

# TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne—Thursday, 13 August 2020

*(via videoconference)*

#### 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 Vallence



**WITNESSES**

Ms Sally Capp, Lord Mayor, and

Mr Justin Hanney, Chief Executive Officer, City of Melbourne.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the second series of 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.

Members are attending these hearings remotely from their homes and from their electorate offices, so we ask that people note that members are not required to wear a face covering if they are working by themselves in an office under the stay-at-home directions of 6 August part 2, section 7(i). 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. Thank you to the City of Melbourne for joining us this morning. We invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes. We ask that you state your name, position and the organisation represented for broadcasting purposes, and then this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

**Visual presentation.**

**Cr CAPP:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for having us present this morning. It is Sally Capp, Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne, and Justin Hanney, CEO, City of Melbourne.

We did distribute a slide pack. I am not sure if we are going to be able to get them up on the screen, but I am going to talk to them, so I am hoping you have got them in front of you. It looks like the secretariat has done an amazing job. Thank you very much.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the City of Melbourne sits, the Boon Wurrung and the Woiwurrung Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and pay our respects to their elders past and present. The City of Melbourne is the engine room of Victoria's economy. In 2019 our city economy just clicked over \$104 billion annually, and that represents almost 25 per cent of the state's economy.

We have 500 000 jobs within our municipality; 240 000 of those are in the CBD, and this represents everybody from workers in cafes and dry-cleaners through to people working in financial services institutions and our education sector. This is a rich ecosystem of businesses, jobs and organisations that combine to drive a very successful pre-COVID city economy, and we believe that our city economy is disproportionately impacted as a result of COVID, most particularly because we rely on a scale of people coming into our city. The ABS payroll data shows that inner Melbourne is one of the hardest hit regions in Australia as a result of the pandemic with just over 9 per cent of jobs lost, as shown in that data; and through our own surveys of city businesses we know that 15 per cent of our hospitality businesses have told us that they are either closed or considering not reopening.

One of our key indicators is our pedestrian count data, with sensors that we have placed around the city. This slide shows the pedestrian count data at Flinders Street station, as one of the more significant commuter sites in our city, and you can see there that we are 90 per cent down on pedestrian traffic year on year. This shows us that people are listening and adhering to the restrictions put in place to help manage the pandemic and its health impacts across our city, but of course it is having a devastating impact on so many businesses that rely on our foot traffic.

Melbourne relies on people coming into our city. We are a place where people gather. It has been a hallmark of our city, something we have been very proud of. Our daily visitation, as you can see from this table, is forecast to remain at lower levels for some time, and we know that we need to work together to be able to reactivate our

city, address the current situation, and provide stimulation for city workers and business owners, places for students and a vibrant city for both visitors and residents.

The City of Melbourne has implemented a comprehensive program of support across all elements of our economy and community. We have certainly pulled as many levers as we can possibly think of, and our budget for this year reflects our response to COVID: the first time in 30 years that we will be going into deficit. We see this as an important investment into our economy and to support our community. I hope we get a chance to talk about some of these initiatives in detail. But more particularly, we have done a zero net increase on our rates for commercial and residential property owners. We have instigated a program of \$50 million of support for local businesses, organisations, students and for our creative sector.

We have been pleased to work with the state government on the Working for Victoria initiatives that have been fundamental to providing jobs for those that might otherwise be unemployed and for creating good outcomes. We have just mentioned here Greening the City: 54 jobs created, 150 000 trees, shrubs and grasses that will have a long-term positive impact across our city; and Cleaning the City: 173 people redeployed into jobs to ensure our city cleanliness. And again, these are programs that we hope we can continue to partner with the state government on, because we know that they will have benefits as people start to return to the city as well.

**The CHAIR:** I am sorry, Lord Mayor, to cut you off there, but the time for the presentation has expired. I will pass the call to Mr Tim Richardson, MP.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Lord Mayor and CEO, for joining us today and for that informative presentation. I will probably go through those support measures with both of you. Lord Mayor, the City of Melbourne has obviously announced a range of support measures for businesses and residents to assist throughout the pandemic. So do you want to take the committee a bit further through some of those measures and also further supports that you intend to roll out?

**Cr CAPP:** Yes. Thank you, Mr Richardson, for the question. We have had a broad range of initiatives. They have certainly been focused in key ways. Firstly, how do we respond to create support for businesses and workers, students and residents to really survive during COVID-19, its impacts and particularly during the lockdown? As I mentioned, this has included things like a freeze on rates, elements that we see as investment, including small business grants to help businesses pivot. We have created food vouchers, together with the Victorian government, for students, and we had a range of programs to support people in our creative sector to be able to generate income and work for them. They are some examples.

We have a stream of work underway with many city business leaders, looking at ways in which we can reactivate the city at the appropriate time, and it is important that we maintain our energy and resources for those initiatives so that workers, businesses, students and visitors can have confidence that the city is reinvigorated and open for business.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** I want to take you to one innovative measure that we saw between the state government and the Melbourne City Council around the support for international students. Can you take us through that partnership that involved the Queen Victoria Market supporting international students during those tough times?

**Cr CAPP:** Yes, Mr Richardson, this was one of the outstanding initiatives during this period, identifying that international students play a critical role in our economy and our community and were identified as a group that had effectively slipped through the gaps on a number of federal and state government initiatives, because we are all trying to support as many parts of the community as we can. International students were issued with food vouchers here at the City of Melbourne. That was co-funded through the city, the universities and education institutions and the state government. Those vouchers were for spending at Queen Victoria Market, another important driver of our city economy—a lot of traders there and small businesses, and also a great way for students to connect in through a fantastic, iconic community precinct, so it has worked very well. Ten thousand students have been helped, and there have been millions of dollars dedicated to that program, all of which have been gratefully received.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** One of the biggest partnerships obviously has been the ability to support rough sleepers in the City of Melbourne, and that has probably been a real showcase of the care and compassion of

your council. Can you take us a little bit through how that evolved and what you want to see going forward in that space as well to support some of the most vulnerable Victorians and Melburnians?

**Cr CAPP:** COVID has created a lot of devastation but it also has created some stellar outcomes, and this is one of them. The response to rough sleepers and homelessness during COVID has been one that is caring, has been swift and rapid and has demonstrated the way in which we can cooperate and coordinate services across support agencies and levels of government quickly to provide very positive and impactful outcomes. Just talking about the City of Melbourne, we normally have a population of about 300 rough sleepers—95 per cent of them are now in accommodation, receiving daily support services and meals. This is a situation that we previously, across many stakeholders, felt was too complex, too difficult, too costly to solve. We have seen that we can do it, and it is certainly a position that we do not want to see us move back from. We can only move forward from here. We have shown we can do it, we should do it and it will remain a top priority for the City of Melbourne as we move forward.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thank you for that, and I think it will be interesting to see how that evolves over time with the state government as well in our new COVID normal going forward. I am hoping to take you to the council budget, Lord Mayor. Obviously the City of Melbourne has made a tough call to go into red to support communities. We have not seen that across all councils, but can you tell me some of the decision-making behind that, what some of the debates were, and why did you and your colleagues see it as so imperative in this environment?

**Cr CAPP:** Yes, and sometimes we look at our budget compared to other levels of government and some of the measures that we have put in place. We see big scale differences, but we also know that every time we can take a measure that eases the burden on residents, on business owners across our city, we can make some sort of positive impact during what is a very stressful time. Every single measure can help, and that really sat at the centre of our budget responses, putting people and an investment in our city economy and community at the centre of the decision-making.

At the same time as looking at things like the freeze on the rates cap, we have also made sure that we have incorporated into our budget investment that can help reinvigorate the city. That is why we have kept measures such as a budget for major events, both ours and partnering with others. It is why we have maintained capacity to support community initiatives, such as homelessness and already mentioned ongoing support for businesses. It is why we view our current budget as an investment in a vital city economy that has impacts not just for our locals but also for Victorians.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** It goes as well with the infrastructure spending. I understand that the City of Melbourne has allocated \$170 million in 2020–21, investing in a range of capital works. What is the council doing to bring forward some of those projects to assist in the economic recovery?

**Cr CAPP:** That is such a good question, because I knew there was a key part of our budget that I was reaching for in my response there, and that is \$168 million in infrastructure spend—our roads, our footpaths, community infrastructure—that creates stimulus in terms of jobs now and will support the city as it reopens but also has fantastic legacy outcomes; things like increasing female change rooms in our sporting facilities, the iconic Queen Victoria Market and its revitalisation and renewal. But I must say we are also talking with state governments and have ongoing discussions with federal government at the moment around ongoing infrastructure stimulus that can support this economy and the Victorian economy as we move forward.

**Mr HANNEY:** Lord Mayor, if I could add, Mr Richardson, the deficit budget—first one in 30 years—is based on the fact that the City of Melbourne has got a strong budget. So to be able to set aside funds and to be able to take some additional borrowings to make sure we have got a capital works budget has been really important. But we will not be able to deliver these projects without support from state government and commonwealth government by way of some stimulus support funding.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Absolutely, and acknowledging how integral the City of Melbourne is to the economic future of Victoria as well is really important.

Can I take you to the Working for Victoria program. From the start the City of Melbourne partnered with the state government to support jobs through that initiative. How many positions has council created through this fund, and have the jobs undertaken helped the community?

**Cr CAPP:** Well, as we said earlier, 173 through the cleaning Melbourne initiative and another 54 through the greening Melbourne initiative. We do have another program that we hope to be able to implement shortly, which would be just over 150 jobs out of the creative sector. All of these programs, in partnership with state government, are creating obviously support for those that would otherwise be employed in the short-term, but importantly working on programs that create value now and into the future.

I have been out with the cleaning teams and with the greening teams, speaking to them about the sense of purpose, the connection into team, the ability to work during a period where they would be otherwise unemployed—that sense of impact on mental health as well as economic. But I have also been there when residents and workers around the city have come up to say thank you, recognising the value of those programs. The confidence around a clean city is important now and will be important, as we saw with things like the pedestrian count forecasts. I know from speaking to mayors around the world, mayors of other cities, that that confidence around a clean city and public transport is absolutely vital. And, of course, greening cities—I think it goes without saying, we are benefiting from the parks established 184 years ago, and we must continue to invest in trees, shrubs and grasses around this city, from a cooling perspective through to driving great outcomes for residents. The reliance on parks at this time has been obvious to everybody—relaxation, exercise, reprieve—and we know it is also a key driver of economic outcomes for our city in normal times. On our last visitor exit survey, parks and gardens were the number one attraction that people enjoyed about the City of Melbourne.

**Mr HANNEY:** Mr Richardson, we would have had to stand down staff if it was not for Working for Victoria. We have employed 700 people. A whole lot of casual staff in our libraries and recreation centres have moved across to Working for Victoria. If I can acknowledge the department and the leadership from the department in terms of Working for Victoria, they have had done an outstanding job, as have Spotless, who came up with the initiative—the CEO of Spotless—at the time. So without it we would have been standing down staff at the City of Melbourne. We have not stood down one staff member through COVID.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** That is fantastic.

**Cr CAPP:** I think it is a reflection of how people are being flexible and accommodating at this time as well to know that we have got librarians in our call centres and we have got rec staff cleaning the streets. It is an all-in effort, and that is going to be required for some time.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Obviously Melbourne's place as an international city is unquestioned. Lord Mayor and CEO, what have you found from other international cities of their experiences? Obviously we are experiencing the second wave. Some of those international cities have been really hard hit, but what are you hearing from your counterparts in other jurisdictions?

**Cr CAPP:** Yes, well, there have been really interesting conversations with mayors, that we have every two weeks, around the world. There are a number of similar circumstances that we are experiencing and some that are quite different. In terms of similarity, we know that in cities where the health response has been prioritised, there has been good cohesion, there has been an orderly response by government and community, and an agreement that people's lives are a priority has been shared. As cities are reopening we are certainly learning a lot from the way in which workers are being cautious about the use of public transport, the way in which employers are being cautious and staging the return of workers, the way in which initiatives are being used to attract visitors back into cities—everything from extra flowerboxes through to incentives to dine, that you would have seen in cities like London. What has been a stand-out as well is in cities where there is a bipartisan approach across levels of government to sharing information, supporting initiatives and building trust with community. Those cities are able to respond more effectively both to the health response and also to the economic stimulus that is going to be required. It has been one of the stark stand-outs, from my perspective.

And just to finish, I think something that we learned at Postcode 3000, which was the last big urban transformational policy, but which is certainly true of cities reopening post lockdown, is the sense of cities and activities happening outdoors—the extension of galleries into streets; of restaurants and cafes along pavements; of people feeling, certainly in the early stages, safer. Doing things outdoors has been a big focus of ours as we look across our own regulations and planning and we interact with business leaders and cultural organisations on plans to revitalise—that sense of bringing indoor activity outdoors at least in the short term.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. And the member's time has just expired, so I will hand the call to Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Chair. And good morning, Lord Mayor and Mr Hanney. You talked about the impact on businesses in the CBD, and it is horrendous, particularly in hospitality. Can you give us two or three specific examples of business support interventions that you plan to help get those businesses up and going and to fill the empty shops in the CBD?

**Cr CAPP:** Yes. It is a great question, Mr O'Brien, because actually this amazing ecosystem that is the City of Melbourne economy shows that everything is intimately intertwined. So BC—before COVID—the data showed us that on any typical day there would be a \$1.6 million spend in retail and a \$1.7 million spend in hospitality. Having a comprehensive offer which includes not just the workers in and out of the city every day—almost 500 000 of them—but the events and festivals to attract visitors into the city, all of those things have to work well together.

At this stage our initiatives around support have been helping businesses pivot to online. It has been around helping with staff development during a time when there might not be as much customer interaction, so it is a great time to upskill and also around capital works projects to make business improvements and of course business transformation around new revenue. And there are specific initiatives into the creative sector, who have been disproportionately impacted and will continue to be as a result of lockdown. So those programs have been underway, and we are working with the state government at the moment on the rollout of the new business support grants program. In terms of looking forward—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** What are the time lines for that, Lord Mayor?

**Cr CAPP:** Sorry—time lines?

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** What are the time lines for that—the new program?

**Cr CAPP:** Well, from the state government, I will leave it to you to ask your colleagues, but some of those deposits and grants are already being made directly into businesses' bank accounts. In terms of the city booster program that we are involved in—and we really appreciate it because it shows the disproportionate impact on city businesses—that program is starting, and we expect to be able to work through the applications and have money in business bank accounts within the next few weeks.

**Mr HANNEY:** Mr O'Brien, we have established a business concierge service so every one of the 15 000 businesses in Melbourne are contacted by the city on a regular basis. Two pieces of feedback—one is that they are concerned about foot traffic. We have basically put in a really simple process for permits. So for restaurants who do not have lots of space inside their restaurants, we are allowing them to spill out onto footpaths and out onto streets, so really making sure the permit process is expedited. Look, the other one is that, in terms of the foot traffic—the Lord Mayor showed you the slide earlier—the return traffic, even in a post-COVID environment, is going to be a lot less, and city business are relying upon traffic and foot traffic. So we will need to run a series of activities and events to drag people back into the city and when the time is right, because of the brand damage to Melbourne and Victoria, an intrastate, international campaign on (a) safety—perception of safety—but making sure that those events are drawing people back into the heart, back into the CBD, of Melbourne.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thank you. That is a good segue. The attractiveness of the CBD is a good segue, and then the impact of COVID on business confidence segues into the injecting room issue. I just wanted to ask: were you involved in any discussions or consultation beforehand? Was there a meeting—

**Ms RICHARDS:** On a point of order, Chair—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** with the police before the official announcement—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mr O'Brien. There is a point of order.

**Ms RICHARDS:** I am not sure how this relates to the terms of reference of the inquiry.

**The CHAIR:** I was about to ask the same myself. Mr O'Brien, can you ensure that your questions are related to the terms of reference of the inquiry, please.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** It is actually specifically relating to the evidence that has just been given about the attractiveness of the city and getting foot traffic back in, Chair, so the question—

**The CHAIR:** That may have been the evidence that has been given, but your question is not within the realms of the terms of reference of this inquiry. So I ask that you rephrase your question in the context of the inquiry.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** In the context of the inquiry—the government's handling of the pandemic—I am talking about the response of the government in helping to stimulate activity in the CBD and the potential impact of other policies that may in fact reduce that activity in the CBD. That is the question I just wanting to get to and—

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, this inquiry is not about other policies; this inquiry is about the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I ask that you relate your questions to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Chair, we can have the Minister for Transport Infrastructure spend 10 minutes talking about all the wonderful infrastructure projects—that is fine, is it?—but I cannot ask a question about issues that will severely impact areas of the CBD as they try to recover from COVID-19?

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, if we consider the evidence that was given to the committee by the minister for transport, she was talking about infrastructure projects and the COVID-safe practices that were put in place to ensure that they could continue during the COVID-19 pandemic. I ask that you keep your questions within the terms of reference of the inquiry.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** One rule for one group, a different rule for others, Chair. Anyway, I will move on. Lord Mayor, the budget obviously has gone into the black, as you mentioned. What action are you going to take to get it back—sorry, I said the black; the budget has gone into the red. What action are you going to take to get it back into the black, given the limited ability of state and federal governments to assist on these issues, given they are also going to be financially constrained, and how will that impact on ratepayers?

**Cr CAPP:** Great question; thanks, Mr O'Brien. We, as our CEO said earlier, have had good financial management over many years, which has given us the capacity to make decisions to take this budget into what we call an investment phase. We have looked forward to understand the impact obviously in the longer term, and we believe that over the next 10 years, which is our financial forecast period, we can start to bring ourselves back into operational balance and then surplus. That is predicated obviously on activity around the city being able to return and then grow over that time, but we are not, if I can be very clear, anticipating in our forecast any big hikes on ratepayers into the future over and above what is allowed. We will continue to prudently financially manage our budgets and work within our normal revenue streams to be able to control our own spending. But it is one of the reasons why we are so keen to continue working with state governments and federal governments around stimulus and support packages, because when we look at our budget and the levers that we can pull, we know that there is only so far we can go. But in partnership with other levels of government and the stimulus that that creates and the activity that it generates for our economy we can look forward to our budgets returning to surplus.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I have only got a minute left; could I just ask perhaps to Mr Hanney a couple of quick questions. What percentage of the rates in the city is business rates?

**Mr HANNEY:** They are just over 60 per cent, so the majority of our income comes from business rates, Mr O'Brien. And I just wanted to add to the other comment: we will need support for our capital projects from commonwealth and state. The Lord Mayor has been leading on behalf of all capital cities. We have got a \$2 billion ask in with the commonwealth budget for stimulus projects, of which nearly a quarter is for projects in the CBD of Melbourne. They will help to stimulate and also assist us with our budget constraints.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Very quickly, do you have a business differential rate, and if not, will you consider that?

**Mr HANNEY:** We do not have a business differential rate. Maybe I will take that question, Mr O'Brien, on notice. What I can say to you again is we have set aside \$20 million in this year's budget for rate hardship support in addition to the rates freeze. Our budget is absolutely focused on the businesses in the CBD in Greater Melbourne. We know that we need to be doing everything we can to support them, and we know that a lot of them are going to be really doing it tough over the coming several years. So whatever we can do to support them, we will, and if it is worth looking at a differential rate, we will.

**Cr CAPP:** We have had some great productive discussions with—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry to interrupt you there, Lord Mayor; the member's time has expired, and I will pass the call to Mr Sam Hibbins, MP.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Lord Mayor and Mr Hanney, for appearing before today's inquiry. I want to first ask about the important role that Melbourne City Council played in supporting residents during the hard lockdown of public housing towers. And can I ask: when was Melbourne City Council requested to assist by the state government, and what was the nature of the request?

**Cr CAPP:** I will start with some overall comments, and then I will go to our CEO. As with a lot of things in relation to the community, we have been very responsive and willing to jump in and play the role where we can create the most value, and there is no doubt that once the City of Melbourne was able to activate local networks and empower local leaders, we certainly saw expeditious understanding of needs and delivery of support and supplies and needed services. That certainly helped make the response more efficient and effective, and we were pleased to do so. In terms of details around times et cetera, I will defer to our CEO, Justin Hanney.

**Mr HANNEY:** Mr Hibbins, about an hour before, on Saturday, 4 July, we were notified that the announcement was coming in relation to the shutdown. We had a presence there on the Saturday afternoon and on the Sunday, working with the department of housing, state government and the likes of Andrew Crisp, we took control of the distribution centre for food, goods, mail and the like on the Monday morning, so on the Sunday afternoon we were establishing that distribution centre. That was on 5 July, and we operated that service right up to the flats being reopened.

**Mr HIBBINS:** So just for clarity, you both established the distribution centre and then operated it. Is that correct?

**Mr HANNEY:** Yes, look, we did, in partnership with the state government. So we advised that we had the capability and the workforce. We used some of our health officers and some of our on-street compliance officers. In fact the Lord Mayor and I were both there on the Sunday for about 8 or 9 hours, as was the deputy lord mayor, for the establishment of—at Buncliff Street in North Melbourne—a distribution centre, which initially was the food distribution centre for both Flemington and North Melbourne.

**Mr HIBBINS:** And prior to that, prior to the establishment of the distribution centre, what was the situation on the ground?

**Mr HANNEY:** Look, in my view it was quite chaotic. I think that the announcement occurred and there was confusion, I think, as people were both returning to their apartments and systems were being put in place. You know, the logistics exercise of moving food and goods, and the coordination of goods and them being received and trying to set up that centre took the best part of Monday and Tuesday. I think, you know, if your question is: was it perfect? No. Are there lessons to be learned? Yes. Did everyone apply best efforts? Absolutely.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Just in terms of lessons learned, I understand that Melbourne City Council is preparing a pandemic plan for public housing estates now. Can I get an update in terms of the preparation of those pandemic plans? Then also, what do you think the key lessons learned from the hard lockdown were?

**Mr HANNEY:** Look, I think the Lord Mayor will have some strong views on this also. We agreed—and again it was raised at a council meeting and through a formal resolution, we shared our lessons with Port Phillip, Yarra, Darebin, Moreland, the cities around us, in terms of lessons around pandemics, in particular in public housing and high-rise towers but also other apartment blocks.

Look, I think the number one lesson from my perspective is: the best conduits are the community leaders that sit in those housing towers and, I think, the coordination of them. The residents in those towers will go to their cultural and faith groups before they come to government, and so the coordination and the communication alongside them is critically important. I think that if there is something that both the City of Melbourne and the state government could have done better, it would have been really having that group ready to go. And so the work that we did do was making sure that all of—be it at the Carlton high-rise, and I know the CEO of the City of Yarra made sure at Richmond and others—those community groups were ready to go, were coordinated and that they would be the information conduit back to the residents in those towers. I know the Lord Mayor would have strong views on this also.

**Cr CAPP:** I think you have covered it well, Justin. I think that, you know, establishing those connections and networks early and really relying on them—in some cases really stepping out of the way, playing a support role rather than a lead role—was vital, and those learnings and how we can apply them in similar situations are really important. We have 84 per cent of our population in the City of Melbourne living in high-rise of one form or another, and so there have been learnings right across those scenarios.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Terrific, thanks. Secondly, I want to touch on the Melbourne City Council's very ambitious roll-out of sustainable transport, in particular separated bike lanes in response to COVID, as is happening around the world. Can you give the committee an update on those—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry to interrupt you there, Mr Hibbins—

**Mr HIBBINS:** Perhaps on notice.

**The CHAIR:** but your time has expired. I am sorry to cut you—well, I did not cut you short, but I am sorry that your time has expired. Thank you, Lord Mayor and Mr Hanney, for appearing before the committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions which were taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request. The committee will now take a short break before consideration of the next witness. We thank you for your time this morning.

**Witnesses withdrew.**