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Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke



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• (1005)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 106 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, February 21, 2024, the committee is meeting to discuss infrastructure in Canada.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Therefore, members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

Although this room is equipped with a sophisticated audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to our interpreters and can cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to a microphone. We therefore ask all participants to exercise a high degree of caution when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbour's microphone is turned on.

In order to prevent incidents and to safeguard the hearing health of our interpreters, I invite all participants to ensure that they speak into the microphone into which their headset is plugged and to avoid manipulating the earbuds by placing them on the table, away from the microphone, when they are not in use.

Colleagues, today we have the honour of welcoming the Minister of Infrastructure, the Honourable Sean Fraser, and two ministers to follow. We also have Kelly Gillis with us.

Thank you both for joining us.

I know you're pressed for time, Minister, and you have to leave directly after the line of questioning, so I'll turn the floor over to you for your five-minute opening remarks.

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities): Excellent.

As a sign of good faith, I'll be significantly shorter than five minutes to make time for whatever questions committee members may have.

I would like to start a bit off topic and wish my daughter a happy eighth birthday. It was eight years ago today. It was pretty exciting. I highly doubt that she is tuned into CPAC at home, but in any event, it's good to put that on the record.

Look, folks, I know the language around the study today and on infrastructure more generally is fairly broad. It's not lost on me that the genesis of this meeting was about the question of whether the federal government funds roads. I'm pleased to share that we do, in fact, fund roads through a number of programs, and there's not been a policy change in this regard.

Mr. Chair, I'm happy to take whatever questions the committee members may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll begin our line of questioning today with Dr. Lewis.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes, please.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Hello, Minister. Thank you for coming today.

I want to share some concerns with you that Canadians have brought to our attention about the "no new roads" policy. You stated today that you fund roads, but we're more concerned about the funding of new roads, and my question will focus on that urgent reason for you being here.

In February, your cabinet colleague, environment minister Steven Guilbeault, said at a conference in Montreal, "Our government has made the decision to stop investing in new road infrastructure."

Minister, isn't it your government's goal to stop building new roads so that Canadians will stop driving their cars, thereby reducing their carbon footprint, in order to fight climate change?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Dr. Lewis. I appreciate the question.

I would like to correct the record. There is no such policy as the one you suggested in the introduction to the question. We actually have a number of different programs that fund roads, both in the past and going forward.

Those kinds of programs would include the national trade corridors fund, the Canada community-building fund, the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, the investing in Canada infrastructure program.

There are a number of different programs—Parks Canada, to go further—that in fact fund roads. We believe they make an important contribution to different communities. In urban environments, we have shifted toward—

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Minister, I'm talking about new roads, though. I'm specifically talking about new roads, and—

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes. Certainly, a number of those programs fund new roads.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: —what you're saying today is at odds with what the Minister of Environment said.

I'm going to go into further detail. In clarifying this “no new roads policy”, he said:

The analysis we have done is that the network is perfectly adequate to respond to the needs we have. And thanks to a mix of investment in active and public transit, in territorial planning and densification, we can very well achieve our goals of economic, social and human development without more enlargement of the road network.

Are you saying that he was stating misinformation or an untruth here, Minister?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Chair, am I correct that Minister Guilbeault is appearing before this committee today?

The Chair: He is, indeed.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I suggest there are questions about his statements that may be better placed—

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Do you agree with his statements? You're here, and I'm asking you if you agree with his statement.

Hon. Sean Fraser: We certainly invest in public transit and active transportation for a whole host of positive economic and social reasons. We also fund road projects.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Okay.

He stated that there was an analysis. Were you privy to that analysis?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I understand that during clarifying remarks, he was pointing to comments around a specific project in Quebec, but there's not a decision that has been taken pursuant to any analysis to not fund new roads, as your question has suggested. That is not the case.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: He went on to say that the money you save from not building new roads would be used to fight climate change. Do you disagree with that?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Again, we have no policy of not funding new roads. I've listed a number of programs that in fact do fund new roads.

It's not that I agree or disagree with the question; I disagree with the premise of your question.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: A number of people in your party are spouting that idea. MP van Koeverden said on X, “building highways doesn't fight climate change.... 'The proposed GTA West Highway will have a disastrous impact on the environment, encourage residential sprawl and increase...[dependency] on cars.'”

Isn't it the goal of the Liberal government not to fund new roads and instead invest in green projects like building bike lanes?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Investing in green projects, including active transportation, is a good thing. However, to be clear, there are certain road projects that are a priority for our government.

When I was first elected, one of my top priorities was to help secure \$90 million in federal funding for the twinning of Highway 104. It was the most dangerous stretch of road in Nova Scotia. There are young people who I have known my whole life who have been killed in traffic accidents.

I promote publicly—

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Minister Fraser, again, you're at odds with—

Hon. Sean Fraser: Dr. Lewis, this is an important thing for my community—

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: —another member of your party, Mr. Fraser.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I will, respectfully, not interrupt you during your questions and I'd ask that you exchange the same professional courtesy.

This is a top priority for me—

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Mr. Fraser, we're very focused on this policy and you're diverting to larger infrastructure. I've been able to examine you on larger infrastructure—

Hon. Sean Fraser: I've said repeatedly that there is no such policy, despite your repetition that there is such a policy. It's simply incorrect that there is such a policy. It's impossible to answer questions about something that doesn't exist.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Fraser. I'm not trying to interrupt you. I'm just trying to focus on this very specific concern that Canadians have.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I appreciate that. Thank you, Dr. Lewis.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Your Liberal government is increasing the carbon tax by 23% on April 1. Isn't that tax revenue supposed to be enough to fund climate change? Why do you need to cut back on funding new roads?

Hon. Sean Fraser: The policy you're referring to doesn't generate new revenue, because all of the money is returned to the jurisdiction in which it's collected to go directly to households to leave eight out of 10 families across the country better off as a result of the rebate they receive.

There is no revenue from that policy for the government to use for infrastructure.

● (1010)

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Well, the Parliamentary Budget Officer differs and says it is not a revenue-neutral policy.

However, I will continue with the line of questioning.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 50 seconds, Dr. Lewis.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Another question is this: Why do you need more money from this new road policy in order to fight climate change if you have the 23% increase on the carbon tax? We know that it's not revenue-neutral. People are not getting back as much as they're paying out.

It's easy to conclude that your Liberal government is increasing the carbon tax by 23% on Canadians who cannot afford food and who are going to food banks. Now this same government wants them to give up their cars. Isn't that a fact, Mr. Fraser?

Hon. Sean Fraser: No. The question contained a number of points that were not based in fact.

For example, there is no such policy as you've referred to. None of the carbon pricing funding goes towards revenue for the government. In fact, the people you seem to be genuinely concerned about are the very families who are left better off as a result of the policy, according to the same Parliamentary Budget Officer that you referenced.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you, Dr. Lewis.

I received a message from interpretation that they will not be able to provide interpretation if we have talkover. To all members asking questions, I know we're trying to get as many questions in as we can, but it's very difficult for them to be able to do their jobs if we are talking over each other.

Next we will go to Mr. Rogers.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: You're very welcome, Dr. Lewis.

Mr. Rogers, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister Fraser and Ms. Gillis, for being here with us today.

First off, Minister, to clarify and reiterate, can you please confirm with the committee what this government's policy is on roads?

Hon. Sean Fraser: We fund roads.

Mr. Churence Rogers: That's pretty clear.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Sean Fraser: No further questions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Churence Rogers: There are further questions, yes.

I want to highlight—because I'm so proud of this—a recent announcement made in Newfoundland and Labrador that stands in stark contrast to what the opposition's pushing for today.

Last week Minister Hutchings, on your behalf, announced over \$15 million in federal funding dollars for 31 different highways and road projects across the province. This includes projects in my riding of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity in towns like Marys-town, Grand Bank, Musgravetown and Bonavista.

Just last year, your predecessor announced \$153 million towards a \$300-million Trans-Canada Highway twinning project that will see highway expansions, including over 40 kilometres past White-bourne in my riding going west towards Port aux Basques. That's pretty exciting for me as a member of Parliament for the riding of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity. That sure sounds like a great road-building policy to me.

Can you elaborate on these announcements and how similar announcements are happening across Canada?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Look, thanks very much for the question, Churence.

Putting \$150 million towards the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Newfoundland is a big deal. The announcement you referred to in the opening to your question, which was putting millions of dollars into the community to help build road infrastructure—that is also a big deal.

Newfoundland and Labrador, through the Canada community-building fund, to date has had municipalities use about \$50 million towards road building in your province since we've been in government. It's important that we understand the impact this has on communities, particularly on rural communities.

I'm a rural MP. I live in a small town, but I have a riding of about 10,000 square kilometres. Road-building projects put people to work and can improve highway safety and can improve connectivity between communities.

To some of the points that Dr. Lewis made during her intervention, we have significantly stepped up transit infrastructure around buses, public transit and active transportation, disproportionately in urban environments. For people like you and me in communities like yours and mine, the impact of investing in road infrastructure improves the efficacy of travel and safety for the general public, and the economic activity it generates is a positive thing, in my view, and in the view of the government.

To answer your question, we've now invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Newfoundland and Labrador alone. That's putting people to work to build out roads, to help grow the economy and to improve the quality of safety on our highways.

● (1015)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Taking that further, you just alluded to municipal road projects, but I know for a fact that in Newfoundland and Labrador over the last number of years, we've been investing in what we call “trunk roads”, which are major highways that intersect with the Trans-Canada Highway and others, and also with many of the municipalities that these roads pass through.

Also, within the municipalities, we've been investing in major road improvements in many towns, which is great for these small rural towns. Without the federal government participation, these projects wouldn't happen. The province wouldn't have the capacity, and certainly the municipalities would not have the capacity.

Can you talk about municipal infrastructure projects, particularly about some of the key investment supports provided?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Certainly, and I agree with your assertion altogether that some of these major projects, particularly on these bigger highway investments you're referring to, don't happen without significant investments by the federal government.

I mentioned during a previous answer my own community benefiting from the twinning of 37 kilometres of highway between Sutherland's River and Antigonish. That is helping to improve safety on what was the most deadly stretch of highway in my province, but within municipalities, when you look at the extraordinary cost of investing in infrastructure, you can see that clearly that they need support as well.

One of the things that sometimes gets lost in the mix is that even the decisions taken by municipal governments to fund roads are sometimes using federal resources. On the municipal projects I was pointing to, in Newfoundland, 391 different projects were funded by the federal government through decisions taken by municipalities through the Canada community-building fund. Literally, in your province alone, hundreds of road projects have benefited from federal funding. It makes an important difference, not just for those major highway expansions you're referring to but also for transportation, particularly in smaller communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in fact in every jurisdiction in the country.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Yes, and I referred earlier to the 40 kilometres in my riding, but there's also a 15-kilometre stretch of the Trans-Canada in the Coast of Bays region that is being funded, near the town of Grand Falls-Windsor and some other nearby towns. More importantly, on the improvements in the highway from Port aux Basques coming east, to fix the horrendous road that's there and that bottlenecks in the traffic that comes from the ferry from Nova Scotia, that's a major improvement that will happen. It will be extremely important for safety reasons as well.

Hon. Sean Fraser: There's no question, but I can't help but feel that you took a shot at Nova Scotia in blaming us for the potholes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Sean Fraser: The federal government will help to build out some of those road projects for a smoother travel experience.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers. Thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to Mr. Fraser for being with us today to resolve the unfortunate situation in which we now find ourselves as a result of the statements made by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

I suppose that, since you're the first of three ministers to appear before us today, you'll be setting the tone.

So you will be the one conveying the official version, or at least the person most responsible within government for decisions regarding the funding of roads.

As you're no doubt aware, Mr. Guilbeault stated not long ago that his government had made the decision to stop investing in new road infrastructure. That statement was very clear.

In the end, you said your government was going to continue investing in roads.

Would you please confirm whether the statement that Mr. Guilbeault made is consistent with your government's policy?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Guilbeault recently clarified those comments and explained that they referred to specific projects such as the third link in Quebec.

Mr. Guilbeault, Mr. Rodriguez and I will be writing a letter to clarify the situation. We're making infrastructure investments—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: That answer is clear enough for me; I understand that it means no. So what Mr. Guilbeault said isn't consistent with your government's policy. You don't want to say it in so many words, but that's what I understand from your answer.

I imagine that people are consulted and discussions conducted before any government announcements are made, as when a minister states that the government has made a decision.

How does that work? How could a minister say such a thing if it wasn't consistent with government policy?

• (1020)

Hon. Sean Fraser: You should put that question to Mr. Guilbeault. The good news is that he'll be here this morning to discuss it. It's good because when I read his initial comments, I was in a meeting with my British Columbia counterpart discussing infrastructure investments, including in road infrastructure such as highways and other projects.

[English]

From my perspective, it's a question you can put to Minister Guilbeault, but we're going to continue to meet this objective.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I'll definitely ask him the question.

You say you come from Nova Scotia, a region of vast expanses. Quebec has vast expanses too. Thousands of Quebecers currently have no road links to the national highway system. It's quite remarkable to hear such a statement from a minister. I don't know if you've thought of the people who have no road access and who've been told that no new roads will be built. That makes no sense. Thousands of people have been neglected for tens, even hundreds, of years, and they hope one day to see a road built to their door. We have a central government telling them it doesn't think they count. That's not a very positive statement.

Moving on to another topic, yesterday my leader asked the Prime Minister twice whether your government was willing to require Quebec municipalities to use money from the Canada community-building fund for housing. The purpose of that fund is, among other things, to fund water and sewage treatment plants and roads.

The Prime Minister clearly hasn't understood that. He has no idea what the Canada community-building fund is, even though your government allocates \$2 billion a year to it.

Did you speak with the Prime Minister before your government hijacked the cities' money and interfered in a jurisdiction that is not its own?

Hon. Sean Fraser: It's not a new program. It's designed to give municipalities an opportunity to make investments to improve their infrastructure. No changes have been made to program eligibility.

However, I need to support efforts to build housing in response to the housing crisis. I want to advance common priorities that we have with the provinces, territories and municipalities. The goal is to facilitate housing construction.

We're discussing the issue with the provinces. The government can discuss opportunities for advancing our common priorities—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: As you know, the Union des municipalités du Québec opposes your wish to make housing construction an eligibility criterion for that fund. The Fédération québécoise des municipalités désapprouve, and, as far as I know, the Quebec government does too.

You're also aware that money is earmarked for other needs such as sewers, roads, aqueducts and water treatment.

Will you tell those municipalities they now have to build housing?

In the end, don't you think your policy is exactly the same as that of the Conservatives, who insult the mayors, call them incompetent and threaten to cut off their food supplies if they don't do what the Conservatives have decided to do to force them to build housing that, in some instances, they're unable to build?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I want to point out that this is a different policy.

[*English*]

We've not made changes to say that you have to spend this money on housing now. It's still going to be spent on the same kinds of projects as before. We're discussing, in the agreements we reach with provincial governments.... There are some exceptions in different provinces. We're going to identify priorities around produc-

ing housing needs assessments for larger communities and around certain changes they can make that will make it easier to build housing as we move forward with multi-billion-dollar transfers to provinces.

However, we're not telling municipalities they have to start spending this money on housing. We have ancillary policies that we're working on to negotiate with provincial governments, primarily, that will facilitate the process of building housing as part of the transfer of funds.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach. The floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today.

You mentioned in a previous response that you met recently with your provincial counterpart in British Columbia, Minister Fleming. I thought I would start there.

Northwest B.C. is a region I represent. That region, specifically Tahltan territory, is a major mineral producer. Several active mines are currently producing critical minerals. I know this is a priority of your government. Through the critical minerals strategy, your government has committed to investing in infrastructure that supports this work.

Highway 37, which services that region as well as several indigenous communities, has seen a huge increase in industrial traffic. It wasn't built for the traffic it's seeing. As a result, we're seeing some seriously unsafe situations. There have been over 500 road accidents on that highway alone since 2018. On Monday, we heard from the chief of the Telegraph band about an 83-year-old in Telegraph Creek who was experiencing chest pain. Emergency responders weren't able to get to Telegraph Creek by road because Highway 51, which accesses Telegraph Creek from Highway 37, was not in a condition they could travel on.

The B.C. government has committed to investing significant funds to upgrade Highway 37 and Highway 51 to serve both the indigenous communities that rely on them and the mining industry that's active in that region.

My question is a simple one: Will your government be there and contribute the federal resources that are necessary to improve the safety and accessibility of those highways?

• (1025)

Hon. Sean Fraser: First, thanks very much. I find there is great value when members of Parliament can provide that local context on projects, so I appreciate it. Having sat on this committee for a number of years, I made efforts to do the same with some of the projects that were most important in my community. It's possible that we can support projects of this nature.

We've not made a decision to date on whether there's funding going into a particular project. It's not because we're sitting around and delaying, but because when there are highway projects, typically the primary jurisdiction falls within a provincial government, or it can be a municipality, depending on the nature of the specific project. We don't pick individual projects and say we're cutting a cheque for this or that. We establish programs that can fund different kinds of projects that are eligible and then rely on partners who have primary jurisdiction to prioritize those projects.

It's a discussion I'd be more than willing to entertain with the provincial government of British Columbia in order to understand which projects we may be able to fund. Of course, they go through an exercise of allocating their share of a federal program.

Of course, in the future there may be new or different programs that would change the eligibility. However, if you want to have a discussion off-line with me or my team to identify opportunities, that's something we'd be happy to do.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes, I appreciate that, Minister.

Specifically, the Province of British Columbia has approached your government and asked for a partnership to support this work through the critical minerals strategy. It's my hope and desire that you will engage in that work as the minister responsible for infrastructure and ensure this important region in northern British Columbia gets the infrastructure support it deserves.

I'll move on more broadly to other infrastructure issues that are challenging for communities in the region I represent.

The community of Smithers applied in 2020 for an important waste-water project. They've been receiving letters from your counterpart, the environment minister, saying that they're no longer in compliance with federal waste-water regulations. They applied in 2020. They were turned down in 2021. They revamped their project. They reapplied in 2022. Now it's been almost two years since they've heard back from your government about whether they're going to get the funding.

In northern B.C., as you know, the construction season is very short. Every season that goes by without putting shovels in the ground is another season when the community risks not being in compliance with your government's own waste-water regulations. Their effluent, of course, goes into the Bulkley River, which is part of the Skeena watershed, an important wild salmon river. Everyone wants to see this cleaned up. Everyone wants to do the right thing and accommodate the future growth of the community.

Can you tell the people of Smithers when they're going to hear back from your department about this important infrastructure project?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Before I give you an answer, on the more recent application you referred to, do you know which program it has come in through?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: My assumption is that it was applied for through the ICIP program, the investing in Canada infrastructure program.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Certainly.

Just by way of process, when we put funding on the table, we then invite provincial governments that we reach a bilateral agreement with to send a list of their ranked priorities in order to use the funding that we have made available for water and wastewater. By and large, we meet the priorities that are identified by provincial governments.

We can look into this specific project, but it will depend on whether the provincial government has exhausted its allocation under the fund and the water and waste-water stream. If funding remains available and the provincial government wishes to advance it, and presuming it's eligible—which it sounds from your description as though it could be—it sounds as though it would be a meritorious project, but I'd have to look at the assessment.

Of course, that would also rely upon the provincial government's decision regarding whether to prioritize or not prioritize a specific project.

• (1030)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Muys. Mr. Muys, you have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, when you said there's been no policy change, as you did in your opening remarks, I found that hard to believe, because yesterday Global News reported—and let me read the headline—that “Guilbeault's road funding remarks send staff scrambling, emails show.” This was the result of an information access request that Global News made, to which it got two days' worth of emails from your department, Infrastructure Canada.

To quote some of what was revealed in those emails, there was “quite the blowback”, and we need to urgently find out what roads were funded this year and last year and give some examples. There was some scrambling to cover up.

Maybe you can comment on how that seems to be at odds with your comment that the policy has not changed.

Hon. Sean Fraser: When I first saw reporting on the comments, I wanted to look into where it had come from. Subsequently, Minister Guilbeault provided clarification and indicated that he was referring to a specific project.

It's important to me—not just as the minister but also as a member of Parliament for a rural community—that we can demonstrate, including in my own community, that when people have concerns about whether we build roads, that we do build roads.

There hasn't been a policy shift. I expect it was a misunderstanding that was playing out in public. It was subsequently clarified, but it required us to demonstrate publicly that in fact there hasn't been a policy change.

I can reassure you that we have maintained support for road building and that there hasn't been a policy change.

Mr. Dan Muys: I challenge that, because the quotes that were read in full by my colleague Dr. Lewis about how our government has made a decision to stop funding roads would indicate that that's a pretty massive shift from what you've been talking about.

Also, in response to Mr. Rogers, you made the comment that without federal involvement, a lot of these projects wouldn't happen.

We've heard from mayors, from premiers, from ministers of transportation at the provincial level and from many different stakeholders. They all raised alarm bells upon hearing these comments, so it was not just your department that was sent scrambling. A lot of others were as well.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm sorry, but I'm unclear on what the question may be.

Mr. Dan Muys: It wasn't a question; it was a comment.

This seems to be a pattern. My colleague referred to comments by the member for Milton, who actually has two Ontario 400-series highways going through his riding. That was two and a half years ago.

There were comments last summer from the Minister of Finance about how people in P.E.I. should hop on the subway, so this seems to be a war on cars. It seems to be an inconsistency—or maybe actually a consistency in the policy, and this has been the plan all along—and so what Minister Guilbeault did was just say the quiet part out loud.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Look, I'll reassure you where I can, but two things can be true at the same time.

We do want to encourage more people to take public transit and to use active transportation, and we've backed up our desire to do that with multi-billion-dollar investments in public transit and hundreds of millions of dollars towards active transportation.

That doesn't mean that it's somehow false that we also fund roads, because there are other reasons—public safety, economic development, efficiency in transportation corridors—that we have made a decision to fund very specific road projects. They've happened in my own community. I'm not sure whether they've happened in yours, but I expect they very well might have.

From my perspective, we both want to encourage the development and use of public transit for economic, social and environmental reasons, but we also recognize the value of building roads, and I don't think those two statements are inconsistent.

To the extent that you have specific questions about Minister Guilbeault's comments, he's going to be here this morning, and I'd encourage you to place your questions before him.

Mr. Dan Muys: If the intent is to encourage the use of public transit in Ontario, in the GO network, more than half of the routes are bus routes on highways and roads. To suggest that the current network is perfectly adequate is inconsistent with the intent of getting people to use public transit.

• (1035)

Hon. Sean Fraser: Most public transit, if you're talking about buses, is developed for roads that already exist today. It's rare that you see a new highway built for the purpose of encouraging public transit. However, we do think that there is significant value in encouraging more people to take public transit on the existing network of infrastructure.

Mr. Dan Muys: You referred to the Canada community-building fund, which of course was the gas tax, which is paid for by drivers, and you referenced \$3.3 billion. We have half a trillion dollars of Canada's economy rolling down Highway 401 and across the border into the U.S. at Detroit, so \$3.3 billion is less than a fraction of a percentage point of that part of our economy. Therefore, we need the 401 to be maintained and enhanced. We can't deliver our goods and support our economy through bike lanes down the 401.

This is what is alarming with this policy that the current road network is perfectly adequate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Muys.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Can I give just a quick response, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I can give you 15 seconds.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Okay, I just have a couple of clarifications.

First, the Canada community-building fund is not linked to revenue from gasoline sales. We're talking about an era gone by, part of the reason the program has changed. However, the road network you're talking about is largely funded, particularly the maintenance, by provincial governments.

To my point, there are a number of different programs, particularly the national trade corridors fund, for those kinds of economically important trade corridors where we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars, even billions, on projects, including road networks for the very purpose you've indicated.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Muys. Thank you, Minister.

Next we have Ms. Murray. The floor is yours for five minutes, please.

Hon. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Welcome to our committee.

I am interested in the issue of building in a way that's climate-compliant. Climate-compliant infrastructure is something I worked on early in my time as an MP. I'm interested in an update, because what and how we build matters. If the federal government is supporting infrastructure, how are we ensuring that the infrastructure we support is climate-compliant?

If you have a brief response to that, I then have some specifics I'd like to dig into.

Hon. Sean Fraser: That's excellent. Thank you.

It's refreshing when I find members of Parliament who have a unique focus on issues of great importance. From the day I first met you, climate has been at the front of the radar, and I thank you for that.

There are a number of different things that we do. We have programs that we put in place to help with adaptation and resiliency. We have programs that we've put in place to focus on mitigation. We have a focus on water and wastewater that can actually protect the health of our marine environments.

In addition, there's the work of one of our colleagues, Andy Fillmore, the member of Parliament for Halifax. When we were brand new MPs, he moved a private member's bill that required us to adopt a climate lens on infrastructure investments. It's essential that we continue to assess the impact of the investments in infrastructure on our climate so that we make better decisions to ensure that we're building communities that are sustainable, healthy and prosperous.

Hon. Joyce Murray: That was a great bill.

I want to talk a bit about mass timber, because UBC in Vancouver Quadra has Brock Commons, an 18-storey mass timber student residence. From the time the hole in the ground was dug to when students were moving in to the residence, it was three months. We know that mass timber can be cost-effective because it is faster to get to a state of occupation. Mass timber is also reducing embedded carbon in materials like steel and concrete.

Are we doing anything to require or specifically incentivize building forms such as mass timber in all federally supported projects?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Absolutely.

We have a number of ways that we support mass timber. Before I get into the ways we support mass timber, I'll say that I'm a huge supporter of the technological advances that are allowing us to build sustainable buildings at the speed you can produce them, along with the safety at the work site. The opportunity to build a factory-type setting creates enormous advantages for the technology. It's going to be a big part of the path forward to help address the climate crisis.

We're looking to include a number of different technologies in the catalogue of pre-approved designs that we've launched, including mass timber specifically. That will create opportunities to create a consistency in demand that will help us ramp up the production of mass timber. We supported a number of projects earlier to help address the housing supply, including a unique program at UBC that

focuses on building kits that are designed to produce houses that meet the building code in the province.

We're also looking at additional ways that we can support mass timber projects through investments in the factories that are engaged in mass timber construction. There are a number of different ways we're looking at doing this, and there were a number of projects we supported in the past. The technology, as a solution to the housing crisis, is sustainable, and can also have the potential to drive the economic opportunities in the forestry sector in our country. It has me fully behind it.

• (1040)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Climate compliance infrastructure has to be a core principle in what we fund. That's the structure, but the functioning of buildings is another matter. There are other issues. Do architects, engineers, and so on, have the skill sets to design climate-smart buildings with climate-compliant infrastructure? Do we have a mandate that requires them to be climate smart? That is one part of the functioning.

I also want to ask about licensing and training in the management of buildings. The United States has a climate change professionals program. It's a registered program through which the Association of Climate Change Officers leads climate enterprise readiness through training programs and certification.

Do we have anything like that in Canada, or are we considering anything like that in Canada?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I have a cursory understanding of some of the work that we do, but I do have an expert whispering in my ear next to me. Rather than play broken telephone, I'll pass it to our deputy minister.

If you want to provide a little clarity, that would be helpful.

Ms. Kelly Gillis (Deputy Minister, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Thank you, Minister.

We have been trying to augment and support the expertise within municipalities and with proponents by having programs through the FCM or through ourselves. This would give them tools, training and expertise to understand the assets they have, the climate risks they're facing, and how to be better custodians of those particular assets by supporting and working with the NRC on codes and standards and bringing those into place.

For example, if a municipality is looking at flood mitigation, it's not just the asset investment in the capital in the end; it's to be able to understand and protect the environment and the different investments that have to be made. We've been investing in that type of capacity at the municipal level.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gillis.

As you can see, colleagues, I'm trying to be as tight with time as possible so that we can get through all the rounds.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, we were discussing the Canada community-building fund at the end of our exchange earlier. We criticized your government for wanting to add more fund eligibility conditions and to interfere in a jurisdiction that is not its own. You told us that your priority was to promote housing construction. I'm glad to hear that because I'd like to discuss a very specific housing project with you.

The riding that I represent includes the municipality of Contrecoeur. That municipality had a problem with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the CMHC, because CMHC had classified it as a rural municipality, whereas its population has grown to more than 10,000 inhabitants. The problem is that, since CMHC still classifies Contrecoeur as a rural municipality, it has become extremely difficult to implement all the funding programs for social and affordable housing creation in that municipality. The funding level is way too low. Furthermore, since the municipality is also located in the metropolitan Montreal area, housing prices are extremely high, which puts considerable pressure on the local market.

We sent you a letter last week asking if we could count on your support in our efforts to have Contrecoeur reclassified. That would help make social and affordable housing development projects viable in the coming years. Without that support, the municipality will be stuck in this situation for the next four, five or six years. I have a copy of that letter.

I'd like to discuss this situation with you. How does one go about getting a municipality reclassified when this kind of administrative error occurs or when demographic change makes reclassification necessary?

• (1045)

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you for your question.

I think it's very important to understand the reality of small communities. I come from a community of approximately 200 inhabitants. In other words, my family comes from a rural community. I'm now living in a small town.

I've considered potential solutions for small rural community towns in order to meet their needs. The job isn't done, and I'm still looking into ways to resolve the situation.

The situation is similar in the riding I represent. The municipality of Halifax will include small towns of approximately 100 or so inhabitants that are located two hours from the city. I've also looked into that matter.

If you email me the details, my team can look into the situation and give you an answer.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Minister.

[English]

The Chair: Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, you have two and half minutes, please.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, a few months ago I expressed to you my concern that the way you structured the housing accelerator fund pitted very small cities against very large cities. The cut-off for the urban stream is a population of 10,000 people. The community I had in mind at the time was the City of Terrace, which has a population of about 12,000. The mayor has expressed this concern to me directly.

In your response, you indicated that you were also a rural MP and that you were going to ensure that those small communities had a fighting chance in the fund. The City of Terrace's application to the housing accelerator was turned down by your government, and now the city is wondering where your government stands when it comes to supporting their housing priorities.

Just for context, the City of Terrace has been significantly affected by industrial development in northwest B.C. It's a regional service centre. It lacks lots of the revenue opportunities that other communities are able to tap into through those industries.

They have a housing crisis. They want to build housing, and the city wants to partner with your government to make that happen. What's your message to community leaders in Terrace? Are you willing to sit down with me as soon as possible and discuss their priorities so that we can find a way to ensure that federal dollars make their way to that community?

Hon. Sean Fraser: First, to your direct question, we can discuss this. We see each other in the halls of Parliament. I would gladly take time with you. More than that, if someone from my office wanted to get in touch with a specific municipality, we could arrange something so that we can walk through specifics of the application. Forgive me, but having received 540 applications across the country, I don't have the details of the individual application front of mind.

We did make significant efforts to ensure small communities were represented fairly within the fund. We had a carve-out for small communities and had some flexibility for some of those communities that may have been just beyond the population threshold. We looked at the need, the growth rate and the accordance with the measures they were willing to adopt as compared with the best practices that we published online.

I'm eating up most of your time, but we can follow up after the fact, because I don't want to ruin your chance at another question.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: On my last question, Ms. Murray raised the climate implications of infrastructure investment. In your response to her, you brought up the climate lens. This was an interest of mine several years ago. My question is very specific to the topic that we were brought here today to discuss, which is road investments.

Have any federal highway expansion investments been subject to the climate lens?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I expect so, but we have the deputy minister here, who would be more familiar with the individual projects.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Any particular project that went through ICIP would certainly be subject to the climate lens. Since then, we actually brought the climate lens directly into program eligibility. It's not a separate lens; it's actually part of eligibility of any particular program.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: However, ICIP is only one of many funding pools—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Deputy Minister.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Well, all of the programs, such as DMAF, as you are aware, are all—

The Chair: Thank you both.

For the third round we will go to Dr. Lewis for five minutes.

I'm going to ask both the members who will be speaking last to keep their remarks to five minutes so that we can respect the minister's time.

Dr. Lewis, the floor is yours.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, your colleague Ms. Murray, in asking you a question, stated that climate compliance infrastructure is essential in what we fund. You agreed with that.

My question to you, Minister, is this: Are cars and the carbon emissions from them compatible with your climate-compliant infrastructure objectives?

Hon. Sean Fraser: We have to recognize the reality in which we live.

Cars are a part of life, but we need to make sure that we're designing communities in ways that are going to facilitate the movement of people to the opportunities and the services that they need, preferably where infrastructure already exists.

Having told you about the importance of supporting a highway-twinning project in my own community, primarily for public safety and economic reasons, I recognize that it's possible to fund a project that would build a road that cars travel on without jeopardizing the climate objectives that we need to pursue through a suite of policy measures.

• (1050)

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Okay. In your answer you said, “preferably where infrastructure already exists.”

I live in a rural community, Minister, and so do you. There are no subways or public transit per se in my community. Do you realize

that rural communities need cars and need the expansion of infrastructure in order to meet their daily needs because of their vast terrain?

Hon. Sean Fraser: When I say “infrastructure”, that includes where infrastructure already exists, and it includes an existing network of roads.

I live in a very small community, but we're supporting public transit. It's not through subway expansion in a community of 9,500 people, but with a small bus that's helping seniors, low-income families and Canadians living with disabilities access the service they need in their community.

I recognize that cars are essential for a lot of people in the communities where we live, but we can do more to create opportunities for people to use public transit and active transportation and to build walkable communities, while still recognizing that some people are going to need cars for some parts of their lives.

We can improve their ability to move through their communities in different ways if we make smart infrastructure investments going forward.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: That ties in with what Minister Guilbeault said. He stated that the network that currently exists, as you said, where infrastructure already exists, is “perfectly adequate”. You agree with that statement, essentially.

Hon. Sean Fraser: No, and if I was ambiguous in my remarks, let me clarify them.

We fund roads and we believe there will be new road projects that will need and deserve federal funding in a number of instances, but the individual projects will differ based on the merits of a specific project. In my view, particularly when I'm focusing on where we're building housing, we're pursuing more density where services, infrastructure and opportunities exist, as opposed to urban sprawl. It's not only more sustainable; it's more economic. It reduces the cost of living and, for a lot of people who can live closer to their jobs, the grocery store, their friends and neighbours, it creates more livable communities.

They may still own cars and they may still travel between communities, but they may have other modes of transportation that they will be able to use if we adopt smart planning policies.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: With those smart planning policies, you're supporting what Mr. Guilbeault said, which was that the road network, as it exists now, “is perfectly adequate” because your policies—including these smart planning policies—will minimize people's use of cars and the expansion of roads, as you will be focusing on existing infrastructure.

Hon. Sean Fraser: There will be some need to invest in road projects, but often we can find solutions within communities by encouraging density and proximity to services.

Again, two things can be true. We can invest in the twinning of a highway for public safety and economic reasons to make transportation more efficient, but we can also believe that if a person lives close to where they work and where their friends and neighbours are, we don't need to invest millions of dollars of Canadians' money to build out new water pipes and new roads because we can create opportunities where those water pipes and roads already exist.

We're not just going to be saving municipalities money; we're going to be saving Canadians money. They may not need to live as far away from their work, because they will have an opportunity to live in proximity to transit or very close to where their destination may be.

I don't agree with your characterization of my answer, but I would suggest that we can sometimes invest in roads for some reasons while we put the focus on creating opportunities for people to move throughout their communities by investing in public transit and focusing on density, particularly when it comes to housing.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you very much, Dr. Lewis.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead for five minutes, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Good morning, Minister.

I'm going to speak to you in French because I know you've made considerable progress in learning the language.

Minister, would you please tell us about the investing in Canada infrastructure program and the ongoing support it provides for infrastructure projects across Canada?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Before I begin, I'd like to thank my colleague, who was my teacher during my first year on this committee. She encouraged me in my efforts to speak French. I couldn't speak a word of French at first, but now I can express myself in acceptable French and I want to practise it.

The infrastructure program is very important.

By investing in infrastructure, we've also expanded economic opportunities for Canadians and their families. That's very important because it also improves quality of life.

The quality of our environment also improves when we invest in green infrastructure and water treatment plants for communities. This is very important because it also affords more opportunities to use public transit. It also makes it possible to construct new buildings as well as recreational and cultural infrastructure that supports heritage.

When we make these kinds of investments, we improve quality of life, the environment and economic opportunities. We also create jobs for Canadians, and that's good for the entire country.

• (1055)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: So you agree that this has made life a lot easier for people and communities.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I agree with that.

It's simple. When we build housing, for example, it isn't just homes for families; it benefits the entire community. For example, my children use parks. My daughter, whose birthday is today, plays soccer in my community. It wouldn't be possible without recreational infrastructure.

Furthermore, when we invest in infrastructure, it's also a good thing for the people who build it. I went to school with some of the people who work in that field.

So it's a good thing for our economy, for Canadians' quality of life and for our environment, and it's a good social program. Every time we have an opportunity to build new infrastructure, we support the economy and improve Canadians' quality of life.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Minister, would you please tell us about the investments our government has previously made in public transit and about how important it is to establish a permanent public transit fund?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Investment in public transit is essential. The program we've just discussed provides for multi-billion-dollar investments in support of public transit systems in all provinces. The Canada Infrastructure Bank has invested \$1.3 billion in Montreal's Réseau express métropolitain, or REM.

In the future, however, it will be essential for us to respect the municipalities' ability to establish long-term plans. That's why we'll be establishing permanent programs to support investment in public transit systems.

When we make a decade-long commitment, for example, that encourages communities to develop a long-term vision, safe in the knowledge that the government will be there to support them. They can thus establish plans not only for public transit, but also for housing and other infrastructure, such as schools, health systems and recreational infrastructure.

Long-term planning is very important and has to be taken into account if we want to make good investments. That was important for past investments, and it's very important that we also continue making investments in the future.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Minister, thank you for taking the time to appear before the committee today.

[English]

Before I suspend, please wish your daughter a happy birthday on behalf of all committee members.

This meeting will suspend in order to welcome Minister Rodriguez.

• (1055) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1100)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Colleagues, for the second hour of our meeting today, we have appearing before us the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Transport. Thank you for being here, sir.

We are also joined by Arun Thangaraj, Deputy Minister of Transport. Welcome to you.

[Translation]

He is accompanied by Serge Bijimine, assistant deputy minister, policy; and Joshua LaRocque, director general, transportation infrastructure programs.

[English]

We're going to jump right into it, Minister, to ensure we get to all of the questions that the colleagues would like to ask.

The floor is yours for your opening remarks, sir.

[Translation]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Colleagues, thanks for the invitation.

Canada, as you know, is a big country, a huge country, so an efficient and reliable network of roads is critical. From coast to coast, roads are part of how we get goods and people where they need to go safely and quickly. Taking care of these roads and keeping them strong and in good repair is important. Also, expanding them when necessary is equally important.

[Translation]

Let's be clear: most Canadian roads are under provincial, territorial or municipal jurisdiction. That means that those levels of government are mainly responsible for activities such as the planning, design, construction, operation, maintenance and funding of the road system. Transport Canada has long funded numerous road infrastructure projects and will continue to do so.

• (1105)

[English]

By far, the biggest source of such funding is the national trade corridors fund, or NTCF.

You guys know it quite well. Since its launch in 2017, the NTCF has provided over \$4.1 billion for 213 infrastructure projects across Canada, which—this is very important to mention—includes over \$1 billion for 42 road projects. These projects are designed to

help improve our national supply chain, making it smoother, more efficient and more robust. It's there to ensure that goods and raw materials get where they need to be when Canadians need them.

Here are some examples.

We're investing \$135 million to upgrade the Klondike highway corridor in the Yukon. This project includes rebuilding 110 kilometres of road, along with new bridges and EV charging stations.

We also provided over \$70 million to help the City of Edmonton improve the crossing at 58th Street and help CP Railway increase safety and improve traffic flow. The project will build a new overpass over the existing railway crossing, two new traffic lanes and a realigned intersection at 82nd Avenue and 58th Avenue.

In Nova Scotia, we completed the twinning project for Highway 104. This included twinning and upgrading 28 kilometres of existing highway and building an entirely new one-kilometre, four-lane realignment of the highway to facilitate container and truck traffic in that corridor.

[Translation]

We have earmarked \$45.9 million to improve access to the Port of Montreal by extending Boulevard de l'Assomption between Rue Notre-Dame and Avenue Pierre-De-Coubertin. We will also create a road link between the port and the Trans-Canada Highway. Transport Canada has provided \$50 million from the national trade corridors fund for another project in Montreal that, among other things, will help improve the road system around Mirabel airport and facilitate access to a new loading bridge.

[English]

In B.C., we're providing \$12.2 million at the Fraser Surrey Port Lands to improve the fluidity and safety of road and rail traffic operations.

That is just a small sample of NTCF projects across the country involving roads. With this program, we have made investments in important projects across the country.

[Translation]

I'm very pleased to see that the Auditor General acknowledged, in the report she released a few days ago, that the national trade corridors fund is working very well. Incidentally, I'd like to say that Transport Canada is also responsible for the Outaouais Road Agreement, the purpose of which is to enhance overall efficiency and promote safety while encouraging regional and industrial development and tourism in the National Capital Region.

Incidentally, last December I was pleased to announce a joint \$70.4 million investment under that program to support numerous road projects around Gatineau on roads that you no doubt use from time to time.

[*English*]

In closing, I'll come back to what I said earlier: Although jurisdiction for most of our country's highways and roads falls to municipalities, territories or provinces, there's still an important role for the federal government to play, and we will play that role.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now begin the first round of questions.

Mr. Strahl, go ahead for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

We're here because of comments by your Montreal and cabinet colleague Steven Guilbeault, who said, in prepared remarks at a transit symposium in Montreal, "Our government has made the decision to stop investing in new road infrastructure...there will be no more envelopes from the federal government to enlarge the road network."

Were you at the cabinet meeting where that decision was made?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I think he's had a chance to clarify himself. He's coming right after me. Mr. Strahl, you will have the chance to ask him exactly what he meant by that.

What I understood, after his clarification, was that he was specifically talking about one project, which concerns—

Mr. Mark Strahl: No, he didn't actually speak about just one project. He said, "We don't have funds for large projects like the Troisième lien." He said they don't have funds for large projects, going forward.

You said there wasn't a cabinet decision—

• (1110)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I can't talk about what we discussed—

Mr. Mark Strahl: When he said our government made the decision, was he lying? How did that...?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Strahl, you've been here for a while. You know that I cannot talk about what's discussed at cabinet.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Okay, so—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: What I can tell you and demonstrate to you is that we have been financing many projects, including a transfer through the NTCF fund.

Mr. Mark Strahl: He said that the analysis "we" have done—I assume that again means the government—is that "the network is perfectly adequate to respond to the needs we have."

As a Montreal MP, do you believe that the road network in Montreal is perfectly adequate?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I've been saying for a while that there's a lot to do in terms of roads, not only in Montreal but everywhere, in the Quebec region where Madame Vien comes from and in other provinces across the country. That's why we have the project and why we're investing in roads.

Mr. Mark Strahl: You disagree with the analysis that your government did and that the minister announced? We will ask him the questions as well.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm not sure which analysis you're talking about, because—

Mr. Mark Strahl: He said the analysis was done by your government, so that's what I'm referring to. If you have it, we would love to see it, but that's what he said.

I'm not creating words. He didn't get jumped by a journalist on the corner of the street; he made these prepared remarks, which I assume were approved by the Prime Minister's Office.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You're assuming.

Mr. Mark Strahl: There's another question I had about Montreal.

We saw in Montreal that there was a police incident at a local food bank because there was so much need for the food bank that there were was a skirmish. The police had to be called in to restore order because people can't afford to put food on the table. We know that the increase that your government is bringing in to the carbon tax, a 23% increase, will drive up the price of food, because as you know as the Minister of Transport, when you increase the carbon tax, you increase the cost of transportation and trucking.

Given what is happening in your own community—

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Strahl. There's a point of order.

Go ahead, Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: I'm sorry to interrupt my honourable colleagues. I just want to speak to relevance. I'd like to know, on the comments, where this conversation is going.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I am sorry, Mr. Chair. With what happened in the last committee when we were here to talk about roads and we were talking about buildings at UBC, I'm sorry to be interrupted now by a Liberal member of Parliament when I'm questioning the minister.

We didn't interrupt when there were irrelevant comments and questions in the last panel and we don't expect to be interrupted by Liberals now when we're asking about something that is important to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Strahl. I've stopped your time so that you will not lose time for that point of order.

I'll ask all colleagues, regardless of political stripe, to try to keep on topic with what we're supposed to be discussing here today.

I'll turn the floor back over to you, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: When you increase the carbon tax by 23% on April 1, you're going to increase the cost of food, which will increase the need for food banks. We've seen two million Canadians a month now needing access to a food bank.

Why are you increasing the cost of the carbon tax when it's having such a detrimental impact, even in your own community?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: What is the cost of doing nothing, as you're suggesting, Mr. Strahl? What's the impact of floods, of huge fires? What's the impact on the future of our children and grandchildren of abandoning the fight against climate change, Mr. Chair?

In terms of the cost of living, I agree with you: It's expensive. We have to do more, and we're doing more. That's why we have programs such as the NTCF, which is investing in trade corridors, which are fundamental for the circulation of goods. I can talk about many other projects if you ask me the question. I have many projects I can share with you.

Mr. Mark Strahl: In terms of some of the projects that Minister Fraser talked about, he admitted that for many Canadians, for rural Canadians, for those who don't have the access that you and your colleague Mr. Guilbeault have to the subway or bike lanes or to being able to walk to work, the road network is critical and that rural communities need roads to have that connectivity.

On those roads, in many communities electric vehicles, for instance, are not an option. The distances are too great. The climate doesn't allow for it. Why, again, are you raising the cost of the fuel that is necessary for people to drive on those roads, to use the cars that they need to live their lives? Why are you making life more expensive for Canadians by increasing the carbon tax and by having your colleague quite frankly say that they're going to be on their own going forward when it comes to investments from the federal government?

• (1115)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I don't think he said that. Again, Mr. Strahl, he was very specifically referring to one project, which we call the *troisième lien* in the region of Quebec. We don't even know exactly where the actual government is on that, whether it's yes or no. We'll see that in the future, but we said that we would be there if there's public transportation.

We also recognize that Canada's very different. You have opportunities of public transportation in cities like mine or Toronto or other places. In rural regions, you don't have that same opportunity; people have to use their cars, and that's totally normal. We totally understand that reality, Mr. Strahl.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

[Translation]

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In keeping with relevance, I want to say that Montrealers—including in my riding of Laval—are extremely happy when it comes to roads.

As you can see, the Samuel De Champlain Bridge was built, and it's toll-free. Also in my riding, the Pie-IX Bridge was just renovated. Furthermore, Autoroute 15 is being enlarged.

That is all thanks to our government, which acted diligently to invest in roads.

[Translation]

It's a pleasure to have you here today, Minister.

You mentioned that the national trade corridors fund was established by your government.

Would you please tell us how important a program such as the national trade corridors fund is and how it helps Canadians?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for your question, Mr. Iacono.

It's an essential fund. I had the good fortune to be the parliamentary secretary to Amarjeet Sohi, who was Minister of Infrastructure and Communities when the project was brought forward, and I was therefore involved in the creation and introduction of that fund.

The fund plays an essential role with regard to supply chains as it helps facilitate the distribution of goods. We understand how important supply chains are, and we witnessed the consequences of dysfunctional supply chains during the pandemic.

We are investing strategically in ports, roads and level crossings. You have to view the supply chain in a more overall, unified and structured way. It has to be more fluid. One of the program's roles is to fund projects strategically in order to make those corridors much more fluid and resilient. Regardless of what the Conservatives say, climate change is having a real impact on our infrastructure, including road infrastructure. Consequently, we're making strategic investments.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Auditor General recently released a report on the national trade corridors fund, in which she praised the fund and made a few recommendations.

Would you please say a few words about the report's findings concerning the national trade corridors fund and what the government intends to do about the report's findings and recommendations?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, I can definitely tell you about that.

We discussed this last week. I had a chance to give a press conference with my colleagues Mr. LeBlanc and Ms. Hajdu because it touched on three points. So I had a chance to follow up on the report. We obviously thank the Auditor General and her team for their excellent work.

I would note that 213 projects were approved and financed by the fund, which plays a strategic role, and that 42 of those projects involved road infrastructure. So it can't be said that we aren't funding road projects.

The Auditor General essentially told us that the fund is working well, and she had two recommendations.

Projects are normally submitted to the group of experts or officials who work on the fund. They analyze them and approve some. They prepare a list and submit it to another committee. What the Auditor General said was that insufficient information had been provided when the projects were ranked. For example, no one knew why a particular project was rated 7.2 out of 10 while another was rated 7. Why the discrepancy? Projects should have been supported by more documentation, and we absolutely agree on that point. And that will be done.

The second recommendation was that there be better mechanisms for assessing results. Action had largely been taken to do this within the department at the time the Auditor General presented her recommendations. We wanted to ensure we were better equipped to assess the impact of those projects.

● (1120)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The opposition party has told us that Canada is broken, but I can't say that's true since we're talking about 213 projects here.

How do those 213 projects affect the lives of Canadians?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: They affect their lives every day because they make for a more fluid corridor.

As I said earlier, you have to view these supply chains as being continuous. Since Canada is an enormous country, everything has to work well; everything has to circulate well. We have ports on Canada's east and west coasts. Air, rail and marine transport also play an extremely important role in transporting containers.

We have to make sure that funding for these projects is more fluid and resilient and makes it possible to transport those goods as fast as possible in order to cut costs as far as possible.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: So Canada isn't broken.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Canada is absolutely not broken. We're very proud of our country.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

I now turn the floor over to Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: After the guy who says Canada isn't broken comes the guy who wants to break it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Minister, at the Trajectoire Québec conference on February 12, your colleague said, "...the analysis that we have done is that the network is perfectly adequate to respond to the needs we have."

I'd like to know if that analysis could be submitted to the committee so we can examine it too. I'm very curious to see what's in it.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: He'll be here. You can ask him.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: You haven't seen the analysis?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I checked but don't have it here.

No, I haven't seen it.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: You haven't seen it. Do you know if it exists?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You should ask him.

You're obviously referring to Mr. Guilbeault, who clearly stated that I was talking about the third link. So he was referring to a very specific project in that case.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: All right.

So you don't know whether it exists either.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: He'll be here.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Yes, that's it. He'll be able to tell us.

Minister, we're discussing road projects, but we're also talking about funding alternatives to roads. Sometimes people say that there's little to choose from in those solutions and that we'll have to nudge people if we want them to switch from driving to public transit.

I'll tell you a little secret: I drove here this morning in an electric car. It's better.

There's unfortunately a lot of traffic when you drive to Ottawa from Quebec. I bet you're beginning to understand where I'm headed here.

There's a major project that's being supported by the people of Gatineau, Hull, Aylmer and all across the Outaouais who would like to see a light rail service built out to their door.

In August 2023, your colleague Greg Fergus said that an announcement was imminent and would be made in September of that year. It's now March, nearly six months later.

In November 2023, you yourself said that an announcement would be made "in a few weeks" and that "good news" was on the way. You said that good news would shortly be announced "regarding funding for studies and the rest of the project".

I'd like to know if you can announce that good news today for the continuation of the project, which everyone would like to see implemented to reduce traffic in the Outaouais region.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: My government and I hope so too.

As you know, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, public transit is an absolute priority for us. We've made record investments. From what I understand, this is an equally important project for the Quebec government.

Yes, there's going to be good news. I may have gotten ahead of myself when I said "in a few weeks". I should have said it would take a little more time. However, talks are ongoing. I've discussed it face to face with Mr. Bibeau because preliminary studies will have to be conducted on the matter. We'll be there to fund those studies.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So today you're announcing that there will be federal money for that project.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We're interested because, as you know, it concerns public transit.

The ideal would obviously be to reduce road traffic and change modes of travel.

I live on the Quebec side too and had to deal with traffic this morning.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I say that because the Quebec government, the Société de transport de l'Outaouais, or STO, and the City of Gatineau are committed. The federal government is the only missing player.

We're really eager to see it happen.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We've made a commitment—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I understand that it's coming. Will it be—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: —to infrastructure.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: —tomorrow morning? Will it be in the next few days?

It's already been several months.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You're in a hurry, aren't you?

We've committed to conducting studies. Quebec has also committed to conducting studies, but no overall funding has been set aside for the moment.

• (1125)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: That's right. We want to see the money for the studies.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We'll be there for the studies.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes left.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: That's good.

I have another question about public transit, since we're discussing alternatives to roads.

I'm very much interested in a project that has been talked about recently. It's often said that there's no alternative to cars in the regions, but there actually is one, whether it be in Gaspésie, Bas-Saint-Laurent, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Abitibi or even Mauricie, and that's Via Rail's trains.

Unfortunately, most of those trains date back to the 1940s or 1950s. Their cars are falling apart. We even hear that service breaks could occur in the near future. We need massive investment in Via Rail's trains for the regions. Trains as old as my grandfather. That's really something.

Could your government decide to invest in that area? Could it decide to renew the fleet to prevent service breaks in the coming years?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That's an excellent question. We're entirely up to speed on this file, and I'm exercising a lot of pressure to come up with funding.

It would be good if you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, and others could help me and talk to my colleague so we can make a significant investment in those locomotives. It's true that they're quite old now.

That's one thing we would like to do as a government, but it's honestly very costly in the current context. We would nevertheless like to go ahead.

And we are moving ahead—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: But you know that the procurement process takes approximately 10 years and that there's less than 10 years of useful life in those cars.

So can you—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No, that's not at all the case—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So can you guarantee that there'll be no service breaks and that people in the regions will have a service, which could also be improved? I say that because we agree that the present service isn't very good.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We've spoken with train builders, experts in the field.

Honestly, just this morning, I spoke with people who work in the train industry. They tell us there really are ways to repair the trains.

In addition, the direction that train transportation will take is currently a topic of debate. For the moment, the industry operates on diesel, but people are wondering whether we should immediately switch everything over and buy back diesel locomotives or wait a little longer and buy hybrid locomotives that can operate partly on diesel and partly on electricity from either a grid or batteries.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours for six minutes, please.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

This discussion today is, in large part, about the balance between investing in highway infrastructure and investing in public transportation. That's how your government has framed it. There are a lot of concerns around public transportation.

I represent a rural riding in northern British Columbia, and people there who don't own cars have fewer transportation options than they have had, I would say, in the last 50 years. We've lost Greyhound entirely from our country, and our passenger train service, in many parts of the country, is on life-support.

Your government has headed down this path of building a new passenger rail system between Toronto and Quebec City and has essentially privatized that corridor. Before you object to the word "privatization", I think that when a private consortium designs, finances, builds and operates a rail system, that is essentially de facto privatization.

That corridor, as you know very well, is currently contributing 95% of Via Rail's revenue across the country, so when it comes to passenger revenue, the corridor is very important to the long-term success of Via Rail. In the area I represent, those funds are needed to ensure that the train continues to run and that we actually expand that service in the future.

How is Via Rail going to maintain its long-distance routes across the country using only 5% of the revenue?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The train you're referring to is going to play a major role, because we want to change

[Translation]

people's behaviour.

[English]

It's a huge chunk. I don't know what the percentage is of travellers from Quebec City to Toronto—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, just wait. I'm asking about British Columbia. How is the train between—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm going to get there. Be patient.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay. The time is short.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We're tackling that part, because that's where the biggest chunk of travellers is. However, we're very aware that there are needs elsewhere, and we're very aware, as I said at the beginning, that it's a different challenge for people who live in regions. Not everyone lives in Montreal and Toronto, and happily so.

We have to look at other eventual steps in terms of investing in railways and connections, in the same way we're doing with this one. However, with this one, the percentage of the population that lives right there is huge.

• (1130)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay, I'll interpret that as your willingness to support Via Rail's long-distance routes financially.

Via Rail has very clearly stated to your government that the first priority, in terms of investment, is renewal of the actual fleet.

Canada, right now, is running some of the oldest train sets in the world. These are train cars that are over 70 years old. The mechanics can't keep them running forever. Via Rail's CEO has told us very clearly that if there isn't a commitment in this year's budget to renewal of the long-distance fleet, we're going to lose those routes. These train cars aren't going to last forever, and within 10 years, they won't be serviceable anymore.

Is your government willing to commit to buying new trains for the long-distance routes so that we don't lose train service in areas like the one I represent in northern B.C., along with the *Canadian*, which goes from Toronto to Vancouver, and the train up to Churchill? All of these routes are extremely old rolling stock. Are you willing to commit to the renewal of those fleets?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We're working on that, definitely. We've very aware, as I said to Mr. Barsalou-Duval, that it's an absolute priority.

However, let me ask you a question. It's not spin and it's not political or this and that. If I changed the fleet tomorrow morning and I had 100% diesel locomotives, or I waited a few years to get hybrid locomotives, is it worth it or not? Honestly, I'm reflecting on that too, because if I were to buy today and renew everything, I would be getting the same type of polluting locomotives.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The message we're getting is that you should have started this process 20 years ago. If you're asking for more time now, the problem is that now we're in a crisis.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm not saying that I'm asking for more time. I'm simply reflecting, and I'm inviting you to reflect with me.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm happy to answer your question.

Yes, we should buy train sets that are future-proofed, that are as efficient as possible and that contribute to our fight against climate change. Yes.

However, I will add that we've been told that the procurement and manufacturing process is going to take 10 years. Those trains that we're running right now will no longer be serviceable in 2035. That means that the process has to start this year, because they have to design custom train cars. They have to run a competitive procurement process—I know that can be challenging for your government—and then they have to manufacture the trains. It's going to take 10 years. We have to start now.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We're working with Via already.

Maybe you can add something on this one, Arun.

Mr. Arun Thangaraj (Deputy Minister, Department of Transport): Sure.

As you know, Via has purchased fleet for the corridor between Toronto and Montreal. We've worked with Via on the safety of the rolling stock that operates along the Canadian and other routes, looking at their maintenance. We've had active discussions on what the new rolling stock would look like, both for locomotives and for passenger cars, as the minister has said, looking at the propulsion system.

What we've also looked at, with Via but also with manufacturers, is what a procurement process would look like that isn't totally linear and doesn't necessarily take 10 years but is competitive and reflects good value for money. We're having those discussions with Via, as well as with the manufacturers currently.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The next speaker is Mrs. Vien.

Mrs. Vien, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us, Mr. Rodriguez.

In response to what you said, it was your colleague, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, who said there would be no more investment in the road sector, not the members sitting around this table.

Mr. Rodriguez, as I was a member of the Quebec cabinet a few years ago, I know that interfering in a colleague's files generally isn't appreciated. Consequently, when a colleague appears and wants to discuss a matter that concerns a cabinet colleague, he or she should at least make that person aware of the fact and seek his or her approval.

Mr. Guilbeault said that the federal government had decided to stop investing in new road infrastructure and did so on behalf of the Government of Canada, to which you belong.

Did he inform you that he would be making that statement, yes or no?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mrs. Vien, you have a great deal of experience. I've followed your career in Quebec City.

Mr. Guilbeault clarified his remarks—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: That's not what I'm asking you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Did he consult you?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: He can't consult me about something that he clarifies. You're asking if he consulted me about something that he didn't say.

• (1135)

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Rodriguez, your colleague Mr. Guilbeault, made an important statement to an audience via videoconference. He said he was going to stop investing in the road network, a slap in the face to a very important project in the Quebec City region.

The question is this, and it's a clear one: Were you consulted, yes or no, on the subject of the statement that he was going to make before the public transit advocacy group?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We've discussed the third link many times. As a parliamentarian and colleague, you know that. If he says he's referring to the third link, then, yes, we've had discussions on the subject.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Were you consulted, yes or no, on the road network investment issue and the fact that he was going to stop creating new road projects?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Guilbeault isn't responsible for road systems. Mr. Fraser and I are responsible for that—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: This is serious, Mr. Rodriguez. He made a statement to the effect that he, as the government, was going to stop investing in the road network. That has a major impact across Canada, particularly in our rural regions.

So I understand why you weren't aware of that.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm telling you that he clarified his remarks. He was talking about the third link—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Do you support what he said?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Please let me answer.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: But you aren't answering my question, Mr. Rodriguez.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That's your opinion. I think I answered it.

Let's disregard the assumptions and look at the facts. Are we or aren't we investing in roads? Absolutely. I have a long list here, Mrs. Vien.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: That's great.

You mentioned the Gatineau region earlier and you said you wanted to spend \$70 million.

Are you confirming that new bridges will be built using that money?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: New what?

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'm talking about new bridges.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No, we aren't involved in that.

The LRT can easily go over the Portage bridge. It would go over it. We have to fund those studies first, however. That's where I'm saying we'll be involved.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'd like to talk to you about the Quebec City bridge.

The Liberal government, to which you belong, made a solemn promise during the 2015 election campaign that the Quebec City bridge file would be resolved on June 30, 2016, or else the government would not be pleased.

Seven years later, in October 2023, your party, the Liberal Party, contended that the Quebec City bridge file was about to be resolved, that it was imminent. That was in 2023. One year later, in March of this year, we thought you were coming to Quebec City with good news about the bridge, but, no, you came to tell us once again that it would be resolved imminently.

I think the only thing the Liberal government has done on this issue is add more rust to the bridge, Mr. Rodriguez.

Can you now give us a date when this file will be closed? You promised 2,821 days ago that it would be resolved, and we are now no further ahead.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You're very impatient, and I agree with you. I'm impatient about this matter too.

We've resolved a lot of issues. One remains to be resolved with CN, and once that's done—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Rodriguez, stop telling us things we already know. Tell us things we don't know; give us a date.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Perhaps they're things you don't know, since you're asking the question.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I now turn the floor over to Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to the minister and all the representatives of Transport Canada for being here with us this morning.

Minister, would you agree that the investments that have been made were essential in supporting our transportation system across Canada? More particularly, would you please explain how essential those investments have been and will continue to be?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: They are absolutely essential.

It's also important to note that these funds, such as the national commercial corridors fund, are used everywhere. I looked at the list today, and earlier I mentioned that \$4.1 billion is invested in the fund and that it's allocated to 213 projects.

For example, there are 12 projects in Alberta; Mr. Strahl will be interested to know that there are 52 in British Columbia. There are also projects in Manitoba and New Brunswick. I could provide committee members with the complete list of projects. However, those projects are conceived and designed strategically. We wonder where we can take action to facilitate the distribution of goods or to solve a problem that affects it.

For example, if a train passes through town and regularly blocks traffic, and we realize we're dealing with a crossing for a large number of trucks carrying a lot of containers, perhaps it would be a good idea to build a viaduct that would prevent any slowdown in train and truck traffic.

The national commercial corridors fund, whether it be for crossings or corridors as a whole, is designed, built and funded in such a way as to make those corridors more fluid and resilient because climate change exists and has impacts. Forest fires are caused by climate change. Consider the recent forest fires, for example. When the towns were evacuated, that had an impact on both people's lives

and on commerce because of the road closures. Consequently, we are investing strategically to facilitate the distribution of those goods, but also to make our infrastructure more resilient so it's less affected by climate change.

• (1140)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you for your answer, Minister.

Half of your opening remarks concerned the roads that the government has funded across the country, in rural and indigenous communities, and we heard Mr. Fraser say the same thing before you.

I'd like to give you an opportunity to explain to us why you think our honourable Conservative colleagues have demanded that you be here today.

I would honestly like to know what you think about that.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I think it's for purely political reasons. In actual fact, the person coming to answer my colleagues' questions is Mr. Guilbeault, who will be here soon.

Since I'm here, that gives me an opportunity to talk about all the investments that also concern my colleagues. I'm thinking of Mr. Strahl and Mrs. Vien in particular. They're very glad when we invest in British Columbia and Quebec. It's good news for all Canadians.

I'm thinking once again about the pandemic and the impacts that the supply chain breaks have had on the cost of living. They are enormous. Our responsibility as the government is to mitigate those impacts on supply chains and to ensure that our trucks circulate more freely, that our trains arrive and depart on time and that our ports can operate.

That, in part, is the role that this program plays.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: I'm going to ask you the same question that one of my colleagues put to Mr. Fraser.

Is it the Canadian government's current policy not to invest in road infrastructure?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely not. We're making investments. I mentioned that more than \$1 billion of the \$1.4 billion in funding is earmarked for road projects. We could discuss all kinds of theoretical issues, but I actually have a complete list of projects that we've funded or are going to fund.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Koutrakis and Minister.

You are the next speaker, Mr. Barsalou-Duval. The floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I briefly wanted to go back to the much-talked-about train in Via Rail's regional fleet.

The Quebec government has invested \$872 million to repair a section of rail between Matapédia and Gaspé that had been completely abandoned, was in poor condition and couldn't be used by Via Rail. The Quebec government took the bull by the horns and decided to fund the construction and repair of those rails so that trains can finally return to Gaspé. However, Via Rail told us it wasn't even sure it would be able to provide adequate service using its present rolling stock when that section to Gaspé is opened.

What commitment will your government make to ensure that the people of Gaspé have rail transportation and that the Quebec government hasn't invested \$872 million in vain?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: As I mentioned earlier, fleet renewal is absolutely essential.

I'll ask you the question that I put to Mr. Bachrach earlier, and it's not a political one.

I'm going to ask you a question that will trigger a discussion I'd like to take part in. Perhaps it isn't a question of any interest to many Conservatives.

Wouldn't it be worth it to wait a while rather than renew our entire fleet with diesel locomotives? I don't know.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I have the answer to your question.

• (1145)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm listening, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I believe that hybrid technology is already available. There are also electric technologies for trains.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No, I've already asked that question.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Technologies that can address the issue are nevertheless currently available.

I also wanted to address another topic because I don't have a lot of time.

We discussed the Gatineau LRT and Via Rail's regional fleet. We also discussed the lack of federal investment. I don't think there's enough investment, and we're actually still waiting for it. I also saw that the Quebec government complained yesterday that your government was planning no public transit investment for the next three years, and that's troubling them. It's also troubling the transit companies, and not just the Société de transport de Montréal, but other transit companies elsewhere in Canada as well. They've written to you to express their concerns because the public transit sector isn't doing well right now.

In the circumstances, do you think your government will have to do more to help them? What we're seeing is that everyone thinks you're not doing enough for the sector.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I assume you also put that question to my colleague because it concerns Infrastructure—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: No, I'm talking about public transit.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, but my department is responsible for this issue. It's Infrastructure Canada's responsibility.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: But you're the Quebec lieutenant.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You can of course speak to me in my capacity as Quebec lieutenant...

We're investing and will continue to invest massively, and I've discussed public transit funding with my Quebec counterpart, Geneviève Guilbault. However, you'll have to put that question to my colleague. I also recently announced some public transit projects together with Ms. Guilbault.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval and Minister.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, did you personally reach out to Flair Airlines after they abandoned over 100 passengers in Mexico last weekend?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: My deputy did.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Why didn't you?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I didn't because he did.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: What recourse do those passengers now have?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Flair, like any other company, has to provide them with a minimum of stuff, such as a food allocation, and it has to book them—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: But it's too late for that.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Can I finish?

Actually, the good news is that they're all out of Mexico. They're all back in Canada.

They had to provide them, as soon as possible, with another flight with the same company or with another company.

We're totally off topic, but it's an important question, even though it's not roads.

That's why we put passengers' rights in place. Then we realized that there were some loopholes. Then we asked the—what is OTC in English?—

Mr. Arun Thangaraj: It's the Canadian Transportation Agency.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm very familiar, Minister—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Now we are waiting on them for the recommendations, but airline companies have to do better.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Was Flair in contravention of the air passenger protection regulations?

You're saying that there are rules and they need to follow them and stuff. You've used up a significant amount of the time.

Flair is clearly in contravention of the air passenger protections. I think that's what your deputy is whispering in your ear right now.

What did you do on behalf of these passengers? They had to find their own way back to Canada.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: First of all, I'm not the person who's going to come here to defend the big airlines. I think they are able to do that themselves. Actually, I think they can all do better.

It's not up to me to decide in which cases the company is responsible or not. The passenger who was transited and got stuck there has to put in a complaint—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes, that's my next question.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Then the agency will determine if they're right or not and make sure that they are compensated.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay, fantastic.

My next question is for Mr. Bijimine.

What is the current backlog of complaints at the CTA? Give us a number.

Mr. Serge Bijimine (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Department of Transport): We are at around 70,000.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: It's 70,000 complaints? This is absolutely astounding.

Air Canada sent me an email and they said it might take up to three years for the CTA to get to my complaint, so I should take \$150 instead of the thousands that they owe me.

Does three years sound like about the right wait time?

Mr. Serge Bijimine: They do have a new process that they are putting in place that basically fast-tracks a lot of these complaints. We've seen a lot of progress over the past few months.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The backlog is growing. How can you call that progress?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bijimine. Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Serge Bijimine: There have been more complaints, but the time it takes has actually gone down by quite a bit.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The next speaker is Mrs. Vien.

Mrs. Vien, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you're really on the hot seat today.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, and I like it.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: We have a great deal to complain about.

A few moments ago, I mentioned the Quebec City bridge, for which we've been awaiting a resolution for 7 years, 8 months and 21 days. You've promised us year after year that the matter would be resolved.

There's another unresolved issue in the Quebec City region concerning the shipyard in Lévis, in my riding. The good news is that the shipyard has been included in the national shipbuilding strategy. Everyone was delighted with the announcement that was made a year ago.

However, in the past year, we've heard no news about that contract, which is supposed to be signed with the Government of Canada. We're anticipating contracts worth \$8.5 billion, thanks to which 1,800 jobs could be created, an enormous number for the Quebec City region and obviously for the riding I represent. One thousand suppliers across Quebec are associated with the shipyard and are waiting. So this concerns the entire shipbuilding ecosystem, not just the marine contractor in Lévis. It's been a year since it was announced that the national shipbuilding strategy would include Davie shipyard in Lévis.

Will this matter be mismanaged as badly as the Quebec City bridge file, Minister?

• (1150)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for outlining all the benefits that Davie shipyard will enjoy. The Liberal government included it in the shipbuilding strategy. It had been entirely excluded by the previous Conservative government.

All the—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I'll give you the credit, Minister. Would you please answer my question? When will Davie receive a response concerning the anticipated \$8.5 billion? Mothers and fathers who work there, as well as 1,000 Quebec businesses, are waiting for these contracts.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Give me a date, Minister.

The Chair: Minister and Mrs. Vien, I'm going to stop the clock to give Mr. Iacono a chance to raise his point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I realize these are very emotional subjects, but we should not forget that the interpretation doesn't work properly when we all speak at the same time.

We have to give the minister time to answer our questions, even if we don't agree with him.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Honourable members, I would ask you to please pay attention. Our interpreters do an outstanding job and we need to show them our respect.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Vien, I'm going to restart the clock. You have two minutes left.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Chair, this is a major issue for the Quebec City region, for Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins. We are anticipating \$8.5 billion.

The shipyard was included in the shipbuilding strategy last year. On what date will it be announced that the matter has been resolved, that the contracts are to be let, that the men and women can be hired and start working at the shipyard and that 1,000 suppliers to the shipyard can begin doing business with the builder?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm not sure it's a good idea for you to raise that question. You know very well, or perhaps you've forgotten, that the Conservative government excluded Davie shipyard by giving everything to other shipyards.

Now there's going to be employment. Two ferries are there, and they play a fundamental role. There will be thousands of jobs, a lot of projects and a considerable amount of investment. We're pleased. On this, we agree with you, Mrs. Vien, that this shipyard plays a fundamental role. That's why we included it in the national shipbuilding strategy and why we're funding the ferries.

There's also preliminary work to be done to upgrade the shipyard, and we're in the process of doing that. We're committed to building ferries there; that will be good for you, for the people there, and even for businesses across Quebec.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I don't mean to interrupt, Minister. I want to be very respectful of our interpreters.

When will the contracts be announced? Give me a date. That's the question I'm asking you. It's so simple.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's been announced.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Give me the date when we'll get the contracts. We haven't had contracts for a year.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Davie shipyard is part of the national shipbuilding strategy thanks to the Liberal government. We've announced that it will have the contract for two ferries. It's been announced.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: You're the Quebec lieutenant; you should have that information.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The Conservative government completely forgot Davie shipyard. Everybody knows that. We don't need to announce it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

[English]

Finally for today, we have Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Badawey, the floor is yours for four minutes, please.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you were invited to this committee to speak about investing in roads. With that, I have a pointed question: Is the federal government investing in roads, and will it continue to invest in roads?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely, 100%, yes.

• (1155)

Mr. Vance Badawey: Of course, this is part, as you mentioned earlier.... You were bang on with respect to the first part of your answers to questions about supply chains and multimodal networks. I don't want to be repetitive in that regard. However, the attachment to road investments obviously touches many ministries: public safety, environment, tourism, infrastructure. I do know first-hand how hard you're working with those other ministers to ensure that those networks are very robust.

I want to focus on the economy.

As you know, I just got back from Washington with a member of the Conservative Party, as well as a member of the NDP. Together, we had some very good discussions with members of Congress, both on the House side and the Senate side, about integrating supply chains and, with regard to your earlier comments, how important that is domestically.

However, in our travels to Washington, and we recognized that economic leaders from both countries are in fact prioritizing proximity-based hubs that concentrate production facilities and sales within the same region to streamline logistics, as well as to improve inventory management and accelerate response to market demand, which is what I want to zero in on.

With that said, how important is it to you and to the ministry to participate domestically and—equally as important—binationally in capital investments to ensure that transportation capacity needed within these proximity-based hubs is robust, as well as to add to the overall supply chains to ensure binational fluidity, strengthening our binational economic relationship?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's very important.

I want to thank you, Mr. Badawey, for those important meetings that you had in Washington. I also want to thank your colleagues from the opposition, because they can go there and have great meetings and share their ideas, and together we can do better for our country.

To be honest, I'm here purely for political reasons. I don't actually know why I'm here, because it would have been easy to ask me for a full list of projects, and I would have given it to them. It's free. I still can give it to them if they ask, but they're not asking for that.

Anyway, what you guys are doing on those trips to the States and the financing that we're doing in those regional hubs and the strategic investments that we are doing are fundamental for our economy.

You know, Mr. Badawey—because you and I had the chance to discuss the trade corridors—how much we have to be present there to make sure that they're not pieces here and there but that they're more fluid, more robust and more resilient to climate change. I think the work of the government through the NTCF and through other departments, as you mentioned, is absolutely crucial.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Minister.

I do recognize the work that you're doing and that the department is doing, particularly in my own area. I know how beneficial the NTCF has been in investing in the Great Lakes, the Welland Canal and the different ports across the country.

My last question is about the importance of that. With digital and data and the managing of the assets—because some of them are aging, whether it be the port of Montreal, the port of Vancouver, or those ports within the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes region—how important is it to ensure that we're helping them attach to that multimodal network and manage their assets, which sometimes are aging?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It is fundamental. We are making strategic investments in some of those assets. Thanks to the NTCF, we have been able to invest in some of those projects and some of those assets.

The whole system cannot work if one of its parts is broken or lacks financing. That's why we're so present with the NTCF, which you know probably better than I do, because you've been sitting at this committee since day one. I want to thank you for sharing some of that knowledge and experience with me, because I became a bit better because of that. Thank you.

Mr. Vance Badawey: That multimodal network would be the main reason we're going to continue to invest in roads.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, that's 100% right.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Minister—

[*English*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for the invitation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: —for taking the time to be here in committee. We really thank you for doing so.

[*English*]

With that, colleagues, we'll suspend once again for a few minutes as we prepare to welcome Minister Guilbeault.

● (1155)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, for the third hour of our meeting, we have the Hon. Steven Guilbeault, MP and Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Joining him are representatives of the Parks Canada Agency: Ron Hallman, president and chief executive officer; Andrew Campbell, senior vice-president, operations; and David Millar, vice-president, real property and assets.

Welcome, all. We are pleased to see you again today.

[*English*]

We'll jump right into it, Minister, and give you five minutes for your opening remarks, because time is very tight.

The floor is yours, sir.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the unceded traditional lands of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation, who have long been the stewards of the lands we are sharing today.

I would also like to thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss Parks Canada's considerable investments in infrastructure, including road construction and maintenance.

I am here today with several representatives of Parks Canada: Ron Hallman, president and chief executive officer; Andrew Campbell, senior vice-president, operations; and David Millar, vice-president, real property and assets.

As the committee is aware, Parks Canada is responsible for some 3,300 kilometres of roads across the country, including sections of the Trans-Canada Highway that cross our national parks from the Rocky Mountains to eastern Canada. Arranged in a straight line, these roads would take you directly from Vancouver to Toronto. This system is essential. Every year, these roads are used by more than 20 million people who visit the national historic sites, national parks and national park reserves across Canada.

● (1210)

[*English*]

More than that, many of these highways and roads are critical components of local, regional and national transportation corridors across the country. They are a major part of the infrastructure that supports community safety, connects regional and national economies, and serves as a fundamental element of our nation's tourism industry.

Our government recognizes the role this essential network plays in our society in ensuring the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people, goods and services.

Our government has invested nearly \$1.6 billion since 2015 to maintain, enhance and strengthen existing roadway infrastructure in Parks Canada-administered places, including twinning entire sections, adding 40 kilometres of passing lanes along the Trans-Canada Highway and adding new overpasses that improve both driver and wildlife safety. These new overpasses serve as vital ecosystem connectors.

Parks Canada infrastructure investments have made a real difference. Some 87% of roadways and 67% of associated bridges are in good or fair condition, which represent an increase of 45% and 20%, respectively, since 2016.

I am sure that some of the other recent investments will be familiar to members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

In Quebec, for example, Parks Canada has invested more than \$55 million in improvements to Promenade Road in the Mauricie National Park, a key 63-kilometre corridor running through the park.

[*English*]

Several important local and regional transportation corridors are being upgraded on Parks Canada-administered lands in Newfoundland and Labrador. These include Highway 436 into l'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, Highway 430, and Highway 431 in Gros Morne National Park. There's also more than \$45 million in improvements to the Trans-Canada Highway that passes through the Terra Nova National Park.

In Alberta, a \$95-million rehabilitation of Highway 93 north through the Banff and Jasper National Parks is now largely completed. Bridges along the Yellowhead Trans-Canada Highway 16 through Jasper National Park have been upgraded to better accommodate transport traffic.

In British Columbia, the twinning of a key segment of the Trans-Canada Highway in Yoho National Park was completed in 2021.

In addition, Parks Canada is exploring ways to enhance its road network sustainability. Recent investments have improved infrastructure resilience against storms, which are, as the committee knows, increasing in both frequency and intensity due to climate change.

In Prince Edward Island National Park, for example, Parks Canada is investing \$4.6 million in the restoration of the Gulf Shore Way to address hurricane Fiona's impacts and protect against further erosion and potential roadway loss.

Other initiatives are focused on the more sustainable use of road systems. We commonly include culvert replacement or exclusion fencing in areas of wildlife crossing, which gives aquatic species and large and small mammals better and safer ways to cross roadways. With the construction of often impressive overpasses and underpasses, Parks Canada is improving landscape connectivity and minimizing vehicle collisions. These efforts help keep wildlife and people safe.

Building on work to date, and in keeping with the long-standing commitment to sustainable transportation in our iconic national

parks, I look forward to announcing details on an alternative fuel trial in Banff National Park at a later date. Parks Canada's support for low-emission transportation and investment in infrastructure serve as an example of our government's commitment to leadership under the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, Parks Canada recognizes the essential role that its road system plays in linking Canadians to these special places. Safety, reliability and resilience are priorities for Parks Canada. This system is necessary both to ensure that our children [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] coming from school, and to support our thriving economy.

Parks Canada is also committed to managing infrastructure in a healthy and responsible manner and always making the best decisions for our environment. That's why we have invested \$1.6 billion in the roads on lands administered by Parks Canada since 2015. More recently, the 2022 budget provided some \$557 million over three years to carry out infrastructure projects over Parks Canada's vast and varied property portfolio across the entire country.

Thank you very much.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

We begin our line of questioning today with Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Lantsman, the floor is yours for six minutes, please.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Thanks, Minister, for joining us, and thanks to your officials as well.

I'm going to read a quote back to you that brought you to this committee. You said, "Our government has made the decision to stop investing in new road infrastructure."

You said you didn't say it. You clearly said it. You said you didn't mean it.

What was it that you meant by "our government has made the decision to stop investing in new [roads]", if you didn't mean that our government has made the decision to stop investing in new roads?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you for your question.

Actually, what I've previously said in public on numerous occasions, and will repeat before the committee today, is that I should have made it clear that those comments concerned the third link project that the Quebec government has at times brought forward and at times abandoned. It is somewhat difficult to follow, but that comment really concerned the third link between Quebec City and Rive-Sud de Québec.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Your colleagues earlier, Minister, threw you under the bus on that.

I'll read the second thing that you said: "The analysis we have done is that the network is perfectly adequate to respond to the needs we have."

I don't have to tell you that it takes 29 minutes to drive 10 kilometres in Toronto. It takes 19 minutes in your city of Montreal. Of course, not everybody lives next to a subway.

What's the analysis that we have done? Can you state a specific analysis?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I said, and I'm going to repeat it, I was talking specifically about the third link project.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: You have an analysis specific to that. Did you share that with the Minister of Transport? He earlier threw you under the bus and said that he hadn't seen an analysis. Is that something that you're willing to share with him, or maybe table at this committee?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I actually think that was somewhat lost in translation. I was talking about existing analyses. Many analyses conducted in Quebec show that we don't need that third link between Quebec City and the south shore or Lévis. They are—

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: So when you say—

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: They are public studies.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: —"the analysis we have done", you're talking about an analysis that was done. Which analysis?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I'd be glad to forward them to the committee. They are studies that have been made public by many in various organizations.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: So it's not an analysis that you have done at all.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I said, they are public studies that show that we don't need a third link between Quebec City and Lévis.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: The "no more roads" policy and the analysis that you didn't do.... That's why you're here.

Again, I'm going to state this: In Toronto, it takes 29 minutes to drive 10 kilometres. It's the third-slowest in the world in terms of

traffic patterns. In Vancouver, it's 23 minutes to drive 10 kilometres. In Winnipeg, it's 19 minutes. In Montreal....

I have a whole list of cities around the country, big and small. All of the them have one thing in common: traffic congestion. We need roads. Those are just for folks who live in the cities. I suspect that you know that you can't use a bike lane in most rural ridings. You certainly can't walk to work or walk to drive your kids to hockey.

What do you mean when you say, "the network is perfectly adequate to respond to the needs we have"? It's blatantly untrue. This is not even an analysis; it's just facts.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I said, I was referring specifically to the third link between Quebec City and the south shore. I wasn't talking about Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg or Vancouver.

I gave you the details regarding the \$1.6 billion that has been invested. I'm responsible for that through Parks Canada. It's for the maintenance and expansion of the road system on the various road segments for which Parks Canada is responsible.

I think we can agree on the fact that \$1.6 billion is a significant amount of money for the maintenance, improvement and expansion of the road system in various regions of the country.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: We're not getting anywhere, because you're not taking responsibility for the policy that you announced on behalf of the Government of Canada. It's very clear that maybe you don't have a role in making it.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: No, I take responsibility for not being clear enough in that statement. I've admitted that several times in public, and I'm admitting it once again in this committee today.

● (1220)

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I'm going to move on.

You've clearly walked back your comments, just like you've walked back many of the policies you've had to put forward—or, frankly, the Prime Minister walked them back for you.

On that, most Canadians are against a carbon tax increase and are even more against the April 1 carbon tax increase.

In the case that the Prime Minister doesn't make a carve-out against your own signature policy and your *raison d'être* here, is there any case...?

You do a lot of analysis and you do a lot of polling, so you must be seeing exactly what the public polls are seeing, which is that 70% of Canadians are against it and 70% of premiers have now come out against it. Different party leaders and different legislators have all come against your April 1 23% tax increase.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Is there anything you personally would do to change your approach?

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Lantsman. We have a point of order. I've stopped your time.

Go ahead, Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Several of us have pointed out relevance issues, even with witnesses who have been here earlier today.

We're here to discuss the comments that Minister Guilbeault made several months ago. He's here before this committee to clarify what he meant. I don't see the relevance of where my honourable colleague is going with this line of questioning.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Lantsman, you weren't here for the previous ministers who appeared—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I watched.

The Chair: We did have a lot of questions. Could we stay focused on the reason the minister is here?

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Minister, the gas tax is levied, and of course all Canadians pay into the carbon tax at the pumps, which is going to be 23% more. If you don't understand how the carbon tax affects road infrastructure, I can't help you.

I have a question for you. Is there anything you personally would do to walk back, in any case, the 23% carbon tax increase in April?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: First of all, I would point out that the Supreme Court of Canada held that it wasn't a tax because it doesn't return to the government's general revenues. It's more of a regulatory charge, and all of that charge returns to Canadians in one form or another.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: That's not true either.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You're referring to the April 1 increase, and your party and leader also talk about it without mentioning that the rebate will increase too.

If you go to the Environment and Climate Change Canada website, you'll see, province by province, that, where the federal system applies, people are getting back more than they pay.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you very much, Ms. Lantsman.

[English]

Next we have Ms. Murray.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Welcome to our committee, Minister Guilbeault.

I have some questions that are associated with infrastructure.

You talked earlier about keeping wildlife safe. One of the challenges with roads and highways is the erosion of tires, which release tiny particles of a preservative called 6PPD, which then acts with ozone to create a compound that's toxic to aquatic life—for example, coho salmon.

I am aware that the EPA in the United States has started to tackle this problem in order to protect ecosystem diversity and wildlife. Has Environment Canada or Parks Canada taken up the baton on this issue of rubber tire particles that affect fish?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you for the question.

I don't have that information in front of me, but maybe Ron or Andrew does. If not, we would be happy to provide that to the committee.

I don't think we have this information.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you. I'd really appreciate that.

I'm also very interested in infrastructure in terms of our natural infrastructure.

As you know, our government committed to invest in improving the state of natural infrastructure, such as wetlands, coastal ecosystems, agriculture lands, forest lands and so on. I'm interested in whether Environment Canada or Parks Canada has a role in those investments. What kind of natural infrastructure...?

We know that natural infrastructure, when it's healthy, stores and maintains carbon so that it's not going into the atmosphere. This is directly a climate issue.

Are there any investments that you can talk to us about in terms of natural infrastructure?

• (1225)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Yes. We are in the process of investing north of \$5 billion since budget 2018 in different conservation and restoration projects across the country.

As you rightly pointed out, a healthy ecosystem can help store more carbon. A healthy ecosystem can also be more resilient in the face of some of the climate impacts we're seeing, like forest fires, for example. We are investing through different programs that are under the Department of the Environment or other departments such as Natural Resources Canada. The ministry of infrastructure is also involved. The \$5 billion that is specifically to Environment and Climate Change Canada is about conservation and restoration.

To give you an example, just before Christmas we signed an agreement with the Government of Northwest Territories and the indigenous governments in the Northwest Territories to protect one million square kilometres of a new conservation area. That project alone is four times the size of the United Kingdom.

We're doing that in the north, but we're also doing conservation efforts in the south of the country as well.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I'm also interested in some of the existing infrastructure that may be orphaned, such as dikes and dams. There are a number in British Columbia and right across the country, and the provinces struggle with the funding to remove these orphaned structures, including dikes or dams that may have been abandoned and are a risk. They also compromise the natural landscape and natural infrastructure.

Has the federal government, through Environment and Climate Change Canada or Parks Canada, considered partnering with the provinces to address orphaned dikes or dams?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Through Parks Canada, we already manage an impressive amount of infrastructure, which can include dams and dikes. I spoke a lot in my presentation and in my earlier comments about roads. I'm not aware....

Mr. Hallman, do we have ongoing conversations with provinces about orphaned provincial infrastructure?

Mr. Ron Hallman (President and Chief Executive Officer, Parks Canada Agency): We would have conversations with provinces about water management with the dams and dikes that we manage, but I will turn to Andrew Campbell to speak about orphaned infrastructure.

Mr. Andrew Campbell (Senior Vice-President, Operations, Parks Canada Agency): Probably the largest one that we're doing right now is in the Peace–Athabasca delta. There was a lot of infrastructure that had been built over a long period of time. We have been working there with the Government of Northwest Territories and the 11 indigenous partners.

We also worked on a joint management board to continue to look at water management in the entire Peace–Athabasca delta and downstream and upstream infrastructure that has either been placed there in the past or could go in to help the revitalization and the annual flood process in the Peace–Athabasca delta.

That's probably the largest one that we are doing across the country, but there are others.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Campbell.

Thank you, Ms. Murray.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to the minister for being with us today.

Minister, do you know what the towns of La Romaine, Chevery, Harrington Harbour, Tête-à-la-Baleine, Baie-des-Moutons, La

Tabatière, Pakuashipi, Saint-Augustin, Vieux-Fort, Rivière-Saint-Paul, Middle Bay, Brador and Blanc-Sablon have in common?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You'd be very surprised if my answer was yes, but I won't be surprising you: The answer is no.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: They're all towns that aren't linked to Quebec's road system. They aren't connected to the national road system either. Consequently, their inhabitants don't have any roads to drive home on. So they probably weren't too happy when you said, about a month ago, that the government had made the decision to stop investing in new road infrastructure.

What do you have to say to those people who heard you say that?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I've previously stated in public, and as I repeated to your Conservative Party colleague earlier, the question concerned the third link. I should have answered more clearly by saying that it obviously concerned the third link, even though the question was about that. I cited numerous examples of investments that the federal government has made through Parks Canada—

• (1230)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I understand.

You say that—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: —in road projects. For example, I mentioned Mauricie National Park, in Quebec.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Yes, you say your remarks were about the third link.

That's what you're saying now, but that's not what appears in the article that was published in *The Gazette*. I'm quite certain that the journalist, Michelle Lalonde, did a good job of faithfully reporting your remarks. I don't think I'm mistaken. She quoted you as clearly saying that you were not going to build any new roads.

However, the journalist addressed the third link idea in the second article she subsequently published. So what we understand is that you had discussed projects "such as" the third link.

What we understand from that is that the government won't commit to any major projects.

Consequently, as I see it, investing to connect towns such as those that I mentioned is nevertheless a major project. We're talking about investing billions of dollars, but, well—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I don't agree with your interpretation of my comments. I was actually talking about the third link.

Moreover, that's a comment that I and other Quebec ministers have made many times about the third link. This isn't new. You heard those comments.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: What I understand from that is that you genuinely meant the comments you made at the time but that you're backpedalling now.

It was absolute at first: The government was going to stop building roads. Then you switched to the idea of not building any major road projects "such as" the third link. Now you're saying that it's just the third link that you won't be building.

It's good to clarify—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I still don't share your interpretation of my comments.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: —or adjust your remarks. It isn't prohibited, Minister.

However, in another part of your statement, you said that the analysis you did was that the network was perfectly adequate to respond to the needs you had.

So you conducted some analyses. Would you please forward those analyses to the committee?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I was referring to analyses conducted on the third link, which are public.

If you're a fan of *Infoman* like me, you probably saw the bit in the season finale with all the third link studies piling up on the Quebec City mayor's desk.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: It says here that, when you mentioned analyses, you meant analyses that "you" had conducted. So my understanding is that those analyses were conducted by your office.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I was specifically referring to public analyses on the lack of any need to conduct—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So you didn't conduct any analyses, which is all right.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I know the Bloc Québécois is very interested in the third link. I'm still looking for the environmental values that your leader attributed to the third link when he made that comment.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: As you can understand, I wasn't really talking to you about the third link, which for the moment is more of a hypothetical project. We don't know if it will be carried out or not, or what form it would take if it is. Consequently, it's hard to express an opinion on a project that for now doesn't exist.

However, I'd like to know if these studies exist.

I actually put this question to the Minister of Transport earlier today, and he told me that he had never seen them and that he didn't know whether they had been conducted either.

I therefore conclude that there are no such studies, and I'm quite disappointed to learn that.

I don't want to blame you for wanting—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: The third link studies exist, and I'd be glad to forward the reports to you. They are public.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I'm talking about studies conducted by your office. If there are any, I'd like to have them.

However, I don't blame you for wanting to step away from the car-centric model. I think we can all agree on that.

I just wonder whether the purpose of your statement was to restore your image as an environmentalist and to conceal the decisions your government has made.

I'm thinking, for example, of its decision to allow the Trans Mountain purchase and even the construction of other such pipelines, as well as oil drilling permitting for places like Bay du Nord.

You've also decided to base your energy transition entirely on oil and to allow the oil companies to conduct business as usual on the assumption that isn't a serious problem because we're going to use carbon capture, an unproven experimental technology that, as far as we know, may not even work.

Ultimately, wasn't your statement solely intended to conceal your government's poor record?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I don't at all share your interpretation of our record, nor do a large number of environmental organizations.

What we've done in the past two years has been hailed by organizations such as Greenpeace, Équiterre, Réseau Action Climat and the David Suzuki Foundation. Whether it be—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So you're proud of having approved the Bay du Nord project. You're proud of getting into—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I let you ask your question—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I'm asking you the question.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: —sir.

The Chair: Pardon me. Please speak one at a time for the sake of our interpreters.

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: We are the only G20 country that has eliminated fossil fuel subsidies, as we committed to doing at the 2009 G20 summit in Pittsburgh. I'm thinking of the goal of reducing oil and gas sector methane emissions by 40%, which we will meet next year, in 2025, the clean fuel standard that we introduced and the zero-emission vehicle standard.

No other G20 country can boast of those achievements. And we've gone even further by also pledging to eliminate public fossil fuel funding. No G20 country has made that commitment. We are the only country to have done so, and, from 2019 to 2021, we also achieved the highest greenhouse gas emission reductions of all G7 countries.

You may say there was a pandemic during that period, but, as far as I know, the pandemic was global. Consequently, we've achieved the best record in spite of it all.

I'm very proud of that.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next, we have Mr. Bachrach. The floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I think indigenous communities were particularly surprised by your comments regarding federal investment in roads. That's because so many indigenous communities across the country have very urgent road transportation needs, especially in remote communities, whether they are communities in Nunavut's Kivalliq region or the four first nations in northern Manitoba that declared a state of emergency this past winter because of the state of their ice roads.

In northern B.C., the region that I represent, there are similar urgent road priorities. The Takla First Nation accesses the community of Takla Landing using a resource road whose maintenance is at the whim of the resource companies that happen to be operating in the region. They've expressed a desire to see federal investment in their transportation options.

On Highway 37 in northwest B.C., which accesses Tahltan territory, there are several producing mines that are contributing to your government's critical mineral strategy. Those communities have expressed a need to upgrade that highway. There have been over 500 accidents on that highway since 2018.

These are really urgent needs. I suppose my question to you is this: Do you not agree, particularly given the federal government's unique and important relationship with indigenous communities, that these kinds of projects should be priorities for federal investment?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: The first thing I need to say is that my comments were specifically related to the project in Quebec that's called the *troisième lien* between Quebec and Lévis on the south shore. It was not a generic comment about federal investment in road infrastructure across the country. I gave a number of examples in my initial remarks of \$1.6 billion of such investments that our government has made through Parks Canada since 2015.

Obviously, I'm not the Minister of Transportation and I'm not the Minister of Infrastructure. I think your question as to whether or not we should be doing this would be better posed to them, but I can tell you that since I made that comment, I have met with indigenous representatives from different provinces and territories. I met earlier this week with the leadership from the Assembly of First Nations.

I think people understand—many people, but perhaps not all—that my comments were specifically related to that project in Quebec.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

Not all residents in northern B.C. get around by road. There are many residents in coastal communities that depend on boats and float planes to get to where they need to go, and related to that, there's a serious problem with the network of weather stations that your department is responsible for maintaining.

In 2022, there was a float plane crash off the northern end of Vancouver Island that killed three people. The owner of the company that owned the float plane that was involved had been writing to the transport minister with concerns about the condition of the Sartin weather station, which hadn't been working for two years.

In the riding that I represent, Holland Rock is a weather station just off Prince Rupert, right at the mouth of the Skeena River. Every winter it seems to become non-operational, and mariners on the north coast have expressed serious concerns about their safety, because they can't get vital weather information that helps them make decisions about navigation.

I've raised these concerns repeatedly with your department. I'm in touch with your office about this issue. What I'd like today is for you to commit to making the investments necessary to ensure that there are zero outages in the weather station network on the B.C. coast this winter.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I was, in fact, close to your riding last summer, visiting communities where you do have to move by float plane or by boat. We are working very hard to ensure that if there's a problem with the weather station, there's enough redundancy in the system so that weather information can still be available, despite challenges with one particular station.

As you've rightly pointed out, we are in discussion about the particular weather station you referred to in your question. My commitment to you and the members of this committee is to do everything that we can to ensure that all of our weather stations are working. If they have a problem, in some cases they can be difficult to access in the wintertime, and our window of operations to fix them is more limited, so we are looking at more battery technologies and solar panels to make them more autonomous in case they are difficult to get to when there is a problem, but my commitment is to do everything we can to have the best-performing weather system in this country.

• (1240)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I appreciate that commitment, Minister.

It seems like the stations on the west coast are particularly challenging, because they're off grid. They rely on solar and wind power to continue their operation through the winter. I know your department has been working to maintain them over the years, but every single winter they go down. There are certain stations that are more challenging than others.

It seems that what is needed is a really clear direction from the minister's office with sufficient resources to ensure that we have zero outages. It's unacceptable that we have any outages in these critical weather stations that are providing safety information for mariners and aviation operators.

Can you make the commitment that you're going to do everything required to ensure that there are zero outages this coming winter?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: We are doing everything we can to ensure the reliability of that network with the resources we have.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I think the point is that we might need more resources.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Unfortunately, I'm not the finance minister. I'm the environment and climate change minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach, and thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vien, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister. Welcome to the committee.

I sincerely think you'd have us believe that you've been inducted into the club of the misquoted and that it's all the media's fault. I don't agree with your reading of the situation. All of Quebec read the statement you made to an audience of public transit supporters on February 12 last. I think you clearly stated your intention to stop investing in roads and, while you were at it, also to avoid investing a cent in construction of the third link.

I don't know whether you realize it, but the people of Les Etchemins, Bellechasse, Lévis, Montmagny, Lotbinière, Beauce, Portneuf and elsewhere viewed your statements as a slap in the face. I'd like to remind you that the Quebec government has engaged CDPQ Infra to analyze overall mobility in the Communauté métropolitaine de Québec, including the third link.

The third link should be viewed as a highway link. It isn't a whimsical notion, Minister. To deny that is to ignore the reality of our communities. It's irresponsible to announce that you plan to stop investing in our roads when you're aware of the reality of rural areas, where motor vehicles are a necessity, not an option. I think your view of this matter is dogmatic and based on a single model, the urban model.

I'm going to help you understand the reality I live in.

Minister, can you tell me how many kilometres one has to travel from Saint-Cyprien in the extreme south of my riding, near the U.S. border, to undergo cancer treatment at the hospital in Lévis, in the extreme north?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: First, I want to say I've never blamed The Gazette's journalist Michelle Lalonde, for whom I have considerable respect. I didn't say I had been misquoted. You heard me, and I'm going to repeat it: I should have been clearer in that statement and should have said I was referring to the third link.

I'm very familiar with the reality of the regions. I was born in La Tuque and go back there from time to time. I've spent much of my life—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I've been on vacation in La Tuque; so I know where it is. I know the town, but I asked you if you know the distance in kilometres between Saint-Cyprien and the hospital in Lévis.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mrs. Vien, I let you ask your question without interrupting you. Please allow me to answer it.

As I said, I am very familiar with the reality of the regions since I'm from La Tuque.

Your party's position on the third link is somewhat hard to follow because you've taken a stand on the third link, but we still need to

know what third link we're talking about. The latest version of the third link, which the Quebec government presented, was entirely based on public transit. Is that the project you support?

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Minister, I asked you a very clear question. The Quebec government makes its own decisions, and it has decided to reopen the issue.

What is the distance in kilometres between Saint-Cyprien and the hospital in Lévis? Do you know, yes or no?

• (1245)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I can calculate it—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Since you don't know it, I'm going to tell you: 106 kilometres. It takes an hour and a half to get to the hospital.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: The third link—

Mrs. Dominique Vien: You don't get there by bicycle or on foot. You have to drive there.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Is the third link—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Chair, can the minister tell me—

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, you have the floor.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Once again, I want to hear the questions, but I also want to hear the answers. We have to allow the other person time to finish speaking so the interpreters can do their job. Some people on both sides rely on the interpretation.

The Chair: We're going to allow the members to ask questions and the minister to answer them.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vien.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Minister, can you tell me how many of the 30 municipalities in my riding don't have access to public transit?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: No.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Twenty-nine out of 30 municipalities in my riding don't have access to public transit.

What is one of the main issues in our rural communities? You who come from La Tuque should be able to answer that question.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: In my opening remarks, I told you about investments that my department, through Parks Canada, has made in road infrastructure since 2015. This represents a significant increase over previous investments in road infrastructure under the Harper government. Some \$1.6 billion has been invested, including in Quebec, in roads and road infrastructure.

We have committed to supporting the communities that need it by developing this network.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mrs. Vien.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: The Minister of Environment and Climate Change is clearly unaware of the reality of Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis. He expresses an utterly gratuitous judgment of the transportation needs between the two banks in the Quebec City region, and he adopts a condescending attitude toward the Quebec government when he says he has trouble following it.

If he's brave enough, he'll go and tell the businesspeople of Quebec City and Chaudière-Appalaches what he told the public transit supporters.

Go to Quebec City; go and say what you told them.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair. I don't know if I've been asked a question.

The Chair: The member is unfortunately 20 seconds over time.

Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, would you like to take a few seconds to answer my colleague's question?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I don't think there was an actual question.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: All right.

First of all, thank you for being here with us in the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

We have heard that the government has invested \$1.6 billion since 2015. Could you take a few minutes to explain to us what impact the Parks Canada investments have had on highways and roads?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I discussed that a bit earlier. It's quite incredible when you consider the extent of the infrastructure network that Parks Canada manages, including both road and other infrastructure. There are more than 18,000 elements in the national parks, at the historic sites and in the marine conservation areas. If we had to replace it all, it would be valued at \$27 billion in 2022 dollars.

As I said earlier, our government has invested a lot more money in this infrastructure than the previous government. From 2006 to 2014, Parks Canada investments in infrastructure amounted to \$1.1 billion, whereas we invested some \$1.6 billion from 2015 to 2023. Our government has therefore invested \$500 million more in infrastructure, particularly in transport infrastructure, through Parks Canada. We are investing nearly 50% more in that infrastructure than the previous government.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you, Minister.

Earlier you cited a few examples of capital projects in British Columbia.

Could you give us some examples of capital projects that Parks Canada has carried out in Quebec, the province I come from?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: It's the province we both live in.

We could of course discuss the \$59.5 million restoration of part of the Lachine canal infrastructure, which will be completed this

year. There is the rehabilitation of the Bastion des Ursulines within the fortifications of Quebec City. An amount of \$11.5 million has been allocated for that purpose. Then there are improvements to security and the visitor experience along Promenade Road in Mauricie National Park, which incidentally is near La Tuque. There's also the rehabilitation of Gauron and Lafleur bridges along the Lachine canal, in which we've invested nearly \$6 million. These are investments that Parks Canada has made in Quebec in recent years.

● (1250)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you, Minister.

Lastly, I'd like to give you another chance to clarify the comments you made.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you very much.

As I said, I don't claim to have been misquoted. I accept full responsibility for the comments I made. I should have been clearer and said that my comment on roads specifically referred to the third link project in Quebec City.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Koutrakis.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is now yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To sum up the meeting, Minister, I'd like to ask you a question. Do you realize that the remarks you made on February 12 last may have pleased a few fans but that, in the end, you set back the cause of the environment by giving a direct boost to the Conservatives?

That's ultimately why we're meeting today. This caused a widespread psychodrama because people were troubled by the dogmatic comments they heard from you.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Are the fans you mentioned the people who were at the Trajectoire Québec conference? I'm not sure I—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I'm a Trajectoire Québec supporter.

I'm talking about the people who absolutely don't want to see a single road built.

What I'd especially like to know is whether you regret the remarks you made on February 12.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I said, my comments should have been clearer. I accept full responsibility for that, and I blame no one but myself.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I have no more questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There's a lot of politics surrounding your comments in this meeting, and I think everyone can acknowledge that, but at the heart of it is a very important policy conversation about the balance between investing in highways and freeways and investing in public transportation.

The concept of induced demand is well established in the urban planning field. When you make certain kinds of investments in expanding highways and freeways, you actually both undermine the climate policy goal and don't solve the problem. Often the goal is to reduce congestion and to reduce travel times. If you induce demand, you can actually undermine that goal at the same time.

I'm sure, Minister, that you're in touch with the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Transport on the climate impacts of different investments. How does your department contribute to that conversation when it comes to ensuring that investing in highways and freeways doesn't undermine your government's climate goals?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You're right that for urban planners and the people who've studied the impact of road transportation, the concept of induced traffic is a well-known one.

I'm not a transport expert and I'm not an urban planner, although I did receive an award from the Order of Urban Planners of Quebec for my work on urban planning and transportation over the years. I guess they felt that it should be underlined.

We have, as a government, tried to increase the offer of different types of transportation modes through our investment, the largest investment in public transit in the history of the country, but we're also investing in roads. We're investing billions of dollars to help the auto sector in Canada modernize and transition to electrification, welcoming companies to Canada that have never invested here before, such as Volkswagen.

Also, we've created the first-ever public active transportation fund to fund such initiatives for municipalities, including rural municipalities. There's one in my hometown, a bike path, that's been established. We're working with municipalities all across the country to help people who want to diversify their mode of transportation to have access to those infrastructures as well.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Lantsman, I'll give you three minutes. We'll follow that with Mr. Rogers for three minutes.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Thanks.

Minister, you started this committee by saying that you didn't say what you meant in your comments, which was that your govern-

ment has made the decision to stop investing in roads. First you said that you didn't say it, and then you said that you didn't mean it, and then you said that you meant something entirely different.

Then you talked about "the analysis that we have done is that the network is perfectly adequate", and it turns out that there is no analysis or you did no analysis, or if there is an analysis, you refuse to share that analysis with anyone.

Then you said that the carbon tax was revenue-neutral. We know there is \$20 billion in the government coffers, of which \$18 billion is not remitted. That's not revenue-neutral, if you understand the definition of revenue-neutral.

Then you said that more families get more back in rebates than they do in paying the carbon tax. We know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer says that's not true for the majority of families where the carbon tax applies.

If you're not going to be truthful on the first four questions I'm asking, I'm going to just ask you once: Are there any circumstances that will cause you to walk back the April 1 23% tax hike that you are about to impose on Canadians, which your colleagues believe has nothing to do with roads or the cost of gas?

Mr. Vance Badawey: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Lantsman. We'll stop the time there.

Go ahead, Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: It's about relevance.

The Chair: It's a point of order for relevance.

If we can make the link between the roads and the question, I think that would be helpful for the minister and for Canadians.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I will make this clear one more time.

You put gas in your car to drive on the roads. I'm asking him about the carbon tax that you're about to raise on Canadian families on April 1.

Minister, do you have an answer to the question?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: First of all, I don't share your interpretation of my comments. I didn't say that I hadn't said it. What I said is that it should have been clearer. I accept full responsibility for that. I said it, and I repeat it.

As regards carbon pricing, your party and your leader never mention the increases that they receive in the rebate. Yes, the pricing will rise on April 1, but the rebate will too. In addition, your party never discusses the fact that, if we don't do it in Canada, if we don't put carbon pricing in place, it will be imposed on us by our economic partners.

Border adjustment taxes are being introduced in Europe. This means that every company that exports to Europe will have to pay a border tax if we don't have our own taxation system. U.S. treasury secretary Janet Yellen has also noted several times that the United States of America, our biggest economic partner, is also considering instituting border adjustment taxes that would apply to countries that don't have a carbon pricing system.

Consequently, we either do it ourselves or else it will be imposed on us by our economic partners. I think that if we have to choose between the two, we're better off doing it ourselves.

[*English*]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Minister, I'll end with this.

I would like to know if you've seen any data that suggests anything other than that 70% of Canadians—which we see in public data—are against your April 1 tax hike. Have you talked to premiers and had a separate conversation with them in any kind of way that would suggest that 70% of them aren't against the 23% tax hike on April 1? Is there anything that you have seen to suggest that any Canadian believes that what you are imposing in less than two weeks on gas, on groceries, on home heating, on families, on farmers and on first nations right across the country is a good idea?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As your party did during the 2021 election, we campaigned on a promise to maintain carbon pricing. In its platform, the Conservative Party of Canada—

[*English*]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Perhaps you want to go to another election and you'll have that chance—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: —we talked about establishing carbon pricing. That's the commitment we made to Canadians, and that's what we're doing.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We will conclude with Mr. Rogers.

[*English*]

Mr. Rogers, the floor is yours. You have three minutes.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister, and welcome to our officials.

I would like to focus on one particular comment you made earlier. It was about the \$45 million that was spent in my riding of Bonavista-Burin-Trinity in Terra Nova National Park. For the benefit of the committee, I want people to realize how significant and important that was.

That was a very dangerous piece of highway, with a single lane for passing traffic. It was very dangerous and caused the loss of many lives over the decades. The work that was done on the passing lanes has saved many lives. The single lane for passing on that highway was a very dangerous stretch that people hated to drive. Today, it's a pleasure to drive through beautiful Terra Nova National Park.

Parks Canada invested \$45 million, as you said. I'd invite anybody on this committee or anybody across the country to come and visit beautiful Terra Nova National Park.

We have all the parks, like Gros Morne, and Torngat in Labrador.

The other part of the equation, minister, is this. I know that Environment Canada has been spending money through Parks Canada on other sites in the province. Could you share some examples of other capital asset projects that have been led by Parks Canada in Newfoundland and Labrador?

• (1300)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Rogers.

In fact, yes, Parks Canada is investing in other infrastructure projects and road transportation projects in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, including upgrades to both Highway 436 in L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site and Highway 431 in Gros Morne National Park, as well as a replacement of the Western Brook bridge along Highway 430. That's \$30 million of investment that will be completed in the year 2025-26.

There is a major investment for the renovation and expansion of the Gros Morne National Park Visitor Centre to improve visitor experience. That's another \$12 million. Also, there's the replacement of underground services and utilities at Newman Sound campground, which required more than \$60 million of investment and was completed in the year 2022-23.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Minister, on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador, I would like to thank you for those major investments in all those parks. I appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Minister, for taking the time to meet with us today.

[*English*]

With that, colleagues, we're done for the day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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