



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Hon. Eric Abetz MP

Monday 23 September 2024

MEMBERS

Mr Simon Wood MP (Chair)
Mr Josh Willie MP (Deputy Chair)
Dr Rosalie Woodruff MP
Mrs Rebekah Pentland MP

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Mr Dean Winter MP
Mr David O'Byrne MP
Mr Mark Shelton MP
Ms Helen Burnet MP
Ms Meg Brown MP

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. ERIC ABETZ MP

Minister for Business, Industry and Resources, Minister for Transport and Leader of the House

Craig Limkin

Secretary, Department of State Growth

Martin Crane

General Manager Road User Services

Cynthia Heydon

Deputy Secretary Transport

PUBLIC

The Committee met at 6.15 p.m.

CHAIR - The time being 6.15 p.m., the examination of the Estimates of the Minister for Transport will commence. Welcome, minister, and could you please introduce the persons at the table for the benefit of Hansard?

Mr ABETZ - From the end of the table, Denise McIntyre, Craig Limkin, Cynthia Heydon, and in-between, Eric Abetz, Minister for Transport.

CHAIR - The time scheduled for the Estimates of the Minister for Transport is three hours. The resolution of the House provides for a minister to provide additional information to a committee either later that day or in writing as an answer to a question taken on notice. To submit a question on notice, the member must first ask their question of the minister. The minister must indicate they will take it on notice. The member must then put the question in writing and hand it to the committee secretary so it can be included in correspondence to the minister.

I remind everyone that the microphones in here are sensitive, so be mindful of Hansard and be careful when shuffling papers, drink bottles and the like. Also, it is difficult for Hansard to differentiate when people are talking over each other. I remind members to only speak one at a time to assist Hansard with this.

Minister, would you care to make an opening statement?

Mr ABETZ - A brief one to say I am pleased to be here as Minister for Transport. It is my first Estimates, so please go easy on me. The transport sector is vitally important for our state and for the people of Tasmania wanting to get to and from school, to and from work, to and from appointments, et cetera, so the government has been looking at ensuring that we have a good public transport network that is more easily and seamlessly accessed. That, as one would expect, is a work in progress and will never be fully satisfied. As technology improves, as requirements improve and as new subdivisions develop, there will always be changes to the network.

I can indicate that we have now had 385,000 passengers travelling on the Derwent River ferry service since its launch, which has been quite popular for people who are pedestrians or who use scooters or bikes because they can get them onto the ferry. It is a very good service and we are excited about the prospects of increasing the number of ferry terminals. We are looking at, if I can get this right, Wilkinsons Point, Sandy Bay and Lindisfarne. Those improvements will continue and we look forward to them rolling out.

In relation to our half-price bus fees or public transport fees, that has gone well. We were hoping we might hit the two million passenger mark in October of this year and by 31 August, we had reached that number, which indicates a relatively good uptake, but there has been a variation in the figures in relation to that.

We have made extra amounts available to Metro and public transport. That is outlined in the Budget figures. The Premier may have shared earlier today about the car parks being used at Huntingfield and Firthside with a relatively high uptake there, and we look forward to more park and ride facilities being developed around the state.

PUBLIC

Earlier today I announced the common ticketing contract, which is going to be an exciting further development where you can tap on and off our public transport with your phone, your watch, your credit card or whatever. You won't need a green card or a specific card for transport. You will be able to use whatever mechanism you have, and that will be very helpful for tourists as well, to get themselves around the city and around the precincts. They won't have to go in to buy a special green card and you won't have to top it up because you'll have your own bank account backing you in on that.

With those few comments, Chair, I thank you and look forward to some questions.

Ms BROWN - Minister, it's my first Estimates too, and don't worry, I will not go easy on you. When will both of the new *Spirits* be in service?

Mr ABETZ - They're questions that I invite you to ask at the GBE of -

Ms BROWN - I am asking you now, though, minister.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - I know you are, but we have elements within these Estimates as to what is for the department and what is for the state-owned -

Ms BROWN - Are you telling me you do not know?

Mr ABETZ - corporation.

CHAIR - Order. Let the minister finish.

Mr ABETZ - We have a fair idea, but I think it is better if the CEO of TT-Line were to be able to provide you with his very best estimate of that.

Mr WINTER - He wasn't available for the committee the other week.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms BROWN - So, you won't be giving that advice today?

Mr ABETZ - No. Look, that comment from the Leader of the Opposition is -

Ms BROWN - Before you go off on a tangent, I'm just going to go on to my next question. Will you guarantee that they'll both be able to operate fully loaded with freight and passengers from January 2026?

Mr ABETZ - Look, we are currently - and as a government, I invite you to ask those questions at the GBE hearings -

Ms BROWN - Once again, I'm asking you now.

Mr ABETZ - I know you are, but we will be in a better position to advise once we have the report. This is publicly known, the report from Ben Moloney and Peter Gimmell who are

PUBLIC

doing a deep dive into all this and giving us as good professional advice as I think we could possibly hope for in all the circumstances. I've said previously, I've seen how the former Labor leader, Kim Beazley, got himself into all sorts of trouble with the Collins class submarines by saying, it will come in on this date, on budget, et cetera. After a few years, it all blew out. So it is -

Ms BROWN - Well, we're five years deep with this, aren't we?

Mr ABETZ - The Collins-class, I think we were about 10 years, but we won't go there, not relevant for this discussion. I think it's important that we leave it to those who are in control of the TT-Line to give those answers.

Ms BROWN - Why won't you consider extra day sailings to increase tourism capacity over summer until the new ships are available to be fully utilised?

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, can you ask that question again?

Ms BROWN - Why won't you consider extra day sailings to increase tourism capacity over summer until the new ships are able to be fully utilised?

Mr ABETZ - Well, as I understand it, the TT-Line has already been running extra day sailings during peak periods. I mentioned all these figures because they were at front of mind when I was on Tasmania Talks. I think they were up to 900 and something of sailings. That is to deal with the demand as it arises. The department has a look - I've got a note here - thank you, secretary:

To meet anticipated demand, TT-Line have currently scheduled day sailings every second day during the peak period, early December to late April, excluding every second weekend. TT-Line will schedule additional day sailings if there is sufficient demand. The Department has requested information from TT-Line regarding the cost of scheduling extra day sailings.

That is something that has happened in the past, will continue to happen and then when and how they are scheduled is, at the end of the day, up to the management of TT-Line. That is why it's a state-owned corporation, and we, as ministers, have to be careful that we don't start operating as ghost directors.

Ms BURNET - Thank you, minister. We hear from the community that limited reliability is a factor in people choosing not to use buses. We also know that the four ingredients of a good public transport service is regularity, reliability, predictability and being on time. We're not really getting that combination very frequently. It's about as frequent as the bus services at the moment. Where is the real-time information - what on average are delays to Metro bus services?

I recently heard of a story of somebody travelling from Huntingfield going to Firthside. The bus at Huntingfield was late by three minutes, the Firthside bus early, which makes it unreliable as well, just as an example. Where's the real-time information and what on average are the delays to Metro Tasmania bus services?

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - I dare say nobody necessarily has that specific information, but I can make inquiries for you. I imagine that would take an exceptional amount of work because a three-minute delay would be a delay to yourself, which I think most people would live with a three-minute delay. If you want to add all them up in all the services, that's going to take some time.

But that said, your initial opening remarks are remarks that I think most people would need to agree with and that is reliability and certainty is something that is a key factor for people engaging with a public transport experience and so that is something that I have mentioned to Metro on a regular basis and once again with the Metro, they will be coming up at the GBEs and the CEO and others can be asked about how they are managing these matters.

Ms BURNET - I'll give another example of somebody who went to Twitter X, he was talking about a 45-minute wait between buses and then others have a staggered start time. So, somebody starting work at 10.00 is not getting the bus services that have been cancelled. How do you stop the congestion and how do you account for these disruptions to service, which is not helping the economy at all?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I've mentioned in the parliament on a number of occasions that Metro and Tasmania are not immune from the driver shortage, which is something Australia is experiencing. There's a 25 000-driver shortage around Australia.

Ms BURNET - That wasn't the question, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, but when you have less drivers available than those that do the rosters of the morning, if somebody rings in sick, et cetera, and Metro will be a lot better at explaining all this at the GBE hearings. They'll be able to tell you that they then have to juggle and decide which services they can and can't operate on a particular morning when you have a shortage of drivers and then a couple of them call in sick. This happened in recent times with the Bridgewater incidents, people were off on stress leave.

You have to keep all that in mind and in all the circumstances, Metro are doing as good a job I think as they possibly can. That said, I am encouraging them to deal with these matters as possible. They are training more drivers, trying to get more drivers and until that situation is resolved, we will continue to have those unfortunate hiccups in the provision of service.

Mr O'BYRNE - Minister, I noticed today you reannounced the smart ticketing with the relationship with the Queensland company, or the company based out of Queensland in Cubic. This project was first announced in 2018 and it was budgeted to cost \$7.5 million. Obviously, each year that's been upgraded and expanded. How much money have you spent on the common ticketing scheme so far and how much will it cost taxpayers?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not sure how much has been spent so far, but we did have a line item in the budget of \$35.4 million which is in the budget overall and what has been spent to date. I have been told it is \$3.441 million has been expended on project costs to date including external legal advice and state growth, internal resources.

Mr O'BYRNE - Your budgeting 35?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, 35.4.

PUBLIC

Mr O'BYRNE - When will it be rolled out? What's the target date?

Mr ABETZ - We are hoping -

Mr ABETZ - Look, these things, these Estimates, and I used to be in this game as well in opposition or when not in government trying to nail a minister down to an exact date so, when it is one day late, you can say 'Gotcha', or and I ask -

Mr O'BYRNE - Just give me a six-month window would be good.

Mr ABETZ - We are anticipating that in mid-2025 there will be the on-road trial and a demonstration bus will be launched to showcase the new tap on, tap off ticketing equipment and provide information to help Tasmanians get ready to use the new ticketing system.

We are hoping that, if things go well, a staged installation program will start with Launceston and then through to Burnie. Is that right? Yes, Burnie and then Hobart. So, there will be a staged roll out. With all these new ventures, trying to put an exact date on it is going to be fraught with difficulty, but I would like to think middle 2026 or a bit later would be a rough estimate.

Mr O'BYRNE - To clarify, so it was announced in 2018, establishing standalone Tasmanian system was abandoned 2021-22, you announced a relationship with Cubic in 2023 - I think the previous minister announced it - and now you are saying - you have reannounced it today - that it will be mid 2025 before we see a single bus trial and then you roll it out. So, it is another two years. That is an eight-year process to establish a single ticketing system for Tasmania, is that right?

Mr ABETZ - You can do the maths and come to your conclusions as you like. We have made an announcement today and, if the indications are that it works as well as it does with the Queensland Labor government, then things would be working well for the benefit of Tasmanian motorists - no, not motorists but the opposite - the public-service commuters.

Mr O'BYRNE - More people on buses means roads are less congested.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, as someone that loves to jump on an old AG200 and ride over to the farm and enjoy motorcycling, I have heard that the motorcycle trainer, AJL Training, has left Tasmania. Can you please advise what the government has done to ensure that motorcycle learners can continue to receive the vital training that they need to gain their L plates and ultimately their motorcycle licence.

Mr ABETZ - In rural regional areas, motorbikes are a very important part of the economy and the way of life. Motorcyclists are overrepresented in the unfortunate road statistics that we confront on a regular basis and, so, as a government we are committed to trying to assist those that are learning and the department has successfully transitioned the new provider, the current provider, Stay Upright Pty Ltd, into motorcycle training and assessment at three regions across the state. They have had extensive experience in providing motorcycle training across Australia.

Ms BROWN - Minister, can you advise how much taxpayer money was used to send Mr Dwyer to Finland to oversee the transfer of the first *Spirit* vessel?

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Look, I cannot, but, once again, I invite you to ask that question at the GBE, because the money, as I understand it, does not come from departmental sources, but from the TT-Line sources, from their business.

Ms BROWN - Were you informed of Mr Dwyer's plan to travel there and not appear before PAC?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, I was, and I in fact raised what, on the face of it, was a concern and, when I was advised of Mr Dwyer's state of mind by the chair of the board, when he had a discussion with him, it was determined by the chair of his own volition, that it would be best for Mr Dwyer's wellbeing not to be at the PAC hearing, but that he would be made available any time when he was back in a better state - if I can use the terminology - and Mr Bugg used his discretion and his genuine concern for Mr Dwyer's wellbeing in making that decision. Mr Dwyer, for what it's worth, had all the technical expertise in relation to having the vessel signed over to TT-Line. He had been authorised by the board to sign for the vessel in Finland. That was determined to be an appropriate course of action by the chair of TT-Line, something which I support.

Ms BROWN - Do you know how many international trips the CEO has taken since his appointment and the total amount spent on that travel?

Mr ABETZ - No, I don't. He has been CEO for many years.

Ms BROWN - Over 10 years.

Mr ABETZ - One assumes there have been many overseas trips undertaken by Mr Dwyer in the course of business. I don't think we could provide any numbers.

Ms BROWN - I have not finished on that line of questioning, if I may.

Mr ABETZ - Can I invite you to ask those sorts of questions at the GBE hearings, because all this money comes out of the TT-Line pot, not out of the Department of State Growth pot, and we are here examining the Department of State Growth and not TT-Line.

Ms BROWN - Can I invite you to take on notice how many international trips he has taken?

CHAIR - Ms Brown, I've given the call to Ms Burnet.

Ms BURNET - Thank you, Chair.

Mr ABETZ - If I may. Apologies, the secretary has just indicated for the benefit of Ms Brown, if you have a look at the annual reports of TT-Line, it is included each year as to overseas travel. It's all there on the public record already.

Ms BURNET - My question is in relation to the prioritisation of learner driver programs in Tasmania. While millions of dollars have been granted over the forward Estimates to develop new driver safety programs, why has funding for established community programs like the

PUBLIC

Learner Driver Mentor Program (LDMP), which already delivers significant outcomes, remained uncertain beyond December 2024?

Mr ABETZ - There is somebody who rejoices in a particular surname as well. That is the program that's run by Mr Garry O'Byrne, and I understand that he is a retiring.

Mr O'BYRNE - Cousin.

Mr ABETZ - There we go. That's why I thought you'd rejoice. The department is undertaking a review of that program. We are also engaged, as a result of our 2030 Strong Plan promise, with the RACT with quite a program. Do you want to comment on that, Mr Crane?

Mr CRANE - I am happy to talk to that. I am Martin Crane, general manager -

CHAIR - I am sorry. Minister, could you please introduce by name and position?

Mr ABETZ - He can do that better himself. All these titles are I know 'secretary' and that's about it.

Mr CRANE - My name's Martin Crane, I'm the General Manager Road User Services in the Transport group at the Department of State Growth.

In terms of the funding for the LDMP, that is part of our Road Safety Action Plan and we provided funding. We got a little bit delayed due to the election so we funded it through the support from the minister to December. We will be providing further advice shortly to the minister for the continuation of that program. It's an important program. The LDMP has delivered 17,500 hours last year. Roughly around 225 people each month access those services. It's in high demand.

As the minister pointed out, we are looking at the program to make sure it's as effective as possible. We understand that there are challenges with people accessing driver licencing. That program is a key part of it. That'll be part of the discussions we have with the RACT, how best to use that through the development of the new initiatives the government has funded for partnership with the Road Safety Council and RACT to look at really innovative ways and provide support to young people to get into driver licencing as, sadly, young people under 25 are still overrepresented in the crash stats.

Ms BURNET - My second question is about extension of that program, not only to rural people so that it's accessible and, therefore, equitable, but also for mature-age learners and learners from multicultural backgrounds. What are you doing in that space?

Mr CRANE - We do fund the multicultural community.

Ms BURNET - The Migrant Resource Centre (MRC)?

Mr CRANE - MRC, to provide driver learning programs as part of the LDMP. It is fair to say that in rural areas we do have challenges with getting volunteers. It is a volunteer-based program. We fund community-based groups such as Neighbourhood Houses and, as you said, the Migrant Resource Centre to coordinate the delivery of that. We provide funding for vehicles and a coordinator, but it is reliant on volunteers to provide those hours to do that. Post-COVID,

PUBLIC

attracting and retaining volunteers in that particular area is becoming a challenge for us. We're looking at ways in which we may be able to better support those volunteers. They do a fantastic job, as I said 17,500 hours were provided through the program in the last financial year to a number of Tasmanians getting into the driver licencing system.

Ms BURNET - And the mature aged?

Mr CRANE - One of the things the minister mentioned, from the review point of view, that program is not age-limited, it's not just for young people. You can be an older person coming through the driver licencing system and access those programs. What we do know is that people over 25 have a very different risk profile in terms of their driving behaviours. Sadly, young males are particularly overrepresented in that age and by 25 they seem to have become more safe on the road. We will look at ways in which we can improve access to that program, including those people you've mentioned.

Mr O'BYRNE - Back to the smart ticketing. Could you talk us through why Cubic was picked as the provider for this technology? Was there a tender? What was the process the department undertook to establish Cubic as the provider?

Mr ABETZ - The solution offered the government exceptionally advantageous conditions that enabled it to leverage off a \$371 million investment made by the Queensland Labor government in its ticketing system. These benefits include that this an existing solution that has already been tested and is operating in Queensland and other jurisdictions internationally. Cubic has provided a detailed project schedule that provides for the complete rollout of the ticketing solution in Tasmania, hopefully by the middle of next year. Pursuant to the proposed agreement with Cubic, liquidated damages are payable by Cubic, in the event that this time frame is not achieved. The solution will offer ticketing as a service. Critically, it will provide access to Queensland TMR merchant fees and grades, full accounting and financial services, back office and device support, and management - as in field technicians.

Mr O'BYRNE - With respect, that's not the answer to the question. He's not answered the question.

CHAIR - That's your interpretation.

Mr ABETZ - Repeat the question.

Mr O'BYRNE - Was it an unsolicited bid from Cubic? Did they approach you? Did you approach them? I want to know how the decision was made, not in terms of the merits. You've listed a number of things.

Mr ABETZ - I now understand your question. The previous minister allowed for a direct procurement, given the benefits that I've just outlined in my previous answer.

Mrs BESWICK - Minister, can you provide an update on the installation of the safety screens for the metro buses?

Mr ABETZ - That's a good question. Once again, can we leave that to the GBE of Metro, which will be later on? This funding, as I understand it, comes from Metro's budget allocations.

PUBLIC

Mrs BESWICK - The additional funding that has been put into this year's Budget is not covering it?

Mr ABETZ - It comes from the Department of State Growth to Metro, and then Metro administers it. The officials here are not, I'd assume, in a position to get into the detail. My apologies, we can't answer that at this stage.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, some businesses have told me that the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme has not kept up pace with the shipping costs. While I acknowledge this is an Australian Government scheme, what is the Tasmanian Government's position on the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme?

Mr ABETZ - As a government, we welcome the Senate inquiry that's been announced in recent times. We believe now that the BITR - is it? Somebody will correct me - where they seek to do the analysis between cost of transport in something by road as opposed to ship, in recent times the evidence is that that has gone in favour of road freight - in other words, the cost of shipping - has increased in comparison to road. As a result, I think an inquiry by the Senate will give us some insight into what the cost differentials are. As a result, I think a strong argument can be made for an enhanced freight equalisation scheme. I've sort of got that right.

Mr WINTER - You've referenced earlier that TT-Line has now taken ownership of *Spirit IV* through Mr Dwyer's visit to Finland. Can you outline to the committee when that ship will commence its journey to Tasmania, when it will arrive here, and what will occur once it does? Is it arriving in Hobart first up?

Mr ABETZ - Once again, they are questions that should be asked of TT-Line. They are the ones who have the management and control of these matters.

Mr WINTER - Minister, I know that you're relatively new here, but I'm very experienced.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr WINTER - The way that issues like this have been handled, even by the Premier earlier today, is to answer questions pertinent to your portfolio. We would appreciate you being forthcoming with information. This is a very important issue. We do have an opportunity to ask you questions today. Presumably, you're well aware of it.

CHAIR - Thank you, Mr Winter.

Mr WINTER - I'm just asking you to provide an outline as to how this will happen.

Mr ABETZ - My answer remains the same. It is for TT-Line to indicate whilst having -

Mr WINTER - You won't even tell the committee when the ships are going to start -

CHAIR - Order, Mr Winter. Second question.

Mr WINTER - Chair, this is really important. We've got a minister -

PUBLIC

CHAIR - The minister has answered the question.

Mr WINTER - Point of order, Chair, if you don't mind. We have a long tradition in this place of ministers being accountable within their portfolios. We have the Transport minister in front of this committee, and this committee has asked a number of questions that are pertinent to the portfolio. I know the minister is from a different parliament. They may have different proceedings and different procedures. In this place it is traditional for ministers to answer questions that are particularly important to Tasmania. In this case, whether the *Spirits* are going to start coming to Tasmania any time soon is a very important question. I ask you to draw the minister back to the question and answer questions particularly relevant to his portfolio.

Mr ABETZ - If I may, on the point of order, the simple fact is that TT-Line has the direct management of these matters, and that is why -

Mr WINTER - Are you the minister responsible or not?

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - I can answer. I didn't interrupt you. I would ask that you extend the same courtesy to myself. The TT-Line has the management of these matters. We have a separate occasion in the parliamentary calendar for the Government Business Enterprises, or state-owned corporations, as the TT-Line is, for full and detailed examination of all these matters. It's not a matter of not wanting to answer, but the question being asked at the right forum. This is not the right forum, because the GBE, or the SOC, is not performed at this committee.

CHAIR - Mr Winter, the minister responded to the question and answered in a way that he saw fit, as is the tradition of the House. I suggest you ask your second question.

Mr WINTER - Again, this is actually really -

CHAIR - No, no. Order.

Mr WINTER - What do you mean, 'no'?

CHAIR - Second question.

Mr WINTER - Excuse me, point of order, Chair.

CHAIR - The minister has answered the question as he saw fit.

Mr WINTER - I'm happy to take it to the Speaker if you want to go in that direction. I am asking questions. This is really important for the House, that we don't go down this path of having ministers refusing to answer basic questions. The Minister for Transport should know when the *Spirit of Tasmania IV* is going to start coming to Tasmania. I'm asking him that question, and I would ask you to draw the minister to the question. When will *Spirit IV* start heading towards Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - When it leaves port.

PUBLIC

Mr WINTER - Honestly. Chair, this cannot -

CHAIR - No, I'm passing the lead over to Ms Burnet.

Mr WINTER - On the rotation I have three questions, so perhaps you could at least give me that.

CHAIR - I suggest you ask another question. The minister has answered as he saw fit.

Mr WINTER - You've issued a ministerial direction to TasPorts and TT-Line for them to commence work at berth 1. That was done some months ago now. How is it that we are here at the end of September and we still don't have a cost or any information as to whether it's actually feasible to upgrade berth 1? What evidence did you rely upon before you made that direction? Did you have any engineering advice or any advice whatsoever before you issued that direction to TasPorts and TT-Line to do something they clearly didn't want to do?

Mr ABETZ - The direction was a direction provided on the basis of the best of information that was available to me and the other shareholder minister. That direction is there on the public record for people to see.

Mr WINTER - What advice was that?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not going to go into the advice that was provided, suffice to say, from a range of sources. We are now benefitting ourselves and people of Tasmania with a full and detailed report from Ben Moloney and Peter Gemell to see what the way forward should be. That's going to take some time. Until we receive that advice, I'm not going to try to make judgment calls or prejudge that; they are going to be advising us.

Mr WINTER - By the end of October, that'll only be 14 months before the actual long-term solution is due to be ready. How is it possible that we are going to be able to design and then deliver a berth 1 interim solution that will be in place for no more than a few months before the long-term solution is implemented?

Mr ABETZ - These are all questions that Ben Moloney and Peter Gemell will be looking at -

Mr WINTER - It's not going to happen, though, is it?

Mr ABETZ - and providing us with advice.

Ms BURNET - Minister, I want to focus back in July, when you did a press release with minister Ellis in relation to the bus rapid transit and the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor. Could you point me to the reference to the bus rapid transit in the budget papers? Is it there?

Mr ABETZ - We are busily looking. It is in budget paper 2, volume 1, on page 350 about two-thirds of the way down, before Minister for Sports and Events, under the line item titled Urban Congestion Fund.

Ms BURNET - That doesn't sound like a BRT to me. It's a footnote really, isn't it? It's about appropriation revenue.

Mr ABETZ - There are footnotes there that tell us to have a look at footnotes 1 and 12, which says -

This project includes the state and Australian government's contributions of \$52 million for Hobart public transport infrastructure planning ...

and as I understand it, the City Deal, that \$52 million, included that particular item to which you refer. I can understand why you asked the question because it's not that obvious.

Ms BURNET - It's buried. I suppose this is a pretty important project for transport in Hobart and the plans are all very well, but this week the POSS submission was made in relation to the stadium and in appendix N, page 14, 1.4.2, it talks about the stadium transport model and it relies very heavily on the bus rapid transit to be implemented. Also, there's this significant modal shift of how people travel; it's very ambitious, may I say. There's an expectation that 60 per cent of people will be using some sort of public transport or non-private transport. At the moment we have probably about 8 per cent of people, which is pretty generous, catching public transport in Greater Hobart, so how in the world do you think that sort of reliable transport model can be delivered in order to get the result of that modal shift?

Mr ABETZ - There's a lot in that question. I don't know how long we've got to answer it, but Hobart, by its nature, is in fact a transport hub where a whole lot of buses and ferries now come into the city. The infrastructure matters relating to the stadium are matters for another minister. In relation to matters that relate to transport or the provision of buses, that is something we will continue to work on, including ferry services, to get people to the stadium and if there is an event on at the stadium, be it a concert or a football game or whatever else, then people may well see that as, if you like, a day out and therefore catching a ferry across the river or down or up the river will be part and parcel of the total experience they will want to enjoy. Similarly, if they know that the city is going to be full, there'll be a lot of interest in catching buses, as I understand happens now with Blundstone Arena. There are a number of buses that leave from the Cenotaph area where people can park and go across. These things are doable, they work and we have every confidence that they will work.

Mr O'BYRNE - Back to the smart ticketing. It sounded like the previous minister has made a captain's call. Minister, the Treasurer's Instructions are quite clear about government procurement, saying:

Government procurement must be undertaken in a manner that is consistent with the following principles:

- 1.2.1 value for money;
- 1.2.2 open, impartial and effective competition;
- 1.2.3 providing local suppliers that wish to do business with the government the opportunity to do so through the adoption of the Buy Local policy requirements.

It goes on. Based on your answer a little while ago, it seemed that there was no procurement process undertaken for this technology. I want to make sure that the previous minister has acted

PUBLIC

in context of the Treasurer's Instructions. Could you provide me with advice, maybe through your department, to settle my concern?

Mr ABETZ - I suppose I can start by saying that given he was and continues to be Treasurer, he might be abiding by his own instructions.

Mr O'BYRNE - One would hope so, but on the face of it -

Mr ABETZ - I don't have the Treasurer's Instructions in front of me at the moment.

Mr CRANE - Through you, minister, the Treasurer's Instructions also allow that a direct procurement can occur if it is a unique opportunity that benefits Tasmania.

Mr O'BYRNE - I think it also goes on to say that as long as there's appropriate paperwork and justification to justify that decision,

Mr CRANE - Yes, that is correct.

Mr O'BYRNE - That is effectively what I am seeking.

Mr CRANE - The assessment was made that the combination of Cubic the services we provide through TMR was a unique opportunity that we could not get through a market approach and that is the basis for the decision regarding direct selection of that offer.

Mrs BESWICK - Over the last 12 months we have had a lot of issues with the drought on King Island and the shipping between Flinders and King is obviously not up to the standard we would like. I know we are looking at doing a strategic plan for the docks around King Island, but what other shipping issues options have been considered and how are we strategically planning to improve these services?

Mr ABETZ - Can you just remind me of the question so I can be as specific as possible?

Mrs BESWICK - Apart from the strategic plan for King Island, what are we looking at in terms of improving shipping for King and Flinders islands and therefore the costs and benefits, and all the things that make their lives a bit better?

Mr ABETZ - Where do we start there? Okay. The government committed \$1.5 million in the Budget for additional sailings and, if achievable, fodder relief for the Bass Strait islands and the mainland of Tasmania. Bass Island Line has now reverted to one sailing a week in response to the seasonal drop in demand. Bass Island Line remains available to reinstate the second service should the situation require. There's a Port of Grassy study in your electorate. During the recent state election, we promised \$150,000 to revisit and complete a study on the Grassy Harbour port. Planning is underway for the study, with this work to be prioritised for completion by early next year. The Department of State Growth is leading the work and the project will provide for input by the King Island community, recognising the importance of aligning infrastructure planning with future needs.

Mrs BESWICK - Apart from that, what other things - have we considered negotiating with different service providers? Are we doing any out-of-the-box thinking or are we just -

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - We always do out-of-the-box thinking. We are always interested in getting the feedback from the island communities to ensure that we service them to the very best of our ability within financial constraints. That's the balancing act and what the various needs of the community are. During the drought, there was clearly a need for extra services to provide fodder and to get cattle off King Island.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, I've heard you mention it earlier on in an answer, but there is the national heavy vehicle driver shortage that I have heard you talk about in parliament previous to this as well. Can you please outline how this year's Budget is supporting the freight and logistic sector to fill this shortage?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, I can. We do have it and I'm just looking here. The government is committed to workforce and driver development and safety in the heavy vehicle industry sector and so registration of new drivers is very important.

In the Budget, we've provided \$250,000 to the Tasmanian Transport Association to establish Tasmania's first industry-led heavy vehicle driver development program. This is to enable the heavy vehicle industry to have the drivers they need. Training of four new assessors employed by member organisations of the TTA is progressing well and is on track to be authorised by the Registrar of Motor Vehicles. We are pursuing that so that we can get people trained up to deal with this driver shortage. It's not only with Metro, it's also in the trucking sector as well that we have this driver shortage.

Mr WINTER - Minister, the new *Spirit of Tasmania* vessels are absolutely critical to Tasmania's future transport needs. We need the uplift in passengers and freight to keep up with demand. Can you tell the committee when the new *Spirit of Tasmania IV* will commence its journey to Tasmania and when it will arrive?

Mr ABETZ - No, I can't, because there were so many matters that need to be determined. Work is still being undertaken in Finland as we speak, and until those works are completed you wouldn't want the ship to leave; then there has to be the working out of a route from Finland to Australia and the various ports that it might call into, and that is quite often to be determined day to day by assessments as to security, safety - like, we won't be taking it through the Suez Canal.

There are those matters where TT-Line will take advice from certain Australian agencies, I would imagine, to determine what is a safe port to refuel, to revictual, et cetera, before moving on to the next stage. So, for you to ask me what day it is going to leave port, I say it's going to leave port will be when the works that are still being done have been completed. Similarly, I can't give you a date of arrival because if there is advice that the ships should stay somewhere to avoid certain issues in the next port or something on the open sea, then these are matters that need to be determined by the management of TT-Line and that is why I invite you to ask those detailed questions of those who deal with it on a day-to-day basis, who can provide you with the information.

Mr WINTER - The ships are currently three years delayed; they were due in 2021.

Mr ABETZ - Look -

PUBLIC

Mr WINTER -No, I haven't actually got to a question yet. How is it that these issues haven't been determined? Can you confirm that part of the consideration, or one of the things you're considering at the moment, is berthing the new ship in Singapore?

Mr ABETZ - I am not considering that and that is why it is important for you to ask these questions at the government business enterprise or state-owned corporations hearings because I cannot write to the CEO of TT-Line saying you will park the ship here or you will do whatever.

Mr WINTER - With respect, you've done that with berth 1. You wrote to them and directed them to do the work at berth 1.

Mr ABETZ - That was in relation to an infrastructure map, but in relation to the years delay of these vessels, I think we all know the circumstances of the delay, and to continually refer to the delays is quite frankly disingenuous and indicates -

Mr WINTER - It was a decision of your government to delay this; they tore up the deal with Rauma Marine Constructions (RMC).

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - Hold on, if I can continue, if you have so much information that you can provide all the answers, then do your press conferences, as you do on a regular basis, but if you are actually seeking information, then allow me to answer the questions. The delays in relation to the *Spirits* are on the public record, people know why and people in the shipbuilding sector, people involved in these sorts of negotiations, know all the circumstances surrounding the delays. It is unfortunate but we are getting brand-new vessels and I would have thought you'd share the excitement of some new vessels, might I add, something that your party would have stopped.

Mr WINTER - What?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, your party did not want to proceed with the new the new vessels.

Mr WINTER - That's not true. Have marine pilots or the harbour master raised any concerns about the ability for the *Spirit of Tasmania IV* or *V* to operate in the Mersey?

Mr ABETZ - Once again, you would need to discuss that at the GBE hearing -

Mr WINTER - So, they have?

CHAIR - Order.

Mr WINTER - They haven't?

Mr ABETZ - No, neither of those, you're trying to put words into my mouth. I'm saying to you, discuss that at the GBE hearings because I don't pick up the phone to the harbour master and ask questions. That is for the TT-Line -

Mr WINTER - So, you're refusing to answer the question.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - It is not a refusal to answer a question, it is just that you are a little bit impatient and you want to ask questions today which are more properly asked at another forum where you will get complete transparency. Indeed, you have the Public Accounts Committee having a look into these matters as well as we speak.

Ms BURNET - Minister, just to go back to the bus rapid transit. The cost estimate is \$445 million, so I am just curious as -

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, what is \$445 million?

Ms BURNET - The bus rapid transit all up. Maybe you could confirm that, but I didn't really get much of an answer as to what -

Mr ABETZ - Can you assist me with that figure?

Ms BURNET - I think it was part of the WSP report. I am not sure; I'll have to get advice on that. Regardless, I have your mind focused on the bus rapid transit with that figure. Can you describe that first tranche of the bus rapid transit - where it is going from, the route and where it might land passengers who are coming into Hobart?

Mr ABETZ - There is a current strategic business case being developed. It is considering the staged implementation of a rapid bus network which could involve a two-lane busway on the transit corridor as well as transit lanes and stations on transport corridors to the south and east of Hobart. These are matters that are still under consideration.

Ms BURNET - It's about as elusive as that ticketing system, I think. It might take quite a long time to actually arrive. Is the point of the bus rapid transit system to move people into Hobart? Tell me what the thinking is behind it.

Mr ABETZ - What people want, and I think you indicated that earlier, is the certainty of transport and timeliness of it. That is why you have these transit lanes. In Adelaide, they have the O-Bahn which seems to work quite effectively. If we can have an efficient bus system for service, then that will encourage greater usage. What is the purpose of it? It is to get people as efficiently as possible from wherever they are to the point of destination, which one would think would be mainly in the city of Hobart, and then conversely, at the end of the day, mainly getting them back out of the city of Hobart back to where they came from. That is the purpose of these.

Ms BURNET - But we do not have any sort of delivery time as to when it might be completed?

Mr ABETZ - No, we don't, because what we need to do is get together a good strategic plan, work these things out and then partner with the federal government and deliver.

Mr O'BYRNE - Minister, in relation to Cubic and the common ticketing system, are you aware of the significant delay and technical difficulties in them delivering that kind of system in Queensland and New Zealand?

Mr ABETZ - I am aware of situations in Queensland and New Zealand. Mr Crane might be able to assist in that regard, but that is one of the good things when you are further down the line - those sorts of hiccups have been worked through by the time we get it -

Mr O'BYRNE - I beg to differ. They are yet to be worked through and they're two years down the track.

Mr CRANE - We are aware of some of the delays. I've had discussions with Cubic around New Zealand. At this stage, they anticipate between three to six months, but they're hoping to catch some of that up in terms of their delivery - around the TMR delays. I would point out that, as part of our contractual arrangements with Cubic, we have put in place liquidated damages for delay. They are incentivised to deliver within the agreed schedule within the contract we have with Cubic.

We are pushing pretty hard. We understand this is an important transformational piece for how people move around the state. We have some of those aspects covered off as best we can, but obviously, delays occur. I think to the minister's point, one of the major attractions of this is that there have been many examples of ticketing systems that have not been introduced well and have had problems. One of the reasons we are looking -

Mr O'BYRNE - The ticketing system in Queensland, yes.

Mr CRANE - at the Cubic system is that it is progressing. It has just been rolled out in the Sunshine Coast. As the minister pointed out, our system will be fully tested through Queensland. It is operating on their ferries; it's operating on other services. We will get the benefit of that testing et cetera, and it's about risk mitigation for the state.

Mrs BESWICK - Currently, we're looking at another month before we have a plan of action with the ports in Devonport for the *Spirit IV* and *Spirit V*. We have *Spirit IV* imminently arriving. As Mr Winter has pointed out, the likelihood of getting anything up and running in the next few months is very low. Are we considering what we are going to do with this ship that is obviously not going to have anywhere to dock? How could we perhaps make use of that time in some way?

Mr ABETZ - Believe it or not, these are questions that have exercised a lot of people's minds, and we are seeking the best of advice. It's a bit like AFL finals; everybody becomes a football coach this time of year. Everybody knows how the game will be played. Similarly, nowadays, it seems that everybody knows how to build a port, and how to do this and how to do that.

Mr WINTER - You don't.

Mr ABETZ - I think it's worthwhile to rely on some of those people who actually have genuine expertise in these matters, and that is what the government and I are now relying on to get the best of advice as to what we can do. As the Premier has previously said, and I'm more than happy to repeat it, that which has occurred is unacceptable and has let Tasmania down. What we can do is look backwards, or we can look forward and say, 'What are we going to do to fix these issues and get the best possible outcome for Tasmanians?' That is what the Premier and his government are committed to doing.

PUBLIC

Ms BESWICK - Can you confirm that if the worst of the worst comes out in this report, to say it's going to be forever until the berth is ready, that we will have a plan B very quickly?

Mr ABETZ - All these things are being looked at. There are a variety of possibilities, and, of course, the ship will have to come into Hobart as well to be decked out for the local content, and there are a number of businesses here that will be benefiting from that. There are a number of matters that are going to be considered, and I am looking forward to the very best advice that we can get.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, I want to go to the state-of-the-art Cubic transport ticketing system, which Mr O'Byrne has asked some questions about. History says that whenever we deal with any of these electronic issues, there's some groundwork to overcome before they are a benefit. I don't want to answer this question for you, but recently I was in Queensland and to be able to tap-on, tap-off with the credit card is a substantial benefit. It was actually only over the weekend my wife came out with five Opal cards when we were last in Sydney. You have to find somewhere to buy a card, then have enough money on it and, at the end of the day, because you paid a deposit, you have to find somebody, somewhere if you want to recoup your deposit. I don't want to answer the question for you, but there are significant advantages in being able to tap-on, tap-off with a credit card. I'm just wondering if you could go through those benefits to all Tasmanians and visitors alike.

Mr ABETZ - On the last point first - 'visitors alike'. If you're a tourist in Tasmania, when this system is in place, you'll be able to catch the Derwent ferry and just tap on with your credit card, your phone, your watch, whatever your device or mechanism may be. You won't need a GreenCard which you have to procure and then put money into it and then try and cash it out if there's still money in it before you leave. All those sorts of inconveniences are removed. Also, for the Tasmanian commuters, you have your GreenCard. How much money's on it? When you tap it tomorrow morning, will there still be money on it? You won't have to -

Ms Burnet - Just make it free.

Mr ABETZ - Well, interesting, and I'll take that interjection because that is something I have thought about. Interestingly enough, the issues for public transport are certainty and reliability and not so much the cost, which is an interesting factor when you look at all these things. Look, the Cubic, or the common ticketing system, is something that's been in the pipeline for a long time, and it's good to be able to announce it and look forward to it operating for the convenience of our fellow Tasmanians and also for any visitor or tourist to Tasmania that seeks to avail themselves of public transport.

Ms BROWN - Minister, how many hydrogen buses were purchased and what was the cost?

Mr ABETZ - There's a good question. I believe there were four electric, if I recall correctly.

Ms BROWN - I was asking about hydrogen.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, you were asking about hydrogen. I saw one of them out of the depot the other day. Three. There are three hydrogen buses.

Ms BROWN - And cost?

Mr ABETZ - That I don't know.

Ms BROWN - Will you take it on notice?

Mr ABETZ - Once again, these are matters for Metro at the GBE hearings and they can answer those sorts of questions. They were given, I've been told - as I wasn't around at the time - that they were given specific funding, a special grant, for electric and hydrogen buses and they then have to acquit against that so the detail of that is with Metro rather than with DSG.

I can pass the buck. It was Mr Duigan, the minister for environment, who bought these buses, so you will need to ask there. It was not DSG. It was NRE was it?

Mr LIMKIN - No, it was DSG's climate change portfolio.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, DSG's climate change portfolio, there you go.

Ms BROWN - Has an electrolyser been purchased? What was the cost and who paid for it?

Mr ABETZ - That I can't answer and, once again, I invite you to ask that at the GBE hearings where people from Metro, the CEO and others will be able to provide that sort of information. Now that you've asked it, I am sure they'll be reading *Hansard* so when the GBE hearings come up, they will be well-briefed to be able to answer that question.

Ms BURNET - Minister, in relation to that \$445 million figure, that was a pre-COVID figure and it was in the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report from 2020, for the record.

Mr ABETZ - To whom was that?

Ms BURNET - I think it was to the department from PwC. From the Hobart City deal.

Now my question, again, relates to modal shift. When we're looking at the stadium calculations, the shift is 40 per cent private vehicle, 60 per cent public, so not cars. The concern that I have is that, you mentioned before that at Blundstone Arena there's acres of buses and so forth, but really that that modelling is quite flawed. The 31 per cent share on bus is a minimum but will be very expensive to achieve, and the lack of developed public transport culture and services means local buses will be under extreme pressure. On AFL match Saturdays, the Metro networks normally fail, with extreme delays, because there's just not enough services. How do you expect to deliver that significant modal shift, given that the education campaign to do that isn't even costed?

Mr ABETZ - As I'm advised, according to the Macquarie Point Development Corporation's multi-purpose stadium transport study, rapid buses are only projected to provide around 3 per cent of the transport requirements for AFL games, whereas event buses are projected to provide around 25 per cent of the passenger transport, with regular bus services and ferries combined to provide a further 5 per cent of the transport requirements. That is the result of their study. With these things, there are always these very interesting studies. What

PUBLIC

human behaviour does at the end of the day will be what we can all talk about, and see whether these studies were right or not.

Ms BURNET - There are other predictions or calculations that there'll be a 10 per cent taxi share, which seems excessive given the lack of taxis. Perhaps you can provide the committee advice on how many taxis are available, including access cabs, in the Hobart area?

Mr ABETZ - We're now moving on to taxis and the-

Ms BURNET - It is part of your remit.

Mr ABETZ - It is indeed, but it is in a different area.

Right. Currently, wheelchair accessible taxi licences: 57; current standard taxi licences: 535; and driver licence holders: 1209.

Ms BURNET - Across the state?

Mr ABETZ - And that is across the state, yes.

Ms BURNET - And wheelchair-accessible, I'd be surprised if we'd have half that number operating in Hobart. Do we have any idea of how many are actually operating?

Mr CRANE - That 57 is a statewide number. I'd have to double-check on the southern number.

Ms BURNET - But operating, actually operating.

Mr CRANE - Yes, it used to be around 70. We've tidied that up and we've noticed that there has been a little drop in numbers across the state in wheelchair-accessible taxis. But I would point out also, if I may, minister, the government introduced some changes to the wheelchair-accessible taxis to improve accessibility, which means that the lift fee for taxi operators is now a flat \$20. We've also put in place some requirements of drivers to take wheelchair-accessible trips. We have seen some lift in the number of people being able to access wheelchair-accessible services due to those changes.

I believe that 10 per cent also includes access to Uber ride-sharing services, where there's a number of people providing that. That ride-sharing model is about people coming on board for events such as that to provide those services. So it is a combination of both.

Ms BURNET - But I understand -

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - If I may quickly, before you ask your next question. I'm advised there are 34 in Hobart as of 30 June.

Ms BURNET - It would be good to have those figures, if I might request those for the committee.

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, which figures?

Ms BURNET - The figures as to how many are actually operating. It's something that comes up quite often with constituents in relation to access to access cabs. It's sometimes very difficult. There's only a small amount, when you're going to Bellerive, that use taxi and ride-share. So it'd be interesting to see how that figure of 10 per cent is arrived at.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, I think there is an extra payment.

Mr CRANE - We pay a \$20 lift fee.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, \$20.

Mr CRANE - Which has significantly increased from previous numbers to incentivise taxi drivers to undertake wheelchair-accessible trips. That, as I said, has seen a lift in the number of services provided across the state and in the regions.

Ms BURNET - Have you got that information available?

Mr CRANE - I think I have got some information on this, percentage increases in trips available. I will find that for you and pass it to the minister.

Mr O'BYRNE - It's good to see we finally got a couple of announcements around the Derwent ferries off the back of the federal government's 2021 infrastructure commitment. There has been some feedback about the location of at least one of the ferry terminals. These ferry terminals arguably need to work in concert with other modes of transport, like a hub and spoke model. The location that's been identified in Sandy Bay is very difficult for, there's no ability for buses to turn around to pick up and drop off. It is, essentially, by Sandy Bay Road. Also, whilst I think there was a discussion around Lindisfarne and Natone Street Pier, there were many questions asked why Rose Bay was not considered, given the other indicator - not just the hub and spoke, but you need to be where people live, so the population catchment. Could you talk through why those two places were chosen, what process was undertaken and do you believe they're the right spots?

Mr ABETZ - I will get the Secretary to deal with that.

Mr LIMKIN - State Growth continues to engage with each council, including Clarence Council, in relation to potential ferry terminal developments. You talked about Lindisfarne. This engagement is being undertaken by the River Derwent Ferry Expansion steering committee and, in some cases, in the Lindisfarne case, direct with the council. State Growth and the greater Hobart councils have steering committee meetings scheduled on a monthly basis, with meetings to work through. As the body for commissioning ferry services, State Growth has developed its decision-making guidelines in relation to the provision of extended service. This framework will be, and can be applied on all ferry terminals. My understanding is there were no issues identified through the draft master planning analysis, but the department will continue to work with our council partners as we firm up the locations through the period of time.

Mr O'BYRNE - Just clarifying that. So, there's a federal government grant to the state government, the state government has auspiced that money through the southern council

PUBLIC

committee you have established and a decision has been made, particularly on the Sandy Bay and the Lindisfarne sites. My question was not about what process you went to necessarily. It's the feedback that they're the wrong spots.

Mr LIMKIN - As I've outlined, the department has worked through this with the councils in collaboration, using a decision-making guideline which looks at areas such as physical access, service area, demographics, suitable service types, ease of [inaudible], building criteria. We have also had criteria regarding marine sustainability, environmental capability [inaudible], accessibility and connectivity, congestion, network planning and land use services before a final decision has been made.

The advice I have is that the work has been quite substantial to make sure we are providing the best advice and best decisions both for the state government and councils. Ultimately, it is a joint decision-making framework and we've done that through that those mechanisms.

CHAIR - I think what we might do is have a break for five minutes.

Mr ABETZ - If I may, Chair, quickly in response to Ms Burnet, I have some extra information for wheelchair-accessible taxis. New regulations were introduced and the requirement for the wheelchair-accessible taxis to give priority to jobs for wheelchair-reliant passengers and to perform a minimum number of those trips per month. That minimum number is 30. Since the regulations, I'm advised that - these April, May, June figures, 2023, pre-reform, and then 2024 post-reform in April: there was a 21 per cent increase, so April 2023 on April 2024, that was a 21 per cent increase. May, similarly, it was an 11 per cent increase and June, a 12 per cent increase. So, these new regulations and incentives seem to work. When I give you the percentage figures, I can let you know that the number of trips we are talking about for April was from 2621 to 3180. So, we're talking about, if I might say, quite a few trips.

Ms BURNET - Thank you.

The Committee suspended from 7.45 p.m. to 7.50 p.m.

CHAIR - We shall commence.

Ms BROWN - Minister, surely you know if the electrolyser has been purchased?

Mr ABETZ - No, I don't.

Ms BROWN - Will you take it on notice then?

Mr ABETZ - No. I would invite you to ask that at Metro.

Ms BROWN - You're the Transport minister. You should know these things.

CHAIR - Order.

Ms BROWN - Can you give an update on the trial?

Mr ABETZ - Once again, that was given to Metro.

PUBLIC

Ms BROWN - Do you know where the buses currently are?

Mr WILLIE - It's a line item for passenger service order.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr ABETZ - I am assuming the buses are at the depot. I don't have oversight of where each bus is in relation to the fleet of, I would imagine, hundreds of buses.

Ms BROWN - I'm specifically talking about the hydrogen buses.

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms BROWN - There are not hundreds of them.

Mr ABETZ - I don't have oversight where each individual bus is. I'm sure you're asking about three of them, but I have no idea where they might be housed to this evening. If you go to Metro GBE scrutiny hearings, they'll be able to tell you where they were, on the night of the 23 September 2024 as you are so anxious to know where they are tonight.

Mr WILLIE - It is a passenger transport line item that helps fund Metro.

Ms BROWN - You seem to have a note.

Mr ABETZ - That was an answer to another question which I will mention after your next question.

Ms BROWN - Have any of these buses taken public transport passengers?

Mr ABETZ - Last time I checked, no, they haven't. Once again, that is something that you should check with Metro. At the time I was out at the Metro depot and had a look at one of these buses it had not been in service. If I may, just before you ask, I gave an answer before in relation to common ticketing to Mr O'Byrne and I've been told it was the then Secretary of the Department of State Growth who signed the actual direct procurement authorisation, not the minister.

Mr O'BYRNE - The minister would have been made aware.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, it was on the recommendation of the secretary.

Mr O'BYRNE - Thirty-five million is a bit beyond the delegation I would say.

Ms BURNET - Minister, the last household travel survey was published in 2019 and we are waiting for the 2023 survey to be released. Do we know when that is likely to be?

Mr ABETZ - Well, I did not really know there was such a survey. So, thank you very much, Ms Burnet, for advising all these wonderful things I am finding out.

PUBLIC

Ms BURNET - Well, it is pretty important just to see where everybody comes from and how they get there. Points out how poor our public transport system is faring.

Mr ABETZ - It's being finalised but no date as yet for when it will be released.

Ms BURNET - Just in relation to active transport, we heard today from the Premier that the Tasman Bridge upgrades aren't favourable for pedestrians nor for cyclists. It's very likely that's going to be very limited and not conducive or any better for pedestrians or cyclists.

What are the priorities of the Better Active Transport Program which is funded in the current Budget at \$1 million per year, this year and next? Because councils are very concerned about the funding running out before projects are complete. Just so that you know that the budget dedicated to cycling infrastructure reduces to just \$500 000 per annum in forward Estimates.

Mr ABETZ - These are infrastructure matters and that's why the Premier was answering earlier this morning. I'll hand over to the Secretary who has oversight on all these things.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, Minister, and through you, increasing infrastructure for and the awareness of people walking, wheelchair and riding and active transport is pivotal to improving our transport made a choice in Tasmania.

Since 2015, the Tasmanian Government has made significant direct investment totalling \$15.5 million into active transport infrastructure programs in relation to the Better Active Transport Grant Program. It was launched in 2023. Round one and two saw a total of \$9.15 million approved to councils, with a total value of projects being \$14.47 million.

The Greater Hobart Cycling Plan was endorsed by the then minister for Infrastructure and Transport in January 2023 and the Tasmanian Cycling Infrastructure Design guidelines we've undertaken targeted stakeholder engagement between November 2023 and August 2024. I understand they're approved and published in September.

Mr O'BYRNE - This is sort of one question on the TT-Line and it's not on the TT-Line's books. Did the state government in terms of the \$80 million payment to the finished shipbuilder, at any stage, seek defect advice as to the appropriateness of that payment?

Mr ABETZ - Not that I'm aware of. As I understand it, the TT-Line board made that determination for the extra payment without - so, TT-Line did that during caretaker and yes, I will find out whether it be [inaudible] advice.

Mr O'BYRNE - Do I need to put that on notice or are you right to just report that back to the committee? At 8:55, I'll write it down if I haven't got it.

Mr ABETZ - Done.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, can you please outline how the government is supporting the heritage and tourism rail sector, please?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, the heritage and tourism rail sector is something which I found out was under my portfolio as well. I've had a chat with people on the west coast, and with the

PUBLIC

West Coast Wilderness Railway and Don River Railway. I understand the president of the Legislative Council has a passing interest as well. I've been to the transport museum, et cetera. It is part and parcel of tourism and a lot of community interest.

One of the issues unfortunately has been public liability insurance. Following the review of the insurance requirements for operating heritage and tourism rail services on corridors leased from the Crown, the government has determined it can accept a lower level of public liability insurance for heritage rail operators while maintaining appropriate protection for the Crown. That has been of some real assistance to those operators.

Those tourists and heritage rail organisations have maintained a strong interest in opportunities to access the rail lines on the Tasmanian rail network. We are working with them to try to encourage that as much as possible, keeping in mind that they are pretty heavy on money, but they are also very popular.

Ms BROWN - Transit officers were announced by Minister Ferguson 18 months ago and he said that they would be on the ground in six months. There are still no transit officers on buses. When will they be implemented? Will you guarantee that they will be on buses by the end of 2024? Not security officers, transit officers.

Mr ABETZ - You're talking about transit officers?

Ms BROWN - Transit, yet.

Mr ABETZ - The pilot deployment of transit officers in southern Tasmania has been running since 3 April 2023 with the aim to make our bus network a safe and attractive choice for customers, and, might I add also, for the workers and the drivers - or operators as they're now called.

Ms BROWN - Will you guarantee that they will be rolled out across all buses by the end of 2024?

Mr ABETZ - They aren't rolled out on all buses. It's like you don't have a policeman at every street corner. They are placed on certain buses randomly, as I understand it.

The supplementary appropriation bill of \$8.1 million was passed before your time and my time in this place. That's \$2 million to extend deployment of transit offices statewide, \$2.1 million to Metro to fund introduction of security screens, \$2 million to Metro Tasmania to fund a wage rise to improve the attraction and retention of drivers, and \$2 million for an IT system. Coming back, it was \$2 million for transit officers.

As I understand it, transit officers have successfully de-escalated disruptive behaviours, including instances of yelling, arguments and vaping. During the pilot officers have been deployed to areas identified from incident data provided by general access bus operators. Examples of focus areas have included Rokeby, Glenorchy, Kingston, Huonville, Sorell and Bridgewater.

Ms BROWN - How many transit officers are actually on buses?

Unknown - They are security guards.

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIE - He's calling security guards transit officers when they don't have the same powers.

Ms BROWN - They're not the same thing.

Mr ABETZ - There's a team of 10.

Ms BROWN - Ten transit officers? Will you be increasing those numbers?

Mr ABETZ - I'll be getting the advice from Metro. Once again, I would invite you to ask these questions -

Ms BROWN - This would come from you, though, wouldn't it, minister?

Mr ABETZ - at Metro, because they will be able to give you advice as to how the situations are developing. I would like to see a situation where transit officers are no longer needed. They weren't needed in the past. We have, unfortunately, had antisocial behaviours which has required them. I would like to hope that we can get back to where we were without the need for them. I've been advised that it's noted that despite occasions of antisocial behaviour, the southern Tasmania bus network operates largely without incident.

Ms BURNET - I don't know if your question was answered at all there.

Minister, given that about 3 to 6 per cent of Tasmanians are using public transport and a 49 per cent increase is needed for emissions reductions, will you extend the half-price fares program indefinitely to encourage Tasmanians to make the switch? Are you intending for that to be permanently in place?

Mr ABETZ - What we have said is that it was a cost-of-living measure, and we will have a look at all the information that is to be gleaned from that period of 12 to 13 months and see what the uptake has been, and we will inform ourselves as to if there's anything to be learned from that and how we can tweak or make adjustments to our public transport system from that. But we aren't going to make any announcements prior to us knowing what the information is.

Ms BURNET - Just in relation to the electric bus trial, electrification of buses has been around and used in other jurisdictions for quite some time. Can you just explain to me why there needs to be a trial of this form of vehicle as opposed to just introducing them across the fleet?

Mr ABETZ - If I recall correctly, and somebody at the table may well correct me, but I understand that the initial buses needed to be retrofitted because they did not comply with disability standards. So, that is why with these things - it is often good to ensure that you don't buy a job lot in the hope that everything's going to be okay, but you test and see, and I understand those adjustments have now been made. But, once again, if you want details of that, I would encourage you to go to the GBE hearings, scrutiny hearings, of Metro.

Ms BURNET - In relation to the ferries, is there any way that you can electrify those from the start?

PUBLIC

Mr ABETZ - Talk to Bob Clifford, I'm sure he's got -

Ms BURNET - You're the minister.

Mr ABETZ - something in mind that. Look, that is not something that I have personally looked at, but more than willing to take advice on whether there are other modes of powering our ferries.

Ms BURNET - For short distances?

Mr O'BYRNE - Thank you, Chair. Minister, my question is around the issue of seatbelts in buses. In a letter - and I'll paraphrase, I'll try and be quick - to the Tasmanian Bus Association, you basically said there's not a lot of difference between not wearing a seat belt and standing up than actually having a seat belt. Are you still of that view, and what is the Road Safety Advisory Council's position on the matter?

Mr ABETZ - It is a good question. As I understand it, a bus that has 25 seats is required to have seatbelts and, if seatbelts are fitted in a vehicle, then by law it is required that you wear them. For buses that are over a 25-seat capacity, the advice is that a lot of the buses of that size have seats and structures that make the wearing of seatbelts not as important as it otherwise might be.

I'm told there's no legislative requirement for buses, including student only or general access buses, to have seatbelts fitted. Research shows that travelling on buses without seatbelts is safe due to the size and construction of larger buses' effectiveness in protecting passengers. Small buses used on school bus services need to be fitted with seatbelts. Small buses are buses with 25 seats or fewer.

Mr O'BYRNE - A lot of the regional services travel on non-A-grade roads at higher speeds. Could you explain the rationale behind the Australian Design Rules, which mandated seatbelts for non-route buses from 2010? If seatbelts were deemed unnecessary for safety, why would they have done that?

Mr ABETZ - You would have to ask them. Whether these buses travel at high speed as you assert-

Mr O'BYRNE - Higher speeds.

Mr ABETZ - I would like to think that the drivers engaged in driving our fellow citizens and students around would drive to the conditions.

Mr O'BYRNE - Could you clarify the inconsistency in seatbelt requirements where many chartered buses for school services managed by DECYP must have seatbelts but DSG managed buses do not?

Mr ABETZ - That's a very good question and I don't know what the differential is. Somebody who runs a school bus service might be able to answer that, I don't know.

Mr O'BYRNE - You're the minister, you run them all.

PUBLIC

Ms BROWN - Federal compliance.

Mr ABETZ - I will hand over to Denise McIntyre.

Mr LIMKIN - I am happy to carry that one.

Mr ABETZ - I will hand over to the secretary.

Mr LIMKIN - I'm advised that DECYP does charter certain school buses. Those are directly chartered by DECYP with their individual contractors, but the services DSG provides, which are all school buses and the school bus services, do not have seatbelts. As the minister said, there is no legislative requirement. As the purchaser of services for seatbelts, DSG makes sure we comply with the law. At this stage we comply with the law, which there is no regulation.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's just stunning, isn't it?

Mr WILLIE - You comply with the law but you made the laws.

CHAIR - Order.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, I understand that in your electorate of Franklin - marvellous electorate, of course - there was funding for the Gordon jetty in the Budget. Can you please outline how this will benefit the members of Franklin in their area?

Mr ABETZ - In 2018, if I recall correctly, the jetty was burnt and was no longer operational, as a result of which representations have been made and we've made money available in the Budget to enable the rebuild of the Gordon jetty.

Those of us who know that area. I think there are three representatives of Franklin around the table, the Gordon Jetty is used by the substantial cohort of people who live south of Margate. There's a good jetty and boat ramp at Margate, but then also people coming in from the Huon side. It's an important camping site as well. There is a lot of recreational use of that jetty. That's an important community amenity and I'm delighted we've got some money to be able to rebuild that community facility.

Ms BROWN - Minister, 10 transit officers was not the commitment that was made by your government. Are you planning to replace the current security guards on buses with transit officers?

Mr CRANE - Is the question are we going to employ our own transit officers, just to clarify? We have no plans to do that at this stage. We'll be looking at the powers of our transit officers, who are employed by Wilson - that is a fact - in terms of what additional powers they can be provided in terms of directions, et cetera, for leaving buses when there's a circumstance.

Our focus at the moment is to ensure they are properly trained and they satisfy the Transport Commission that they've got the appropriate skills to undertake those additional powers which relate to asking people for their name, direction, and under the legislation we've also increased the banning capacity. We can increase bans up to six months for poor behaviour on buses. Our goal is to ensure that our transit officers are trained under the requirements to

have those additional powers. They are strategically placed across the southern network; that is the amount for the southern network.

Ms BROWN - I understand that, but that's not the commitment that was made at the election and, with all due respect, the security on the buses do not have the same powers as security guards when it comes to curbing antisocial behaviours.

Mr LIMKIN - Not at this stage, but we're planning to provide those security guards, transit officers, the additional training to enable them to take on additional powers.

Ms BROWN - Okay. Just one more question. Are their pay rates the same, because if not, they should be.

Mr LIMKIN - It's a contracted service from Wilson, so I'm not sure what their pay rates are. I'm not quite sure what that question is relating to. We contract the service to provide transit officers on buses for a number of hours per week. We target those hours and those services based on feedback from our employees. Where there are incidences, we work very closely with Tasmania Police on matters relating that are highly escalated, so if an issue becomes seriously escalated we refer those matters to Tasmania Police. A lot of the incidents we've identified are in bus malls and that is a space where Tasmania Police operate.

Ms BURNET - Minister, you talked a bit about DDA compliance with electric buses and that's why you might undertake a trial before purchasing; I understand that. The bus stops and DDA compliance is woeful across most of Tasmania, so I'm just wondering what you're doing to rectify the situation and making bus stops up to standard, up to DDA compliance.

Mr ABETZ - We do have a program and somebody will soon tell me where to find the detail of that.

Ms BURNET - I see there's \$2.5 million, about \$10 million over four years for that.

Mr ABETZ - We made a 2021 election commitment of up to \$10 million to provide all-access all-weather bus stops at priority locations. That represents the largest single injection of funding for bus stops and is delivering improvements to infrastructure across the board.

I understand that smaller councils, in particular, have received grants to date, although Launceston City Council has been a keen participant and has received grants for a total of 68 stops across the two rounds and has completed 27 to date. Some larger southern councils have refused having any responsibility for bus stop provision and maintenance, and either have not made application or sought bespoke arrangements for participation which have not been accepted.

We have a fund and round three of the program opened in August of this year. State Growth has reached out to those councils that have not previously participated in the grant program to encourage them to apply for round three. High priority bus stop upgrades along key state road corridors are also being addressed with this election commitment funding. Is there a lot of work to do due to neglect over decades? Yes there is, but we have made the largest amount of money ever available for that and we're trying to rectify the situation. However, we won't be able to do it overnight.

Ms BURNET - As a follow-up question -

Mr LIMKIN - Sorry, Ms Burnet, I just want to add that the Department of State Growth takes disability inclusion really seriously. We have spent the last two years working across the department to ensure we had tangible actions for disability inclusion. Some of those include, as the minister said, improving infrastructure at bus stops and engaging with the minister and Premier's Disability Advisory Council to help us design these programs. We are committed to creating accessibility across all of our portfolios because it is really important that our community has that access.

Ms BURNET - I'm very pleased to hear that.

Mr ABETZ - I can also add, if I may, 162 bus stops across the state will have been upgraded to full compliance with disability standards over the first two rounds of the grant program. I think Mr O'Byrne asked me a question first of all to do with Oakdale, but then generally the disability sector. Minister Jo Palmer and I held a roundtable dealing, amongst other things, with disability access to transport and public transport.

Ms BURNET - So 162 bus stops, that's fantastic. How many bus stops would there be in total across Tasmania?

Mr ABETZ - I would anticipate - who does the bus stop counting?

Ms HEYDON - We'll come back and confirm.

Mr CRANE - The majority of bus stops are on local roads.

Ms BURNET - What does that mean?

Mr CRANE - That is one of our challenges with councils, and as the minister alluded to, I would like all councils to participate in the program.

Ms BURNET - Well, there's a lot of transport property in your electorate, minister, as there is in the northern suburbs of Hobart.

Mr O'BYRNE - Just before I ask the question, I want to confirm that I've been provided with advice from the secretary that my question for the TT-Line and DFAT advice needs to be taken on notice, and I've done that.

My question is a follow-up to member for Franklin Meg Brown's question on the transit officers. My question has always been why has the department engaged the service and not Metro? Metro is the organisation responsible for running the buses and providing safe, secure environments, et cetera. Why did they not have full responsibility to direct and instruct where to go? Why has the department engaged all the contracted services? It seems a bit confusing to me.

Mr CRANE - We engage those services because although Metro is the largest provider of services, we have a number of other service providers, such as Tassielink and others. We're looking to provide a service more broadly across the whole GA network. That is one of the

PUBLIC

major reasons why we've taken that on board. We work very closely with operators including Metro around where we need to deploy those operators.

Mr O'BYRNE - So, the current security officers who are trialling the transit officer role are now taking trips on private buses as well, on Kinetic and others, or are they, as my understanding is, just taking on Metro?

Mr CRANE - There may be some confusion but Kinetic and Tassielink provide similar services to Metro and they are contracted to provide general access services, the same as Metro. They are operating and when we can, we put them on Tassielink and Kinetic services.

Mr O'BYRNE - So those transit officers are going on Tassielink and others already?

Mr CRANE - Yes, and we have quite a responsive approach when, unfortunately, an incident occurs. We look to put those officers on those buses in response to that and we work closely with our operators.

Mr O'BYRNE - When you move from the trial to the more permanent status, is it by virtue of the practice that it will now be run by the department and not run by any of the services? Will there be a user pays principle in terms of the cost incurred with that?

Mr CRANE - The government has fully funded the trial and there's no cost to operators. If that were to change we'd work through that with operators and the government, but at this stage it has been fully funded by government.

Mr O'BYRNE - When does the trial end?

Mr CRANE - The trial will be ending fairly shortly and we'll be looking toward the government around the expansion of that service.

Mr ABETZ - I may, quickly, in answer to Ms Burnet's question, my punt that there were thousands of bus stops was proven to be correct another few times, but my guess is a correct 3500 general-access bus stops in Tasmania.

Ms BURNET - Thank you. So, it's only really a drop in the ocean.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, it is, and we are mindful of the task that's ahead of us and the need for co-operation from local governments as well.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, my question is around the old two-stroke driven petrol-powered cycles. What's the government doing to regulate those noisy and unsafe petrol-powered bikes? You can't call them push bikes anymore because they've got a motor attached to them.

Mr ABETZ - They are a genuine concern to the community; one, the noise they make and two, the safety issue for the rider as well as the community at large, because they attach these sort of lawnmower motors or whatever to these push bikes, but the braking system is not fit for purpose when it's powered with an engine of that nature. We as the government have promulgated regulations which will give some grace period that will ensure that if they are classified as motor vehicles, they can get them classified, but then they'll have to have them

PUBLIC

registered, et cetera, and they'll have to be checked to be of a particular safety standard. Chances are a lot of them would not pass that fundamental test. I'm just trying to find the date; I think it's the beginning of next year that they will be banned. What we're trying to do is protect mainly the young users, the public and the amenity of the community to ensure that they don't have to put up with that noise. We are doing what we can as a result of representations from the public as to the nuisance that they cause, but we are giving some leeway so people can get them either registered or upgraded properly to overcome the difficulties of which I spoke.

Mr SHELTON - Obviously they'd never complied with the ADR regulations, the Australian Design Rules, it's obvious.

Ms BROWN - Minister, the Liberal government has committed over \$3 million each year for the More Buses initiative. Is all of that money going to Metro Tasmania or will some be going to the private sector?

Mr ABETZ - That money goes to all general access service providers. We contract with Metro, Tassielink, Kinetic, Calow's, Manions', and whoever else.

Ms BROWN - How much of that money will be going to Metro Tasmania?

Mr CRANE - We're in the process of doing a review of the southern network, particularly in the south. We've started that work and, in that review, we're looking to try to make sure that services get the maximum benefit. That review will enable us to determine where those additional funds will go. We're not yet sure exactly where they'll go, but it'll be greatly appreciated and will inform the outcomes of the review of the southern network.

Ms BROWN - Okay. Will that be a public document once it's - ?

Mr CRANE - Yes.

Ms BROWN - Great. Also, your government has committed \$5 million to Metro Tasmania for the bus replacement program. What type of buses will be purchased?

Mr CRANE - That is probably a matter for Metro, but I would assume, at this stage, while we're in the middle of trials for electric buses, it'll still probably be Euro VI standard buses.

Ms BROWN - And so how much - just one more question.

CHAIR - I've been pretty lenient and the number in the room's dwindling, so I think we'll be back to you very quickly.

Mr ABETZ - In fact, I've just been advised that that's a reimbursement for buses already purchased.

Mr CRANE - Yes, my apologies. That's correct, minister.

Mr ABETZ - Is it? Right. Yes. Handy things, these screens. They just throw up answers. I don't know where they come from.

PUBLIC

Ms BURNET - Minister, traffic congestion and air pollution are two major factors that affect transport and our health generally. I'm just interested to know what sort of incentives you might be considering in relation to active transport, such as e-bikes or personal mobility devices. Are there any sort of incentives and subsidies in that area?

Mr ABETZ - I've just been advised that those incentives are with the minister who's got responsibility, and that is Mr Duigan.

Ms BURNET - Right, okay. I suppose, to that broader question, what are you doing to tackle traffic congestion and air pollution in relation to active transport and encouraging that?

Mr ABETZ - In relation to air pollution, the quicker cars can be on and off the roads, the better. As a result, the road works that we're undertaking are part and parcel of that. In relation to active transport, where it is appropriate, we seek to encourage walking paths, et cetera.

We've just had some that I think were announced in Snug and Kingston. I'm just trying to think where else. We've got the one along with the north-west coast at Cooe - is it Cooe way, a cycle and walking path there? We do have a program of seeking to make that -

Ms BURNET - And how do you measure that? How do you measure the effectiveness of the uptake of active transport?

Mr ABETZ - I suppose that's one of those questions, like how do you measure the uptake of a road widening or a brand-new road or a bypass road. It's very hard to determine. I don't know if there's some metric that is used by somebody.

So, we are developing a strategy, Secretary? The Tasmanian Walk, Wheel, Ride strategy, with a public consultation proposed from late October for four weeks.

CHAIR - Mr O'Byrne.

Mr ABETZ - We bounce to Mr O'Byrne a bit too often, I think, Chair.

Ms O'BYRNE - When the Chair calls, I have to answer. When bus services are contracted in certain areas to deliver services there are penalties if they fail to deliver those services. What are they?

Mr ABETZ - That would be the contractual terms determined by the Department of State Growth and the provider. Mr Crane or deputy secretary, do you have the detail?

Mr O'BYRNE - Is there a framework?

Mr ABETZ - I understand there is. Ms Heydon?

Ms HEYDON - Yes, it will depend on each of the contracts, but in relation to Metro Tasmania, we have had funds of \$2.525 million withheld since January 2023 in relation to their performance.

Mr ABETZ - I believe the question is the metric that's used. Is that in the contract?

Ms HEYDON - It's in the contract, yes, it's specific to each of the contracts.

Mr O'BYRNE - Just let me be clear. You have Metro that's struggling to deliver the services and there are budgetary challenges, and you've withheld over \$2 million in penalties? Is that right? I understood that they were being waived.

Ms HEYDON - No, we've withheld funds since January 2023.

Mr CRANE - They're not penalties. They're the costs they have avoided by not, unfortunately, being able to deliver services. We're not paying for a service that isn't provided. Only parts of those costs, so they're not a penalty as such.

Mr O'BYRNE - Okay. What's the total withheld payments to other providers?

Mr CRANE - Zero. Other operators have been close to the wind a couple of times but they still continue to deliver their services.

Mr O'BYRNE - How was that accounted for in the budget papers then, because I've not seen that line item - withheld payments?

Mr ABETZ - Withheld payments, you don't budget for those things. It's under a contractual arrangement.

Mr CRANE - It's seen as an expense item. We pay less as part of our contract, so it's part of the overall expenditure we use for general access services.

Mr SHELTON - How is the government supporting local government - local government's dear to my heart - to improve outcomes for vulnerable road users?

Mr ABETZ - To the former distinguished mayor of the Meander Valley Council and member for Lyons, the government has a program to improve road safety and we are working on 40 projects around Tasmania to improve safety on local and rural roads. The funding comes from the latest rounds of our Vulnerable Road User Program and the Safer Rural Roads Program, both part of our Towards Zero Action Plan 2020-24. Whilst you have to have the ambition of having zero, the campaign is called Towards Zero, I think we all look forward to the day when there might not be a road fatality. We know that driver behaviour is an important factor, but also the standard of our roads is an important factor. That is where we are seeking to partner with local government to assist in dealing with some of those unsafe aspects of the local road network.

Ms BROWN - Minister, your government has committed \$1.4 million for the electric bus trial. How much of that money will be committed to educating mechanics to fix the buses when they break down?

Mr ABETZ - That is such a detailed management question. I invite you to ask that of Metro.

Ms BROWN - Okay. Currently, how many mechanics are educated to fix buses like the electric buses?

Mr ABETZ - Once again, you would have to ask Metro that question. The detail of the qualifications of each of the mechanics is not something I am briefed on a daily basis. Keep that for the government business enterprise scrutiny.

Ms BROWN - Let's try another one. There was \$14 million allocated to Metro Tasmania to help with the attracting and retention of drivers. Whilst I'm pleased to see this money and some sort of strategy for retaining drivers, was there any thought into giving our private operators any funding, if \$14 million is going to Metro Tasmania?

Ms HEYDON - We work with all the operators to understand what their needs are in relation to bus drivers. I can say that the issue is predominantly in Metro. That doesn't mean that we're not actively engaged with other operators if they feel they've got a need as well, but our focus is on working with Metro.

Mr ABETZ - And would it be fair to say its Metro Southern mainly?

Ms HEYDON - Yes.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, so Metro Launceston and Burnie don't seem to have the issue of driver attention and drivers. I'm not a social scientist, but I think in smaller regional communities and with Tassielink, the other providers, they seem to have a more stable workforce than the one provider that does the city and suburbs services.

Ms BURNET - Minister, I think we're on the home straight.

Mr ABETZ - We can finish right now.

Ms BURNET - No, no, we are still bringing you right to the end. Bus services in southern Tasmania are fairly poorly connected and there's a lot of frustration, particularly in regional areas, in relation to reliability of services and the function of the bus network. Often you have, from the far reaches of Franklin or the Tasman Peninsula, you might have a bus trundling up with some passengers up to Huonville and that bus may go all the way to Hobart, whereas there may be a hub-and-spoke approach to bus services. I am wondering about the thinking and logic behind, perhaps, altering that. This is even to the point where ferries and Metro services aren't even joined up on the eastern shore, so you can't go to Rosny. What's your plan to fix some of those things? It's not a Dorothy Dixier but it sounds like one.

Mr ABETZ - The issue of Metro linking up with the ferries on the eastern shore, in particular, is something that I have raised with Metro as to what can be done to achieve a linkage there. In general terms, there's a Greater Hobart network review and State Growth is fast-tracking planning for a review of the Greater Hobart bus network in response to the current driver shortage and service reliability issues. In the first stage, the department will focus on evaluating and adjusting current service offerings to maximise service reliability and make better use of existing resources.

We have that review ending I can let you know that I bounced an idea with Metro as to school bus services, but I've been told that that is very, very difficult. But if there's a school bus, let's say coming up from Dover to Huonville, whether general passengers could potentially use that bus -

Ms BURNET - Like they do in Victoria.

Mr ABETZ - I've been told that there are certain issues with that, but I would like to think that that's the sort of thinking that I think you and I would agree on -

Ms BURNET - Absolutely.

Mr ABETZ - would be helpful. Running a bus costs a lot of money and if we can make the services that are provided more efficient - and look, you do then have to protect school children, et cetera, so there are those issues as well which were of concern as expressed to me but I would like to think that we could make it work. Any ideas are gratefully received and looked upon by myself because I agree with you, we have to get the best possible use.

Another thing that I floated, just for what it's worth, which also got bounced, was our rural services. I'll pick on Tassielink, I think they come in from Bicheno or Swansea in the morning and then the bus sits there at the Tassielink depot until the afternoon when it returns. Could it possibly be used on a few suburban runs during the course of the day rather than sitting idle in a bus depot? That's the sort of thinking that I'm trying to encourage. I'm sure there are a whole lot of ideas in my head that, in practical terms, mightn't be as easy to implement as I might think, but I think they're worth exploring.

Ms BURNET - There's certainly a lot of social isolation associated with those bus services that aren't available from places like Dodges Ferry. I've spoken to the mayor of Sorell in relation those services and coming into that regional centre rather than the service up to Hobart is more important in some ways.

Mr O'BYRNE - Thank you, Chair. My question, minister, is an extension of the previous line of questioning. I've written to you about this issue. The concept of, and the underlying principle of providing school bus services, is to enable children to get to school and get an education. Down at Dover, there's a circumstance where the contracting decision for the size of a bus has made it difficult for a number of families to have a bus pass by their door or within their community, meaning tens of families and a lot of kids are not accessing or not able to access a public bus service along Kent Beach Road there. That, to me - I mean, these issues were raised with the department back in 2018-19; there was a change, and that was accommodated. The issues with the recontracting have occurred again. The issues have been raised with you and your department but no change has been made. Many families are either opting out of the public school or they're finding it very difficult to get their children to school because of a lack of a safe bus service.

Mr ABETZ - I've been made aware of that situation, not only through your correspondence, but also by representations, and I have passed them on. The Department of State Growth contracts a school bus service between Geeveston and Dover District School via Esperance Coast Road using a 39-seater bus with no standing capacity. In 2022, an additional bus service between Geeveston and the school commenced. Operating by the Huon Highway is a temporary service to address capacity issues on the Esperance Coast Road service. This used a larger 58-seater bus. The additional service was introduced to allow time for the department to assess the demand for the service and to consider the suitability of having a larger bus travel along the Esperance Coast Road. An independent assessment report was finalised in early 2023 and confirmed that Esperance Coast Road is generally considered suitable for a

PUBLIC

58-seater bus. The Huon Valley Council has also confirmed that the road is not subject to a load limit. The department considered increasing the size of the bus travelling, but based on passenger counts conducted in terms 1 and 2, made the decision to remove the additional bus service at the start of term 3. This was on the basis that passenger count showed the 39-seat bus travelling along Esperance Coast Road would be able to cater to expected demand. However, capacity issues emerged again early in term 3, and on the basis of feedback received from the school community, a decision has been made to reinstate the additional Huon Highway bus service in the afternoons only until the end of this school year. This allows further time for state growth to work with DECYP on options.

Mr O'BYRNE - On that, the issue is the families that reside along Kent Beach Road. They have no service and some of the decisions are made that the bus travels past them and then is offering to come back, but then the kids will be late for school. The overwhelming number of parents in that community are upset about the lack of consultation and the lack of acknowledgement of their issues.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for that, that will be noted.

Mr SHELTON - Minister, with another person sadly being added to our road fatality numbers today, can you please provide an update on the government's automated traffic enforcement program?

Mr ABETZ - We have the sobering statistic that on average 35 people killed and another 276 people seriously injured on our roads each year. Whilst they are numbers, they impact individuals, families, communities. We try to modify and moderate driver behaviour; we had the automated traffic enforcement program introduced in late 2022 and it has shown positive signs of reducing both general vehicle speeds and illegal speeding on our roads. Over the course of the program, the amount of speed enforcement has been increased and new technology to detect illegal mobile phone use, seat belt non-compliance and driving in an unregistered vehicle has also been introduced. Between October 2022 and 30 June 2024, the program has issued approximately 79,000 speeding, 3200 seat belt, 1500 mobile phone and 1400 registration traffic infringement notices.

The government initially funded the program as a trial for two years and the trial was extended for a third year through a combination of road safety levy and state budget funding commitments. During the trial, there have been many learnings - terrible term - and challenges. While most people chose to do the right thing, some people have chosen to maliciously vandalise the camera systems and abuse and threaten camera operators, which is a matter of regret. It is a program that I think has worked overall to help modify their behaviours.

Ms BROWN - Thank you, Chair. Minister, you yourself have said incidences on the buses are on the rise. When a driver has experienced a traumatic event due to an incident when they're on the job, do you believe they should be allowed a couple of days to get themselves right before they're expected back on the job?

Mr ABETZ - As a matter of principle, yes. It always has to be tested on the basis of the extent of the incident, but there was somebody who drove a bus who had a rock go through the front passenger side. It was one of those bizarre things. I was about to say thank goodness, you don't want rocks at all, but if it had been a metre the other way, that driver would have been seriously injured. I think that driver had at least a week off and the employer had no difficulty

with that. I sat down and spoke with him over the phone for quite some time whilst he was on leave and then caught up with him later for a cup of coffee and to hear his story firsthand.

Our bus drivers, operators, do a great job. They provide a very important community service and they deserve to be respected by patrons, other road users and people in the community. Hopefully, there will be less of the sort of behaviour they been subjected to. Services out of Bridgewater and Gagebrook have been resumed and we hope there won't be any more of those rock-throwing incidents. I would have thought in general terms that if an employee has been subjected to a substantial situation, some time off to recover would be appropriate.

Ms BROWN - Just to clarify, you support critical incident leave when it comes to our drivers.

Mr ABETZ - If that is the terminology and if that is, for want of a better term, a mental workplace injury, then you have sick leave and other leave available to you and hopefully the employer would cooperate with a worker to ensure they can recover appropriately to take on the tasks they are given with appropriate confidence and satisfaction.

Ms BROWN - Tasrail has said in the past financial year that the number of reported near-misses at level crossings between trains and vehicles or pedestrians has increased from 39 to 68. What are you doing to support these drivers after these incidents?

Mr ABETZ - I will say once again that questions about Tasrail should be going to the GBEs. I don't have any oversight of Tasrail.

Ms BURNET - Minister, in relation to our most vulnerable road users, children, there's the chance to make our roads safer around schools. We've had a number of incidents and one fatality earlier this year in my electorate. I'm wondering what sort of approach the government would consider in relation to improving safety around schools. I did write to you earlier, so I'm just wondering what you might do.

Mr ABETZ - I would take advice from those that are expert in the area. I think each school and its location and roads, et cetera, make it a separate situation. We have the 40 kilometre per hour speed limit during, beginning and after school. We encourage people to be mindful of pedestrians generally, but especially around schools. We have the lollipop people at school crossings to assist our children to cross the road safely and we have a number of mechanisms in place.

Mr LIMKIN - The department takes this very seriously, both for the children but also for the school crossing guards who are our employees. I have recently written to the acting secretary of DECYP to ask her to communicate with all schools to make sure parents are informed about the importance, not just for our school crossing guards, but also the importance for their children in that area. The department is also currently developing a media campaign to go out in the future. I think 'Love 40' is the wording we're using and it's really focused on supporting our staff, but also supporting children's safety from motorists. It is a key focus that we have as a collective Department of State Growth executive and I know my colleagues in DECYP also have it.

PUBLIC

Ms BURNET - I suppose the concern I have is that there are school zones or zones in front of schools which are 80 kilometres per hour. If you look at Montrose Bay, it doesn't drop to 80 kilometres and whilst parents and carers may be advised not to pick up from the Brooker Highway, it still occurs so it doesn't always work. Are you familiar with the 8 to 80 campaign and what UK schools do and have a walking zone around some schools and would you be interested in trialling such a safety campaign?

Mr ABETZ - I don't know about it so I can't say that I would be willing to trial it, but I will seek to get a briefing from somebody in the department, or from yourself, as to what that looks like and see whether it's got potential application.

Mr O'BYRNE - Minister, the provision of public transport is fundamentally important when you look at urban design and how our communities grow. For example, when you get further out on the network and subdivisions pop up, it's really important that public transport is provided to them. One infill suburb that is being sort of left alone is in our electorate of Olive Grove on the way to Risdon Vale. That is a 15-minute downhill walk to the closest bus stop. That community now has hundreds of houses, many families and people who don't have their own car or rely heavily on other modes of transport. If we continually build these suburbs and all the government mantras will provide the services but then the services aren't provided, aren't people feeling a little bit betrayed by the government sort of mantra?

Mr ABETZ - I won't take the bait or agree to your classification but I think you make a valid point that new subdivisions will look for the benefit of public transport, and Olive Grove is one, Spring Farm is another down my neck of the woods in Franklin and people are asking. I met with two local councillors to discuss that and with the Greater Hobart bus network review that will all be taken into account to see how we can service some of those areas. I am told that some of those areas don't necessarily have much uptake in relation to public transport, albeit a fair bit of uptake in relation to school buses because of the need for kids to get to and from school. But for general public access, not so much.

Mr O'BYRNE - It is hard to catch a bus when it doesn't go past your place.

Mr ABETZ - What the department and those that make the decisions have to try to judge is whether there is sufficient demand and a requirement for a bus service. As I think you would know from your former roles as the minister, you can provide a service and if it's not taken up, good luck trying to remove it. Genuine consideration, robust consideration, needs to be had. That said, the more we can expand the network, the better.

Mr O'BYRNE - That community did have quite a large petition about three or so years ago calling for a bus service, and whilst I understand you're going through a review, it's three years after they first raised it. Nothing's happened. You can understand they're quite frustrated.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for drawing that to my attention. I wasn't aware of the petition. Like my colleague, Ms Brown, I wasn't aware.

Ms BROWN – Oh, I was aware.

Mr ABETZ - I'm a newbie here, so I wasn't aware of that, but Ms Brown just corrects the record and she says she knew about it. You got one up on me.

PUBLIC

Mr SHELTON - Minister, you mentioned at the start in your opening statement about the take-up of park and ride facilities. Can you please provide an update to the committee on the next tranche of facilities?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, that I can. I think the Premier talked about park and ride at Huntingfield and Firthside, down Kingston way, and how that seems to have been taken up well. I availed myself of that service one morning and it's a great service. Everybody just piles onto the bus at the one place, then it's straight into town. It's a good service. Because of the importance, or the benefit, of that service, we are expanding. We're looking at Claremont, Midway Point and Rokeby for other sites. We were also talking with the West Tamar Council for Legana.

In relation to the ones I've just mentioned, the detailed designs are now well advanced, with the designs being informed by the comments received during public consultation. That's the Claremont, Midway Point and Eastern Shore-Rokeby ones. The tender for construction of the Midway Point and Claremont facilities will be advertised later this year, with works anticipated to start in early 2025, and construction of the Rokeby facility is expected by mid-2025. The department will evaluate the success of these park and rides to inform decisions around future park and ride locations and facilities. From what I can see at Kingston, where the car park is about 50 per cent full, Firthside 85 per cent full, that indicates that there is a growing demand within the community for such a service. Where we've trialled it, we think it's worthwhile expanding the network, and that's what we're doing.

Ms BROWN - I just want to quickly circle back to some questioning earlier around the security screens. Can you confirm that the current screen has a glare issue and what other screens that you're looking at?

Mr ABETZ - Once again, these questions ought to be asked at the Metro GBE. I'm not briefed as to all the details, although I understand that there were various screens trialled by Metro to get driver feedback on them, but where Metro has landed on that, I don't know. I'm sure Metro will be able to give you all the details.

Ms BROWN - To the best of your knowledge, though, the current model isn't working. Is that fair to say?

Mr ABETZ - That I can't confirm, and I'm not sure that there is a 'current' model. I think they trialled something. I'm not sure if they trialled a number of them. Mr Crane, are you able to assist?

Mr CRANE - Through you, minister, I'm not fully across it, but I do believe they trialled a number of different screens due to some challenges, and they're working through consultation with their drivers to make sure they meet all the appropriate standards.

Ms BURNET - What is State Growth's involvement in the trial with the security screens?

Mr ABETZ - As I understand it, money was provided, then it's for Metro and Metro management to work that out with their drivers. That's why these questions are best asked at the Metro scrutiny hearings.

PUBLIC

Ms BURNET - Minister, the Circular Economy Huon - you might be aware of it - Jerry White and former councillor Jenny Cambers-Smith are heavily involved and interested in transit and transport options. One of their concerns that they constantly raise is that ability to move from 'point A to point B' in the Huon Valley, through Kingston and up to the city. They wanted to do a trial on transport, or transit, on-demand. Could you give the committee some answers as to whether that kind of trial is a possibility?

Mr ABETZ - Any trial is a possibility. I'm not sure what we are currently minded to engage.

Ms HEYDON - I'll say that we don't have on-demand trials planned. Part of what we're looking at with the broader Greater Hobart bus review is to understand what the needs are. That could be, what is the best response - be it a traditional sort of route bus service or an alternative. It is part of the conversation we'd be looking to have, because part of that network review will be talking with communities and talking with key stakeholders. I will say that we're open to hearing and part of that will then look at, from a design perspective, how we can best meet the needs of the community.

Ms BURNET - I'm very pleased to hear that you're open to that, because it's a very simple and cost-effective approach. Whilst the Southern Outlet lanes are a very expensive option, it is really important that it's considered - all of those public transport and modal shifts are considered.

Mr O'BYRNE - Minister, what's the total value of consultancies in your output areas?

Mr ABETZ - That is a very good question. I don't know the answer to that. Secretary, do you have - put you on the spot? We might have to get back to you on that.

Mr O'BYRNE - Take that on notice?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, take that on notice, because you're asking in my areas.

Mr O'BYRNE - For this output.

Mr ABETZ - Yes. The Department of State Growth, I imagine, has a whole host of consultancies. Those that relate to me, I'm not sure.

Mr LIMKIN - Minister, we would have to take it on notice. We only have the information on a department basis, unless my finance team, who are still here at this hour, are working it through.

Mr O'BYRNE - We could just take it on notice. I'm happy to take it on notice.

Ms BROWN - Minister, will you ensure that the department has the funding to allow for fair and reasonable cost increases to be applied to all Tasmanian GA and school bus contractors?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, we will make sure that reasonable funds are available for contracting. These are commercial negotiations that will take place, or have taken place, in some cases.

PUBLIC

Ms BROWN - Would you like to provide any more information?

Mr ABETZ – I suppose each one is, Mr Crane?

Mr CRANE – Through you, minister, under our contract model, there are a number of indices that reflect changes in things like fuel price, et cetera. They are all automatically calculated on the cost of delivering services. There are some mechanisms under our contract model to enable those additional costs - the cost of doing business goes up through indices and we reflect that in their contract.

Ms BURNET - In relation to active transport and bike lanes, I'm pleased to see that the government has helped fund trials in Hobart and in other places. In relation to joining up that network - you're looking at the Greater Hobart Bus Network review - but joining up existing bike lanes, is that part of your strategy as well? Also, is there any funding in relation to that?

Ms HEYDON - Part of what we look at with the infrastructure is where we can address gaps in active transport. Part of the Moving Hobart document, the draft document that's out there, talks quite a bit about active transport. We do consider through the grants and through the works that we're doing, how we can start making that a collective network that falls as part of the broader transport system. It is part of our thinking.

Ms BURNET - Presumably links up with buses? I'm aware that, when I was down at the park and ride, there wasn't a great connection across Altona to the park and ride, and I didn't see any bike racks.

Ms HEYDON - Part of what we're looking at in relation to the standardisation of the park and ride is, of course, the provision of bike storage, et cetera, to support active transport. We obviously look at what we can do within our own network, as well as making those connections through with councils for any plans that they have, supporting them with grants to bridge that gap as well. That's an iterative approach to developing that connected network.

Ms BROWN - Thanks, Chair. Minister, earlier today, the Premier agreed to table his savings strategy. Would you be willing to do the same?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, happy to do the same.

Ms BROWN – Great. That's it. When? You're going to take it on notice?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - Are there any more questions?

Ms BURNET - Chair, just a procedural question. Those things that are being taken on notice, do they come back to each of the committee members or just the person who's asking?

CHAIR - The committee as a whole. If there are no further questions, then time for Estimates, the Minister for Transport, has expired. The committee will resume proceedings tomorrow at 9:00 a.m.

The committee adjourned at 9.19 p.m.