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Thursday, May 27, 2010

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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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•(0835)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Thank you, and good morning, everyone.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, meeting number 19.

Orders of the day are pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the main estimates of 2010-11. Today, we're dealing with votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 70, 75, and 80, under Transport, referred to the committee on Wednesday, March 3, 2010.

Joining us today again is the Honourable John Baird, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, and beside him, representing the Department of Transport, Ms. Yaprak Baltacioglu, Deputy Minister; André Morency, Assistant Deputy Minister; and, under Infrastructure Canada, Mr. John Forster.

As is the procedure to open the meeting and hear from the minister and his comments, I will call vote 1, and now the meeting shall open.

Minister, I know you have an opening comment. I welcome you and ask you to proceed.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the members of the committee for their work during the last session. In a portfolio as important and as diverse as this, cooperation is key as we take action on issues that matter to Canadians. Guided by our economic action plan, our government has made significant investments in this portfolio in the transportation mode and the vital infrastructure area of the country.

In Transport, we've made significant investments in all areas related to safety, security, the environment, and trade and infrastructure.

[Translation]

All of these investments contribute to Canada's reputation of having a transportation system that is among the strongest, safest and most secure in the world.

[English]

It's a transportation system that ensures that Canada remains not only economically competitive but a global leader.

However, today I would like to focus my remarks on the government's commitment to the environment, as demonstrated through our unprecedented investments through Infrastructure

Canada's green fund. The investments we're making in green infrastructure are improving the quality of the environment and leading to an improved economy. Through federal infrastructure funding, we are supporting projects that help protect and improve the environment by focusing on issues that matter to Canadians, such as cleaner air, cleaner water, renewable energy, and diverting solid waste from our landfills.

One significant vehicle for these investments is our green infrastructure fund announced in Budget 2009.

[Translation]

The Green Infrastructure Fund was designed to provide funding for public infrastructure that will improve the quality of the environment and lead to a more sustainable economy over the longer term.

[English]

Every project we have funded under the green infrastructure fund is done in partnership with our provincial, territorial, and, importantly, our municipal partners. To date, federal funding totally almost \$627 million has been committed to 18 projects across Canada. Added to this funding is \$1.5 billion from our partners. As minister of this portfolio, I'm proud of these positive effects the projects will have on both Canada's environment and on our economy.

In Ontario, we're providing \$234 million for eight projects to improve waste water treatment, all of which are cost shared with the province. Take, for instance, the upgrading of the Woodward Avenue waste water treatment plant in Hamilton, Ontario. By reducing pollution in Hamilton's harbour, we are making environmental improvements that will help us meet our country's obligations under the U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Green infrastructure funding support from the federal government is some \$100 million.

In the north, we're helping to protect the environment by partnering with the Yukon government and the Yukon first nations on the Mayo B hydro facility and the Carmacks-Stewart transmission project. By building a new powerhouse at the Mayo hydro facility and connecting Yukon's two grid systems, the generation and distribution of clean energy, as well as the reliability of hydro for communities in the north, will be greatly increased. Due to Yukon's current reliance on diesel for much of its electricity, this project is expected to reduce forecast diesel generation in 2012 by some 40%. In turn, this will reduce greenhouse gases from energy production by 50% from the current levels. GIF is providing \$71 million for this project.

• (0840)

[Translation]

I want to highlight as well the partnership we have established with the government of Quebec for projects in six municipalities that will gradually reduce landfill needs and generate green energy from waste in the province.

[English]

These *biométhanisation* projects involve building anaerobic digesters that will process tonnes of organic municipal solid waste per year rather than sending it to a landfill. In addition, they turn garbage into fuel. The capture of methane results in a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and is used as a source of power.

[Translation]

Let me give you a concrete example. In Longueuil, the methane will be used to power a fleet of 78 municipal buses. Green Infrastructure Fund support for these projects totals more than \$170 million.

[English]

In Saint John, New Brunswick, nearly \$10 million of green infrastructure funding is supporting a district energy system that will capture waste heat, which is currently being discharged into the environment as hot water or steam, from existing industrial operations and will distribute heat to 14 different downtown buildings. This will eliminate the use of oil, electricity, or natural gas for space heating and domestic hot water and will result in a reduction of up to 16,000 tonnes in greenhouse gas emissions every year.

As you can see, we are very proud of the quality projects supported by the GIF and the positive effects it will bring to communities and to our environment. But the green infrastructure fund is not the only way we are supporting environmental improvement. We are making funding investments through all of our infrastructure programs.

[Translation]

Infrastructure projects such as green energy, energy transmission and waste management are at the very heart of all of our funding programs.

[English]

Every year the Government of Canada provides some \$2 billion in base funding for municipalities through the gas tax fund. Municipalities use this funding to support environmentally sustainable infrastructure, including waste water infrastructure. In addition, to date we have committed almost 35% of the \$8.8 billion Building Canada fund and one-quarter from the \$4 billion infrastructure stimulus fund for projects that support green priorities such as green energy, solid waste management, water, and waste water. For example we've supported the Summerside wind farm, a project in Prince Edward Island, with \$4.5 million from the Building Canada fund. This project will allow the Island to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce its dependency on out-of-province electricity, meaning that city funds can be redirected to other community improvements.

We recognize the importance of waste water treatment systems and the beneficial effect for the health of Canadian families and the environment. We are working across the country to help municipalities upgrade their waste water infrastructure and to meet the upcoming implementation of a new regulatory framework. For example, across a number of our programs we are contributing to improving the quality of water in the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence basin, supporting our obligations under the Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Through the Building Canada fund, the Canada strategic infrastructure fund, and the green infrastructure fund, the Government of Canada has invested some \$600 million in waste water projects in the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence watershed.

[Translation]

Making Canada greener is a priority for this government, and we are working closely with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners.

[English]

The main estimates that are before us are directly linked to funding top-quality, cost-effective, green public infrastructure. I look forward to chatting with you today on these issues.

I'll make one final comment. We have great news out of Lansing. Jeff Watson and I were down in the Michigan capital yesterday morning and we got another hurdle through the House of Representatives in Michigan by a vote of 56 to 61, supporting the DRIC process. It now goes to the Senate in Michigan. So we're one step closer, but the Senate will prove to be tougher than the House. We had good support from the Democrats—and in Canada from the New Democrats.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. John Baird: Joe Comartin and I are talking regularly on these issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I know all of us share in the good news.

Mr. Volpe.

•(0845)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Minister, Madam Deputy, and your associates as well.

I wonder if I can do the same thing the minister did; that is, instead of looking at the estimates, perhaps ask a couple of other questions that might be related to some of his portfolio.

You know that we're looking at Bill C-442, a Holocaust monument act.

Hon. John Baird: Could you repeat that?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: The Holocaust monument act.

I'm wondering whether you're prepared to seek a royal recommendation in order to build that Holocaust monument, especially under the estimates that provide you with a substantial amount of money under real asset management.

Hon. John Baird: There's no doubt about it that I am very supportive, the government is very supportive, of building a Holocaust memorial. I would certainly be prepared to look at public funds to support that. I've had good discussions with Tim Uppal about that.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: You're very supportive of building it, but I asked you whether you're actually going to use government funds—

Hon. John Baird: I'm very prepared to look at funding and providing funding to support it.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: So you're willing to give a royal proclamation to—

Hon. John Baird: As far as a royal recommendation of the bill, if that was one of the ways to do it, you bet.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: So then we can expect support from your colleagues on that side of the table as we finish up the bill in the next couple of days.

Hon. John Baird: I'm prepared to work with the committee on that, no doubt.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: On the Toyota file, I'm wondering if you could address a couple of issues very quickly.

The last time you were before us you gave us an indication of several things. One, you were going to provide information; we have it. Secondly, you were prepared to be as rigorous as possible in enforcing the Motor Vehicle Safety Act irrespective of its limitations, to the point of calling in the RCMP. Have you in fact done that?

Hon. John Baird: One of the challenges in the Canadian system that's different from the American system is that, as a cabinet minister, I'm not allowed to direct a criminal investigation, nor am I allowed to direct that criminal charges be laid. I could ask my deputy minister to comment further on that.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Before you do that, with no disrespect, it's not that your government hasn't asked the RCMP to look into infractions of laws other than this one. What would prevent you from actually making the call or writing the letter and saying simply that it has come to your attention that there may be a possible breach of the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and would you please look at it?

Hon. John Baird: Well, right now, the issue is currently under investigation by the department. I'll ask my deputy to give you a more specific response.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: If she could be brief, it would be helpful.

Hon. John Baird: She's brief, thorough, smart, savvy, sharp.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I wonder why she's working for you.

Hon. John Baird: It's always smart to put a good deputy with a minister like me.

Ms. Yaprak Baltacioglu (Deputy Minister, Department of Transport): The department is in the process of looking at the technical documents that we have asked for from Toyota since their appearance in front of this committee, because they made some comments. We have been back and forth with them, asking for all additional information. These are technical issues. We have to understand who knew what, when, and when did they let us know. We can't really call in the RCMP based on a suspicion or a perception, so we're trying to get the fact. And we're moving as expeditiously as possible, because it's a critical issue for Canadians.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you.

Mr. Minister, are you asking cabinet to put aside more money for your department, in order to beef up the department that looks at precisely what the deputy is suggesting they're doing—in other words, the identification of defects department or branch of the Department of Transport?

Hon. John Baird: If the department feels they need more resources to deal with safety, I'm surely prepared to take it up with my cabinet colleagues, but I have not got that request at this stage.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: If I can go back to your success in Lansing, I'm just wondering whether you think the \$550 million offer that you laid on the table for the Michigan legislature had anything to do with your success.

Hon. John Baird: I think there's no doubt that the State of Michigan has some significant financial pressures. That was a significant issue for legislators. This has been done in the past, but the other way around, where the Americans supported the Blue Water Bridge in Sarnia.... I think there's no doubt that it assisted.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Did you ask the Auditor General whether that \$550 million would pass her examination?

•(0850)

Hon. John Baird: Well, the Auditor General doesn't give pre-clearances. She's the auditor after the fact. She will not give a pre-clearance on any issue before government.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: So did you ask the justice department whether it was a legitimate offer for you to make?

Hon. John Baird: We're comfortable with it. I should underline that it's up to \$550 million. It's not a loan to the State of Michigan. It'll be part of the P3 project.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: But it's all going to be paid for by tolls, as you put it.

Hon. John Baird: Correct.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Bill 4961, which passed the legislature yesterday, has provisions in it for a P3 model that will operate independent of any oversight by the legislature or in fact the government on either the Michigan side or the Canadian side.

Hon. John Baird: It will be overseen by MDOT in Lansing.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: No. That's not how that is being read by others. I'm just wondering, when you asked Justice for the approval to make that offer...whether in fact you would be giving over access to \$550 million without any proper oversight for the organization that would be actually managing that money.

Hon. John Baird: Of course, there has to be oversight. There must be oversight. Absolutely.

What we've done is we've made an offer of assistance in terms of how the financing is put together. We've got 11 kilometres in Ontario. We've got I think a little more than a kilometre to the I-75. It's quite a complex interchange. What we've done is we've said that we're prepared to work with MDOT on the financing of it and that money would be further recouped by taxpayers. It was out-of-the-box type of thinking. We want to see the project go forward. It has taken many years, and I think it's been pretty well received by labour, by the auto sector, by local elected officials—

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Let's say it's not a unanimous view, because there are those who think this falls under the potential consideration of the Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act. I don't know whether you'd like me to read some of the sections that it comes under, but have you looked at that at all?

Hon. John Baird: I don't share your view.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: It's not my view.

The Chair: I have to stop it there.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: It's the view of the public that is considering this.

The Chair: Monsieur Laframboise.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, I have two or three questions. The first is about infrastructure programs. There are a number of them. It is quite complex. I have a pretty good understanding of this area, but I still have questions about the perception that Quebecers have right now.

I read the estimates for Infrastructure Canada. They indicate that the funds for the Communities Component of the Building Canada Fund for 2010-2011 have all been committed. All the funding in the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund has been committed, as has the money in the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund. Furthermore, I have a note from a government member in Quebec. I will not say his name, because I do not want to cause trouble between Quebec and Ottawa. In the note, he tells municipal officials that Quebec is waiting for an agreement with the federal government to be signed or ratified before announcing new investments. The Web site of Quebec's department of municipal affairs indicates that all applications must

be submitted to the Quebec-Building Canada Fund. It seems as if there is a lot of money.

I know that you will not have time, but I would like some clarification on the situation, Mr. Minister.

Hon. John Baird: We are prepared to send you a copy of our agreement with Quebec for the Building Canada Fund. It is working rather well. I think that in the case of large municipalities, the majority of large-scale projects have already been announced. I believe that 83% of the projects, which is 18 projects, have already been announced, and that represents more than \$1.2 billion. It has been signed; we can give you a copy of the agreement with Quebec.

Furthermore, in terms of the Building Canada Fund, an agreement has also been signed for small municipalities with less than 100,000 residents. We are also prepared to give you a copy of that agreement. In the budget, yesterday, further to Canada's economic action plan, there was an additional \$500 million approximately. There is no provincial allocation, but I can say that Quebec is receiving its share, nearly 23% of the fund. We can give you a copy of that agreement, if you like.

● (0855)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Great, I could meet with your officials to—

Hon. John Baird: No problem.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Perfect. Thank you.

My second question has to do with the estimates. They say that \$50 million has been earmarked for support related to the G8 Summit. Has that money been spent, has it been committed? We have seen that security costs for the G8 Summit are high. Has any other money been allocated, apart from the \$50 million in the estimates?

[English]

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Forster?

[Translation]

Mr. John Forster (Associate Deputy Minister, Infrastructure Canada): I can answer that. Under the project, \$46 million has been approved, and approximately \$30 million has been spent. The project has to be completed by late June, before the summit. A few months later, we will receive all the bills.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: It should not exceed \$50 million, right?

Mr. John Forster: It should not be more than \$50 million; it will probably be a bit less than that.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Obviously, in your estimates, amounts have been allocated for gateways and corridors. There is the Asia-Pacific Gateway, and funds were allocated for that, but there is still the Ontario-Quebec Trade Corridor. I know that you allocated money for 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, but is there a plan? Who is working on that? What efforts are being made to support the Ontario-Quebec Trade Corridor?

[English]

Ms. Yaprak Baltacioglu: There is work going on between Ontario, Quebec, and the federal government concerning the corridor. We're in the process of getting our approvals. However, the critical component of that gateway is the actual Windsor-Detroit crossing, be it the bridge or be it the rail tunnel that proponents are working on. We're working on all of the pieces, and there has been good cooperation.

Because of the infrastructure stimulus fund and the economic action plan, we have taken many steps in terms of putting in projects on the ground, such as the investment in the port, which has been part of the gateway discussions. But they were already funded under the stimulus funding.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Have funds already been committed in Quebec? Will more money be committed?

Hon. John Baird: We have not spent all the money; there is still some left. There are also funds for projects that have not been announced, such as the highway connector between the Canadian bridge/plaza in Windsor and Highway 401. Partnerships between Michigan and the United States are pending. We have already announced some funding for the project, but it is not enough. More money is needed. It is very clear to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation that the \$400 million announced will not be enough. It is really not enough. We will continue to work with ministry officials. I believe 20% of the products transported by truck across that bridge are the result of trade between Quebec and the U.S. This project will affect Quebec's manufacturing sector.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Will you sign an agreement specifically with the government of Quebec? Do you anticipate something like that?

[English]

Ms. Yaprak Baltacioglu: This is not an agreement per se. It's a strategy that goes beyond money. It is important to look at regulations of the two levels of governments, important for industry to participate. There are actions industry could take. This is more of a getting together and working on a strategy so that we can have trade moving north-south, from the Quebec-Ontario corridor to the United States.

[Translation]

Hon. John Baird: We are prepared to provide information on Quebec's participation. We have done a lot of work on a policy called the Ontario-Quebec Continental Gateway and Trade Corridor. The Building Canada Fund is ready to support the projects, further to our agreement with Quebec or Ontario.

• (0900)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Chow.

[Translation]

Hon. John Baird: It is more than what Quebec receives under the Building Canada Fund.

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Last year, your government eliminated the money for police patrol at the airport and at the same time aviation security had a cut of a total of \$50 million. We notice that the airport security charge has gone up anywhere from, on domestic flights, \$14.96 to \$25.91, or close to \$26 for international flights.

Is that money going directly to security or is it going into general revenue? Is it used for buying those big naked scanners at the airport? Is it being used to hire more inspectors? Since self-regulation was put in, in 2003, by the former Liberal government, there has been quite a lot of concern about safety. So how is this money used? Is it specifically for security or is it general revenue?

Hon. John Baird: The \$1.5 billion charge over five years will all go towards that.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It will go towards security?

Hon. John Baird: It will go for security under CATSA and others.

We have committed to give this committee—a proper oversight committee—a complete accounting for how the money will be spent, so that taxpayers can have confidence that the increase in the charge is actually going towards security.

The \$10 million reduction for the airport policing program, which is a granting program, represented less than 1% of the projects at airports. The policy brought forward by the previous government with respect to airports was by and large a good one in terms of its operations. I might have some issues about the governance, but it was by and large a good one, because it said basically that the travelling public should be paying the freight. I have a lot of constituents in my riding, as I'm sure you have in yours, who don't have the funds or the luxury to take air travel, and why should their tax dollars be supporting others who do?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Some of those constituents take public transit, and they have been asking when they can see permanent gas tax funding, not the existing ten cents, of which five cents goes to the municipality. We've always been asking for an extra cent, but it used to be that one or two cents was designated, not per capita but by transit ridership. That actually generates far more stable funding for public transit, and it is now gone, which is unfortunate.

Hon. John Baird: Now gone?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Well, the distribution of the funding is now per capita rather than by transit ridership. Many municipalities, especially urban centres, are asking that we take at least one or two of those cents, or an extra cent, from the existing gas tax and make sure it is transferred to the municipalities through ridership. That's one of the things they have been asking for, so that they get permanent funding.

Hon. John Baird: I think to say that there's no permanent funding just is not accurate. We not only made the gas tax transfer to municipalities permanent in the 2008 budget, but last year, in a difficult financial year, we doubled it.

We have a lot of confidence that the municipalities can make the choices that are good for them. In the case of Toronto and the GTA, public transit is a big issue. In the case of Hamilton, clean water was a big priority. I'll let the local councillors make that determination.

Insofar as we allocate money, obviously your area has a high degree of public transit ridership; you'd like it allocated that way. I suspect Mrs. Aglukkaq would think we should allocate it based on land mass, because they don't have a lot of transportation. My riding has only 88 square kilometres; public ridership might be good for me. I suggest the member for Wild Rose or the member for Athabasca thinks it should be by square kilometre. I suspect all of us will advocate for what is best for our own ridings. That's why the per capita allocation I think is a pretty fair one.

Ms. Olivia Chow: What percentage of your green infrastructure funds and the Building Canada fund actually went to public transit, in terms of the dollars? Do you have a rough percentage?

Hon. John Baird: I think we said it was about \$400 million.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That's why you have her beside you. She gives you the numbers.

In terms of percentage of these green funds...?

Hon. John Baird: I'll give you the numbers here.

Of the \$4 billion stimulus fund, across Canada about...

• (0905)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Do you want to send it to us later on?

Hon. John Baird: Sure, I'd be happy to send it to you.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Okay.

Hon. John Baird: We did a good amount of public transit with the infrastructure stimulus fund, the \$4 billion fund. It was by no means a good fund to support large-scale capital—

Ms. Olivia Chow: What about the green infrastructure fund?

Hon. John Baird: Public transit wasn't eligible.

Ms. Olivia Chow: And what about the Building Canada fund?

Hon. John Baird: There was lots of it, more than \$2 billion. We'll get you the specific breakdown, if you like. The Building Canada fund is a natural one for large projects.

For example, in the city of Toronto, some \$600-odd million went to the Sheppard...the Spadina subway extension. Part of it was from CSIF, the previous government's program; there were a lot of unallocated funds there. Part of it was Building Canada. We put in \$333 million for the LRT in Scarborough, and we're putting in some

Ms. Olivia Chow: Streetcars?

Hon. John Baird: Toronto didn't make an application under the Building Canada fund for streetcars. I'll say that when it came to Toronto, we took their priorities.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I thought their number one priority was—

Hon. John Baird: It was Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It was not streetcars?

Hon. John Baird: No, it wasn't; it was Spadina. That was their number one priority. The number two priority was Scarborough LRT. The number three priority was Union Station.

We completely adopted the Metrolinx priorities. But every time we make an announcement, all of a sudden a new priority says, you're not funding our priority. Well....

Ms. Olivia Chow: Well, partially that's because there is such a huge list. The Urban Transportation Task Force report said it provided a blueprint for federal, provincial, and municipal governments to work together. Are you planning to act on any of those recommendations?

Hon. John Baird: We're not planning to act; I think we are acting. I look around this room and I see a lot of pictures of politicians. If you were to have pictures of politicians who have supported public transit on a year-to-year basis in the city of Toronto, at the federal level the person who has funded the most would be Stephen Harper.

I think we've done a lot for public transit in Toronto—plus a tax credit for riders.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Can I just ask one last question? I'm coming back to aviation safety.

The Transportation Safety Board issued a watch list in March of this year, and there were a large number of safety issues on it. It's causing concern, because in 2006 there was a report that said a lot of the problems hadn't been followed up on; there's no sign-off, etc. I think your deputy minister's nodding her head. So what is the plan to ensure that all the problems in the watch list are followed up on? Are you putting in any of the funding so that you have better or more staff to do this kind of follow-up? Is staffing inspectors one of the key problems or is it really oversight? Is it the board or is it the Canadian Business Aviation Association?

Hon. John Baird: The TSB came forward with the watch list, which we welcomed. One of the concerns that I've had—and I can ask my deputy to expand on this, and I think your party has certainly spoken up loudly on this—is with the Business Aviation Association basically being the regulator of themselves and a lobby group at the same time.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That is a problem.

Hon. John Baird: I agree, and we're taking that back into the department, so there will be public inspectors doing the work.

The Chair: Be very brief if you can, please.

Ms. Yaprak Baltacioglu: As the minister said, the Canadian Business Aviation Association will no longer be regulating the business airplanes. That responsibility has been moved into the department, and we will be in full implementation within the year.

Regarding inspector vacancies, we have 98 vacancies right now. Sixty inspectors are being hired, and we hope to finish all of our staffing by the end of this year.

Regarding a Transportation Safety Board watch list, we can get you the public material we put out right after the TSB issued their watch list. We're working with the TSB. A lot of the recommendations they have concern regulatory action by the government, and we're hoping to gazette most of the regulations that were suggested in the TSB list. In some areas we are just working with TSB to see if there are practical solutions to some of their recommendations. This is a top priority for the minister, and he has instructed us to spend quite a lot of time ensuring that we have a good response to the watch list, because TSB has the same objective in mind as we do, and that is the safety of Canadians.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to commend the fine folks in Brandon for hosting what I'm told was an excellent Memorial Cup Tournament and a spirited run by the Wheat Kings. We'll have to have you down our way at some point.

I knew a minister was coming today, Mr. Chair, because Gerard Kennedy is back at committee. So welcome back, Mr. Kennedy.

To the minister, you mentioned the vote yesterday in the Michigan legislature. Just to be clear, for the record, what the State of Michigan was considering, and the Senate will now be considering, is legislation to enable a public-private partnership, not a Michigan budget appropriation vote for the DRIC project. Is that correct?

Hon. John Baird: That's correct.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay.

Also, I know the Liberals—it's become clear—favour the Ambassador Bridge monopoly. That's been a long-held position, I guess, for the party. Former Liberal cabinet minister, Susan Whelan, was offered a very soft landing by the Ambassador Bridge, with a job there after I defeated her in 2004. But here's what Mr. Stamper—

Hon. Joseph Volpe: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Volpe, on a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Watson: It had better be a point of order, Mr. Chair—I would hope.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Yes.

I think, Mr. Chair, there's always a lot of leeway for what people can say or not say, and we try to stay away from statements that inflame passions of partisanship.

Ms. Whelan has not been a member of Parliament for some years. Minister Van Loan was an employee of the Ambassador Bridge. Last time I checked, Mr. Van Loan was still a member of cabinet. I did not mention his name. I did not talk about recusal. I did not talk about casting aspersions on people who do their jobs, and I don't think anybody around this table does.

I would ask you to ask Mr. Watson to stick to questions related to the decisions with respect to what Michigan did or did not do without talking about whether somebody lands softly or harshly after they have left public office. Otherwise, I guess we're going to have to ask how it is that a minister of the crown currently can recuse himself from a decision when you can only do that or only need to do that if you actually still have an interest in the decision that's being made.

So if Mr. Watson was wanting to raise a point of order so that we could again entertain the idea of bribery and corruption in this government, well, then, let's go ahead. Otherwise, let's be serious and ask the minister questions that are linked to the estimates.

The Chair: Mr. Watson, on the same point of order.

Mr. Jeff Watson: No, I have nothing to add to that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. It's not a point of order, but a clarification.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It was part of a preamble to a question I was moving to, by the way.

Mr. Dan Stamper, president of the Detroit International Bridge Company, was quoted in *The Windsor Star* this morning about that process in Lansing yesterday, and I quote him. He said, "We've had fun here", referring to the Ambassador Bridge folks. He goes on to say, "We understand now how the game is played in Lansing."

I think the unemployed in Windsor–Essex would hardly view this as a game with respect to their future. I don't know if you'd care to comment. Do you share Mr. Stamper's view that a new crossing between the two countries and maintaining or enhancing the importance of our trade with the United States somehow all revolves around a game?

Hon. John Baird: As one of the political ministers for Ontario, I think we're deeply concerned about unemployment. You've certainly been very active in ensuring that the government is aware of that. The economy in Windsor–Essex is experiencing real trouble. We've been I think pretty generous to that community in terms of the infrastructure stimulus fund. The DRIC project would see billions of dollars being spent in that region. It would do a lot as a shot in the arm for those unemployed, whether you're a steelworker or, frankly, whether you deliver pizza. It would put a lot of money into the economy. We think it's pretty important.

I think, though, when you look at the campaign finance rules in the United States.... In Canada we can take great pride both in the reforms that Prime Minister Chrétien brought in and the landmark reforms that Prime Minister Harper brought in to take the influence of big money out of politics. I think that's a very good thing and a positive thing.

I'll just let people connect the dots on their own.

• (0915)

Mr. Jeff Watson: I note in your comment that in fact the highest per capita infrastructure stimulus funding in the country went to Windsor–Essex.

The Ambassador Bridge has floated a proposal, if you will, to twin their bridge or replace their bridge. I guess it depends on which day and which audience their speaking to, whether it's twinning or replacing. I would argue they're talking but not acting like it. They've talked about being shovel-ready with this project.

What permits are needed for this twinning or replacement spending? Which do they have?

Hon. John Baird: There are no applications before any government body, federally, provincially, municipally, that I'm aware of for the twinning of the Ambassador Bridge. Some like to leave the impression they're all ready to go, that if the government would just stamp their form they could twin that bridge tomorrow, when in fact a huge amount of work has been done by successive Ontario governments, by this and the previous federal government, by the city. A huge amount of effort has gone in, and I think that simply for national security reasons and economic security reasons to twin an existing bridge after 9/11 is not a good idea; it's distinctly a bad idea. If anything happened to that bridge, the southwestern Ontario economy and the Michigan economy could come to their knees in a matter of days if not a matter of hours. So we're deeply concerned about that.

There is just an unprecedented consensus on the need for a second bridge over the Detroit River. You have the Premier of Ontario, the Prime Minister of Canada. You have the infrastructure minister, the finance minister here. You have Governor Granholm very strongly in support, as well as her predecessors, Governors Engler and Blanchard. You have Ray LaHood, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, who spoke out very strongly this week for a second bridge. You have the mayor of Windsor, the mayor of Detroit. You have the two Liberal cabinet ministers from Windsor. You have your own strong leadership in this regard. All the stars are aligned to give this boost to the manufacturing sectors of Ontario and Quebec. We need to get it done. We have a very tough road ahead, though. It is going to be very tough in the Senate, in Lansing. At this stage I'm not optimistic we can get it through.

Mr. Jeff Watson: To be specific, if I understand correctly, there are at least two U.S. federal permits and three federal permits here that they don't have. I'll go a step further. If I understand it correctly, it's actually one of our federal government agencies that is doing some of the work that the bridge should be doing with respect to reviewing the plaza needs in Windsor at the Ambassador Bridge, or future needs there. Is that correct? Are we in fact doing that work rather than the bridge company?

Hon. John Baird: We're making major investments for a new plaza. We acquired about 80% of the lands in the city of Windsor. There's just overwhelming support, especially for the Windsor–Essex parkway. We have 17 traffic lights through Windsor. This, in many respects, is not a Windsor problem. It's a Quebec problem. It's an Ontario problem. Whether it's an auto parts manufacturer in

southern Quebec or whether it's agrifood processing in Leamington, with the bottlenecks, it's a huge problem for competitiveness.

Mr. Jeff Watson: The Ambassador Bridge in Fort Erie–Buffalo, where there are more bridges and lane capacities than between Windsor and Detroit, also has lower vehicle traffic than we have in the corridor, yet they're arguing, in order to build a new bridge there, that they have sufficient vehicle traffic for the future, looking at the projections there; yet in the Windsor–Detroit corridor, they are arguing the exact opposite, that somehow vehicle projections won't support a new bridge that would compete against their bridge there.

What are the traffic projections for DRIC, and are you confident of them?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Watson, we're well over time.

Hon. John Baird: Let me see if I can just jump in to respond very quickly.

Traffic in the first four months was up by 20%–22% at Detroit. That's huge, but the bottom line is that when Pepsi has the monopoly and Coke wants to come into town, Pepsi is not exactly going to be excited and supportive and necessarily upfront with that.

This is desperately needed, and we're committed to doing all we can. It's going to be very tough. I'm not, by any means, going to say we can get it passed through the Senate.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Volpe, on a point of order.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: It's clear that the minister has added that he would like to share with the committee, and I invite him to do so, the studies that illustrate the tremendous need that he has talked about.

Hon. John Baird: Certainly anything that's publicly available we can get to you.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: No, I mean the stuff that you have, and you probably already have it in French and in English. So I wonder whether you'd make available—

Hon. John Baird: Anything that we can make available, we will.

The Chair: Thank you.

Due to time constraints, I'm going to go one more round of three minutes each.

Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'm going straight to questions on the lack of accountability for your program and the failure in terms of jobs for infrastructure. Last year, only 12% of your money got out: 12.8%, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. You have requisitioned billions of dollars. Can you tell us directly, and can you provide backup, project by project, as to how many jobs were created by the billions of dollars that you took?

Can you tell us how much money was actually spent in each of the programs, particularly infrastructure stimulus programs, in the year that finished two months ago?

Hon. John Baird: We'll certainly get you all the information we have.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Mr. Minister, you promised that last time and you didn't do that. So I wonder, here, in a public committee, will you make a very specific undertaking? Can you tell us how many jobs the billions of dollars you put forward for infrastructure stimulus programs created, and by project? Will you release the schedule H that all the project people are required to fill out to say how many jobs are being provided?

Will you release that here to the committee? Will you be accountable, or is it just propaganda that you're talking about in terms of these funds?

Your record is to not get very much money out at all. Tell us what you have done. Will you agree to make sure that it is tabled here by your office?

Hon. John Baird: Anything that we can get you, we certainly will.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: What does that mean, Mr. Minister? Why can't you give us what I'm asking for?

Hon. John Baird: It has been 150 days since you asked me a question on infrastructure in the House. I expect that if you were concerned you hadn't got it, you should have asked for it again.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Well, Minister, I've asked 11 times to be briefed by your ministry. I raised this with you last fall. You said you would do something, but you did nothing. You have no credibility. You've offered an accountability act that has no accountability for yourself.

Again, Minister, will you provide this information to the public, never mind me? Will you say whether jobs were created or not?

The Chair: Mr. Jean, on a point of order.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Kennedy is out on a hunt that has nothing to do with estimates in relation to the Accountability Act. We've gone from one end to the other of the Accountability Act—

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I understand there is a time issue. I would rely on you not to allow interference.

Mr. Brian Jean:—and there is an issue in relation to documents that I don't remember him asking for specifically. He barely shows up, so I think I would remember that, but I would ask him to keep it relevant.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Please continue. You have one minute and 10 seconds.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Mr. Jean's distracting function is not of much value here.

Minister, I want to ask you whether you will provide the information on schedule H that every single project person has to fill out and that you have not provided to us. Would you make sure that all the data that went to the PBO through the general government committee is released to members of Parliament? Will you agree to that today?

Hon. John Baird: I could ask—

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Are you hiding the failures that you have in your program?

Mr. John Forster: The schedule H that you are referring to is an agreement between the Province of Ontario and its municipalities. We flow our money through the province.

In response to a motion from the operations and estimates committee, we've written to the Province of Ontario asking whether they are collecting that information and whether they are willing to provide it. We've shared that letter with the chair and the clerk of that committee, and we're waiting for a response from Ontario.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Mr. Forster, can you provide us with any figures about how many jobs the billions of dollars in infrastructure stimulus funds have created? Can you provide us with any information from your department?

Hon. John Baird: We'll get you everything we've got. I'll send you a great report that the McGuinty government commissioned.

I can tell you the great thing about this challenging economic time we've been through. There's really an unprecedented amount of cooperation going on with the Liberal government.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Minister, I have no time to listen to propaganda—

Hon. John Baird: They're all very satisfied with the work we've done.

The Chair: Order, please

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: When I get a chance to ask questions—

The Chair: Order, please. Your time is up.

I will go to Monsieur Laframboise.

Mr. Brian Jean: If we want to keep going, how about a fair shake for everyone?

The Chair: I have given the floor to Monsieur Laframboise. We've gone over time.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Mr. Chair, I want to register a protest because the interference in my time was not properly regulated.

The Chair: The time was stopped.

Monsieur Laframboise, you have three minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Champlain bridge, the most used bridge in Canada, sparked all kinds of debate. Surely, you are aware of all that, Mr. Minister. During the last election campaign, studies were conducted by engineering firms suggesting that the bridge was dangerous. The Federal Bridge Corporation Limited did not want to release the studies, and your government said that the bridge was safe. But everyone agrees on the fact that the bridge is in need of maintenance.

Are there any maintenance measures or programs? Are there any such plans that you could submit to the committee to give us an idea of the efforts being made to make the Champlain bridge safe? Are there any plans under way?

● (0925)

Hon. John Baird: First of all, I have to say that bridge safety and security is most certainly a priority.

I can fully appreciate why Quebec is making it a priority, given Pierre Marc Johnson's report on the accident that happened in Quebec five years ago. I am very familiar with the needs of the Champlain bridge over the next two years, indeed the next ten years. A lot more money has been spent on that.

My deputy minister can tell you about a study designed to determine not only the immediate needs, but also whether it is time to consider building a new bridge. I will ask the deputy minister to elaborate on that.

[English]

Ms. Yaprak Baltacioglu: First of all, the budget of 2009 granted \$212 million over 10 years for repairs. In the meantime, there is a study being done to get the data needed to see if there's a need for the bridge to be rebuilt. The moment we have the data and the study, we would be happy to share it with you.

[Translation]

Hon. John Baird: As I said in response to another question, if you or your colleagues in the regions would like a briefing on the bridge repairs or the future of the bridge, you and your colleague, Mr. Gaudet, are always welcome to come to the department for a thorough briefing.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Thank you. That would be great.

[English]

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Chair, first off, I'd like to thank the minister for the great investment in British Columbia. As a British Columbian, I think it really helped the Olympics to be the success it was. It wasn't just a sporting event; it was also a display of the great infrastructure we have in British Columbia, in large part because of the partnership your department has had with the Province of British Columbia. Thank you very much for that.

There has been a great investment in the Trans-Canada Highway. As the member of Parliament from Okanagan—Shuswap, I am familiar with a large part of the Trans-Canada Highway in British Columbia because it goes through my riding. One of the concerns I have is that the investment in the Trans-Canada Highway will stop after the stimulus money on the Building Canada fund. Your department has made great investments of \$100 million around the Lake Louise area. We've seen more money spent on the Trans-

Canada Highway with this government than we have in the last 20 years.

Are there any future plans for further investment for providing four lanes of the Trans-Canada Highway through the parks?

Hon. John Baird: I see this as a huge priority, not just in British Columbia but also in Alberta. Your colleague, the member from Wild Rose, and I assume his predecessor, were very active in this, particularly for safety reasons; the single-lane highway is a real problem. I personally think we have to try to make progress every opportunity we get. We've made good progress, working with the Government of British Columbia. It's probably our best relationship with any province. They're fantastic to work with, whether it's the premier, whether it's this minister of transportation or her predecessor, Kevin Falcon. B.C. is finally getting its fair share too, and that's important.

On the work in the parks, we're able to put some not insignificant investments into Parks Canada outside of Banff, and that's good not just for the Trans-Canada Highway; it's good not just for safety, it's also important. I think it's so important that Canadians have the chance to see their national parks. Whenever we get more Canadians into a national park, we get more support for land conservation, more support for their upkeep. We've done a huge amount of investment with Parks Canada as part of the stimulus plan. Alan Latourelle, the CEO of Parks Canada, is probably one of the most competent public servants I've ever worked with. He just gets things done, and gets things done quickly. Of all the federal agencies we've looked at for infrastructure, we've made some significant investments there.

But wherever we can, we've certainly made investments in the Trans-Canada. We've done a lot in Kenora, on the Manitoba border, with Building Canada. It's certainly something I'd like to see a commitment to over the long term. Building Canada is a seven-year program, but obviously I don't see us getting out of the infrastructure business after 2014.

● (0930)

The Chair: I'll have to stop it there. I'm sorry.

Thank you, Minister and our guests, for attending today.

Hon. John Baird: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just to advise you, on Tuesday, the 1st, we have Toyota coming to the committee, so be ready.

The meeting is adjourned.

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