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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): Welcome to the sixth meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, November 25, 2021. Members can attend in person or using the Zoom application.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all the meeting participants that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

[*English*]

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from public health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on January 28, 2022, to remain healthy and safe, the following is recommended for all those attending the meeting in person.

Anyone with symptoms should participate by Zoom and not attend the meeting in person. Everyone must maintain two-metre physical distancing, whether seated or standing; everyone must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is recommended in the strongest possible terms that members wear their masks at all times, including when seated. Non-medical masks which provide better clarity over cloth masks are available in the room. Everyone present must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer at the room entrance. Committee rooms are cleaned before and after each meeting. To maintain this, everyone is encouraged to clean surfaces such as the desk, chair and microphone with the provided disinfectant wipes when vacating or taking a seat.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on January 31, 2022, the committee is meeting today to study the mandate letter of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities.

Appearing today is the minister himself, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc.

Minister, it is a pleasure to have you appear before committee today. We know that the members are very much looking forward to asking you their questions and so without further ado, I would like to turn it over to you to provide your introductory remarks.

However, prior to doing so, Minister, I see there is a hand raised by Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my apologies for interrupting.

I have a procedural question. I noticed that at our last appearance by a minister, the Minister of Transport, the way the questioning by members took place essentially treated the minister's appearance and the appearance of the department officials as one panel, and Monsieur Barsalou-Duval and I only had two and a half minute rounds of questioning for the officials.

It's a departure from the way this committee was working in the last Parliament. I just wonder if you could consider treating the officials as a separate panel, giving the NDP and the Bloc a six-minute round at the beginning of that panel.

Thank you.

• (1105)

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

Do I have the consent of the committee to make those arrangements?

Okay.

Thank you very much Mr. Bachrach.

Apologies, Minister, and I turn the floor over to you. Welcome once again.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you will see, I am joined by our Deputy Minister, Kelly Gillis, and a series of senior officials from the department. You saw some of them before the meeting opened. They are both with me for the next hour. Mr. Bachrach's point is a good one, and, of course, they are available to offer precision for colleagues who may have questions with respect to specific programs or expenditures within the infrastructure portfolio.

Mr. Chair, let me begin by apologizing for cancelling at the last minute two weeks ago. It was the Monday that the Emergencies Act was proclaimed. I participated in a first ministers meeting with the Prime Minister and then had a number of calls with different premiers to follow up. I regret doing that. I wasn't trying to be disrespectful, but there was no way on that particular morning that I would have been able to attend the committee, so I apologize.

Finally, if I seem a bit short of breath and if I perhaps have a red face, colleagues cannot construe that in any way as proof of the truthfulness of what I'm about to testify. You talked about people with symptoms, Mr. Chair. Last week, I developed what felt like COVID symptoms in New Brunswick. I went through a series of COVID tests and it turns out I developed a form of pneumonia that can affect immunocompromised people. It's entirely treatable, but I had a difficult weekend. This is why I'm not in Ottawa this week, but it's expected to run its course over the next week or 10 days. I wanted colleagues to know that I'm not short of breath because I'm nervous, or even perhaps because I'm not in excellent physical shape; it's simply because I ended up with this lung infection.

Mr. Chair, I welcome this opportunity to discuss the Prime Minister's mandate letter to me. I'm happy to do so with the team from Infrastructure Canada who are working with me to deliver the results that Canadians and the Prime Minister expect.

Delivering results means establishing, maintaining and leveraging partnerships across the country. It's partnerships with other orders of government—municipalities, provincial and territorial governments—that are critical for us to get the work done that we must get done. Through collaboration with different orders of government, we believe we're in the best position to improve the quality of life for Canadians, and we will continue to build a country and the country's infrastructure that work for everyone.

[*Translation*]

This means that support must be provided for major nation-building projects that will enable us to better connect. We are talking about transformative projects, such as the Toronto waterfront revitalization, as well as connections, such as the Gordie Howe international bridge project, in Windsor, Ontario, whose construction is well advanced. This is about planning key infrastructure projects, such as the Bonaventure Expressway redevelopment.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, we keep Canadians moving forward in a number of ways, including investments in transit that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, provide health benefits and better serve disadvantaged groups, including women, seniors, youth and those on low incomes.

Our support toward the purchase of 17,000 new buses, including 7,469 green, reduced-emission buses, has significantly increased the capacity of Canadian municipal public transit systems.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

We will work with provinces, territories, municipalities, indigenous communities and other stakeholders to design a permanent public transit fund. I have held fruitful discussions with a number

of mayors of Canadian cities and with representatives from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

While promoting greener transit, we are implementing a number of additional measures to enhance Canadians' climate resilience.

[*English*]

Since 2018 our government has committed almost \$3.4 billion through the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund to help communities remain resilient in the face of natural disasters triggered by climate change. To date we've announced over \$1.9 billion in funding for 69 projects across the country to mitigate threats of natural disasters, such as floods, wildfires and drought.

The work of the climate resilient built environment initiative and the standards to support resilience in infrastructure programs across the country are helping to increase public awareness of the existing tools and resources available to enhance the resilience of public infrastructure.

Mr. Chair, we've seen this across the country, for example, in Mr. Bachrach's province of British Columbia. I think all Canadians were surprised at how quickly and how devastatingly critical public infrastructure can be damaged, leading to economic and social consequences for millions of people who depend on that infrastructure. We're obviously working with the Government of British Columbia, as one example, with respect to how we can rebuild a more resilient climate-adapted infrastructure, and those conversations are very encouraging.

Mr. Chair, the green and inclusive community buildings program will help build more community buildings and improve existing ones, making them more energy efficient, reducing carbon emissions, enhancing climate resilience, and increasing accessible and inclusive spaces.

[*Translation*]

In budget 2021, we announced a \$200-million investment over three years in the natural infrastructure fund. This is a program for funding natural and hybrid infrastructure projects in Canadian communities in order to enhance climate change resilience, improve environmental quality and protect biodiversity.

[English]

As we look ahead, Canada's first national infrastructure assessment will provide an evidence-based and expert-driven assessment of Canada's infrastructure needs over the coming decades to tackle climate change, support our quality of life in big communities and in small ones, and enable our economy to flourish. The assessment will better enable infrastructure planning and will be available to all orders of government as well as the private sector to help them make informed decisions on future investments.

Throughout, we are leveraging partnerships, both public and private, and developing innovative means to get infrastructure built for Canadians. These include, for example, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, the \$10-billion growth plan that involves investments in five key sectors: public transit, clean power, green infrastructure, broadband, and trade and transportation projects.

We're committed to supporting families and communities to ensure that infrastructure all across the country is safe and reliable while protecting people as well as we can from the effects of climate change and creating economic opportunities and quality of life, from housing to active transportation.

Mr. Chair, I'm looking forward to a conversation with colleagues.

[Translation]

Thank you for taking the time to hear from me. I apologize once again for what happened two weeks ago. I am very happy to see you and I am looking forward to seeing you in person soon.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

[English]

I think I speak on behalf of all members of this committee when I wish you a speedy recovery.

The first round of questions goes to Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Lantsman, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

• (1115)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks for joining us, Minister. I do hope you feel better and that you're back in person when you are good and ready.

I want to zero in on the departmental results report from 2020-21. The actual spending on public infrastructure was 30% below the planned spending. That's a shortfall of \$2.8 billion, yet the administrative spending of the department was increased by almost the same amount. I want to know why your department is spending billions more and ostensibly achieving much less.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Ms. Lantsman, thank you for the question.

Obviously, over the last two years, a number of federal and provincial infrastructure investments have been affected by COVID—the planning, some of the work and some of the costs have gone up. I've had these conversations with provincial ministers, premiers and mayors across the country. I acknowledge that some of the investments in infrastructure projects across the country have been made more complicated. The good news is that we

continue to approve thousands of projects and proceed in collaboration with municipalities and provinces in a way that we think is important.

With respect to the administrative costs of the department, the infrastructure department is a relatively new department. In my briefings with officials last fall, when I assumed the portfolio, I was surprised by the extent of the policy capacity in the department, such as the things that Environment and Climate Change Canada was expecting us to act on as part of a tackling climate change plan. Some of the internal capacities had to be built into the department. That may explain some of these administrative costs.

If you'd like, Ms. Lantsman, the Deputy Minister could perhaps give you a very clear answer on that right away.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Yes, that would be good.

Firs, I want to make it clear that the administrative costs and the policy capacity accounted for some of the \$2.2 billion, because Canada's total expenses jumped from \$5.5 billion to \$7.7 billion in 2021, but no infrastructure was actually built. I'll continue those questions, but if I'm hearing this correctly, then \$2.2 billion, or at least some of that \$2.2 billion, is administrative costs for policy capacity in the department.

Ms. Kelly Gillis (Deputy Minister, Infrastructure and Communities, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Perhaps I can add to that.

During that particular period of time, we also adjusted our programming to create something called a "COVID stream". During that time, we changed our terms and conditions to have projects to a maximum of \$10 million to be COVID-resilient while we're living in this particular environment. We approved almost 2,000 projects worth \$2 billion, so a high volume of projects went through.

However, because they were about changing infrastructure to allow for social distancing, putting in ventilation and HVAC, they were lower value projects, with a maximum total of \$10 million—but a very high volume went through the department. We saw the flow and the volume coming through at a much higher pace, but the value was not as high for each individual project. That also accounts for some of the workload within the department during that particular period of time.

Since COVID came into place, we've approved 4,500 projects, worth \$15.5 billion. There's a lot of economic activity going on.

Thank you.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Knowing that I don't have that much time, I want to zero in on the following.

Minister, at the end of your opening remarks, you mentioned the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I want to point out that the Parliamentary Budget Officer released findings last March that projects partnered with this bank have absolutely no private sector investment committed to date. That includes projects listed on your own website. Those are the PBO's words, not mine.

Can you tell me, Minister, how much private sector investment or private sector dollars have been invested in this process to date?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Ms. Lantsman, that's a very good question. The Canada Infrastructure Bank has advanced 33 projects to date, committed over \$6.3 billion of Infrastructure Bank capital and attracted an additional \$6.7 billion in private and institutional investment.

I'm happy to get you the exact breakdown of the private versus the institutional, but that \$6.7 billion is both private investment and institutional investments. I'm thinking of some utilities in Atlantic Canada, for example, that might be provincial crown corporations, but that may have used the Infrastructure Bank.

We can get you a list if you would like from the Infrastructure Bank. I'm happy to provide that.

• (1120)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Given how slowly the Infrastructure Bank projects have come to fruition, or not come to fruition in terms of their completion—though I do understand that some of them take a very long time—would you say that the Infrastructure Bank, in terms of what it was set out to do, is a success?

The Chair: Give a 20-second response, please, Minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Yes, we think it is. We think it's part of the mix of tools that will help Canada for a generation build the kind of public infrastructure it needs. Whether it's broadband access in Manitoba, transit access in some big cities or potential green energy projects in Atlantic Canada, like the Atlantic Loop, we think the Infrastructure Bank is part of the mix of tools that a government can use to leverage other partnerships, but also contribute in a way that Canadians expect us to in order to build that infrastructure.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Iacono, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, had you not mentioned it, we wouldn't have been able to tell you were feeling a bit under the weather. It is always a pleasure to see your great smile.

Minister, the maintenance, modernization and development of infrastructure for the well-being of all Canadian communities are at the heart of your department's mandate.

In part of my riding, work on the Highway 19 extension project was able to begin after our government invested \$260.4 million.

Can you explain to us the importance of that kind of a project and the resulting benefits?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Iacono, thank you for your comments. Of course, I would have liked to join you in person, but maybe next time.

You mentioned your riding, in Quebec. You are absolutely right. Traffic congestion significantly impacts not only greenhouse gas emissions, but also people's quality of life, be it in your area or in other regions. This is often an issue that affects people who live in the suburbs of big Canadian metropolises.

We feel that the Highway 19 extension is the perfect example of the government working with other levels of government to find a way to improve public infrastructure efficiency, but also to reduce traffic congestion and give residents a more effective and safer way to participate in the economy or in other social activities.

It is a perfect example of the type of project we would very much like to make progress on, be it in Quebec or in other provinces. I am very encouraged by the conversations I have had so far with my provincial counterparts and with the mayors of a number of Canadian cities.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: A biomethanization plant is supposed to be built in my riding. Can you tell us what the benefits will be for Laval residents, both economically and in terms of quality of life?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, Mr. Iacono, you are much more familiar than I am with the details at the regional or local level.

That said, this is an example where Infrastructure Canada and potentially the Canada Infrastructure Bank, which Ms. Lantsman brought up earlier in one of her questions, have an opportunity to participate in the funding of public infrastructure, which is essential for these kinds of investments.

Of course, the private sector invests a huge amount of its own money in a number of industries or industrial complexes in Canada. Often, the infrastructure around a project that is important for the regional economy is key for unlocking private investment that may contribute to the local economy. That is actually often the topic of my discussions with Canadian ministers or mayors.

• (1125)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: In my riding of Alfred-Pellan, there is a real need for community facilities for young people, but also for seniors. What are the department's commitments in terms of carrying out those kinds of projects during your term?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I completely agree with you, Mr. Iacono. You have actually shown continued leadership for a number of years on the national seniors caucus.

I am seeing an essential need in terms of community facilities for young people and seniors across Canada, in cities large and small. I represent a fundamentally rural riding where the largest municipalities probably has 5,000 people. Community groups or small municipalities often lack the means to manage existing infrastructure, be it in terms of improving accessibility for people with a disability or reducing the energy costs of maintaining and operating that kind of community infrastructure.

Over the next two years, we will invest \$1.5 billion specifically to build that inclusive community infrastructure. Moreover, we will focus on what we can do to reduce the emissions from that infrastructure, which was often built 30, 40 or 50 years ago and which will benefit tremendously from the investment.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I have one last question for you, Minister.

[English]

What measures is the government taking to ensure that infrastructure projects are effective in reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, Mr. Iacono, that is a critical question. It's one that our department spends an enormous amount of time focusing on.

Our department has participated in elaborating Canada's climate change plan, and therefore a number of the emission targets, a number of pathways, to get Canada to meet and exceed its international commitments in terms of greenhouse gas come from investments in public infrastructure. Obviously, *transport en commun*, transit, is an obvious one, but to your previous question, smaller community projects that can be net zero or much more energy efficient also contribute.

We're very much embedded in the government's effort to fight climate change. A lot of the different programs are based on analyses of what we can invest to reduce the overall footprint of particular infrastructure projects.

Thank you for the question.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, go ahead for six minutes.

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

Welcome, Minister. We are happy to be hearing from you today. I hope your health will improve over the coming weeks.

In your opening remarks, you said that adapting to climate change was important for you and that you have made investments

for that purpose. Of course, those initiatives are quite commendable and necessary. However, I have noted that those investments were used mostly in situations where there was some sort of extreme pressure on infrastructure or during climate disasters.

You said you represent a predominantly rural riding. My riding also has largely rural parts that are also affected by climate change, but not of the natural disaster variety.

I will talk to you about a specific case involving ferries. At certain locations on the Richelieu River, where there were ferry crossings in the summer, there were ice bridges in the winter. Management of those ice bridges has become impossible, so people can no longer cross the river to get to the other shore in winter.

I searched through programs available at Infrastructure Canada, at Transport Canada and at other departments, but I have not managed to find a fund that would be used to remedy those kinds of issues.

Is your government interested in those types of situations and could there be relevant initiatives in the future?

• (1130)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I thank Mr. Barsalou-Duval for his question.

The country was indeed tremendously concerned by the fires in western Canada and by the floods that destroyed infrastructure in British Columbia last fall. Those are examples of rebuilding megaprojects, and we can all work together to build resilience through those projects. As you are saying, that does not change the fact that we need to invest in smaller projects that are directly related to climate change.

I was not aware of the ice bridge situation in your riding. However, New Brunswick has the exact same kind of a problem. My colleagues have often told me about the ferry that crosses to Rivière-du-Loup, making it possible to get to New Brunswick.

So we are seeing infrastructure that was once adequate, but that, for financial or other reasons, can no longer be supported today by small municipalities or community groups that used to ensure its operation.

I will not hide the fact that the federal government could buy ferries. Provincial premiers have suggested this to me. They are apparently using the example of the CTMA ferry, which goes to the Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

It would be my pleasure to discuss these kinds of issues with you, as I am very interested in them. The example is pretty interesting.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you for the answer, Minister.

I am rather talking about ferries on waterways, such as rivers, where it was once possible to manage ice bridges. Of course, I am not talking about places with a very large distance to cover, as in the case of the Îles-de-la-Madeleine. To get there, you practically have to cross the ocean, or at least part of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. So I'm talking about specific cases, which are surely found on the Ottawa River, for instance.

My second question for you is about the active transportation fund. Your government has been working on that for over a year, and that is very honourable. This is a \$400-million fund for projects. A number of announcements have been made concerning the fund. However, no agreement has been signed with Quebec to give it access to the fund in order to implement active transportation initiatives.

In my riding, for example, the City of Boucherville would like to build a bike path along the Louis-Hippolyte-La Fontaine bridge-tunnel to give pedestrians and cyclists access to the Îles de Boucherville. This is a major project that has been generating a great deal of enthusiasm in the community, but the city cannot submit a request to get access to that kind of funding.

Will a relevant agreement soon be signed with Quebec? That would be important for the province.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I completely agree with that.

A week or two ago, I had pretty encouraging discussions on this with Quebec Minister Sonia LeBel. We discussed that program in particular, as well as other issues related to housing. I definitely don't want us to be in a situation where highly valuable projects in other regions may be carried out more quickly than projects that are just as valuable in Quebec, be it in Boucherville, which I am somewhat familiar with, or in other regions of the province. I am convinced that we will find a solution. That underpinned the very informative conversation I had with Ms. LeBel, a person I really like. Our senior officials actually met specifically to discuss a potential agreement.

I don't want us to end up missing the construction season, which will begin in a month or two. Many of those projects can move forward over the next few months.

So everyone is getting to work. I am very optimistic.

● (1135)

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

The simplest solution would be to transfer directly to the Government of Quebec its portion. That way, it would have access to the funding.

My understanding is that people have until March 31 to submit a request, so I am worried that Quebec may not be able to have access to an adequate portion of the funding by then. The money should not be sent elsewhere, leaving Quebec with crumbs.

Can you assure us that this won't happen?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I can assure you that we will not transfer money to the Government of Quebec with no visibility or with no role for the Government of Canada. I actually teased Ms. LeBel about that. She was talking about block transfers. I told her that we were allergic to blocks. We had a laugh over that.

So we want to transfer money to Quebec, but we will find an agreement, as we have done for a number of other sectors, such as housing and infrastructure. Quebec's priorities will be respected. We will approve projects that will benefit Quebec citizens together, be it in your riding or elsewhere in the province.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I would like to ask another question—

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

[English]

The next six minutes go to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is now yours.

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

Welcome, Minister. It's great to have a minister from a rural riding who understands the needs of rural communities.

If you know about the place that I represent, it's a very rural place, very spread out, and with many small communities that have infrastructure needs. I have a lot of questions on a whole suite of topics, but I want to start out with the community of Stewart, on the northern coast of British Columbia, right up against the Alaskan border.

I was talking with the community leaders. They have a lot of challenges with high-speed Internet; they don't have it. They have low-speed Internet. The local service provider that provides fixed wireless solutions for the residents is totally maxed out. People get five-megabyte service, and there's so little broadband available that the service provider can't add any new customers, so the community can't attract any new residents or any new business.

Now, the local service provider applied to your universal broadband fund with a solution that would have increased service for the residents and allowed the community to expand; however, the government turned down their application. I'm wondering if you can speak directly to the residents and the community leaders in Stewart and tell them what the path forward is. What role will the federal government play to ensure that they get high-speed Internet, given that the government has turned down the application that the community supported moving forward?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I'm a bit familiar with your riding. I grew up as the son of a fisheries minister in the seventies and eighties. We spent an enormous amount of time travelling with our dad to communities big and small on all of Canada's coasts, and obviously I have been back numerous times in my current role, so I'm familiar with your constituency a bit.

I'm not familiar with the specific issue in the town of Stewart, but it identifies a much broader problem, as you correctly note. The Infrastructure Bank was able to contribute at one point to some broadband accessibility and connectivity in the province of Manitoba. The universal broadband fund, as you said, has done a number of projects, often in partnership with provinces. The big ones—Ontario and Quebec—have suited up.

I've had conversations with Premier Horgan specifically on how we can work together and use the universal broadband fund or other infrastructure types of investments to support what is a critical, critical piece, as you said, not only of the economic and social development of these communities, but it's now becoming part of virtual medical care. There are so many reasons why this is critical infrastructure now. I'd be happy to look at the particular case of Stewart and get back to you to see, Mr. Bachrach, what we can do to follow up on that one example, unless any of the officials who are joining us have—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: My time is very short here, Minister, so if you don't mind, I think I'll move on to the next question—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: But I would be happy to get back to you with that specific example of Stewart.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I really appreciate it. Looking into it would be much appreciated.

My next question is about the active transportation fund. I think a lot of communities really welcome the creation of that fund, but there's some frustration with it as well. Smaller communities especially are struggling with the very short application window. I believe it's a nine-week application window. Given that the ATF is a five-year program, will there be another application period for communities that aren't able to apply in this first window?

• (1140)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Absolutely. Again, one of the challenges—and maybe we have similar constituencies—is that the smaller communities often don't have the in-house capacity in a municipal government or a community group to be able to fill out endless bureaucratic pages and different analyses, some of them engineering documents. I think we have a built-in dysfunction around the capacity of different groups—usually smaller centres—to be able to access these programs, so I'm working with the department to figure out a way that we can perhaps extend some capacity-building to these groups.

To your point about the active transportation fund, our colleague Andy Fillmore from Halifax was working with former minister McKenna, who was a big champion of this, and absolutely, we're not going to create a situation where one deadline [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to get a first tranche of projects out will close the door on other communities being able to apply. As I said, I think we'll go further by actually figuring out a way that we can give resources to the smaller communities so that they're not frustrated or

end up submitting something that's incomplete, and then end up in a situation where it's denied, as opposed to being approved, because the application was missing a particular technical document that a group of volunteers can't put together.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Very briefly on that, Minister, I think the expectation is that the fund is going to be oversubscribed in the first intake. Is it the government's intention to have a second intake even though it will be oversubscribed for the first one?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Yes. I will not authorize all of the funds to be expended in the first intake.

Mr. Bachrach, we live in eternal hope that these funds can also be increased.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes, absolutely, and I would support that fully, Minister.

As my last question, on the active transportation fund, applicants are wondering when the criteria and the evaluation process are going to be made available. We're over four weeks into what is, I believe, a nine-week application window, yet applicants still aren't clear on how the department will evaluate their proposals.

Is that information going to be forthcoming?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I hope so.

Mr. Bachrach, perhaps the deputy minister can give you a very precise answer on that. I don't know that.

Kelly, do you have a precise answer for Taylor?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you, Minister.

I don't have an exact date, but I will get one for you very quickly. I know the department is working on it. A number of webinars and information have recently been put on the website and we are answering a number of questions from recipients across the country.

I will ask the department for a date and see if I can get one before the end of this session.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thanks, Ms. Gillis.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach, and Ms. Gillis.

To kick off the second round of questioning today, we have Mr. Muys.

Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Minister, let me echo the sentiments of all in wishing you a speedy recovery. Best wishes in that.

Getting back to the mandate letter, because we have gone down the bunny trail on some specific projects, it tasked you with removing internal trade barriers and reducing supply chain bottlenecks in Canada's transportation networks. We know from discussions over the years that red tape and duplication of regulations have certainly been identified as major barriers to internal trade.

Maybe you can speak a little bit about how you're going to address that, maybe specifically what some of the hurdles are that you're going to reduce and plan on eliminating.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Muys, it's a very important part of the mandate I have as the intergovernmental affairs minister for the reasons you said. It does seem strange that there are...and every Liberal and Conservative government for the last 20 years has made significant progress, but we don't seem to be able to get the fine series of exemptions to the Canada free trade accord that was signed five or six years ago. There are still schedules attached to it that list a whole series of exemptions where different governments advance a particular reason why we can't have across the country a true free trade context.

To your point, you're absolutely right. I share entirely your connection of that issue to some of the fragility of supply chains that we have seen during COVID and certainly during some of the events of the last number of weeks.

I remain quite optimistic. My colleague François-Philippe Champagne and I have a number of provincial and territorial ministers who would be our counterparts on the internal trade file. A number of premiers have kept internal trade as an area of responsibility for themselves. I have had extremely encouraging conversations with Premier Kenny, Premier Houston, Premier Ford, a number of premiers who really want us to finally drop the last remaining number of barriers. It would add immediately to the GDP of the country. It would also secure some of the supply chains.

It does seem rather bizarre that we could renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement with the Trump administration in the United States, and we haven't collectively as a federal government and provincial governments found a way to make our own domestic market truly free.

A final point is that the Government of Canada does not come to that conversation with clean hands, in the sense that we as a national government still have a few remaining barriers that the finance minister and I are working on eliminating. If we want to speak to some provinces that are perhaps less enthusiastic than the ones I mentioned, the Government of Canada has to be able to show what we have done within our jurisdiction. Financial services and food and agri-food industries are the obvious ones that keep getting raised.

I'm enthusiastic about the progress we can make in the next few months.

• (1145)

Mr. Dan Muys: I'm flipping back to infrastructure, because that's certainly the bulk of your responsibility, or an important part of it from our vantage point in the discussion today.

If you look at the mandate letter, there are 24 different commitments for you to deliver on. In addition to the interprovincial responsibilities, which you've talked a little about with regard to internal trade, there are four things. They have to do with leaders' debates in elections, foreign interference in elections, participation in elections, as we've just seen—under ongoing events with COVID—and security of parliamentarians and ministers. Those are important things that in themselves could take up all of your time.

How are we going to balance that with the importance of infrastructure? You've been left with a department that, from our vantage point, I think needs reorganizing. You talked about 33 projects on the go, but in a country as vast as Canada, that seems paltry. There's a lot to do, and these other things seem to be perhaps taking up too much of your time.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, I appreciate our colleague's concern.

I think all of these various issues can be managed in an effective way. I have a lot of confidence in the senior officials at the infrastructure department whom I've been able to work with over the last three or four months.

I also recognize, for example, that the Prime Minister left me with what had been the democratic institutions portfolio at the Privy Council. To your example, issues of disinformation are obviously of huge concern, not only with what we're seeing happening in Europe but also events here in the last number of weeks.

I can be busy on a number of fronts. The intergovernmental affairs portfolio, not only in the COVID context but in the regular federal-provincial conversations as well, requires a certain amount of time, but I'm quite confident that I'll find a way to do all of it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

The next five minutes go to Mr. Chahal.

The floor is yours.

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, Minister. It's good to see you. You're looking great and healthy on my screen. I hope for the best in your recovery in the upcoming days. Thank you for joining us.

For me, your department is extremely essential to the work we're doing across the country. In my community in Calgary Skyview—I was a city councillor in 2020—we were devastated in June 2020, during COVID, with a hailstorm. It cost \$1.5 billion in terms of the damage; there were over 70,000 claims. Deerfoot Trail was under water; the airport tunnel was flooded. It caused extensive damage.

We didn't see much or any response from the provincial government to support our community. For months, nobody showed up to help us in our recovery.

With more extreme weather-related events, what programs are available to directly help our communities adapt and prepare infrastructure for events like these?

• (1150)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, through you to our colleague Mr. Chahal, thank you. I'm happy to see you as well. I don't have as elegant a backdrop as you do. I'm at home in Moncton.

I have visited Calgary many times. I used to hang out in Calgary with your brother some years ago. I am very familiar with your city.

To your point, I remember the devastating consequences of sudden and severe weather events. In my conversations with both our finance minister and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, one thing is on how we can use infrastructure programs—either create new ones quickly or add flexibility and funds to existing infrastructure programs—precisely to be able to respond not only to the circumstances of what happened in your city of Calgary, but as we rebuild damaged infrastructure, to do so in a way that we're not back at it again in three years because there's been another extreme weather event.

We have the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund. That's one example. Since 2018, the Government of Canada has put out about \$3.4 billion to help communities rebuild and remain more resilient in the face of natural disasters created by climate change.

We've announced \$1.9 billion of funding for 69 projects across the country to look at exactly those kinds of threats: wildfires, floods, drought. We're looking at a series of smaller-scale projects that can be applied for, and we launched an intake for small- and large-scale projects, including a guaranteed \$138 million being set aside for some of the indigenous communities that are also very much affected by this.

I think we could do more, Mr. Chahal. I think we have to do more. My conversations with the finance minister are encouraging in terms of our ability to step up. The example in your city is sadly one of many across the country.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you for that, Minister.

Going over to the importance of public transit, my constituency has the Blue Line. It is some of the highest used public transit in the city of Calgary, with the bus routes and the Blue Line, but we need further extensions to the Blue Line. The Green Line is also being built towards my community. There are, potentially, opportunities for rail to the city of Edmonton and to connect our downtown, our airport and the mountains.

How will investing in modern transit create jobs and investment for our city moving forward?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That's a great question, Mr. Chahal. With your experience in municipal council, you would have seen the importance of the Green Line project to Calgary's light rail transit system. The Government of Canada, I think, contributed about \$1.5 billion.

We're very open to working with municipal and provincial partners on the Blue Line. These are, in our view, essential projects for the sustainable economic development of communities like yours, but they also speak to the quality of life, as you say, for Calgarians and for people who go to Calgary for work and perhaps live in other communities.

One of the things we announced in 2021 was the permanent public transit program with almost \$15 billion over eight years. The mayors and transit authorities always say to us that you can't give a short amount of time even if it's a big quantum of money. They need to do the planning and the environmental assessments. You would know that from your experience in municipal government more than I would. These are complicated undertakings, so to have a longer runway and more sustainable, predictable funding will allow us to do projects like the Blue Line in Calgary.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

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

Minister, you have been asked a number of questions about the Canada Infrastructure Bank so far, and I think there are good reasons for that. Although it is already a few months old, a report published by the Parliamentary Budget Officer in 2021 states that, out of a total of \$12.5 billion set aside for projects, only \$2.5 billion come from the private sector. When the government announced the setting up of the bank, it was a matter of investing one dollar for every five dollars from the private sector. Yet, currently, 20% of the funding is apparently coming from the private sector, rather than 500%. Based on the rule of three, the \$2.5 billion invested by the private sector accounts for 4% of the \$62.5-billion objective, for an equivalent project value.

Are you happy with the outcome in terms of the promises you made?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: No, I am not yet satisfied, as you say, with the ability of the Canada Infrastructure Bank to go out and seek private partnerships. That was one of the reasons why, at the time, the government created the bank through a budget. The bank was certainly delayed in the first year or two before it was operational, but those delays are behind us. The bank is now up and running and is involved in many projects across the country. I have seen the list of projects it is evaluating: it is reassuring and impressive.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So you are telling us that we will see an increase soon.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Yes, absolutely.

We need to increase private funding. Like you, I am not yet satisfied with the bank's ability to raise funds from private investors as a complement to its capital investments. I have also expressed this to the chair of the bank's board of directors.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: The Infrastructure Canada portfolio has changed hands a lot. From 2015 to 2019, Mr. Champagne was head of the department. Then, from 2019 to 2021, it was Ms. McKenna. Now, in 2022, it is you who holds the post.

How can you explain that? Is it because it is a difficult department? Is it because there are challenges in terms of effectiveness? Are there important things to do that the ministers before you failed to do?

[English]

The Chair: Would you give a 10-second response, please, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You forgot our former colleague Amarjeet Sohi, who is now the mayor of the City of Edmonton. He was the first to serve as Minister of Infrastructure and Communities after our victory in 2015.

When Ms. McKenna decided not to run for re-election, the Prime Minister had to choose someone to replace her in last fall's cabinet shuffle. I have to tell you that I am extremely pleased that he chose me.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

[English]

Next we have Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Ashton, thanks for joining us at committee today. The floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

• (1200)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Excellent. Let's try that again.

Mr. Minister, just today the IPCC released a new report warning that climate change, which is already deadly, is about to get much worse. Your government has acknowledged that urgent action is needed to tackle climate change. Today, you have talked about the need to invest in infrastructure relating to climate change.

We also, though, have an infrastructure bank that could be doing this work, investing in infrastructure that mitigates climate change,

as well as helping communities adapt to this devastating reality. This committee, however, has heard that Canada's infrastructure bank is running on a parallel track, focused on profiteering and not helping those in greatest need.

My private member's bill, Bill C-245, aims at shifting the mandate of the Infrastructure Bank, by using public ownership to mitigate climate change and by investing in infrastructure desperately needed by vulnerable communities, such as indigenous and northern communities that are already paying the price of climate change. These projects focus on mitigation as well as adaptation, including the transition from diesel to green energy, to all-weather road construction, to forest fire protection, to public transit and so on.

Given the sense of urgency once again reiterated today, will you and your government support Bill C-245 ?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Ms. Ashton, thank you for the question. I'm happy to see you.

We've taken note of it. The government has not yet taken a position with respect to that private member's bill. We have a process. It's the cabinet operations committee that I chair that looks at different private members' bills. We've certainly taken note of it, but the government has made no decision yet with respect to that. I'm happy to continue the conversation with you as well.

I recognize that the Canada Infrastructure Bank has to really step up in helping, and not only large projects...whether they're transit projects or green energy projects.... In Atlantic Canada there's the Atlantic Loop, which would potentially bring renewable energy to maritime provinces, for example. Those are megaprojects where the bank, we hope, can play a constructive role in Canada's fight against climate change.

To your point, you represent a huge swath of northern Canada. I've visited your riding as well a couple of times, and I think what you said is absolutely true. The tools the Government of Canada has to help smaller indigenous communities or smaller community groups, municipalities, with their climate change mitigation and adaptation needs have to be varied.

It's great that the Infrastructure Bank can buy zero-emission buses. It's great that we can work on big projects like the Atlantic Loop, but I do recognize and agree with you that there is a gap that I'm certainly happy to commit to try to close with those smaller community projects. I think the green and inclusive community buildings fund will, hopefully, in indigenous communities and some smaller remote communities, offer at least a start in that work.

I'm happy to continue the conversation with you, including projects in your own riding, Ms. Ashton, where we can hopefully suit up.

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

Finally, we have Mr. Jeneroux followed by Mr. Badawey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jeneroux, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us virtually here today.

I want to drill down a bit on some of the comments and questions coming from Ms. Lantsman's opening round of questions.

You stated that there were \$6.7 billion in private and institutional investment. According to your website, it's actually \$7.2 billion, so I'd hate to think that you lost half a billion, Minister. I'll leave it to you to explain the difference.

Then you go onto the website and look at who some of these partners are and it's very clear that there are other municipalities. For example, for the New Westminster bridge, the partner is actually the Government of Canada, which is you, Minister. The other interesting one is the Montreal international airport REM station. Again, the Government of Canada is the partner.

In my own city of Edmonton, the partner for the zero-emission buses is the City of Edmonton. There's only one taxpayer. Does that mean me as a taxpayer and the City of Edmonton are doubly on the hook for the Infrastructure Bank investment?

• (1205)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I would think, as a property taxpayer in the city of Edmonton, you would really be doubly on the hook if the Government of Canada didn't partner, for example, with the City of Edmonton on some of the zero-emission buses or transit priorities. Often, as you correctly note, the partner in some of these large-scale projects—particularly for public transit and light rail—is often other orders of government, such as municipal or provincial governments.

As for your specific question about the Infrastructure Bank, I'm going by the briefing notes that I was given, but the deputy minister joining me is very familiar with the Infrastructure Bank funding of different projects. Mr. Campbell could answer your question precisely right now if you'd like.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Getting something back to the committee would be helpful for all of us, Minister.

If the solution is to partner with other levels of government, then you can do that as an infrastructure announcement. I think I asked the same question at committee back in 2018. Since 2015, the Infrastructure Bank has had \$19.4 billion invested in it. How has it really helped get any infrastructure built in this country?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: For example, it has done a very significant investment with the Six Nations of the Grand River in Ontario in energy storage. The Infrastructure Bank has made significant in-

vestments in rural broadband in Manitoba. We talked about zero-emission buses across the country and energy retrofits with SOFI-AC in Quebec. I know that the Infrastructure Bank is working with utilities in Atlantic Canada around a green energy loop.

I don't share your pessimism in terms of the bank's ability to add value. I do agree with you that it has to also raise its game in terms of the private investment that it attracts. It shouldn't be another line of programming from an infrastructure department. I take your comment entirely at face value. I think the bank, and my job as minister responsible, is to tell the board of directors and the chair of the bank that the government has certain expectations for them in terms of policy direction.

You're absolutely right that leveraging greater private investment has to be one. I totally get your point that if all of the partners end up being other public entities.... It doesn't mean the mayors don't try to unload a whole bunch of different projects across the country on the Government of Canada, but at the end of the day, as you say, it's the residents of a city or the taxpayers in a particular jurisdiction that are contributing in different ways. In some cases, we can leverage other investors.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I know we have a solid chair in Mr. Schiefke who will cut me off, so in the 30 seconds I have, would you be able to get back to the committee, Minister, on how much of that \$6.7 or \$7.2—whatever is the accurate number—is actually private investment? Looking at the website, it's really clear that a lot of it is just municipalities and other levels of government.

Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Absolutely, Mr. Jeneroux. I'll make sure that we get back to the chair of the committee with a detailed breakdown of what in my notes says is \$6.7 billion. If it turns out to be half a billion more, great, but I'll happily get that breakdown for you.

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

Minister, I want to give you a huge thank you for appearing before our committee today. It is always a pleasure. You are welcome back any time.

Feel free to disconnect. I know that you have other things going on today.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I look forward to seeing all of you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Colleagues, we will go to the second part of our meeting. We have witnesses appearing from Infrastructure Canada: Ms. Kelly Gillis, deputy minister, infrastructure and communities; Alison O'Leary, senior assistant deputy minister, communities and infrastructure programs; Erin Lynch, associate assistant deputy minister, communities and infrastructure programs; Nathalie Bertrand, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer for corporate services; Glenn Campbell, assistant deputy minister, investment, partnerships and innovation; and Gerard Peets, assistant deputy minister, policy and results.

To begin the third round of questioning today, we will go to Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Lantsman, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

• (1210)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Thank you to the officials for joining us virtually today.

I want to go back to the Infrastructure Bank. We heard from the minister. We know that projects take time, so we can dispense with that. The CIB has been in existence now since November of 2017. That's five years. Can you tell us how many projects—just the number—this delivery model has actually built?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: The Canada Infrastructure Bank is involved, as the minister mentioned, in 33 different projects. A number of them are under way. As we know, large infrastructure projects do take time to complete, so none are completed, but infrastructure projects like the REM in Montreal are well advanced.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Thank you very much. So “none” is the answer. I just wanted to make that clear for all Canadians, because I don't think we got that in the last round.

I want to know if the department thinks that this delivery model, which has built absolutely no projects, is seen and viewed as successful.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: What I can say is that the demand for infrastructure across the country is large. When we look at the tools to be able to get the infrastructure we need as a country, we need to look at different models in place and different tools at hand. The Canada Infrastructure Bank is one tool of many that we have.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank looks at trying to bring in both private sector and institutional investment. I know that StatsCan has a different definition for public versus private and institutional that goes into the public domain. I think that is an important tool so that the building of the infrastructure is not completely on the tax base of Canadians. That's where the innovative model of the Canada Infrastructure Bank comes in.

They are advancing, and have made progress in the last couple of years on different projects and an array that the minister has [*Tech-*

nical difficulty—Editor] to advance the needs of Canadians and the need for infrastructure in this country.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

I want to stay on this. We heard claims of a bold multiplier effect of 2:1, 4:1 and even higher, of all of this private capital that you've talked about just sitting and waiting to jump on big projects. But what we are seeing now is essentially a version of corporate welfare.

The shadow critic for infrastructure raised the issue of Fortis Inc. with the previous minister. That was a company that made \$9 billion a year—but we could cite almost any of the projects on the list. My predecessor asked the former minister—she didn't answer, so I'm wondering if we can get an answer from officials—about that multiplier effect, about private capital, and about whether you think this is at all successful, given there is so little in terms of accomplishment of actual projects or private capital coming into what you call a “bank”.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: As we look at the infrastructure that we need, the Infrastructure Bank has advanced on 33 different projects. They are bringing in institutional capital. We do want institutional capital investing in Canadian infrastructure. It brings in a different discipline in terms of innovation and a risk transfer to different projects that are important. As I mentioned, it's one tool of many that we have for advancing infrastructure needs within the country.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I want to just change gears, because I know that I just have a few moments left.

Ms. Ashton raised the green and inclusive community buildings program, or perhaps it was the minister who did in response to her question. The program was established early last year, and the applicants were required to submit their proposals at the beginning of July.

Many not-for-profits, including many in the area that I come from in the GTA, had spent thousands of dollars putting together environmental audits to ensure that they met the terms and conditions of this program. They're desperately waiting for decisions. It's been seven months and there is no sign of life from any official in the department. Will there be a call to any of these not-for-profits? Has the minister asked for an update from the department on any of these applications that not-for-profits, particularly in the area that I come from, have spent thousands of dollars trying to put together?

• (1215)

Ms. Kelly Gillis: That particular program has been seen as extremely relevant and therefore popular, so we have hundreds of applications that are in the final throes of being evaluated. I would think that you will see, in due course, some outcomes and some decisions on that particular program. There was a handful made just before the election, and then more will be coming in the weeks and months to come.

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

The next six minutes goes to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you to all the officials with us today. It was great to see the minister participate in our committee work today as well. Certainly, we always look forward to having a minister visiting and providing information to this committee.

For the officials, I have a few questions relating to rural and northern communities and many of the challenges they face when it comes to infrastructure and other issues of trying to stay in touch with today's world.

How is the Canada Infrastructure Bank helping to attract investment to address challenges with broadband across the country, specifically with a focus on rural and northern communities, Ms. Gillis?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: One of the priority areas of the Canada Infrastructure Bank is to invest in broadband for rural and remote communities. They have made some investments like the Manitoba fibre project and have made agreements with Quebec and Ontario, so they have a pillar, and they're looking at approximately \$3 billion of investment in that particular area.

As the minister so articulately outlined, the importance of broadband for Canadians is an area that the Canada Infrastructure Bank is advancing and continues to advance.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you very much.

I was fortunate to be able to participate in an announcement with the Minister for Rural Economic Development, Ms. Hutchings, in Newfoundland and Labrador just this past week where we partnered with the province on a \$136 million investment—\$116 million federally and \$20 million by the province—to advance Internet services across the province. It's a great investment that we're very excited about.

Many smaller and rural communities, particularly, have sometimes been discouraged from applying for funding due to the complexity of applications and the process. It's a very laborious process with a lot of challenges for small municipalities with not a lot of staff to assess these. How are you working with smaller and rural municipalities to ensure that they can apply for programs such as the green and inclusive community buildings fund, and how do you ensure the fairness and accessibility of these programs for the smaller groups, municipalities and indigenous communities?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: That is a really important question, and I know the minister is quite keen on making sure that we have the appropriate tools and support for smaller communities. One example of that was within our rural transit fund. It's a new fund that's dedicated solely to rural communities and it has a planning component to it, so we're giving grants of up to \$50,000 for smaller communities to think about and design how transit can work within their particular communities.

There are other programs, like our green and inclusive buildings program. There are programs that are much smaller, in our components streams, that are for smaller projects of under \$3 million.

There's a lighter application process so that smaller communities can access the fund in a more streamlined way.

We are constantly looking at our programming and adjusting accordingly, as we did with our disaster mitigation and adaptation program. In our first round of \$2 billion, all projects had to be a minimum of \$20 million. That wasn't accessible to smaller communities. They rarely have projects of that magnitude, so in the second top-up of \$1.4 billion, half is dedicated to smaller projects from \$1 million to \$20 million, and there's 10% set aside for indigenous communities.

Those are some of the ways that we're making sure that what we're doing is relevant and accessible to smaller communities, and we'll continue to try to focus and adjust accordingly as smaller communities need the infrastructure to be able to support their communities going forward.

• (1220)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you for that. As a former president of the municipal sector in Newfoundland and Labrador, I understand the many challenges that a lot of these very small municipalities face. That's why the question is important, and I'm happy to see that we're making progress.

I have one final question. In the minister's mandate letter, there's a reference to the Newfoundland and Labrador fixed link. The Canada Infrastructure Bank signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador with a goal of expediting further capital and user assessment. The CIB was aiming to complete this study by the winter of 2022.

I wonder if you could give us any kind of update on where that study is, and if it's still on target for the winter of 2022.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: To answer that particular question, yes, that study is under way and I understand that it is on track to be completed this winter. Discussions between Newfoundland and the Canada Infrastructure Bank are under way.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you very much. I'm happy to see that the target date is being met.

Mr. Chair, are we...?

The Chair: You're just about done, Mr. Rogers. You have 10 seconds left.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Given that, I'll forego the next question. There's not enough time.

Thanks.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Ms. Gillis, I was talking to Minister LeBlanc earlier about the Active Transportation Fund, for which no agreement has yet been announced. The same thing could be said, in a broader sense, about the money for public transit. An Infrastructure Canada press release on its website states: “[...] discussions are ongoing between the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec regarding the implementation of this program in Quebec [...]”

Do you know when this agreement might be reached? Will there be an announcement about it soon?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you for the question.

As the minister mentioned, there are discussions going on and we are trying to move them forward. There was one with Minister LeBel recently. I don't have an expected date for an agreement, but discussions are ongoing.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I am asking you this question because I have the impression that, every time the federal government announces infrastructure programs, everyone in Canada has access to them before Quebec. This ends up causing problems.

To take this thought a step further, I would mention that not long ago, the Auditor General of Canada was critical of the Investing in Canada plan, saying that Infrastructure Canada had failed to report satisfactorily on the progress of the distribution of funds, because it was not done quickly enough.

Don't you think that the policies in place at Infrastructure Canada are hindering the flow of funds to Quebec?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Under the Investing in Canada infrastructure program, the bilateral agreement we have with Quebec is progressing very well. We have already announced many projects in Quebec. About 56% of the funds have already been approved for projects. So, it's progressing very well in terms of the investment plan.

As for the new programs, discussions are underway, as the minister mentioned.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you for your reply.

However, when we look at things closely, the picture seems to be different. The Auditor General still said it wasn't working. We talked about the Canada Infrastructure Bank earlier, and we saw that the projects seem to be having trouble getting off the ground as well.

There is also the fact that there have been several ministers...there was Mr. Sohi, then Mr. Champagne, then Ms. McKenna, and now it's Mr. LeBlanc. We feel there is no stability in the department.

Is it the constant change of ministers that has created these problems or is it a structural problem within Infrastructure Canada?

• (1225)

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Since 2015, Infrastructure Canada has approved and announced 10,617 projects, with funding totalling \$43.9 billion. That's not counting gas tax projects, Infrastructure Bank of Canada projects and major bridge projects, such as the new Samuel De Champlain Bridge.

Since 2015, then, there are a lot of investments that are working and projects that are moving forward in the country.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: From your side, you say that the balance sheet is positive. I understand that whenever a dollar is invested in a good project, it can only be positive. At the same time, it seems to take a long time for the money to reach its destination. Indeed, according to commentators and independent analysts, such as the Auditor General, the money is not getting out of Infrastructure Canada fast enough, generally speaking.

How do you explain these different interpretations of the situation? Is it just a matter of perception?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Actually, there are two things to consider.

Firstly, the economic activity starts as soon as the project is approved. That's when the project can go ahead and individuals, municipalities or communities can start hiring the engineers and planners and spending the money. In order for the funds to be released to the community, the community must first send the invoice to the province, in most cases, and it is then forwarded to our department.

On the other hand, as I said, just in our programs alone, there are over 10,000 projects, for which the funds total \$43.9 billion. That is a lot of money. These are projects that have already been approved and have begun to generate economic activity across the country.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: The government itself recognized a few years ago that Canada had a significant infrastructure deficit. I believe it feels the same today.

In addition to this infrastructure deficit, we see that money is not flowing as quickly as it should for projects.

Do you think Infrastructure Canada will be able to solve this infrastructure problem, or will it get worse?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you for the question.

Many countries are currently looking at this issue and doing analyses.

That's why we launched Canada's National Infrastructure Assessment last year, to establish a discussion with the different levels of government and the different stakeholders in the infrastructure field. We need to determine our needs between now and 2050. There are a lot of demands. We need to plan together how we are going to work to improve this situation.

In the spring and summer of last year, we had quite intensive engagements to look at this. We're still working with the provinces, territories and communities to define the needs so that we can come up with a plan based on good data.

Australia, New Zealand and the UK are working on these types of issues as well, that is to say, how to develop a long-term plan and investment in the infrastructure that will be needed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gillis and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

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

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

Welcome to all of the officials.

Ms. Gillis, I'd like to start with some questions about public transit.

I think the local government sector across Canada, especially larger cities with big transit systems, were pleased to see the government's recent announcement of \$750 million to support the operating shortfall that those systems are facing. Given the urgency of the situation that a lot of transit agencies are facing, could you provide some sense as to when those funds are going to flow to municipalities?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just before I get to that, I promised you an answer on your question from before.

• (1230)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes, thank you.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Actually, the assessment guide, including the evaluation criteria, is on our website. It's in section 4.3. I'd be happy to send that particular link to the committee chair so you all have that information. As well, we're doing webinars right now and trying to answer any questions people have as they're going through the application guide and the assessment criteria.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's fantastic. I think that question was formulated back when the minister was scheduled to first appear, so they have probably been posted since that time.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Sorry. No, they were posted prior to that, so—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay. That is good to know.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Going back to your question on public transit, it is a very important area that we are investing in and looking at advancing. Certainly, with regard to the operating budget shortfall that different transit agencies have advanced, they have been speaking with the Department of Finance and working with it on the particulars, including the commitment of provincial-territorial matching and some of the requirements for advancing housing needs within communities.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Is there no specific timeline at this point?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: That would be with the Department of Finance. It would have a better appreciation of the advancement of those conversations.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thanks, Ms. Gillis.

On that same topic, the announcement of the \$750 million came with an interesting condition on provinces to meet certain benchmarks when it comes to housing supply.

I'm wondering if you could speak to how your department measures that and what those benchmarks would be. When do you know that the provinces have satisfied those criteria and are able to access those funds?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: For the operating budget commitment that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has made, that is with the Department of Finance. It is looking at the details of those particulars regarding both the provincial-territorial matching and any particular housing commitments with the discussions with those municipalities that would need it for those transit authorities.

It's similar to the safe restart agreement where that particular fund or that particular transfer is not through our ministry, the infrastructure department.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thanks, Ms. Gillis.

I'll move on to something that I think does fall within this department, the national infrastructure assessment, and in particular the appointment of the independent advisory body that's going to inform that work.

Could you speak to the process for appointing the members of that advisory body? In particular, will there be a role for Parliament in that process?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: As we have gone through the extensive consultations and we've posted a what we've heard report, you will have seen that it's very important that we're basing infrastructure decisions on a body of evidence and experts.

What we are working on right now is what the governance would be and how the process would work. We are still working on some of the details of what that particular institution would be, what the process for engaging would be and what the governance of it would be.

There were a number of different comments. We've received over 300 submissions with different views. Those are all being taken into consideration as we look at the next steps and the actual structure of that particular body.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: On the same topic of the national infrastructure assessment, other jurisdictions that have done assessments like this, and I'm thinking of the U.K. in particular, have essentially put into place accountability frameworks that have reporting to Parliament on whether or not the government is meeting the objectives that are set out in the infrastructure assessment. Instead of being a snapshot in time, it's an ongoing process with accountability built in.

Is the government looking at a similar framework for this country's national infrastructure assessment?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: We have engaged the U.K. and are looking at their model. We've also engaged Australia and New Zealand. We're looking at all the different models that countries have put in place. Sir John Armitt has come and spoken with us a few times about their particular model.

As I said, we're determining now what the different options are for its governance and structure and are learning from others in how they've done their particular national infrastructure assessments.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'll turn now to the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

We've had some great questions from the committee. Obviously there's a lot of frustration that the bank is simply not living up to its promised mandate and that the track record so far is pretty lackluster, to say the least.

One of the frustrations is that the bank's mandate is quite narrow. What we saw in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report on the bank is that all these communities were putting forward projects to the bank, because, of course, communities have infrastructure needs and they see this as one of the potential funding sources, yet I believe 45% of the submissions to the bank were rejected because they didn't meet the bank's narrow criteria around private sector participation and also around being of a certain size to justify the bank's involvement. The number I have is 189 projects were rejected based on those criteria. I wonder if this doesn't speak to the fact that the bank is not meeting the needs of communities, especially small communities that really need to see their infrastructure funded.

I need to phrase this in a way that's not hypothetical.

Does this not point to a need to revise the criteria of the bank so that it's really speaking to the needs of communities, especially small communities such as the ones in northwest B.C.?

• (1235)

The Chair: Mr. Bachrach, unfortunately we're going to have to wait until the next round for a response to that question.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Sorry.

The Chair: Next we have Mr. Dowdall.

Mr. Dowdall, you have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you as well to all our guests who are here today.

As someone who was a mayor for quite some time, I think probably the number one thing that most mayors and everyone wants to do is get shovels in the ground. It was certainly a priority when I was a mayor, and it's a priority now. I have seven towns and townships in Simcoe—Grey with many needs, and I understand, quite frankly, that we need large, different infrastructure, even for lending the money out for certain projects that are larger than the municipalities—say, connecting different towns and cities together. I understand that. I think it would be a lot easier, and maybe I could get your thoughts on it, that when the gas tax was introduced, it gave us an opportunity that's sitting there—and it's a frustration I get—to have reliable and stable funding to know how to move forward.

To give you insight into what goes on outside Ottawa, the politicians who are in those areas know their area. It costs a lot of money to get these applications going forward. You get your planners and engineers, and you do up the application. Then you sit and wait, and it's like a lottery to see if you get the money or don't get the money. Some of these towns and townships don't have that much money to begin with when it comes down to just getting into the application process and for the size of the project.

I wonder if there's any thought or insight into that we make it similar to the gas tax, other than those huge projects, for every town and township, so we don't create winners and losers. I know that's a frustration. If they know what that is, it's easier to do a large project

and to do a debenture if you know those funds are coming in. Could you comment on that process?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: I think that goes back to having an array of tools. You need a spectrum of different tools to achieve different objectives. The gas tax is one tool that certainly has a simplification in administration, but it also has been criticized by the PBO and the Auditor General from a transparency and accountability perspective.

There are different pros and cons to using different tools, and as we're looking at getting certain outcomes within the country, whether it's GHG reductions or inclusivity, or other tools. We have programs that are designed to get certain outcomes. It's by having a range of different tools that you can get the infrastructure that you need built.

That also goes back to the national infrastructure assessment that we were talking about a minute ago. As we look at the long term and making sure that we have the right evidence and information to make informed decisions as we're moving towards a net-zero 2050 and have the infrastructure we need for Canadians and a good standard of life, the gas tax is a very important tool, as well as others, in achieving that.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: I guess the follow-up to that is, if we knew what those moneys were to go to, at least they would know how much they're getting each year to do that. I just know it's very expensive for all these towns and townships to go through the process and just then hope.

Anyway, I'll go to something else quickly. In March 2021, the Auditor General found that half of the investing in Canada plan's reporting did not include programs that pre-dated its creation, even though they made up almost half of the \$188 billion in commitments. The problem was flagged in 2017 and 2019, but to me, it doesn't look like it was acted on. The auditor also determined that a fifth of the planned spending was unspent in the first three years of the plan and was moved to later years.

Simply put, half the investing in Canada plan reporting was for projects done before it existed, and a fifth of its funding was pushed to further years.

Can you tell me how this was able to go on for so many years?

• (1240)

Ms. Kelly Gillis: When we look at the investing in Canada plan, at this point in time we have \$118 billion out of \$188 billion to approved projects. We are six years into the particular plan. As we look to move forward, half of the programs in there have actually been completed or have exhausted their funding. This information is all on our website.

In terms of the Auditor General, for the programs that were in existence but still active when the plan was created, their recommendation to us was something called a “horizontal report”, a template given by Treasury Board Secretariat for us to include the legacy programs. Because those programs were in existence when the plan was created, at the time, Treasury Board Secretariat did not require us to include it in the report. The Office of the Auditor General, when they did their report last year, for a more complete reporting, asked us to do so and we committed to do so starting in 2022-23. Therefore, in the coming months you will see, as part of the supplementary table, that particular report include our legacy programs.

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

Next we will go to Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. O'Connell, welcome to the committee today. The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you to all of the officials for being here today.

I want to clarify some things on the record that I think were unclear. I want to make sure there are no misperceptions out there.

Earlier, in the panel with the minister, as well as in this round, it was suggested that no infrastructure is actually being built. First, can we clarify that piece?

Secondly, then it was suggested with the minister that his portfolio is so large and there are questions that only 33 infrastructure projects are being undertaken at this time. However, to clarify, those 33 projects are actually the Canada Infrastructure Bank's, not the totality of the infrastructure portfolio.

Then, Ms. Gillis, you spoke about 10,000 projects currently under way, worth about \$83 billion. Can we get some clarity on the record that there are currently significant amounts of infrastructure not only being built but also have been built, and that the 33 projects are specific to the Canada Infrastructure Bank and not the entire infrastructure portfolio?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you for the question. I'm very happy to clarify.

First, the 33 projects that were mentioned, both by the minister and me, are the Canada Infrastructure Bank's and only the Canada Infrastructure Bank's.

The 10,600 projects that I mentioned are the projects that have been approved for the various programs, not including the gas tax, here at Infrastructure Canada as a department, worth \$43.9 billion of federal investment. On top of that, we've also approved \$17.5 billion in the gas tax. The gas tax goes to about 3,600 communities for about 4,000 projects every year. Hence, there is significant activity that has happened since 2015 in infrastructure, both being built, having been built, and active right now, with that volume of investment.

Those numbers that I just quoted do not include the 33 projects; I'll put that aside. That's almost \$20 billion of separate investment that the Canada Infrastructure Bank oversees.

There are two other major projects that I have not mentioned in there, which is \$11 billion worth of investment, both the Gordie Howe International Bridge, which is four years into a six-year build, as well as the new Samuel de Champlain Bridge, which is built and in use in Montreal. Therefore, significant investments have happened since 2015 through this ministry, with a lot of infrastructure projects that are completed as well as being built.

I'll turn maybe to my assistant deputy minister Alison O'Leary. She might have a bit more on the built and under way.

Ms. Alison O'Leary (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Communities and Infrastructure Programs, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Absolutely, and thank you.

I think one thing that's important to remember is that the figures the deputy minister was mentioning are for projects that have been approved. Once we approve projects, proponents can start construction right away, as long as any conditions associated with that approval have been met. They can begin their construction, and they do. Then we receive the claims for those projects coming in as the construction progresses throughout the life of the projects. The economic activity starts as soon as the projects are approved and any associated conditions have been met.

Thank you.

• (1245)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's perfect. Thank you so much for that clarification.

With 10,600 projects and \$43.9 billion, and then an additional 3,600 through the gas tax, certainly the Conservatives' suggestion that this represents no projects.... I mean, that's a significant amount of investment in communities right across this country that the Conservatives downplay as absolutely nothing being built.

Coming previously from municipal politics as well, I know how significant it is to get that approval process. We have, in this country, construction seasons in certain parts of the country. If contractors tend to be busy, that can delay projects and things like that, but can you maybe speak to—because you touched on it, Ms. Gillis, in the earlier round—the issues around COVID and some of that, in getting those after approval by municipalities or community groups and indigenous organizations, to then engage with contractors, as an example, causing some of the delays...? Can you maybe elaborate on some of that experience and the work that you and your department are doing to ensure those approved funds translate into shovels in the ground?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Certainly.

When COVID arrived, we looked at all of our programming to see what would be relevant and appropriate in the context of living in a pandemic. We adjusted our integrated bilateral agreements to create something called a “COVID stream”. In that particular stream, communities, provinces and territories could look at projects that would be making communities more resilient to living with COVID, such as doing HVAC, ventilation and social distancing.

Within that stream, we allowed a 10% transfer of funds from other streams into that particular stream—optional. Provinces and territories could determine whether they wanted to avail themselves of this particular option. The maximum project value was \$10 million, and we created quite a streamlined process to approve projects within 20 working days so that we could make sure they could be done fast and could be done quickly and get into the communities while we are living with COVID—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gillis. Unfortunately, that's the amount of time we have for that round of questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

My question is for Ms. Gillis and concerns the much talked about high frequency train that has been proposed and announced on multiple occasions by the government.

The high frequency train was in the mandate letter of the former minister, Ms. McKenna, but it is not in the mandate letter of the current minister, Mr. LeBlanc.

So I wonder if the department is still involved in some way with this project or if it is no longer part of their plans at all.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you for the question.

In fact, this is part of the mandate letter of Minister Alghabra. He is responsible for the project, in conjunction with Transport Canada. The file is moving forward.

There is also a joint project office at the Canada Infrastructure Bank and Via Rail. Our department as well as Transport Canada are working with these agencies to move the project forward.

In addition, our team, with Glenn Campbell, is working on the issue of expertise with respect to other forms of funding.

Maybe Mr. Campbell can add a few words about this project.

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Campbell (Assistant Deputy Minister, Investment, Partnerships and Innovation, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Yes, I'd be happy to.

With respect to the high-frequency rail project, Infrastructure Canada is providing technical support for planning and advisory services to our colleagues as they prepare for this project, and I would refer to Transport Canada to speak to any of the merits of the project.

We're also facilitating the supporting work of the Canada Infrastructure Bank towards a joint project office, where they are collaborating with Via Rail again on the long-term planning of that project. We are very happy to provide our technical expertise in P3 and alternative finance to our other department that is leading that project.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: In that case, I will yield to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We have Mr. Bachrach for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours.

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

I'm going to try to put a bit more of a point on my last question from the last round.

The question, Ms. Gillis, is really whether, given the well-documented shortcomings of the Canada Infrastructure Bank and the challenges it has faced, there has been an internal discussion at the department about adjusting the mandate of the bank to better meet the needs of communities.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: As the bank has advanced and evolved, it has made tremendous advancements in a number of projects over the last couple of years. It is now at 33 projects with \$20 billion worth of investment. I would think, as is done for any tool, the bank has a legislative review at five years, and that would be the appropriate juncture to look at the mandate. That happens with any Crown corporation over a period of time.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Ms. Gillis, to shift gears a bit, when the Auditor General looked into the investing in Canada infrastructure program, one of the things that were found was that the sustainable development goals were not being considered when project applications were being assessed. Has that been formally addressed in the review process?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: We do submit our sustainable development goals through the horizontal reporting through Employment and Social Development Canada, but the Auditor General would like us to also include those goals in how we report on that—and that, again, is under way and being done. That was being done, but it was just that they were being reported through a different mechanism.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Will they be formally included in the assessment of project applications as well as in the reporting?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: They are. They're actually very similar when we look at transportation needs, reduction of GHGs and the off-diesel initiative. Those are consistent outcomes we look for in sustainable development goals and our other goals and in what we are looking for within our projects.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Can I sneak in one more question, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Perfect. That's lot of time.

Can you confirm for the committee that the Gordie Howe International Bridge is still on track for completion in 2024?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: The private partner is still working towards the 2024 completion, yes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much, Ms. Gillis.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Now it is time for Mr. Muys, who will have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you.

Let me just pick up a couple of threads from the earlier conversation. My colleague asked about the green infrastructure fund and community groups and organizations that are waiting for an answer on that. As well, Mr. Bachrach spoke about applications through the universal broadband fund that the minister spoke about specifically in his community. I know there are many in my constituency as well.

These are urgent projects, and the need is very real. What is the holdup? Is there something that can be done to expedite that? The answer seems to be that it's coming, but can you be more specific than that?

Ms. Kelly Gillis: The question about the universal broadband program is for our colleague department, Innovation, Science and Economic Development, although we do fund broadband through the integrated bilateral agreements and have funded approximately two dozen projects across the country for broadband. So those are advancing, and we do have a 60-day business turnaround time for our integrated bilateral agreements, and we have now advanced to having about 4,700 projects under the integrated bilateral agreements, for just over \$20 billion.

The green and inclusive community buildings program was launched just last year, but during an election period we do not advance anything as we do not have a government to approve projects. It is extremely relevant across the country, and we have hundreds of project applications before us, on which decisions showing the various project approvals will be made imminently.

• (1255)

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you. I'll look forward to those.

One of the things that have been concerning in the pandemic that I know everyone has thought a lot about is the rise in mental health issues, and one thing that's helpful in addressing mental wellness is recreational facilities. I recall back in the early 2010s there was a federal program that made some infrastructure investments in recreation—in things like conservation trails, conservation areas and hockey rinks. I know in my own constituency that was the case, and I think there was tremendous value from investment there. I'm wondering whether the department has any plans to resurrect that or

whether that falls within other programs currently under the bailiwick of the department.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Yes, if I look at the integrated bilateral agreements, I see there is the community, culture and recreation stream of \$2 billion that provinces and territories can avail themselves of. Certainly you just mentioned the green and inclusive buildings program, but also we've recently launched—it's been mentioned here—a \$400-million active transportation program, which can fund walking trails, bike trails and footbridges to allow for outdoor use and active transportation for people to deal with health and mental wellness.

I'd also point to a program that we launched called the Canada healthy communities initiative, for \$31 million. It was, again, a pandemic-related program that is about making small investments in communities for healthy communities. That was another area that can get at things like pop-up bike lanes and ways to make our communities healthy as we try to get outside or do different things while we're living in a COVID environment.

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, how much time is left?

The Chair: You have two minutes left, Mr. Muys.

Mr. Dan Muys: Okay, there's time for another question, then.

One thing that the Ontario government is investing a lot in in southern Ontario is its highway infrastructure. Particularly in proximity to me, the 401 and 403 are important trade corridors and among the busiest highways in the world.

I recall a lot of federal and provincial co-operation during the great recession on highway infrastructure projects to make improvements to highways and rehabilitate bridges—that happened around me—and I'm wondering whether there are similar initiatives amongst those 10,000 projects that we heard about.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: When we look at trade corridors, we see there is a program at Transportation Canada called the national trade corridors program that has invested in a number of different, really important pieces of infrastructure that deal with trade and transportation. When we look at some of our urban highways we see that we've had the building Canada fund, which historically funded a number of different investments in that area.

In our more recent programming here at Infrastructure Canada, we're funding more public transportation to deal with some of the congestion and mobility issues that we need in our communities rather than urban highways.

If we look at some of our rural areas, though, we see of course that this is eligible under our rural and northern fund, under the integrated bilateral agreements. As well, in any community, under the gas tax or the Canada community-building fund, roads are eligible.

Those would be some of the programs I would point to for those types of investments.

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

We now turn the floor over to Mr. Badawey for two and a half minutes.

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

I have a quick question to members of the team. As you may recognize, the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence municipalities continue to move forward with a great deal of economic, environmental and cultural infrastructure work. Some of that work includes dockage and wharfage along the Welland Canal to strengthen multimodal trade corridors, water, wastewater including mitigating combined sewer flows, stormwater management, mitigating eroding shorelines, and all of this based on natural disasters, fluctuating water levels and 100-year storms now occurring within five-year increments. Finally, there are investments in strengthening the Great Lakes cruise industry, as well as ensuring cleaner beaches that at times, as you know, experience postings due to high E. coli counts.

Can you speak to what the department is doing to leverage investments in our local-level communities that are working to ensure they become more resilient?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1300)

Ms. Kelly Gillis: When we think about resiliency and adaptation, this has been raised as a really important area of opportunity. We have been working on some of the upstream work with communities and researchers such as through codes and standards with the National Research Council, with the Standards Council of Canada, as well as with really important investments through our disaster mitigation and adaptation program. Through this we have funded 69 projects worth almost \$2 billion. We have launched a small stream and a large stream—they closed just before the holidays and we're doing the evaluation of them now—which will be important investments in resiliency across the country.

As we look at some of the risks they are facing, collaboration with communities in these important investments is important work going forward. As the minister said, it's a priority for him and an active part of how he's looking at the investments that are needed within the country going forward.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey and Ms. Gillis.

[*Translation*]

I thank the witnesses very much for their presence today and for their contribution.

[*English*]

Thank you, colleagues, for your interventions today.

That ends the proceedings for today.

This committee is now adjourned.

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