



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

TRANSCRIPT

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Hon. Kerry Vincent MLC

Wednesday 19 November 2025

MEMBERS

Ms Helen Burnet (Chair)
Mr Marcus Verney (Deputy Chair)
Hon Josh Willie
Ms Kristie Johnston

OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Mr Winter
Ms Dow
Ms Butler
Mr Jaensch
Mr Garland
Mr O'Byrne

IN ATTENDANCE

HON. KERRY VINCENT MLC

Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Housing and Planning.

Infrastructure and Transport portfolio

Tim Lovibond

Chief of Staff

Craig Limkin

Secretart, Department of State Growth

Cynthia Heydon

Deputy Secretary, Transport, Department of State Growth

Anthony Reid

Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning

Ben Goodsir

Chief Executive Officer, Infrastrucutre Tasmania, Department of State Growth

Ben Moloney

Executive Director, Major Transport Projects, Department of State Growth

Lia Morris

Chief Executive Officer, Marine and Safety Tasmania

Travis Boucher

Director Finance, Department of State Growth

Ministerial Staff

Trent Dann

Senior Adviser

Richard Wilson

Senior Adviser

Todd Newett

Senior Adviser

Housing and Planning portfolio

Tim Lovibond

Chief of Staff

Craig Limkin

Secretary, Department of State Growth

Anthony Reid

Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning, Department of state Growth

Eleri Morgan-Thomas

Chief Executive Officer, Homes Tasmania

Kym Warner

Chief Financial Officer, Homes Tasmania

Richard Gilmour

Director Community Infrastructure, Homes Tasmania

Jessemy Stone

Director Housing Policy and Programs, Homes Tasmania

Travis Boutcher

Director Finance, Department of State Growth

Ministerial Staff

Victoria Matterson

Senior Adviser

Adele Fenwick

Senior Adviser

PUBLIC

The committee met at 9.00 a.m.

CHAIR - Good morning, everybody. Before we start this session, I'd just like to say that I'm in receipt of a note from the Speaker of the House which I'll read into *Hansard*.

Dear Chair,

In accordance with the provisions of the resolution appointing the Estimates Committees under Membership of Committees, paragraph 6, I hereby nominate Mr Roger Jaensch as a substantive member of the committee in substitute for Mr Marcus Vermey on Wednesday, 19 November 2025, from 10.30 a.m. until 2.00 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Honourable Jacquie Petrusma MP
Speaker

Welcome, everybody. The time now being 9.00 a.m., Estimates scrutiny of Infrastructure and Transport will begin.

I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. Welcome. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table for the benefit of *Hansard*.

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Chair. On my right I have Craig Limkin, the Secretary; next to him is Anthony Reid, Acting Deputy Secretary for Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning; my Chief of Staff on my left, Tim Lovibond; and Cynthia Heydon, Deputy Secretary, Transport, Dept of State Growth.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. The time scheduled for the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport is four hours. We'll take a break of 10 minutes at 11.00 a.m..

Questions should be directed to the minister. The House's resolution 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 to the minister, and 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 for answer.

I remind you that the microphones are sensitive, so I ask you to be mindful of *Hansard* and be careful when moving your folders, documents and water glasses around the table, and it's often difficult for *Hansard* to differentiate when people are talking over each other, so I ask that members speak one at a time.

As Chair, I will be looking to ensure the fair and appropriate conduct of proceedings today, and ask that all participating members do the same. Just to let you know that I'll be asking questions from the Chair as well, for the Greens' allocated questions.

Minister, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

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Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Chair, and with your indulgence, my opening statement includes Infrastructure and Transport.

Good morning, everyone. Since taking on the Infrastructure portfolio along with Transport recently, I've been focused on working with all stakeholders and departments to eliminate issues and get projects up and moving.

In the infrastructure space, over the Budget and forward Estimates, we are demonstrating our ongoing focus to look to the future with optimism and a dedicated sense of purpose when it comes to planning and delivering intergenerational projects in Tasmania.

Over the next four years, there is \$3.4 billion in infrastructure investment, with a further \$1.7 billion planned across government businesses. There isn't a corner of Tasmania which isn't going to benefit from our investment over the coming years, ensuring Tasmanians can get home sooner and safer.

Expenditure in 2024-25 was lower than expected, due to the range of challenges impacting the delivery of road and bridge projects. These issues included lengthy Australian Government environmental approvals, budget caretaker period impacts on procurement and other project activities such as stakeholder engagement processes, and difficulties in obtaining expert draft design consultants.

Importantly, we continue to provide stable work for the Tasmanian construction industries while recognising the increased complexity in project delivery in a truly national challenge. A significant forward infrastructure program continues to provide confidence to industry to create new jobs and invest in training.

It should be noted in recent years we have included the expenditure for the brand new Bridgewater Bridge, which resulted in previous year capital expenditure peaking up to \$550 million in 2023-24 and \$570 million in 2022-23.

Despite being open to the traffic, the new Bridgewater Bridge project is near completion. The 2025-26 Budget profile for Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) represents a more normalised and sustainable baseline deliverable annual expenditure profile range of \$400 million-\$425 million across the forward Estimates.

I could sit here and talk about a lot of major projects the government is embarking on, but it'll take a fair while. Instead, I'll simply say we remain committed to upgrading and improving our roads and bridges, and will continue to back thousands of workers who are keeping Australia moving.

A nice little pun here, moving into Transport, rolling into Transport. The 2025-26 Budget continues to invest in transport services, helping Tasmanians to commute and access essential services across the state.

The Budget includes significant investment for general access bus services and school bus services. We have extended half-price fares, and this initiative delivers cost-of-living relief to families, commuters, students and regional communities. It also encourages people who might usually drive themselves to work to try public transport.

PUBLIC

We want our passengers and bus drivers to be safe, and this is why we're expanding our transit officer program with additional funding. We'll run a tender for a long-term transit officer program. This program includes a training standard which requires transit officers to become authorised officers, approved by the Transport Commission, which will give transit officers additional powers. The tender will also expand transit officers to some services in the north.

We recently completed the third round of the All Access All Weather Bus Stop Upgrade Grants Program, which has helped local governments upgrade bus stops and shelters, making them both more accessible and more comfortable for passengers.

Earlier this year, the Regional Transit Centre opened in Launceston, providing a significant upgrade for public transport in the city. This state-of-the-art facility provides convenience and comfort for travellers.

The Transport program includes key investments for new park-and-ride facilities across greater Hobart, including sites at Glebe Hill, Claremont and Midway Point, as well as in the state's north. Park-and-rides help people who are living in outer urban areas to access public transport, and reduce congestion in peak commuter times.

As my understanding grows with my ministries, I am confident I will continue to make a positive difference in this beautiful state, and I'm very proud to be on this journey with all my colleagues, stakeholders and constituents. I have in my portfolios as well the good people of Prosser.

Thank you. I'm happy to take questions.

Ms DOW - Minister, when were you first informed that the Auditor-General had determined that TT-Line was insolvent?

Mr VINCENT - I'll just get the proper date for you. My incoming ministerial brief on -

It was the Auditor-General?

Ms DOW - Yes.

Mr VINCENT - Just checking on that.

Ms DOW - Who determined that TT-Line was insolvent. I take it that you were informed?

Mr VINCENT - Yes.

We're just looking at the date between the financial advice and when we were informed about the Auditor-General's decision, which we believe is 8 October.

Ms DOW - Were you informed directly by the Auditor-General yourself as a shareholder minister? Or did somebody else inform you?

Mr VINCENT - I was informed by the Chair of TT-Line.

Ms DOW - In October?

Mr VINCENT - Yes. On 3 November, the Auditor-General wrote to the office informing us of their finding.

Ms DOW - You just said 8 October as the previous date though. 8 October was the previous date that you gave me about when you were informed and now you're saying 3 November.

Mr VINCENT - That's right, from the board; and then we received a letter from the Auditor-General on 3 November.

Ms DOW - In that correspondence that you received from the Auditor-General, did he inform you that he had made a referral to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC)?

Mr VINCENT - No.

Ms DOW - When did you find out that he had made a referral to ASIC?

Mr VINCENT - I will have to take that on notice. I don't know that date, sorry.

Ms DOW - Okay, I will put that on notice, thank you. Have you seen TT-Line's independent advice regarding its solvency?

Mr VINCENT - The independent advice is a matter for the board, but I have been updated on that situation.

Ms DOW - As a responsible shareholder minister, you haven't actually seen that independent advice?

Mr VINCENT - No, the board has that under consideration, but the board and their independent adviser did update us.

CHAIR - Ms Dow, we will move on. Minister, I'm very concerned, as you are, no doubt, about road fatalities. We see a spike in road fatalities this year. Could you explain what your government is doing in relation to addressing these issues?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, before handing over to Ms Heydon, it's been a major concern for some time with the road safety. I've had ongoing talks with various members of the road safety groups, in trying to understand the break-up of some of the issues we're facing. There are spikes and anomalies. We've had a spike in road deaths this year, but the overall amount of serious casualties remains within a few of previous years.

It is disturbing that a lot of our programs are probably not bringing the results that we would like, so we're having a new focus. We have been looking through various members of the committees at some of the overseas programs that work in countries that have had an effect on that. In the coming months there will be more discussion. I've even met with the Local Government Association of Tasmania CEO, Dion Lester, yesterday to discuss the possibility

of fresh eyes being run over some of those programs, or how we could lift the profile in those. I will ask Ms Heydon to expand a little bit more. Thank you.

Ms HEYDON - Certainly. Through you, minister. Just to give you where we are with the road statistics. As of 17 November 2025, There have been 40 fatalities and 242 serious injuries on our roads. This is a slight decrease from the same time last year, but it only a slight decrease. For interest, we actually had a fatality on Monday, which was a motorcyclist. Of the 40 fatalities we've had to this year to date, nine of those have been motorcyclists.

While these are definitely not good statistics, as the minister has said, he's asked us to look at what our program is doing and how that's linking to improved outcomes both in fatalities and serious injuries. We're reviewing some of our programs, working with other jurisdictions to understand that we're all in a very similar situation and looking at what other jurisdictions and countries are doing that are seeing changes to those statistics.

CHAIR - Minister, our office has been approached by various people who provide the driver mentor training programs, of which you are no doubt familiar. Their concern is that RACT is looking at doing some sort of audit on the program. Can you guarantee the committee that those areas, particularly rural and remote areas, multicultural communities, will continue to be able to access the driver training that they require?

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Chair. Yes, I have been involved with this through being a board member at Neighbourhood Houses as well as my involvement with the Rotary program for a good many number of years and also being closely associated with RACT. Everybody you talk to wants to take this seriously, and driver mentoring, driver training, once again, are all things that were highlighted - even more so in country areas where the roads are different and the opportunities are different - and we are working our way through it. I will give you a guarantee on the fact that we are looking at all options on what we need to lift the profile of driver education.

I have seen firsthand what a difference the Rotary program has made with the pure heavy increase in numbers of high school students taking that program now, and taking it seriously. We just had my granddaughter get her licence, and it hits home the importance of making sure those programs are in place. So yes, we will be increasing our focus, well, I will be increasing my focus on driver awareness because what you instil into a young person as they train to get their licence is what largely stays with them for the rest of their life.

CHAIR - I suppose, minister, it's around access for other key groups. It may not be just young people, it's people in regional areas, it's the multicultural community, particularly with the driver training program.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, very much so. We have to make sure that all parts of the community understand - or that we understand the difficulties for some of them in obtaining licences - getting their hours up or just general training - and that includes language barriers. I can guarantee that we will be working at all parts of the community.

Ms HEYDON - Through you minister. For clarification, I am part of the steering committee that RACT has, and, just to give assurance it is not looking at, essentially, let's say, winding-up those programs. It's looking at all of the programs that are out there, what's actually making a difference, and where that could potentially be expanded. It's to be a learning exercise,

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and, again, it's not just about young drivers, it's actually that sustainable improvement and again, particularly for migrants, anyone who actually needs further assistance to actually become a driver and a safe driver.

CHAIR - Before I go to Mr O'Byrne, I just have one more question. It's not because I'm in the Chair, but -

Mr JAENSCH - But it helps.

CHAIR - Do we know with any of those breakdowns whether any of the people who have been involved in motor-vehicle accidents, have been unlicensed?

Ms HEYDON - I'll have to get that. I'll take on notice and get back to you in the session.

CHAIR - Thank you. Mr O'Byrne.

Mr O'BYRNE - Minister, I asked you in parliament recently about the common ticketing system for Metro and all bus carriers across Tasmania, which was announced in 2018 with \$7 million promised in 2019-20. I understand that you've inherited, I think, two or three ministers' lack of activity and progress on this matter. The last update was \$35 million at Estimates last year, I think - all these elections. Now if you look at the budget papers there's close to \$65 million allocated in one form or another. Could you explain how we've gone from \$7 million? I understand that sometimes budgets blow out. I was upset with \$35 million and you can imagine the Tasmanian people are very upset about \$65 million for a common ticketing system, which seems to be a long way away.

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Mr O'Byrne. There are two parts to that. The total contract is \$65 million excluding GST, and it's made up of \$30.5 million including GST, to design and build the ticketing solution and operate until 28 June. The other part of it is \$37.3 million including GST for options, contract extensions and operations beyond 28 June.

Sorry, the \$30.5 million is including GST, and the \$37.3 million is excluding GST. For a little more detail on that I will throw to the secretary.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, minister. The contract is set up in two parts. First of all, there is a build part to put all the hardware onto our buses and the software we need to operate at at the back end. That number, as the minister said, is consistent with the number you heard in Estimates last year and my advice is it's slightly under that. There's a contingency the department still holds in case there are those types of risks that materialise during the project.

That contract had an original operational date that was set up with the contractor and then there are a number of extensions that the government will be able to exercise at certain points that take us to that value of \$65 million.

Under the Treasurer's Instructions, as part of annual reports we are required to show the entire cost of the contract that we enter into, not just the the build contract, so the \$65 million in our annual report includes, as the minister said, all those extensions that we could choose to exercise over time, and those extensions are only in relation to operational, they're not in relation to the capital build amount.

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Mr O'BYRNE - Cubic is currently in dispute with the Queensland government over implementation for their ticketing solutions. We've been promised this year in, year out. You're a long way down the track. You've locked in \$35 million for them, they haven't delivered it, and you're promising another \$30-odd million on the hope that it actually works.

Mr LIMKIN - Through you, minister, there is no guarantee that the extensions will be taken up by government. At this stage we are very much focused on holding Cubic to account for their commitments they've given us as we've procured it. We are actively working with Queensland. When I was up there a couple of weeks ago I met with the Director-General of Queensland Transport and Main Roads and we discussed this matter. To ensure value for money for the state, we piggy-backed off Queensland. Queensland is the principal [inaudible]. We are working very closely with Queensland. Ms Heydon is on a joint committee with the Queensland deputy secretary and we are driving them to ensure delivery as much as we can.

Mr O'BYRNE - You say the nature of the contract is you have to allocate the money that you've already committed to, even though it may not have been expended at this stage. You've contracted a company that's in dispute with the Queensland government. They haven't delivered in Queensland, they haven't delivered here, yet we're signing up to an extension on something which, at this stage, I don't think there's a lot of confidence in. Are we paying for Queensland's delay by some of our contracting? Surely there has to come a time where if they're not able to do it, you move on.

Mr LIMKIN - Through you, minister - and I may ask Ms Heydon to comment - we are not committing future expenditure. We have the option to choose whether we accept it or not. Cubic has to deliver for the state, otherwise my advice to the minister will not be to exercise those options.

Mr O'BYRNE - How much have you paid them to date?

CHAIR - We will move on after this question and answer.

Mr LIMKIN - I'm going to have to confirm the number and come back to you in this session.

Mr O'BYRNE - Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, where are we at with the Hobart northern suburbs rail corridor? Reports on the Hobart City Deal website indicate that there have been a number of pieces of work done in 2020, all of which recommended that light rail is the best use for that particular corridor in terms of transport, land-use and city-shaping outcomes, but it appears that your government has selected the bus rapid transit system. What's the update on that?

Mr VINCENT - The draft is with the department at the moment -

Ms JOHNSTON - Draft?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, the plan for the rapid bus. Perhaps the secretary would like to expand on that a bit further.

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Mr LIMKIN - Through you, minister, the department has completed a strategic business case for rapid buses that has gone through a gate 1 process. We have provided it to government for government decision-making. My expectation is that that will be subject to government decision-making and will be submitted to the federal government later this year.

We have been actively working with the federal government. If you go through the life-cycle of infrastructure, what you do first is a strategic business case where you look at very high-level options, you do pricing, and we're probably at a P50 number, probably less, so you have a large contingency. You then move it to a final business case where you take those options and drive it down. On submission to the federal government of the strategic business case, we will move into a final business case which will confirm the the route, the capital costs and also the funding sources.

One of the conversations I have been having very strictly with the federal government is their commitment to fund the rapid bus and the work on the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor.

Ms JOHNSTON - Rail corridor.

Mr LIMKIN - Rail corridor - because we are a state that doesn't have heavy rail, so the Commonwealth government funds heavy passenger rail in moving people around our network in the cities. The Commonwealth government funds other states for cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and all funds are heavy rail for passenger movements and so we are having conversations with them about funding on an 80:20 basis for the the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor and rapid bus service.

Ms JOHNSTON - So there's a draft report available now, completed? Are you able to table that draft report into the business case for BRT?

Mr VINCENT - It's just going through public scrutiny -

Ms JOHNSTON - I hope so.

Mr VINCENT - Sorry, Cabinet scrutiny - and once the strategic plan is done -

Mr LIMKIN - Once it's submitted to the federal government, relevant sections will be made public.

CHAIR - Ms Dow.

Mr JAENSCH - Sorry, Chair?

CHAIR - Oh, sorry, Mr Jaensch, I completely missed you.

Ms DOW - I'm happy to go, Chair.

CHAIR - Mr Jaensch.

Mr JAENSCH - One you miss is one you never get, Ms Dow.

PUBLIC

Minister, in the lead-up to the 2024 election the state government made a commitment to review the Special Interest Vehicle Registration Scheme with a particular focus on vehicle appearance requirements. Could you please update the committee on progress of this review?

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Mr Jaensch, and it's something I've never paid much attention to except for admiring special interest vehicles going down the road, but boy, do you learn how passionate some people are about their Special Interest vehicles very quickly.

I'm happy to announce today that this review has now been completed and changes will be made to the Special Interest Vehicle Registration Scheme to firstly expand the eligibility to a broader range of vehicles, and secondly, permit vehicles registered under the scheme to carry or tow certain loads. The scheme allows historic, collector, classic and other Special Interest vehicles access to reduced motor tax and MAIB fees, reflecting the vehicles' limited use.

Prior to the introduction of the scheme, many of these vehicles were unregistered and transported to events or displays using short-term permits or trailers. The scheme therefore created an opportunity for these vehicles to be driven legally for maintenance and enjoyment purposes within limits.

It's important to note that Special Interest vehicles can only be driven 104 days of the year, and operators must also have another vehicle registered. They can't use their special interest vehicle as their daily drive. The changes I'm announcing today include: expanding eligibility for the scheme to include campervans and motorhomes; relaxing paint quality requirements to allow some patina or surface rust on special interest vehicles; limited modifications which improve safety and roadworthiness will now be allowed; and that there will be new digital and redesigned hard-copy logbooks available for members of the scheme. These changes will ensure the scheme better reflects public attitudes towards special interest vehicles and will expand the type of vehicles which can be part of the scheme. The implementation of these changes will be phased in over the next few months, with the website being updated next month and new logbooks introduced by early 2026.

There are currently 8600 vehicles registered under the scheme across the state. These changes are likely to increase these numbers, which may result in a slight decrease to MAIB's revenue and registration fees collected. However, the Department of State Growth will monitor the uptake in numbers following the introduction of these changes and, if necessary, provide advice on options to limit excessive growth in the scheme.

Protections are also in place to reduce the risk of vehicles in the scheme being used for commercial purposes.

Ms DOW - Minister, the Premier's told parliament and Estimates just this week that shareholders were informed of the Auditor-General's opinion on 21 July 2025. Can you confirm that that's not correct and that you were first made aware on 8 October 2025?

Mr VINCENT - I'm sorry, I wasn't the minister until mid-August and I will clarify through the secretary.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, minister, and through you. I was informed at 9.30 a.m. on 21 July from the TT-Line Chair, then I called the minister, Mr Abetz, who I wasn't able to get,

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so I informed his Chief of Staff on 21 July as well. Minister Abetz was the Transport minister at 21 July, not Mr Vincent.

Ms DOW - To the secretary, again, why, as the incoming minister, was the Premier made aware such a long time before you were? You came in in August; you didn't find out until October. What was the delay? Surely this was really, really important that you had access to this information?

Mr VINCENT - On 21 August, I had financing matters discussed with me, as the incoming minister, which was touched on. The other question you had was when the Attorney-General informed us, which was 3 November, wasn't it?

Ms DOW - 8 October? 3 November?

Mr VINCENT - On 3 November, but it was the October one. This was the incoming brief, on 21 August, where I was just informed on general situations on finance.

Ms DOW - The insolvency wasn't mentioned during that first briefing, minister? In August?

Mr VINCENT - I don't believe it was. We talked about finances being needed that were required, or possibly required, for TT-Line to stay in line with things, but I wasn't given the details of the report.

Ms DOW - The Premier didn't inform you? Just to be clear, it was the Chair of the board who informed you, not the Premier, even though the Premier knew on 21 July?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, I was informed by the board and I can't go into discussions I have with the Premier.

Ms DOW - Why not? It's pretty important.

Mr VINCENT - Very simply, this is when I was informed by the board, and they are the discussions I had at that time.

Ms DOW - Have you met with the Auditor-General to discuss his concerns?

Mr VINCENT - No, I have not.

Ms DOW - Why haven't you?

Mr VINCENT - Because the situation of the solvency of TT-Line is very much with the board. I have weekly updates with the CEO, or mainly the Chair of TT-Line, and stay across it there because it is a board. The solvency situation is with board.

Ms DOW - Yes, but the Auditor-General has concerns and has referred them to ASIC. So, wouldn't you meet with the Auditor-General?

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Mr VINCENT - Once again, under the *Corporations Act*, the board is responsible for the solvency of TT-Line, so I've been working through the Chair of the board to discuss those points.

Ms DOW - As the shareholder minister, the responsible shareholder minister, do you have faith in the TT-Line board?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, I do. The new board has been acting really well in solving some of the situations they inherited. They are very, very highly trained people that are fully aware of their responsibility under the *Corporations Act*. They have been passing on various comments and thoughts, and where they are with their situations with the Auditor-General, through the Chair, to me, which is our regular updates.

Ms DOW - Just to be very clear, you won't be seeking to see that independent advice that the board has received? You're happy to take their word, given everything that's happened with this project?

Mr VINCENT - I repeat what I said before about it being privileged advice with the board. I have been briefed on it. I have faith in the board doing the right thing; from everything that I have seen, they are working through the process properly. It is under their control at the moment. I'm sure once they have worked their way through it, there will be more discussions, but I have faith in what they are doing as the board of TT-Line.

CHAIR - Minister, just a further question in relation to rapid buses. How are you looking at rapid buses to reduce the issue around congestion? Are the rapid buses solely there to deliver for the stadium project?

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Chair. As a person who's mainly lived in regional areas, it's been interesting to see the flow of information around the Metro transport corridors. We touched on it yesterday, about how a rapid bus can be used to actually move off the rail corridor into other areas to be more effective for people within that 800 metres or so of those corridors. I think it is an important part of Hobart's future to understand those corridors, the three of them - eastern shore, Kingborough and the Glenorchy area - to understand how we need to actuate them for future volumes of traffic, to take vehicles off the road. Yes, it does help the stadium, but that's only part of it. It's more about the future growth of Hobart as a whole.

CHAIR - Many places - I note Sydney, I note Ireland - are expanding their rail network, and they would absolutely kill to have a dedicated rail line which is pretty much intact, so I don't see this as planning for the future. Wouldn't it be better to use that to establish light rail to the northern suburbs? I mean, it's a gift that we have.

Mr VINCENT - It is a fantastic opportunity. When you read all the different data, and I can't say I'm an expert so I will throw it to the Secretary in a few moments, the situation of being effective to move the volume of people of a morning and of an evening makes it difficult for the crossover on a set corridor. That's been an interesting fact of how you move in and out and cover the areas. I'll ask the Secretary for a bit more guidance on that.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, minister, and through you. How we're looking at the rapid bus network is beyond just that rail corridor. We are looking at it as modal shift for our city. We're looking at it to work as Greater Hobart. I understand that the light rail service can't

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deliver this model, because to actually look at modal shift for both the north, the south and our eastern suburbs, light rail will be too difficult. It will be too costly. We could consider it just on the northern corridor, but when we're looking at modal shift for our cities, not just an area, the advantages are greater from a rapid bus network that would actually deliver that modal shift for our city.

CHAIR - Yesterday we talked with the minister with Housing and Planning on densification of the northern suburbs. Why wouldn't that be the perfect opportunity to introduce light rail?

Mr LIMKIN - Through you minister, we believe that the rapid buses will enable that densification for the northern suburbs transit corridor. This is about transit orientation development. We can do that transit orientated development around a light rail stop or a rapid bus stop. The work of the strategic business case has identified the ability to deliver that no matter what modal area we use.

Ms JOHNSTON - Following on from that line around transit-orientated development, your own reports back from 2020 indicate that there is a significant difference between the ability to deliver city-shaping and transit-orientated development between bus rapid transit and light rail. Indeed, bus rapid transit has been identified as delivering 1612 dwellings and 484 jobs, light rail on the other hand has been identified as delivering 7083 dwellings and 1799 jobs. That is a significant increase. That's four times the number of homes, almost four times the amount of jobs. Why are you continuing to ignore your own expert reports? We're not unicorns here in Tasmania. We can have an integrated multimodal transport system. Why are you still focused on bus rapid transit on the rail corridor in the northern suburbs rather than something that will actually deliver a city-shaping changing mode?

Mr VINCENT - Some of those reports were well before my time in this House and I'm not aware of some of those numbers, but I will ask the secretary to clarify, sorry, Cynthia has been involved a fair bit.

Ms HEYDON - No, through you minister, they were also before my time. Just to provide some clarity. Rail has been looked at. Light rail was looked at further to what was already provided. What we're looking to do is essentially reset the public transport network across Greater Hobart.

Try not to think of buses as the traditional idea of buses, more in line with the Brisbane Metro where if you look at it from appearance and capacity perspectives, they're fairly similar to what you can provide in a light rail. To give you an idea, Canberra light rail carries just over 200, I believe; the Brisbane Metro which is technically a bus carries about 186 and one of the things we were looking at with the business cases is what is the need before looking at what is the mode and then looking at the need is very much around that frequency, that capacity.

What we're also looking at is not just to service the north, but the idea of through-services, so you can go from the north through to Kingston, you can go then through to the east. The ability to do light rail would be easier in the north. It is not easy going across to the east and it's very challenging, possibly impossible, to get that through to the south, which makes that reset of the trunk network, which is what the rapid bus proposes, very challenging.

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Ms JOHNSTON - With all due respect, minister, your own strategic options assessment still finds that light rail provides all those. In terms of capacity you struggle to find enough Metro bus drivers at the moment to drive on the existing routes, let alone on a bus rapid transit system. The ability for light rail to be able to be coupled together to increase patronage and numbers for events, for peak times, for off-peak times is incredible. Your own documents and studies indicate that light rail provides the best bang for buck on transport outcomes, on land-use, housing, and job outcomes, on affordability, yet you're insisting on pursuing a bus rapid transit system. This is another example of where you completely ignore basic evidence, expert evidence, in favour of a pet project.

Mr VINCENT - Having only been in the role for two-and-a-half months, I don't have pet projects as yet. I am learning, but a lot of the details you're talking about there, I understand are in the strategic business case, which is being worked on by the department at the moment.

Mr O'BYRNE - Minister, with the contract with Cubic, how many deadlines or timelines have been set? How many have not been met? And, are there any penalties in the contract?

Mr VINCENT - I will pass to Ms Heydon on that. There are details in there that I'm not aware of on the resets at this stage, Mr O'Byrne.

Ms HEYDON - I'll come back to you with the details.

Mr O'BYRNE - Within this hearing?

Ms HEYDON - Yes, that's fine. There have been milestones and they've also been achieved. Just for clarity, the project came across to State Growth in 2023. We executed a contract in 2024. We will be delivering very soon - I won't take it out of the minister's piloting of the new services - and then rollout in 2026.

Mr O'BYRNE - Could you elaborate on that 2023 date? Metro was given the job to do that in 2018. You say you took it over in 2023. What circumstances justified that decision? Were there any payments made by Metro to the government in lieu of their inability to deliver that?

Ms HEYDON - I do not have the background as I was not here. What I am advised is, that what Metro was not initially looking at a statewide solution. It was looking at a replacement for their green card system. We will get some advice on the decision-making behind that.

Ms HEYDON - You weren't briefed when you engaged in this, in the history?

Ms HEYDON - No.

Mr O'BYRNE - Seriously? Wasn't there a handover?

Ms HEYDON - I asked, and I was advised that Metro had been looking at a replacement of their existing system.

Ms O'BYRNE - Despite the 2018 announcement around statewide common ticketing?

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Ms HEYDON - My understanding is that what Metro had looked at was the replacement of their ticketing system.

Mr VINCENT - Metro will be here on GBEs next week.

Mr O'BYRNE - Oh yes, I'm looking forward to that.

Mr LIMKIN - Ms Burnet, if I may, before we go to Mr Jaensch.

CHAIR - Well, yes, through the minister.

Mr LIMKIN - I have the number for Mr O'Byrne. Total expenditure incurred by the department, from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2025 is \$12,579,435 for the common ticketing.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, half-price fares are providing cost-of-living relief to Tasmanian families and encouraging more people to use our public transport. Could you please update the committee on the extension of half-price fares and the impact it has had on passenger numbers across the state?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly. This is an extension of half-price fares through 30 June next year. Although around the Metro areas the uptake of increase patronage was probably flat, we have seen a quite remarkable growth in regional areas with the half-price fares and quite extensive. It was brought around to provide cost-of-living relief and to, hopefully, reduce congestion or attempting to do that, and attract new public transport users. It has done that in the east coast, in Burnie, and down the Huon areas as well. We have seen quite a remarkable increase in that.

We would like to build on that even more to get more people onto the buses and I think the transport officers do create a situation where there's a little bit more comfort for the people to increase that. Over the last three months we have seen a steady increase in the numbers of people using it in Metro areas as well. Metro, when I was talking to them yesterday, seemed happy with the growth in numbers, but obviously want a lot more to start to use those half-price fares.

Ms DOW - Minister, I'm really keen to understand this. What date were you briefed on TT-Line's independent advice on its solvency?

Mr VINCENT - On the independent advice was 12 November.

Ms DOW - To be absolutely clean minister, the first time you learnt of TT-Line's insolvency from any source was on 8 October.

Mr VINCENT - I will double-check that by taking that on notice, but I'm sure I'm accurate with the dates that I have been talking to you about today.

Ms DOW - What date did the Premier inform you of his briefing from the secretary on 21 July?

Mr VINCENT - I will take that on notice as well, thanks.

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Mr LIMKIN - Sorry, minister, just for clarity, I spoke to Mr Abetz. I didn't speak to the Premier on 21 July.

Ms DOW - I thought you said you couldn't get Mr Abetz.

Mr LIMKIN - Sorry, Mr Abetz's Chief of Staff, but I, ultimately - sorry. On 21 July, I called - I got a phone call from the TT-Line Chair. I tried to ring Mr Abetz, I could not get him. I informed his Chief of Staff. I think I heard you say that the secretary briefs the Premier. I just want to be clear that I did not brief the Premier on 21 July, I informed Minister Abetz's Chief of Staff.

Ms DOW - Then when did you brief the Premier? I thought that in your previous answer you said that you then spoke to the Premier.

Mr LIMKIN - I did not brief the Premier and I don't believe I said that. If I have I'm sorry, but I don't believe I said that I briefed the Premier. I attempted to brief minister Abetz, but when I couldn't get him I briefed his Chief of Staff.

Ms DOW - Minister, are you confident in TT-Line's financial modelling and what advice have you been given about what further bailouts will be required for the company?

CHAIR - This is your last one, Ms Dow.

Mr VINCENT - I am confident in the information I have been getting from the TT-Line board. They have withdrawn their corporate plan while they're doing their financial remodelling. When they get a full understanding of the financial situation they will work through a new corporate plan which will be discussed at length, and then we will have a better understanding of what we need to do for TT-Line going forward.

Ms DOW - Just to clarify a previous answer -

CHAIR - With respect, Ms Dow, I've given you quite a lot of leniency. We will move on and you will have plenty of time to ask other questions.

Minister, I'm curious to know, you talked about the fact that the number of people using public transport, Metro, has pretty much flatlined, but it has increased when it comes to regional services. Has the government favoured those regional services and private services over Metro, in relation to enabling some of their services to occur?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly not to my knowledge, not at all, across the board. Having spoken to some families up the east coast last Friday regarding why they're using it, it's purely because of fuel costs. There's quite a few people who are using it because it's much cheaper than what it costs them to run a vehicle down to Sorell or Hobart for their groceries. I haven't seen any anomalies that you indicate there at all.

CHAIR - I suppose it goes to the heart of the number of Metro services still cut. I don't want to get into GBE territory, but given we haven't had those services reinstated with those service cuts, how can you expect that people will be flocking to public transport services, as opposed to Kinetic and Tassielink and so forth?

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Mr VINCENT - The present figures through to the end of June indicate an 8.4 per cent increase on a statewide basis since the half-price fares increased, and as I said, most of that is regional. With the reduction in the amount of routes, 34 per cent of those have been put in place. We have chosen not to increase those until the transport plan is understood on where we need to add to some of the new areas. A lot of the ones that weren't replaced weren't fully patronised routes - a valid point to some extent - however Metro is very conscious of making sure there are as many people on the buses as possible.

CHAIR - I caught the bus the other night. I waited at the bus stop and was expecting, from the app to get on a Metro bus, but a Kinetic bus came along and I couldn't use my Greencard. Why is it that on Metro lines, it's not either free or that you can use your Metro card? I know we've talked about integrated ticketing, but can you explain? The other person who got on the bus at the same time was heading to Amelie House, so they had a history of homelessness. Why is it that that person would have to pay to use the bus service on a Metro line?

Mr VINCENT - Sorry, I'm not familiar with the individual runs on that. We would have to clarify what happened in that situation and come back to you.

CHAIR - It would have been a New Norfolk bus or a bus from the northern suburbs, but it was on a Metro service line.

Mr VINCENT - Thank you. I'll seek more clarification on that.

CHAIR - You don't need that on notice?

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister, we'll be able to get back to you in this session.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, is one of the reasons you've elected to progress a BRT option over a light rail option because you plan to put a massive Macquarie Point stadium on the rail corridor gateway into the city and it's impossible to get light rail now and into the future into the city if there is a stadium at Macquarie Point?

Mr VINCENT - Nothing like that has been discussed or come across that I'm aware of.

Ms JOHNSTON - With the BRT option you're progressing and the draft business case, what's the route for that? I understand it's from Glenorchy along the existing rail corridor to around New Town Station Nursery. Where does it go from there?

Mr VINCENT - I'll just pass to the deputy secretary

Ms HEYDON - Thank you, minister, and through you, that is one of the routes that's proposed, but part of what will be done in the development of the final business case is interrogating that route or alternatively using the whole of the existing rail corridor.

Ms JOHNSTON - What's the route that's currently being looked at? From New Town, how does it get into the city at the moment?

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Ms HEYDON - Yeah. Essentially as you said, coming down through New Town is one and the other is coming through under the Tasman Bridge and through with the existing corridor.

Ms JOHNSTON - How does it come from New Town down?

Mr LIMKIN - Ms Johnston, at this stage in a strategic business case there are multiple options for route selections. There is not a confirmed route option. If you're looking for a specific route that will be coming or going through the northern corridor, that will be determined as part of the final business case. At this stage there are two to three options on how the rapid buses will work. None of those are confirmed yet and that is a piece of work that you do as you go through the detailed business case and final business case.

Ms JOHNSTON - So the three routes would be continuing through the corridor, potentially on the Brooker Highway, coming off at New Town, coming onto the Domain Highway onto the Brooker Highway into the city, or alternatively going through the suburbs, so that's through Park Rd, Letitia St, Campbell St down to the city. Are those the three options?

Ms HEYDON - They're definitely options that have been looked at. There's probably two that make more sense, particularly for that connectivity through to the east and the south, but the final business case needs to do the work to determine which is the best route.

Mr O'BYRNE - Just following on the common ticketing, you updated the committee that the government had spent \$12.5 million between July 2023 and July 2025. The budget of \$7 million was established in 2018, so of the \$12.5 million that's been spent, does that mean on the government's budget there's \$24.5 million of the budget unspent? That doesn't actually answer the original question, which was how much has been spent on the common ticketing?

Mr VINCENT - I have just been advised it's probably best to take that on notice to get the exact amounts. We'll get the breakdown of that and come back to you, Mr O'Byrne.

Mr O'BYRNE - When will the common ticketing be implemented?

CHAIR - Been waiting a fair while.

Mr O'BYRNE - Yeah, it's like a bus.

Ms JOHNSTON - Or light rail.

Mr VINCENT - We're about to begin a trial before the end of the year. Derwent Ferries I believe are the first part of the trial with that, with a view to implementing towards mid-2026.

Mr O'BYRNE - Sorry, just to clarify - this has been a project for common ticketing for buses and you're starting with ferries?

Ms HEYDON - We're doing two trials. One will be commencing on the ferry because, again, it's a whole-of-PT system, and then rolling out on buses early in 2026. The reason we're looking at the ferry in the first instance is that it's a closed system and we can understand if there's any issues with the system before we roll out the buses, which have multiple zones. The

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Derwent ferry, for example, is within a single fare zone and then we'll roll out to an outside Metro bus trial.

Mr O'BYRNE - So it's a trial in the next few months on ferries and buses. When will the when will it be rolled out across the state? When will you actually start?

Ms HEYDON - Based on the success of those trials, it will be progressively rolled out through 2026.

Mr O'BYRNE - How has the success of the Cubic trial in Queensland gone?

Ms HEYDON - We'll probably be a bit ahead of Queensland with our trials.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, antisocial behaviour on buses is a key barrier to increasing the number of people catching public transport. What is the government doing to reduce antisocial behaviour on our buses?

Mr VINCENT - The Tasmanian government has allocated \$2.38 million per annum in recurrent funding to support the wider rollout of transit officer services to make our public transport services a safer and attractive choice for customers. Most public transport bus services operate without incident; however, a small number of services have been impacted by people behaving poorly towards drivers. I spoke before about some of the training we're going to do for them to have increased powers.

I have spoken to several of the transit officers to better understand their feelings towards their position on the buses. They have gleaned a fair bit of natural information by being involved and understand some of the route pinch points where they need to be. The first day I was talking to them they had some people they were training and they were explaining some of those areas that they go to on a regular basis. They find that they have been very well accepted on those routes and that most people are pretty good. I also spoke to five drivers and asked about how they felt about that and I must say the drivers were extremely professional and didn't see it as a negative sticking point in their roles. They saw the rollout of the transit officers as complementary and they found their communication with most of the people on the buses was fantastic, and I saw that firsthand as people were coming on and off the bus. I also saw a couple get on the bus who probably would have been problematic in the past because of the looks received, but it was handled very professionally. The transit officers are certainly fully aware of their role in that position. I'm glad to see that with the Budget we are expanding that into the north of state as well.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, could I make a suggestion or a request, noting that because they are public transport users, members of our migrant community sometimes are the targets or recipients of some of the antisocial behaviour, so engagement with the Migrant Resource Centre or Multicultural Council of Tasmania might be also useful as part of that push if you're not already exploring those avenues.

Mr VINCENT - We would be happy to take that on board. Public transport is something I've never had to worry about too much myself, being in a regional area, so it's been interesting to talk to people within the different aspects and get my own GreenCard and be able to take ferry and bus trips to fully understand the transport system. I've even been to the drivers' area at Metro and talked to drivers en masse which has helped me understand some of the pressures

they are finding, and there are many multicultural drivers there now who are assisting with some of those conversations.

CHAIR - I'm being as fair as possible and I know I don't always give Mr Jaensch a second go, but sometimes it might elicit something that's useful - with all due respect, Mr Jaensch.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you - every now and then.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, as proposed, the operation of the stadium will limit and may at times remove the existing vehicle access at the wharf and terminal for a range of vehicles serving the needs of cruise ship passengers. Onshore cruise ship expenditure by passengers and crew contribute around \$30 million to the Tasmanian economy each season, with around 350,000 passengers and crew, and 83 out of 143 port calls are in Hobart. That's around 210,000 cruise ship passengers and crew per season accessing cruise ships through Evans Street. What is the plan for vehicles to access Evans Street for passenger ship services during stadium events? Please don't answer with, 'It's challenging.'

Mr VINCENT - Thank you. As we move through the planning for the stadium, the transport plan needs to happen for the whole area. We're not at that point yet, but that will be worked through as part of one of the orders that needs to happen. We are fully aware of the delicate nature of the delicate nature of that whole area for people movement because it is a vital part. From my time as minister I know TasPorts also fully understands the impact of heavy transport into that area, as well as the motels in that area that are operating 24/7 virtually and the impact of the massive numbers of people coming in on the cruise ships. All those things will be taken into account and done properly through a proper plan for that whole area, including the pedestrian movement to and from the stadium.

Ms BUTLER - It looks like there's a geography issue with it. How are we going to have two cruise ships with thousands of passengers and Evans Street cut off when there are stadium events? I want to put an idea in your mind of what that would look like if there was a cricket event during summer, which is highly likely, at the proposed stadium. With two cruise ships and no Evans Street, how will those cruise ships be able to be refilled, restocked and passengers be able to access the site and access tourist buses and so forth? We can't just say we're going to put them on ferries. Logically speaking, and I know it's very challenging, what are your thoughts on that, minister, because I can't see how any of that will work?

Mr VINCENT - Macquarie Point has done a lot of detailed modelling on that already and will continue to do so. They are fairly certain they have their numbers in the movement right and changes to the way the connectivity of the whole area will work with Macq1 and the UTAS building. A lot more detail has to be worked out, but they have done a lot of modelling on it already. I will ask the secretary if he has any more advice on that.

Mr LIMKIN - Macquarie Point Development Corporation and Stadiums Tasmania, as part of the TPC submission, put in their detailed transport modelling. I understand the transport modelling was well tested during that process. The team at the Department of State Growth has actually verified and challenged that modelling as part of that. Ultimately, the department's accountable for making sure the city moves appropriately, so the team looked at that and there were a number of submissions I put into the TPC around that. My understanding is the TPC was comfortable with the modelling and where they were going, and -

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Ms BUTLER - No, they weren't. The proponent said it's going to be an issue.

Mr LIMKIN - as the minister said, section D1 of the order before parliament requires an operational transport management plan to be developed and for that to be considered as part of that process.

Ms BUTLER - I don't want to misquote and I don't have the quote in front of me, but I think the proponent did state that during major events Evans Street will be closed, conceding port access will still need to be accommodated, so there is no plan.

Mr LIMKIN - The northern access road is a really important process as part of this to continue port access. The department has commenced work on the northern access road and the work on that matter.

Ms BUTLER - I'm talking about what happens with the closure of Evans Street and accessing cruise ships? We're not talking about the northern access road, at the moment, that's part of the infrastructure, not transport. I'm talking about the transport of cruise ship passengers and how they're going to restock. It just doesn't seem that the geography is there, on a very factual basis, to be able to accommodate that, if you have two cruise ships on stadium days.

Mr LIMKIN - As I said, and through you minister, the operational transport management plan will need to consider all of these matters. The operational transport management plan has not been produced yet, but that will be produced by Stadiums Tasmania and the proponent, following parliament's consideration of it.

Ms DOW - There's no funding allocated for any of that, is there as well?

Mr LIMKIN - That is a matter for the Macquarie Point Development Corporation and Stadiums Tasmania, it is not a matter for the Department of State Growth.

CHAIR - Minister, could you just give a bit of an outline as to how the review of the southern regional transport network is going, please?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, I will pass that to the deputy secretary.

Ms HEYDON - As you may be aware, we went out for public consultation earlier this year. We've had some feedback from that and that's informed what we're doing in phase 1, which is essentially, I will say, the low-hanging fruit, in relation to improvements and additional services that we can do. We've developed that timetable with Metro and other operators, and are working through that to ensure we have the buses and the drivers. That will be rolled out well before mid 2026. We're also running phase 2 parallel to the phase 1, which is essentially more of a greenfielding of the timetable, looking at where we can do more significant improvements, reviewing potentially more direct services where possible; and essentially a larger reset of the public transport network.

CHAIR - I didn't quite hear that. Did you say greenfielding?

Ms HEYDON - Yes, essentially. What we are doing in phase 1, is where we can, putting in some additional services and adjusting existing services so that they run better. The second

phase is more of a greenfield approach to revising some of those fundamentals of the timetable and the services.

CHAIR - I was pleased to see, but also a little bemused, if you like, to identify that there's some disability access upgrades to bus stops. It's very good to see that that's been a dedicated fund. I can't remember seeing it in the budget this time, but perhaps you will be able to correct me. The Glenorchy upgrade was on a bus route near the Derwent Entertainment Centre, near the Jack Jumpers' home on the Brooker. How many Metro services use that bus stop, or how often is that bus stop utilised?

Ms HEYDON - I will have to come back in the session with that level of detail, I don't have that on hand.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms JOHNSTON - Continuing on bus stops. We seem to have a perennial issue about who owns bus stops and who maintains bus stops. It's particularly a concern for constituents of mine, in regards to antisocial behaviour at bus stops and access to bus stops. Can we have some clarity as to who is responsible for the location of bus stops? And, when they need to be moved for antisocial behaviour reasons, whose call is that?

Mr VINCENT - I will pass to the deputy secretary on that.

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. The ownership of bus stops varies across the state, between ourselves and local councils. In relation to their placement, there's a bit of a historic, where there are some bus stops. If there is concerns around a bus stop, we will often get feedback from operators or from the council, and then we will look to review if that should be relocated or if there should be improvements to that bus stop.

Ms JOHNSTON - How do constituents, or members of the community, know who to contact? Whether they contact local council or State Growth in relation to bus stop issues? Where's the information held? Do they play pot luck and call one and not the other?

Ms HEYDON - The easiest may be to contact us in the first instance. We do have a page that allows for filtering and saying what your concern or issue is. Alternatively, they can go through to the operator because they also contact us in relation to any issues at bus stops.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, I've heard that capital expenditure on infrastructure is a key objective for this government to create economic activity. Apart from the stadium, what is planned in the next two years?

Mr VINCENT - In the forward Estimates we've allowed for the next four years. A lot of the capital expenditure that comes under Infrastructure is mainly with roads and bridges. We did a lot of work last year to understand the impact of the Bridgewater Bridge workers coming off and how we kept a constant flow of work through the industry on roads and bridges. That from all our knowledge, runs at around \$400-425 million per year required to keep the industry going.

We are fortunate that over recent years, a lot of the projects and road corridors have had studies done on them, which fits with the Australian Government's requirements for project

funding - that we work more in advance of just putting a project up. We actually work through a lot more detail to put through for federal funding now and those requirements are becoming heavier and heavier all the time, but it's a good thing because it's making us do the work on the corridors.

Once we identify a corridor then work is done on safety aspects of high-accident areas, corners, visibility, road widening in places, and things like that. A lot of the projects for the various corridors are prioritised to fit with the annual expenditure. Now, sometimes when you strike a hold-up with a road project, it can swing over to another time. We try to bring things forward and that's one of the good things about having a lot of the corridor work done and working through advancement on those projects, it allows for a much more even flow of work should there be hold-ups.

We are experiencing an enormous amount of hold-ups with the new requirements over the last 12 months of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC) federally, holding up a lot of work. That's Australia wide I might say. The new minister is certainly trying to speed that up because we have seen a handbrake put on some projects, which makes it difficult for the department to keep that flow of work - tenders, design work, the whole structure of it - coming through. We have to do a lot more work in those areas now when we put the projects in and have to understand we don't have a guaranteed timeline anymore, so we have to have a bigger pool of projects to keep that flow of work going.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, in 2021 the Tasmanian government made an election commitment to provide all-access, all-weather bus stops at priority locations. Could you please provide an update on how that commitment is progressing?

Mr VINCENT - Yes. I've been out and had a look at some of the work here and it's been really good the council uptake on that. We made that 2021 commitment for up to \$10 million over four years to provide the upgrades to those bus shelters.

A total of 15 councils applied for round one, 11 in round two and four in round three. A total of almost \$1.3 million was committed to councils for the upgrade of 237 bus stops through the three rounds of the grant. While there were 26 councils with general access bus stops, only 11 councils successfully participated in the three grant rounds. Four of these 11 councils have been successful in multiple rounds.

Funding allocated in each round included \$325,000 in round one for the upgrade of 94 bus stops, which were all completed by September 2024; and \$447,000 allocated in round two to upgrade 66 bus stops, which is currently being delivered and expected to be completed by the end of 2025; and \$466,000 allocated in round three for the upgrade of 75 bus stops, which are expected to be completed by February 2026. Due to the low uptake by councils in the first three rounds, the grant program concluded in April 2025. However, the funds will continue to be used to upgrade priority bus stops on state roads as well.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, Tasmania remains the only state where automated speed camera revenues are not hypothecated for road safety investment. As part of the election advocacy statement from RACT, they asked that funds raised through automated safety cameras be reinvested back into the camera network. I've met with RACT about this and their advice comes from a survey where 75 per cent of respondents stated that when they receive a

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speeding fine from a speeding camera, they've done the wrong thing, but if part of that was hypothecated back into road safety, they wouldn't feel like it was just a revenue-raising episode.

Have you considered the RACT's advocacy statement? It seems like a good idea and we're the only state that seems that we're not doing that. Would you take that on?

Mr VINCENT - I certainly would. I agree with the comment. Most people, even going back to the fuel tax days, always like to know that the fuel tax was going to roads. I think it's an important thing even in local government for some of the things collected for people to understand that it is going to where they think it will. At least then you can say, hand on heart, I contributed towards something.

I fully agree with your comment there and it has been part of my discussions with the CEO from RACT. I don't fully understand the funding of all the road safety initiatives and infringement notices, at this point. I am just starting to work through that now with that view that I mentioned earlier on that I really want to try to make a difference in 2026 about how we utilise that.

We have seen, with the infringement cameras, a massive decrease in speeding wherever those cameras are. Bridgewater Bridge, as soon as the cameras became active, there was a decrease of 50 per cent of speeding on the bridge - virtually overnight. Same in most other areas where they act. Speed is still one of the major concerns for deaths on roads. It is important and I can only imagine that everybody - well, nearly everybody - would support a further rollout of cameras in sensible places because it does put in people's minds that they need to slow down a little bit. It certainly does in mine. I don't know if it's because I'm getting older or slower, but I'd love to see that money used for much more of those initiatives, so everyone knows it's going to -

Ms BUTLER - Some of the other advice that was provided by RACT, suggested that countries such as Norway have a very low rate of fatalities and youth fatalities on their roads. They have speed cameras everywhere and, therefore, their population basically do not speed.

How many speed cameras - 'the pizza ovens' I think was how RACT referred to them. How many pizza ovens are rotated across Tasmania at the moment? And, if some of that funding is going to be potentially placed back into road safety, do you think that there should be an increase in the use of speed cameras in Tasmania?

Mr VINCENT - As a whole, yes, I would like to see a more effective or an increased effect of those automated 'pizza ovens.' It's a good description. That might be why some of them get very hot sometimes.

Ms BUTLER - They said there's about eight statewide at the moment and I thought that seemed quite low.

Mr VINCENT - It's contracted to Sensys Gatso Australia and that includes four fixed speed cameras; 16 mobile speed cameras, four of which can detect mobile phone and seatbelt offences and another eight can detect registration offences as well - all significant things to road safety. It does come at a cost, but the infringement notices for 2024-25 was 71,000 infringements for speed; nearly 4000 for seatbelts, which amazes me in this day and

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age; 1800 on mobile phones; and just under 5000 for registration, which brings in just under \$13 million in infringement notices.

Ms BUTLER - On that particular topic -

CHAIR - Alright, last one. I'm very generous today.

Ms BUTLER - You are, thank you. Do we know how much the contract is for the use of those cameras operating around Tasmania by Sensys Gatso - how much do we contract them annually for the use and the movement of those 'pizza ovens'?

Mr VINCENT - I will just come back to that; the secretary will look that up and get that information shortly for you.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you very much.

CHAIR - Minister, I want to go back to the review of the Southern Transport Network. We've heard it's going to be rolled out, so I'm sure the committee will be very interested to see the work. I'm curious to know if you, or the department, has set targets of modal shift; so getting people out of cars and into public transport, or perhaps even using active transport modalities?

Mr VINCENT - That's a pretty good question, Chair. A lot of the data that is being collected now is quite fascinating, when you see some of the numbers involved in the cyclists or people using the ferries. I haven't got all that data in front of me, so I will ask the deputy secretary for a bit more information in that area, please.

Ms HEYDON - We don't have a formal KPI in relation to mode shift, but it is something we are definitely chasing. We do have the most recent figures as part of our household survey of Greater Hobart that was released earlier this year. It is not as good as we would like it, particularly in relation to public transport, but it is actually quite positive in relation to active transport.

CHAIR - It brings a point to this committee - how do you get people using public transport if it's not frequent, it's not reliable, and you can't rely on the app to identify when buses might be coming. How do you make that change, minister?

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. They're the things that we actually do need to change - it is that frequency, it is that reliability. The arrangement we have in relation to telling you where the bus is, is an interim arrangement. That will be an improvement as part of the common ticketing system when that rolls out, but you're right, and part of what we're looking at in the Greater Hobart Bus Review is the improvement to the reliability, is the improvement to the frequency. That definitely sits behind the work we're doing around what the future network for public transport needs to look like in Greater Hobart.

Mr VINCENT - I've said a couple of times that being from mainly regional areas, it's been fascinating trying to get my head around some of these concentrations of numbers. Even as a mayor, and now as a minister, watching old habits struggle to change with a lot of us moving in and out of Hobart. We all complain about the funnel effect of Hobart as our major city, but we still all add to it every day.

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CHAIR - Not all of us, if we can help it.

Mr VINCENT - I'm talking about the regional areas coming into it, mainly. There is a slight shift, but we have to accelerate that shift. I haven't got all the answers to that at the moment, but it is at the forefront of my mind to understand that, because it has to change. As we talked about yesterday with planning and other issues, it's a lot of different things that are going to add up to a change in our culture towards transport and how we move around metro areas, especially Hobart.

CHAIR - I'm sure you wouldn't want to be known as the 'minister for congestion', rather than the minister for Transport.

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, well, I'm a grandfather now, so -

Mr O'BYRNE - I think that was Rene Hidding. Thank you, dearly departed Mr Hidding.

Minister, your government - State Growth contracts: bus routes, private and public sector. You contract Metro - they cancelled over 100 services a number of years ago, and very few of those have returned. As a part of the failure to deliver those services, they're fined; they have to pay a fine. It's been previously reported in Estimates how much they have paid, but how much are you fining Metro for not doing their job?

Mr VINCENT - I wasn't aware that there were fines involved with those routes, so I'll just ask the deputy secretary for some more information on it.

Ms HEYDON - Yes. Just for clarity, they aren't referred to as -

Mr O'BYRNE - Non-compliance failure?

Ms HEYDON - Yes, non-compliance, and that is predominantly due to the decision a couple of years ago of the withdrawal of some services. Those have started to come back on, and we're working with Metro as part of the broader bus review of those other services that need to come back on, or potentially be changed to be more reflective of what demand is. If you give me a moment, I will find the figure.

Mr O'BYRNE - Just while you're finding that, maybe the Secretary, then. How many services have been returned of the ones that were cancelled? You intimated in your answer just then that there have been other changes, so we may not be aware of other services that have been cancelled in the last couple of years and may have gone under the radar. I suppose the net would be a figure I would like as well.

Mr VINCENT - Certainly, Mr O'Byrne. The information just handed to me is that Metro reintroduced 26 services into the Hobart network in late 2024, and a further 30 services in August 2025. I think that's about 34 per cent of the fares. Part of the review is also working on the most appropriate bus routes to service some of the new growing areas of Kingborough and Brighton as well. Whether that's with Metro or private contractors is still being worked on. Part of that review is also about adding routes that are effective for moving people out of some of the new growth areas as well.

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Mr O'BYRNE - Of that review, how many existing services were removed and how many new services were added?

Mr VINCENT - We suspended 177 weekday trips due to the bus driver shortage of which 56 -

Mr O'BYRNE - That was back in 2024, 2023?

Mr VINCENT - That was in August 2023.

Mr O'BYRNE - I'm sorry, just quickly. It was intimated then that there was a review of services, and you mentioned new services were coming on, but obviously, given a whole range of reasons, that means other services would be taken off. So, I'm looking for - initially 100 were taken off, some have come back. You've done a review, you've put some on, apparently, but also you've taken some off. I'd like to know what that figure is

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. Just for clarity, Metro had suspended 177 weekday trips back in August 2023. To date they introduced 26 services back in late 2024. They introduced a further 30 services back in 2025. The balance of those services we are looking at as part of the Greater Hobart Bus Review, so we have not implemented that change yet. That is part of what we're looking at for the first half of next year. The amount of withheld contract payments since January 2023 to June 2025 is \$4.5 million.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's \$4.5 million that's been lost from Metro and stays in State Growth?

Ms HEYDON - Has been withheld because - yes.

Ms JOHNSTON - If I can move to freight transport issues, and it probably comes to no surprise, minister, that I'm a fan of rail when it comes to freight transport. Road transport obviously takes a massive toll on our road infrastructure. You just look at the left lane of the Brooker Highway, for instance, to understand the issues around that. It's also a road safety concern. Rail, in terms of freight movements, has productivity benefits, road safety benefits, environmental benefits, all those kind of things. Can you outline to the committee the split between rail and road freight transport within the state and how you're trying to change that to have more on rail?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, it's a fascinating subject. Our rail tonnage is increasing and TasRail, over a number of years now, has performed very well in taking a lot of trucks off the road and increasing their reliability. Now they are actually doing fresh freight from north to south and vice versa, and their mix of freight is growing also. Their reliability is in high 90s, so it's becoming a very, very effective way. Their maintenance programs, even when you look at the derailments that used to occur to the upgrades of strength of the rail corridor. It's just improved year on year on year.

The effect of heavier trucks - B-doubles, now A-doubles, and there is talk of A-triples - where the movement - and the work I did with some transport operators over the last couple of months, bring around tonnage in the area of 85 tonnes. That's a fairly big vehicle, if we end up going that way. It does draw efficiencies onto the number of vehicles on the road if you can get your corridors right, but it does put an enormous amount of strain on the road

corridors, and we forget that. I quite often look at the old bits of the Bass Highway when I'm going up and down it, and the Midlands Highway, and I think, 'Cripes, did we really drive on those roads not so many years ago?'

We forget about how big vehicles are now, and even when you look at some of the magnificent caravans that are coming in around the state, they are so much more sizeable, putting pressure on the road shoulders as well. That's why so much of the road corridor needs to be continually looking at widening of shoulders to still allow for, not necessarily cyclists, although it does allow for cyclists, but also the wear and tear of the edges, the maintenance of those roads. It's a major impact, and we forget so easily how transport modes have changed.

I don't formally have exact numbers, unless the secretary has, but I am happy to find out the tonnage between road and rail. It is quite significant and quite a few of the trucking companies are some of the biggest customers of TasRail as well because of driver shortage, the cost and the pure efficiency at some times. It's not perfect, but it's certainly complementary and it is working to increase the number of vehicles off our roads.

Ms JOHNSTON - Are you happy to take that on notice? Can you also take on notice any incentives that you might be delivering to try and drive, excuse the pun, more freight onto the rail?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, we're certainly happy to take that on notice. It's a positive story and it's a very competitive field. You're talking down to cents per kilometres that make the difference over 12 months, when you're moving the number of containers or the kilometres, that make a huge difference -

Ms JOHNSTON - And when there's a target.

Mr VINCENT - Yes.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, aviation services are vital links for communities on our Bass Strait islands. What's the government doing to ensure continued regular and reliable services to our island communities?

Mr VINCENT - A major part. We forget that we're an island too and how important our air services are to us, but the people of King Island and Flinders Island certainly don't let us forget that at all.

It has been interesting talking with the airlines. We have an unfortunate situation at the moment with Rex Airlines and the subsidies that they're drawing from the federal government to make sure they are still viable for regional areas. That puts pressure then back onto the other airlines. We're also noticing with some of the independents flying people in and out of, mainly King Island, that it is also leakage away from the freight side of the commercial lines.

We have supported Sharp Airlines on a continual basis, and I have been swapping letters with the federal minister to make sure all this is taken into consideration - the importance of air travel from Victoria in and out of both islands as well as in and out of Tasmania. There's also the fresh freight side of things, there is the emergency side of things, and then the general movement of people to and from the islands. It's a very important link. We are fully aware of the situation, and that includes ongoing discussions of continued upgrades of the airports over

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there with both the federal government being involved with those and us, as well as the local councils. We are very conscious of that and have regular phone conversations regarding what is needed to keep that going and strong.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you.

CHAIR - I've had a request that we break earlier. If we can have our 10-minute break now, we'll be back at 10.49 a.m.

The committee suspended from 10.39 a.m. to 10.49 a.m.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, there was an election commitment made by your government to trial SkyBuses that would travel from Launceston Airport to Launceston City central, I would imagine - I think that's where it goes. I can't see anywhere in the Budget where that's funded. Are you going to fulfil that election commitment? Apparently it will be really important to that tourism infrastructure and transport for that area.

Mr VINCENT - Yes. The SkyBus Launceston Airport trial election commitment was not included in the 2025-26 Budget. State Growth will submit a budget bid for the 2026-27 budget to fund this election commitment. We did have some brief discussions on the SkyBus, and I'll ask the deputy secretary to clarify where we are with that. There are costings.

Ms HEYDON - About a week and a bit ago we got an indicative proposal from Kinetic around what they see the trial could look like and we will be working with them. We are already working with them on some of the arrangements they've proposed - stops, et cetera - and we'll be using that to inform our budget bid for 2026-27.

Ms BUTLER - So there won't be a SkyBus service as per the election commitment, it might be a service that's run through Kinetic after 2026-27?

Ms HEYDON - It's a trial. SkyBus is actually owned by Kinetic. It is a SkyBus trial and Kinetic is the operator of that service.

Ms BUTLER - Thank you.

Ms DOW - Minister, a couple of years ago your government made a commitment to install some bus stops in Zeehan and Rosebery, because I had a number of constituents - some elderly ladies, actually - who came into my office who were very wet from standing out in the rain and who used the bus once a week to go up to Burnie to do their shopping. Where are those bus stops - it's been quite a while since they were committed to - and when will your government build them?

Mr VINCENT - I'm not aware of exactly where they are, but if they have been made as a commitment I will follow through and come back to you on that. I understand the weather conditions on the west coast and can fully understand why that would be needed, so I'll follow through on that.

CHAIR - Minister, could you please outline for the committee how many full-time equivalent positions last financial year and this financial year to date have been subject to recruitment freezes, target negotiated voluntary redundancies, other forms of redundancies, or

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any other vacancy control, vacancy management or workforce renewal initiative resulting in positions being eliminated or deliberately unfilled?

Mr VINCENT - I will ask the secretary to supply those numbers.

Mr LIMKIN - The department has identified several strategies to meet our budget efficiency dividend. Just for the committee's information, we manage this on a department basis, we do not manage this on an output basis.

CHAIR - The department being Transport or DSG?

Mr LIMKIN - The Department of State Growth. Transport is a group within DSG so it's managed on a department basis. They really fit into a couple of categories and we will talk about the workforce committee in a second.

We're looking at it how we combine functions and services to implement leaner operating models; reviewing how we administer programs, for example, grants and our capital programs to ensure they deliver value for money for the Tasmanian community; and looking at how we adopt digital to help remove some paper process out of that. For example, we have a requirement where we have to send out all the registration and licensing information using the postal system. Is there a way we can do that through digital if people make that choice? I acknowledge there are a number of people in our community who will not make that choice because they aren't digitally literate, and we have to work on that, but they have to have paper. It's about providing those choices. We're looking at those types of services. We've also looked at how we reduce our operational expenditure and supplies, consumables, marketing, accommodation, ICT and a variety of other mechanisms.

In relation to the government's announcement, we have established a workforce committee to help us better manage our workforce and align their capabilities to what we do. We do that through a workforce committee, but first of all we start by asking and empowering our accountable managers and deputy secretaries to really look at it first. Does the function of the role relate to a delivery of an election commitment? What is the financial and budgetary implication? In the road space, for example, a lot of this is linked to the Commonwealth agreements and we want to make sure we deliver on those commitments, so I have to make sure that those roles that need to be filled don't impact those types of things. Is there a legal risk, is there safety and are they continuing to deliver outcomes? First of all, the deputy secretary makes those determinations and then it comes to the workforce committee, who looks at it on a department-wide basis to see if we can move resources around and create opportunities for people to use their skills in different ways. Then there is a decision made based on that basis.

CHAIR - Have you got a percentage of how many things you're going to cut? Has the position of urban mobility planner been filled, minister?

Mr LIMKIN - In relation to that specific position, if we can just confirm the name of it I will check.

CHAIR - The urban mobility planner, I think.

Mr LIMKIN - I'm happy to take on notice, subject to you, minister, the number of requests the workforce committee has rejected on a department basis. I do not have a target of

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cuts, what I have are budget efficiency dividends and I have a policy from the government about their [inaudible]. I do not have a target for any reduction in public servants.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, I'm aware that the Tasmanian Association of Tourist Railways, TATRail, has written to you a number of times over recent months regarding their concerns about heritage rail across Tasmania. A shout-out to the Tasmanian Transport Museum members who are doing amazing amount of work to encourage heritage rail operations on the northern suburbs rail corridor and have expanded their services to Chigwell. TATRail has raised concerns about the Bridgewater Bridge and the old bridge and the removal of the lifting span. Why is it necessary to remove the lifting span from the old Bridgewater Bridge, which would sever the rail link between the east and west side of the river?

Mr VINCENT - I will ask Ben to come forward for a lot more detail on that. Chair, I would like to introduce Ben Moloney to the table, who has certainly been very passionate on this subject.

Mr O'BYRNE - He's a superhero with a cape, he fixes everything.

Mr VINCENT - He has been described as that many times recently, yes. He will give a lot more detail on the old lifting span.

Mr MOLONEY - One of the main benefits of building the new Bridgewater Bridge has been to re-establish navigation access upriver, because currently the lifting span's operation and reliability was very challenging. Essentially it was a very old piece of infrastructure that was very difficult to maintain and was unreliable in terms of its operation. What we've sought to do with the project is deliver not only that continued access for vessels which are much taller and able to go through past the bridge without needing the lifting span to be opened [inaudible] by having a fixed bridge which has a clearance that is compatible and similar to the Bowen Bridge.

Effectively, if you've got a vessel that can get under the Bowen Bridge, it will now be able to get under the Bridgewater Bridge. Equally, the width of the navigation channel is also consistent with the declared navigation channel underneath the Bowen Bridge, which is a navigation width of 45 metres. In order to provide that 45 metres width and also ensure that we have the height, we need to demolish the existing bridge and that includes removing the lifting span and also one of the adjacent supports of the tower, so that we have that wider navigation span. The current gap where the lifting span is is approximately 30 metres and is quite narrow.

Ms JOHNSTON - It's been put to me that vessels were able to navigate through that channel previously when the lifting span was up. Why could we not have rediverted the funds that have now gone to removal of the old structure into maintenance, to ensure that that lifting span could continue to rise and be maintained appropriately? Instead we have spent - I'd ask to see what the costings were for removal of the structure. Why have we done that rather than just maintain it so that we can still maintain rail access across there.

Mr VINCENT - Before handing back to Ben for more detail on the costings there; there was a substantial maintenance cost. It was getting to a stage in life where the operation of it was quite difficult. Even the little building up on top, the control centre, was full of asbestos. There were certainly some maintenance issues and the cost to keep the structure there was going to be quite high. I will ask Mr Moloney for more detail on that area.

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Mr MOLONY - Certainly. The costs for maintaining the operation of the existing lifting span were considerable. We can provide the actual cost estimate for that during this session. It certainly exceeded the cost of demolishing the existing bridge and its removal.

Ms JOHNSTON - Can I put that on notice, the cost of the two options, please?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, certainly can.

CHAIR - Before we go on, I think there was a response to one of Mr O'Byrne's questions?

Mr VINCENT - I have one from the secretary and the deputy secretary has another one as well.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you. Mr O'Byrne, in relation to your two questions regarding Cubic, one is the total contract that has been spent on the common ticketing and also the penalty clauses. We need to ask you to put them on notice, which we're happy to. The first one we have to confirm the number with Metro. The second one, we need to work through what we can legally provide you under the contract. We want to provide you as much information as we can in relation to milestones and penalties, however, the advice I have is that we need to check with the solicitor's office about confidentiality clauses. My commitment to you is, we will provide you as much information as we are legally able to under that contract.

Mr Di FALCO - Minister, how many motorcycle learners have to go up north because of lack of capacity in the south?

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. We will get back to you with statistics, but is it specifically in relation to access to testing or training?

Mr Di FALCO - Well, training and testing, but my understanding is there's three areas where they test and train, two up north and not enough down south. So, people have to go up north to access that training.

Ms HEYDON - Alright, I'll come back to you in the session with the information we have.

Mr Di FALCO - Okay, thank you.

CHAIR - Was there another answer to the questions?

Ms HEYDON - Yes, there is. This is in response to your query Chair, about unlicensed drivers in relation to the fatalities this year. I'll just put a caveat. These are the numbers of unlicensed drivers or riders involved in a fatality. It does not necessarily mean that they are actually the fatality or even at fault. That comes out of part of the coroner's finding.

CHAIR - Good. Thank you.

Ms HEYDON - Of the 40 fatalities to date up to 17 November, there have been four fatalities - two motorcycle, one motorcycle rider, and one vehicle driver - who have been

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unlicensed drivers or riders, so four all up. Four who are unlicensed drivers or riders involved in fatalities.

CHAIR - Thank you. What was the time period?

Ms HEYDON - That's from the beginning of January to 17 November.

Mr LIMKIN - Chair, just on your question regarding the Urban Mobility Coordinator. My advice is that the transport team are looking at that role and whether it could be redesigned to have the functions of that role sit in a broader role. The advice I have is that all those functions in that role will continue to be delivered by the department.

CHAIR - Transport planners are worth their weight in gold, I might add. Minister, are you aware of the value of people with that specific experience and skill set?

Mr VINCENT - I'm sure that everybody's advice is well - it's not something that I've been totally involved with, but I thank you for highlighting it and I'm certainly aware of it now.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, park-and-ride facilities established at Kingston are popular with users and they help to reduce urban congestion by making it easier for people to use buses over private vehicles. Can you update the committee on recent park-and-ride projects and future sites?

Mr VINCENT - We've committed \$20 million to develop new park-and-ride facilities in the south, with Rokeby, Sorell and southern beaches communities and Hobart's northern suburbs. The one at Midway Point has just recently opened and, though I'm not there in the middle of the day to see how many people are using it each day, there are still vehicles in there most evenings and mornings when I come through.

The construction of the Claremont park-and-ride commenced on 28 July and is expected to be completed by May 2026. That will be substantial in that area, out there. Some network changes are required to support the new Claremont park-and-ride. The design for the Rokeby park-and-ride is progressing. Public consultation for the new site layout commenced in October 2025 and is planned for commencement of construction in 2026, subject to the finalisation design and the public consultation.

The Department of State Growth will evaluate the successes of these park-and-rides to inform decisions about future facilities and their location. I don't have that bit in front of me, but there is also a commitment for several in the Launceston area. I'm not sure about Devonport and Burnie, but certainly I think it's three in the Launceston area as well.

Ms DOW - When will they be delivered?

Mr VINCENT - I will get that information and come back to you, thanks Ms Dow.

Ms DOW - Chair, is the committee happy to move on to Infrastructure now?

CHAIR - Yes, please go ahead. Thank you. It doesn't rule out any Transport questions you still might have.

Ms DOW - I want to ask you about the upcoming 'proper' budget in May, minister. What projects have you identified in the Infrastructure budget that will be cut, not progressed, or pushed out to account for the budget challenges your government has?

Mr VINCENT - At this point in time, we are not looking at cutting any Infrastructure projects. The timing of those projects is what I talked about earlier on, where we've adjusted that \$400-425 million per year in road and bridge infrastructure to make sure that the industry is flowing right and they are able to deliver. Some of those projects move from year to year, but at this stage, because of the work we've done with the federal government on the allocation of funds and the work we've done on the various corridors around the state, I'm not expecting any of those projects to be cut. The timing of those projects coming on board may change slightly, but our infrastructure allocation of jobs is still there fully in the forward estimates.

Ms DOW - No cuts?

Mr VINCENT - Not that I'm aware of at this point in time.

Ms DOW - Have you undertaken a review of Infrastructure Tasmania, minister?

Mr VINCENT - A review of Infrastructure Tasmania will be happening, yes. It is part of what - It is something that was talked about when I first came into the ministry and the secretary has been working through some of those reviews of Infrastructure Tasmania and how we deliver those projects around the state. Not just on roads and bridges, but other projects as well.

Ms DOW - Has the review been completed, minister?

Mr VINCENT - I'll just pass to the secretary for a summary on that.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, minister. The review has been completed. One of the things that I'm very focused on, is how we improve our infrastructure delivery? Infrastructure delivery is a -

Ms DOW - I hope so, because you don't have a good track record.

Mr LIMKIN - focus over time. In the 18 months I've been in the job, it has been very focused on how do we improve our infrastructure. We did a delivery, so we did do a review of Infrastructure Tasmania (ITas). The review was completed by Mr David Riches. David Riches was the head of Projects NSW for Infrastructure NSW, and Mr Riches' review really highlighted that we need to continue to develop our capacity and program if we want ITas to become a centre of excellence across government. The recent government election commitments in the economic statement does have ITAS taking a more leadership role. We are now currently working on how we deliver that through.

We have also had these conversations at Secretary's board, given that this is about not just how we improve infrastructure in the Department of State Growth, it's how we improve infrastructure across the state. That's in relation to planning, business cases and actual project delivery.

Ms DOW - And the GBES?

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Mr LIMKIN - I will come to GBEs in a second. In relation to GBAs and SOCs, we are working with the Department of Treasury and Finance to put those processes in while we can work with them through directions such as the TT-Line through shareholding ministers. There are options for us to actually embed these into the Treasurer's instructions and the GBEs policies that Treasury does. We are working through implementing those types of processes through that process.

Ms DOW - Through you, minister. Would you table that review, please?

Mr VINCENT - We will take that on notice.

I have an answer to the park-and-rides in Launceston. Three new park-and-ride facilities are proposed for the Legana/West Tamar area, Kings Meadows/Youngtown and East Tamar/northern suburbs.

In consultation with the City of Launceston and council officers, State Growth has identified two sites in the municipality area which are being further investigated, including site feasibility, concept design and public consultation, if feasible. The two sites are located on Invermay Road in Mowbray and along the Westbury Road corridor in Prospect. Concept designs for these two sites are currently being developed.

Ms DOW - When can we expect those to be up and running?

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. We've just received the concept designs. We're reviewing. We'll be engaging with council to make sure that they're supportive of those sites and the designs, then we'd be looking to go out to tender next year.

Ms DOW - Okay, thank you.

Mr VINCENT - Chair, I have another answer for the previous question on road vs rail.

Perfect tonnage isn't easily available. As close as we can work out the numbers available to us, approximately 12 per cent of heavy freight is done on rail, by mass, which is approximately 25 per cent by the tonnage on rail.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, and the other two questions I asked are on notice still?

Mr LOVIBOND - Yes.

CHAIR - Minister, regarding the new Consultant Services Panel for transport and civil infrastructure, is that a pool of money to be drawn down from to pay billable hours? How does it work? Is there a fixed division of cash that keeps consultants on permanent retainer?

Mr VINCENT - Thank you. I will refer that to the deputy secretary.

Ms HEYDON - Apologies, I don't have that detail on hand. I'll have to come with an answer in the session.

CHAIR - You will take that on notice?

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Mr LIMKIN - Can we just clarify the question, Chair?

CHAIR - Regarding the new Consultant Services Panel for transport and civil infrastructure, is there a pool of money to be drawn from to pay billable hours, or how is that paid? Is there a permanent retainer?

Mr LIMKIN - Panels are used as predefined areas that we can pull from. If, for example, we have a piece of work, we can actually take that to the panel and ask them to quote on it. The panel provides us an option under a procurement framework to speed up procurement. We still have to go through the relevant procurement processes depending on the variety of panels. Some may be hourly rates; some may be fixed price. We may choose that depending on the project as well. Some panels give us both options to actually do it. There's a set of predefined rates that we just lock in and we go to them with the project and go, 'This is what we do - how many hours?' Or some panels give us the choice to go, 'Here is the project we would like, please give a bid for that.' We use both those options under the panels.

CHAIR - How does the department assure value for money in relation to that set-up?

Mr LIMKIN - Through you, minister. First of all, there is a value-of-money assessment when the panel is established, is my understanding, to make sure that when people get on the panel there is value for money. Then an assessment is made by the department under procurement delegation for each project depending on what way there is. There are really two checks on that value-for-money test.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, was there an environmental assessment conducted in the Mersey River prior to the approval of the berth 3 development in East Devonport?

Mr VINCENT - That would be through TasPorts at GBEs next week. In the discussions that I had with them, there was comprehensive work done with the EPA and the EPBC involved in that, but I'd ask that question next week, if you like.

Mr GARLAND - No worries. Do I get another question?

CHAIR - If it follows on from that, yes.

Mr GARLAND - Yes, I'd like a copy of that assessment, if possible, but I guess I will approach TT-Line next week.

Mr VINCENT - We will talk to them for you.

Mr O'BYRNE - Minister, my question goes to the saga of the Tasman Highway upgrade at Cambridge. This was a project that was initially announced in 2014. I think there were various start dates - 2019, 2021. The second latest update was it was to commence in 2023, to be completed by 2025.

You've updated the website now that construction will commence in late 2025, to be completed by late 2029. My understanding is there's still a fair bit of work to be done. Can you update the committee on when you actually think work will commence? A bit ambitious with the target, perhaps?

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Mr VINCENT - It's a fantastic program of works down there that have been very close to my heart as mayor. Excitement's turned to frustration, and that frustration continues. I'll just look here for the details that you request, and the timing for it.

At the moment we're waiting for the EPBC to tick off for the causeways to start. We were expecting that some months ago, but that is still drifting on. We have tender documents virtually ready to go, and I will ask Ms Heydon for a little bit more information on that.

The project past the golf club still has a bit of work to do, which is a separate project, and I reckon that's the one you're talking about.

Mr O'BYRNE - That's the section I am talking about.

Mr VINCENT - The department is currently preparing additional documentation requested by the Australian government to support the referral under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* to the Midway Point causeway and McGees Bridge duplication.

For a little bit more clarity on the bit past the golf club, I will ask the deputy secretary.

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. I appreciate the frustration. We definitely had programs based on certain dates being achieved. Without blaming another entity, it has been challenging around the approval process and timeliness of the EPBC referrals. We are progressing as best we can to be able to go out to tender in advance of getting those approvals. We are hoping to be going out to tender early next year.

Mr O'BYRNE - Obviously that means, then, the construction of late 2025 is no longer applicable?

One question. One of the key parts - and there's always, when you're identifying lines and roads and where you seek to build, you deal with a whole range of threatened species. Now, given the EPBC proposal, and given this has been a known factor in this development for quite some time, can you tell me why DSG has not mapped the habitat critical to the survival of the listed species concerned with assessable project as yet?

Ms HEYDON - I'll take it on notice, but we have done assessments and part of what we're going back to -

Mr O'BYRNE - With respect, I did an RTI on this and it shows that you haven't done that work or consulted with the local landowner about that assessment.

Ms HEYDON - We can come back with additional advice as to our consultation and the environmental assessments we've actually done; including what we're going back to the feds on, which is the outcome from some of the work we've been doing around protecting species.

Mr O'BYRNE - Okay.

Mr JAENSCH - Residents of the Tasman Peninsula, lower east coast, Sorell and southern beaches are looking forward to the completed duplication of the Tasman Highway between Sorell and Hobart. Minister, when can we expect the duplication of the causeways and

the section of the highway between the Hobart Airport interchange and the Midway Point causeway?

Mr VINCENT - I think most of that was just touched on.

Mr O'BYRNE - It actually is a large extension, so in his defence, he's probably talking about something else.

Mr JAENSCH - I'm talking about a larger extension.

Mr VINCENT - It's been interesting some of the frustrations with that whole project and some of the work done initially, where we thought we could keep moving through and then we found out the EPBC needed more detailed designs. That meant a lot more design work had to be done before putting it in. There was also the awkwardness with both the golf club and the nearby resident - which Mr O'Byrne was referring to - which probably wasn't at the level it needed to be through that process. I spent a lot of time out there myself before entering these Chambers to do that work. A lot of people at the golf club had fantastic ideas such as big high fences to protect it, but they didn't realise the bracing would be out in the middle of the highway, so there was realignments done on several occasions.

One thing that doesn't come up in the press very often is that on the the Milford property side there is also quite a large water main that goes through there for Sorell, which is right in the middle of that, as well as NBN and the old copper line there as well, so there was a lot more that needed to be taken into consideration with the design of that road. There were also complications around how you move Pittwater Road, the golf club and Barilla Bay into a sensible intersection that isn't going to cause a blockage for traffic at several points. To move them along to one point, with either a roundabout or lights, was quite a difficult process as well to work through. Most of that has been worked through now with the golf club and they are comfortable with where we're at. There are some endangered species that we certainly still need to understand on Milford, although we have moved the alignment of the road across a fair bit so that it takes in a much smaller portion of that now.

It is a frustration to all the locals down there that the causeways have not been duplicated yet, but most understand the holdups. We will continue to work through them, but it is a source of frustration and understanding. I've certainly learned a lot out of it, both as mayor and in my new role as a minister, on trying to be better prepared for some of these projects. I've touched on the EPBC a couple of times today and how they review all projects where there's federal funding. We need to learn to work within those parameters a lot more and understand the requests. This will ensure that we do a lot more homework earlier, in my opinion, on the effect of those roads; including the one from Campbell Town to Conara, which is very close to being given the go-ahead now.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you for the extra information and the insights.

Ms DOW - Minister, how many kilometres of state roads were upgraded or maintained in the 2024-25 financial year, and how does this compare to previous years?

Ms HEYDON - We will come back to you with the detail, but just for clarity, we maintain all of the state roads as part of routine maintenance. In relation to upgrades, I assume you're referring to the resealing activities as opposed to major capital.

Ms DOW - Patching potholes -

Ms HEYDON - All of our roads are maintained and there's a resealing program that goes across the network.

Mr VINCENT - I have some details now on the costings for the removal of the lift-span on the old Bridgewater Bridge. The demolition contract is \$13.162 million and best estimates on maintaining the existing old bridge was between \$50 million and \$100 million over the next 50 years to keep that there.

Ms DOW - Minister, why are we using Victorian standards to build our roads rather than Tasmanian standards?

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister, a decision was made several years ago around essentially what was the the best way for us to keep up with standards that other jurisdictions have and that was determined to be using the Victorian standards. The application of Victorian standards does not mean that we cannot have Tasmanian specifications, and part of the work we're doing with the industry at the moment within those standards is looking at being able to provide more specificity on what should be used from a Tasmanian specification perspective in relation to sealing, et cetera. We have a meeting with industry I think in the second week of December to get their ideas, particularly around sealing and other things they think that we should be able to specify when we put out contracts.

Ms DOW - Does that include materials as well for places like the west coast where the roads -

Ms HEYDON - Yes.

Mr VINCENT - I might just add to that as well for my own benefit, having taken on this when the pothole numbers exploded.

Ms DOW - They're still exploding, minister.

Mr VINCENT - To understand that, I've been working with the Civil Contractors Federation and individual contractors about understanding some of these big standards with gravels around the state. Different gravels perform differently in different areas of the state. I've had some very sensible discussions about some of those testing regimes and ticking off everything that needs to happen to make sure our roads are built well. I've also spoken to several of the road construction crews where people have been doing it for 30-40 years and had discussions with them also about the performance of different gravels. I'm in the process of learning a fair bit about that myself so that I can understand that because it is a point that's been raised and over the last couple of decades I've understood the different performance of gravels and some of those standards in different areas of the state. It is certainly something, as the deputy secretary indicated, we are doing a lot more work on to understand that.

CHAIR - Fascinating topic, isn't it? We will move on.

Minister, back to the panel and potential hiring freezes. Has State Growth, particularly for transport and infrastructure projects, put consultants ahead of hiring experts? What is the impact of using consultants over actually filling permanent positions?

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Mr VINCENT - I will ask the secretary to answer that.

Mr LIMKIN - We do not look at consultants and employees. We don't say we won't fill this employee and do a consultant - that's not how our department works. We use a mixture of both consultants and our own staff to make sure we get the outcome and deliver it. Sometimes we use consultants because of workload for our own people, availability of resources, or if there's a particular technical skill we want. How we look at it is not about that. I can say no decision I have made in relation to the workforce committee has been about prioritising consultants over our employees, because our employees do an amazing job every day of the week.

CHAIR - Thank you. In relation to the Bridgewater Bridge, were there any sort of problems with the build or load-bearing capacity? Is the load-bearing capacity of the Bridgewater Bridge any different from other bridges?

Mr VINCENT - That's not a technical question I can answer but I'm sure Mr Moloney would be right across that.

Mr MOLONEY - I guess I'm not exactly sure of your question in the sense that the Bridgewater Bridge has been built to contemporary standards, to withstand appropriate loading for the types of events that would, I guess, be anticipated during the life of the build. For an important piece of infrastructure such as this, some of our design standards require us to build a build that's suitable to withstand events that may be anticipated within a one-in-2000-year event. The bridge has been designed and constructed to achieve that.

CHAIR - Were there any problems during construction with slumping?

Mr MOLONEY - In terms of slumping, as in, for instance, movement of piles downwards?

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr MOLONEY - No. Part of our processes actually included very accurate surveying of our piles, because we did have some concerns. We wanted to make sure that the piles that were constructed did perform as intended. There was quite detailed surveying undertaken throughout the construction of the project, and will continue afterwards, to make sure there isn't any settlement. All of the movements of the piles that have been monitored are all within anticipated ranges.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, the last three state budgets include reference to a framework for infrastructure investment by GBEs - which would mean GBE and state-owned corporation infrastructure projects in excess of \$50 million, for which board approval is provided in the budget year - 'must have a net positive net present value (NPV) and/or positive business-cost ratio, calculated as part of the cost benefit analysis undertaken in accordance with the Infrastructure Australia Assessment Framework'.

The 2024 Budget said:

Work on the development of this framework is continuously included in the 2025-26 Budget.

Has that been included?

Also, minister, why is it appropriate to use the Infrastructure Australia Assessment Framework for these projects but not for the stadium?

Mr VINCENT - Thank you for that. There is a fair bit in that, so I will ask the secretary to clarify.

Mr LUMKIN - If you can let me check that and I will come back. I just need some advice, minister, on where that's at, because it's a piece of work that we did in Treasury. I'm going to try to come back to you in this session.

Mr VINCENT - Chair, I have two answers to questions here.

The question in relation to the status of bus stops in Zeehan and Rosebery. State Growth has been working with the West Coast Council to deliver this commitment. As existing sites do not have room for shelters, the bus stops will need to be moved a short distance to provide a suitable site. The site of Rosebery has been selected and endorsed by both the West Coast Council and the operator, Tassielink.

The site at Zeehan has been identified and endorsed by Tassielink, however, council are yet to indicate if they support the new location. Once confirmed, State Growth will prepare the grant deed for council to complete the work, and delivery is expected to take six to 12 months.

Ms JOHNSTON - At the completion of that, council will take ownership of that as an asset and have to maintain it - is that correct?

Ms HEYDON - That would be the basis of the grants.

Mr VINCENT - The other question is on how many Metro services use this stop. It was upgraded opposite MyState Bank Arena on the Brooker Highway, and the bus stop opposite MyState Bank Arena is serviced by four Kinetic services to Launceston per day. No Metro public or school services use this stop. It is important to note that Kinetic operates public transport services with its route, timetables and fares set by government.

CHAIR - They're set by government, but you can't use your GreenCard on them.

Mr VINCENT - No, that was just in relation to the bus stop.

CHAIR - Yes, I know, but it begs the question that I asked before.

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. No, GreenCard is not available outside of the Metro services.

CHAIR - But we're on Metro routes. Can you not address that discrepancy?

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. That's the intent of the common ticketing system. There'll be no need for a GreenCard. Anyone who has a smartphone or a credit card or a debit card will be able to use any service. There'll be no distinction between the buses and the ferries and any other service.

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CHAIR - Mr O'Byrne, I hope you're listening.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, back to berth 3 and the environmental assessment, were you made aware of any issues by TT-Line or the EPA over that berthing area?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly, I haven't been notified of anything there. It would be through TasPorts, because they are the operator there, but no, I have not been made aware of any of that.

CHAIR - You have a follow-up? Mr Jaensch.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, the Arthur Highway is the key connection for communities on the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas, servicing the key tourism assets such as Port Arthur and growing communities on the Southern Beaches. What funding has been allocated to the Arthur Highway, and what are the highest priorities identified from the government's corridor strategy?

Mr VINCENT - Thank you. I must declare an interest as a resident of the southern beaches. It's certainly a growing area. Primrose Sands is a surprise every time you go down there.

The Tasmanian government committed \$50 million to upgrade the Arthur Highway from Sorell to Port Arthur as part of the 2021 election. The Australian government has subsequently committed \$1.6 million for planning and design work. State Growth released the Arthur Highway Corridor Strategy in April 2025, which was developed in consultation with the wider Tasmanian community and Tasman Council as well. In 2025 the Australian government committed \$200 million, at an 80:20 split, to the Arthur Highway improvements based on the corridor.

The five highest-priority improvement opportunities have been identified with concept design work underway for the following sites:

- The intersection improvements at Sugarloaf Road, which is the road that turns off to the right to go to Primrose;
- Overtaking lanes both north and south of Dunalley;
- Northbound overtaking lane opportunity between Forcett and Sorell;
- Safety improvements between Pirates Road and Masons Point Road at Eaglehawk; and
- A southbound overtaking lane between Taranna and Port Arthur.

Certainly, with Port Arthur being a major attraction, I think around 400,000 vehicles, so this fits in line with some of those corridor project works that need to be done, not just for tourists but locals as well; and the widening of the roads because of the increase in traffic.

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Public consultation on the five priority projects is expected to commence in 2026.

Ms DOW - Minister, the last couple of weeks I've been down the west coast a lot, and I've come across some really bad patches of road that are very, very broken up with large potholes. There's been absolutely no signage to warn people that they're going to come across those potholes. What are you doing to improve the safety around that?

The other aspect of that question is, what are you doing to improve the safety of the guys who are going out onto the road to patch those potholes as well? I've seen a number of them having to just dodge out between traffic to do that, and I'm concerned about that. Can you update the committee?

Mr VINCENT - That's a fair concern. The safety of people working on our roads is paramount. We have advertising campaigns for that; I've been involved with those directly. Very, very important. The contractors, as a normal, have very good safety processes in place themselves. There's certainly a couple of different aspects to the road. We will follow through on those things you've observed with the contractor, for more information on why that mightn't have been done to the normal safety standards, if I can put it that way.

It's been identified with a lot of the potholing systems that our seal and reseal programs mightn't be what they probably need to be to keep the moisture out of the roads, which prevents potholes. I've certainly been asking for an increased focus on major patching instead of potholing. You see that in a lot of areas around the state.

Ms DOW - The next week I went back, and they'd done that in that segment.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, major patching. We have done some experimental work with Fulton Hogan with some of the techniques they use in other places. They've been doing that on a 50:50 basis with State Growth, to understand the durability and the wearability in the sealing off of the bit they cut out - because every time you cut the seal there is opportunity, if you don't get it right, for moisture to get in.

With major patching, we are concentrating on fixing some of those areas where there is moisture underneath the seal. Major patching is far superior to potholing, wherever we can scope that work sensibly. Then a reseal program follows on behind that.

Secondary to that, we've also asked the department to look at the specifications on the seals that we are giving out to contractors on what to use, so that over the next few years we improve the reseals and the new seals going down over our roads, to give it more durability. Just on that, then, with the maintenance contracts that you have in place currently across three regions of the state, are you aware of issues, particularly in the north-west, around the financial sustainability of those contracts that have been raised by contractors? What are you doing to address those concerns and the need for flexibility in those contracts?

Mr VINCENT - I have very regular meetings with the two maintenance contractors around the state and have had very open, honest and forthright conversations with everybody concerned. I've also pulled up at various times on the side of the road to talk to the crews to get their opinions. We are revisiting several things in the contract. The way we set up the contract after a problem a few years ago has probably created a situation that isn't quite workable for both State Growth and the contractors. We're presently looking at that. I'll ask the deputy

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secretary to give a little bit more detail because we're right in the throes of doing some things at the moment.

Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister, we are well aware and have had discussions with both the contractors, one of which has two of the contracts. In July we made some changes that we can within the existing framework of the contracts to trial a different approach with a lot more of a partnership approach and responsiveness. We'll be reviewing the outcomes of that at the end of this month.

Ms DOW - So you expect that work to be concluded and changes made that would be more amenable to both parties?

Ms HEYDON - Yes, the outcome of that review will inform the things that we continue and any sort of other major changes that would be proposed.

Ms DOW - Then you will continue to monitor that situation through your regular contact with the contractor?

Mr VINCENT - I have very regular meetings on that so yes, I stay very close to that.

CHAIR - Minister, do you have an answer for Mr Garland?

Mr VINCENT - I certainly do, just a little bit that might give you a bit more information before the GBEs next week. In September 2024, TasPorts lodged an application with the federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, or DCCEEW, for a 10-year sea dumping permit to support long-term dredging activity for the Port of Devonport.

Following the receipt of approval from DCCEEW, the permit will facilitate the disposal of dredged material from our operational waters within the Mersey River and entrance channel to a preferred dredge spoil disposal ground located approximately 15 kilometres north-north-west from the port's entrance.

The receipt of approval from DCCEEW will enable TasPorts to pursue its planned major maintenance dredging in the coming months, which will see the relocation of approximately 470,000 cubic metres of accumulated silt, sand and cobbles to the disposal area ground across an 18-week period.

Mr GARLAND - That helps a bit. I have a question, though. There's been a concern raised with my office that a certain species of handfish was discovered in the environmental assessment of the Mersey River. Were you aware of that?

Mr VINCENT - No, I'm not aware of that.

CHAIR - Do you want that taken on notice, Mr Garland?

Mr GARLAND - Yes.

Mr VINCENT - Chair, if you like, I can inform TasPorts of that ready for GBEs next week.

CHAIR - Ok, thank you. Minister, I want to come to the Tasman Bridge. Why has it taken a decade to respond to the coroner's recommendations that safety barriers be installed on the Tasman Bridge? We've been talking about the the upgrades to the Arthur Highway, but given that it is such a funnel for traffic and a large component of the congestion problem, what is happening with the Tasman Bridge upgrades?

Mr VINCENT - I will hand to Ben Moloney in a moment for some more detail on it, but it's been an interesting body of work around that, looking at the engineering design of the bridge and the wind stress - I think I've got this terminology right - pressures on the bridge which forced the department to have a fresh look at it all. It also highlighted to me the regular maintenance and review of that maintenance of the bridge. There's been a lot of comments made in the press about the life of the bridge, but the bridge is in good condition and has had work done on it. It highlighted the fact that with modern technology such as vibration sensors and different ways of being able to scope the work now with different electronic or automated devices, it means that we have to build in a lot more maintenance on the bridge going forward to understand the pressures that are on the bridge. We are very close now with the pathway designs and work. I will ask Mr Moloney to clarify a bit of the work around the bridge.

Mr MOLONEY - Thank you, minister. Extensive work has been undertaken over several years. As you mentioned, it has been a project that's been under consideration for quite a long time. The real impetus for the project came through in terms of a coroner's report in 2018 and at that time it was recommended that the barrier safety be improved by heightening the barriers in that location.

In order to take into consideration our preferred approach to maximise shared user path capability on the existing bridge, the department went into exploring options by which we could widen the shared user paths in those locations while also improving safety through heightening the barriers in that location. Quite a bit of work was undertaken through that, and unfortunately the outcome of those investigations concluded that it wasn't appropriate to increase the load on the existing structure. The existing structure is safe and sound for its existing use, but we note that it was built back in the 1960s as a four-lane bridge and then in the 1970s it was actually widened to five lanes in anticipation of needing to meet future traffic demands at that time. That meant that a lot of the spare capacity or you could say the structural capacity of the Tasman Bridge was taken up by that extended use.

It's quite a tall, lean structure, so that makes it vulnerable or susceptible to wind loads, and a lot of our work in recent times has been better understanding the wind loads that are on the existing bridge, so that when we install the higher barriers we understand what influence that may have on the loading of the existing bridge. Being a tall, lean structure it relies upon its foundation. We're working basically from the riverbed up and making sure that what modifications we make we understand the changes they have for the loads of the existing structure. We can certainly reassure government and members of the public that the bridge continues to be safe to be used.

We have now developed a preliminary design that we feel is appropriate for that location that will provide modest improvements on the usability of the shared user paths. We are using a mesh that is more open and will allow the wind to blow through easier to reduce loads, and we will be looking to go to the construction industry for a design and construct contract on that project, ideally before Christmas. We're just working through dotting our Is and crossing our Ts on the documentation at the moment in order to put a package to market.

As to why we've gone for a design and construct approach there, we feel that by working collaboratively with industry we will be able to undertake that project in a way that's constructed to minimise impacts on traffic. One of our real challenges with that project is the fact that we have to undertake the project with minimal impacts on traffic movements, so we're talking about undertaking works predominantly at night time outside of peak periods. By working collaboratively with the construction industry, we feel we will end up developing a construction methodology that can be safe and efficient for our workers and also minimise the impacts on traffic.

As the minister mentioned, another factor that's been quite critical in going forward is that simply by heightening the barriers, it changes our approach to how we maintain the existing bridge. The existing bridge for several decades has been maintained by a bridge inspection unit, which hangs off the side of the bridge to which access was gained by going over the old barriers. By heightening the barriers, we've had to adapt and change our methodology. People will see over the course of the next few months there will be an under-bridge unit being used on the Tasman Bridge where we will be doing further inspections and works by accessing that from the deck. That's a bit of a trial to make sure that we're able to continue to maintain this important structure in the decades into the future.

Ms JOHNSTON - Minister, I'm aware of the time. Do you need me to put that question on notice, before I ask my next question, so we don't miss that question?

Mr LIMKIN - Through you, minister, if I can answer a couple of questions. I'll start with Ms Johnston's. The advice I have is that the process you spoke about in the 2024-25 Budget was a determination by Treasury and Treasury put that policy in. Matters in relation to that implementation of that policy are a matter for the Treasurer and Treasury, so that question should be directed to them.

Ms JOHNSTON - The second part of that question was about why it's appropriate for other projects but not the stadium?

Mr LIMKIN - Once again, I would direct that question to Treasury as the holders of the policy, not the minister for Infrastructure.

In relation to, I think it was Ms Butler's question on the cost of the AT's contract. The total expenditure for the AT program for 2024-25 was \$8.08 million. This includes the contract with Sensys Gatso; adjustments and infringement management to Tasmania Police, because they have to do part of the work as well; ancillary software costs that we incur; and some other expenditures such as data collection and communication, but that's all in that \$8 million.

Ms JOHNSTON - Back on 10 November, minister, you announced a consultant service panel for transport and civil infrastructure. In doing that you announced that we're cutting red tape to make it easier for contractors and consultants to get on with the job. Who is on the panel and what red tape are you allegedly needing to cut?

Mr VINCENT - With the infrastructure panel, we're looking to make a smoother transition and detailed programs with assurance of getting to P90 quicker, but I'll ask for details on the panel from Cynthia.

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Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. The intention of the panel arrangements is to essentially streamline the procurement process. That has been, as you may be aware, a bit of a criticism from industry about the lengthy time period we have on some of our procurements, so, essentially, having that panel arrangement, again, we still have to demonstrate value for money, but we have a list of suitably qualified providers. To get you the list of those providers, we'll have to come back to you in the session. I don't have them to hand, but we can get them for you.

Ms JOHNSTON - They can be put on notice, given the time we have. Is that easier?

Ms HEYDON - It should be pretty quick. It's listed.

Mr LIMKIN - Through you, minister, it helps because I've signed the brief. I can provide the answer to that question. The 14 are:

- AD Design & Consulting Pty Ltd
- ACOM Australia Pty Ltd
- AAP Corporation Pty Ltd
- Burbury Consulting Pty Ltd
- Blue Tier Consulting Pty Ltd
- GHD Pty Ltd
- Jacobs Group
- Johnstone McGee & Gandy
- NGB Civil Consulting,
- pitt&sherry
- SCMC Australia
- WGAVIC Pty Ltd
- WSP Australia
- Victor Lister Consultants Pty Ltd

Mr GARLAND - Minister, does the government have any plans to further address the disproportionate cost-of-living King Islander's face as a result of being a remote island with insufficient services and a substandard government-run shipping service?

Mr VINCENT - Probably the best way to answer that is, yes, we're very conscious of the pressure. Cape Barren Island is also in that cluster of three islands. An enormous amount of work is being done on that. I have been over and I am heading over again early in the new

year to understand a lot of those pressures. It's a changing environment of population, industry and tourism and all parts of -

Mr VINCENT - (cont) it's a changing environment of population, industry and tourism, and all parts of the island. Certainly, there's a lot of work being done with Cape Barren. As the Local Government minister, I would certainly like to do a greater body of work on what is needed there going forward, both in shipping services and airline.

I touched on it before with one of my answers about the airlines. As you introduce various things like the King Island Tourism, it allows for independent operators that are flying in and out to take some of the freight, which makes some of the commercial things unviable.

I have a paper that I'm working through at the moment on the feasibility of the *John Duigan*. We would like to have regular, solid services that are servicing the needs of the islands over there, instead of too many services all pulling away from one another, but it's a delicate balance between commercial, private and tourism. I would like to understand that a lot more and that is one of my things I want to do in the new year because it is awkward for the islanders. I have several friends who live over there, and one who keeps pumping me full of information and I appreciate that from him and it adds up to a growing knowledge base of what we may need to do for all three of the islands.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, the Great Eastern Drive has seen a number of improvements over successive Liberal governments. What projects are underway and coming up to improve safety and amenity for road users?

Mr VINCENT - Thanks. Yes, there is a lot of work to do there.

Ms BUTLER - It needs a lot of work.

Mr VINCENT - That's what I was about to say, it will be ongoing for many decades. This is part of what we used to accept as a normal road. It's been described as a goat track. Some parts of the east coast are very much about - the beauty of the east coast, too, and I did talk about this at an Infrastructure meeting recently, you don't want to destroy the beauty of the east coast by busting through with the dozer and putting too wide there.

We've seen very sensible changes around the Coles Bay turnoff and at the Pondering Frog and through to the Apsley River Bridge as well, which is almost finished now and it's a very nice drive through there. We have a couple of sections that are coming up near - just out of Triabunna, is the next lot of work that's being looked at.

Ms BUTLER - [inaudible] to Bicheno?

Mr VINCENT - I don't think the Bicheno job is the next part of it, but certainly the Triabunna work and then the piece closer to - I think it is - Pontypool, which is an awkward section of road.

Once again, I refer back to how we look at the corridors now and try to define some of those safety bits. I do travel through every couple of weeks to Swansea, so I fully understand every inch of the road. We also did the work at Glen Gala a couple of years ago, which made a difference to some bad corners there. The section between Glen Gala and Cherry Tree Hill is something that we need to look at a lot more because it is quite windy and tight when you meet caravans, trucks, or anything else on that road.

The work will be ongoing as part of that corridor work for the whole way through and it's a big part of the government's commitment to the east coast and the Great Eastern Drive, and it certainly is making a difference even with the number of turnouts now for moving into some of the tourist attractions up there. It's certainly made for a much safer drive, but there is still a lot of work to be done that we are concentrating on.

Ms BUTLER - Evans Street from Macquarie Street to the Port of Hobart forms part of Tasmania's designated National Land Transport Network, minister, which is designed and managed to ensure key intermodal and export points are connected to a safe and efficient freight network. To provide logical flexibility, land-based road freight incorporating over-mass and oversized vehicles and that they should have unrestricted access to Tasmania's ports. Now the proponents for the stadium have stated that with Evans Street closing, that port access may not be able to be accommodated. Is there a plan on how you're going to provide heavy vehicles with access to our southern port on stadium sitting days?

Mr VINCENT - With the northern access road work being done, there is a lot of work and understanding and input from all players in the area there at the moment. The success and viability of that part of the port is paramount. When you go from the control tower up at any height, you can look down and it's quite massive. It's being used as a lay-down area for the Bridgewater Bridge, for instance, and will be for other projects as well. A lot of work's been done on that to make sure it connects. It also it opens up other opportunities around that area and is an important part for the stadium to be operational.

We are having ongoing talks with everybody and anybody would be probably the broad statement to make down there, about how that would work. Having a major function at the stadium could affect the operations of other tourism ventures around there as well as ports, and we already talked about the cruise ships, so that transport mechanism and flow of heavy traffic, light traffic and pedestrians is paramount in our minds going forward.

Ms BUTLER - We've already discussed the cruise ship issue but this is a major port. It's our southern port and according to the information the project proponent gave within the POSS was that, 'Evans St will be unavailable from time to time for port traffic'. Are you seriously considering cutting off our southern port when a stadium is active? It's our southern port. Will Evans St be available to heavy freight to service our port? Everyone thought the berth would be considered with the *Spirit*, so is this even being considered? I know we've got to start asking these very basic questions because they weren't asked.

Mr VINCENT - That's fine. I will ask the secretary for a lot more detail on that. I'm lucky that I'm minister with TasPorts because the conversation comes up regularly and they're very passionate about their operations. There's no way we would want their operations impacted.

Ms BUTLER - Cut a port off?

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Mr VINCENT - No way. When you think of all the activities that happen down there it's quite enormous, but I will ask the secretary for a bit more detail on some of those points.

Mr LIMKIN - Thank you, Minister. I understand that TasPorts, MPDC, TasWater and TasNetworks are currently finalising an access and coordination arrangement to ensure that access continues to be provided to the port, as you've mentioned, during construction. That is a legal agreement being developed between those parties to ensure continued access to the southern port.

Ms BUTLER - You said during construction.

Mr LIMKIN - I'm going to get to operation in a second. During construction that legal agreement will actually require that under the order the House of Assembly has considered. Under D11, at least 18 months prior to the stadium being completed, there has to be an operational transport management plan developed which deals with the operational requirements. Prior to that plan being approved, there is a requirement for that plan to be consulted with TasPorts and Marine and Safety Tasmania to make sure that any type of issues occur that order does require protocols for ongoing coordination with TasPorts, including during periods where transport is increased due to patronage leaving and the stadium as a transport demands around the stadium, and also to ensure sight lines for the port control tower and proposed measures to avoid any visual impact.

This transport management plan is designed to ensure that during the operations of the stadium that access continues. That work is required to be completed 18 months prior to the opening of the stadium. The reason it has to be completed 18 months prior to the stadium is that it's a network, so if we've got to make any changes to the network, that can be considered well in advance prior to the opening of the stadium.

Ms BUTLER - Okay. There's been discussion around this northern access road and how that may be used to service the port which is next to a stadium. Where is that northern access road meant to be? What does the plan look like of the location of that road? I've looked at the geography down there a lot of times and it's just not fitting.

Mr LIMKIN - I'm will hand to Ben, who is actually leading the work on the northern access road.

Mr MOLONEY - We've commenced work on planning the delivery of the northern access road. The northern access road is a project that's been talked about for a number of years. Clearly, with the intention of proceeding with building a stadium at that location, it makes the timeframe more important to be implemented sooner rather than later. As part of that project, we're seeking to provide a secondary access to Macquarie Point -

Ms BUTLER - And Evans St?

Mr MOLONEY - In addition to Evans St.

Ms BUTLER - Sorry to cut you off, but when Evans St isn't able to be utilised, this northern access road would fill in that gap - is that correct?

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Mr MOLONEY - It's intended to operate while Evans St remains operational and should Evans Street ever be closed. Essentially, the intention is to have two functional access points to the redeveloped Macquarie Point; one being Evans St and the other being the northern access road. The northern access road will generally follow the alignment of the existing rail corridor through that section, and as part of the project not only are we seeking to provide that access from Macquarie Point to the Tasman Highway via the existing half-cloverleaf, we are also looking to incorporate a bus plaza to support public transport for major events.

Ms BUTLER - Is that underground? Sorry, I couldn't help saying that.

Mr MOLONEY - At this stage, we are producing or basically finalising our early concept analysis report and consulting with key stakeholders in the area. Once we've gathered that information, our intention is to seek more public consultation on that, anticipated early in the new year, on the concepts we are developing up. We'd have to acknowledge it is a very tight corridor through there, and not only is it narrow, it also has vertical gradient challenges; it's quite steep through that area.

Ms BUTLER - I just can't see it myself, but I don't have your expertise.

Mr MOLONEY - What we're intending to do is consult more publicly early in the new year. We have preliminary information that we can provide on where the project is at at this moment in time, if requested.

Ms BUTLER - That's great. Minister, can I put that on notice to ask for additional information?

CHAIR - Minister, you have some answers to questions.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, I do, thank you, Chair. In response to Mr Garland, TasPorts has received confirmation of a 10-year sea dumping permit for the Port of Devonport maintenance dredging project from the Department of Climate Change. This represents a major milestone following years of preparatory planning and engagement. TasPorts has just advised there is a protected fish species, the Australian Grayling, that breeds in the river at certain times of the year - I'm told a couple of months - and TasPorts won't be dredging during that period. For any more detail I'm sure TasPorts would only be too happy to talk to you about next week. Deputy secretary Heydon has a answer to the motorcycle training question as well.

Ms HEYDON - I do. We are aware that there have been some delays for access to training and assessment. The waiting time for motorcycle training and assessment is targeted to be four weeks or less. The current waiting time in the south is about six weeks for the pre-learner course, which is to obtain your learner licence. The bookings for pre-provisional assessments are available within a few days, so it's impacting those looking to get their learner licence. These are expected to improve shortly, as the provider has recently appointed two additional testers in the south of the state, and we understand two or three people have chosen to get their learner licences up north due to that delay.

Mr VINCENT - We will provide that to Mr Di Falco so that he's fully aware of it.

CHAIR - In relation to some of the answers Mr Moloney provided about the Tasman Bridge, I want to follow up with a couple of questions regarding active transport. Are you or is

the department likely to monitor the use by not only cars, but pedestrians and users of the paths, before and after modifications might occur?

Mr MOLONEY - Through you, minister. We have existing information and data on usage so far, historically. I will quickly talk through the construction sequence to explain how it's intended to be undertaken.

In order to undertake the project, it will be necessary for us to close one of the shared user paths at any one time, undertake the works on that path, have that complete, then open that to public use before moving to the second pathway. To facilitate that, we are undertaking some work on the eastern shore to have a better connection underneath the bridge so that people can move from one side to another.

Post-undertaking both pathway improvements and opening to the public, we are intending to monitor its usage, but also looking to identify whether or not there would be any benefit in considering changing how it operates at the moment.

Previously, it has been raised that perhaps by having one-way movement of people in one direction on one side of the bridge and in the opposite direction on the other side, it may be more efficient for people. However, the feedback we've received from regular users of the bridge basically relates to the preference to be able to choose which side to use based on prevailing wind conditions and things like that.

We don't want to make that decision pre-emptively. Our intention is to undertake the project, open it up to use, then after it has been used for a period of time, we would seek to consult with the pathway users to understand whether or not some changes in the way it operates might be of benefit.

CHAIR - Ongoing counting of usage also. I think it's important to try and compare and contrast what is existing in a less-than-adequate space for people trying to bike-ride, at their peril, across the bridge currently, and how that might alter once these works have been undertaken.

Mr MOLONEY - Yes, it will certainly be important in trying to identify the benefits of the project, so yes, we will be gathering data about usage post.

CHAIR - Minister, as I said yesterday, I'm very pleased to see that the Health minister, Mrs Archer, is looking at a whole-of-government approach with preventative health, which the government is undertaking. How will you embed active transport projects in what you're doing with infrastructure projects, where possible?

Mr VINCENT - I can assure you that most projects that come across my desk have already taken into account active transport. It is part of the consultation process on most projects now, excluding some highways, of course. It is very much part of the future, I think, that we have to do that sort of thing. It's an automatic part of what we do. The secretary might like to expand on how they do that internally, but certainly, a lot of things coming across my desk include active transport.

Mr MOLONEY - Through you, minister. At a macro-level, we're looking at updating our Tasmanian transport strategy at the moment and this will look at all modes of transport.

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Active transport is part of that. Our priority is to make sure transport is safe, it's accessible, it's connected, and helps grow economic activity. Active transport is a really important part of that, so at a macro level, we look at that.

At a lower level, we're really looking at how we build this into projects we're doing. If we're doing a road upgrade, is there a possibility of designing this that has active transport on it? We're looking at it for the full spectrum.

One of the things we're looking at as well is the federal government has had a number of programs out about this. We want to take advantage of that, because we'll deliver better outcomes for our community, so we're actively considering that at the moment.

CHAIR - I put it to you that that's not necessarily what we're seeing through the Public Works Committee, and Ms Butler chairs that currently. Huntingfield is a classic example, where the first thing to go was active transport. Is that active transport bridge to park-and-ride, which can't be in isolation - but to the park-and-ride from the subdivision, is that going ahead?

Ms HEYDON - To your earlier point as well, and through you, minister, I appreciate that active transport may not have been coming through quite clearly. One of the things we're definitely trying to do in relation to transport planning is when we do corridor planning, we consider all transport. We're at a bit of an iterative stage of bringing that in.

You look at what are the needs of all of the users in that corridor and including in identifying active transport - not just road but public transport as well. That is where we're evolving to. Thank you for your shout-out to transport planners. I'm a big fan.

One moment. On Huntingfield - there's good news on that.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, we are funding that. The federal government, in the allocation of money for that, chose not to fund it. We had to work it through some other funding, and that has been allocated now. The final design was completed in March 2025, the construction pending receipt of all necessary environmental approvals. So, that project you did mention will be going ahead through other funding sources. Funding committed for this project is \$3.9 million.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Mr GARLAND - Minister, the Murchison Highway is a bit 'how ya going'. There are a lot of potholes, a bit going on there. Based on the conversations we had with the West Coast Council, they have raised concerns that the gravel base being brought in from Sheffield isn't holding up to the weather. They're suggesting you need to use the gravel base that is sourced locally on the west coast. This is what they do on the roads they maintain, and it holds up much better. Is this advice your department can take on board?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, it is. I did touch on this earlier on in the session, and we have examples of that in the Midlands and Tasman Peninsula, all around the state, of exactly that sort of scenario.

There is an issue in some of the quarries that councils do operate in various regional areas that we're working through with - I think it's Mines that control the quarrying - the volume

they're able to process at any one time. Because councils aren't selling it privately and just keeping it for their own road projects, we have to look at a different licensing there. For instance, at Interlaken, when that road was done by Southern Midlands, the gravel came from out of area, which added to the cost, of course. The gravel was still up to specs and everything, but there are local gravels that could've been used which would've minimised the cost, as well as being of a substance and quality that would have maintained the road. So, yes, we are very seriously looking at that at the moment.

CHAIR - Do you have another question, Mr Garland?

Mr GARLAND - Yes, I have, on new buses for the stadium. The government has indicated it will be required to purchase an additional 80 buses to meet the public transport demands of Macquarie Point stadium. Noting that we have a critical shortage of bus drivers, how are you proposing to attract sufficient drivers for these buses? When will these buses be purchased, and where will they be housed?

Mr VINCENT - There are still parts of that that are being worked through to do with the stadium. In relation to the bus driver shortage, the recruitment process that Metro have been going through over the last few years has produced a growing number of people coming through the system for driving buses. From the figures I saw a couple of days ago, the numbers of bus drivers on the books for both Burnie, Launceston and Hobart are the best they've been in three years.

They've had three intakes of driving programs and training programs for drivers. They usually have between 20 and 28 people at those courses. They used to have a certain amount drop out, but they've noticed that's minimised. Now there seems to be a steady flow of people wanting to drive the buses. They certainly have a very minimal dropout rate now from the courses.

Having spoken to a lot of the new drivers out there, they're thoroughly enjoying what they're doing. The industry, in my feeling, has turned a corner with the activity that they've had over the last couple of years to recruiting people into it, so that may help.

I don't know if the secretary has anything to add?

Ms HEYDON - We're doing a piece of work around the fleet strategy. We identified 80 buses, which was less than initially anticipated. That's very much informed by the nature of the events and that they're usually outside of peak times and that's taking a whole-of-fleet look, so addressing what we need from a PT perspective as well as for the events.

We are cognisant of the issues around driver availability. I think one of the other advantages to the nature of the events is they are outside of peak times, so there are some opportunities around where we could potentially target school bus drivers to become event drivers, et cetera. That's part of the work that we're doing.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, residents of the Derwent Valley are keenly anticipating improvements to the road between New Norfolk and Granton. I understand \$100 million has been committed. What's happening next?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly there is a fair bit of work done on that corridor as well and it doesn't feel like so many years ago that widening occurred up there, but the growth of that area has been fantastic and good for that region, and I think that will continue.

You are correct, it is \$100 million, and the findings from the corridor study will be used to help inform how this funding and potential future funding upgrades for other sections of the highway are invested. The department has engaged with stakeholders on the corridor, including council, and the stakeholder consultation summary report is pending approval for publication.

The upgrades between Granton and New Norfolk are expected to include new overtaking opportunities, widening of the road and shoulders, as we've been talking about earlier, intersection upgrades and public transport facilities. There is a lot of work to be done in that area and will continue to be done in that growing area of the state.

Ms DOW - Minister, can you please provide an update to the committee on the timing and cost of the fifth lane on the Southern Outlet project, please?

Mr VINCENT - The state government has committed \$35 million to provide a transit lane on the Southern Outlet northbound between Olinda Grove and Macquarie Street under the Greater Hobart Traffic Solution. A further \$4.4 million has been committed under the targeting congestion package, providing a total of \$39.4 million for works between the city and Olinda Grove at Tolman's Hill. To date, \$20 million has been expended on construction of the transit lane connector stage 1 and investigation, design and land acquisition for the next stages.

The Southern Outlet transit lane is proposed to be delivered in three stages. Stage 1 has been completed. The transit lane connector, which has added an additional lane on the Southern Outlet between Davey and Macquarie Streets, opened on 25 April. Stage 2 involves the rockface protection stabilisation work on the existing embankment between Cat's Eye Corner and Olinda Grove and is expected to be tendered in early 2026 with a construction duration period of 12 months. Stage 3 is the construction of the transit lane from Olinda Grove to join the recently completed transit lane connector and is expected to be tendered once stage 2 is completed subject to funding.

A staged delivery approach has been adopted to minimise impacts to traffic during construction. The Southern Outlet transit lane will operate between Olinda Grove and Macquarie Street as a T3 transit lane, which means it will be used by private vehicles carrying three or more people, buses, taxis, motorbikes and emergency services.

Ms DOW - When will your government ever complete the road to Marrawah and the improvements required there? It's been committed to for years now and the roads are terrible. If you want to talk about a goat track, talk about that. Speak to the local bus drivers who pick the kids up each day and afternoon and travel that route. Can you give me a timeframe and is there funding for that particular route in this budget?

Mr VINCENT - I'm unable to give you an exact timeline on that at the moment. I have gone out on the buses myself to travel that road. The sections that have already been done on that road highlight the urgent need around the Broadmarsh intersection there for a bit more. The corridor money that has been put into there has improved a lot of intersections, but most of it's been on the eastern side of Smithton, not the Marrawah side. I've had discussions over the last couple of months with the department and we were unable to reprioritise some of that

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work, but I believe the deputy secretary, who I will go to in a moment, is personally involved in opening up discussions about what we need to do in some of the upcoming projects on the Smithton to Marrawah road, so I will ask her to expand on those pretty recent discussions.

Ms HEYDON - As you're aware, we identified some works under the corridor strategy. We've had discussions with council and they've identified some other priorities. I am actually meeting with council tomorrow to get a better understanding of those and how we can then progress potentially changes in priorities with the Australian Government commitment.

Ms DOW - Are you going down to -

Ms HEYDON - We're doing two things. They're actually down here for a conference so we're catching up with them when they're down here, and our GM for policy and planning is going to be up there with them the following week as well.

Mr VINCENT - I've had two visits in the last six or seven months to the council there, and it's been a big part of the conversation as well as the trip out there on the bus.

Ms DOW - It's a massive issue that's been going on for years.

Mr VINCENT - She made sure she found every dip and hollow on the road and it does exaggerate it when you're on a bus.

Ms DOW - It's terrible.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, there is work that needs to be done there. There's a lot of freight on that road with the dairy industry there and it's quite surprising.

CHAIR - Minister, going back to the northern access road, I think it was budgeted at \$75.9 million. I'm not sure if that figure was from when it was described in the 2019 Hobart City Deal. Could you confirm how much has been spent already of that \$75.9 million and will it cover costs for the spending, design and any works undertaken?

Mr VINCENT - I will ask Mr Moloney to give details on that.

Mr MOLONEY - I will need to seek an accurate number in terms of expenditure to date. It has been relatively modest in the context of the \$70 million -

CHAIR - It's \$75.9 million, isn't it?

Mr VINCENT - I can give a bit more detail on it. In 2024-25 there was \$210,000 for some of the design work done, there is an allocation for 2025-26 of \$1.19 million, for 2026-27 it is \$26.9 million, for 2027-28 it is \$25.3 million, and for 2028-29 it is \$25.3 million.

CHAIR - Should the stadium be refused and not go ahead, will this access road be built?

Mr JAENSCH - Wouldn't want to chance it. Get in behind it.

Mr VINCENT - It was identified under the Hobart City Deal as required for development of the whole wharf area there.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Yes, but in the Hobart City Deal there was a transit centre, which I think comes up every so often, and that was critical as part of the Hobart City Deal and has never been delivered. Will it still be delivered?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly we're working on it at this stage. If anything changes I will have to get back to you on that.

CHAIR - In relation to access, clearly at the moment access through the Macquarie Point site for the intercity bikeway is an area where the bike path was concreted and is not accessible; it's a bike track to nowhere. What will the access be in relation to the northern access road regarding cyclists heading north?

Mr VINCENT - Mr Moloney

Mr MOLONEY - Through you, minister. At this stage we are still developing our concept designs. As I mentioned previously, within the scope at this stage we're anticipating ensuring there is a minimum 3m-wide shared-user path connecting the Macquarie Point precinct adjacent to the new northern access road then to the existing cycleway.

Our current concept designs also includes a - at this stage, we're looking at an underpass, in order to make sure that we separate out the active transport users and the northern access road itself in terms of port traffic and things like that for safety reasons. We're still working through those concepts. It is very early stages of consulting with our key stakeholders and then more broadly with the public. In that regard, we're happy to provide a short description of what the project involves, includes and excludes. Then, perhaps through the minister, whether or not separate briefings are provided at a suitable time.

Mr JAENSCH - The Ridgley Highway, minister, closer to home, is a vital connection servicing communities and industry between the west coast and Burnie and the north-west coast. Can you please explain the budget allocation for the Ridgley Highway and the opportunities for improvements to that road?

Mr VINCENT - I can say that resurfacing work was planned on the Ridgley Highway this financial year between Emu Valley Road and Laoona Road and between Bunkers Road and Waratah Road. The Tasmanian government has contributed \$6.8 million with a further \$27.2 million from the Australian Government to upgrade the highway to improve safety and ride comfort for heavy vehicles and other road users. Ridgley Highway is a key infrastructure link between the north-west and the west coast regions connecting Burnie and the Murchison Highway, which is vital for the mining, forestry and tourism industries.

Based on the findings in the corridor strategy, potential improvement opportunities include: passing opportunities, including several climbing lanes to improve travel time reliability and safe overtaking opportunities; intersection improvements including left and right turn treatments for turning vehicles, particularly for larger vehicles; road widening and alignment to improve turning and sight distances; and separated shared-user paths for cyclists and pedestrians to connect Melville Street and Cascade Road.

Allocations are in the forward Estimates are \$1.25 million for 2026-27, \$6.25 million for 2027-28, and \$15 million for 2028-29.

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Ms BUTLER - Minister, I wrote to the previous minister for Transport - actually, it was a constituent question. I spend a lot of time with truck drivers on the roads at the moment, which is an incredible experience because it gives you such a better understanding of how difficult it is to manoeuvre those trucks and also highlights different deficiencies in the road design as well.

I spent a day with Mike from Scamander, he's been driving trucks for 48 years and he has just recently retired after driving 5 million km. He is very much regarded in Tassie as one of the best of the best of the truck drivers. Now, he spoke to me on our trip around a section of the Esk Highway, which is colloquially termed Red Hill Railway Crossing.

That's when you turn off at Conara, you're heading towards - Yeah, you know where I'm talking about?

Mr VINCENT - Past near the old cricket ground there? Yes, been there, thank you.

Ms BUTLER - He highlighted that as - he thinks one of the most dangerous sections. We went from Scamander to Bell Bay and back, and he said that was by far the most dangerous. All the truck drivers talk about it, apparently, because it's not wide enough to cater to two heavy vehicles crossing it at the same time, according to Mike. These are his words; I'm certainly not a truck expert. He said, 'It's a very narrow road bridge where people can get in trouble if two large vehicles meet on top of it, if there is anything over width, there is practically no room for the oncoming vehicle.' So, they're really concerned about that. I had a response from the department and I thank them for that. However, it is quite concerning, so, I wanted to bring it up with you today because if you have experts and people who know the road that well saying this is an issue, I think we need to listen to it.

The response was:

The existing bridge has recently been strengthened, which has enabled the structure to carry heavier loads.

That's not the issue he was talking about.

I'm advised any widening of this small section of road would likely require a new bridge structure to be built. A new bridge structure would also need to provide more than two metres of additional vertical clearance to meet current TasRail requirements. This would trigger a significant length of approach roadworks to accommodate a new road alignment. There are no current plans or associated funding available to increase the total road width at this location.

Minister, could I ask, on behalf of Mike, because he's seen this response, that that be relooked. Yes, it would be expensive, but if you have an expert with all that experience, who's driven 5 million km - He has retired and this is one of the things he wanted to see fixed so he felt like he contributed as a service back to the truck community, 'Look, I fixed that for you.' He really thinks it's a very dangerous spot. Can I ask you to take that on board and look into that as a priority area? I don't think it's been given a priority ranking. It's a very long question.

PUBLIC

Mr VINCENT - I'm very familiar with that having travelled that section arrived a fair bit and how it narrows off with the rail overpass there. I am happy to take that on board and have discussion to the department about that. I have heard of other people raising that because of the way the rails come in. There is also a perception the width of the travelled pavement is still right, but the guide rails that come in for protection as you go over the bridge give an impression of the road narrowing when you're approaching it. I am happy to have that discussion with the department.

Ms BUTLER - He also referred to the fact that it can have visibility issues for drivers at certain times of the day, when they're going over that incline, the sun can hit them, especially if they're heading back towards Avoca instead of going towards Conara, there can be real problems with visibility there as well. So that would be great.

I also spent time with Ellie, a female truck driver from SRT, very recently. A big shoutout to SRT and Ellie for their time and she's very patient with me. She talked about the lack of restroom facilities for truck drivers along the highway route. She used examples of when she does cherry season, and she'll travel from Huonville to Devonport, and it can be about a five-hour trip one way. At certain times of the day there's really no way for her to stop at all because she drives B-double truck. The St Patricks pass toilets, when the department upgraded that, those toilets became inaccessible to B-double trucks because they didn't put in an appropriate resting lane for them. Mood Food is problematic. Epping Forest, apparently it does congest pretty quickly. It just seems that we've got so many more trucks on the road, we really need to provide those adequate rest facilities for them where they can actually relieve themselves as well as rest.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, you mentioned a couple of private ones there, like Mood Food that does cater very well for trucks of all sizes, but it does create problems.

In 2022, the Australian Government committed \$14 million, and the Tasmanian government \$3.5 million to provide \$17.5 million for design and construction of five heavy vehicle driver rest areas across the state road network. The Australian Government component of this funding is being delivered under the safer local roads - Just looking for the positioning of those. There is one at Kings Meadows. Commencement of the program was in 2024 for the first facility on the Bass Highway, Howarth, it was completed in November 2024 and included toilet facilities and 15 truck bays. We also have the one there at Longford just passed the roundabout where they pull over there. There are no toilets there, though. In this financial year construction will commence on two more facilities - Bass Highway at Westbury, the new eastbound, and the westbound one is under construction. I stopped and had a look at that, and it's enormous.

Ms BUTLER - It is enormous.

Mr VINCENT - It is very large, isn't it? So they'll be able to take it. They are predicting that they will also provide some comfort for people towing caravans and everything, to get off the road, be able to have a break, and allow traffic to move better.

Murchison Highway at Fossey River - upgrading the existing site: the tenders are closed and we're awaiting that to be awarded to commence construction.

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The Kings Meadows design is completed, but on hold while the department works through sound wall issues with the Launceston City Council and the State Planning Office.

As I said before, the Bass Highway one at Westbury, and East Tamar Highway and Bridport Road, are currently in the design stage.

The Department of State Growth met with adjoining land owners and the Meander Valley Council on 7 October to discuss the proposed design for the westbound Westbury stop, to identify any concerns with the proposed location. That will, over the next 12 or 18 months, give us several locations around the state on the major corridors, alongside complementing the private stops.

Ms BUTLER - Can I just ask that within those designs - when I was with Ali, we stopped just near Bisdee's Hill or Bisdee's Heights on the Midland Highway -

CHAIR - Bisdee Tier?

Ms BUTLER - Tier. That's it, sorry. We entered, and she had to slow down to zero, but it's on an incline as you're going down towards the south. There is a resting bay there but it's really thin. That would hold up a lot of the 110 kilometre-per-hour traffic behind her, but then to exit that bay, for the B-double trucks - they're coming out having to speed up as much as they can, but they've got traffic at 110kph flying down the Midlands as they're pulling out, accelerating as quickly as they can. It's really quite dangerous. That was raised with me and I thought, how could that be overlooked?

CHAIR - Could you ask a question, please, rather than having a conversation?

Ms BUTLER - Can you assure me that with those resting bays, those kinds of things, will be considered, and truck drivers will be consulted?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, it is being considered. The one at Westbury under construction now has a deceleration lane, but it also has a very long acceleration lane to it. We worked with the industry and the national body to locate the appropriate places along the major routes for these positions. Then we had to also take into account the slope of the road and more so the take-off, because if you're dragging a heavy load, it's quite hard to get up to speed, which means you need it longer. With all the stops, we are taking into consideration the speed in that section of road and the length of the deceleration and the acceleration.

I don't know whether the Deputy Secretary has any more information on the design of those, specifically around that?

Ms HEYDON - Not specifically on that design, but we definitely engage heavily with the Tasmanian Transport Association (TTA) both on locations and design. We also have an open process for community and industry to provide feedback on the design. We definitely appreciate the criticality of heavy vehicle rest areas - these are those people's 'offices' and they don't necessarily have all the office facilities. What we're looking at when we put in a rest area is those drivers coming in.

Ms BUTLER - And with more women truck drivers coming in.

Ms HEYDON - Yes.

Mr VINCENT - Chair, just before you ask the next one, Mr Moloney has a little bit more information for you on the northern access road, if you'd like.

Mr MOLONEY - In order to potentially avoid the need for a question on notice, if we could provide a more comprehensive response. Our project actually has a certain amount of information available on our website: www.transport.tas.gov.au, in the 'Roadworks, Current Projects' section for northern access road. In relation to the project, the northern access road will provide an alternative route for heavy vehicles to access the Port of Hobart, and will support developments in the Macquarie Point precinct and Regatta Point foreshore area. The new road will link the Tasman Highway with Macquarie Point precinct, and includes an event bus plaza that will service the proposed multipurpose stadium. A northern entry into the Port of Hobart will ease pressure on the surrounding road network, enhance connectivity and provide more opportunity for land use and investment within Macquarie Point.

In terms of timing, construction is expected to start in the second half of 2026. Upcoming activities - we have been undertaking site investigations to inform our concept designs, and they've been undertaken during October and November of this year. We're still working on those concept designs I mentioned before, with the intention of releasing those to the community early in the new year. There is information on our website and happy to respond to other questions in that regard.

CHAIR - Thank you. I have a couple of questions. Will there be incursion into that rail corridor? Effectively, will the rail corridor, or rail line, be unusable?

Mr MOLONEY - Through you, minister. A section of the rail corridor will be utilised for the northern access road, that's unavoidable. It is basically the land that's required for constructing the new northern access road. While we're not physically building a road connection to the rail corridor, our concept designs will show how a road connection, or other form of connection, could be connected to the existing rail corridor.

Should it be used for a rapid transport network solution or other solution into the future, the section of rail corridor that is north of the northern access road, so basically heading towards the Tasman Bridge, that will be retained and we will demonstrate how a safe road and cycle connection could be made to that. We will be providing that safe cycle and shared user path connection to it, to ensure that's been maintained.

CHAIR - It leads to a question around the bus plaza. Are the rapid buses likely to go into the bus plaza? Will they be accommodated for turning?

Mr MOLONEY - I think that's something that would be developed further in the business case that Craig Limkin mentioned further. That is only one of a number of routes under consideration. How that route may operate would be something that would be developed further.

CHAIR - Also, DDA compliance - there was some significant concern raised by the Tasmanian Planning Commission panel. What compliance is planned for both the bus stops on the plaza, but also with any new bus service?

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Mr MOLONEY - Certainly the intention is to ensure that the new bus plaza will be DDA-compliant.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, the Midland Highway 10-year action plan is complete, except for one 10-kilometre section north of Campbell Town, which I will be riding on in a very few hours, I hope. Can you provide an update on that project and what's holding up this last bit?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, certainly. That was probably one of the sections where I first became associated with the EPBC. I never thought that section of road, that had basically been farmed for so many decades, would come under it, but that's my ignorance of some of that environmental work. However, we have received a lot of transfer of information from the EPBC. We know that 143 kilometres of the Midlands Highway has been upgraded over the last 10 years. The final project to be constructed is that 10-kilometre section north of Campbell Town and Conara, programmed to be tendered in late-2025, and pending finalisation of all Australian government environment approvals, which I think are very close.

Ms HEYDON - Yes. Through you, minister. It has been tendered, and we've done that in advance of the expectation of the Australian government environmental approvals in early 2026.

Mr VINCENT - We expect the work to be completed in 2027. It will be a big step through on that.

Mr JAENSCH - It will be.

Ms DOW - Minister, I understand that the target for the opening of the Bridgewater Bridge was the end of 2024. On many occasions you've said that the bridge opened on time and it was within budget. Do you stand by that statement?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly, in my time in the ministry, all the information before me was on time, on budget. There were two parts of the budget, the original part for the bridge itself and then \$270 million added for the roadworks and the network connecting bridges which made up the full amount of that. Since I've been in the role, yes, it has been on time and on budget. I wasn't aware of the original start date or anything like that, but once the project got started, everybody was very proud of the project and it stayed on time and on budget.

Mr JAENSCH - When did Labor promise to build it by?

CHAIR - I think -

Ms DOW - You don't get to ask me any questions Mr Jaensch.

Mr JAENSCH - There have been a few targets, what is your T-shirt's slogan on this one?

Ms DOW - The bridge didn't really open until June 2025 when all of the lanes were operational, and it was up to the speed of 80 km/h. It didn't actually open on time, did it, minister?

Mr VINCENT - It did, and it was open.

Ms DOW - But only one lane.

Mr VINCENT - There were two processes we could have done. We could have slowed the process down. Doing it the way we did it allowed us to be able to continue doing the work and have the bridge open, and Mr Moloney gives more detail on that, but it was a contract that was worked out very closely between the major contractor and Mr Moloney on the best way to have that bridge operational. Would you like to add to that a little?

Mr MOLONEY - Yes, certainly, minister. In establishing our arrangements with our contractor, we wanted to allow a degree of flexibility as to how we undertook those completion works. It was very important that we did seek to get traffic on the bridge as early as possible. I believe the commitment for traffic on the bridge by the end of 2024 was made back in something like 2018, and we were certainly seeking to achieve that target.

Within the contract that we had with our contractor, there was a 'traffic on the bridge' stretch target or target we were seeking to achieve, then there was also our construction completion, which was the 29 July 2025. As we got closer towards - basically, partway through the construction of the project, we identified that, whilst it may have been achievable to open the bridge to one lane and therefore open to traffic earlier than opening up to all four lanes, we concluded that that would slow things down and to be honest wasn't going to add all that much benefit. At the time, we sought and gained approval from government that we would really focus on opening to traffic at the posted speed limit of 80 kilometres per hour, all four lanes fully operational and the shared-user path also being available, and that's how we changed tack. That element of complete functionality was achieved prior to the contract date for construction completion.

CHAIR - Minister, with relation to the Bass Highway, quite often it's the scene of major road accidents or fatalities. We know that over the course of the last 12 months or so there were some road safety changes for the Leith turnoff. Can you give an indication of how that's being monitored and how that's going and any other works for road safety improvements along the highway.

Mr VINCENT - Before I hand over to the deputy secretary, for more information, I'm not sure about all the details around Leith as it was before my time, but certainly another major intersection, Christmas Hills, is causing some awkwardness for locals and tourism.

When I first came into the role, I was on my way to Devonport and spent quite some time to and from my trip to Devonport standing on the side of the road. I got a lot of interesting comments standing there, but I saw firsthand the awkwardness of overtaking lanes and tourists with vans, in many cases, turning into that intersection. At the same time, I was standing there with the driver looking at all that, there were a couple of department people doing exactly the same thing from different positions on the road in the couple of kilometres before and after that intersection to understand the complexities of it themselves. It was good to see how they were going about monitoring that.

You learn a lot very quickly. If you think back probably 25 years ago when the raspberry farm went in with the Dornauf family and then the ice creamery. When you approve a very good tourism development like that, you don't expect some of the problems it will create. We've seen that around a lot of other corridors. Constant monitoring of some of those - growth in

tourism or other business ventures, are forcing us to constantly look at what we need to do at some of the intersections right around the state and the major roads.

Certainly, the Christmas Hills one is a classic example of growth in business in the area, increased traffic, heavier transport, the speed of the overtaking lane has caused that. After that, I would just like to ask my deputy secretary for a bit of clarification about lease and any other points that are under review on a constant basis. Thank you.

Ms HEYDON - Yes, through you minister. As you are probably aware there was a change and a reduction in the speed limit at Leith earlier this year, which I approved with my commissioner hat on. That change occurred as a result of us monitoring accidents at that location. We continue to monitor the area just to make sure that we've seen an improvement. I don't have the figures right in front of me, however, and I will possibly be challenged to get them to you in five minutes. I'll see what I can do.

We are seeing good results from that speed-limit reduction and it's also used to see where we have similar characteristics at other parts of the network to show that there is an actual outcome improvement in relation to safety.

Mr VINCENT - Six priority upgrade options were also identified along this category of road and section of the Bass Highway, which would be part of the 10-year Bass Highway action plan. Christmas Hills, as we just talked about, north of Sassafras upgrade, Parramatta Creek upgrade, north of Latrobe duplication, the Hadspen to Hagley duplication, and the Exton duplication are some of the main areas that they're looking at for upgrades, as soon as finances can be organised.

CHAIR - Excellent. I'll ask that that be a question on notice should you not get that upgrade for those figures on the Leith turnoff.

Another road safety question, and something we should all be trying to do better with, around schools we have vulnerable road users. What is the government doing - and this comes to the preventative health strategy as well - what is the government doing to try to reduce the amount of congestion around schools at drop-off and pick-up times? Perhaps minister, you might want to put on the record any upgrades to pedestrian safety around the Montrose - what is it? The high school.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, the upgrade to the intersection there.

CHAIR - Oh yes, the Montrose Bay intersection there. That doesn't sound right, but Montrose Bay High School intersection that you're undertaking presently?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, with road projects and also down at Lauderdale with the primary school down there, we actually went down there and worked with Mr O'Byrne on some of the issues there and identified the need for barriers to separate students and the highway. Simply with a - you might think the footpath is perfectly alright, but it only takes a bit of a trip or a bit of fun to happen and you're out into the traffic. So, that is looked at quite seriously.

Out at Montrose Bay, the safety upgrade work has been funded and brought forward because of the complications at the intersection. It will allow for a proper crossing with lights and all other pedestrian mechanisms to make that area much safer. That's a classic example of

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an intersection that had grown in popularity and use over the recent decade and needed to be adjusted and it has been. I'll ask the deputy secretary to expand on how the department looks at that in normal processes.

CHAIR - Possibly with the connections with bike lanes so close by as well.

Ms HEYDON - Through you minister. The Montrose Bay signal and pedestrian improvements are due to be completed mid-2026. In relation to what we're doing around school zones, we are very much champions of this. We have a significant number of crossing guards who are part of the department and they are a major protector for children getting over a crossing safely. We also have from them a very good reporting arrangement for anything they're seeing that helps us to make any changes on our side of the network. We also have a vulnerable road user program which is available to councils and we often flag for them to be looking at what can be done around school areas and any improvements on their part of the road network we could access that program for.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, can you update the committee, please, on upgrades to the South Arm Highway between Rokeby and Lauderdale?

Mr VINCENT - I just touched on that with the issues around the school there. There are a couple of different sections there. That's another one of these corridors that is growing at a rapid rate around Glebe Hill and an enormous amount of work has been done right through that section, but to bring that almost bypass of the Rokeby area with the road going around the back is going to move a concentration of traffic off a very narrow area there.

The work done through Lauderdale has been quite awkward in its design and we have had discussions with a lot of truck drivers who come out of that area, because to be able to control the intersection coming out of Acton at the school and to have lights there to control the flow of traffic to make the flow better so you're not held up for too long and get panicking drivers trying to jump out into the traffic, it does make it awkward for truck drivers and we can only do so much limited design on that. They are pulling up potentially where it's currently awkward for them to take over, but it's unavoidable for that section of road.

The South Arm Highway upgrade project includes upgrading the Acton Road junction to Lauderdale to a [inaudible] station; dual carriageway extensions to the South Arm Highway between Pass Road and Oakdowns Parade in Rokeby; and initial plans for the future South Arm Highway upgrade between Oakdowns Parade and Acton Road. We are also very cautious and understand that for the growth area around Pass Road future alterations will need to be made there and how it connects back at Mornington as well. I will just check with the deputy secretary on tender and construction timeline.

Ms HEYDON - We have split the works into two. We are bringing forward the footpath and fencing activities near the school into a minor works panel arrangement and we're targeting to have those works completed before term 1 commences in 2026 and then the tender for the rest of the works is due out at the end of this year.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you.

Ms BUTLER - Minister, the Illawarra Road budget was \$80 million. The Liberal member for Bass, Rob Fairs, at the end of his budget reply speech mentioned extra funding for

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Bridport and Illawarra Road. How much more funding is being allocated to this poorly researched, minimally beneficial time-saving for freight section of Illawarra Road?

Mr VINCENT - I'm not aware of any changes to that. I will ask the deputy secretary if there has been a change to the budget on it.

Ms BUTLER - I was wondering if Mr Fairs made a mistake when he was reading his speech.

Mr VINCENT - He was probably talking about the Bridport Road, but I'm not sure on Illawarra, so I will seek some advice.

Ms HEYDON - The Illawarra Road upgrade project commitment is \$80 million, \$64 million from the Australian Government and \$60 million from the Tasmanian government. That's the budget for that project.

Ms BUTLER - Okay. Is the Commissioner for Transport aware that slow farm vehicles will now have to cross three lanes of 100 kilometre an hour speed limit by directional trucks to access their properties on Illawarra Road and that there is a safety concern?

Mr VINCENT - I would think the commissioner is extremely aware of that so I might handball it to them to answer that question.

Ms HEYDON - I will put my commissioner hat to the side, which is slightly different to my deputy secretary role. In relation to the delivery of the project and the engagement with stakeholders, I am aware of issues that have been raised with the section that's currently under construction and we are working with those stakeholders. With my commissioner hat back on, I am also aware of issues that were raised around existing speeds. Following an assessment, I made a determination to reduce the speed on one section of Illawarra in response to issues raised by stakeholders, including concerns of movements across the road from farm vehicles.

Ms BUTLER - Would that be a permanent arrangement of a speed change and what would that speed be?

Ms HEYDON - It was put in as a trial at this stage but we are reviewing the design of that section based on feedback from the stakeholders. We are providing that updated design through to the minister and then we'll be looking to do consultation with the stakeholders on some proposed changes.

Ms BUTLER - Will underpasses, as per the request of the landowners, be considered? It seems to be a very sensible idea for them to be able to not only access and exit their own properties because it's a high yielding and very busy prime agricultural route, that part of Illawarra Road. It probably shouldn't have ever been considered for freight. Will the department take seriously those requests for underpasses and safe exit and entry points as they try to conduct their normal agricultural activities along that route?

Mr VINCENT - Before handing to the deputy secretary, I will finish off on that question. Around 12 months ago I went and spent time with most of them out there and learned firsthand and talked to them. From my point of view as minister we had very sensible discussions with the deputy secretary about the communication program we had in place for that section of road

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and others, which was taken on board and looked at on how we go out and communicate on an improved basis. That was the first part. The second part was the obvious suggestion from a couple of different landowners about the need, in their opinion, for underpasses, which I passed on and had decent conversations about, but haven't been involved with the changes as yet of the designs. With that, I might pass over to the deputy secretary to clarify a few things.

Ms HEYDON - There's been engagement with all the stakeholders around their needs and their movements across. There has been at least one underpass included in some of the design work that we've done. I am aware there are some stakeholders who have identified a subsequent need for underpasses and we're doing a bit of design and costing work for that landowner at the moment.

CHAIR - I'd like to ask a question now, thank you. We've only got a few more minutes.

Ms BUTLER - We were told in the Public Works Committee that full consultation had happened on that and it never did on that section. I think the department really needs to be mindful of the information they're giving to the Public Works Committee.

CHAIR - Go ahead, Ms Butler, but it's not very fair. I've been very generous to you, but you go ahead.

Ms BUTLER - That needs to be taken on board.

Mr VINCENT - As minister, I am fully aware of that. That's why I raised the point of going out and then coming back and having a very sensible discussions with the deputy secretary about being able to do that in a more open and conducive way - why, how and when. I think that information from all accounts has been taken on board very well and acted on in that consultation phase.

CHAIR - Minister, you talked about the vulnerable road user grants to councils. Can you indicate how much is allocated and is that over four years? In relation to active transport grants, which I'm assuming have a different pot of money, are they continuing, because I have stakeholders who are concerned that the active transport grants are ending after this year?

Mr VINCENT - I'm not aware of that. I might have to seek some more information on that specific area. I know how valuable they are to local government in getting a lot of small projects done.

Mr LIMKIN - The government committed to two rounds of the grant program and those two rounds have occurred. The remaining active transport program funding of approximately \$4 million has been allocated to a planned pedestrian overpass over the Channel Highway that connects the Huntingfield site.

CHAIR - That's where it went.

Mr LIMKIN - The department is currently looking at future active transport opportunities for consideration in further budgets for the government.

CHAIR - And vulnerable road users?

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Ms HEYDON - Through you, minister. That is a program that's funded under the road safety levy. I don't have the breakdown of the allocations, but it is an ongoing program within that road safety levy, and a pretty important program.

CHAIR - Is it likely to continue?

Ms HEYDON - That's the intention.

Mr VINCENT - We are looking at how that money can be utilised for all aspects, but I think it is highly regarded as very central money into multiple projects that have benefits for everybody in the community, so I have my support behind that.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Unfortunately, Mr Jaensch, you don't get a question. If only Ms Butler had been more succinct.

I'd like to thank the committee. The time for scrutiny for this session has ended. Thank you, minister, and thank you everybody who came to present before the committee.

The next portfolio to appear before the committee is the Minister for Local Government, again - the same minister. That will be at 2.00 p.m.

The Committee suspended from 1.10 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.

CHAIR (Ms Burnet) - Good afternoon, everybody. I welcome everybody to the scrutiny of the Local Government portfolio, which has now begun. It's 2.00 p.m.. I welcome the minister and other witnesses to the committee. I invite the minister to introduce persons at the table for the benefit of Hansard.

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, Chair. On my left I have my Chief of Staff, Tim Lovibond, on my immediate right, Mat Healey, Deputy Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC). Beside him is Luke Murphy-Gregory, Acting Director of Local Government, DPAC.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. We have one-and-a-half hours for scrutiny of the Minister for Local Government. Would you like to make a brief opening statement, minister?

Mr VINCENT - When I first came into this ministry, I was determined to ensure the work, the sector consultation I had been involved with during my 12 years as mayor and 15 years on council was progressed in time for the 2026 local government elections.

This is overwhelmingly what the sector requested and I'm working hard to deliver everything I can. We're at a crucial point in our delivery of the Local Government Priority Reform Program 2024-2026. We are progressing in a coordinated program of reform which will lift the bar for the entire sector. Our vision is for a sector defined by professionalism, integrity and capability, one which is trusted by communities and positioned for long-term sustainability.

At the heart of our reforms is the targeted amendment bill, which establishes a strong framework for integrity and accountability. This bill creates an independent pathway for addressing serious councillor misconduct, empowering the Director of Local Government to

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refer matters directly to the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (TASCAT). The exposure draft bill has been released for consultation, open for six weeks.

Effective local government sectors rely on dedicated community leaders from all walks of life who can work collaboratively for their communities. We are proposing a new model of fewer, more focused and fairly-remunerated councillors to strengthen this foundation. This reform ensures councils are well equipped to serve their communities for the 2026 elections and beyond. It is a cost-neutral reform with the savings from reducing total councillor numbers funding the increase in allowances. We are ensuring this delivers fair remuneration without adding costs for ratepayers.

A discussion paper was published in September 2025 before eight weeks of community and sectorial consultation, closing on 7 November 2025. Following consultation feedback, I want to ensure any changes to the local government system are practical, transparent, achievable and focused on delivering fair pay while minimising cost impacts for communities. The aim is clear: Tasmania needs high-quality representation supported by a fair and sustainable system.

We're also introducing the Local Government Electoral Bill, which will provide a contemporary, flexible framework for local government elections. An exposure draft will be released later this year, with the intention to introduce the final bill next year.

All these reforms will deliver real benefits for Tasmanians. For councillors, it means clearer expectations, better support and fairer remuneration for what is an increasingly complex and demanding role. For the sector, it provides a sustainable foundation for a respected and professional tier of government for Tasmania.

We are shaping local government to be a sector in which our communities can have continued confidence, and who deliver positive results for the community.

CHAIR - Before I kick off with Ms Dow, I was intending not to have a break, so if somebody does need a break, please let me know.

Ms DOW - Thank you, minister, and thank you to your team. Minister, have you been considering postponing the 2026 Local Government Elections?

Mr VINCENT - No, not at all.

Ms DOW - Given that you've got a large tranche of legislative reform that has to happen before that - a lot of it that we've been waiting for pretty much since 2018 and the review of the Local Government act at that point in time - do you think that you're going to be able to get that legislation through both Houses of parliament and some of those changes, for example, around the general manager's role or even the way in which local government elections are facilitated in time for that election in October?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly, we're under pressure, mainly because the election which slowed things up a little bit in the timing of legislation -

Ms DOW - You introduced that legislation in 2018. It has nothing to do with the election.

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Mr VINCENT - I know, but in our timeline since I've been involved in bringing it forward for the 2026 elections, we haven't had any discussions whatsoever on delaying the election either with local government or people in the local government sector.

There are certain things in the bill that need to be separated into things that are in the act, and things that are in regulations, and we'll be working through that. Otherwise, we are trying to put a timeline that would fit, but, no, there haven't been any discussions in any shape or form about delaying the elections.

Ms DOW - If, for example, you were to do that, say, something changed and you were to do that, how much notice would you give the community and prospective candidates and those already elected before doing that?

Mr VINCENT - Look, that's hypothetical and I do not have the knowledge or experience to know that, but I will refer to Mr Healey to define that and where we might be with some of the legislative requirements.

Mr HEALEY - The first point to make is we are working pretty closely with the Electoral Commission to make sure that we understand what the lead times would be for the introduction of changes to the electoral arrangements for local government. It may be that some of those provisions won't be able to apply to the 2026 elections. If it's going to undermine, or if the Electoral Commission doesn't have confidence that they can implement them, then we'll talk about how best to manage those issues.

Postponing the election, obviously, would be a significant thing to do, which I'm sure the minister would want to give maximum notice to, but there are other options.

CHAIR - Minister, the Office of Local Government's funding has decreased by \$654,000 in this interim Budget, which equates to a reduction of \$168,000, or 1.6 per cent over the next four years. Could you please provide an explanation of why this funding has been reduced?

It follows neatly on from Ms Dow's questions because there's a lot of local government reform to occur.

Mr VINCENT - Part of that is because we're under a temporary increase at the moment for some of the work that we are doing, but the 2025-26 expenditure Budget for output group 1.9 is \$3 million, a \$431,000 increase from the 2024-25 of 2.6 per cent. The increase in Local Government output 1.9 in 2025-26 reflects funding for the Office of Local Government's compulsory voting initiative, provided for in the 2023-24 Budget, and the Central Coast Council's waterfront renewal program, which gives it a spike but I will ask Mr Healey to clarify any other points that may affect that budget.

Mr HEALEY - No, that's right. there is some funding that we do receive from the Commonwealth for the administration of the recreational fishing and camping grants, but the base funding is steadily increasing, indexed as per normal. There is a slight anomaly I notice in 2026-27, but I assume that's from the 2027 pay issue that is showing up in a number of the Estimates.

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CHAIR - In relation to a delayed start on recommendations from the Future of Local Government review, how is your government planning to go forward with the local government reforms given the tight budget and timeframe?

Mr VINCENT - We've discussed that and worked through it. We believe that we are able to work with what's there at the moment. Should something change or needs to be addressed, we would certainly be very quick to put up a hand but at present we're working within the constraints that are there and believe we have that under control.

Mr HEALEY - Through you, minister, we did reprofile a little bit of funding this financial year. Previously, we were planning on a bit of reform. Given that it's a very compressed year and we have plenty on internally, we've reprofiled that so that there is a small amount of funding in 2026-27 and 2027-28 to progress the recommendations. A lot of the recommendations from the Future of Local Government are internal policy related issues, which we can reprioritise our internal resources to deliver on. Obviously, some of them, if there was a voluntary amalgamation for example, that couldn't be accommodated within the funding envelope that's here, but we would consider that on a case-by-case basis.

CHAIR - I can't remember which councils - was it Kentish? The two councils up in the north-west?

Mr VINCENT - Kentish and Latrobe, and then the three councils on the east coast were looking as well.

CHAIR - Are you able to give us an indication - Even though they want amalgamations, you can't process those happening earlier, subject to the community wanting this? My understanding is that it does.

Mr VINCENT - There is some work that is still being done in that area, and we are still in consultation and there hasn't been any great surges of community or council support to rush that through. They were looking to do a lot more community consultation, but having been through that process a few times before, there needs to be a maturity of conversation that they have themselves because the government can go along and spend a lot of money in initiating a certain level of conversation in those areas where nothing comes to bear. So, we need the communities to mature to the level that the conversation is much more pronounced towards being a workable proposition. The general managers certainly on the east coast councils have some sensible discussions about the service levels and everything like that, but it hasn't progressed to a point that we're satisfied that it would move quickly enough.

Mr HEALEY - Through you, minister, we have had a few preliminary discussions with the councils on the north-west coast; looking to the west coast and to Circular Head, Waratah, Wynyard, Burnie and King Island. We certainly think that there's some opportunities there to strengthen the arrangements in the north-west. They were doing some work with the university on options for working more closely together, that hasn't progressed very far. Similarly, on the east coast, we have had some discussions with them, but it hasn't really progressed. In terms of Kentish and Latrobe, they already have a close working relationship. From our perspective, if we were to ask the government to invest a significant amount of money in structural reform, we would want to know that that reform is going to be of substantial benefit to the state.

CHAIR - And the communities, probably?

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Mr HEALEY - And the communities, that's what I meant. Absolutely.

Mr VERMEY - Minister, you recently announced an increase for councils for the heavy vehicle motor tax. How will that extra \$3.5 million be allocated amongst councils and what are the timelines for this?

Mr VINCENT - The \$3.5 million increase up to \$5 million is in relation to - the previous amount of money had been sitting there for many, many years; unindexed or no increase applied to it, yet the size of the vehicles using many of the roads in the communities or the municipalities around Tasmania was increasing, as it was in the State Road. It was a sensible thing to recognise that, and bring that up to the \$5 million level which the Local Government Association is comfortable is on the money for where it should be as a percentage of the overall levy collected.

We are starting discussions about how that all goes forward, so that stays in touch with the percentage of the levy collected to make sure we don't have this rise and fall in the amount. We will continue to work with the councils and the Local Government Association to try to get a very strong and good position that's suitable for local government and also suitable for Treasury.

Ms DOW - Back to Ms Burnet's question, following on from that, around cuts to the Office of Local Government. Will you rule out further cuts to the Office of Local Government as part of the upcoming May budget?

Mr VINCENT - There are certainly no plans to cut the Office of Local Government. We still have a lot of work to do and there's been no talk of that. The additional funding comes and goes with various projects we might be doing either with the Office of Local Government or with potential amalgamation mergers or any other project that comes up where we need to strengthen that. It is a relatively small amount of money in the overall scheme of things. It's not a big office but we've certainly still got a lot of work to do.

Ms DOW - Do you need more resources in the office though, minister?

Mr VINCENT - There's always the need for more, but at this stage in conversations with people they are comfortable with the resourcing they have. I'm sure they would always like to have a few extras, but that's open to discussion like any other budgetary item.

Mr JAENSCH - Can we get that on the record?

Ms DOW - I find it interesting that you talk about offering a financial incentive for local government collaborations or strategic alliances, and I know where I come from on the north-west coast there's a number of councils, as you said, that have initiated interest in that. But it's always been a bit of a chicken and egg situation because councils can't do this work off the side of their desk, so there has to be some incentive from government, but there's been lots of work done in the past around this and different models, particularly across the different regions of Tasmania and the north-west did a lot of work in that area years ago. There has to be money in place to enable the process to happen.

There are a number of key recommendations in that report, minister. How are you going to ensure that you achieve those recommendations or give local government the opportunity to

be autonomous and determine its own future and offer opportunities for collaboration across regions that will ultimately deliver better services to communities?

Mr VINCENT - I am very much in the same frame of mind and would raise the same points you have just raised. I'm in constant discussion with many mayors on a regular basis. I have always been involved in a lot of those discussions personally as a mayor and have been through it a couple of times myself to know where the trigger points are. Only a few years ago I was wrestling with a gentleman on my right as to the procedure to do it, and what Clarence mayor at the time Doug Chipman and I had worked through in the south-east was different to what Mr Healey thought was the appropriate way for the government and we reached, I think it might have been around 23 November, some sensible points on the way forward.

A lot of that is because every community has its own passions. Sometimes a mayor is for progress, others want to turn the clock back, but either way they're passionate about their community. Everybody's worried about the loss of services in a community. In my opinion, from knowledge I've built up in my journey through local government, GMs with appropriate assistance from the office and other departments need to work through what a service model looks like, but alongside that you also need to understand Australian Accounting Standards where councils have to have 100 per cent depreciation of their assets.

Not all councils are up to speed. Every council says they're doing a great job on that, but we know there are different figures and I've been working with the Auditor-General to try to use local audit committees in a more collaborative way to bring around an even playing field to how all parts of government look at the asset management system. Once you establish a baseline for assets you know the true, absolute hand-on-heart position of the financial viability of a council.

The second body of work that runs alongside is the service delivery model. All your work crews and that don't change. There might be some supervision, but you can put together a model of how you are going to look after that region or whatever the area may be. The third part is how you go out with a professional asset management financial service a plan to talk to your community on a professional basis. What's fallen down in the past has always been that we head out to a community with an idea that we're just going to do something and everybody throws in their 10 cents worth and you end up with a mess and then negativity takes over from positive, so in my opinion we have to follow a very set format of professionalism around the numbers with service delivery.

The service delivery has two parts to it. One is how council in its operation looks after the assets such as sports grounds and delivers the service to the community, but also how it represents the community through councillor numbers and representation. Securing stronger pathways for council in both education and support from council staff to be able to bring the views of the council in. Then you would have a professional plan to have much more solid conversations with all parts of the community.

Ms DOW - I think that's right and I agree with you, but the reality is that councils need some type of seed funding to be able to do that. Hearing from you and the officers today, my understanding is that there's not the ability for that to be an opportunity for council through this Budget because there's no money in it to do that.

Mr VINCENT - There isn't at present, but it can be sourced if I had to, I believe. I had that discussion regarding what would be the trigger points for that. At the moment those trigger points are not there, as Mr Healey was indicating, although there are sensible conversations trickling through, not a great flood.

Councils have seen that change in some of the areas. Some councils still have councillors with cold feet, so all the GMs might agree and have a very professional meeting, but then it goes cold because councillors don't wish to. It's a maturing conversation all the time. We need to keep progressing that until we get to a trigger point where the commonsense of government money to support councils is balanced by a sensible conversation and outcomes that are going to make the community stronger in whatever form that takes.

One of the projects I will be looking at in the new year is how we utilise some of these communities alike and we're starting to see that form up naturally in local government with the Mersey Leven Strategic Alliance. We're seeing it with South Central. I was involved with the South Eastern Regional Development Association, SERDA, for many years that had great success in the south-east and the Cradle Coast Authority has always been a fantastic organisation and there's others forming up that have been successful in the past and will be in the future.

The communities alike are starting to form up themselves and that's the maturing of the conversation that I'm really pleased about and really like about local government. As much as we want them to do it on their own basis, I still go into those meetings saying 'we' a lot and forget which hat I've got on all the time and that's been recognised by everybody in the room.

CHAIR - You're the minister now.

Mr VINCENT - Yes. They remind me pretty quickly if I step out of line, but I still use the word 'we' a lot. The discussions and the systems I've put in place with open communication through the Local Government Association have been rewarding already. We don't agree on everything but we have those discussions. We're not trying to hide it or anything. I've made a commitment to do my best to get to every council in the state twice a year. I'm very close to that at the moment, I probably won't exactly make it this year but I'm still having regular communication with all councils to make sure I'm still across all those issues so that we can gradually work through with them to get to a point where they're feeling better about dealing with us as a government and delivering results.

CHAIR - Minister, that's great. You and I have been involved with the southern Tasmanian councils authority and we know that Mr Jaensch has been involved with the Cradle Coast Authority. It's a bit like going back to the future because doing those regional things and getting councils on board is a really important step. How are you going to fund those those approaches?

Mr VINCENT - Look, we don't need to at this point in time. Most of them understand that they need to fund. There hasn't been any request for any funds that I'm aware of towards any of those local associations.

CHAIR - So it's a funding model where councils chip in?

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Mr VINCENT - Yes, most of them do there and they all have different lines of understanding. Some of it's come around because of the jobs hubs in regional areas that have created a cooperation between boundaries of municipalities, which has been very good and professional and sharing a few resources on a few projects like that. Everyone has their different focus, but the overall benefit of it is, they are talking about regions now instead of just their individual municipalities. That's the professionalism, the maturing nature that we want to encourage.

Should there be a project-specific thing that they need assistance with, which was quite often the case with the STCA in yesteryear, I would be the first to come knocking on Mat or anybody else's or the Treasurer's door for a level of support on that.

CHAIR - I suppose that leads into one of the areas of greatest need, particularly for councils, because they bear the brunt of either mitigating or adapting to climate change, among other things, but if we just concentrate on that. What do you see as the role of government, and your office in particular, in trying to negotiate that for councils? Again, you and I were involved with the Regional Climate Change Initiative and the good work that Katrina Graham did amongst other officers from each of our councils. How do you see both state government and councils being climate ready?

Mr VINCENT - There were a lot of points to that.

CHAIR - There were, yes.

Mr VINCENT - We're seeing a lot of that through cooperation already. If you look at some of the vulnerable road users funded through the road safety levy. The state works very closely with councils there for projects, for pedestrian crossings and similar activities. We work very closely with some of the projects for some of the federal funding that is available to bring in and support some of that, even when you look at waste, with the operations in Launceston, Dulverton and Copping, and now with the waste levy starting to build up to some serious amounts, it's very important that we make sure that that is supporting projects in the community and local as well.

We're happy to support any other points that come forward from local government. Last year we did see a lot of discussion, before I took the role on, but certainly on the part of the Local Government Association wanting to do some centralised procurement with planners, which the department supports. I don't think that's quite where we want it to be yet, but that's something we still want to progress.

Even with the learning modules, the amount of support from the department, that fits so much better, being driven and understood, and continuing to be developed by local government. There's there's quite a few things, when you start to look, that we are supporting them on. This openness that we have now continue, hopefully, because I'm in the chair with my previous hats on, I would like to see continue. The door is always open and the conversation is always transparent and open to what needs to happen or what they would like to have happen with sensible discussion around it.

CHAIR - I have more questions on climate change, but we'll go through the rotation.

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Mr JAENSCH - Minister, what's currently being done to support learning and development for councillors in local government across the state, and is there a timeframe for that work?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, there have been timeframes on it, and I didn't quite finish mine before I finished as mayor, so I have to say I'm a little bit guilty. I think I might have got 70 per cent there. I hope Mat hasn't still got a letter with -

Mr MITCHELL - It shows.

Mr JAENSCH - Always learning.

Mr VINCENT - I had done a lot of it in the end though. The overwhelming points from most councillors is that they do want learning, and it was very awkward for the government to drive that from a government point of view. From discussions with local government, it was far more sensible to come out of the Office of Local Government. I've been around to quite a few councils and even spoken to some councillors that openly admit that their literacy is not up to scratch to be able to do it.

We've encouraged GMs to sit down and take them through it, and spoken directly to two that are willing to be advocates for that. There's one who had been on council for a long number of years, and didn't realise what they didn't know until they actually did a bit of the training through the GM. It's very important, though, that learning and development matches up to the demands of local government. I think, sitting in the Office of Local Government, that will give the opportunity as it develops. The concept of people coming into local government to have that training, if they're planning well in advance to come on, and/or if they decide late to run for council and get elected, they will also have the ability to sit down and feel a lot more comfortable around the table, that they are up to speed with a lot of their responsibilities and knowledge round the table.

Ms DOW - Chair. Going back to the review of local government, it would appear that there are some cuts to that line item in the Budget, I wonder if you could just explain that? The second part to my question is, how many of the recommendations that are outlined in that report has the government actually implemented?

Mr VINCENT - Thank you, I will just ask Mr Healey. Do you want to respond to that?

Mr HEALEY - Absolutely. In terms of response to the recommendations of the review, a number of the recommendations are embedded in the current reform program that is being rolled out over the next couple of years before the election. By the end of the 2026 program we will have delivered reforms against all the high-priority recommendations, which is 17 in total; as well as the complex suite of electoral reforms from the earlier review of local government legislation. The short answer is 17.

Mr VINCENT - The first part of that was budgetary on the line you said?

Ms DOW - Yes, the line item in the Budget. It would appear there are some cuts.

Mr HEALEY - In terms of base funding in 2024-25 it was \$2.171 million, it's now \$2.247 million for 2025-26; Future of Local Government funding of \$250,000 last year comes

off for this year, but comes back in next year and the year after. There's some additional funding in there, as the minister pointed out, for supporting the promotion of compulsory voting for the 2026 election; and there's some funding there for the Central Coast Council waterfront renewal; there's a couple of other balancing items, but the base funding is incrementally increasing.

Ms DOW - The other thing that I wanted to ask you about that reform process was, obviously, it takes us coming to the table to understand the things that you've implemented - yes, they're in a number of draft proposals that have been exhibited and you're getting feedback on now, but - Would you consider putting together a dashboard or some type of report that documents how the government is working towards those recommendations? Just so that it's more transparent and people can see the progress that's been made against that report. Quite a considerable amount of money was spent on that report and, from an accountability point of view, it would be good to have regular updates on how things are progressing.

Mr VINCENT - That's a very fair comment and I will probably have to seek some advice on how to do that easily. I'm scared of the word dashboard at the moment, but I certainly understand the 'open-cy' and transparency of having something on the site that is easy to do it. I've had to do it in my own office a couple of times because all the bits and pieces that are floating around at the moment, you don't know which one to grab some days, but we could put that together. It's a very sensible suggestion. It would be good for everybody to have a look at it.

Ms DOW - Minister, you know through your dual role as Planning minister as well, that there is a significant shortage of planners across the state. At the 2024 election, your government made a commitment to legiate around funding for a project of scoping around a professional pool of planners across the state that could be drawn upon where there were shortages in different municipalities. It would appear that that election commitment hasn't carried through to the current budget papers. I'd like to know why, and I'd also like to know, if you're not going to do that, what are you doing to address the shortage of planners across the state?

Mr VINCENT - I will get a bit more advice from Mr Healey in a minute, on where that's at. I haven't had any great discussions with Dion Lester the CEO on that matter at the moment. I will just take a bit of clarification, I might have to come back to you on that.

Certainly, with the level of planners, there is an enormous shortage. Even to go out and get contract planners at the moment, unless you have a pretty good agreement with one of the firms, it's hard to just pick up the phone and grab them. They are flat out. This is part of what I've been working with Anthony Reid in the State Planning office to open up, or simplify some of the interpretations that we're finding that are quite difficult for councils to interpret. We're also finding that councils are pushing back sometimes and hitting the stop clock because they haven't the amount of staff needed to deal with it. I'm dealing with that issue a lot.

We're also looking at things like minor amendments which have a time line on them but have to go back out for advertising, when it could be a simple minor amendment that could be agreed to by the planner, and cut down weeks of work or rework.

There are quite a few things there that we hope to, in the early part of 2026, be able to finetune to minimise some of the workload on planners. That's about where I've got to so far in the last couple of months. I'm very pleased that I have somebody in my office now who was

involved with the Southern Tasmanian Land Use Strategy and has an extraordinary knowledge of the planning system. I know the basics and the principles - I dealt with those as a regional mayor - but she has a greater knowledge of Southern Tasmania and other areas around the state. I'm hoping that will also allow us to work with the State Planning Office to eliminate some of the duplication or interpretation issues that we have.

Ms DOW - Minister, you don't have any plans to change the role of Tasmanian councils as planning authorities in the state?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly not at this stage.

CHAIR - Good question. Minister, I'll continue on the line around climate change. As I alluded to, there's an increase in bushfires, floods and heatwaves. Councils, therefore, are increasingly expected to pick up the tab for fixing roads, gutters, stormwater drains and community halls. According to a recent report from The Australia Institute, councils are paying 12 times the insurance costs they were 20 years ago for climate change. This figure is only set to rise. What's your government doing for local governments to foot the bill for climate change?

Overall, there's \$9.482 million set aside in the Budget, which is a decrease of \$19,000 over the next four years, and that will be a decrease of \$166,000 compared with the May Budget, for climate change activities. What's the real commitment in this space, and recognising this as a significant problem?

Mr VINCENT - There is a commitment from the Minister for Environment towards working with LGAT to identify some of those climate change issues with local government, which I'm not totally across, I must admit.

We are working on an infrastructure side of things so that we stay across that with councils. We are also looking at supporting various funding issues to do with climate change initiatives within council, because a lot of that cuts across some of the infrastructure and foreshore with Parks and Crown. We're working with councils very closely with that, for outfalls, filtration and better systems.

I suggest that I'd have to seek some more information to answer that properly from the Environment minister.

Mr HEALEY - The only thing I was going to point out is obviously ReCFIT do quite a lot of work in the climate change space. A lot of that is quite relevant to local government and supports their understanding of many of the impacts of climate change. I'll also point out that the Resilience and Recovery Tasmania, within the Department of Premier Cabinet, does a lot of work with councils to understand the changing risks associated with fires and floods.

Obviously, a little while ago we did reform our bushfire planning system to try to, over a long period of time, moderate and reduce our risks associated with bushfires. I know there's been a lot of investment and work in the mapping of flood risk as well, to try to improve councils' ability to be able to manage that more effectively.

CHAIR - And there's an overall mapping, is it the LiDAR project, through Hydro?

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Mr HEALEY - Well, we were. I probably won't confirm that we still are, but we were well ahead of the rest of the nation in terms of a lot of our climate-related mapping, coastal hazards mapping, flood mapping, bushfire risk mapping, et cetera. I think there is quite a bit of work being done to try to understand the risk and how that's changing, but more importantly, to allow communities to start to adapt to build resilience.

CHAIR - That resilience of communities, that Sparking Conversations project was really useful, but that building of resilience in communities must be fundamental for this.

Mr VINCENT - Chair, I believe the flood mapping was one of the biggest things that I came across in the last decade for an education process on how we need to change our thinking. It's brought around a different view from the maturity now of TasWater and other agencies supplying information into council with regard to subdivision developments. Then when that subdivision goes into review every couple of years, flood mapping again to see what the difference is with the amount of hardstand, or where the water's going now, where it's directed, has been a very massive learning curve.

Some of that has come around because of the huge expenditure, especially in regional areas. I think Hobart has its own issues with ageing stormwater and infrastructure, but that body of work's brought around a whole different level of understanding of what we need to do in direction of water - the damage that's causing the insurance side of things as well. That's been a combined effort to continue to look at that.

Mr VERMEY - Minister, with the announcement of the review of council numbers and allowances, there's been scrutiny that it's a missed opportunity for greater change. Can you explain the thinking behind a legislative approach rather than an independent local government?

Mr VINCENT - There are a couple of different things here. There has been some criticism of this move from people who are demanding fewer councils and saying there should've just been a reduction in the number of councils. That's a totally different matter to be taken up - totally separate.

I can say that the former acting Director of Local Government - from the very first day I was given this ministry, my passion was to see the way councillors are treated, both in their community and by the sector, being a lot stronger with recognition of their workload. They do not get paid superannuation, although there is an amount in their allowance, and taxation, everything like that. New councillors are quite often caught with a large tax bill because they don't realise that tax hasn't been taken out. I wanted recognition of those points.

There were several other points that brought this review around, and I believe the New South Wales local government is doing something on a national basis to see how councillors around Australia can be recognised. You can bring in individual legislation to do it, but this was certainly a sensible way of doing it, and a much cheaper way than having the controls of a local government board come into play and doing it.

We will work through the formulas, because there wasn't a real great formula because of changes over the last couple of decades with councillors voluntarily dropping off or taking on council numbers. We had a lot of different discrepancies in council numbers around the state. There are quite a few councils with a higher number of councillors per head of population than

anywhere else in Australia, as well as even numbers of councillors, which caused issues on voting. There are a lot of different moving parts, and this review has addressed some of those things. It's created a good conversation. It is self-funding, and we're at a point now where we have to take all that review on board and have a close look at a few things. Some issues have been raised, but we'll work our way through those issues with the division, with the sector, and hopefully come up with something good and sensible out of it.

Ms DOW - I want to take you back to the heavy vehicle motor tax question that was asked before. My understanding of that election commitment was that that wasn't just going to be a one-off, that it was going to be ongoing. I believe you alluded to that before, but will you confirm that it's just not going to be a one-off, that there will be indexation or -

Mr VINCENT - The wording is open to some conversation at the moment, but yes, we are looking to continue a higher level of support with the heavy vehicles for councils. How that is determined we're still about to work through. We met with local government yesterday to make sure we were both of the same understanding that we will work through that issue. There was discussion about how you ensure that that amount of money stays true and an equal proportion of the levy collected for local government, so we take those peaks and troughs out of the future. Yes, we are very solid in wanting to continue those central discussions on how we keep that in place.

Ms DOW - Good, glad to hear it. The other thing I wanted to ask you about, which was an election commitment, was the infrastructure contributions framework which you committed to as a government, I believe, or doing some work with LGAT.

Mr VINCENT - Could you just repeat the first part of that?

Ms DOW - The infrastructure contributions framework.

Mr VINCENT - Yes. I think some of the pressures we talked about with subdivisions and flood mitigation have highlighted an enormous amount of issues with breaking into new subdivisions as a whole. You see some developers take the initiative, but when they take the initiative in a new area they also wear the huge cost of upgrading TasWater and council stormwater assets, which is to the advantage of the second and third person coming in to do some of that subdivision work, or to a council that might be opening up a new area.

There is a maturing conversation between developers, civil contractors, councils, and a lot of people who have large blocks very close to some of the regional towns that could be subdivided, within walking distance to the main street in some cases, but where the individual can't afford to do that infrastructure work.

To put it into a situation where we're discussing about what that may be to assist a TasWater into new areas or assist council, it's not hard to work out the potential number of blocks in a certain area. We are looking in 2026 to having a sensible conversation with all parties about how that could benefit the sector as a whole to make sure we stay in front with the underground infrastructure requirements we need to continue to grow.

Ms DOW - Thank you. The other thing I wanted to ask you about is if you proceed with an election in October. There's been a lot of reputational damage done to local government in more recent years with poor culture across organisations but also from the way in which

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councillors are sometimes treated by their community and the incredible pressure they're under. You alluded to that earlier. Have you given any consideration to doing a promotional campaign - and I know LGAT has the Lift the Tone campaign at the moment - about the importance of local government as an institution and the importance of people participating in the community and coming forward and putting their hand up.

CHAIR - Hear, hear.

Mr VINCENT - Thank you. Somebody didn't feed you that question, did they?

Ms DOW - That was one of mine.

Mr VINCENT - Mat can laugh about this. From the very first day I was in this role, I started discussions about exactly that. I was involved with Lifting the Tone and one of my frustrations is how flippantly most of the community take the roles of their council staff, general managers and councillors. It is one of the most amazing jobs that some of us in this room have been involved with that you can ever have [inaudible] the community and anybody who's run for local government should feel very proud of it.

The strength and weakness of local government is that sometimes the most basic person in the community can be one of the best councillors you could ever see for decades. There is no secret or rhyme or reason to what makes a successful councillor, and that's some of the beauty of the conversations around the table. I always feel sorry for general managers. They have the most awkward job because they can never keep councillors, council staff and the community happy, so they're on a hiding to nothing.

That is why I have been discussing with LGAT about going into next year with the next rollout of a program that will explain to the community how hard council staff work, some of the things involved like asset management that the public wouldn't have a clue about, how a budget works and all the different things a council and general manager have to do, because they are very much singled out, or what a department head is responsible for under statutory and regulatory authorities and who they have to answer to and why. It won't be the easiest thing to roll into a simple campaign.

The second part of that we're looking at is that it starts to explain the pride and honour you feel when you are elected to local government in that position. That's about trying to lift the role of councillors and just because you don't agree with their opinion doesn't mean they're not working their butt off for the sake of the community. The respect around the table that everybody's got to have on the council table, to weigh up and understand that you are representing the whole of the community, not just your opinion or your next door neighbour's opinion, is vital for people to understand the importance of that role.

The third part of that campaign would roll into discussion or promotion of councils, saying, 'If you would like to stand for council, these are the things we suggest or these are the places you can go for information', so that it's a tiered approach to lifting the profile and understanding the work of council and councillors and working on people thinking about running for the 2026 elections. So we are progressing.

Ms DOW - Is there money available in the Budget to do that?

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Mr VINCENT - We don't believe there's a lot needed because LGAT has been working on some print and social media and they're happy with the market penetration of that. We don't believe it's anything extraordinary to do those programs alongside LGAT.

Ms DOW - Look forward to it.

CHAIR - Minister, it's good to hear about that and I fully endorse the work on those awareness campaigns and the work of southern councils and particularly the GM from Brighton who has looked at anti-racism campaigns, which is good for the community but also good for council workers. It's those grassroots connections, if you like, that are so important in local government, as we're aware. The question is around the infrastructure for all manner of community members such as playgrounds, skate parks and all of those things. How are you supporting active communities with any sort of funding that's going to local government?

Mr VINCENT - There are two parts to that. I would say on the transport side of things with the TPPs in planning that were introduced, part of that is looking at subdivisions and transport being near and what services are there before the subdivision is approved. Brighton is a classic example of a large subdivision going in where social and affordable housing is but no bus service that connects and quite often you see people walking up past the council chambers there with several bags of groceries. We need to be a lot smarter and work with local government when those decisions are made. It's all right for TasWater to say yes, we can connect to sewerage or we can't, but I think it's more than that because for social activities just having access to transport is something we all need to be involved with. State Growth are fully aware that is part of the TPPs and it will be looked at going forward.

With planning, some things are not in planning for open space when subdivision goes in. Walkways aren't included in that and I'd like to change that, because of what we have seen over the last decade throughout Tasmania. Up on the north-west coast it's magnificent what they're doing with the coastal walk and I know Sorell linked up all the new subdivisions in Midway Point, so the pathway is linked up now.

Developers are always looking to maximise land, I can understand that, but many developers know that the sale of their blocks of land is far better if they have playgrounds, rollover kerbs, nice street lighting and things like that. Certainly you only have to look around some of the townships at families out walking together of a night or a weekend to see how important those walkways are. There are things that we'll be able to do through the combination of my ministries to work with councils to expand on some of those planning issues that might tidy some of those things up.

Ms BURNET - Is there funding available presently for local government in those areas?

Mr VINCENT - Sorry?

Ms BURNET - Is there funding specifically for activities?

Mr VINCENT - I might just ask Mr Healey here, he's just brought up a few numbers.

Mr HEALEY - Yes, just from other Estimates that have I been involved in. I know certainly Active Tasmania since 2020-21 has invested about \$35.2 million into community-based sport development programs. They've also, since 2021, invested about

\$195.4 million into community-based sporting facilities. That's just two areas where the government has invested over the last few years. There is quite a reasonable amount of money that is invested into local community-based sporting and active - the Ticket to Play, Ticket to Wellbeing is quite a program.

Mr JAENSCH - Minister, from time to time there are instances where the behaviour of some of our councillors leaves a lot to be desired. Can you tell us a bit more about work that's being done to deal with serious councillor misconduct?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, we're looking at tidying this up. This is a frustration and sometimes your greatest strength, is your greatest weakness, and the diversity of people on council can create some of those anomalies in behaviours. Part of that advertising campaign was, as I said, to highlight the responsibilities of councillors. We still have a lot of people that run for council to get rid of a general manager, or just to do this or that. That creates frustrations on their part and for other councillors because it's not a conducive council round the table for a sensible conversation.

As part of the local government priority reform, the government will introduce new provisions to the *Local Government Act*, dealing with serious councillor misconduct. We're all aware of continual cases and they are struggling themselves to find that and there's not an easy answer to it, but they've certainly reached out. During some of the situations that we've had to encounter over the last few years, we found some missing links in the acts and regs about being able to step in, either as a minister - well, you don't want the minister stepping in, but certainly with the director, or acting director of local government. We are looking to strengthen that so that we can step in earlier to be a circuit breaker before a situation deteriorates. That's also - with some of the issues that flow on from that misconduct, of creating a bigger problem within councillors and the management of councils, the director being able to issue or insisting that a mediator comes in on a neutral basis to help work through those issues. We've already had a couple of councils that have done that voluntarily, with good success, both on the councillor and officer level.

We've had to strengthen up the requirements of what happens if people do not want to stick with the system and be a solid councillor and cause trouble, that is detrimental to the community and that council. We will continue to strengthen some of those things. TASCAT is a big part of that going forward because it puts it into a system where it can be dealt with, with a lot more experience and knowledge. At the moment, the system is open to 'Oh no, I will just take that further and keep kicking the can down the road,' which drags the council into disrepute and it is also detrimental to members of the community. A lot of the correspondence we have as an office with the community is about the frustrations. Now, some of that is because people don't like the decision the councillor might make - that's fine, that's part of the system - but a lot of it is because of both personal conflicts and some bitterness there. We need to bring circuit breakers in to prevent those sorts of things happening.

Mr MITCHELL - Minister, you just mentioned that you see TASCAT having a bigger role, 'a big part of that going forward,' I think is what you said, in terms of the council disputes or councillor disputes. As we all know, TASCAT's workload is pretty horrendous already. I'm just wondering what funding allocation do you see in order for TASCAT to be able to take on this extra workload?

Mr VINCENT - That's a matter for the Attorney-General in resourcing that, but we do have regular discussions because there are other systems that we have also put through TASCAT and the number of people at TASCAT is increasing. Mr Healey?

Mr HEALEY - Yes, through you, minister. We don't think many complaints will go to TASCAT. We've raised the bar very high. Most complaints will still go through the normal code of conduct process. In fact, we hope that more complaints get mediated at the local level in council and don't go into the code of conduct system at all.

The two issues that we found - the two main concerns with the code of conduct system - are that some people were weaponising it and putting too many complaints in for low-level issues, which we hope will be dealt with locally now. At the other end, there were some really serious breaches of the code that just weren't being dealt with in the current system. There are examples of persistent behaviours that frankly harm people that we're not able to deal with appropriately at the moment.

Under this model, 'serious councillor misconduct' will be defined as representing a serious or severe breach of the existing local government code of conduct, with a whole bunch of things that have to be considered: whether the conduct was unlawful, the extent of the harm, the degree in which the conduct negatively impacts on the ability of the council to perform, and whether the conduct involves deliberate and intentional misuse of council resources. There are things that have to be considered in taking it to TASCAT. Only the Director of Local Government can take the complaint to TASCAT, so there's a gateway there. We don't believe there'll be many complaints that take that path, but when we do need it, we think it'll be a valuable tool.

Mr VINCENT - I might add, I'm very conscious of conversations I've had right around the state where a lot of good councillors are thinking about not running in 2026 because of some of these situations. Certainly, that's the conversation we're having with quite a few mayors and we don't want that. We want to be encouraging people to put their hand up and have a go at it for community leadership, for lots of different reasons, and we are very conscious of those situations and of minimising the impact on the community.

Mr MITCHELL - Supplementary? Thank you, Chair. Through you, minister, you mentioned how you're 'raising the bar,' is there an intention to also increase the penalties for various breaches under the code of conduct, and if so, what are the new figures likely to be?

Mr HEALEY - Through you, minister. Absolutely. If a complaint is made by the director or a referral is made by the director to TASCAT, then TASCAT will have a much broader range of sanctions available to them, including dismissal.

Mr MITCHELL - And financial?

Mr HEALEY - I don't think there are any fines involved. It would be suspensions or dismissal. They'll have the full range of other penalties available to the code of conduct panel, such as referring people to training and the like; but the ability to dismiss was the big one that people wanted to see, which is why we shifted it from an internally managed panel process to one that was moving into the quasi-judicial arrangements with proper processes, the ability to be represented, because the sanctions do get up there.

Mr GREGORY - Through you, minister, if I could just add to that. In addition to a dismissal, it would enable TASCAT to bar a member from running for office for a period of up to seven years.

Mr HEALEY - That penalty is available to a magistrate at the moment, so if there are certain breaches of the act, a councillor can be dismissed and barred from running. We had one in the last few years in in Derwent Valley that was found to have misused resources, released confidential information deliberately to the press. They were dismissed and barred from running for, I think, four years in that instance.

CHAIR - Some of the situations you have encountered over the last little while, could they have been worked through using this process?

Mr HEALEY - Yes, a very small number. There have been a couple of occasions when I was in the director's role where I personally took out code of conduct complaints against councillors, which is a really significant thing for a director to do, but that was on occasions where I believed that the harm being caused justified the weight of the director to lodge a complaint. Ideally, if this is available then the director could consider elevating somebody else's complaint to the TASCAT process.

Ms DOW - You spoke about the damage done to people in local government and it's been my experience too, minister, speaking with a number of our elected representatives across the state just how tough it is for them at times. Obviously you're fully aware of that, but what supports are put in place for them, because it is very concerning and worrying the pressure that a number of people are under across our state?

Mr VINCENT - It's not an area I've been involved with at this point in time. It is a good point, though. I know most councillors I've been associated with have systems in place. General managers are very quick to pick up on some of those situations around the table and a couple I know have had many conversations of support and nurturing. Sometimes that support and nurturing doesn't go too well, but in most cases it's accepted. Quite a lot of councillors have called me for advice on how to deal with different circumstances, but that's about as far as my knowledge goes. We don't have anything formal in place that I'm aware of.

Mr HEALEY - We don't, but the office does put a lot of work into trying to support both the staff and councillors when they find themselves in circumstances where they're subjected to bullying, frankly. There's no other word for it and it's the right word for it. It's a very difficult space to be in at times because as unelected officials you obviously don't want to step into the space of elected officials unless you absolutely have to. We support the council to try to use its council processes to disincentivise the behaviour. At times we also suggest WorkSafe is brought in to remind people about their duties to maintain a safe workplace, which includes protecting people from psychological harm.

I have to say we're talking about a very small number of people. The significant majority of both staff and elected officials are really hardworking, committed and passionate local people. It's unfortunate that there are a few who choose to behave in a really damaging way and to be honest, it's also a little perplexing why it seems that the politics of the state and commonwealth act to moderate poor behaviour whereas we don't seem to have that same moderation for some people in local government, which is a really significant challenge.

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CHAIR - It's an interesting observation. On the same theme of health and wellbeing and mental health, I talked about local government facilities aiding local communities. The Future of Local Government review identified that local government plays a key role in community wellbeing, including the rollout of workshops and learning on preventative health programs and community and cultural festivals. A lot of those are really important and given the positive impacts of these for health and wellbeing, are we already paying a lot for preventable diseases and illnesses through our state health system? Could you confirm which funds have been allocated for preventative health programs within local government?

Mr HEALEY - It's probably a question more for Public Health and the Health department. I know they run health prevention programs, including at the local level. The one thing I could say is you may be aware that the Premier at his Estimates tabled the state's Wellbeing Framework.

CHAIR - Yes, and it kind of relates to that and the importance of embedding that in local government and supporting it. What do you see as your role in doing that, minister?

Mr VINCENT - It's probably something I do naturally. A lot of people move to sunny Sorell just for the relaxed lifestyle which improves their health straight away before they have to drive into Hobart. I understand people even move from Western Australia to sunny Sorell for the lifestyle too.

I think with the maturing conversation with local government, there are certainly areas like that where we could assist through various departments, but at this point in time I haven't ventured in that area but fully understand.

The part answer to that is my view towards communities of like in regions. Where I want to head with that is towards understanding what is important to each of those communities of like. They're all different, and we learned this through work we've done through some of the merger amalgamation talks or with bodies like SERDA and STCA on some of the things that you need to concentrate on in some of those communities a little bit differently.

When I was doing work on disaster recovery after Dunalley and then working with the government recovery for the Geeveston fires, it is so different for individual needs when you get further out from the metro area. In the metro areas you have so many different services. What stood out to me is that when the pressure is on, the far-reaching regional areas do not have access to a lot of very basic thing, so we have to have a better understanding of what is needed to make those communities work and tick.

A lot of that is not normally council work, although some smaller communities do get into some of those delicate areas. I think between local and state and certainly with assistance from federal funding when it's available, we could be doing that so much better than we are now. That is part of what I would like to start to do in 2026.

CHAIR - I think you're perfectly placed with all the intercepting roles you have to a point that affects Glenorchy and Hobart - the swimming pools - so both are very important, but also Bushy Park in Mr Mitchell's electorate and there are various other places. Local pools are really important. Doone Kennedy Aquatic Centre is very important and funded by the council. I did go cap in hand to the former minister a few ministers back to get funding but to no avail from the sports minister and local government minister at the time. How are you enabling

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communities to continue running those really important local sports facilities and particularly pools, because they give a whole lot of water safety skills as well to build on?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, the government has supported quite a few pools recently, both from federal funding and state funding towards pools in areas where there isn't close proximity to one. There is one being built at the southern beaches now. One went in at Oatlands a few years ago that had support from all levels of government to make sure it was there.

Councils do not like swimming pools, as you well know, because of their loss-making situation. This refers back a little to what I was saying about understanding communities of like so that you're not duplicating facilities. Regardless of who's in government, state and federally, there is more and more pressure coming on budgets, so we have to be smarter about how we do things and part of that is understanding how many footy grounds, speedways, swimming pools or whatever else might be around the area are needed to make an area work. The days of each community having a full suite of services that are breaking the local community isn't necessarily a good thing anymore. You have to look at what you need for people to have access to essential services and sporting and community activities, and that is part of the body of work I'd really like to do in communities of like or regionalisation.

CHAIR - There is a lot about to be spent on the stadium, which really compares starkly with what's spent in local communities for the health and wellbeing for kids in the local community.

Mr VINCENT - I will just give an example of how it changes. I know it's back in my own territory but Pembroke Park as a regional sports centre and it used to be just used by cricket and football. We used to estimate 200-300 people a week and then gradually grants were achieved to add netball, which is just amazing and has gone from four local teams to about 28 now. There's BMX there and the soccer club is expanding so quickly they can't keep up. Footy and cricket are going stronger, as well as basketball, and Little Athletics its just incredible. The closest estimates I can come up with are that over the last 10 years that has gone from 200-300 people to 6000 people a week using that complex. I know it's only a small regional area but we've got mums and dads and people of all ages coming from Nubeena up and Swansea down, from all over the Acton area and Coal Valley, and that is driving communication for kids.

I remember a couple of the parents used to bring bus loads of kids up from Nubeena to play sport. It wasn't the sport they were bringing them up for, it was for the kids to interact with people outside their area and vice versa. It's all about health and wellbeing and the results of what's happened with that, thinking about it as a region instead of just the individual town of Sorell, has driven benefits for the whole region.

Mr. HEALEY - Other recent examples include Dial Park, \$14 million; Northern Suburbs Community Recreation Hub, \$46.3 million; Glenorchy Sports Centre, \$27.9 million. Since 2021 - and I've got a table here with 389 lines in it - the total, as I said before, is over \$195 million of investment in local sporting facilities.

CHAIR - That is admirable but it's a drop in the ocean when you compare how much is being spent on the stadium.

Mr MITCHELL - Have you got \$100,000 for North Launceston Football Club in there?

Mr HEALEY - I can't review the entire list so quickly,

Mr VERMEY - Council governance has been flagged as an issue in the local government sector quite regularly. Are you able to expand on the work being done to address these concerns?

Mr VERMEY - We've touched a bit today on the government priority reform program. Broadly, the progressed amendments are focused on delivering two key outcomes. First, the amendments respond to ongoing community and sector concerns about council governance and the conduct, professionalism and integrity of councillors. Second, they implement crucial reforms to drive a high-performing, transparent and accountable sector.

They are all nice words, but at the end of the day it means productivity and sustainability for the community. General managers and key staff in the council lose an enormous amount of time dealing with a lot of the issues before councillors at the moment. I was absolutely horrified when I came into this role to find that the officers of local government were spending well over 50 per cent of their time dealing with councillor lack of professionalism issues along the way.

That took away a lot of resources from the office. It takes a lot of time away from the general managers from doing exactly what they're meant to be doing. This reform will assist in putting that level of professionalism of conduct right throughout the whole sector. You're never going to stop the anomalies but almost all levels of the community are screaming out for that bit of assistance in getting that level of professional resident into the sector.

When you look at the issues that a lot of councils have to deal with now and the pressures being brought on by the expectations of growing communities, they are far different to what they used to be when we had a lot more councils and the councils were much simpler in regional areas. Growth has brought a whole different vision about what communities expect. A lot of councillors feel that pressure and don't know how to handle it, so some of this will help them deal with it.

Ms DOW - Minister, we talked a bit before about your proposal to reduce numbers in local government. One of the concerns I have had raised with me is that it will be good for incumbents but it won't be very good for new people wanting to be involved in local government. Do you have an opinion on that?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, it was raised. I didn't see it that way. I never thought of it that way when I did it. My thought pattern was quite genuine towards improving the role of councillors in that area.

It was also about - A lot of the regional councils, in particular, where councillors have stepped down, some of the people being appointed to council were people that threw their hat in the ring late. I think we had some councillors that received single-digit votes, and all of a sudden, they're on council representing a whole community. In some cases, there haven't been the number of councillors in the pool to do recounts, so a lot of my thought was through that.

I didn't see it as a way of making it harder for people - yes, the quota system does change a bit, but a lot of people rely on either their name, or they don't really go out to sell themselves to the community either. I think this would bring about people perhaps thinking twice about

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running for council - in a good way - and if they are going to run for council, what it means, and what they need to do to get there.

That's fully where my thoughts were in it, lifting the standard.

Ms DOW - More competitive, rather than -

Mr VINCENT - It does make them a little bit more competitive, but that's not a bad thing. That's also a good thing for people to get out, because they have to go out and understand the community, where sometimes the bar is fairly low at the moment. Because the low numbers are running, sometimes people just fall into those positions, and when they get there, I know some of them, after a couple of meetings, say, 'What am I doing here?'

A lot of things, in combination, will strengthen the sector; not just as one little part of it, so that's where my thoughts are coming from.

Ms DOW - Thank you. I now want to turn to work, health and safety across councils. You will be aware that there are ongoing issues at some councils, and that there was a report done at the West Coast Council not so long ago that listed a number of recommendations. As minister, with oversight over the sector, is that something that you're looking to improve across the sector? What actions have you taken to do that?

Mr VINCENT - Yes, it is. You name one council there; there are quite a few councils in similar sort of situations at the moment. That was one of the things that I really wanted to look at a little bit more. I haven't got any big thing on my agenda at the moment for dealing with it, other than we need to deal with it, because it is a growing issue in today's world. We can't expect younger people to stand for council with a lot of the situations happening at the moment. I certainly want to rectify that.

Mr HEALEY - Just some points on the West Coast Council.

Mr VINCENT - Yes, I won't deal with that as an individual - look, we have got those situations and we do talk about it almost daily in the office, about what we need to monitor and look at and what the solutions are. Certainly, our ongoing discussions with the Local Government Association are drawing our focus towards a lot of the things we need to do. I am happy to do anything I can to support. Quite often, I do have people ring me or I ring people to offer a little bit of support and assistance, to check they are alright. That'll continue and we will see what we need to do in the future.

Ms DOW - There are obvious, significant workforce issues across local governments in the ability to attract everything from general managers, engineers to customer service operators. What is the government doing around a workforce development plan for local government?

Mr VINCENT - I'll just check on that. I don't know anything straight up on workforce development, other than we've had generalised discussions with Local Government Association. It is of concern, mainly because engineer planners - EHOs is another area - and in a lot of cases, sharing of staff hasn't worked the way we want it to - that's a cultural thing - and the area of covering. That is what I think what Dion was trying to do with planning, if we can attract some pools into places. When you think about it, shared services can work for a lot of

the regional councils, but it is a management tool that we can use at any stage. When there's been disasters or issues, every council puts up their hand to help neighbouring councils, but that's not the norm.

Ms DOW - It's not the solution either, though, is it?

Mr VINCENT - No, it is not, and we have to attract more people to the sector. Those that are in it, you seem to have people that move in and out of it pretty quickly, but you have an enormous amount of people there that have been there that are generational. That's probably dying out a little bit.

Certainly, private sector wages have been a real problem in the engineering field, and EHOs and planners as well. Some of them go away for a while and come back. The workload at each council is a little bit different, and the work environment. It is probably something we need to look at a little more closer and work to develop something. It's the same in the construction industry, and the civil contractors have all got the same sort of thing where they're developing programs for themselves to be able to concentrate more.

I know several councils have very good training programs in place to upskill those workers there and multi-skill, so that people have the ambition to move up through the council. I see that happening more and more, and it should be encouraged.

Ms DOW - More around supporting women into leadership roles in local government - I've noticed, just in my observation, there are a lot of capable women in higher leadership roles in local government that probably aren't supported to take that next step or feel confident to take that next step. I think that's a missed opportunity for the sector. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr VINCENT - I'd support and promote that. I was right behind Janet Gatehouse becoming mayor of Sorell Council, and still back her into that role. It's something that I'm very open to and would always encourage. For every organisation to be open to the opportunity to promote whoever is best for the job or wants to take that job on.

CHAIR - Minister, my last question, or two, is around the local government reform - the possibility of reducing councils from seven to five. I have some people who are very concerned about that, as far as getting that representation goes. I've been hearing a range of issues around the reform. I don't know if Ms Dow's question before covered that specifically, but can you just talk through that, please?

Mr VINCENT - Certainly. There are ongoing discussions in that area. We fully understand that, especially with some of the isolated communities, where low numbers mean that the five, seven or nine people on that council have very similar interests within the community, so conflicts can occur.

We're working through some solutions to that at the moment. There's been some of the suggestions put forward to deal with that in different ways. Quite a few have supported it also, so it's like anything in local government - there's mixed reactions.

CHAIR - There's always mixed reactions.

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Mr VINCENT - Mixed reactions. We'll work through it. There's risk associated with maintaining a quorum in a council with only five elected representatives, and 14.25 per cent allowance increases have been seen as insufficient to encourage a more diverse range of candidates to stand for office. Although I've been fed other information. For a lot of young people, the money isn't always important, but it is to leave home, mostly of an evening, or get involved with community events.

I've been talking to quite a few people who are probably more worried about the behaviour on council and not being treated with respect. There certainly is a view that there is a lot of age, mature-age associated with some of the council members, which is always awkward because that's where a lot of the experience comes from but it's something that some of the younger people aren't dealing with.

Like always, there's a lot of many and varied issues that we're work through and the five, seven, nine numbers are something that will collate that information on and have a closer look and have a bit more discussion on.

Mr JAENSCH - We talked earlier in the hearing about structural reforms, and some of the groups and gatherings of councils that are starting to make some progress there. Is there any of that that you'd like to update us on where you see that there are some important opportunities emerging for structural reform?

Mr VINCENT - Yes. We talked about the maturing of the conversation, but some of those groups of councillors probably haven't gone to the next degree. They get to a point of having some sensible conversation, then walk away from it. Then some have had changes in general managers, which means they change their focus.

We have seen on several on those that the asset management techniques or methods they're using -

Mr VINCENT - (cont) techniques or methods they're using -

CHAIR - Minister, the time for scrutiny has expired. It's now 3.30 p.m. Thank you to the minister and members of staff here. Thanks to everybody who was on the committee. The next portfolio to appear before the committee is Police, Fire and Emergency Management tomorrow at 9.00 a.m.

The committee adjourned at 3.30 p.m.