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Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

I'd first of all like to welcome and thank Minister Lebel, Minister Fletcher, and department officials for being here today.

The ministers will be here for the first hour. Then the department officials will remain to answer questions for the rest of the time.

Ministers, you probably have some opening remarks.

Minister Lebel, please go ahead.

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

Thank you for the invitation to meet with your committee today to provide an update on the transport, infrastructure, and communities portfolio and to speak to our supplementary estimates.

I'm pleased to be joined by my colleague the Honourable Steven Fletcher.

[Translation]

I am also pleased to introduce Louis Lévesque, the new Deputy Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Also joining us are Anita Biguzs, Associate Deputy Minister for Transport Canada, and Marie Lemay, Associate Deputy Minister for Infrastructure Canada.

[English]

I will first address our priorities in transportation and infrastructure, and then Minister Fletcher will speak to two crown corporations in our portfolio.

This has been a busy year for transportation issues and related legislation. I look forward to continuing our work to support Canada's transportation system to ensure our economic prosperity. Transportation is critical to economic growth, job creation, and Canada's competitiveness in the world. The funding we seek through the supplementary estimates will help to achieve those goals.

[Translation]

As you know, the government places great importance on the role that trade plays in fuelling our economy, creating jobs and improving our quality of life. Transportation, in turn, helps to drive trade and requires coordination between many players across all modes so that supply chains can move goods efficiently, safely and securely.

This is why we developed Canada's gateway and trade corridor approach, which established the Asia-Pacific, Continental and Atlantic Gateways as a way to ensure our competitiveness and future prosperity.

A key principle of this approach was partnership. It required that the federal government work with other government and private sector partners to develop projects that would strengthen both our transportation systems and Canada's international trade links.

[English]

Supporting our trade and gateway agenda involves many initiatives. One is the need to build bridges, quite literally, to improve our transportation corridors. Accordingly, since 2009, the federal government has invested nearly \$380 million to maintain the safety and the structures of the existing Champlain Bridge corridor.

[Translation]

In October 2011, I announced the construction of a new bridge for the St. Lawrence in Montreal to replace the Champlain Bridge. Developing a new crossing in this corridor remains a priority for our government. Not only are these structures vital transportation links for people and goods in the region, but they also provide a valuable trade corridor that is responsible for some \$20 billion worth of commerce.

The environmental assessment for the project was launched last January and will be completed by 2014. While the current structures continue to be safe, we are taking action to ensure they remain in safe operating condition. We will continue to work with key stakeholders throughout the duration of this project.

[English]

Another project that will greatly contribute to Canada's competitiveness and long-term prosperity is the Detroit River international crossing, which is the new bridge between Windsor and Detroit. This new publicly owned bridge is critical to the economic security of both Canada and the United States. Let me make a few points to put this in better context.

•(1110)

[Translation]

The vast majority of our trade crosses the border by truck, much of it at Windsor-Detroit. With more than 8,000 trucks a day,

[English]

—again, that's 8,000 trucks per day—,

[Translation]

it is the busiest Canada-U.S. border crossing. To give you an example, Chrysler alone makes 1,200 crossings a day. In 2011, Canada-U.S. trade reached \$689 billion.

[English]

This project will advance Canada's economic action plan and will provide much-needed border crossing capacity to handle the anticipated growth in commercial and traveller traffic for many years to come. Not only will it create 10,000 to 15,000 construction jobs in Michigan and Ontario, it will also generate new trade-related jobs and investment opportunities along the Quebec City and Windsor corridor. This, in turn, will make the North American manufacturing sector even more competitive.

Understandably, then, a new bridge is a very high priority for shippers and manufacturers. To expedite construction, we have introduced the Bridge to Strengthen Trade Act to ensure the successful and timely construction of this bridge. Canada will recoup this investment over time from toll revenues; the same in Montreal.

[Translation]

The Windsor-Detroit crossing is only one of many initiatives Transport Canada has pursued with the United States, in support of the economic action plan.

Our two countries also cooperate closely in the marine mode. This past September, we announced that we would join the United States Coast Guard in a new pilot project to inspect vessels in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway. These inspections will focus on improving vessel safety, security and pollution prevention.

In addition, we are aligning Canadian and American regulatory requirements more closely under the Regulatory Cooperation Council. This will make the system more efficient while also reducing impediments to trade for Canadian and American businesses, while also increasing marine safety and security.

[English]

Mr. Chair, the Government of Canada is also committed to ensuring that our rail system continues to be safe and secure for Canadians.

[Translation]

I am proud to note that, on May 17, 2012, Bill S-4, the Safer Railways Act, received royal assent. Bill S-4 significantly modernizes the current Railway Safety Act, in order to reflect changes in the industry and to strengthen Transport Canada's oversight and enforcement capacity in Canada.

[English]

According to the transport safety board, train accidents have decreased by 23%, and passenger train accidents have decreased by 19%, since we launched the Railway Safety Act review in 2007.

On the topic of rail transport, Mr. Chair, I shall note that we are also taking steps to make the rail-freight supply chain more efficient and reliable. Earlier this year, we completed a facilitation process with shippers and railways to develop a template service agreement and a dispute resolution process. This past June we released the facilitator's final report of his findings. The process will provide useful tools for both shippers and railways to use in their commercial negotiations.

I remain firmly committed to tabling legislation this fall to amend the Canada Transportation Act, and our government is committed. These amendments will give shippers the right to service agreements with the railways. They will also provide a process to establish such agreements should commercial negotiations fail.

Mr. Chair, from rail safety and efficiency, I now turn to other actions taken by the Government of Canada to maintain an efficient and safe transportation system.

[Translation]

The purpose of the Navigable Waters Protection Act is to balance the efficient movement of marine traffic with the need to construct works that might interfere with navigation.

This has been the case for more than 130 years and will not change. However, over time, the scope and application of this law has expanded to the point where it now applies to brooks, streams

[English]

and culverts. These are very, very small waterways.

[Translation]

The time spent on navigation assessments for works that have little or no impact on navigation has created huge backlogs for important projects, such as bridges and other works that might interfere with navigation.

[English]

In fact, 80 separate navigation assessments were done for ducks on a single lake near Edmonton. These applications took as long as a year and a half to approve, even though each one was essentially the same. It was a waste of time and tax dollars. That is why we're essentially proposing amendments aimed at refocusing the act on its original intent to protect navigation while supporting economic development.

These proposed amendments introduce a streamlined approach to balance the need to ensure safe and efficient navigation with the need to construct projects that support economic growth.

They also focus on the regulating works of the busiest waterways and relying on common law to protect navigation in other navigable waters.

[Translation]

And I would like to add that all environmental protection processes will continue to be enforced. Nothing in this Act in any way compromises either federal or provincial environmental laws. This includes the Fisheries Act, the Species at Risk Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012.

[English]

Mr. Chair, investing in Canada's infrastructure is a key element of the Government of Canada's plan to create jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for Canadians.

Our government is strengthening the economy by investing in infrastructure projects that help to support both trade and the safe, secure, and efficient movement of goods and people while sustaining our environment.

• (1115)

[Translation]

These investments involve partnerships. So, over the past year, we have worked with provinces, territories, municipalities and other stakeholders to develop a new long-term plan for public infrastructure.

During the summer, we held 14 round tables across the country, meeting with more than 200 stakeholders. They reinforced both the need for strong and sustained federal support for infrastructure and the practice of building partnerships to develop these projects.

We will take this input into consideration and, looking ahead, will establish a new long-term infrastructure plan to build on our successes and contribute to provide lasting benefits for Canadians. This plan will help to leverage new investments in infrastructure, while continuing to respect the capacity of Canadian taxpayers.

Mr. Chair, I am proud of the government's actions to strengthen Canada's transportation systems, support our commitment to trade and fuel the future prosperity of our country.

[English]

I can speak for hours about what we have done, Mr. Chair, with all this marvellous team behind me.

A voice: Please do.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Denis Lebel: But I'm pretty sure you have a lot of questions to ask us.

That concludes my remarks. I will now invite Minister Fletcher to speak to you on two of our portfolio's crown corporations.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lebel.

Minister Fletcher.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport)): I'll start by saying that everything the minister said is absolutely correct.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Fletcher: I am pleased to be here today.

[English]

Our government is obviously committed to making sure that Canadians have security and safety when they travel and to helping Canadian businesses transport their products efficiently so that they are competitive, they grow, and they create new jobs. We are making strategic investments and continuing to look at ways we can improve services for Canadians.

I'm here to discuss investments related to two of the crown corporations in our portfolio. That's because those are the two that supplementary estimates (B) touch on.

Before I do that, I would like to take an opportunity to highlight the important work of all the crown corporations in the portfolio, such as Canada Post, Marine Atlantic, CATSA, Ridley Terminals, Blue Water Bridge, and the whole set. We are fortunate to have them work more or less very well and serve Canadians.

I have certainly enjoyed my opportunity to work alongside Minister Lebel to oversee the management of these files, of which each contribute a great deal to the prosperity and competitiveness of Canada. The funding of these organizations will continue to deliver important services to Canadians.

Now, let me start by speaking about VIA Rail. Transportation has been identified with opportunity in Canada. Via Rail connects, or transportation in general connects, workers with jobs, travellers with destinations, products with markets. For over a century, that opportunity has moved across this country on thousands of kilometres of steel rails. The building of Canada's railroads contributed greatly to shaping our country, developing our economy, and bringing us together as Canadians.

Today VIA Rail continues this proud tradition of connecting people across the country. Our government is proud to contribute to providing Canadians with a safe, reliable, sustainable passenger rail service. That is why since 2007 our government has committed nearly \$1 billion to improve VIA Rail's passenger rail service and the stations and tracks over which VIA operates. Nearly half of that funding was funded through Canada's economic action plan.

More recently, in the economic action plan 2012, our government announced \$105 million for this fiscal year. This will support VIA operations and further capital investments in track signalling systems, track components, station repairs, and IT.

Overall, these projects will enhance the safety and efficiency of VIA Rail passenger service and create jobs in local communities throughout Canada. By investing in VIA, we ensure that rail continues to play an important part in moving people and providing safe, efficient, and reliable alternative transportation.

I'll just give you a sense of some of the things we've invested in. VIA recently opened a new station in Windsor, near the riding of one of your committee members, in an important part of the network. The new facilities can also be found at Smiths Falls, Belleville, Cobourg, Oshawa, and Ottawa. This will include new walkways, platforms, and other services to improve rail travel experiences for passengers.

In April we restored VIA's wonderful heritage station in Vancouver, and in May we announced some pretty awesome changes to Winnipeg's Union Station. There are also major track improvements under way in the Ottawa-Toronto-Montreal corridor, which will be completed shortly and make rail travel safer and faster.

These investments in VIA are about the future, a future in which passenger rail will continue to play an important role in Canada's transportation system. As with all important transportation projects in this country, progress for our rail system would not be possible without strong partnerships. I would also like to recognize the various governments, businesses, and community representatives who have worked along with us to maintain a modern and viable system.

Mr. Chair, just before I close, I want to touch on one other corporation. Minister Lebel has made note of the investments our government has made in the bridges in Montreal and Windsor. I'd also like to mention the work we're undertaking in Cornwall, Ontario. The Seaway International crossing at Cornwall is an important link between Canada and the United States. This project involves constructing a new bridge connecting the city of Cornwall and Cornwall Island. This includes demolishing the deteriorating north channel span of the Seaway International Bridge crossing as well as ramps that connect to the existing roadway.

While this bridge remains safe for the public, the new bridge will ensure the long-term viability of this important border crossing. Through this initiative, our government is creating jobs and supporting the future economic growth of the region. Construction of the new bridge is scheduled for completion in late summer 2013, and the final approach changes are to be completed in 2015-16.

Mr. Chairman, these crown corporations, and the others, report to Parliament through the Minister of Transport, and they do provide an essential service to Canadians. Our government is committed to ensuring they have the resources they need to carry out their mandates.

May I say, just on the VIA front, I had the good opportunity to take the VIA train from Windsor to Ottawa about two weekends ago. It's a very civilized way to travel, perhaps the best way to travel if you're travelling in the corridor between Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. So, go VIA.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Fletcher, for your updates, and Minister Lebel.

Just before we go into questioning, I want to remind all committee members that under O'Brien and Bosc procedures—which you already know, but I would just remind you, as you don't want to

waste your time—public servants, of course, have been excused from commenting on policy decisions made by government. So to get the best use out of your time, I'd just remind you of that.

With that, Ms. Chow, seven minutes.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister Lebel and Minister Fletcher. It's good to see you at the committee.

I notice in the main estimates on page 325 that \$349 million was cut from the green infrastructure fund. Out of that, \$15 million went to natural gas pipelines; \$22 million went to the Beaufort Sea, probably oil; environmental assessments; and \$60 million went to....

At any rate, at the end of the day, this green infrastructure fund is short \$349 million, according to the main estimates.

Then, you notice that the mayors and councillors came to Parliament Hill last week, and they were saying that they need predictable funding; they need to know precisely how much money. Rather than playing the grant game, they want to take politics out of infrastructure funding. They want more direct transfers. They want to be treated with respect; you understand that. Sometimes you see this money, sometimes you don't.

What do you say to those 200 communities that have boil-water advisories and to the mayors and the councillors looking for transit dollars for crumbling bridges, like the Gardiner Expressway? How do you justify taking \$349 million out of the green infrastructure fund?

Mind you, you're adding a few dollars back in, but at the end of the day it's still close to \$350 million being cut.

• (1125)

The Chair: Minister Lebel.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the question.

During the summer, Mr. Fletcher and I held 14 round tables to meet the Canadian population—businessmen and women, mayors, ministers of provinces and territories from all over the country—and we received very well their message.

First of all, they were very, very happy about all we'd done in the past. We have to begin with that. They proposed to us, for sure, a lot of different things, but different parties have different approaches. For us, we have lowered taxes on income 140 times since we've been in government. Other parties want higher taxes; create \$56 billion in new expenses; \$21 billion of carbon tax—it's easier to transfer money at that time; they promise something on one hand, and they catch more in the other one.

That's not what we want to do in our own government. We want to continue to manage the economy of this country very well, and that's why we will depose a good infrastructure plan for the future of this country, respecting the capacity of the taxpayers.

[*Translation*]

It is very important for us to have a plan that respects the capacity of Canadian taxpayers and to continue doing good things.

[*English*]

As well, Mr. Chair, we have to respect jurisdictions. The Gardiner Expressway is municipal. I know this member was a municipal councillor in the city, and probably she knows the issues of her own city very well. But that's not a federal matter; that's a municipal matter. We'll never decide on behalf of municipal councils what is good for them. We will always let them decide on their own priorities.

The same for transit. Since we've been in government we have invested more than \$5 billion in transit in this country, and we will continue to support transit, but we will not decide here in Ottawa what is good for Montreal, Laval, or Toronto, or any other city in the country. We respect that.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you, Mr. Mayor...or Mr. Minister.

Hon. Denis Lebel: As a former mayor, I can accept that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Olivia Chow: Well, you were talking about municipalities.

Minister Fletcher, you talked about all these wonderful projects of VIA Rail. I share your passion for VIA Rail, but if that's the case, how come we notice that Sarnia, London, Stratford, Kitchener, and Niagara Falls have reduced services? The services from Montreal to Quebec City, Campbellton, Bathurst, Moncton, Sackville, Amherst, Truro, and Halifax were cut in half. In winter, services to Sudbury, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Jasper, and Vancouver have been reduced—two times per week. That's a huge amount of cuts.

• (1130)

Hon. Steven Fletcher: There is an expectation that VIA run as economically as possible. They are at arm's length from government and they do have the flexibility to adjust their schedules to meet demand and also to utilize their assets to the maximum.

While there have been reductions in that area, there have been increases in the frequency of the number of VIA trains travelling from Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal. We're also adding another line directly from Ottawa to Quebec City. That's going to be announced on Monday. So we are adding routes as well.

Now, many of these trains, particularly in the winter, have been running empty. So that is not good.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Empty.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you, Minister Fletcher.

I'm going to give the rest of my time to Mr. Aubin.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds for the question and answer, Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you. My question will be very simple given the time that is left.

Can the minister commit to responding to the request made by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who would like to obtain information on the cuts to his department?

Hon. Denis Lebel: I would ask Mr. Lévesque to outline the situation and indicate where we stand today.

[*English*]

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...that's not in here.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Why not?

The Chair: It's not.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Why?

The Chair: It's simply not, and....

Ms. Olivia Chow: It's about budget: it's in front of us; it's in the estimates.

The Chair: Minister Lebel.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel: It is already done, Mr. Aubin. Based on the information I have, our department has already responded.

Mr. Lévesque, please clarify that.

Mr. Louis Lévesque (Deputy Minister, Department of Transport): The Parliamentary Budget Officer received a response to his information request from the department on October 26.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Was it a positive response?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: We provided the information to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Coderre, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ministers, first please allow me to greet your new deputy minister and your new associate deputy minister. These are people of very high integrity who have served their country very well. I am pleased to see that they are with you. This will give you more help and I imagine it will be good for the future.

I have a few questions about infrastructure. We often talk about transportation, but infrastructure is in a way its poor cousin; so I would like us to talk mainly about that today.

The money allocated to infrastructure funding has not all been spent. However, you are requesting supplementary funding. Why has that money, some \$130 million, not been spent? Why request supplementary funding when you are unable to spend the money already available to you?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you for the question on infrastructure, sir. I know you introduced the former government to the principle of transferring the gasoline excise tax. We made it permanent, and now every city in the country can forecast how much money it will have several years in advance, since it is over five years.

You know the process well; now it is the law. You also know that our process is to pay when we receive invoices. You are also aware that the only province where we cannot go directly to the cities is Quebec. In Quebec, we absolutely have to go through the province.

At Infrastructure Canada, we disburse the money when we receive the invoices. Of course, we manage available funds in a balanced manner year over year. However, for projects that have been approved, and even completed, we have occasionally received invoices payable for those projects. We are often required to manage money on a year-over-year basis or to have supplementary budgets approved depending on the period in which the invoices have been sent to us. We often do not receive the invoices as quickly as we would like.

I am going to ask Ms. Lemay—

Hon. Denis Coderre: So you are telling me you pay even if you have not received the invoices.

Hon. Denis Lebel: That is not what I said. I said there were estimates.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That is fine.

Hon. Denis Lebel: I will let you finish the answer, Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Louis Lévesque: Generally speaking, the payments made are in the nature of transfer payments. For the federal government's accounting purposes, we depend on the speed with which our partners perform the work and bill us for it. In many cases, first, the work takes longer than expected and, second, partners take more time to submit the necessary documentation to justify the federal government's payments.

This almost customarily requires reallocations, that is to say when budgets provided for previous years must be carried forward to subsequent years. Budgets thus expire during the previous year and we must subsequently request new budgets or supplementary funding.

Ultimately this essentially corresponds to the same funding that was initially allocated; it is simply reallocated to a subsequent period.

• (1135)

Hon. Denis Coderre: That is fine.

Minister, I want to talk to you about the Champlain Bridge. I am one of those people who still believes there is a safety problem, and I am not playing politics with this. There is a problem regarding the safety of the Champlain Bridge, and work on the new bridge must be stepped up.

However, I am a bit troubled about land decontamination. You are conducting the environmental assessment, which will be finished in 2014, as you said. I have a question. You have to know Montreal to know that there may be some surprises. In the event your assessment turns up a worst-case scenario, do you have the necessary funding to deal with it? Will you need supplementary funding? Have you set aside a specific budget for that? For the moment, we are just talking about an assessment, but this could require supplementary funding.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you for the question.

The bridge project is currently on schedule. Our timeline is being respected. In June, we said we would conduct the environmental assessment over 18 months. We started the process in January, but we issued the contract in June. Everything will be on schedule. As for being on budget, we will see about that at the end of the project. It is still too early in the process of putting the new bridge in place. However, we are on schedule for the environmental assessment.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I know your deputy minister is a forward-thinking individual.

Hon. Denis Lebel: I am getting to the point.

I know you are very familiar with the beautiful Montreal region, are you not, Mr. Coderre?

Hon. Denis Coderre: I know it very well. And we cherish it.

Hon. Denis Lebel: I know, and there can be no doubt about that.

However, you know that four partners are involved in this sector that we are talking about. We are in talks with certain individuals and some budgets have been set aside, but it is too soon to tell you about that. However, we are well aware of the importance of the issue. We are working with our partners in the area and we are determining how this will work.

Things are going well, but it is impossible for me to confirm for you at this point whether the funding set aside can cover everything we have to do. I am not saying that will not be the case, but simply that it is too soon to give you an answer.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Several departments in the negotiations are of course concerned by the future of the operation of this bridge. In particular, we are talking about the relationship with aboriginal people and with Canadian Heritage. As you know, another cemetery has been discovered on Nuns' Island. Are the negotiations being conducted at the same time so that we do not waste any time?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Absolutely, we will meet our schedule, which we know is already too long, but it has to be met step by step. Everything is being done within the allotted timeframes.

As you suggest, in the negotiations with the first nations, we have to consider recognition of all the heritage elements in the same way as environmental elements.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You are walking and chewing gum at the same time.

Hon. Denis Lebel: All that is being done simultaneously because we want to be on schedule, sir.

Hon. Denis Coderre: With regard to the additional \$40 million for Ponts Jacques-Cartier et Champlain Inc., what is the current situation regarding the Mercier Bridge? I know the Jacques-Cartier Bridge will be closed again on the weekend. Is this an endless cycle or are you satisfied with the way the work and the safety are being addressed there?

Hon. Denis Lebel: As regards the Mercier Bridge, sir, you know that the federal portion of the work was mostly completed. A part of the work that also involved the Quebec government has been postponed because we could not agree on the awarding of the contract. That caused some delays for us and funding had to be carried forward. This was somewhat the same principle as for infrastructure, as we were discussing a moment ago. The money must be requested and it will be paid once we have the invoices. So that part is going well.

The Jacques-Cartier Bridge, as you know, is monitored in the same way as the Champlain Bridge, which is monitored daily. This bridge is probably monitored more than any other in the country, using all those sensors, to guarantee safety.

I personally use it quite a bit less often than a Montreal resident since I come from Lac-Saint-Jean, but I have no problems driving on it. I know that people from the South Shore are following this with great interest. The bridge is being monitored to a high degree. Regular work is done on the Jacques-Cartier Bridge, but it still has several decades of life left in it.

The condition of the bridges in Montreal is very well monitored at the present time. A new bridge will be built over the St. Lawrence. The status of the Jacques-Cartier Bridge is religiously monitored. The federal portion of the Mercier Bridge is paid for and we will be completing talks with Quebec for the rest of the work, and we will also respect the first nations.

● (1140)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Lebel.

We'll now move to Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Holder.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Thank you very much for being here, Minister.

Thank you also to your public servants, who run a lean and results-driven department. Special recognition, of course, goes to your outgoing deputy, Yaprak Baltacioglu, who did an excellent job. And to your incoming DM, Mr. Lévesque, welcome.

Our goal is to get results, and the main criticism from the opposition seems to be, Minister, that you're not expensive enough. I think Canadians would agree that their goal is to see infrastructure in their communities, not higher taxes out of their wallets.

On that question, I look at the municipal revenues over the last decade, and since 2001 revenues for municipalities have grown by 68%, even though the combined rate of population growth and inflation has only been 30%. That is to say, municipal revenues have grown twice as fast over the last decade as has the need. Where is the money going? In large part it's going to employee compensation, which has grown by 62% over the same period—again, twice as fast as population growth and inflation combined.

How can we work to ensure that when we invest dollars in infrastructure, they achieve results for the taxpayers, who pick up the bill?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you for the question.

First of all, one thing is for sure: the revenue for municipalities, for provinces, and for the country always, always comes from the same taxpayer. It's always, always the same taxpayer.

We always try to have a balanced approach in respect of any level of government. That's why I think we have good results. For sure we don't want to have a fight with other levels of government. We respect their jurisdictions. We want to work well with them. But we will not expend money we don't have. That's the way we want to manage the infrastructure program, and I'm sure that's the way the population wants to have it too.

When we are in municipal politics, we can do a deficit...like a mayor, or that's the law in Quebec, at least; I know more the law in Quebec on that.

I think sometimes we have to invest money to stimulate the economy, which is what we have done, for a specific time. The country was needing that. But for the rest of the time, we have to balance the budget and to manage the money that comes from the taxpayer—always the same taxpayer.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: There are results from your work. If you look at the statistics, the average piece of infrastructure in Canada today is about fourteen and a half years old. When we took office, that number was closer to 17 years old. In fact, infrastructure has not been as new as it is now; you'd have to go back to the late 1970s to find a year where our infrastructure inventory was as new as it is today.

Can you talk about how it is that we've achieved these results in renewing our infrastructure?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you.

I'm an old man now, and I can say that I have had a lot of past experience. I was a full-time mayor from 2000 to 2007. Never has a government—and I know the former government started the gas tax fund—supported the infrastructure of this country as our government has. That's very important to remember.

I'm sure we're better now than we were in 2005, and I'm pretty sure we'll be better in our infrastructure at the end of the other plan, and we will continue to support it. We have made the gas tax fund permanent because we understand the needs of the country, the needs of municipalities and the population.

With the money we have invested through the Building Canada plan, through the economic action plan, because the country needed more support, we've changed the face of the infrastructure of this country. Do we still have a job to do? Yes, sure, we still do, and we will continue to do it. But now, for the most part municipalities have a plan. They know what they have to do, which infrastructure they have to change. We will continue to support them in their own priorities. We will not decide on behalf of the municipalities.

I'm sure, if we're able to discuss this in 2015, 2016, or 2017, we'll say that our infrastructure is in better condition than it was in 2012.

● (1145)

The Chair: Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all our guests.

It's interesting, Minister, when you speak in terms of the funding through the gas tax. You may know that I come from the tenth-largest city in Canada. In London our prior mayor—I don't mean the current mayor—once said that if the federal government would only provide us with funding that was guaranteed...and then we talked about doubling it, but doubling it and making it permanent, that they would never come back to us for another ask about infrastructure funding.

So it's rather interesting; when my colleague opposite talks about the mayors across Canada looking for more predictable funding for infrastructure, it's clear—to me, at least, as I review this—that they have done that.

It would prompt this question. As Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities, what message might you give to the mayors across Canada?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel: I am going to tell you an easy joke. To use an expression I have heard, I would say we have added a fountain of youth to our infrastructure. I do not know whether it is a fountain of youth for London; that is another matter.

A voice: Oh, oh!

Hon. Denis Lebel: Whatever the case may be, we can say that we are still offering our support.

[*English*]

They can trust our government. We judge people more by what they have done in life than by what they say, and we have delivered it. That's what I want to say. They have to continue to support us because we have delivered more money for the infrastructure of this country than ever in Canadian history. They know that, and they will continue to be partners with the new infrastructure plan.

Mr. Ed Holder: May I say, I think one of the most—

The Chair: You have about five seconds, Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Congratulations on the initiative with respect to the Windsor-Detroit bridge, which passes by the tenth-largest city in Canada. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lebel, I wanted to comment on your comment about the infrastructure. I spent almost 13 years in local government as well, and I know that in terms of the delivery of the programs, I guess it was under Minister Baird at the time, I'd never seen anything delivered better, and that was important.

Mr. Adler, seven minutes.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair. I am happy to be here.

Thank you, Ministers, for both being here today.

Minister Lebel, I was really interested in your comments earlier, and I was hoping that you would have taken more time to explain all the great work that you have done. I know that we could be here for hours, as you said, and I would certainly be very interested to hear the entire list of everything you've accomplished so far. It certainly has been a lot, so congratulations on that front.

I do want to ask you a couple of questions. One is on the Navigable Waters Protection Act. I know our friends opposite keep claiming that it's about the environment, and we don't see the word "environment" once appearing in the act. Could you please help my friends opposite and explain...? I'm feeling very generous today, and I just want the members opposite to come to an understanding on why this has nothing to do with the environment.

Maybe the language we've been using up until now has been maybe just too difficult for them to understand. Perhaps you could just help them out, in very plain, simple language, in understanding why this not about the environment.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you for the question.

At the beginning, I can tell you that over 90% of applications received for navigable...or under this bill never posed any threat to the navigation. Any small project for a pier, wharf, or personal dock at your summer house or cottage has to go through this process, for absolutely nothing. And that's a Transport issue. Environment Canada is doing its job. Fisheries and Oceans will do their job too. Us, we have to manage the navigation of this country. We can see

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

a little stream or a little river

[*English*]

and say that it's about navigation, but any of these projects had to go through this process before we made these changes. We don't think this is a responsible use for taxpayers, and shows just how we have to change this act.

We will focus now on navigation. For sure the list has been built by science. It's not politicians who have done that, it's the department. They looked at where it was more navigation than in other waterways. The list was created after a rigorous process, using up-to-date statistics including nautical charts, freight movement, historical data, and applications of local knowledge. All the lists have been built.... It's not because I'm coming from Lac Saint-Jean that I add Lac Saint-Jean to the list. That would be nonsense. But we have to respect the mandate we have and that's about navigation. That's what we have done and we will continue to do so.

Going forward on the list of waters, for sure we will have some discussion about how it will go. But the regulations have to keep pace with changing traffic patterns and must meet one of the conditions of economic interests, public interest, and requests by local authorities, and at that time this will be seen through the regulations. But that's the science we talked about. That we want to change the channel and to...[*Inaudible—Editor*]...about environment, that's not the truth. We only want to manage in the best way we can the navigation in this country to support the economy of this country.

Some projects are important for municipalities. Here I have letters of support from provinces and territories and they have asked that of us. Our department consulted all provinces and territories before we launched the process.

We created the process and now we are sure we are doing the right thing. None of the provinces and territories had concerns with the list. That's where we are now. We are going to continue to improve that, to work very well to make better navigation in the country. It's about safety, and about the economy. That's very important for the future of our country. We know we have many economic developments to come in our country so it's important to manage our navigation well.

Mr. Mark Adler: Thank you very much.

I hope that my friends opposite were listening closely, and that they understand now and will be able to take that message back to their colleagues within their own caucus.

I do have another question for you. As you indicated during your remarks, there is one taxpayer. If we look at that taxpayer as a chicken with feathers, I think that bird's been plucked in terms of all of the taxes it could possibly pay. There is—

Hon. Denis Coderre: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I doubt this is a point of order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: —if we cannot ask questions about Kevin Page, I doubt we should ask questions about chickens.

Thank you.

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Adler.

Mr. Mark Adler: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, the NDP is proposing a \$21-billion carbon tax. Now, they are also proposing, which they claim is...now they're calling tax increases "clerical errors". But they are advocating a one-cent increase in taxes. In their party platform, they are also calling for a two-cent increase in the GST.

The Chair: Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I can't let that slide. The NDP never advocated for this.

If Mr. Adler wants to continue to put words in people's mouths, it's just not quite correct.

The Chair: It's not a point of order. That is on a public document that you presented here, Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I did not advocate for it; I just want to be very clear.

The Chair: Well, you handed out a public document.

Mr. Adler, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order as well.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I just wanted to say that if the taxpayer is a chicken, then the NDP is Colonel Sanders.

Voices: Oh, oh!

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

Mr. Adler.

Mr. Mark Adler: Thank you, Chair.

The NDP is calling for a one-cent increase in taxes, which they claim is a clerical error. Second, it's in their party platform that they want to increase the GST back to 7%. It's not really clear if it's...

Pardon me for speaking while you are trying to interrupt.

So we're not really clear if it's a 7% GST they want or an 8% GST they want, but we do know that they want to propose a \$21-billion carbon tax.

How horrible would that be for our economy? What effect would that have on our economic performance incentive? Could you just comment on that?

• (1155)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you for the question.

For sure, in terms of infrastructure, I have here the paper on which is written:

[*Translation*]

"The one-cent tax"

One per cent sales tax on value-added charged by the municipality...

I was very interested in that increase.

[*English*]

I'm pretty sure that when we leave more money in the population's pocket as well as in municipalities' pocket, they can invest in their own priorities. The impact of creating more taxes for our government will be huge, for us, because that will stop the economy from growing. We're not the best country in the G-7 and probably worldwide in terms of the economy without reasons: it's because we made good choices. We decided to

[*Translation*]

do some housecleaning

[*English*]

in our own home, at the beginning. That's why we decided to make economies in many of the departments, but we're still supporting the economy of the country through the infrastructure program and other programs.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Nantel, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are going to stop telling dumb jokes about taxes.

Good morning and thank you for being here today.

I would like to ask you one thing. Consultations are starting this weekend. It has to be said that we would have liked to have this feeling of consultation on other topics such as the effects of the toll you have proposed for this bridge. You also proposed, without too much consultation, to do this as part of a PPP.

I would like to know whether you received any comments from members of the public concerned about what will happen to this bridge which used to be free of charge. Earlier you talked about the impact of money staying in people's pockets. However, this bridge was free of charge, and suddenly it will be a toll bridge. Have you received any comments on that?

Hon. Denis Lebel: First, I must say that what is important for people is to have a new bridge. In the current state of the public finances of Canada, the Province of Quebec and the City of Montreal, if there is no public-private partnership project or toll, there will be no bridge.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That is it, the PPPs?

Hon. Denis Lebel: No, they are other PPPs. We will definitely find good public and private partners to invest in a beautiful region such as ours, where a lot of clients use the bridge. We know that.

However, our primary objective concerned the public. I met with a number of mayors in the region; I went to several forums to attend conferences; I was able to meet a lot of people. Some segments of the population are of course concerned about having a user-pay principle. However, people from Trois-Rivières, Sept-Îles, Roberval and Chicoutimi think this is a bridge that is used more by people from the Montreal area. It is not exclusive to them, far from it. Truckers from my region, and from Trois-Rivières and elsewhere, use it to go to the United States or the Maritime provinces as part of their work, to transport goods and materials for the country's economy, for example.

This is the same principle as we put forward for the Detroit River Bridge between Windsor and Detroit. It takes into account the state of the country's public finances. You obviously do not want us to talk about taxes, but you are simply forcing me to do so. You are forcing me to say that there are ideological differences. It is part of your party's DNA to increase direct and indirect taxes so that we can pay for things like that and for others to have them free of charge.

However, we do not work like that. We want there to be a user-pay principle, and that is why we have put forward the process to build a new bridge across the St. Lawrence River.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: What is unfortunate here, Mr. Lebel, is that, although some people have asserted that it is appropriate to install toll booths on Montreal Island bridges, the fact that you have come up with the idea of making this specific bridge a toll bridge virtually undermines the vision we have of eventually funding public transport, as it was presented in the PMAD.

In any case, what is important to me is for you to really listen. So I have a specific question on this. In fact, I have two questions.

First of all, on Monday I was at the marvellous summit organized by Culture Montréal entitled "Montréal, Cultural Metropolis". That summit on arts, heritage and culture in Montreal concluded with a request that we have a signature bridge in Montreal, a bridge that would be a distinctive feature for the city. I would like to hear your comments on that.

I would also like to ask you whether you received the request from the Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de la Rive-Sud, which hopes to see the partnership office for the future Champlain Bridge set up in greater Longueuil, on the South Shore.

• (1200)

Hon. Denis Lebel: The structure of the on-site partnership office is the Quebec government's responsibility. Construction of the bridge is entirely the federal government's jurisdiction. The province cannot criticize us for not dealing with the bridge issue for five, six or seven years, then want us to transfer our responsibilities to it. We will be shouldering our responsibilities and assuming them totally.

As for managing the process of establishing the bridge, if we paid for new premises, you would say we were mismanaging the economy. We have magnificent offices near the airport in Montreal. The new St. Lawrence River bridge project will be managed from Transport Canada's offices. They are not overly spacious, but they are big enough to accommodate the team.

We have worked well with the people in the community. The people from the urban community, the mayors of the entire urban community and the Province of Quebec will clearly be choosing the public transit structure they want to have on the new bridge over the St. Lawrence.

From day one, we were told we had not considered public transit. I heard your leader say that a number of times, as well as the FCM, but it is completely false.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: But I was not talking to you about public transit, Mr. Lebel.

Hon. Denis Lebel: But I want to talk to you about it.

That is completely false. We told the Province of Quebec to decide what type of public transit it wanted, whether it be light rail or anything else, and that we would put it on the bridge.

That is in addition to the architecture issue. We will pay for what we are able to pay for. I can do a \$15-billion bridge. However, if the toll is three times higher than what people thought, I am going to say it is the fault of Mr. Nantel, who asked me to build a work of art instead of a bridge.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: We were already between \$3 billion and \$5 billion, so—

Hon. Denis Lebel: Yes, we are going to consider taxpayers' ability to pay as well as the use that is made of the bridge. We will definitely take all that into account. To give you a simpler answer, Mr. Nantel, I will tell you that we are going to take that into account but that we will also consider taxpayers' ability to pay.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

You have the last five minutes, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The minister has answered my question. Let's go to Mr. Watson.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Watson, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Ministers and officials, for being here today.

Minister, I appreciated your opening comments raising the single most important infrastructure priority facing our country right now, and that's a new bridge between Windsor and Detroit. Recently progress is being made on the American side, as we know, with the defeated Proposal 6 in Michigan, and with Governor Snyder very recently talking about fast-tracking of the project on the U.S. side, I think that's optimistic news; I would characterize it that way.

First of all, the presidential permit, which will be very important, looking to have that issued by the State Department—have you encouraged the Department of State, in terms of expediting, joining with Governor Snyder?

Second, would you care to comment briefly on Governor Snyder's comments regarding fast-tracking?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Okay.

As you've said, this project has been in the plans for years. I spoke about the team. I'm the minister answering questions here today, but I've had the chance to work with the advisory caucus, with the team of Transport Canada. We have a woman here with us today, Helena Borges, who has worked on this issue for 11 years. That's an example of how we continue to work hard on an issue and to fix it.

We are very happy about the announcement we made with the Prime Minister and the way we're managing things. For sure, we add to it. We expected the presidential permit before the American elections. We have been unable, because of delays, to...but we are already on the process. We contacted them, we asked...*[Inaudible—Editor]*...transportation U.S.A. will change, I think, direction. Well, that's not our business, but we will follow what is going on in the U.S.A.

We continue to push...or to work with them. We don't have to push them; I'm wrong. They are very good partners. The American ambassador here, Mr. Jacobson, and Governor Snyder, have said that...

For the P3s, as an example, Governor Snyder has already said that Canada is an example of this project of partnership. We will continue. We have some other sensitive issues. We already have said that North American steel will be in this bridge. We already have said that. We'll continue to work on this issue, too. The presidential permit, for us, we'd like as soon as we can, but for sure we don't have control over that.

Mr. Jeff Watson: We appreciate our American partners, who are making progress on the fast-tracking. On our side, we're taking an important fast-tracking step as well. As you're aware, Minister, this committee took the invitation of the finance committee to study elements of Bill C-45 related to the DRIC crossing.

Ms. Borges, who testified at this committee, was very clear on two key elements of that: one, the reminder that an exhaustive environmental assessment process has already been completed and that clauses 7 through 12 will ensure that the new P3 proponent will be compliant with that environmental assessment and other key measures; and secondly, that by removing the approval permit authorization points, we are removing the points for judicial review in Federal Court. She was confident, she expressed, that the DRIC

process will be able to proceed, with the passage of Bill C-45, without further lawsuit.

Do you share the same confidence on those points?

• (1205)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Absolutely. That's why we have done all that work up front on the project, and we want to continue to protect, as I already spoke about, the economy. Yes, I agree with what Ms. Borges said about that, and we're very confident that we can go very quickly on this issue.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you.

The Chair: Minister Fletcher and Minister Lebel, thank you very much for being here.

I know you have busy schedules. I will give you the chance for closing comments, if you wish, but it's at your discretion.

Hon. Denis Lebel: I have just a quick comment. All members of this committee all work to have better transportation and infrastructure in our country, and I want to thank the members for their support. Together will reach our goals.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll take a couple of minutes here while the ministers exit, and we'll continue.

Thanks.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

With that, Ms. Chow, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: To the officials, thank you for coming.

I'm just trying to get to the bottom of the green infrastructure fund. I asked the minister about the \$349 million being cut. The original plan was the green infrastructure fund was to do \$200 million per year. Now there's only \$18 million left out of the entire package, it seems to me. Rather than spreading it out over five years, now it's spreading out over six years, because the program went from a five-year to a ten-year program with the same dollar amount, which amounts to about \$3 million per year on green infrastructure.

Am I correct in that calculation? That's the first question.

Also, on the same infrastructure fund, \$45 million has been reprofiled or transferred to other departments to do other types of things. Could you tell us what they might be? And \$58.7 million was sent to the department to do a certain kind of work. Could you describe what that might be?

• (1210)

Mr. Louis Lévesque: I'll make just a general comment first before passing it on to department officials for more detail.

I just want to go back to the point I was making before. Generally speaking, and you see this in the supplementary estimates (B) also for infrastructure, what is happening is that we are asking for reprofiles, and then we have lapsing funds and the need for supplementary estimates because, in nature, the payments under those funds are transfer payments. So we follow fundamentally the pace of the partners in that respect.

Ms. Olivia Chow: We understand that.

Mr. Louis Lévesque: Those are the basics, but I'll turn to Marie and David Miller to address specific questions.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I understand the spending, and it depends on the speed of the project, but that wasn't really my question: it's that at the end of the day, how much is there, right?

Ms. Marie Lemay (Associate Deputy Minister, Infrastructure Canada): I will ask David Miller to see if he can give you the details. Before I do that, though, the good news is that we do have \$156 million planned to spend this year, so I think that's the number that is important. For the details about where, maybe I can transfer to David.

Mr. David Miller (A/Assistant Deputy Minister, Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Services Branch, Infrastructure Canada): I'd like to refer members of the committee to our 2012-13 report on plans and priorities. We identify on page 32 exactly what funds have been moved out of the green fund and for what purposes. That identifies the entire amount that's been moved out. The rest of it, as the associate and the deputy were saying, is simply moving cash around in order to meet what we expect the bills to be for the current fiscal year.

I think members must appreciate that the estimates for the cash requirements are actually done about 18 months before we actually know what projects are going to come and occur during that year, so the estimates for 2012-13 were finalized in the summer of 2011. There is an 18-month delay, and obviously for a lot of reasons already explained, we have to make adjustments during the year to match the cash requirements of individual projects. Page 33 of our report on plans and priorities identifies all of the moneys that have been transferred out, and the reasons why.

Ms. Olivia Chow: The \$150 million you talked about, is that per year or is it over six years? That's the green infrastructure fund.

Mr. David Miller: The \$150 million of the green infrastructure fund is identified in the supplementary estimates (B). What we have done is move some of the statutory funding that was provided originally back in 2009-10 and we've moved that to requirements for 2012-13, and there's an additional amount that's voted under vote 45 for this year that nets out to a total of \$150 million.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It's \$150 million per year, not—

Mr. David Miller: This is just for this year because of the project cashflows. It has nothing to do with the overall total. It's our best estimate of how much cash we need this year.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Right, but the overall total, by the time we finish, is \$18 million left per year for the next six years. Am I not correct on that?

Mr. David Miller: No, that would be based on the authorities. On the actual expenditures we have considerably more than that to go.

Ms. Olivia Chow: But you have transferred \$58.7 million to the department and then the \$45 million to other departments. What is the justification of sending \$45 million to other departments? Is it because there is a request? What kind of infrastructure funds are they? How is it green? Should it not meet some basic criteria?

The \$58.7 million that's transferred just to do regular work of the transport department again has nothing to do with green infrastructure. How would you justify that transfer? The green infrastructure fund was really set up to assist municipalities to deal with their sewage, their clean water systems, and at the end of the day, so very few of those dollars are actually flowing to the municipalities to help them to deal with their 200 boil-water advisories per year.

• (1215)

Mr. David Miller: Perhaps I could start to answer this one. The green infrastructure fund was originally \$1 billion, and yes, some amounts have been transferred out. In some cases it was because of a project that fell more appropriately under the control or the policy or the program authority of another organization. So it would have been green-related, but on the money, the principle of parliamentary control is that we provide the estimates of the department that has the program authority.

In terms of money to do green projects, the green infrastructure fund was set aside for specific strategic projects of national significance. Believe me, an incredible amount of money goes to things like water and waste water out of all the other seven or eight programs that are run by Infrastructure Canada, from the gas tax through to some traditional programs through to the Building Canada fund, both the community component and the major infrastructure component.

Ms. Olivia Chow: The first round of funds went to sewage and clean water, but in later years it didn't. But the \$58.7 million to the department, for regular work in your department, is.... How is that green?

The Chair: I think that was kind of a comment.

Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We obviously would have liked the ministers to stay longer.

I would like to ask a question about Canada Post. Is there a plan to privatize Canada Post?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: I am aware of no government announcements about that.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Are any plans currently in the works for a number of options for Canada Post's future, including privatization?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: I am going to let Anita give you more details on that.

What I can say is that we usually work with Canada Post so that it can continue carrying out its mandate of providing Canadians with services defined in the Canadian Postal Service Charter while complying in a way with Canada Post Corporation's mandate to achieve a balanced budget.

[English]

Ms. Anita Biguzs (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Transport): Just to build on what the deputy has said, clearly Canada Post is a crown corporation under the Transport portfolio. It has a legislative mandate, and it develops its own strategic plans. It presents its own corporate plan and corporate plan summaries, which are tabled in Parliament. It looks at how it can deliver its service in a self-sustaining way, which is also in its mandate.

The corporation is always in the process of looking at its operations, particularly at a time when letter-mail volumes are going down. It would be incumbent on the corporation to look at its own strategic plan with its board of directors in its business planning processes.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I guess one of my problems is that every time we're talking about a strategic plan and rentability, I have a feeling we're cutting some services. I understand it's a crown corporation. It's arm's length and all that. But I believe the relationship with a minister, because he's accountable to Parliament, is maybe to take a look at what's in their mind, what's the future.

I'm not asking you about policy. I'm just asking you about some contingent plans. Does the strategic plan mean privatization? Frankly, looking at the number, the way that they've been reducing....

I understand the Internet and all that, but rural Canada is also a first-class citizen, and I have the feeling that in certain areas, especially in Quebec, we are paying a little bit more than some other regions. I'm a federalist, so it's not one region against another. I'm just trying to understand the future of that great crown society.

Ms. Anita Biguzs: It's incumbent on the corporation, but the minister who's responsible also has a policy interest in the corporation and how it's delivering services. Letter-mail volumes, as I think everyone is aware, are declining, so the corporation is looking at measures that will make it more efficient in its operations. It embarked on a very ambitious postal transformation initiative a few years ago. It's still under way. It's trying to improve productivity and achieve efficiencies through those processes. It's looking at how it can expand its parcel business, which is experiencing some growth. But the corporation has to look at how it addresses this matter, from the point of view of the minister as well as the declining letter volumes, and how it continues to deliver services in an efficient manner.

•(1220)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you.

Mr. Lévesque, I want to talk to you about aviation safety.

With regard to aviation safety, it appears that the logic of cost control is undermining public safety. The issue of aviation

inspections appears to be increasingly a concern. How many inspectors are there currently in this field at Transport Canada? Do they all conduct actual inspections? Are they all regularly on flights?

I have another question for the deputy minister for safety and security. With regard to the discussions, how many pilots are involved in decisions and develop safety directives, and what specifically is the level of knowledge at the top of the hierarchy? Since March 30, 2010, how many more inspectors have been hired and how many more inspections have been conducted? What programs are there to ensure that pilots remain up to date on new aviation technologies and stay qualified in that area?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: Your question referred to knowledge at the top of the hierarchy. Based on my two and a half weeks of experience, I have no intention of telling you that I am an expert in aviation safety. However, what I know very clearly is that, in all the decisions that were made, particularly in the last budget regarding financial cutbacks, there were absolutely no cuts to aviation security programs and no staff cutbacks, that is to say to the number of positions allocated to those sectors. Safety is priority 1.

I can ask Anita or Gerard to answer more specific questions.

[English]

Ms. Anita Biguzs: I have a general comment, Mr. Chair, in terms of civil aviation generally. We have had a very aggressive and ambitious plan in terms of responding to some of the weaknesses that have been identified by the Auditor General. We believe we actually have a very effective program. I think the safety record in terms of the accident record is the best, certainly in recorded history, in terms of incidents.

That being said, I think we are actually going to have a very ambitious and aggressive plan in terms of addressing some of our issues. Included in that as well is the engagement process with our inspectors in terms of the development of the kinds of tools and guidance materials that our inspectors need in performing their functions, which is very important. We are, in fact, engaging them through working groups and other mechanisms to make sure that the surveillance procedures, for example, reflect the kinds of issues they are aware of on the ground, and that the instructions and guidance material are clear for them. So we have a very active engagement process with our inspectors to make sure they are part of the process and they have the guidance material they need.

We also ensure that we have training in place, certainly on surveillance planning, and we can indicate at this point—

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: With all due respect, madam, I asked specific questions.

[English]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I asked for figures, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I would appreciate, since I asked some clear, specific questions, if you would send, through the chair, the answers I was asking for, if it's possible. Thank you.

The Chair: You are out of time, but I will allow time if any of the witnesses has anything further to add.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thanks. I appreciate it.

Mr. Gerard McDonald (Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Security, Department of Transport): To the question with respect to the knowledge level of our senior management, I can assure the committee that all of the senior people in the civil aviation area generally come from one of three professions. They are either pilots, aircraft maintenance engineers, or other types of mechanical engineers, for a large part. They are all very well qualified and very capable of carrying out the duties they've been assigned.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McDonald.

Mr. Poilievre, five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I'm going to give the time to Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our officials who are here with us today, because this is important.

I want to pick up a little bit on Mr. Coderre's questioning in regard to air safety. Could you tell us about the goals and intentions of our SMS, safety management system, and expand on the benefits of that?

• (1225)

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Essentially, the intent of a safety management system is to ensure that the carriers that are operating in our civil aviation environment have a system in place to regularly assess that they are following the required regulations we have in the civil aviation regime. Many people incorrectly try to say that this is self-regulation. It is anything but. Safety management systems are another layer on top of the regulatory regime to ensure that companies pay attention to safety on a day-to-day basis, as opposed to trying to pass inspections once a year when we come in and look at how their operations work.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Can you just give us an example of how this has affected this culture of safety? You talked about it a little bit, that it's day to day rather than periodic. Can you give us an example of how that works?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I used a very plain example before, and I'll use it again.

We'll take a taxi company, for instance; we don't regulate taxis, but it's a good example. We might have a regulation that says your brake pads have to be five millimetres. So we come in once a year as the regulator and we take off the tire and we look at that tire to see whether or not the brake pad was less than five millimetres. If it were less, then we might slap a fine on you or something like that. All that tells us is that at that particular time, that one time of year, the brake pad was the required thickness.

With the safety management system, we would say that you have to have a system in place to ensure that the width of your brake pads

is being continually looked at and to ensure that the person looking at them has the required qualifications to do so, and you have to document that. So we would go in then and take a look at the system they have in place to ensure, on a daily basis, that they are indeed meeting the requirements of the regulation.

Obviously, when we're talking about civil aviation, it's much more complex than that, but in the short time I have available, I think that's a quick explanation of how it works.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: That's very helpful, because it does give us a sense that the ongoing safety aspects are being monitored on a regular basis and not just at points in time. For an air traveller such as I am, it's much more comforting to realize that whatever I'm on has been inspected on a regular basis and not just checked out maybe nine months before the last time I flew.

Regarding the program, I understand that Canada is seen as a world leader in implementing SMS. I'm wondering if you can talk to us a little about how this has been implemented, how this model has been brought forward, some of the processes that have gone on, and what kind of support we are having from stakeholders on this type of process.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I should note that stakeholders are very supportive of the use of safety management systems. It's a way for them to systematically manage their safety environments, and it's something they take very seriously as well.

Canada has been a leader in the introduction of safety management systems. We were one of the first countries to do so internationally, and right now all our carriers carrying 20 passengers and more are required to have safety management systems as part of their regime.

We are currently investigating whether or not to extend that requirement to those carriers carrying between 10 and 20 and then 10 and fewer. One of the issues we have to deal with is whether or not the industry has the capacity to do that at that level. Obviously, a small airline operation doesn't have the same capacity as Air Canada to implement a system such as that. So we have to ensure that the system is scalable enough to allow for it to be implemented.

That being said, many of the smaller carriers have implemented safety management systems on their own, just because they see it as a good management practice.

This is not endemic to the airline industry; indeed, we have safety management systems in the marine industry and in many industries other than transportation. In fact, safety management systems came about in the chemical industry as a result of the Bhopal disaster in India.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Holder, it's your turn.

Mr. Ed Holder: Very quickly, I had the opportunity to briefly mention to the minister the importance of Windsor-Detroit as those 8,000 trucks pass by London every day.

The cost of the bridge is a concern of some of my constituents. Through you, Mr. Lévesque, to your staff perhaps, can you explain, so that I can explain to my constituents, what the gross cost is estimated to be and how we intend to recoup that cost? And is there a timeframe in which you'd imagine that would happen?

•(1230)

Mr. Louis Lévesque: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...level, as the minister has indicated, we're looking to a P3 and tolling system to recover costs.

I'll turn to Helena to talk to you more about that.

Ms. Helena Borges (Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs, Department of Transport): The total cost of the bridge component is roughly about a billion dollars. On either side, of course, we have to have customs plazas, both on the Canadian side and on the American side, and then on the Michigan side there is an interchange that connects to the interstate system.

Those pieces will comprise the DRIC crossing, the Detroit River international crossing project. As for the total of cost of that, right now we are doing the figures again because the work on the Michigan side was really delayed for a two-year period. We're bringing those numbers up to date, and we estimate that the cost will be a little bit above \$2 billion.

As the deputy said, the objective is that we will go for a public-private partnership. We have done various rounds of soundings with the market, so the players, the P3 players, and they've indicated to us that they have an interest in the project, a big interest. I think the governor saw that in Toronto earlier this week at the P3 conference. We expect that they will be able to invest equity in the project, and that they probably would be able to invest enough to cover the costs of the bridge.

With that, the government would then have to look at how to cover the rest of the funding through appropriation. Tolls will be charged and tolls will be set according to the market rate at that time. We expect from the traffic analysis we've done—perhaps three times over now, and we'll update them again before we go out to market—that the project cost can be totally recouped within a concession period ranging about 35 to about 40, 45 years, and that it would be totally covered from the toll revenue. After that point, all the toll revenues are then gathered and put back into the infrastructure to make sure it's kept in good condition.

So there will have to be upfront support for the project, but the toll revenues will start to pay back very soon thereafter. The project, in fact most projects, will take about a five-year period right at the beginning for the traffic levels to basically firm up. At that point, the tolls start covering the actual investment in the project.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Watson, seven minutes.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our officials for appearing.

Greetings to our new deputy minister. We look forward to ongoing work with you.

I want to direct my questions towards the Navigation Protection Act, an act originally brought in, if I understand it, in 1882. Do I have the year right on that one?

This committee has looked at that issue previously. In 2008 we conducted a number of hearings for several weeks as the build Canada plan was being rolled out. We were looking for some efficiencies to the existing Navigable Waters Protection Act. We settled on, for example, amendments to exempt minor works from consideration. There were a few other things.

But witnesses at the time—we had representatives not only from municipalities but of seven provinces and two territories—were looking for a complete overhaul of the act. It wasn't possible at the time with building Canada plan being rolled out. Now we're at the phase where, as we're looking to the next set of infrastructure programs, it is the right time to restore this act to its original intention, which was to deal with navigation.

We faced two questions at the time: do we try to define what a waterway is, or do we simply move to a listing of waterways or the exclusion of other waterways?

Can you describe for us the decision to move to listing versus trying to define a waterway? What are the problems? We had difficulty as a committee trying to define what a waterway was, as did our witnesses. Can you explain that decision as briefly as possible for us?

•(1235)

Mr. Louis Lévesque: The first comment I would make is that the proposed legislation provides for both a list of major waterways and an opt-in process if in some areas there's a feeling that there's a need for more protection. So that to some extent combines the best of both approaches.

I will defer to Gerard for more detailed comments.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I think we faced the same conundrum that the committee did. We knew we wanted to change the scope of the act, and the question was what was the best way to do it? Trying to come up with a definition to limit the scope of the act proved very difficult.

In the end, we thought the best way was to establish criteria, to identify those bodies of water where commercial navigation was indeed a high priority, and to try to come up with a list of appropriate waterways to which the act could apply. Then, as the deputy minister pointed out, should we find out that we've omitted something or a water has been missed for whatever reason, give us the ability to add them in if so required.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Our provincial-territorial witness at the committee had suggested that it was their understanding, at both the provincial and the municipal level, that the act from its inception was to deal exclusively with navigation.

In that vein—and I don't expect you to have the numbers here, but I'd appreciate it if they could be compiled for the committee—how many environmental assessments were triggered in the first 100 years by the Navigable Waters Protection Act? How many permits for navigable waters were issued in the same amount of time?

I'll leave that for you to report back on to the committee.

The deputy minister explained that there is an opt-in system. For those who are interested in it, can you explain how the opt-in system will work?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I guess there are two aspects to opting in. One is bringing another water into the act, and that would be at the request of a province if they thought a particular waterway was to be in the act. They would make a request to the minister, the minister would consider it, and then there would be a Governor in Council approval to change the schedule of the act.

The other one is for a specific work. If a constructor of a specific work for reasons of greater certainty wanted to ensure they had an approval under the Navigation Protection Act, they could come to us and ask us to review their plans. Then we could do so and issue an approval, and it would have the coverage of the act.

Mr. Jeff Watson: The current Bill C-45 obviously is not yet enforced. We hope it will be passed in due course and that the changes will be made to it. But under the current execution of the Navigable Waters Protection Act, if I were a forestry company in a remote area doing some logging, and I had to construct, let's say, 100 different temporary bridges over a winding intermittent stream that is clearly not navigated, would I have to make separate application for each temporary bridge, and would each have to be assessed by Transport officials prior to a decision to grant a permit being made under the Navigable Waters Protection Act?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: That's correct. Each work would require a permit.

Mr. Jeff Watson: So moving to a system whereby we are having that kind of scrutiny on waterways that are heavily navigated, as opposed to that, will mean a tremendous savings in resources, will it not? It will simplify, too, and give a greater degree of certainty to the proponents who are looking to move ahead with their projects as well.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Yes. Certainly for many of those works while the majority of constructors try to live within the law, we strongly suspect there are many who go out and construct these works without living within the actual law as it now exists.

That being said, the changing of the act will allow us to redirect our resources to those areas where navigation is most important.

• (1240)

The Chair: Mr. Sullivan, you have the last five minutes.

I want to remind members that we do have a motion to deal with the estimates at the end, which should just take a couple of minutes.

Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Very quickly, I'm not sure who to put this in terms of civil aviation safety. There are two airlines in Canada that are using temporary foreign workers to pilot their aircraft in order to pay much lower wages. In the cases where those temporary foreign workers can't pass Canadian certification, they are wet-leasing planes with those temporary foreign workers so they don't need to pass Canadian certification to fly the plane into Canada.

Is the department aware of this, and what are you doing about it?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: Gerard.

Mr. Gerard McDonald: Certainly we're aware of wet leasing going on, but with respect to the certification of pilots, the pilots being used would be certified either by us as Transport Canada or by the foreign entity that is responsible for the registration of the aircraft. So they would be certified individuals.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Well, what we're told is that some of those pilots can't pass Canadian certification, so they're placed on wet-leased planes in order to avoid the regulations. I'm simply putting that out for you folks to consider. It seems like a loophole to me. We have many pilots in Canada who would love to be flying those planes and who are qualified, and the whole idea of using temporary foreign workers to avoid using Canadian workers is a matter, perhaps, not for the Department of Transport but for the ministries of immigration and of human resources.

I have another question, very quickly. The Humber River is a heritage river, designated so by the Canadian heritage rivers service, which was created, in part, under the Navigable Waters Protection Act. Now that the Navigable Waters Protection Act no longer protects the Humber River, what will happen to its designation as a heritage river? How will that be financed and funded, since the whole idea behind heritage rivers was that there was no act required to create them because other acts covered them, one of which was the Navigable Waters Protection Act?

Mr. Gerard McDonald: I'm not sure that.... Certainly we do not provide any funding for any rivers, no matter what their designation. With respect to the Humber River, as I indicated earlier, if the province indicated it would like to have it covered under the Navigable Waters Protection Act, it can make an application to do so.

With respect to any protections for the river itself, those would revert to common law, as with all of the other rivers that would no longer be covered under the schedule of the act.

The Chair: You have time for one more question.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: That's for Monsieur Aubin.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I experienced a short-lived pleasure earlier in my 40-second discussion with the minister, when I learned that he had filed the response to the requests made by the Parliamentary Budget Officer on October 26. However, it appears from a report dated November 7 that Transport Canada submitted the answer to only one of the three sections requested by the officer. In fact, there is apparently nothing on staff cutbacks or on the impact on services.

Since, once again, I have little time left, approximately one minute, I would like to introduce a motion that the committee ask the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to provide it with the information—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Aubin, you know that I have to rule your motion out of order because there wasn't due notice.

If you have a question, you have about 65 seconds left.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Then I will take the 65 seconds I have left to read you what O'Brien and Bosc say about this.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry: I have a point of order from Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: We are about to deal with the supplementary budget. Any motion that is related to the budget is completely in order and notice doesn't have to be given, according to—

The Chair: No, not on this one. It's not in there, and I'm ruling it not admissible.

You have 65 seconds, Mr. Aubin.

Yes, Mr. Aubin, on a point of order?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. It states: "A member of a committee may move a motion at any time in the normal course of a meeting..."

• (1245)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...that's true, and then we vote on it in two days.

The Chair: That's right, 48 hours.

So do you want your—

Mr. Robert Aubin: No—

The Chair: Mr. Aubin, I'm not going to argue about it. Do you want your 65 seconds or not?

I'm going to take that as a no.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today—

Mr. Robert Aubin: I am challenging the chair.

The Chair: You're challenging the chair?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Yes.

The Chair: We'll call a vote.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Let's have a recorded vote.

The Chair: As the chair, I have to ask if the decision of the chair is sustained.

(Ruling of the chair sustained [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

An hon. member: But the chair can't vote.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: The chair can't vote on a motion of his own...

No.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. Thanks for taking the time to be here.

A number of you, I believe, have question period that you want to....

Order!

The meeting is still going on. We have a motion to deal with the budget.

Order, please.

We have a motion to deal with the estimates, if somebody wishes to move it.

Can I have some order, please?

In regard to the supplementary estimates, I have a number of questions, some under Transport.

Shall vote 60b under Foreign Affairs and International Trade carry?

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

National Capital Commission

Vote 60b—Payments to the National Capital Commission for capital expenditures.....\$1

(Vote 60b agreed to)

The Chair: Shall votes 1b, 5b, 30b, 45b, 50b and 60b, under Transport, carry?

TRANSPORT

Department

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$1

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures.....\$1

The Federal Bridge Corporation Limited

Vote 30b—Payments to The Federal Bridge Corporation Limited.....
\$11,241,693

Office of Infrastructure of Canada

Vote 45b—Contributions.....\$108,366,300

The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc.

Vote 50b—Payments to The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc.....
\$40,475,000

VIA Rail Canada Inc.

Vote 60b—Payments to VIA Rail Canada Inc.....\$79,661,000

(Votes 1b, 5b, 30b, 45b, 50b, and 60b agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the chair report the supplementary estimates (B) 2012-13 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all I need.

The meeting is adjourned.

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