



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2017-2018](#))

Members:

**MS S ORR (Chair)
MISS C BURCH (Deputy Chair)
MR J MILLIGAN**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2018

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms B McGill (Ph: 620 50124)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Privilege statement

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.33 am.

Appearances:

Steel, Mr Chris, Minister for City Services, Minister for Community Services and Facilities, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Roads

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate

Thomas, Ms Emma, Director-General

Corrigan, Mr Jim, Deputy Director-General, City Services

Edghill, Mr Duncan, Deputy Director-General, Transport Canberra

McGrath, Mr Michael, Program Manager, Land Release Infrastructure

McHugh, Mr Ben, Executive Director, City Operations

Horne, Mr Hamish, Chief Executive Officer, Canberra Cemeteries

Marshall, Mr Ken, Director, Roads ACT, City Services

Alegria, Mr Stephen, Acting Director, City Presentation, City Services

Trushell, Mr Michael, Director, ACT NOWaste, City Services

ACT Public Cemeteries Authority

Bartos, Mr Stephen, Board Chair

THE ACTING CHAIR (Miss C Burch): Good morning, everyone. Ms Orr is running a little late today, so we are going to kick off without her. Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into annual and financial reports 2017-18.

Today we are going to begin by examining the annual reports of the ACT Public Cemeteries Authority, the ACT Veterinary Surgeons Board and the Animal Welfare Authority. We will then examine the sections of the annual report of Transport Canberra and City Services relating to city services and Transport Canberra. Finally we will conclude with the annual report of the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

Before we begin, on behalf of the committee I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you, Minister Steel, and the representatives from the various statutory authorities for your attendance this morning. Can I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink coloured privilege statement before you on the table. Could you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Steel: Yes.

Mr Bartos: I do.

Mr Horne: I do.

Mr Corrigan: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Can I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live.

Turning to cemeteries first off, when was the section that has been set aside for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander burial at the Gungahlin cemetery opened and how is it being received by the community?

Mr Steel: I will pass to Stephen Bartos.

Mr Bartos: Probably Hamish Horne, as CEO of the cemeteries, who is very involved with that and has taken a close interest, is the best person to answer.

Mr Horne: I do not have the exact date but it was opened in the late 1990s. It has capacity for about 50 spaces. Until now there have been about 20 burials there.

THE ACTING CHAIR: And how was it received by the community?

Mr Horne: As far as I am aware, it was actually done with considerable consultation in the first instance. But I think it is fair to say that it is not well subscribed to by the Aboriginal community because the very large proportion of folk actually go home—they take their loved ones home to be buried—which is why there are not that many burials there.

Mr Bartos: If I can add from the perspective of the board of the authority, we are well aware that most people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander prefer, if a loved one dies, for that person to be buried on country. However, with the ACT having a reasonable sized population of people of Aboriginal background, primarily Wiradjuri, we do maintain that facility there for those people from that community to use.

MR MILLIGAN: Are there any particular characteristics or how does it differ? How does that part of the cemetery differ to any other part? Are there any specific requirements that set it aside?

Mr Horne: There are no special requirements. The area has its own garden with features that were, if you like, requested by the community in the first instance. Otherwise it would be classified as a fairly standard plaque beam or lawn space.

MR MILLIGAN: Your report mentioned in a couple of places natural burial options. I was wondering if you could give a little more on detail on what that is exactly, how that would benefit the cemetery and also the community and how this service is being promoted to the community.

Mr Horne: The natural burial space is set up in what is actually forest area. It has all been planted. The Gungahlin cemetery was essentially built on a completely terraformed space, if you will. It was scraped clean and then replanted from scratch.

There are a number of forest areas in there. This allows us to make use of those spaces that otherwise would not be used or are very hard to use. It also provides an option for a number of members of the community who wish to be buried in a more natural way.

The prescription for natural burial is that everything that goes with the person in the grave must be of natural materials, with the odd exception such as rings and those sorts of things. Otherwise, everything goes. Wicker baskets, shrouds, anything made from materials and wood and those sorts of things are normal. We do not allow standard coffins or plastic to go in there.

There are special requirements the health authority places on that sort of burial. To meet those, the body must be prepared and presented in a very specially made body bag, which is actually made from compostable plastic and sealed specially to make sure nothing escapes, if you will.

We do not have any memorials on the actual site of the grave. There is a memorial space at the front of the area, a large rock where people can place a small plaque, but otherwise the grave itself is identified in two ways: (1) we locate it by survey; we have a surveyor that comes in and pinpoints it precisely, but also (2) we have a RFID tag that goes at the head of every grave so that we can positively identify the spot later if necessary.

MR MILLIGAN: Is it a much cheaper option to have that sort of burial service?

Mr Horne: It is cheaper but I would say not much. It is about 15 per cent cheaper.

MR MILLIGAN: Is there a time frame attached to that, in the sense that can they reuse that site in 15 or 20 years time, or is it indefinite?

Mr Horne: No. All burials in the ACT by law must be in perpetuity, or forever, essentially.

Mr Steel: We are currently consulting with the community on their needs and preferences around burial, including types of technologies which are not currently available in the ACT that the public may be interested in. That includes a form of burial known as capsula mundi which involves actually burying the body with seeds which would then potentially grow into trees on the site. There are a few different options there which we are seeking feedback on at the moment.

MR MILLIGAN: When is that feedback due or what are you doing with the—

Mr Steel: I understand the consultation is closing this month.

MS CHEYNE: The annual report notes that this is, I think, the highest ever interment of ashes. What sort of system is used to keep track of where ashes are interred? Is this ever audited or checked?

Mr Steel: Before we go on, the consultation closes on 10 December. I correct the statement there. I will pass over to Hamish Horne for that information.

Mr Horne: Ashes are treated exactly the same as every other interment. So they are in a designated space which essentially is geolocated. We have a digital map that swiftly locates every single interment. It is the same for a burial or ashes.

MS CHEYNE: Even very old interments?

Mr Horne: As far as age goes, the only place that is really old here is Hall Cemetery, but we are pretty confident that we have most of the graves located there, certainly as far as we know, at least. But they have been keeping very accurate maps since Woden Cemetery opened in the 1930s.

MS CHEYNE: That is good to hear. Does the authority have oversight of the process if someone wants the ashes of their loved one back, returned to them?

Mr Horne: Yes, and that does happen from time to time.

MS CHEYNE: How does that process work?

Mr Horne: We essentially locate the ashes and dig them up.

MS CHEYNE: Is there a fee?

Mr Horne: There is a fee, yes.

MS CHEYNE: What is that fee?

Mr Horne: Off the top of my head I cannot tell you. I can take that on notice.

MS CHEYNE: Okay.

Mr Horne: It is a published fee, though. It is a minister-approved fee. It is part of our fee schedule.

MS CHEYNE: I appreciate that Norwood is a private facility, but do you have any oversight of that process there?

Mr Horne: None whatsoever.

Mr Steel: I will pass over to Jim Corrigan to talk about the regulatory oversight of private facilities.

Mr Corrigan: The Public Cemeteries Authority is independent from the directorate. My role in the directorate is like the regulator of cemeteries and crematoriums in the ACT. So, yes, there is oversight of those facilities. I am unaware of where your line of questioning is going. Has something occurred or is there—

MS CHEYNE: Yes. Do you want me to keep going?

Mr Corrigan: Yes, in terms of—if it is something at Norwood Park, if something was brought to our attention, it maybe would be Norwood Park. The act sets out the

requirements for crematoriums, how they practise and what they need to do. There are codes of practice and things like that. If something is brought to our attention that something may have been breached or not in accordance with the act, we would fully investigate. There is an ability under the act for the director-general to write to Norwood Park if there was an issue and seek rectification—

MS CHEYNE: If it is alright, I will ask broadly and then I can be a bit specific?

Mr Corrigan: Yes, okay.

MS CHEYNE: Has the directorate received any complaints where someone's ashes have been lost?

Mr Corrigan: No, not to my knowledge, no.

MS CHEYNE: If the directorate did receive a complaint where someone's ashes had been lost, what would be the process?

Mr Corrigan: We would investigate that. We would take that pretty seriously. That is, potentially, very concerning for the family involved; absolutely. We would look into that. Obviously, we would have to receive the details of the case and we would make some inquiries.

MS CHEYNE: What options for recourse would be available? I assume that as a regulator this would apply whether it was at Norwood or whether it was ashes lost somewhere else. It sounds like you have very good record keeping; so that gives me some assurance.

Mr Corrigan: As I said, the act sets out some procedures and things. It puts requirements on the cemetery or the crematorium operators to keep a record of all the remains and things like that. There are a number of things in the act we would look at to say, "Has anything here been breached?" As I was saying, the director-general can write to the relevant authority to ask for an explanation and to seek rectification if we believe things have been breached.

In the case that ashes have been lost, we would have to understand the circumstances. That is pretty serious. And then there is: what rectification could the authority do? I mean, lost in what way? Have the ashes gone somewhere they should not have gone? Have they been given to the wrong person? Were they put in a memorial garden and the location lost? We would have to work that through and see what—

MS CHEYNE: Yes. In this, I can be specific. I might talk to you separately, Mr Corrigan, but my constituent had a son who died within two hours in the late 1970s. His ashes were interred in the children's niche wall at Norwood. Approval was sought from families in 1992 for ashes in that wall to be moved to a children's court wall. My constituent gave that approval, but he wants the ashes back so that he can fulfil a promise to his late wife to scatter the ashes of his late wife and the son together. Norwood has advised that they cannot find the ashes, and that they apologise, but that is it.

It is very distressing for my constituent, as you would imagine. The reason he has reached out to me is because he cannot keep going and asking. It is too distressing. If ashes are lost, what is the recourse there? Even more concerning, he told me that when he was first advised, Norwood said that they found ashes that should not have been in the place where they were looking.

I am very interested in how both private and public memorials are operating in terms of how we are keeping track generally of where ashes are. I guess if you do not want them back you would never know if there is something wrong. But I very much want the best outcome for my constituent. I have written to Norwood. The response I received back was not satisfactory. I am just not sure what other options are available, but it seems to me that I write to you as the regulator.

Mr Corrigan: I think so. Without knowing all the circumstances, it sounds very distressing. Yes, I think if your constituent, or you on the constituent's behalf, were to write to me or write to the director-general, we would investigate this. The recourse—

MS CHEYNE: Is there a privacy issue here? Do I need to attach a letter from him saying he gives his approval?

Mr Corrigan: It would assist. It would assist to understand the full circumstances.

MS CHEYNE: I do not want to slow this process down; it has dragged out long enough.

Mr Corrigan: No, I understand. We also need to know the circumstances to investigate. Obviously, it is going to be very distressing for the family, but we will need to know what has occurred to ask for an explanation.

MS CHEYNE: Yes, he has already lost his son once; I do not want him to lose him twice. Thank you.

MS LAWDER: There was some mention in a few pages of the annual report of work relating to the southern memorial park, something we often ask about.

MS LE COUTEUR: That was my question as well.

MS LAWDER: Could you give us an update of where your considerations and work are up to with regard to the southern memorial park?

Mr Steel: The government is continuing to explore options around southern memorial park to make sure that the full range of burial and interment services can be provided on the south side once Woden Cemetery comes to capacity, which we think is at the end of the year. The government has been undertaking a market sounding exercise as well around the operation of, and potentially the delivery of, a southern memorial park cemetery and potentially crematorium. I will pass to Jim Corrigan to provide some further detail about that market sounding.

Mr Corrigan: The capital up-front cost of establishing these cemeteries can be quite high. As part of the consideration of southern memorial park, we thought, "Let us just

see what market interest there is and what other models of internment and care could be provided.” That is what we have done. That has recently concluded. We are just waiting for the final results to come through. That will help to inform the government or brief the government. We can say, “Here are some options going forward about how a southern memorial park could be delivered.” That is where that is at.

Based on all the excellent concept planning work that the cemeteries authority did some years ago, we are continuing to refine the design. That is obviously subject to government process in respect of funding going forward and those sorts of things. We are looking to refine the design for the southern memorial park and what services would be provided there. It is still very much all very active.

MS LAWDER: Woden, in theory, will reach capacity before not too long.

Mr Corrigan: The end of the year. It is fully subscribed at the end of the year.

MS LAWDER: What year are we talking about—December?

Mr Corrigan: This year, 2018, yes. “Fully subscribed” means that if you have not booked a plot, there will be no plots left to book. Arising from burials long ago, people have obviously reserved a lot space there already. But at the end of this year, if you have not reserved a place at Woden there will be no space left.

MS LAWDER: You are doing some market sounding, as I understand it. Do you have any ballpark date—I am not asking for a commitment—for when a southern burial crematorium may be available to people who live on the south side?

Mr Steel: No, that work is ongoing.

MS LAWDER: Is it still considered for that Long Gully Road-Mugga Lane site?

Mr Corrigan: It is the same site. That is still the site.

Mr Steel: The master plan that was undertaken in 2012—

MS LAWDER: Are there any other sites or options being considered?

Mr Corrigan: Not by the government as such. Certainly, through the market sounding, there is some private sector interest at other locations, but more around possible crematoriums and things, but I do not know all the details.

MS LAWDER: There is one at Symonston, I think?

Mr Corrigan: Yes, one private entity group that is in the market has said that they are interested. I think there was some media about it recently. But I do not have all the details. Obviously, we want to see what is possible.

MS LAWDER: What you are looking at currently in that site, the southern memorial site, does that include both burial of various sorts—perpetual, renewable and whatever tenure—and also a crematorium? Or is that still just part of your—

Mr Steel: Both of those are being considered. The master plan that was undertaken in 2012 for southern memorial park certainly provides a full range of options.

Mr Corrigan: Ms Lawder, just to clarify, at the moment under the act that Mr Horne referred to earlier, all graves are in perpetuity in the ACT. The idea of renewable tenure, that is through the consultation exercise we are doing at the moment, a review of the Cemeteries Act. We have just gone out to seek the public's views around the concept of renewable tenure, but it is not in place yet. If it was to come in place, it would be an act amendment with the government's and, obviously, the Assembly's consent. It would be going forward. There is no retrospectivity in that concept at all. That is the concept going forward if, indeed, it ever came to be.

MS LE COUTEUR: Given that the southern memorial park has not yet started, are you doing market soundings on the basis that the potential change to non-perpetual tenure would be in place?

Mr Steel: We would want to hear from the community first about their preferences with regard to that. Some very strong views in the community are coming through the consultation with regard to renewable tenure. We need to consider those views before making any decisions and planning for the future.

We know that more sustainable approaches and renewable tenure would extend the life of our existing cemeteries, particularly Gungahlin given that Woden will be fully subscribed at the end of the year, and it would certainly extend the life of southern memorial park if that came on line in the future.

MS LE COUTEUR: So expressions of interest are being called on two different scenarios: one, the current legislation; and two, potential changes? It would make a considerable difference to the economics of running a cemetery.

Mr Steel: We know that there is a considerable demand for crematoria services—75 per cent of people choose cremation. We know that there is demand for that in the community, so that is always going to be there. There will be preferences around that, but I do not think that there will be a huge difference when it comes to the planning for a future memorial park.

The city is growing; we know that we need extra burial plots, and we know that we need extra crematoria services. Certainly the need is there and that is why we have gone out for market soundings now. While there may be some changes to the needs and preferences of people with regard to renewable tenure, we cannot stop that process; we need to move forward with it.

MS LAWDER: What is the expected capacity for the Norwood Park cemetery? When is that due to fill up?

Mr Corrigan: Under current scenarios we have at least 25 years at Gungahlin. To clarify, Norwood Park is separate to Gungahlin Cemetery. Norwood Park is the crematorium across the road. So for Gungahlin Cemetery we have 25 years under current scenarios, that is, no southern memorial park coming online or anything like

that.

MS CHEYNE: Even with our current population growth?

Mr Corrigan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: There are no more questions on this topic so we will move to roads. Minister, can you outline the impact that kangaroo fencing is having on the Tuggeranong Parkway?

Mr Steel: Tuggeranong Parkway has fairly recently been upgraded with kangaroo fencing and we are seeing the impact of that with data from Roads ACT. The number of crashes has reduced considerably, particularly involving animals. There has been a 50 per cent reduction in the number of reported crashes down from 120 to 60. There has also been a 50 per cent reduction in the number of dead kangaroos being picked up along the Tuggeranong Parkway.

We think that the fences are having an impact and we are looking at the data on our other roadways as to whether that sort of treatment might be useful in the future given the success along the Tuggeranong Parkway.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned it has gone from 120 to 60 reported crashes and you have also seen a 50 per cent reduction in the number of kangaroo carcasses taken from the side of the road. Do you have absolute numbers for carcasses?

Mr Steel: We have that data but we will take that on notice; we need to provide that data through the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned you are looking at other roadways for this project given that it is making some real changes. What other roadways are you potentially considering?

Mr Steel: The government considers a whole range of different factors when looking at these sorts of treatments, particularly the speed limit along the roadway. In this case, the Tuggeranong Parkway is 100 pretty much all of the way so the severity of crashes has the potential to be catastrophic. That is one of the factors that is taken into account as well as positioning of the roadway in relation to nature reserves.

You may be aware that in addition to the federal government the ACT government has committed \$100 million to upgrades along Monaro Highway. We are looking at whether fencing along that roadway may be useful to try to prevent crashes with animals in the future. I will pass to Ken Marshall from Roads ACT to provide further detail about those measures.

Mr Marshall: I am not sure there is a lot to add; the minister has covered the key factors well. The sorts of applications where this measure is likely to be most effective, as the minister has noted, are the high speed, high volume arterial roads. As identified, the next most obvious candidate for that is the Monaro Highway in conjunction with other work under consideration focused on safety outcomes.

A whole range of circumstances is taken into account. It is quite difficult to predict animal movements. They vary with weather conditions and a range of other factors. It is certainly not an application we would see as having universal use, but in those very specific circumstances where the consequences warrant a treatment along a whole road section it is one of the options that is available to us.

Ms Thomas: To add to the responses already provided by the minister and Ken, the directorate has a strong focus on improving how we use data within the directorate to get good improvements for things like this. The kangaroo fencing is a good example of where we have worked with other directorates to pool their data. EPSDD collects the carcasses from the road after there has been an incident and we are able to look at their data and the data we have managed to get through any reports of incidents, and using that data we can provide hot spots. We are doing a hot spot mapping of Canberra to see where incidents are more likely to occur and then using that data to provide advice to government on future infrastructure requirements. It is a really good example of lots of different pieces of data coming together for the directorate to be able to use that in a more effective way.

Mr Steel: Over the past year we have seen a large number of kangaroos coming down into the suburbs to feed as a result of the dry weather we have been experiencing. So people have been seeing in our bush capital more kangaroos around. The awareness of this issue is certainly at a high at the moment. It is pleasing to see that the treatments that have been provided along the Tuggeranong Parkway are working and so now we can consider whether those sorts of treatments are appropriate in other areas as well.

MISS C BURCH: I would like to ask about road resurfacing. Of the one million square metres of resurfacing that have been completed, how much of that has been tar and how much of that has been blue metal chip or other?

Mr Steel: I will defer to Ken Marshall.

Mr Marshall: To be a pedant, none is tar. Bitumen is the binder that is used in virtually all the resurfacing or surfacing treatments in the ACT. The only alternative is rigid pavement concrete, Portland cement concrete pavements, which we generally do not use in the ACT. Bitumen is the binder in all the treatments.

The range of treatment options that we have available is dependent on the outcome that is required. The vast majority by area of our resurfacing program is chip seal spray, about half of the program by dollar value but the vast majority by area.

The objective of spray seal is that it is a preventative treatment. Through a program of pavement condition evaluation, we are able to identify the trajectory of deterioration of road surfaces and target a point in that lifecycle where a preventative treatment will be effective in extending the useful life. The objective is to intervene before the deterioration gets to a point where a corrective treatment is required because a corrective treatment is significantly more expensive, usually something in the order of eight times as expensive to do a corrective treatment.

Inevitably, though, any preventative maintenance program, no matter how well planned, will never be completely effective in preventing road sections deteriorating

to the point where they need a corrective treatment. And, generally speaking, that corrective treatment will involve excavation of the failed or deteriorating road pavement and replacement with a new structural pavement, which is usually made from asphaltic concrete, which sometimes is referred to as hot mix, which is essentially the same principle. It is an aggregate held in place by a binder. The difference is that asphaltic concrete is batch-prepared in a plant, delivered to site in bulk transport, in trucks, and then laid and compacted, whereas the spray seal, again, is aggregate held in place by a binder but it is constructed, in effect, on site. The binder is applied and then the aggregate spread over the binder and compacted into the binder.

MISS C BURCH: You said that the vast majority is the spray seal and that is around 50 per cent of the dollar value. When you say the vast majority, do you have an actual proportion?

Mr Marshall: I do not have precise figures in front of me but it would be in excess of 80 per cent. It would 80, 85 per cent approximately.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned in the annual report that you tried a geotextile fabric with the resurfacing of the Tuggeranong Parkway. Do you have any feedback? How did that go?

Mr Marshall: It is not a particularly new treatment. We use it where it is appropriate. The primary purpose of the geo fabric is to add some structural strength to a spray seal. As I noted earlier, generally speaking the objective of a spray seal is to reseal the surface, to re-waterproof the surface. Its objective is to simply fill the cracks and prevent water ingress into the structural pavement beneath the surface.

In some circumstances, if the cracking is significant or if the loadings on the surface are significant—a busy road with a high proportion of heavy vehicles—spray seal can be fragile in bridging the cracks. The cracks can tend to reflect through and therefore you lose, obviously, the waterproofing effect that you are looking for. The purpose of the fabric is to just add a bit of structural strength to prevent that or resist that tendency for cracks to reflect through. It is a very effective treatment used in circumstances where it is appropriate.

MS LAWDER: You have got about 50 sites in the ACT that were treated with heavy patching. How is that compared to the previous year?

Mr Marshall: I do not have comparison figures.

MS LAWDER: Could you take that on notice?

Mr Marshall: I can take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Just while we are on the topic of road resurfacing, can you please outline how the Plastiphalt is going? I know you have been trialling that as a road resurfacing.

Mr Steel: That is a very good question in National Recycling Week. That material

uses plastic bags, recycled toner cartridges and glass fines, broken down glass. We are looking at how we can procure more of those recyclable materials in our projects, particularly road projects. I will ask Ken Marshall to talk about that. It is currently, I believe, being trialled on Horse Park Drive in Gungahlin. Ken might have some further detail about that.

Mr Marshall: Yes. Plastiphalt is a proprietary name but what it represents is a combination of a series of other material reuse strategies that have developed over years, most of which we have trialled in the ACT in previous years. Plastiphalt is a particular company's attempt to combine a number of those options into one product. It basically involves using recycled soft plastic as an additive to the binder, to the glue if you like, the bitumen component of the asphalted concrete.

The product also includes aggregate replacement, replacing virgin rock as asphalt with glass. It also involves the use of printer toner, again as an additive to the binder. It is a combination of a range of different substitutions that have developed over years and it is an attempt to roll them all into one product to maximise the benefit in terms of material reuse.

THE CHAIR: I look forward to the next annual report and hearing how the trial went.

MR MILLIGAN: Gundaroo Drive has been delayed for now getting close to two years, I think; 18 months or two years. An auditor has now come in to review that whole project. How did that auditor review come about? What instigated that, and were you aware of the issues associated with this project before the auditor came in?

Mr Steel: We brought in the auditor, without prompting, to look at this so that we could learn more about how we can better plan: what governance improvements we can make and what process improvements we can make for future projects.

Regarding Gundaroo, in relation to the premise of your question, the government made a deliberate decision, which was an election commitment, to change the scope of the project to add a signalised intersection at the corner of Mirrabai Drive and Gundaroo Drive. Obviously, that added a bit of extra time onto the project, but it was an important component of the project and it included an additional lane on Mirrabai Drive. That was one part of the extension of time.

Another issue was in relation to moving the Jemena gas infrastructure along the route, which was unforeseen. That has meant that stage 1 of the project, in particular, is now coming to a close at the moment. We are seeing the significant difference that that is already making. And stage 2 works will continue into the future.

MR MILLIGAN: Residents who want to do groundwork on their property do "dial before you dig": they look at what is under the ground before they do any sort of work. Would the government not do the same thing in this situation, and shouldn't the government have known about the gas lines that already exist there?

Mr Steel: I will ask Jim Corrigan to explain. These were unforeseen. We were certainly aware of the gas lines, but sometimes it takes third parties a longer time to be able to move this type of infrastructure.

Mr Corrigan: The minister has touched on it. Obviously we know where the services are. The issue in this one was that there were delays around actually moving the gas main itself. Jemena moved the gas mains in this case; we are reliant on a third party to actually do the relocation. That added some time.

A lot of it was that we found we had to relocate just about every utility we found. The other issue we found was that even though we knew where some of the utilities were, we thought that they were at the depth that they should have been, which would have allowed the construction to continue, but some were not at the right depth and had to be deeper; otherwise you get impact from the road. So we had to re-lay some surfaces as well.

So there were some unknowns in the project. In a project of this scale often that is what does happen. It was a combination of these things that led to the calendar time going out as long as it did.

MR MILLIGAN: The delays specifically that contributed to the 18 months were what?

Mr Corrigan: One of our capital works colleagues might be able to join us on the actual time frame delays, but the delays were a combination of what I just outlined. It was relocating services, getting services to the right depth and just some of those unknowns related to projects of this scale. The contractor did not delay; I do not know what the overall delay of the project was.

Ms Thomas: The total delay was 434 days, as far as I understand. In that delay, 75 per cent is attributed to the utilities. It is not just Jemena; I understand that a number of other utilities are required. Yes, we often know where they are. Sometimes we are surprised by where they are, because dial before you dig is only as accurate as the data that is provided to it. But also the utilities themselves sometimes will not allow anyone else to touch their works; they have to do the design, removal and movement of those within their systems, and we do not have an opportunity to do it. We will work with them very closely but, unfortunately, we are at their whim for their requirements.

MR MILLIGAN: How much have these delays added to the cost of the duplication?

Mr Edghill: There are two components of that. In terms of the budget, we are still expecting the project to come in on budget; we are talking about extensions of time rather than compensable extensions of time, for the most part.

In terms of the causes of the delay, we are going through that process through the audit at the moment. There are some overlaps; you should take some of the precise percentages with a grain of salt because of those overlaps. Generally speaking, of the 75 per cent related to utilities that Emma mentioned, you can cut that down into the Jemena gas main, contributing about 20 per cent of that; and TransACT fibre-optic cables, which also contributed about 20 or 25 per cent of the delays. When it came to the intersection works that the minister referred to, from memory that change in scope was in the order of 20 per cent. About 14 per cent was delays caused by wet weather.

There was no single cause of delay, but when they are added up that has led to the extension of time on the project.

MR MILLIGAN: Can you explain why Mirrabai Drive is not dual lane going both ways from Gundaroo?

Mr Corrigan: When the projects are designed, we look at the road system capacities and those sort of things. The pressure point is heading to the town centre on Mirrabai Drive, not necessarily the other way. So the duplication was just heading south towards the town centre. That is pretty much why. It is just how the road network functions. The need was not there, at this time anyway, to duplicate in both directions.

MR MILLIGAN: Did the government look at what costs would be associated with duplicating the road going both ways compared to the works that you are doing right now, as a cost comparison?

Mr Corrigan: Not precisely. It goes over the dam wall as well, the further duplication. That section of Mirrabai Drive is the dam wall for Yerrabi Pond. Without knowing those details, the cost to the project would be significantly more. But, as I said, the main driver, though—pardon the pun—was the need for more traffic to get into the town centre, particularly in that morning peak.

MR MILLIGAN: As you indicated, as the need increases, you might look at duplicating the road, which seems to be a common thing for this government: to play catch-up when it comes to road infrastructure. We see it right across the electorate of Yerrabi and right across the ACT. A lot of residents would think, “Why wouldn’t you do it in the first place?” If you see that there is a potential that that road will need to be duplicated, why not save on cost and do it in the first place rather than go back and redo it in five years time?

Mr Steel: We are duplicating roads in Gungahlin. Horse Park Drive is currently underway.

MR MILLIGAN: Fifteen years too late.

Mr Steel: I will remind you that it was the Liberal government that planned Gungahlin in the first place.

MR MILLIGAN: And then it was the Labor government that actually implemented it and built it.

Mr Steel: We have been investing \$121 million to duplicate roads in Gungahlin. That work is already making a difference. Gundaroo stage 1, with the switching on of the signals at Mirrabai Drive, is making a massive difference to traffic already, and we will see that improve as stage 2 comes on board and as Horse Park Drive is completed as well. And of course there is light rail, which you continue to oppose.

MR MILLIGAN: I do not necessarily think that we are continuing to oppose light rail. We want to ensure that the light rail does work effectively; we will support that,

and we will try to make sure that it does and that it delivers for the community, as Labor has promised it will do.

THE CHAIR: Can I go back to the traffic lights at Mirrabei Drive. You mentioned that that was actually an amendment to the original. Did I understand that correctly? Can you just run me through the thinking behind why you did that amendment?

Mr Corrigan: Again, we manage the entire network: what behaviour there is, where all the cars are going and where there are vehicles throughout the network. That information was telling us that the duplication of Gundaroo Drive was required because of how the traffic network moves around Gungahlin, with the arterials to pick up the traffic and move the people out of Gungahlin, through and around the town centre rather than through the town centre. These are important needs. And through that, we identified information about the roundabout. Whilst the roundabout performs well from a traffic point of view in general terms, when you get those peak periods at roundabouts you can get queues, so it is about queue management.

Another issue is that because the town centre is located near Yerrabi Pond and Yerrabi park, there are a lot of cyclists, a lot of people walking and people just wanting to recreate, move through that area. Roundabouts are not particularly good for active travel; they are not particularly great to navigate if you are walking a dog, riding a bike or doing things like that.

A number of those factors, as well as just the volume, suggested that a signalised solution was required for that intersection, given the volumes of traffic through it and those other needs. That is what led to it in briefing government about the needs and the growth of Gungahlin. Also, Gungahlin has been—I am not sure if it still is—the second highest growing urban area in Australia. After doing that modelling, we said to the government, “Now is probably the time, or in the near future.” At the time, the government made the decision to adjust the project and add the signalisation into it.

MISS C BURCH: Going back to the percentages we were talking about on the delays, out of the 434-day delay, you said that 75 per cent was due to utilities. What was the other 25 per cent?

Mr Edghill: Roughly there was the change of scope for the intersection at Mirrabei Drive, and I think the remainder was pretty much accounted for with wet weather and rain delays. In terms of the utilities, to put it into context, it is an issue which is being grappled with by jurisdictions around Australia at the moment, across quite a variety of projects.

I think there are effectively two main issues that, as an infrastructure market, we are dealing with. The first one is that there is just an extraordinary number of major infrastructure projects happening in Australia at present. When we in Canberra are dealing with Jemena, TransACT or whoever it may be, quite often the experts that they need on the ground, to authorise movement of utilities or to be involved in the design, are in a pool between all of these different jurisdictions. There are a number of working groups across jurisdictions involving the utilities in the private sector at the moment trying to nut through this issue. Unfortunately, we are not working in isolation here in Canberra; we are working in that broader Australia market and we

have to do our best to get the attention of the utility companies. That is probably the first issue. That is the carrot side.

On the stick side, the second issue is that there is a limited degree of stick. Speaking frankly, I am much more attracted to what I think is the French model where there are laws in place at the national level where the utility just has to move things when it needs to be done for major projects. The reality here is that we are somewhat restricted by the time frames that the utility companies themselves dictate.

There is no easy answer to the utilities issue in Australia at the moment. There are some things that we will learn with Gundaroo Drive and from other projects that we are involved in where we hope to minimise the risks and the associated potential for delays in dealing with these utilities.

MS LAWDER: Ms Thomas said a 434-day delay but I think you, Mr Edghill, said that you still expected to come in on budget. Can you explain how it would work that something that is a year and a half over time might still come in on budget?

Mr Edghill: In short, the way the contracts work is that the contractor can be entitled to extensions of time but that does not automatically mean that they are entitled to additional compensation for those delays. So depending upon the precise nature of the delay and the particular circumstances on site, and whether it is an integrative path, an extension of time does not automatically mean, under our contracts, that they are entitled to additional compensation as well.

MS LAWDER: That is good for the taxpayer but quite awkward for the contractor, who is penalised through no fault of their own. They are relying on the utilities people to do something and yet they have had to have staff on the same job for an additional year and a half past their expectation. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Edghill: Our number one concern, of course, is the ACT taxpayer, but we do at a practical level work with contractors in our market so that resources, rather than sitting idle on a project where there are extensions of time, can be redeployed elsewhere. There is a reasonably limited number of contractors in this space in the Canberra market. Typically they are delivering projects for us across more than one project at a time. So if there is an opportunity to move resources from one project to another and help that other project move along more quickly while there are extensions of time on the first one, then we are reasonably pragmatic in terms of working with the private sector to keep everybody as fully occupied and employed as possible.

MS LAWDER: Does the contractor outline the project plan and does the government then have some oversight? For example, the government could have said, "Our experience across other projects is that utilities are taking a huge amount of time." It seems like a bit of a failure in the planning.

Mr Edghill: These projects go for years and inevitably there is a degree of catch-up, and what we learn on one project we can apply to another project. With Gundaroo Drive I would not categorise it as a planning failure. It was identified that the pipeline was there, for example, and that works needed to be undertaken. Where the issue

arose was in the amount of time that Jemena subsequently came back to us with when they said, “Actually, no, we need more time.” I think Mr Corrigan spoke about some of the issues that were uncovered when the shovels were actually put in the ground. Of course you do not know that until you are actually on site.

But we will take these learnings into account, and some of the paths that other jurisdictions are going down, which I think we will see here in the ACT. Maybe there is an opportunity not to include utilities works as part of the main works. They can be undertaken as early works, so you are kind of de-risking that part of the project. And also we are quite mindful that we want to be using the right contract forms for the right projects. Gundaroo Drive is different from light rail, for example, which is a PPP contract form also. They can help to minimise this utility risk.

MS CHEYNE: Speaking of road delays, Coppins Crossing Road and William Hovell Drive-John Gorton Drive: I understand from the Roads ACT website that it is due for completion in early 2019, but the associated roadworks there have caused significant delays for most of 2018. I sympathise with my constituents who report back to me that there are times when they do not think any work has been done for a few months, from what it looks like. Is there some more detail that you could give about when it will be completed?

Mr Steel: You are referring to the John Gorton Drive 3A works?

MS CHEYNE: The one that intersects with William Hovell Drive.

Mr McGrath: It is scheduled to be completed, as you say, in early 2019. A comment I could make in relation to “There doesn’t appear to be work” is on the intersection. When you have traffic going through, you can do only a certain amount of work in that intersection at one time. Part of this project is another 900 metres of road construction along Coppins Crossing Road. While intersection work may not appear to be happening, we are actually doing quite a bit of work in relation to the rest of that 900 metres of road.

MS CHEYNE: But the constituents in West Belconnen, in particular, who use that road every day and who are being significantly delayed do not really care about Molonglo and the work that is happening along that 900 metres there. They are really focused on that intersection. Are we confident that it will be completed by early 2019, and what does early mean? Is there a month?

Mr McGrath: At this point it will probably be late February or early March. The reason in part is that we have the Christmas shutdown occurring, when a lot of the major suppliers are not working. Those elements need to be taken into account. Once you go past Christmas it is not going to happen in January because by the time everyone restarts it is not going to be there.

MS CHEYNE: To help explain the situation, if there is work happening along that 900 metres, how is it that the intersection was not done first and that all the work is being completed at the same time?

Mr McGrath: The original Coppins Crossing Road was a two-lane road: one in, one

out. To undertake the works, we needed to build the southbound lane while the existing Coppins Crossing Road was maintained open. You cannot build all of the road at the same time. You have to build this bit of road and relocate all the services, including Telstra and various other things, from where they were adjacent to the existing road into the new conduits that are provided as part of the new road. At that point, you can move people from the old Coppins Crossing Road on to the new one. That requires some modifications at the intersection. Then you have to build the northbound carriageway, which again will require modifications to the intersection once that bit of road is available. So it is a staging process where you have to move people from this point to that point, modify the intersection to suit the new arrangement and then get on and build the next bit. So—

MS CHEYNE: So the intersection is intricately related—

Mr McGrath: To the rest of the construction of the road. You cannot build the intersection in its complete form until you have all the other supporting infrastructure in place.

MS CHEYNE: That is quite hard to physically witness if you are driving through, because the work might be happening down the road.

Mr McGrath: And if you are not going down Coppins Crossing Road, you do not see all of that work. You are quite right.

MS CHEYNE: Okay. That is good. Thanks.

MS LAWDER: I want to ask some questions about stormwater infrastructure. How many people sit on the cross-agency stormwater task force and how many times has it met?

Mr McHugh: The task force met for the first time in October with representation—off the top of my head—of somewhere between eight and 10 officers from across various directorates within government.

MS LAWDER: Minister, have you been briefed on the issues in relation to stormwater infrastructure and drainage?

Mr Steel: Yes, I have, and it was a major theme of the better suburbs citizens forum. In fact, the priority recommendation from that forum was in relation to investment in stormwater infrastructure. That is something the government is considering.

MS LAWDER: We had the Auditor-General's report earlier this year, but the taskforce is not expected to report back to you, minister, until May 2019 as I understand it. That means that we will go through another storm season before that reports. Earlier this year we had a major storm event which I presume led to this review. Have there been any changes or any work done on our stormwater assets after the last major storm event to try to avoid the damage that occurred last time?

Mr Steel: There certainly has been some learning as a result of that significant event. I will pass to Mr McHugh to provide some further information.

Mr McHugh: Obviously a lot of repair work was required following the February storm event. The inundation during that event damaged some existing infrastructure which subsequently blocked the flows of some particular systems, including Sullivans Creek so significant repair work was required.

In terms of your question around preventative work to avoid those sorts of things in the future, the stormwater system to manage those sorts of flows requires significant enhancement or upstream catchment and storage-type responses to help manage those flows, which obviously brings with it significant investment.

We have been doing some planning work recently, separate to the task force within TCCS, to understand where those opportunities exist. We will be presenting those to government for consideration in the future.

MS LAWDER: I think one part of the issue earlier this year—there were a number—was a bridge at the golf course that blocked a drain and when that rushed through all of a sudden that was one of the causes of major damage. Is that correct?

Mr McHugh: Absolutely. A temporary footbridge at the Yowani golf club was dislodged during the flooding and blocked a couple of culverts under a particular road and caused some flooding.

MS LAWDER: Do you know what kind of bridge is there now at the golf course?

Mr McHugh: Not off hand; I will take that on notice.

MS LAWDER: You are reporting back to the minister in May. Is that the final report and will there then be a budget allocation for the significant works you said may be required?

Mr Steel: Obviously budget matters will be considered in the budget context. That is a matter for government.

MS LAWDER: I am just interested in when money may be allocated because there has not been a lot of maintenance and upgrade of stormwater infrastructure over a number of years.

Mr Steel: To the contrary. A significant project is happening right across our city—the healthy waterways project—which is having an impact on the management of stormwater. I will pass to Ben McHugh to provide some detail about our response to the Auditor-General's report.

Mr McHugh: As you would know with a copy of the report in your hand, there are 17 recommendations in the report. The majority of those are around how government manages the integration between planning and operations and maintenance of our stormwater network. In a planning sense there are particular objectives around water management and stormwater management. Obviously at times there are competing objectives in an operational and maintenance space.

The key function of the task force is to bring those two objectives together to ensure that across the board we are achieving environmental benefits and outcomes of good stormwater management processes as well as providing a system that we can support and maintain across the city.

A lot of the recommendations, for example, are about making sure that our policies are aligned with our operational functions and strategies and changes to our standards at the operational level support the environmental benefits we are trying to get out of the process. That work has begun. The task force, as I said, is made up of various representatives from both EPSDD and TCCS who are responsible for progressing those actions. So there has been some progress in that sense.

THE CHAIR: Minister, can you explain how the new streetlight contract is helping to reduce emissions and outline any cost savings the ACT government is achieving?

Mr Steel: The new streetlight contract started earlier this year and contains three major parts. The operation and maintenance of the network is performed by Electrix, an Australian company which has a French parent company. That includes the repair and replacement of faulty lights, many underground and aboveground cable faults and attending and making safe vehicle crashes or collisions with streetlight columns and cables.

The second part is the replacement program for the streetlight luminaries themselves with LEDs. The contractor must meet guaranteed energy savings through the implementation of the measures. They are replacing around 45,000 lights throughout the city on major arterial roads and roads in the suburbs. If the guaranteed energy savings are not met the deficit is an amount owing to the territory.

The third component of the contract is the creation of the smart city backbone which will provide communications coverage across the territory and potentially allow in the future additional smart technologies to be added to the network. Importantly, it will enable better reporting around streetlight faults in real time so that we can respond to those outages as quickly as possible.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned a deficit to be owed to the territory. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Mr Steel: I will pass to Ken Marshall to give further detail about how that works.

Mr Marshall: In terms of savings to the territory, the monetary outcomes are at the end of the current contract. The concept of the current contract is that it is outcomes based and will be undertaken within the existing budget envelope, so within existing investment in the streetlight network.

During the course of the contract by definition the cost to the government is consistent with the investment level before the new contract. Importantly, though, by the end of the contract the outcomes on which the tenders were evaluated will be achieved. The first and most important of those is the energy savings. There is a guarantee in the contract that the network returned to the territory at the end of the contract period will be using a specified amount less energy.

There are obviously some complications given the growth of the network over that period in that calculation, but there is a definition of that calculation and there is a specific amount of energy saving guaranteed in the contract. If that guarantee is not met there will be monetary compensation, but we have every confidence it will be met.

The monetary benefit to the territory is that it inherits at the end of the contract period a network far more efficient than the network it started the contract with. Then every year thereafter energy savings will accrue as well as maintenance savings.

Mr Steel: Over the life of a seven-year contract it is estimated the cumulative guaranteed energy savings will be 110 million kilowatt hours generating an estimated cost saving of around \$20 million.

THE CHAIR: You said 45,000 light bulbs will be replaced?

Mr Steel: That is correct. There are around 80,000 in the network so that is a substantial portion of the network. The replacement of the luminaries is effectively being funded through the savings gain by installing the LEDs over that seven years. It is a win-win for the taxpayer in terms of reducing our carbon emissions, making sure that we have a network that requires less maintenance into the future after that seven years when the responsibility comes back to government, and providing us with a more responsive network.

As part of the contract terms the response times have been reduced for faulty luminaries. People will be able to see that and we are hoping that we will be able to have those fixed before constituents need to contact Access Canberra with the problem.

THE CHAIR: If there is a problem with streetlights do people still report it to fix my street and Access Canberra?

Mr Steel: Yes.

THE CHAIR: After the break we will discuss the other business units within City Services.

Hearing suspended from 10.47 to 11.04 am.

THE CHAIR: During this session we will examine the sections of the 2017-18 annual report of Transport Canberra and City Services relating to library services, waste and recycling, city maintenance services and Capital Linen Services. Once again, I extend our thanks to you, Minister Steel, and to your officials for attending. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and I draw your attention to the pink-coloured privilege statement before you on the table. I believe that everyone currently present has confirmed that they understand the privilege implications of the statement.

I also take a moment to remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. We

will move straight to questions.

Mr Steel: Before questions, I have some information arising from the previous hearing. The fee for exhuming ashes is \$777.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MISS C BURCH: I ask about waste management and waste priorities. How far has consideration of the waste dumping levy progressed? What factors are currently being considered as part of that?

Mr Corrigan: I will start and go to Michael Trushell, Director of ACT NOWaste. We have commenced investigation. I am assuming that you are asking about the additional levy?

MISS C BURCH: Yes.

Mr Corrigan: We have commenced investigation of what would be required in that. There is an important distinction to make: a waste levy is really levying how waste moves around the territory and what happens to it. It is different from the landfill gate fee when a load is actually dropped off at the landfill. It is a very important distinction to make.

The reason why we have to investigate these things is that the ACT is obviously surrounded by New South Wales. The difficulty we had was that in this region of New South Wales, the New South Wales government does not impose a waste levy; so we need to investigate how a waste levy would operate in the ACT for what outcome, because the outcome obviously is to get more resource recovery and those sort of things; less material going to landfill.

But we need to structure it in a way that does not have the unintended consequence that waste just disappears across the border because it may be cheaper to landfill elsewhere. That is the complicating factor. That is what we are investigating right now.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can you explain more about what you mean by “the waste levy”? I am sorry; I am not understanding something that moves around the ACT.

Mr Corrigan: I will ask Michael Trushell, director of NOWaste, to give you more detail.

Mr Trushell: Waste levies are generally considered in better practice jurisdictions, both in Australia and internationally, to be a key policy instrument which complements a range of others. If we start from the point of view that landfilling is cheap, therefore waste will tend to go to the cheapest solution. Landfilling generally and gate fees do not reflect the sorts of adverse externalities of landfilling, including environmental and other impacts. So jurisdictions will impose a waste levy, effectively as a market intervention.

The idea is that it creates an incentive, first of all, for waste generators to look for an alternative solution. For example, when you take the combination of a gate fee and a

landfill levy, in New South Wales in the metropolitan region the landfill levy on commercial waste is about \$150 a tonne. If you took a gate fee of about \$100 a tonne plus that, you are looking at \$250 a tonne to landfill waste. Therefore, a whole bunch of recycling solutions become cost effective at under about \$250 a tonne.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am still lost. Who actually pays the levy? That is what I am trying to—

Mr Steel: Not householders. It is that—

Mr Trushell: It depends.

MS LE COUTEUR: Who pays it?

Mr Trushell: No, what I am saying is that there is no one model. It can be imposed in different ways.

MS LEE: That has not been determined at the ACT level, as in—

Mr Trushell: Correct. At the moment that is really the issue. I do not think that the effectiveness of the policy intervention is in question in terms of waste best practice. What you have specifically is a situation in the ACT where we do not have the levy across the border. So, for example, if we impose at the gate of a facility—

MS LEE: Sorry, when you say that we do not have the levy across the border, it is only the metropolitan area in Sydney, is that right? So not—

Mr Trushell: There are two—typically, you have a metropolitan and a regional levy.

MS LEE: Yes.

Mr Trushell: The metropolitan levy tends to be the highest and the regional levy is a little bit lower—

MS LEE: Sure.

Mr Trushell: and they have this in South Australia and Victoria as well. If you are really talking about up to the border, up on the coastal areas, it is basically done on a council basis. That is how they identify the regions to which it applies. It comes down as far as Shoalhaven. It is basically from Shoalhaven on the eastern seaboard up to the New South Wales border. Currently, there is no levy in Queensland; so that is why—

MS LEE: Yes, but they are bringing it in in 2019, are they not? That is their talk.

Mr Trushell: That is correct, because we saw the *Four Corners* story about one million tonnes of waste. That was an example of the arbitrage opportunities that arise when you have a very high waste levy in one jurisdiction. Transporters can then easily move it into cheap landfill in another jurisdiction. We would face exactly the same thing if we did that here.

There are also legal questions to answer about the constitutionality of our being able to say, “You cannot take your waste across the border.” So we have to deal, essentially, with the potential for avoidance through adverse behaviour. The last thing we want is waste moving out of our landfill simply into cheaper landfill in New South Wales, possibly even being dumped in New South Wales, these sorts of things. So it is not so much around the effectiveness of the policy if it can be implemented properly. It is really around that arbitrage.

Then we come down to the question in the ACT of the best way of applying this. You could apply it on waste transporters. We register all waste transporters in the ACT under our legislation, unlike other jurisdictions. Or you could apply it on waste facilities. The challenge around waste facilities is that the waste can readily move into Queanbeyan and other places where that might be the first waste facility it goes to.

We do not have jurisdictional capacity to apply an ACT levy on facilities that exist within New South Wales. Because we are small geographically, there is a big no levy area within New South Wales; within most of New South Wales. That presents the major challenge for designing and implementing an ACT waste levy.

MS LEE: Do you have any data in respect of the problem that you just raised? If we imposed a levy, there is obviously some risk that they are going to go across the border. Is there concern the other way? Are there people from Sydney who are trying to avoid the metropolitan levy and coming all the way down to Canberra?

Mr Trushell: No.

MS LEE: We do not have that?

Mr Trushell: We do not see any evidence of that.

MS LEE: Or anywhere else for that matter?

Mr Trushell: Other waste coming from other parts—

MS LEE: Yes.

Mr Trushell: Not in terms of a negative effect. For example, what I would say is some really positive stuff. For example, we get about 8,000 mattresses from regional New South Wales coming in to our social enterprise down here and being recycled. That is a positive.

With our container deposit scheme, we are receiving a lot of material out of, I think, about six or seven regional councils coming to our MRF to be processed in the ACT. In some cases, we are not seeing adverse landfilling. What we are seeing is the ACT acting as a regional centre to provide recycling solutions which are obviously cost competitive.

Most councils that I have been able to research charge a fee for the recycling of mattresses. Our price is about the middle of that. Obviously, it is reasonably competitive otherwise we would not see mattresses coming from Cooma and places

like that to be recycled in the ACT.

MS LEE: Yes, of course. In terms of the economic modelling that you are doing on this levy, what consideration is being had to ensure that there is no adverse on-cost to the final, to clients, customers and small business?

Mr Trushell: If I am really frank, the idea of the policy is in fact to do that. At the moment, recycling is not competitive. So the cost, the idea—this has occurred all throughout the world and across the rest of the country. We can maintain cheap waste management if we want to landfill a lot of waste. That is the cheapest way to do it; quite simple. If you aspire to achieve levels of resource recovery, you are going to have to pay more for that. It is simple market economics.

MS LEE: That policy is designed to actually be putting a disincentive, obviously, on waste going to landfill?

Mr Steel: It is something that government is only considering at the moment. The government has not made a decision about whether we want to implement a levy. It has been raised in the context of our waste feasibility study and how we move to a point where we are getting to our target of 90 per cent waste recovery by 2025.

Part of the work that is going on nationally around developing a new national waste policy is about creating a circular economy. We are moving away from a discussion about sustainable waste management towards this notion of a circular economy where we can use what are resources as many times as possible before they go into landfill.

That has the potential to create jobs and we are seeing that at Soft Landing and places like that where jobs are being created in the recovery of those materials and saving most of those materials from going into landfill. There is an opportunity to actually deal with this waste and create jobs at the same time as well.

MS LEE: Did I read, I think it was in media, that any revenue collected from a levy, if it was to be imposed, would go to recycling efforts? Is that right?

Mr Trushell: As the minister points out, the government actually has not made a decision to do this. What I would point out is that, as a policy intervention, typically what is done with the levy money is that it is reinvested. What you are trying to do is not just create a disincentive to landfill. You have actually got to create the recycling businesses. And sometimes those businesses need some initial support.

New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia all do this. They fund recycling initiatives through various grants programs. They provide money to councils et cetera to actually affect the transition. You will not move to a circular economy without support. You cannot just simply put in a landfill disincentive. You have actually got to provide some seed money.

Some of these are education programs, community programs. There are some really fantastic examples. For example, in New South Wales and Victoria a lot of food waste-type programs around food waste avoidance are funded through EPA programs which are funded by the New South Wales waste levy. The idea is that you are not

just taxing, if you like, if you want to call it that. You are also supporting industry to make the transition.

In the other jurisdictions there has been a lot of work around improving the quality of transfer stations et cetera to facilitate the separation and collection of material, changes around kerb cycle, this sort of stuff. And quite often it does require an investment in order to facilitate those changes towards a circular economy.

MS LEE: Minister, you were saying that the government has not made a decision on this yet. What is the likely time frame and the process? Would you ensure that there is public consultation and all that?

Mr Steel: There is no time frame. It is something the government is considering at the moment. It has come out of the waste feasibility study. There is a whole range of different recommendations from that study and we are gradually rolling out some of those recommendation like the container deposit scheme, which began on 30 June this year, and green bins and other things that we need to do. Bulky waste is obviously something the government is committed to look at as well. There is a whole range of things that we need to consider, and the levy is just one of those components.

MS LEE: One of the other components in the waste feasibility study that you have not mentioned is the waste to energy policy that is currently underway. Have you got a time frame for that?

Mr Steel: That was a recommendation from the waste feasibility study as well. We have actually extended consultation in relation to the information paper, which is up on the your say website for community feedback. We want to consider the outcome of that before we work out what the next step might be.

The number one stakeholder in that process is the community. We want to hear from the community about the range of different waste to energy technologies that exist and whether they have a future in the ACT. On the one hand that goes from things like burning of waste and waste incineration right through to other technologies which do not necessarily involve any burning or heating at all, like anaerobic digestion technology, which is effectively an advanced form of composting.

MS LEE: Can you confirm when the consultation has been extended to?

Mr Steel: The exact date has now been pushed into December and that is to enable the waste management officials to attend Tuggeranong Community Council and to consult further with the community. The exact date we will come back to you on. Just while we are looking for that, we want to hear from the community genuinely about this.

We have not had a policy on waste to energy in the ACT and we have seen proposals come forward from industry in two particular proposals, one of which is in your electorate, Ms Lee, which has been concerning to the community. Part of this is making sure that we have got a policy in place so that we can give certainty to industry about what types of waste to energy can be accepted here in the ACT, if any. We currently have landfill gas capture at Mugga Lane but that is after the process of

landfill, not before.

MISS C BURCH: Beyond this current consultation process, how will the government assess any potential sites for a waste to energy plant and will the community be consulted on that?

Mr Steel: The closing date of the consultation has been extended to 14 December. The government wants to hear from the community. We will look at the feedback and make a decision about how we proceed. But the purpose of this is to develop a policy on waste energy in the ACT before we go out and actively seek there to be a waste to energy plant. We have not reached that stage yet. We need to consider what the feedback is first and we do not want to pre-empt the outcome of the consultation.

MS LAWDER: Is the scenario Ms Lee outlined of perhaps people coming to the ACT and allegedly what happened with that so-called Hume pop-up tip was that they were bringing waste from New South Wales?

Mr Trushell: No. Effectively they were competing with our landfill and other waste facilities in the ACT. Essentially they were undercutting those at the gate fee.

MS LAWDER: And what is the status of that pop-up tip?

Mr Trushell: The status at the moment, in terms of our regulatory function under the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act, is that the waste manager has issued a series of directions around removing that. There has also been one infringement notice issued and paid in regard to breaches.

MS LAWDER: And is the operator complying with those?

Mr Trushell: That is ongoing regulatory activity.

MS LAWDER: They paid a bond of some type, I think, did they, \$250,000 or something?

Mr Corrigan: Part of my role is also I am actually the waste manager under the act as well. The bond you are referring to there was a bond paid to the EPA. And that was around environmental issues and that sort of thing. There is no evidence of serious environmental issues at this stage. That question is best directed to the EPA.

MS LAWDER: I think that that operator has allegedly, in the past, left other sites in New South Wales. If he abandons the site, who will pay for the clean-up?

Mr Corrigan: We cannot answer that at the moment because there is regulatory action with that operator and he has a direction to remove the stock pile.

MS LAWDER: When is the due date?

Mr Corrigan: 30 November this year. He has been directed to do that. How the act works is that because he did not comply with the first direction he was fined. And the fine has been paid. It escalates. If he does not comply with this direction we could

start prosecution, court proceedings, against him. I cannot speculate if he does not remove the stockpile what happens next and who and how. Those are things we would have to keep working through.

MR MILLIGAN: The annual report states that the government maintains 505 playgrounds, yet there were 25,000 playground audits—

Mr Alegria: Yes, inspections.

MR MILLIGAN: Can you explain what that figure is?

Mr Alegria: Those safety audits and inspections are carried out on each playground multiple times through the year. For example, a district-level playground, which is a large, high-use playground with a lot of equipment, is inspected more frequently than a low-use local neighbourhood playground. Collectively through the course of the year our staff would have undertaken those 25,000-odd inspections to ensure the safety of the equipment.

MR MILLIGAN: With the multiple inspections a year of the one playground area, does anything different come out of each inspection, or is it relatively the same every time?

Mr Alegria: No. Playgrounds are used, as you know, by a whole range of children and teenagers. Things wear out, things break and things deteriorate. That is why we have the inspection regime, to pick up things that have happened since the last inspection. In essence it is a regular routine to ensure that we are up to date with the safety aspects of it.

MR MILLIGAN: I see that the government has installed safety fences at four playgrounds. Does the government have any plans to extend that program to other playgrounds?

Mr Steel: The government is considering the recent petition on that matter and looking at how we can provide more playgrounds with fencing. It was something that was considered by the resident play spaces forum, among other issues, to try to increase the accessibility and inclusiveness of our playgrounds here in the ACT. We recognise that for some families fences are really important to make sure that their children are safe while playing.

THE CHAIR: How many of the 500 or so playgrounds are nature play playgrounds?

Mr Alegria: At the moment we have four, including one in—

THE CHAIR: So one could say there is a bit of room for growth there?

Mr Alegria: Yes. In fact I am sure the minister could talk about the new ones that we have got coming up.

Mr Steel: The nature play space at Giralang is a great example of that. Nature play was a big topic at the play spaces forum which was recently conducted. That jumped

to the better suburbs consultation and the citizens forum work, which recognised the importance of those play spaces. Often there is a jump to existing playgrounds rather than necessarily being by themselves like they are at Giralang. It is something we certainly recognise. There has been quite a lot of advocacy around providing for more natural play spaces where children can build on their sense of curiosity and utilise free materials to build their gross and fine motor skills. We are looking at how we can provide more of those in the future. I am looking forward to announcing the outcomes of the citizens forum which was deliberating on how to allocate our \$1.9 million of new investment in playgrounds. I will pass to Jim Corrigan to talk a little more about the process and deliberations of the play spaces forum.

Mr Corrigan: The forum extended on from the better suburbs forum that we had. Some of the participants in the better suburbs forum volunteered more of their time, with some additional people. It was a small group to look at play spaces going forward. It was a very informative, interesting exercise. The previous minister for city services, Minister Fitzharris, made \$1.9 million available. The forum outcome was how to allocate the \$1.9 million coming up over this financial year, when the investments are to be made. Announcements will be made in the near future about that.

The forum participants had a lot of input. It was over a number of weekend days, so we really appreciate the time they gave up. A lot of input had to be given about how we manage playgrounds, strategic issues around play spaces, the science of play—how kids interact with different equipment and age groups and things like that—and accessibility issues. We had some international experts, who study this. That is what they do for their careers: they study play spaces. It is a great job is it not? They gave all this input to the forum. We also explained the budgeting principles, how we go about allocating a budget and things like that.

The forum was over quite some time. They recommended various ways that the money could be divided up around the priorities and issues we have, like requests for new playgrounds and what to do with ageing playgrounds. The city is 100 years old now, not that we have 100-year-old playgrounds, so we have playgrounds that extend over decades. We have very recent ones, some fantastic new ones in Gungahlin and Molonglo like the one at Moncrieff, which is a fantastic play space, through to very old ones in some of the older parts of Canberra.

We said, “This is the range of issues we’re constantly dealing with: how to maintain them, how to see input on whether they are meeting families’ needs, children’s needs—all these issues.” So, as you can imagine, there was a huge amount of input. The committee went through that, then they started to make some recommendations about how they thought the \$1.9 million could be divided up. Those have been provided to the minister now. It was a fantastic experience. Post the forum, we had individual working groups. Some of the forum participants would look at a bit more detail on locations and give input there and on other things like that.

It was a great experience. The big learning, I think, is how to manage that input. It is really hard for citizens out there who come with various degrees of understanding of how to manage complex assets like playgrounds. You might think they are pretty simple structures but a lot goes on behind them. A lot goes into it. The biggest learning for us, if we continue these sorts of forums, is how to manage all the inputs.

We obviously approach it from the playgrounds themselves, asset management, the budgets we use and these things, but there are all these other factors. There are community needs. Some communities are very active. They petition government and things and they are way on the front foot, saying, “Let’s get something new,” and those sorts of things. Other communities are not as organised. With those sorts of inputs, it is hard for forum participants to take all of that in. That is one of the big learnings we got from it.

MR STEEL: Part of the discussion, which was really led by the community, was around how we can take a more strategic approach to playgrounds right across the ACT and also in particular suburbs. There was a discussion around whether there should be suburb reviews in suburbs around Canberra to bring the community together, as in a co-design process, to look at the existing playgrounds within a suburb and to look at the needs in that suburb, which may be different. We would obviously need to accommodate future needs if it is a growing area, particularly for young families, and to look at the data that is available.

We do have some reasonably good data through the Australian early development census, which is a survey that is undertaken in children’s first year of full-time schooling. It provides quite good information about how that cohort is faring with regard to physical health and wellbeing. It is broken down into a whole range of different areas. One of them is motor skill development. We can look at that at a suburb by suburb level and potentially break it down even further as well to look at whether some communities in Canberra are more vulnerable than others when it comes to their physical health and wellbeing and whether they require extra interventions from government with regard to particular playgrounds or other interventions in the community.

That data is not easy for the whole community to digest but it is something we need to consider as we look to take a more strategic approach. That view was certainly supported by the forum in their approach to allocating this small bucket of money, which is actually, I think, going to lead to a much bigger piece of work around the future of playgrounds in the ACT.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am really going back more to where we started, with the audits. What do you use in respect of pesticides and herbicides on playgrounds?

Mr Alegria: Nothing, because in an actual play space, unless there is vegetation there, generally speaking, there would just be the soft fall and/or the rubber soft fall or tanbark soft fall. In that situation, we would not use anything. In the border—

MS LE COUTEUR: I was talking about, I guess, more the fact that playgrounds typically have vegetation around them. I am sorry; I should have asked about the vegetation we all use if we are using the playgrounds.

Mr Alegria: Yes, that will be treated like other urban open space. Sometimes we would be in there hand weeding shrub beds, for example, if that is the most appropriate way of doing things. Other times we may use herbicide to do edges and so forth. Other times we may attempt to shade out weeds through the use of trees and shrubs. It is really a horses for courses situation there.

MS LE COUTEUR: You would be aware of the concerns about the safety of glyphosate, the 2015 World Health Organisation finding that it is potentially carcinogenic and the recent court actions in America. Do you use it? Do you consider these issues in deciding what to use?

Mr Alegria: We do use glyphosate. We use around 6,000 litres of concentrate per year across the city. We really act on the advice of the commonwealth regulatory agencies. So APVMA is the organisation that manages the registration of chemicals of all descriptions, including herbicides. We abide by the rules that they put in place. Those rules are generally on the label of the product. It is a mandatory requirement that any user follows those rules, including when you can apply it, in what weather conditions, what personal protective equipment you might require, what species you can use it on et cetera. We abide completely by that.

In fact, we go beyond the minimum standards as much as we can in terms of our own internal policies about ensuring public and staff safety. I guess the view that we have, and many in rural industry across Australia would share the view, is that glyphosate is a very versatile herbicide that is used very widely. In comparison with the alternatives, which may require different herbicides for different species, glyphosate can be used on a range of species. It is a sort of a one pass-type approach.

Mr Steel: I have asked the transport and city services directorate to consider the alternatives on an ongoing basis, given not only the concerns about the potential carcinogenic nature of glyphosate, but also the potential effect on bee populations, which has also been raised in fairly recent research.

I understand that federal Labor has called for an inquiry into the matter to find out what the APVMA processes are around that. It is something that we continue to monitor, but it is an ongoing challenge. The consideration also needs to be on the alternatives rather than sort of jumping from glyphosate to other alternatives—looking at what the evidence is around those ones as well. They may also have concerns around them.

We need to do this work based on the evidence that is best available to us. That will be in ongoing forms. Certainly, I have heard concerns from the community about that in relation to the potential cancer risk and also the risk to bee populations. It is something that we need to continually monitor.

MS CHEYNE: I have questions about dogs. When was the last fine issued for a dog being off leash?

Mr Alegria: The last time? I know that a fine was issued yesterday.

MS CHEYNE: Yesterday?

Mr Alegria: Yes, but I would have to get back to you if you wanted specific details of that specific offence.

MS CHEYNE: But it was for the dog being off leash?

Mr Alegria: Yes, a dog roaming would be the offence.

MS CHEYNE: Is there a difference between dog roaming, being off leash and a person walking beside their dog, or their dog in the vicinity, and their being in a non-off-leash-friendly area?

Mr Alegria: Yes, there are a number of infringements around a dog being in a public place without a carer. That would be a roaming dog, for example, where it has escaped its yard and is roaming by itself. There is also an offence of having a dog off a lead in an on-lead area. There is also an offence of having a dog not under effective control, regardless of whether the dog is in an on-lead or an off-lead area. If your dog is in an off-lead area off lead, if you cannot control your dog and you cannot call it back immediately, that is potentially an offence that you have not got your dog under effective control.

MS CHEYNE: In respect of those two latter offences that you mentioned, when was the last time fines were issued or infringements were issued for those?

Mr Alegria: I do not have that information in front of me, I am sorry.

MS CHEYNE: Are you able to take it on notice and are you able to take on notice how many have been issued in the 2017-18 year? If you have the level of detail, also the location where they were issued.

Mr Alegria: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Does the ACT government know how many domestic dogs there are currently in the ACT?

Mr Alegria: We have an estimation. Our estimation is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics census data, which has a rate of pet ownership per household. We have extrapolated that to come up with a figure of around 60,000 dogs in the ACT. However, we recognise that it would be good to have a more, I guess, granular understanding of the pet population. To that end, the government has provided some resources to do a pet census in the coming months in this current financial year, which will help us understand better the actual situation in the ACT.

MS CHEYNE: How would a pet census be carried out?

Mr Alegria: I guess it is not necessary or possible to carry out an individual survey of every single household in Canberra. But we would plan to use a number of methods. We plan to use a randomised survey methodology by telephone, which is clearly a statistically valid way of doing things.

MS CHEYNE: Yes.

Mr Alegria: We also plan to consider a face-to-face doorknocking program as another way of collecting data that does not necessarily rely on telephones, so trying to capture another group of people and also a randomised way of collecting that

information. We are also considering whether we can go to industry and seek de-identified information about how many pets are on the books of a vet, for example, or vets across Canberra. That is something that we are exploring at the moment to see whether that is feasible and whether that would be supported. We are basically trying to get as many different sources of valid information as we can to come up with something that is cohesive and that gives us a pretty good idea of the population.

MS CHEYNE: What has been the driver for that?

Mr Alegria: The driver for the pet census?

MS CHEYNE: Why would we not just go to the ABS?

Mr Alegria: Absolutely, we could, but the ABS data is pretty high level. We want to know more than just whether you have a dog or a cat. We want to know, for example, whether your dog is microchipped, registered, de-sexed. There is some other information that we could collect that will really help us understand, I guess, the level of this compliance with our responsible pet ownership laws. That will help us target our resources where they are most at need. For example, if a survey found that 50 per cent of people's dogs are not registered, that is an issue we need to tackle. We would need to put resources into education about the need for registration, for example.

MS CHEYNE: If we found out that there were substantially more or substantially fewer numbers of dogs than we currently think there are, would that also have an impact on the resourcing for rangers?

Mr Alegria: I think the resourcing really comes down to a question of the issues that we need to address. That can be independent of the number of dogs. For example, if we had 20,000 dogs in the ACT and half of them were owned by people who were not behaving responsibly, we would have a big problem. On the other hand, if we had 80,000 dogs and only a handful of owners were irresponsible, we would have a small problem. Population is one aspect of what we would need, what resources we would need. But the other aspect is how people behave and how they manage their pets. That is probably the bigger impact.

MS CHEYNE: Doing a calculation of how many rangers per dog head of population would not necessarily be appropriate?

Mr Alegria: Not necessarily, no. As I say, the pet census is trying to get a handle on the compliance levels as well. That is really the driver. That is where we have to put intensive effort into the pointy end of compliance. If we did not need to do that, if people were responsible and they managed their pets correctly, we would then also be able to put more resources into reinforcing all of those educational messages. The population is important but it is not really the key driver for resourcing.

MS CHEYNE: Finally, the telephone survey that is part of the census, would it be restricted to landlines or would it also include mobile numbers?

Mr Alegria: We are yet to delve into that level of detail but the main premise is that

we want it to be inclusive and statistically valid.

MS CHEYNE: Representative.

Mr Alegria: Yes, obviously mobiles would potentially need to be in that mix but we will seek advice on that.

MS CHEYNE: I think it would need to be in that mix.

Mr Alegria: Yes, from experts.

MS CHEYNE: That would be my recommendation.

Mr Alegria: Absolutely, yes. We will get some advice about the design. We need to make sure that people are willing to answer the questions truthfully and that they do not feel like they are going to be targeted if they say that their dog is not registered.

MS CHEYNE: Or that they have 12 dogs in their apartment.

Mr Alegria: Yes, exactly.

MS CHEYNE: I do not by the way. Let us be clear.

Mr Alegria: There is a lot of careful design required for that.

MS CHEYNE: Okay. The pet census, that survey, will go out to tender?

Mr Alegria: Again, we have not drilled into the detail of what is required. There may be a whole-of-government contract that we can use. We will work through that.

MS LAWDER: I want to go back to playgrounds. In the annual report it says you had 505. I think last year it was 507; presumably some have been removed and others added. Can you tell me about which ones have been removed and added?

Mr Alegria: I am not aware that any have been removed. Sometimes there is a bit of movement in numbers depending on when they get handed over from developers and so forth, but I cannot explain that difference of two off the top of my head, unfortunately. I am happy to come back to you.

MS LAWDER: You will take that on notice?

Mr Alegria: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. Could you perhaps provide a list of all playgrounds by suburb, including those you are expecting to come online and be handed over in the next few months?

Mr Alegria: We could do that. We could provide a map or we could provide a list. Obviously, the playground would be described by the adjacent street.

MS LAWDER: With the large number of safety audits, is there a standard that you work to as to how often a playground may be refurbished or repainted?

Mr Alegria: Safety audits are undertaken periodically, regularly, through the year. Annually we do a level 3 audit against the Australian standards. That is an independent audit that is carried out by a consultant. They provide us with a much more detailed report on each playground, and that guides the allocation of our resources to significant repairs or upgrades.

Through the year, we will tackle the minor issues as we can. We always make them safe, by the way. We will tackle those issues. The level 3 audit gives us that bigger picture: we have 15 playgrounds that really need to be refurbished and we have 20 that could benefit from some other level of work; we can then allocate our resources.

As I say, the key driver is safety there. We will always make sure playgrounds are safe. If they are not safe, they will be fenced off until they can be made safe. That is always our fundamental driver. We recognise that people may look at some playgrounds and think they look a bit old and tired; that may be the case, but they are safe and fit for purpose.

MS LAWDER: In terms of repainting, is that identified by your staff or members of the public, or is it a combination?

Mr Alegria: It is a combination. We try to put our resources into something that adds life to the asset. It is not just an amenity issue. The community may see something that needs painting, that looks tired, and a fresh coat of paint will rejuvenate it. That may be true, and that is valuable, but we also look at whether that coat of paint would actually extend the life of that asset. You may have seen some of the playgrounds around town, particularly in your electorate, that have been refurbished and painted where that gives them another five to six years of useful life. That is a benefit in terms of maintaining our asset base. But yes, we do consider community requests as well. If people have requests, and we get requests for service, we will do our best to deliver on those requests.

MS LAWDER: For example, there was a playground in Rivett where a constituent told me that one small piece was repainted and they did not understand why the whole place was not repainted at the same time. Do you look at that in terms of efficiency rather than going back another time to repaint?

Mr Alegria: I am not familiar with that particular one, but that may have been a case where that piece of equipment required refurbishment to extend its life and the rest of the equipment would not have benefited from that from an asset maintenance perspective though it may have benefited from a visual amenity perspective.

MS LAWDER: It probably was visual.

Mr Alegria: Yes, that is right. We just need to balance our resources to make sure that we hit those safety things as a priority. Then if we have any resources for amenity stuff we will definitely do it.

MS LAWDER: Do all playgrounds have bubblers?

Mr Alegria: No.

MS LAWDER: Are you able to tell me how many playgrounds have bubblers?

Mr Alegria: Unfortunately, no, I cannot. I could comment, building on the minister's comments about the play space form, that one of the key messages that came out from the community was that they wanted us to consider the play space as a part of the broader community. The amenity of the play space is impacted by things like whether you can get to the playground, whether there is a path, whether there is enough seating, whether there is potentially a bubbler. We have heard that message from the community that we should be looking holistically at the space rather than just at the equipment. That is something that we are aware of. I am happy to come back to you about the bubbler.

MS LAWDER: Where you have decommissioned bubblers in the past year, does that mean you have not replaced them with a new working bubbler?

Mr Alegria: In general we would not have replaced them. Often those decommissioned bubblers have been under-utilised in the past anyway, so there was no strong case to replace them. There may have been instances where they were replaced or where there is the new rollout of the health program bubblers.

MS LAWDER: How are you able to tell if they are under-utilised?

Mr Alegria: If a bubbler is located in a space that has few other facilities, not a lot of people are going to be going to that space to use it, and it becomes a case of: why would you need a bubbler there if there is no real attraction for people to come? You would then say, a bit like we talked about with Giralang, that we ought to put our resources into a natural play space, locating these playgrounds and play spaces near shops or near existing community facilities where as many people as possible can benefit from them. That is another message we got from the community.

MS LAWDER: Do you have a plan or forward program to replace metal slides in playgrounds?

Mr Alegria: Not in particular, no. The metal slides are durable. I understand that there are people in the community who are concerned about the heat factor. They are, hopefully, all located facing south so that they do not get the direct sun.

MS LAWDER: I know.

Mr Alegria: There is no active program particularly to replace metal slides. When we build new playgrounds, they are built to the relevant standard of the day. Obviously that is today for new playgrounds, and playgrounds that were built in the past were built to the standard of the past. There is no particular replacement program.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, you will remember that in August 2017 the Assembly

passed a motion which said, amongst other things, that the government should, as part of its budget review to improve community input, conduct a participatory budgeting pilot, no later than the 2019-20 budget cycle, which asks citizens to consider and make clear recommendations on how the discretionary portion of the city services budget could be allocated to best reflect community priorities. Are you planning to use the better suburbs statement as part of that? And please do not give me a description of the better suburbs process, because Mr Corrigan already gave us a very full description. Could we concentrate on the budgetary part of it, please.

Mr Steel: Yes. Obviously the budget is something that government is considering for next year. Part of the input into that will be the recommendations from the better suburbs statement, which has provided a very clear direction to government around all the elements of city services and what needs to be done. There were some areas where the community thought there should be less of a focus, some areas where they thought it should remain the same and some areas where they thought we need to be doing more investment and giving greater priority. One of those was in relation to stormwater in particular, and there is a whole range of other areas. That will be a really important input.

For me, as the new Minister for City Services, it has been fantastic to come into the role and have a whole blueprint just provided, laid out for me to start working on. That will be a really important input into the budget process for next year as far as the city services portfolio goes.

The process is important. I know Mr Corrigan has given a very good outline of that. It was a genuinely deliberative process. They got into the detail of all of these areas. The presentations were by experts, and they were able to engage with the subject matter in a way that has now provided us with a really great road map heading into the budget. Of course, it is subject to the decisions of cabinet, but it is something that I am keen to take forward in a genuine way, to respect the decisions of the citizens forum.

MS LE COUTEUR: From memory, there was only one area where they thought less money should be spent but there were quite a few where they thought it should be more and quite a few where they thought we should retain the current arrangement. What does this imply? Is TCCS going to get a lot more money? Presumably, that is not going to be the case. The implication is that we will see actual reductions in some areas and you are going to prioritise expenditure on the 19 areas in that order. Would that be the sort of thing we can expect?

Mr Steel: There is also a timing factor. I do not think there was an expectation that there would immediately be these things within one budget, that there would be an expectation to deliver everything in city services. There are quite a few of these things.

One of them is for organic waste. I do not want to go back into the waste discussion again, but the citizens forum is keen to see that work progress. That program needs to roll out over the next five years in order to get the processes in place that we need to make that happen. It is something that we will consider in this budget, but on an ongoing basis as well.

The government needs to consider those proposals in the context of the entire

ACT budget. I am not suggesting that we will be cutting things because of what has been provided, but it may be that over time we look at how we can increase the overall investment in one particular area while not increasing it as much over time in another.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is this going to be the only citizen involvement part of that project?

Mr Steel: The citizens have been involved in the play spaces forum as well, so that is an important part of it. There was a view from those who were involved in the forum that they found it a very useful exercise and they wanted to have an ongoing role and relationship with government to make sure that those recommendations were implemented over time.

MS LE COUTEUR: They want to have an ongoing role. Does that mean that they will have an ongoing role? How is this actually going to work?

Mr Steel: The recommendations were provided, and I will take those forward to budget cabinet.

THE CHAIR: Minister, can you give us an update on the green bins rollout?

Mr Steel: The green bins program continues to roll out. At the moment the take-up rate is around about 50 per cent in the suburbs where they are currently available. We are looking forward next year for the main suburbs to come on board. The contamination rate still remains very low, which is really great news, and those resources are recycled and turned into mulch by Corkhill Bros. I will hand over to first Jim Corrigan and Michael Trushell to provide the most recent figures on the program.

Mr Corrigan: Tuggeranong and Weston Creek have their bins. Belconnen is being progressively and the take-up is excellent. As the minister mentioned, it is about 50 per cent, and that contributes to the low contamination rate, which is less than 0.01 per cent. That is amazing and is the benefit of an opt-in service. The contractor is performing well and we will work with the contractor to achieve the rollout for the rest of Canberra by June 2019.

The material goes to Corkhill Bros. They are part of the contract arrangement with JJ Richards who collect the material. They process it and turn it into other products and sell it to their markets as fertiliser products and the like.

Mr Trushell: Of those who have taken up the service around 26 per cent are concession card holders. That shows that it is providing a service to those who might otherwise struggle to pay for this.

THE CHAIR: How many households in Belconnen have signed up?

Mr Corrigan: It is on track for about 50 per cent of households. In all the areas that is approximately what we are seeing.

THE CHAIR: Does the rollout to other suburbs by June 2019 cover Gungahlin?

Mr Corrigan: That is right. We are looking at bringing all suburbs on line next year.

THE CHAIR: I have a constituent—who may or may not be my aunt—who has asked if she can get a second bin. She really likes the first bin and thinks a second bin would be great; she is an avid gardener. Is any consideration being given to the provision of a second bin?

Mr Steel: Not at this time. The opportunity to drop off green waste for free at Mugga Lane is still available for people who have excess green waste they need to dispose of. Of course, private services offer trash bags if required.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have been talking about opening this up at some stage to kitchen waste, putrescible waste, food waste. How are we going with that important part?

Mr Steel: The first step is rolling out the green bin program next year, and that is on track. We have just conducted the waste feasibility study which has provided a recommendation of looking at food and organic waste over the next five years. The reason for that is that we need the collection process in place with the bins themselves. We expect only around 60 per cent of people will take up the green bins so there is a group that will not have green bins as well.

There is also what happens to the waste once it is collected, and that is a much more difficult question and takes some lead-in time for us to develop options. For example, in the waste feasibility study there is a discussion around whether composting could be done on a large scale with the food and organic waste or using an anaerobic digestion plant. That is a significant piece of new infrastructure that potentially would have to be put in place to be able to deal with that waste.

There is also the timing of the contracts we already have with Suez for household garbage and JJ Richards for the garden waste collection service. So with all those considerations we are looking at a five-year time frame for considering the rollout of food and organic waste collection.

We are also working with other jurisdictions through the national environment ministers council around national waste targets, which also include draft targets on food and organic waste collection. Everyone will be coming together to discuss those targets in December and there is a view that we want to bring forward the rollout of food and organic waste collection for 2025. It currently makes up 37 per cent of the standard garbage in our bins, so it is a significant proportion. If that goes into landfill it creates gas which ends up in the atmosphere if it is not captured through a landfill gas capture.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am a little confused. You said there is going to be five years of consideration. Should I interpret that as meaning nothing could happen in the ACT for five years?

Mr Steel: No. It is a rollout time; we are considering the options to roll it out within

that time frame. That is the recommendation of the waste feasibility study, so all the information is in there. I suggest that you have a look at that because that has far more information on the considerations around making sure that we do not talk only about collection—which is the easy part in some ways—but also what happens to the waste afterwards. We need to build the capacity of industry, Corkhill Bros for example, to do large-scale composting. That is not something they do currently.

The answer is that there is a bit of work to do and it is going to take some time to do it. You cannot roll it out tomorrow. The first step is getting the garden waste collection service rolled out to the whole of Canberra. Ultimately the vessel that will be used for collection will probably be that bin, whether it is a separate container within the bin or all mixed.

MS LE COUTEUR: So when you said time for consideration, you mean it will be within that time?

Mr Steel: Yes. Government has not made a decision on it. We have a recommendation of five years in the waste feasibility study and that is something we need to work through. We are doing that nationally as well.

MISS C BURCH: You said that you are expecting a 60 per cent take-up with the green bin rollout. Is that 60 per cent of eligible households?

Mr Steel: We will come back and confirm the exact number, but that is currently where we are at. It is about 50 per cent in the suburbs where it has currently rolled out. As people see bins literally being rolled out to the kerb no doubt the awareness in the community will increase, but we are expecting it to be only around 60 per cent. We will see how it goes; it has been a very popular service thus far.

MISS C BURCH: Back to the potential food and organic waste collection, you said that you are considering it and there is a potential five-year time frame. Has the government started looking at potential composting sites yet?

Mr Steel: No, we have not. The recommendation was only provided to us through the waste feasibility study earlier this year so that is something we need to work on. But the priorities for government are rolling out the garden waste service, which has not been completed. We have also committed to looking at bulky waste, which is another important part of reducing the amount of waste that goes into landfill, so they are the priorities for government.

THE CHAIR: Just going back to the changed time line, you said everyone by 2019; I believe that has changed. Can you run me through what the new time line that you are proposing is?

Mr Steel: For the rollout of garden waste?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Steel: We are looking to have all remaining suburbs coming on board mid next year, which is actually ahead of the original schedule, and it will certainly provide an

excellent outcome for the community.

THE CHAIR: Is it signing up for the service? I will get a lot of inquiries about this. People are keen to do it. I know these questions will be coming to me. I will put them to you.

Mr Steel: We have not got an exact time frame on when people will be able to register but we are certainly hopeful that that would be relatively early in the new year so that, for the people, there is a bit of lead-in time for the actual collection starting in the second half.

THE CHAIR: When you say all suburbs, does that include multi-unit developments within those suburbs or are you still looking at doing single—

Mr Steel: I might pass over to Michael who will talk about the MUPs.

Mr Trushell: We are still looking at how to manage multi-units. That has a particular set of issues, as you can imagine.

THE CHAIR: We spoke about that previously.

Mr Trushell: That is right. We are still looking at models there to do it. And that is further to the minister's outlining of the issue with the food organics. We want to capture all those food organics but capture it at multi-units. That presents another set of particular challenges we would have to consider as well.

MISS C BURCH: I would like to go to the review of the plastic bag ban. What is the level of plastic bag consumption since the introduction of the ban and what types of plastic bags have been responsible for increases in consumption?

Mr Steel: We have recently received a report on and recommendations into the plastic bag ban which began, I think, in 2011. There has been a reduction of over 11,000 tonnes, I believe, of plastic bags being used. But there is certainly acknowledgement that we need to take further steps in relation to that, and that is what has been recommended to government about looking particularly at the pricing of plastic bags and whether other alternatives should be considered, more biodegradable bags in particular. I will pass over to Michael to provide some further detail about the ban.

Mr Trushell: To be honest, we have only recently received that legislation. The administration legislation came across in August. The report was commissioned by the sustainability minister. We have received that report. We are currently working through what is in the report; the data recommendations et cetera. At this point we are not really in a position to provide too much advice around that.

MISS C BURCH: There has not been much consideration of those recommendations so far?

Mr Trushell: Yes. We are heavily into that. What I am saying is that the act itself and the data et cetera—the regulation of the act—was with another directorate. NOWaste has only recently received responsibility for the legislation—the shopping bag ban act.

I am saying we are familiarising ourselves with the legislation, the review report, the current regulatory activities which were undertaken within Access Canberra et cetera. We are currently rapidly getting up to speed on that. The minister will be in a position to form his views around those recommendations and bring the government's position to the Legislative Assembly, I think, in March next year. Our policy people are heavily engaged in reading that review and getting an understanding of the recommendations and what those implications are.

MR MILLIGAN: Government maintains a lot of lakes and ponds across the ACT but we have had a couple of reports come in that the people who are responsible for cleaning the ponds and lakes are not necessarily responsible for taking away the rubbish that is collected. Is that accurate or not?

Mr Corrigan: There are a couple of issues there. We have a program of keeping our lakes and ponds clean, and our city presentation folk undertake that good work. I think your reference to materials collected not being taken away is with regard to our gross pollutant traps. We have what are called gross pollutant traps in these water bodies to capture the larger pollutants before they get into the waterways themselves. Some of them are quite significant in size. Sullivan's Creek, Isabella Weir, these ones are quite large.

They are cleaned regularly. The material is brought out and it is stored to the side of these ponds to dry it out because to move it when it is wet is many truck movements and it is actually dangerous to move. The tonnage is massive. We store it to remove the water content. Then the material is taken away later. Sometimes, after a big cleanout of, say, the Isabella Weir one, which I know is quite visible from the main roads around it, it can look a bit unsightly. We are always trying to look at ways to minimise that and move it as quickly as we can. It is just that the volumes of material are such that that is what occurs.

But the good news story is: as part of cleaning it, well over 90 per cent—95 per cent—of that material is organic. We are always exploring how we can actually manage that material as well.

MS LAWDER: I have a supp about the gross pollutant trap cleaning. Can you talk about the frequency and is there a schedule after major storm events? Can you give me a bit of info about that?

Mr Corrigan: Yes, there is a schedule about how we keep them all clean. Obviously some of the larger ones and the ones that really catch a lot of material are cleaned more regularly. The smaller ones, we can get the schedule for you if you are interested in those sorts of thing.

Mr Marshall: I can probably help a little with that. The contractual arrangements that we have around cleaning GPTs require two rounds of program cleans per year. In addition to that there is a rain event trigger. Rain events of a specified volume of rainfall trigger additional clean. Typically what happens in those circumstances where there is a trigger is that the GPTs are inspected. They are not necessarily cleaned. They are inspected and the content that has been captured is assessed. There is another threshold measure about the amount of material that is in the GPT and if that is

exceeded that will trigger an additional clean.

What that means is that typically speaking GPTs will get a visit probably four or five times a year and those visits will trigger a clean, maybe, depending on the content, three or four times a year for a typical GPT.

MS CHEYNE: Last week Mr Rynehart discussed the ongoing joint project between Access Canberra and TCCS to automate jobs logged via fix my street so that residents receive an automatic response about the outcome of the work undertaken. He referred me to you for more detail about the back end of that process. Can you provide a further update on what is being done to get good, robust responses through fix my street?

Ms Thomas: Fix my street is a really important tool for us. It has been a strong vision for us as a directorate to make it easier for people to log jobs. We are trialling at the moment a different format for that across six different types of activities on fix my street—footpaths and cyclepaths; potholes; trees and shrubs; street sweeping; illegally parked vehicles; and abandoned vehicles. We chose them as a bit of a selection not just to change the front end of fix my street so that it is easier for people to put in requests but also to direct people to the type of information that makes it easier for us to do the job when we get the requests.

A good example is that someone might put in something about a branch being broken off a tree, but there is no ability to put in information about whether it is a shrub or a really big tree and how many people and what types of equipment we might need to respond to the issue. Now we have an ability to get a photograph and much better location information so that the team can provide a more appropriate response straight up, instead of sending someone out to have a look and then coming back and then sending out other people to have a look again.

MS CHEYNE: There probably is an element of that still required?

Ms Thomas: There is, but we are trying to minimise that. The next phase of this work is to look at the geolocation of various jobs and the work Ken and Stephen are doing together on how their teams might respond to various tasks to make that more efficient and productive when we go out.

MS CHEYNE: That is really what I am interested in. I think we have on a few occasions talked about how the response on fix my street is sometimes “job closed”. Does that mean it has been resolved or does it mean it has been looked at and is not an issue that needs resolving? There is no detail about what has been done, who has visited and what has been decided.

Ms Thomas: We now have the ability to take a photo of the completed task. Our aim is to improve that part of the process so that people can see what has happened and whether that has fixed their problem. The aim of the tool and the beta testing of those six categories is so that we can understand better how to manage that within the team.

MS CHEYNE: Is there an option to ask, “Are you satisfied with the result?” and for people to say yes or no?

Ms Thomas: In future iterations we want to put in a customer experience thing. You will have seen websites like Uber where people can give five stars or four stars. We are really keen to improve and change our customer experience. We have to make sure we have the ICT part of it working together. We have to work closely with Access Canberra because they have the CRM tool that goes with it. We have to work in conjunction with them to upgrade, but that is our pathway.

MS CHEYNE: Do you have enough resources and money to make sure that that upgrade happens?

Ms Thomas: It is probably for the minister to decide his priorities for resources.

MS CHEYNE: It is a high priority for me, Minister Steel.

Mr Steel: We will consider it.

Mr Corrigan: One of the things we have piloted with the six categories is that currently with fix my street there is a massive box where you enter text about the issue and you can type an essay if you like and tell us your whole family history. That does not really help us deal with the issue. We have tried to tighten that a bit and ask more specific questions. It is very helpful when people can be very specific.

Another issue is that it really helps us if people put a contact point. It is amazing how many anonymous requests we get. A tree is again a good example. We will get a notification that a whole tree has come down across a road and a whole crew will go out to find it is only a small branch. If people are specific and give us their details, we can make a phone call and that is very helpful. Sometimes the location details might be a bit vague, so contact details are very helpful. People can always remain anonymous, but it helps us a lot if they attach their details.

MS CHEYNE: I appreciate that some people use fix my street more than others. Is there a hall of fame for the most number of contacts you have received from one individual? Please say it is not me.

Mr Corrigan: I think there is, but we would have to consult our colleagues at Access Canberra to get those details for you.

MS CHEYNE: Okay. Thanks.

Ms Thomas: We do not use the data for that reason, and any data we get at a consolidated level is always de-identified. But we use the contact data to contact the individual if we need more information on that. We use it internally as well; I sometimes use it. I think my team prefer me to use it rather than ring them directly on the weekend to fix my street. We are encouraging much greater use of it because through this tool we can get much better data and we can plan and manage our work much better.

MS LAWDER: You said there is beta testing of getting feedback to the person who has submitted a complaint. Do you have a time frame for that?

Ms Thomas: I will have to take that on notice; I do not have the exact time frames.

MS LAWDER: It has been raised many times in the past and it would be very useful for people who use it regularly.

Mr Marshall: It is worth noting that the software that allows communication with the customer is one part of the task; the other important part of the task is the quality of the information we have to feed back into that communication software. Again, that is about the level of sophistication of the technology of those who deliver the services. That varies across the different requests we receive depending on whether those requests are met by officers from the directorate directly or whether that work is contracted. There is obviously a range of sophistication in our contractors' ability to capture data electronically in the field and feed that back in real time to our systems. For some classes of work that flow of information is faster than for others. We are working with our contractors to improve the quality of that information.

To revisit the streetlight contract briefly, as the minister touched on when we talked about it earlier, that is one of the areas where we are looking for significant improvement in the capacity to capture information from the field in real time—in fact, even faster than the communication with the customer. We will essentially know what is happening with a streetlight before the customer makes that inquiry, so that means the information can go back into the CRM much more quickly.

Ms Thomas: That is a really good point. With Stephen's team we are rolling out technology to the team so that they can do a lot of those things in the field and on the ground. We have a structured program of rolling out iPads to a lot of our city presentation team.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned streetlights, but I presume another is the trimming of trees under powerlines by Evoenergy. How is that going? Do you get many complaints about them not picking up their trimmed branches?

Mr Alegria: I recall a handful of such complaints in the recent past, through representations.

MS LAWDER: Are you work with Evoenergy to improve their responsiveness?

Mr Alegria: Yes, we are. As you would probably be aware, we have drafted a technical code to ensure that when they are doing that work they are looking after the health of the tree and not damaging the tree. We work with them and provide them with advice on how best to do that work. If we get complaints obviously we refer them straightaway. We have a good operational relationship.

MS LAWDER: Do they have a service level of how quickly they are meant to remove trimmed branches?

Mr Alegria: I believe that is covered in the code. They need to remove them in a timely manner, but I am not exactly sure what the time frame specifically is.

MS LAWDER: Could you take that on notice?

Mr Alegria: Yes, certainly.

MS LAWDER: Most of the activities in your portfolio, minister, have high visibility. How are you performing against your key performance indicators for the removal of abandoned vehicles?

Mr Alegria: We are experiencing a large and growing number of abandoned vehicles through the city. I think there is a parallel with the general nature of our community. Waste is another example where we have a very well-off community overall. Some 508 abandoned vehicles have been reported so far this financial year and 141 of them have been impounded. Last year the figures were 1,400 reported and 234 impounded. Often those vehicles present a hazard or they are involved in some way through ACT Policing. We know we can improve our time frames in this area because if we work more collaboratively with ACT Policing we can potentially reduce the time the vehicle is sitting in the public realm reducing amenity.

We are actively engaging with ACT Policing to work out an MOU or some sort of agreement where we can specify how to share information and our roles and responsibilities. That is not just vehicles; that is across the whole range of things we do, including littering, domestic animals and all sorts of things. By working better with them we can improve our ability to meet our time frames on abandoned vehicles. But, again—back to fix my street—we encourage people to report abandoned vehicles.

MS LAWDER: Is nine days still your goal?

Ms Alegria: Yes.

MS LAWDER: For the past year, could you provide consolidated stats of how many abandoned vehicles you responded to, how many were removed within the nine days and how many were removed many after the nine days?

Mr Alegria: I believe that information is provided in the annual report, but I could be wrong. Bear with me while I find that information.

THE CHAIR: While you are looking that up, we might move to Ms Le Couteur. If you get the answer before we finish, you can respond.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is about trees. Page 45 of the annual report says you have over 768,000 trees to manage but you have only planted 1,450 replacement street trees. Is that because only that number of trees died and needed replacing or is tree stock in the existing suburbs declining? I am assuming the new suburbs of the SLA are not relevant to this question.

Mr Alegria: The short answer to that question is that, again, as with all of our resources, we triage the issues. When it comes to trees, the number one priority, as with playgrounds, is safety. We will allocate resources to the management of safety incidents with trees, be it broken limbs or dead or dying trees. We recognise that we need to renew our urban forest. That is part of the whole-of-government approach to

making sure that the benefits of the tree canopy can be sustained in the future and meet the impacts of climate change and so forth.

In this case, we have planted a reasonable number of trees. Most of those are targeted at community requests to replace their street trees. We have spaces available to fill for planting, no doubt. But, as I say, we need to prioritise our resources and make sure that we are covering off not just the removal of dead and dying trees but also the care of trees that we have already planted. There is no point in us going and planting things and then not being able to look after them. For example, there is a watering program which we have underway at the moment and there is the need to make sure that the investment we have made is actually carried through. Tree care is required for a number of years post planting.

MS LE COUTEUR: That sounds as though the number of trees is actually declining. From what you are saying, you are prioritising maintenance, which is good, and you are prioritising safety issues. Do you know whether urban trees are increasing or decreasing? It sounds as though they are decreasing.

Mr Alegria: I can say with confidence that in relation to the useful life expectancy of the urban forest overall, the forest is getting older and there is a large cohort of trees that are getting towards the end of their useful life expectancy. That ranges, from memory, from the 30 to 60-year-old age bracket of trees. There is a big group of them. As time goes on, they are getting closer to the end of their life. That is an issue that we recognise, and we do our best to manage that.

MS LE COUTEUR: In terms of managing this, are you taking into account the urban heat island effect?

Mr Alegria: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are we managing to plant more trees to address that? And if we are planting more trees, do our replacement trees take into account our changing climate?

Mr Alegria: I will take the second part first. Yes, we are constantly reviewing our species list to make sure that trees remain appropriate. We take advice from the weeds advisory group about potential weed species. In terms of prioritising where trees are going, I mentioned community requests, but we also have a very good understanding of where the hotspots around the city are and where vulnerable communities are. We use that to target where we get the most bang for buck in using our resources to replace trees.

Mr Steel: We have been working closely with Minister Rattenbury on his work on living infrastructure around the city and looking at the next couple of decades, when there will be significant numbers of ageing trees across the city. We are currently sitting at around 20 per cent canopy across the city, and the better suburbs statement recommended that we should move to 30 per cent. That is significantly more.

We also need to take into account that a very large number of trees are going to come to the end of their life during the next few decades. If we are to make sure that we

have our climate change and adaptation strategies right, planting more trees is certainly part of that. There was funding in the budget for 1,300 additional plantings, but that is a small amount compared to what would be needed to get to a 30 per cent target, which is a significant number of plantings. It does vary across the city. In our new suburbs in particular, we know that the canopy cover is very low, so the question is also: where are the priority areas for plantings and, if it was done on a larger scale, where would you do that and with what species? We need to maintain the integrity of our bush capital in that regard, so that species selection is important as well.

THE CHAIR: On that note, minister, I suggest Gungahlin. We might call proceedings to a close. Mr Alegria, did you find an answer to Ms Lawder's question or are you happy to take that on notice?

Mr Alegria: I will have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance this morning. We are asking that any questions taken on notice be submitted to the committee office within five business days of the proof transcript becoming available. Members, I remind you that if you have any supplementary questions on notice, they should be lodged with the committee support office within five business days of the transcript becoming available. Responses taken to supplementary questions on notice should be submitted to the committee office five business days after those questions are received.

Hearing suspended from 12.33 to 2.01 pm.

Appearances:

Fitzharris, Ms Meegan, Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Medical and Health Research, Minister for Transport and Minister for Vocational Education and Skills

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate

Thomas, Ms Emma, Director-General

Edghill, Mr Duncan, Deputy Director-General, Transport Canberra

McHugh, Mr Ben, Executive Director, City Operations

Davidson, Mr Geoffrey, Acting Director, Place Coordination and Planning, City Services

Sturman, Ms Judith, Executive Director, Public Transport Operations, Transport Canberra

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into annual and financial reports 2017-18. During this session we will examine the section of the 2017-18 annual report of Transport Canberra and City Services relating to Transport Canberra.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you, Minister Fitzharris, and your officials for attending this afternoon. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink-coloured privilege statement before you on the table. If you have not done so already, could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Ms Fitzharris: I do, thank you.

THE CHAIR: I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and being webstreamed and broadcast live. Minister, we do not have opening statements for this annual reports period.

Ms Fitzharris: That is a bit new.

THE CHAIR: I will jump into the first question.

Ms Fitzharris: Sure.

THE CHAIR: I would like to start with buses, because they have been quite a heavily discussed topic of late. Would you be able to run us through the key principles behind the redesign of the network, looking at the benefits of it and in particular the structures, because they have undergone quite a big change?

Ms Fitzharris: We can do that. I will hand over to Duncan Edghill and Emma Thomas to talk further. The key principles are that the government is investing significantly more in our bus network for the purposes of providing more buses to meet people seven days a week to get them around the city. We have some very clear and significant investments in an integrated public transport network as a whole. This

has always included our investments in light rail and in buses.

We have done significant work over the past few years to look at our current bus network, to look at bus networks around the country and around the world where they work well, to talk with our community, to do extensive household travel surveys and to discuss with the community what types of features they want to see in a bus network. Then this year, on the back of all that consultation, research and data, we released a draft network for discussion and engagement with the community that met all of those objectives so that the government could develop a new network to best meet the needs of what is a growing city.

Where we see significantly increased patronage in our bus network is on the rapid services. There were only two of them in 2016. There are four now, with the introduction of two more last year. Next year, including light rail as a rapid service, there will be 10. That is a massive investment and significant change on the bus network. I will ask Duncan to continue.

Mr Edghill: Certainly. I think that is a good summary, thank you, minister. If we take a step back, there are a lot of positives about our existing bus network. One of the things that we are seeing is that our patronage numbers are increasing, which is a positive. But when you look at public transport usage in Canberra, particularly compared to other capital cities in Australia, mode share for public transport is still lower than we would like. There is an opportunity for us to increase that. That has a benefit not just for those who are using public transport and providing transportation choice to Canberrans; it also has knock-on benefits for our broader community in reducing traffic congestion and so forth. Fundamentally, the core principle that guides what we are doing is to get as many people as possible to use public transport.

What we do know from the current network, from data that we have and from the various pieces of consultation that we undertake, is that there are a number of things our customers are looking for, one of which is frequency. In our current network we have an exceptional degree of coverage, particularly compared to other cities. But for anyone who has used the bus network, particularly if you are outside of the rapids, the frequency is not necessarily always there. With that, some of the operating hours are not quite as long as they could be. Particularly as Canberra begins to move from a nine to five economy, when we are seeing the development of a night economy in our city and different working hours, we need to adjust the public transportation network to match.

One of the key features of the new network, as the minister mentioned, is the introduction of the 10 rapid network routes, which really form the spine of what we are doing. Of the boardings that we have today, something like 40 per cent of patronage is on the four rapid routes. People love them. One of the reasons why people love the rapid routes is that you can miss one, knowing that another one is going to come along pretty quickly thereafter.

That is really key to making that step change in the public transportation network in that it works best when people do not have to rely on the timetable; they just know that they can turn up and get on a bus. We started with the principle of developing our rapid routes along key transport corridors but then designing the local routes in a way

that still provides exceptional coverage. Between the existing networks and the new network, whichever way you measure it the coverage is still pretty much the same. But we are being a little smarter in the way that we are designing the network so that, effectively, your local routes are more evenly spaced, rather than all bunched up in some places and then no local routes in other areas.

It has given us the opportunity to look at every single route in the entirety of the network and to produce something within the constraints of the road network and within the constraints of all the other things that we have to deal with to produce an overall network where the local routes are more frequent and are feeding in an integrated way into the rapid network.

The core principle is always: what does the customer want and what is going to get more customers using our transportation system? Thereafter, it is a balance to try to deliver that with the new network. But we are very confident that the new network represents a very good balance amongst all those kinds of competing interests. We are confident that, once bedded in and once we get our people used to the idea of catching a bus rather than driving their car, we will see that next step change in patronage.

THE CHAIR: I have quite a few follow-on supplementaries arising from that very detailed answer. One of them is this: when looking at the current network, what were the things that you found? You touched on that, but is there anything you would like to add?

Mr Edghill: Things I did not mention are the simplicity of using the network, way finding and a consistent weekend and weekday bus network. One of the gripes that we hear about the current network is that I can catch a bus on a Friday to get from home to a hospital but it is a different bus on the weekend that goes a different way, and it has a different number on it. There are historical reasons why that is the case, but we think it is now appropriate to make the system as a whole more legible and more user-friendly. The easier we make it for passengers to get on our bus, through investments in ticketing systems, improved way finding, improved frequency of services, then the more likely we are to have more people using the bus service.

Ms Fitzharris: You may want to refer to on-time running and being able to have shorter routes and how that operationally lets you improve on-time running.

Mr Edghill: Indeed, one of the challenges with Canberra is that we have inherited this odd geography. North to south, Canberra is actually quite a big city. I think it is something like 46 kilometres. It is the equivalent of going from Hornsby in the north end to Cronulla in the south, if you overlay us on Sydney.

That creates some challenges for us. The longer the routes that we have, and we have some long routes at the moment that kind of wind around the suburbs, the more likely it is that a little problem—a traffic jam or something early on in the route—means you get out of whack with the timetable very easily and you get buses bunching up. This is one of the pieces of feedback that we received through consultation. It is the idea of having more direct local services in particular, rather than ones that wind through every street of the suburb before getting to where they need to go. Those more direct routes are better for our customers and they are better from an operational perspective

also because they increase the probability of our running to timetable.

THE CHAIR: You said that you have looked at other jurisdictions for learnings from them in forming this new network. What are some of the things learnt? What learnings have you taken from them?

Mr Edghill: Frequency is key. That is probably the major lesson. Comparing the existing bus network to other jurisdictions in Australia, we do have an extreme amount of coverage in the ACT, but it has been at the sacrifice of frequency in the network. If you have a given number of assets, the basic equation in public transport is that you are either going absolutely everywhere but you are not doing it very frequently, or you are going to fewer places but doing it very frequently.

As I mentioned before, what we are really doing in the scheme of things is that we are pretty much staying where we are in coverage terms but we are being smarter in the way that we have designed the network. We have also been able to increase the frequency and put the new rapids in, and we have new buses coming in. That is how we have managed that particular balancing act.

I think that was really the key thing, both in an Australian context and internationally. We are increasingly in an on-demand sort of lifestyle: “I just want whatever, whenever I want it.” It is no different with the bus network. People do not really want to be reading a timetable; they just want to turn up and see their bus come. So that is where we are heading.

THE CHAIR: Noting that there has been a lot of community feedback about the new bus network, can you talk me through the approach you took at the end of each round of the consultation, in particular the most recent round, and what the outcome of that consultation has been?

Ms Fitzharris: Do you mean since the draft network came out or the two significant previous consultations—the first one in March 2016 and the subsequent one in late 2017?

THE CHAIR: I sat on the committee and heard about the previous two, but we have a few new members. Would you briefly give us a catch-up but speak specifically about the most recent one?

Ms Fitzharris: There was a large one in 2016 which went through what everyone will understand was a consultation process that helped inform some changes we made that year. In terms of the government’s commitments at the election there was the release of what was then nine rapid routes, noting that we have moved to 10 with the new network that was released this year.

Then there was a broader consultation again at the end of 2017 about how people wanted to see the rapid network rolled out—and some finalisation of that—and that was combined with a household travel survey, clearly using the MyWay data to then inform the draft network, which was released in June this year. There was a lot of work in the lead-up to that in terms of consultation with some targeted groups, including school groups and community groups.

Then there was quite a significant period of consultation, with a significant number of face-to-face meetings, both arranged and drop-in types of sessions right across the city, very extensive presentations to community councils, and various other groups—real work. In some cases a particular residential complex wanted to speak, and Transport Canberra folk went out and spoke directly with people, as well as having online surveys which provided significant feedback.

Mr Edghill: In that most recent consultation process we received something like 13,000 pieces of correspondence, and some of those were comments that were made through the website process. I think we had something like 1,600 face-to-face conversations between our staff members and members of the community. There was a lot of feedback that was received.

Once the consultation process finished, it was a matter of us working through that. I think it may have represented a record amount of feedback in the consultation processes that we have run. That was very encouraging to us. I think it was very well known that we were undertaking a consultation process. It certainly was not something that flew under the radar.

Of course, one of the challenges is that some of the consultation feedback can be mutually contradictory, if that makes sense. There was at least one occasion at a community council meeting where I had two different Canberrans in front of me, one arguing very strongly for a bus to go down a particular road and then the other one equally strongly saying, “No, I don’t want the bus to go down that road.” As with everything in public transport, particularly through the consultation process, it was then a matter for us to take on board the feedback that we received—and there were some broad themes of feedback that we received—and then, as best we could, balance sometimes competing feedback and competing needs.

It is, I think, important to note that, going back to that point I was making before in terms of modal share, there is opportunity for us to grow. It was also a balancing act, the feedback that we received from existing bus users. Most of the feedback that we received was from existing bus users, but we also did need to keep in mind that the broader policy picture here was to satisfy not only the needs of existing bus users but to attract some of the 92 per cent of Canberrans who are not actually using public transport to get to work in the mornings. It was very important for us to bear that in mind. How do we best structure this network to attract some of those people who may be as close to the bus network today as existing users are?

THE CHAIR: That ties in nicely to my last supplementary on this line of questioning. You did mention the patronage was increasing, particularly on the rapids. I believe I heard you say that somewhere.

Ms Fitzharris: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Please can you fill me in on what you are seeing in those trends?

Mr Edghill: We are seeing growth in the patronage in our network, and I think last year we achieved 18.9 million, which exceeded our target, which is good. The rapid

routes represent a significant portion of our boardings. What we want to do, of course, the customer being at the heart, is give the customers more of what they are actually attracted to and what is working on the ground. As mentioned before, that is certainly one of the reasons why there has been a big focus on improving and introducing new rapid routes in the new network.

MS CHEYNE: Just on patronage, I take, I think, one of the busiest routes, which is the blue rapid. It is busy all day every day. There is no time really that it is not. Fortunately, I am near the beginning of the route, so I get a seat, but most people have to stand. Indeed, sometimes the buses have to go past people. Fortunately, there are lots of buses and, as is the aim with other routes, you do not need to look at a timetable because there is usually another bus coming, thank goodness. Is blue rapid the route where we are seeing the most number of non-pickups, where people wanted to originally get on but had to wait a little longer for the next one? Is that recorded somehow?

Mr Edghill: Yes. We get driver feedback. It is difficult for us to accurately count how many we have missed because the way that we count the passengers is when they swipe with their MyWay card. But certainly from the driver feedback in peak times that is an issue that we are trying to address. The other one is the red rapid on weekends. It has been particularly popular and there are instances there where we are getting close to capacity on that route also. Again, focusing on the rapid routes but also focusing on improving our frequency on the weekends, not just during the week are some of the steps that we are undertaking to try to address some of the challenges that you mentioned.

MS CHEYNE: At least from Belconnen to the city there are not a lot of changes for the blue rapid route, but will there be changes in how many more buses there will be and perhaps putting bigger buses on?

Mr Edghill: It depends where we are, but one of the neat features is that some of the additional rapid routes in the new network actually overlay each other. Between Belconnen and the city, for example, we will move to having four rapid routes. It might not be the blue, but if they are coming every 15 minutes in off-peak times, more frequently in peak but even in off-peak times every 15 minutes between four of them—how is my maths?—the odds are that there will be a bus once in fewer than four minutes in that corridor, even in off peak. Then in peak times there will be a lot of buses moving through.

Ms Fitzharris: It depends on where people are going. If they are currently, for example, going to Brindabella or out by the airport they will not be catching the blue; they will be catching the yellow.

MISS C BURCH: You spoke about people wanting increased frequency and more direct suburban routes. We also often hear from people that they do not want to transfer and we know that in this network a lot of people are going to have to transfer, particularly through the city interchange. What modelling has been done specifically on the effect of transferring services and the impact that that is likely to have on patronage and the desirability of public transport?

Mr Edghill: Throughout the process—it has been a very interactive process—we know that, coming back to this idea of balancing what we are doing, there is in public transport what is called an interchange penalty. Obviously if you can stay on one bus, that is fantastic; you do not have to get off. At the same time, the problem is that if you stay on one bus, as well as introducing reliability issues, you are reducing the frequency that you have in the network.

The approach that we have taken is that we have interchanges in the network that were designed for interchanging between intertown services and local routes already. It is not something new for Canberrans. In fact, interchanges are a function of what we do today. But the public transport trade-off is that, by having an interchange and having much more frequency coming through those interchanges, you are limiting the amount of time that somebody has spent waiting at that interchange for the next bus to come along. It is a balance, but we think the need for some people to interchange will be outweighed by the increased frequency that we have put into the network.

MISS C BURCH: Have you done specific modelling to show that?

Mr Edghill: There has been work which has been undertaken by our advisers across all aspects of the new network. That also of course depends upon which route that you are talking about. In the modelling and the network that we have designed we are showing that there are actually many hundreds more bus trips and bus options which are available in the new network than under the old network.

MISS C BURCH: You spoke about the consultation process and the huge amount of community feedback that was received. What was the total cost of this latest round of consultation?

Ms Fitzharris: We might have to take that one on notice.

MISS C BURCH: I have heard from residents about the moving of bus stops. Particularly we have heard from people that some work seemed to commence on moving bus stops in the few days following the closure of consultation. Can you talk to me about that? How many bus stops have been moved, when did that work commence, when is that work likely to finish?

Ms Fitzharris: We might have to take the detail on notice because there is—

Mr Edghill: Yes, I might have to take that one on notice.

Ms Fitzharris: There is quite a bit of work in that.

MISS C BURCH: My final supplementary on this is: what is the commencement date of the new network?

Ms Fitzharris: That is something that we are still working through. What I would say is that all the advice that I have had from Transport Canberra is that the start of the school term is highly preferred, not only just for school kids but for the network as a whole. We are very much looking at that and also looking, obviously, at the commencement of light rail services. We are working through those. It is important to

me to provide advice within the next three to four weeks, particularly before year 10 students start leaving school, so that school communities can provide information to their communities, even though I know parents will find that information themselves, but to give some certainty to schools before the end of the school year.

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is about the ANU and how it is being serviced. Did you do any specific consultation with the ANU as an organisation or with the students? I have been told they had a lot of conversation among themselves but possibly did not realise that you do not in fact monitor all social media and they have to actually direct it to the ACT government.

Mr Edghill: The ANU is an interesting organisation. There is the ANU itself but also we are increasingly finding that there are different groups within the ANU, and some of them from time to time might have different views. We spoke with the ANU both before and after the consultation period. The ANU has its own plans around what it wants to be doing on campus. We are providing some feedback into that. Our view is that the ANU, by dint of geography, will in the new network be one of the most incredibly well-serviced universities—and places in Canberra.

MS LE COUTEUR: Not inside it, though.

Mr Edghill: At the moment even if you look at—

MS LE COUTEUR: There is a difference. The outside, sure, but what about inside?

Mr Edghill: Yes. There are perceptions and then there is data. What the data is telling us is that the vast majority, over 90 per cent, of people at the ANU are actually using the services that service the border of the campus. There is one, route 3, through the middle of the campus, at present. The data is telling us that that is not the bus that people are using. The buses that people are using are the ones that surround the campus, both in the north and in the east. Under the new network, depending on how you count it, six rapids or thereabouts will be serving the ANU. So with the new network, and given the overlaying of the rapids, it will have more buses than you can poke a stick at. It will have buses in peak coming through with minute-type regularity, and even in the off-peak period there will be a mountain of buses going past.

MS LE COUTEUR: I appreciate that the outsides are going to be as well or better serviced. But inside the ANU the route 3 will not exist anymore. That is where I have had personal complaints, largely from more elderly constituents, who say, “We go to the ANU; we go to the lectures. We’re not going to be walking from Barry Drive to wherever. We use these buses.” I appreciate that on the outside the rapid routes are not being diminished, but what about the inside, the western side?

Mr Edghill: We are working with the ANU on its own plans for what it wants to do on the campus. The road network in the ANU itself is more constrained, and they have their own plans for changing that. We are engaged with them in relation to what shuttle services they might want to run within the ANU. But, again, it is one of those balancing challenges that we have in the public transport network. If we were to put the route 3 into the new network, we would be doing it in the context of most people, over 90 per cent, not using the in-campus bus. They are servicing from the boundaries.

It would also be in the context that route 3 has to come from somewhere. Which route from Woden, from down south or from Gungahlin do we take away to put in a route 3 that the vast majority of people going to the ANU are not actually using, in the context of the university being serviced by buses which are coming through with a frequency in the peak that will be measured in seconds, not minutes? That is one of the balancing trade-offs that we needed to make in designing the new network.

MS LE COUTEUR: So basically you are saying that the ANU is going to provide a shuttle for interior servicing and you are just doing the outsides?

Mr Edghill: That is probably a matter for the ANU to comment on. Certainly in our ongoing discussions with the ANU we are engaged with them about how we can continue to support them in their public transport and campus transport needs, both in terms of what they are doing within the campus boundaries and what we are delivering to the campus.

MISS C BURCH: Thank you. We keep hearing that light rail stage 1 is due to start operations in early 2019. Obviously early 2019 could be a six-month period. What is the specific date or range of dates when this is likely to occur, and what does “operational” mean for the general public?

Ms Fitzharris: I would not say six months; I would say the middle of the year would be the middle of the year 2019. We do not have a specific start date yet.

MISS C BURCH: Do you have a period that is shorter than that six-month period?

Ms Fitzharris: I have said I expect that it will be in the first quarter, but we do not have a date yet.

MISS C BURCH: And what does “operational” mean to the general public?

Ms Fitzharris: Where people can get on light rail in Gungahlin and travel into the city.

MISS C BURCH: So operational is when people are buying tickets and travelling on it?

Ms Fitzharris: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: You just mentioned that the bus rollout is going to coincide with light rail. Is that going to be a staged rollout or is it going to be a day when the entire network goes live?

Ms Fitzharris: Those are the options we are looking at now.

MISS C BURCH: When is there likely to be an announcement around that, to give people some certainty?

Ms Fitzharris: With the buses it is a priority to give people certainty about that because that is somewhat within our control. But with Canberra Metro, as they get

very close—and we can actually see today a light rail vehicle at Dickson on Northbourne Avenue, so there is significant progress on light rail and we expect it to start operating in early 2019—we can give less certainty on the start of light rail. But I do want to give certainty on the start of the bus network, particularly, as I have said before, to school communities in the next three or four weeks.

MISS C BURCH: You are talking about both of those things happening at the same time but then you want to give certainty to schools a lot earlier. I do not quite understand how they can coincide if you do not know the start date of light rail yet.

Ms Fitzharris: That what cannot coincide?

MISS C BURCH: Giving people certainty around school buses and the new network versus the start date of light rail and the broader network 19.

Ms Fitzharris: Sorry, I do not understand.

MISS C BURCH: You said that you want to give school communities certainty earlier. I do not understand how you can do that if you do not yet have the light rail start date.

Ms Fitzharris: That is because light rail is servicing one particular part of the city but for the rest of the city—and it is not just school communities but also people who are catching buses right around the city—it is within our remit to determine the start date. As I have also said, it is the beginning of the school term; it is highly preferable.

MISS C BURCH: So it is going to be a staged rollout in some format?

Ms Fitzharris: We do not know yet.

MR MILLIGAN: My question is on the light rail stage 1 project and the construction of it. We all know that it has had an impact on businesses from Gungahlin all the way through to Mitchell. My question is: what strategies are in place to help businesses maximise the benefit and the potential of light rail coming online? Have you had discussion with businesses? Have you put in place practices that they could use to try to recoup what they lost during the construction period due to a drop in trade?

Ms Fitzharris: I am very pleased to hear you acknowledge the potential and the benefits of light rail for businesses, because it is something we have been saying for a very long time. The light rail business link program continues, and we have been working very closely with businesses in Mitchell, in Gungahlin and right throughout the corridor.

More recently, on a Saturday afternoon, in acknowledgement of the considerable work particularly in the Gungahlin town centre, we had—on what was probably a great day for everyone's garden but not a great day to have a festival—a community festival in Gungahlin town centre to acknowledge and celebrate the end of the Gungahlin bus station opening, which happened earlier this year; the Hibberson Street shared zone opening; and the considerably changed light rail terminus at the Gungahlin town centre. There was significant support for local businesses through

that and very close collaboration both with Transport Canberra and with Canberra Metro.

It was and is a requirement of the government's contract with Canberra Metro that they have extensive community outreach. They have people who will be talking to businesses in the town centre literally on a weekly basis, getting to know them very well and getting to understand their businesses. As we have discussed many times, Gungahlin town centre has seen a lot of public sector investment, but huge private sector investment, when two large shopping centres sit adjacent to one another and one invests \$70 million in upgrading their parking and significantly expanding the retail that they have got, is going to have an impact on the people that did not invest \$70 million in their business as well.

All of those factors have come together, which is why we agreed in the Assembly to conduct the impact study. There were some really useful lessons that we learned out of that. We will continue to implement those through Transport Canberra and share them right across government in terms of different parts of government undertaking major public sector infrastructure investments that impact on businesses. Canberra Metro shared that very closely. And there is the Canberra Business Chamber running the business link program. They have a different relationship with their member base and businesses, right across the territory but particularly in Mitchell and Gungahlin.

Ms Thomas: I met with a couple of stakeholders yesterday, and I am seeing that stakeholders now are much more creative in the ideas they have and what things they want to do in the town centre. It is better for government to support good ideas rather than try to come up with them all of our own accord. We are really keen to continue working with groups to support those good ideas.

People are thinking about lots of different ways of activating street fronts: having more people walking and cycling in front of their shopfronts and having ideas for not just big events but the night-time economy and what that looks like. There are a lot of ideas out there now that the town centre is starting to come together and we have started to move. Obviously, the bus interchange is done. We have Hibberston Street shared zone operating. It seems as though a lot more enthusiasm and ideas have been coming through.

Mr Edghill: As well as delivering them busloads and light rail vehicles full of potential shoppers. I would make two other points. The first one is that during the design and construction phase of the project we were quite mindful of what it would mean for local businesses in Gungahlin once it was operational. For example, we moved some light poles and changed the design of the footpaths to better facilitate outdoor dining; we put our minds to that as we were developing the project. More immediately, as we are preparing for the launch activities, a very strong focus for us will be to involve local businesses in a way that promotes them but also thanks them for their patience during the construction period.

MR MILLIGAN: You mentioned activating street fronts and increasing the footpaths. A few restaurants have got on board and put extra tables and chairs out and used that extra space. Do you know if that extra space is being provided free of charge to businesses? I take it that that extra space would be government land, because it is past

the verge of the business, past the awning.

Ms Fitzharris: Which part are you talking about?

MR MILLIGAN: Out the front of restaurants—

Ms Fitzharris: Outside the Marketplace?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes, the Marketplace and so forth.

Ms Thomas: On Hibberson Street or Gungahlin Place?

MR MILLIGAN: On Hibberson Street.

Ms Fitzharris: Outside the Marketplace? That is really a question for Access Canberra.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to the light rail business link, what additional programs or new programs of support will they be offering businesses once the light rail is up and running? Have they got a different type of approach that they can offer businesses or, in relation to businesses on the light rail route that has been completed, will they no longer need the support of the light rail business link?

Ms Fitzharris: One of the features of the program is that it has been pretty dynamic in responding to needs. It is the biggest single infrastructure investment the government has ever undertaken. The purpose was to have that sort of outreach support and connection to local businesses, and some expertise around that within the Canberra Business Chamber. It has been a program that has been able to respond to issues as they have arisen, many of which we anticipated, some perhaps which we did not. That will continue to be the case.

Now there is a focus on coming down into the southern parts of the route, particularly around Northbourne Avenue. We are at the stage where we are really starting to plan for the launch of that first operation; that will be a focus over the next couple of months as well, because it is going to be a pretty big day when that starts. There is a huge amount of interest right along the route for businesses to participate in that.

MR MILLIGAN: Are you able to give a date for when the works on Hibberson Street will be completed and all fencing and construction removed out of that Hibberson Street area in the town centre?

Ms Fitzharris: When the light rail is all done?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes.

Ms Fitzharris: Yes. There is just a tiny little bit left near Gungahlin Place. We can perhaps take that one on notice. It is pretty minimal now, but partly there are some safety issues.

Ms Thomas: Until the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator fully gives

accreditation, part of the reason for having those fences there is not so much because construction activity is still occurring but to keep the rail safety zone there so that they can maintain their testing profile before they need to move everything.

MR MILLIGAN: In relation to identifying priority areas, which areas of light rail construction should be completed first, how do you determine that, and where did the Gungahlin town centre come into that decision on when you should be having that area completed so that it did not affect business for too long?

Mr Edghill: Fundamentally, that is a matter for Canberra Metro and its construction program. What we have done and been doing, as the government and the light rail team, is effectively been on Canberra Metro's back and been an advocate for local businesses as part of the construction process, to continually push our construction partner to do things like move the fencing back in, reduce the size of the fencing, and minimise, as best we can, the disruption to local businesses. As Emma mentioned before, some of it is dictated by the accreditation and safety processes and whatnot that Canberra Metro needs to go through. So even if everybody wanted to remove it, there are certain rules that they need to abide by as they are building the system.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have a very local question about light rail stage 1 at the Dickson stop on the western side of Northbourne Avenue. There are a couple of footpaths which go through the Pines townhouse complex; these are a shortcut to Goodwin Street and to Lyneham high. They are private footpaths through the body corporate's land, and the owners are concerned that light rail is going to funnel people from that stop through to the high school in particular. Can you give me an update on your discussions with the Pines residents?

Ms Fitzharris: We will have to take that on notice.

MS LE COUTEUR: The reason I am asking this is that they have written quite a few times to you, and this is the last step that they have.

Ms Fitzharris: To me?

MS LE COUTEUR: To you en masse. Probably not you specifically, minister, but to the ACT government. I could bring out copies of some correspondence.

Ms Fitzharris: I am not familiar with it.

MS LE COUTEUR: They have certainly—

Ms Fitzharris: They have or you have?

MS LE COUTEUR: They have. Not me; I have not.

Ms Fitzharris: Okay.

MS LE COUTEUR: I know they have been sending heaps of letters. They have been interfacing. They have had people out there looking at it.

Ms Fitzharris: I know the area. I used to live right next door to there. I know those footpaths; I know that they have been used, and they are used right now.

THE CHAIR: As a former student of Lyneham high, I can confirm that we regularly had assembly updates telling us not to walk through the Pines. I imagine that some 20 years later they might still be giving those updates.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. My latest understanding is that the body corporates have been told that the government wants the body corporates to pay for gates. I can get back to you and find exactly who they have been talking to, but I assure you they have been talking to parts of the government.

Ms Fitzharris: Okay.

Mr Edghill: We can go back to the team. I think the answer to the question revolves around what you mentioned at the outset: it is not our asset; it is their asset.

Mr McHugh: Yes, correct. I, along with other representatives from Transport Canberra, have met a couple of times with representatives from the body corporate about this matter. We are working with them on their options in terms of restricting public access onto their property as well as providing some directional signage for school students or people looking to access the Lyneham shops and other areas in Lyneham, showing the appropriate way to get there around this site. There has been a bit of work done in that space, but there has not been a commitment from either side in terms of physically restricting access at this point in time.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you any comment as to whether or not the government is prepared to come to the party in terms of payment for any physical infrastructure? As I said, it has been suggested to me that the body corporate is of the understanding that the government thinks they should be paying for the gates, if installed.

Mr McHugh: At this point in time, the commitment from government is to monitor the situation after the operation of light rail to see if the expectations of the body corporate actually play out in reality. There are footpaths around their site that do follow Northbourne and the adjacent streets. We will continue to work with them if it does become a problem. We have not confirmed otherwise whether we would or would not commit at this point in time.

MS LE COUTEUR: I will send them a copy of the transcript, because they are feeling incredibly frustrated. Otherwise, I would not be asking this question.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, you mentioned that the commencement of light rail will be a pretty big day for Canberra. I assume it will be accompanied by some kind of launch event. How much has been budgeted for that?

Ms Fitzharris: I will take that on notice.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, I know that delivering light rail and delivering it on time is very important, but is it equally important, if not more important, for light rail to be of the highest standard and the safest possible and to have a very happy regulator? Are

we prepared to wait a bit longer to get all of those things happening?

Ms Fitzharris: The short answer is yes. Because I go out of my way to travel the route every day, I have gotten quite used to seeing the route. Even just this morning, residents in the inner north would have turned off Mouat Street on to Northbourne Avenue and been greeted by a very shiny red LRV. It is of very high quality, as are the urban design, the stops, the poles and the landscaping. It has included, as we have always said, significant upgrades to the intersections, kerbs and roads right along the entire route, and to the Gungahlin town centre.

The quality is very important. That was always very important. So is the safety, not only for businesses and residents moving around the site but also particularly for the people working on the site. A lot of times it has been reasonably high-risk work, as it is with infrastructure work. So, yes, that is right. It has always been a very clear message to Canberra Metro and a key feature of my discussions with Canberra Metro, and for the directorate at the most senior level, including board level, as well.

MS CHEYNE: And confirming we are not paying a cent until it is up and running?

Ms Fitzharris: That is right. In terms of the availability payment, that is the nature of the contract.

MS CHEYNE: It is not like it is costing us if they are delayed?

Ms Fitzharris: That is right. Canberra Metro are responsible for building, maintaining and operating the service for a 20-year period.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that it is a whole project and that the poles are included in that. I have had a lot of people come up to me and ask, as a trivia question, why the poles along Flemington Road are silver and the ones on Northbourne are brown, even though some of the ones on Flemington Road are brown. Minister, if you are familiar with the route, which you said you are, you will understand what I am talking about.

Ms Fitzharris: I do not know the colour. Someone somewhere would have come up with a very creative name.

Ms Thomas: Bronze.

MS FITZHARRIS: It is a beautiful colour and it is just—

THE CHAIR: It is no mission brown, that is for sure.

Ms Fitzharris: It is quite remarkable how much it just integrates into the landscape. I have observed this.

THE CHAIR: It looks like a tree.

Mr Edghill: Yes, it is dissimilar from what you see in road projects, where once you are in an NCA area the colours of the poles may look a little different, and then when

you are in the ACT planning area the colours may look a little different again. It is really about planning requirements and the delineation between the NCA and ACT government areas.

THE CHAIR: So they will be staying silver down Flemington.

MISS C BURCH: While we are on the safety of light rail, what specific equipment has been required in case of any light rail derailments or major collisions, and is that equipment owned by the ACT government or is it owned by Canberra Metro?

Mr Edghill: I fairly recently signed off for JACS—I am not the technical person, so I do not know exactly what the equipment is—a piece of equipment they asked us for to deal with that particular issue. We have said, “Yes, we’ll help you fund that.” I do not know when it gets delivered.

MISS C BURCH: So it is JACS who—

Mr Edghill: Yes, as part of their emergency services portfolio. We have agreed to and facilitated that. I do not know the detail or exactly what the machine looks like.

MS CHEYNE: We are starting to see ticketing machines. I am curious about how they operate. Are they just for getting a paper ticket, or can I top up my beloved Transport Canberra card, which I hold very dear? Have we jumped the gun a bit by installing them, given that there is work underway about how we are doing ticketing?

Ms Fitzharris: We are all eagerly bursting to answer all your questions.

MS CHEYNE: You tell me, and then I will ask some more specific questions.

Ms Thomas: We are pretty excited about the new ticketing machines. We started this process a couple of years ago, actually, to do ticketing machines because with light rail in particular people were going to be coming into stops. You do not walk past a driver and you cannot ask for a ticket. The territory was responsible for providing that infrastructure. At the same time we thought it would be very useful to have that at key bus interchanges as well.

The ticketing machines have now come into the country and are being installed and tested. We have not jumped the gun so much as we are going through the testing process. We are working through software and all the requirements. They will be a great inclusion to our ticketing system at the moment. You will be able to get a paper ticket but you will also be able to top up your MyWay card on them. I saw a demonstration of this recently and got to play with the machine.

MS CHEYNE: Can you explain to me how it works? Do I insert my Transport Canberra card and then tap my credit card, or—

Ms Thomas: No. There is a—I do not know the technical word for it—little panel that you can slot your MyWay card onto, and the reader will then read the value of your card. That will come up and you can choose to add value via credit card as well as cash. It is a really convenient way of checking your MyWay balance if you are

waiting and you need to do that. As well as that, though, you can just put in your cash and buy a single ticket, much as you would do as you get on a bus.

Mr Edghill: In terms of jumping the gun, the short answer is no, because you need the ticket vending machines there on the light rail platforms from day one, because there is not a driver there to transact for you. With the new ticketing system that we buy, even though it will be able to do many different things, you will still have some form of token that you are scanning over the reader. It is not just the ticket vending machines that we are buying; we are also buying the validators. With the new ticket machine, whether it is a plastic card or something else that you are using, or whether you just want to buy a paper ticket as a casual user, there will still be a need for ticket vending machines in the new system.

MS CHEYNE: What other validators are you looking at? Now I am excited about putting a chip in my arm.

Mr Edghill: It is funny you say that, because I was just reading the—

MS CHEYNE: Tell me more.

Ms Thomas: In New South Wales a guy did that, remember?

Mr Edghill: Yes, and there was a Melbourne bloke who put it in the webbing too. In fact, the public transport group in Canberra put forward their ideas for budget bids, and one of them is to enable chips to be worn with a person, so there you go. What was the question, sorry?

MS CHEYNE: What validators are we looking at? Are there chips?

Mr Edghill: Yes, sorry; it is not very exciting. When you scan your card to get into the office door, the thing that you are scanning is the validator. They look much prettier than what we have on the office doors here but they are prominent, so you know when you go to a light rail station where you are meant to be tapping on and off. But at its heart it is just a validator that reads the token that you are waving over the top of it.

MS CHEYNE: What sorts of tokens are we looking at?

Mr Edghill: When I say token, I mean your MyWay card. That is today. In the future ticketing system, that is where things become a lot more exciting, because there is a lot more convenience.

MS CHEYNE: With a chip?

Mr Edghill: The fundamental difference is that with the ticketing system we have at the moment the smarts, the balance, is actually stored on the card itself, so you need to keep using your MyWay card in order to be able to do it. With the new ticketing system, we will be moving to an account-based system where the smarts are not actually on the card; the smarts are in a database in the background. So when you are swiping something you are not taking the value off what you are swiping; you are

using that as a token to tell the database in the background to debit whatever the fare is from your account.

In that world, maybe you do have a MyWay card, or whatever it is called, and you are able to swipe that. But because you just need something to tell the database in the background what to do, you could be swiping your phone, or where you have got credit card functionality with the tap-and-pay sort of stuff you could do that. You see it in London at the moment. It is really convenient. You swipe your Mastercard and it is exactly the same cost as if you had a MyWay token. It is just another one of those things about reducing the barriers to public transport usage to get as many people unafraid of it as possible.

MS CHEYNE: Is the credit card option a live one?

Mr Edghill: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: Does that mean the online payment portal will also be upgraded with this new ticketing? We hear a lot from people about the delays in funds appearing.

Mr Edghill: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Am I right that your funds are there when you put your \$100 on it but it is not until you actually board the bus that it appears in your account?

Mr Edghill: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Can that be fixed? It is really stressful.

Mr Edghill: The existing MyWay system is probably the better part of 10 years old now. Imagine using a phone from 10 years ago or going to a website from 10 years ago. It would feel pretty clunky and out-of-date by now. That is where the MyWay system is in its life cycle. It will still be with us for a little while as we go through procurement and then the transition periods. It does take time. It is complicated introducing a ticketing system. But the process is well underway to introduce an account-based system.

Ms Thomas: The ticket vending machines are set up to look after the MyWay card at the moment. But as we migrate to a new ticketing system we will be able to change the validators on the card.

MS CHEYNE: Easily? At little cost, or big cost?

Ms Thomas: It depends on what system we choose. The details of that are just being worked through with the vendors at the moment as part of the tender process.

MS LE COUTEUR: There is the federal parliamentary committee on light rail stage 2. What happens next?

Ms Fitzharris: Once the committee reports, the government needs to provide a

response. My understanding is at the commonwealth level there are not the same requirements as in the Assembly, but we are expecting a response from the commonwealth government to the parliamentary report.

MS LE COUTEUR: And then what happens?

Ms Fitzharris: We will continue our work. There are a couple of things we can continue and have funded to continue to progress light rail to Woden. Obviously we are looking through the recommendations of the report and considering what they mean for our preferred route and our time frames. We know that one of the significant processes we need to go through is approval under the EPBC Act, so we are preparing for that.

MS LE COUTEUR: You mentioned the third route, so clearly you are going through a route selection process. What criteria or objectives do you use to evaluate which of the various routes you prefer?

Mr Edghill: Again I come back to this idea of balance. There is not necessarily a right or wrong answer when doing these things. We are looking at the patronage of different options and of course we consider travel time and the capital cost associated with actually building it. We look at community preferences. We think about what future development may occur, because this is a long-term asset, and not just servicing what is there today. There are a multitude of other factors that go into the mix.

As part of the business case process we undertake economic and financial analysis, we look at constructability issues and we consider any planning constraints. All those factors go into assisting cabinet to make decisions as to the most appropriate route. Some of those are interlinked; a slightly longer route is not necessarily a bad thing if, for example, it is going past more employment nodes or cultural attractions and so forth. It is all part of the complicated mix we work through in ultimately making a decision.

MS LE COUTEUR: When you do your estimates for patronage, do you assume that the blue rapid service will continue?

Mr Edghill: I make it clear at the outset that a very clear distinction needs to be made between esoteric-type transport modelling and economic analysis in the business case and policy decisions that may be made closer to the time because there is a large time gap between the two pieces of work.

If you look at stage 1, for example, some of the modelling was done in 2014, and we are talking about introducing the new bus network in 2019. There is no way that in 2014, when we were doing that transport modelling, we could have guessed exactly what the network would look like in 2019 because it changed as a consequence of community consultation and the other processes we went through.

In terms of some of the modelling we have done to date for stage 2, we generally do not assume that we are running bus services in direct competition to light rail. But the government has previously made clear that a decision about what the bus network will

look like for stage 2 cannot be made until the route is 100 per cent locked down. We still need to go through the EPBC Act process with the commonwealth and the NCA. Once that is done, I am sure we will again go through community consultation before the opening of light rail stage 2 and all that will feed into a decision about what the bus network looks like for stage 2.

MS LE COUTEUR: You talked about bus routes in direct competition to light rail stage 2. Under the current plans the blue rapid is not in direct competition because light rail stage 2 goes on a more complicated route through the parliamentary triangle. So could I assume that the blue rapid will still be going?

Ms Fitzharris: No. It is too early to say.

MS LE COUTEUR: I took notes of some of the points you were evaluating and you said there were lots more. Can you provide a list of what they are?

Mr Edghill: I have probably touched on the big ones, but we would more than happy to give an overview of some of the key issues.

Ms Fitzharris: I will add one more—that is, the importance of the city-wide network of light rail and the integration of buses with that. Stage 1 clearly has intersections with both existing and future routes, but stage 1 is Gungahlin to the city. We are now looking at making a light rail route work from Woden to Gungahlin and through to the city. There are issues of people who get on at Dickson and want to get off at Barton or people who would be able to get on at Yarralumla and go through to Gungahlin. So even if you were just on light rail there is a greater variety of travel than Woden to the city.

Mr Edghill: And we do not necessarily know yet some of what may become key issues. When we go through the EPBC process we anticipate we will get a lot of comments about everything from environmental to heritage and other matters, all of which will need to go into the decision-making framework for how to get from A to B.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you any idea when the route decision will be made, or is that in the hands of the house on the hill?

Ms Fitzharris: We have a preferred route that was decided upon after extensive and detailed consultation as well. Everyone is really familiar with that; we have talked about that before. That is the preferred route, but we are looking at what the recommendations mean. I have sought meetings with the relevant commonwealth ministers. I had a meeting with the previous minister about this, but the minister has since changed.

There has been extensive consultation and engagement with the National Capital Authority on stage 2 of light rail, from weekly meetings since the end of 2016 to walking the government's preferred route with members of the board and the executive of the NCA this year. Those extensive discussions with the NCA will continue, and they were part of stage 1 as well.

MISS C BURCH: You said that you are currently working through a government

response to the parliamentary report.

Ms Fitzharris: No, the federal government will get a response.

MISS C BURCH: Okay; I am sorry. Regarding the fourth recommendation of the report, requiring that light rail be wire free, including along Adelaide Avenue to Kent Street, is this going to be possible with the preferred route? Have you costed the additional requirement of doing this?

Ms Fitzharris: We have always said we expected that from the NCA.

Mr Edghill: We were generally pretty happy with the report that the committee released. That was one of the elements that we were happy with because the committee defined for us the extent of wire-free running. Down to Kent Street, our current thinking is that technically it should be possible in the time frames when we actually build light rail stage 2. That was an element of the report that we welcomed.

In terms of understanding the exact cost impacts, that would be part of the ongoing work that we need to undertake as part of the business case process. There are some pluses and minuses. You have the additional cost of on-board energy storage in the LRVs, but then obviously you are not having to build poles and put wires in. We still need to do that.

Ms Thomas: I think it is important to note that we were going to be wire free for part of the route anyway. So the incremental cost of being wire free for a little further is more our consideration of the technical capability of the light rail vehicle—whether it would force us to have extra stops to allow it to charge in time. There is a slight sort of hill, from my memory of that area, that puts the light rail vehicle under bigger pressure. We are going through a task with the light rail manufacturer to try to understand the capability a little bit better.

MISS C BURCH: So that work is being undertaken at the moment?

Ms Thomas: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: And then—

Ms Fitzharris: Could I add to that? Again, the sort of futureproofing of stage 1 meant that the vehicles that we currently have are capable of wire-free running. That was factored in very early on.

Ms Thomas: The installation of battery assistance.

Ms Fitzharris: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: They need to be retrofitted, though?

Ms Thomas: Batteries?

MISS C BURCH: Yes.

Ms Thomas: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: The sixth recommendation of the report is the removal of the trees with heritage value—that that be met with appropriate replanting. What is the additional cost impact of that as well?

Mr Edghill: I think we gave some broad cost guidance in one of our submissions. We had always anticipated that the removal of any trees, particularly through that area, would require a sufficiently sophisticated landscaping plan. That is already included in our estimations.

Ms Fitzharris: I think you will see that landscaping is a huge feature of the stage 1 route as well. The expectation that that would be part of the entire network as well was always factored in right from the early stages.

THE CHAIR: How is the electric bus trial going?

Mr Edghill: It has been a genuine trial and a genuine learning experience for us. If I take a step back, we are very interested, as are many other public transport agencies around the world, in this move to zero emission buses and electromobility. It has been a great opportunity for us on a number of fronts. You may recall that we had a hiccup with the supplier in the first instance in getting the trial underway. That was a learning experience for us and part of the trial around the sophistication of suppliers in the Australian market at the moment.

The trial itself is coming to an end. We had two fully electric buses and one hybrid electric bus in the mix. The feedback has been interesting. We found that the hybrid has some advantages. Some of the driver feedback that we received is that, for all the buses, it requires a slightly different driving style from a diesel bus. With the electric buses you probably have the torque there straight away. With the hybrid bus, you have got that crossover point when the bus is already moving where it switches from electric to diesel. So we will need to pay attention to driver training when we go down this path.

The other aspect of the trial, which has been interesting for us, is that we are dealing with—I will be delicate here—a different suite of suppliers than we have traditionally dealt with when you are talking about diesel buses. What we found through the trial is that actually the energy storage systems on full electric buses themselves have done pretty well and they do what they say on the tin. We do not have in-route charging. We charge overnight at the depot. Then we run the system. But because there are different manufacturers involved, there are just some other things that we will need to pay attention to if we go down that path.

The other interesting element from the trial is not so much the buses themselves; it is around how we manage the depots and how we manage some of the infrastructure that would be needed to support electric buses. It is okay when you are managing one or two buses. But as soon as you start putting more electric buses into the mix then that changes. At the moment, at the end of the day the buses come in, they are cleaned, refuelled, swept out and then they are parked. We would need to begin to change how

we manage the refuelling of the electric buses. You would need to have a battery management system in place at the depot. You would need to have a think about how that is designed so that you are not having people unplugging buses at three in the morning. You would have them plugged in at the same time but the system would need to be able to switch between the buses.

It is a different way of thinking. It has been an eye-opener for us. I think it certainly has not in any way, shape or form dissuaded us from our interest in that area. It has just made us alert to some of the things that we will need to be particularly mindful of when we go down that path. But from a customer perspective, I think they have been warmly welcomed. You cannot hear the engines much. Maybe you can hear the air-conditioning a little more, but it is very definitely a question of when, not if.

THE CHAIR: What is the furthest you have been able to run buses out, given that Canberra is quite extensive in its geography?

Mr Edghill: I want to say that it is well over 200 kilometres, but they are able to do an ordinary bus route in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Minister, were you going to add something?

Ms Fitzharris: I was going to add that the Transport and Infrastructure Council, which is under the COAG framework, met in Sydney on Friday. The ACT and Queensland sponsored really the first major discussion at that council meeting on electric or zero emission vehicles. We were really pleased that we were able to get agreement to get the senior officials—at director-general level—to develop a work plan to get some consistency and a framework in place nationally around the transition to zero emission vehicles, both passenger vehicles and particularly the potential in public transport fleets to move towards that. It was a really good discussion and probably a bit overdue. It was great for the ACT and Queensland to sponsor that.

MS LE COUTEUR: I understood that the Woden depot is being rebuilt to service electric buses. Is that correct? It did not quite sound like that from your story.

Mr Edghill: That is very definitely what we are doing. The depot layout will change between a diesel fleet and an all-electric fleet. Obviously we are not going to be all electric on day one. Rather than having a refuelling bay, for example, you do not need that space, but you need to leave some space for the charging infrastructure where the buses are actually parked. That is probably the biggest example. You also might need some electrical distribution infrastructure onsite.

MS LE COUTEUR: I would think so.

Mr Edghill: Part of the design process that we are going through at the moment for Woden is to make sure that we are designing it and building it with a view to it being an all-electric fleet at some point in the future. That means, for example, leaving enough space between bollards and so forth to be able to house the infrastructure that you need. If we are laying conduits, it means putting conduits in now rather than having to dig stuff up down the line. It is very definitely part of our thinking for

Woden depot.

MS LE COUTEUR: When do you think you are likely to buy the next electric buses? You have been pretty positive about the trial, but when do we get some more?

Mr Edghill: That is a very good question. There are a lot of electric buses in China. Europe has been a bit slow off the mark, but there are some laws in places like Berlin and Hamburg that any new buses that are purchased from 2020 onwards need to be all-electric. That is focusing suppliers in that neck of the woods. In Australia at present, the electric buses that we have had here across all jurisdictions have been on a trial basis. No-one yet in Australia has actually put in a fleet order for electric buses. It is a bit of an unknown for us as to what kind of pricing you get, what the delivery terms are and so forth.

We have funding for 80 buses. We have purchased the first 40 of them. The last buses, arrived very recently. In the coming months we will begin a procurement process for the additional buses that we need. We will not be prescriptive; I think we will open it to the market to come back to us with diesel, electric, hybrid and anything they want. When we have a clear picture from the market of what is deliverable to us, we can make an informed decision as to whether the market is sufficiently mature for us to make that investment or whether we are still a little way off. I do not have the answer, but we are doing everything that we can to get the answer in the next procurement process that we run.

MS CHEYNE: I am sorry if you said this, but how many days in the last financial year was the electric bus not operational?

Mr Edghill: I do not have the exact figure to hand, but this is one of the points I was alluding to before. There have been some operational issues with some of the electric buses, and they have given us some good learnings as to what we will need to be particularly mindful of when we run that next procurement process. Where the buses have not been on the road as we would like them to be, it has generally not been because of the battery component of the buses; it has been because of maybe some different manufacturing standards for those buses coming out of a jurisdiction other than Europe, which is where we typically get our chassis from.

MS CHEYNE: I guess it is a good point about the maturity of the market in being able to supply us. We are all keen for some electric buses on the road, but we do not want to have electric buses on the road that are not on the road; that is a not a very good use of taxpayers' money.

Mr Edghill: They need to be reliable. We need to get the balance right between battery weight and passenger capacity. All these things are solvable in time and doable. The trial has been really valuable for us, and it has been a genuine trial in that when we go to the next step we can do it with eyes wide open.

MISS C BURCH: I would like to talk about flexible transport. We hear a lot from elderly residents about difficulties in accessing the flexibus: it needs to be booked in advance and it only operates for a limited number of hours. What, if anything, is being done to improve flexible transport options for elderly people?

Mr Edghill: The flexible bus service is great. We are really proud of it, but we will also admit that it is not quite as demand responsive as we would like if you have to phone up a couple of days in advance and make a booking. We acknowledge that.

One of the features that we would like to introduce into the new network is a feature whereby, with some of the places that we serve, we think we can deliver a better customer outcome if we go down a more demand-responsive path, rather than having a fixed bus service that runs, say, every two hours out to the Alexander Maconochie Centre. A bus with a two-hour frequency is not good for customers and it is not good for us.

In the near future we are going to take the next step in that process, which is running a procurement process to test the market for the smarts that will help us deliver a better system which can be applied not only to those demand-responsive services that we want in our ordinary network service but also to the flexible transport network. There are increasingly examples of these sorts of services around the world, and there are a number being trialled in Australia at present. There can be some nuances between them. Some of them can be a system where a taxi turns up and takes you wherever you want to go; some of them can be where we run a shuttle on a reasonably fixed route and the way the system works is that it will deviate from that. Then there are other systems that just plan the routes dynamically.

We are keeping an open mind as to what exactly the best way of doing that is. But the end result is that we already have a fleet of small buses that we use as part of the flexible transport system. We obviously have drivers there to go. The bit that we do not yet have is a booking system which can bring down the advance booking required from days to minutes. We are on that process, and fingers crossed that we get the right result out of that. Then we can apply that to the flexible transport network and it will benefit our community members who use that service.

MISS C BURCH: What is the likely time frame for that procurement process?

Mr Edghill: We are drafting up the documents now. We will have to think about what the Christmas period means and whether we do it beforehand or afterwards.

MISS C BURCH: So quite soon?

Mr Edghill: Reasonably soon.

MISS C BURCH: You mentioned the AMC specifically. We are talking about flexibuses. Are there plans to extend that to people with a disability or other groups as well, or to other locations like the AMC?

Mr Edghill: Once we have got the technology in place, we are very keen to think about who we can deliver a better service to, using that technology.

Ms Fitzharris: The other aspect of that is that Transport Canberra operate the flexible bus service, but we know that the community sector has a number of buses that are owned by and funded or leased through ACT government grants or a combination of

those things. They have been part of this conversation for us. We know that we have quite a lot of capacity in that sort of flexible bus community transport, in addition to other aspects such as the taxi subsidy scheme. There is quite a significant amount of capacity. As Duncan has said, we could use that much better. If we get a better technology to be able to dispatch that service to more people, we can work with what we have already got. I think there is a really strong collective view that it would be great to provide our current capacity to even more people.

MR MILLIGAN: I was wondering if you can give an update on the progress of the proposed light rail stop in Mitchell and the design study that is currently underway. When can we expect the design outcome, when will construction start and when will it be potentially completed?

Mr Edghill: We are in discussions with Canberra Metro at the moment. There are two main elements to it. One is constructing the stop itself. Because you are adding another stop into the system, it changes some of the operating patterns, in which case we need to think about our light rail vehicle numbers and what it means for the overall system. The ball is presently in Canberra Metro's court to provide us with a proposal that we can take forward.

Ms Thomas: The design of the light rail route did allow for conduits for the new stop to be put in at the time. We are talking about what the actual stop infrastructure is on top of that. That is the design work that is required. But also there is the design work for the power system and how much power they require, if there is anything additional they need with respect to that.

Mr Edghill: And the traffic signalling system, because it is connected with the rest of it. It is a bit more complicated than just pouring the concrete, but we are actively working through those issues.

MR MILLIGAN: So modelling is being done at the moment on the expected disruption that it would potentially cause, the disruption it could cause to the route that is currently being undertaken?

Mr Edghill: Disruption is probably the wrong word. It is more about, operationally, how we make it work when we put another stop into the system. But also it is about what are the lead times: depending upon when you are constructing it, how do you construct it around the operating light rail system, because you do not want to close the light rail system to build the stop; and if we have another light rail vehicle as part of the process, what are the manufacturing lead times and so forth. There are a few issues that we are working through, but they are being actively worked through.

MR MILLIGAN: Is there a date that you hope to get that completed by and then start on construction of the new stop? Is there a time frame—first, second, third or fourth quarter of next year?

Mr Edghill: We are probably a bit too early to be even putting quarters around it, other than that we would not be having active conversations now to deliver it in seven years time or anything silly like that. We will just keep the momentum going and deliver it as soon as we appropriately can.

MS CHEYNE: I have a pretty specific question. The work underway on the Sydney and Melbourne buildings—I know that is under the city services portfolio—has caused, I am hearing from constituents, delays to buses travelling down there and back out. The complaints, which are not coming from my constituents but are particularly coming from people from Dickson and nearby, are about the normal route timings of when and where buses should be have been put out. Was any consideration given to diverting buses away from the area during these works, given they have been and are going on for some time?

Ms Fitzharris: I think if they are coming southbound down Northbourne it will not be the Sydney and Melbourne building works; it will be the light rail works, because there is the combination of both the light rail works and the under-street works. We certainly did look at the development of Northbourne Plaza and the timing of that. We are very conscious that, between the light rail works on the Alinga Street stop, the work on the Sydney and Melbourne buildings and now the upgrades to the bus station that is being developed on the western side of Northbourne to accommodate the new network and light rail, there is a lot of work going on. I think that, overwhelmingly, in the end the view was that people have been really keen to see work on the Sydney and Melbourne buildings for a long time and that we should get on and get it done as quickly as possible.

MS CHEYNE: I am totally not against work happening there.

Ms Fitzharris: But I think there was quite a lot of consideration given to the impact on the bus network, the road network, the businesses there as well. And there is ongoing discussion with the businesses there.

Mr Edghill: We are just trying to get the works done as quickly as possible. That is the number one—

MS CHEYNE: In terms of the bus taking a different route or—

Mr Edghill: The issue when the buses start deviating from their routes is often that the deviation can actually take longer than moving through the traffic more slowly. That is the short answer. Then you have the additional complications of maybe people being familiar with where the bus goes and it is not going there anymore. It is certainly not ideal, but I think we are looking at the greater good and just trying to get it done as quickly as possible.

MS LE COUTEUR: Could I have a couple of quick updates on projects? The dockless bike share scheme, how is that pilot going in terms of usage and dumping?

THE CHAIR: Are you asking how many are in the lake?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, specifically dumping in the lake, but there are other places you could dump them. Sullivan's Creek would be one, I assume.

Mr Davidson: On dockless bike share there are some really encouraging results. It kicked off on 31 July. We have now had over 5,000 hirings and 4½ thousand accounts

have been created. We have got some hotspots of activity as well. The ANU precinct is a hotspot; also the Civic interchange and through to Barton.

In terms of bikes being recovered, there was one bike that was in the creek in the ANU precinct. That was recovered very quickly by the provider. Otherwise, there have been a handful of bikes that have been damaged, repaired by the provider and then deployed back into the fleet very quickly. We have had really quick response times. But by and large the community have really valued this service and we have not seen the kinds of issues that they have seen in Melbourne and Sydney, for example.

MS LE COUTEUR: I was writing down the figures. You said there had been 5,000 hirings and 4½ thousand accounts. That would mean, it would seem, that there are only 500 hirings more than numbers of accounts and that most people only use it once. Is that what is happening?

Mr Davidson: No. Of the 4½ thousand accounts, there are people that are using the service multiple times. The top user has made over 66 hirings since the service commenced. I do not have the full range of data on exactly how many times each user account has been used it, but we have had 4½ thousand accounts created.

MS LE COUTEUR: Most of them would use it once, if there have only been 5,000 in total and we have got some people up to 66 times?

Mr Edghill: Some might also be creating accounts in anticipation of using the service when the weather warms up a little.

MS LE COUTEUR: The point is they have not used it. There does not seem to be a lot of ongoing use, but maybe that will improve. What about the car share scheme that two years ago was a trial? Is it permanent? How is it going?

Mr Edghill: The permits that were provided to those providers have been renewed this year, and we are in the process now of considering what we do going forward with the car share scheme. But all those vehicles are still in operation.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is it likely they will go south of the lake?

Mr Edghill: We still need to consider what the future of that scheme is. What we know is that it goes very well, for example, in the Braddon region. We need to really have a think about where it might operate best in future, but right now it has been a successful scheme. It was evaluated. It was found to be successful, particularly in those areas like Braddon, and we now need to have a bit of a think about what the future of that scheme might be in Canberra.

MS LE COUTEUR: What sorts of things are you thinking about in terms of the future?

Mr Edghill: Exactly the things that you have touched on: where it should operate, the types of vehicles that are in service, how many we have, where they are located.

MS LE COUTEUR: This is another quick one but slightly different. How has the disability reference group been involved with all the wonderful new things you are doing? Probably someone else, I am guessing.

Mr Edghill: That is Judith.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is, the new bus network and the active travel upgrades, light rail et cetera?

Mr Edghill: I will pass to my colleague, but there have been multiple contact points with relevant groups. We are in ongoing dialogue with ACTCOSS, for example. Some of the feedback that we have received—it depends which part of the public transport network we are talking about, for example—on the light rail system and around the location of the guiding strips has helped inform the final design and what will be the final product for light rail and then through the bus network. I invite Judith to comment.

Ms Sturman: Probably the most substantial engagement we have had is with ACTCOSS—and this is on a number of fronts—largely to do with how we deal with the disabled groups and other disadvantaged groups in providing transport through the on-demand system, actually establishing what that looks like and doing studies on where those people exist. It is easy to put an on-demand system in place, but actually if it is only delivering one person per vehicle then it is not really being very successful.

There is quite a decent piece of work that we are working with Susan on. We are also working with that group behind Susan to help people learn how to use the bus network. There are groups of people where, for them, it would be helpful to come out and trial the bus network and almost have tutoring so that they can understand how it works, especially when we have so many connections in the new network, so that people have confidence in using it. Additionally, that is going to stretch through to light rail so that they can go and explore how they can access light rail when that comes on board too.

We have talked also to Guide Dogs Australia and had a good conference discussion with them about how they can help us to identify and prioritise where people who have disabilities need to use the service more and where we can check on DDA compliance and make sure that it is prioritised to where those users are most commonly accessing the network.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am a bit confused because you have talked a lot about talking to ACTCOSS, which is a great thing to do, but I specifically talked about a disability reference group, which was one of the parliamentary agreement items. We do not have one? Is that what you are saying? You just talked to ACTCOSS?

Ms Sturman: There is a reference group as well.

MS LE COUTEUR: But you are not consulting it frequently then?

Ms Sturman: No, we have been consulting with them. That is the group which consists of Guide Dogs Australia—and Ian can probably talk to a couple of other

groups that are included in that. We will take that one on notice. There have been other groups that have been involved in the discussion. We have got stakeholder engagement information that we can provide.

THE CHAIR: Minister, can we get an update on the school crossing supervisor program and just what feedback you have received? And is a review of the program going to happen, given that it has been operational for a bit now?

Ms Fitzharris: Who would like to speak to the wonderful school crossing supervisor program? We are very pleased with how this has been going. The response of schools has been really strong. In the new network we will be looking at rolling out five more schools to have school crossing supervisors, as part of the approach of really taking the pressure off schools in terms of all the transport needs: taking pressure off car parks and making it easier to walk and cycle to school. I will hand over to Geoff Davidson.

THE CHAIR: Is it possible to announce which five schools?

Ms Fitzharris: Not just yet, but they will know before the end of this school term. There has been some very recent work done surveying the schools that have them, and the anecdotal feedback from a number of schools has been that the program is highly regarded and the supervisors themselves have become a really important part of the school community. They have become well known; the families, kids and teachers have come to trust them and know them. They are part of the school community now. I will ask Geoff to take you through some of the statistics, but they are really encouraging.

Mr Davidson: They are very encouraging results that we have got through so far. We have 20 schools that have a supervisor currently. The early results of the evaluation that we have done have shown that, as the minister said, the community really value this service that they are getting, and they consider that it is reducing the traffic danger. The early results show that 75 per cent think that it has reduced the traffic danger greatly, and almost 95 per cent think that it has at least somewhat reduced the traffic danger. They are really encouraging results.

We also have around 48 per cent of parents who said that they are more likely to allow their children to walk and ride to school because of the school crossing supervisor. There could be a range of reasons for that, as the minister said. With the crossing supervisors, we try to have the same or a small number of crossing supervisors operating at the same school. They then develop a relationship with the children and their families, and the school community broadly. The early results are very encouraging.

MISS C BURCH: Is the transport journey planner something that the government is developing in house or is it engaging a third party to develop a new app?

Ms Thomas: We are a little hesitant, because we are doing it in house—we have someone in the team who is specifically looking at that—but we are also engaging with a contractor to help provide that. The answer is that it is a bit of both.

MISS C BURCH: Has that third-party provider already been engaged?

Ms Thomas: Yes.

MISS C BURCH: Was a tender put out for that process?

Mr Edghill: I think we would have to take that on notice. I do not have to hand the value of the work and what process it went through.

Ms Fitzharris: Could I just clarify something about the parliamentary agreement and the disability reference group.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, 7.2.

Ms Fitzharris: Yes. I will discuss that with Minister Stephen-Smith as the Minister for Disability, because she has considerable support from reference groups that range across a whole range of issues. I note that this one is on transport and new developments, and also parents of children with disability. I think that you are referring to a broader group, as opposed to the one that is specifically within Transport Canberra.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. I am not suggesting that it is within Transport Canberra, but I am suggesting that it is something you should be consulting with.

Ms Fitzharris: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: As the item says.

Ms Fitzharris: Yes. I am sure Minister Stephen-Smith will be able to work with us to clarify exactly that.

MS LE COUTEUR: So we should expect—

Ms Fitzharris: I will take that on notice and provide any further information.

MS LE COUTEUR: You are basically saying we should expect responses from you and Minister Stephen-Smith? Is that what you are saying?

Ms Fitzharris: Yes. There may have been discussion about these matters when she appeared, presumably in front of the HACS committee.

MS LE COUTEUR: I do not think we talked about this as part of the HACS hearings.

Ms Fitzharris: We will provide it to this committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance this afternoon. We are asking that answers to questions taken on notice be submitted to the committee office within five business days of the proof transcript becoming available. I would like to remind members of the committee that supplementary questions on notice should be lodged with the committee support office within five business days of the transcript

becoming available. Responses to supplementary questions on notice should be submitted to the committee office five business days after the questions are received.

We will now adjourn for a short break and resume with the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

Hearing suspended from 3.45 pm to 4.02 pm.

Appearances:

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
Auty, Professor Kate, Commissioner
Farrelly, Ms Serena, Project Officer

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
Le, Ms Thao, Chief Financial Officer

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank Professor Kate Auty and her colleagues for attending today. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement before you on the table. Would you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Prof Auty: Yes, I do.

Ms Farrelly: Yes, I do.

Ms Le: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: I also remind witnesses that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and are being webstreamed and broadcast live. Commissioner, we have heard from a few of the directorates about the positive impact of the plastic bag ban in the ACT. Can you provide an overview of the benefits from your office's point of view?

Prof Auty: The report came to us as a ministerial direction, subject to section 21 of the act. As we developed this report it became very clear that we needed a bit more time, so that is why I sought that from the minister. The four recommendations made include introducing a mandatory plastic bag disclosure regime, and that picks up on the fact that we were unable to get information from big retailers about the bags in the ACT. We also took the view that a minimum price for plastic bags should be introduced. While there is a price in some instances already, we think there is a need for a further nudge. It has been put to me that that is penalising some people. That is one way to construe it, but it is also rewarding those who do what we want them to do—that is, bring their own bags to the retailer.

I thought there was a need to improve the governance around the plastic bag regulation. I understand that one directorate now has that role. We also thought there was a need to align with the research synergies coming out of the federal jurisdiction around the issue of plastic bags generally.

When we took the time to ask people what they thought about the plastic bag issue in the ACT, we asked 1,000 people by way of a phone survey, and we also had face-to-face interviews with 1,000 people at shopping outlets. Professor Andrew Macintosh from the ANU made that possible through the way the ANU assisted us in relation to this report. There were also face-to-face interviews with retailers. There were about 40 responses to that, so we had good responses from retailers but not from

the large retailers.

Community views on the ACT plastic bag ban are found at pages 50 and 51 of the report. We know that 57 per cent of the people we spoke to have reduced their plastic bag use as a consequence of the ban; 68 per cent of Canberrans say they take reusable bags always or most of the time; and 69 per cent of Canberrans thought there had been a positive impact on the environment as a result of the ban.

Continuity of community support came out from the 2018 community views, with 68 per cent of our respondents saying they supported the ban—48 per cent strongly supported it and 20 per cent said they supported it. Interestingly, 27 per cent of respondents said they opposed the ban—14 per cent were simply opposed and 13 per cent were strongly opposed. Five per cent were unsure about what the ban meant for them.

The analysis we have wrapped around that is that the level of public support for the ban has increased over time, from 58 per cent in 2012 and 65 per cent in 2014 to 68 per cent in 2018.

The interesting thing about the work we did with Professor Macintosh is that people support what has been happening but there is, in my view, some level of confusion about issues associated with compostable and biodegradable bags. If you have had an opportunity to look at the report you will see that on pages 62 and 63 it talks about the compostable packaging issues, and we have used a German example and the environmental effectiveness of that.

You will note the commentary on page 20 in relation to biodegradable bags and the issues associated with them. Regulations proposed in Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria include in their bans degradable, biodegradable and compostable plastic bags less than 35 microns. At the back of this document is a very large technical report which Professor Andrew Macintosh and his team have put together for us. I understand that that is on the website.

MS LEE: Commissioner, you talked about doing the phone survey of 1,000 people. How did you target the 1,000 people?

Prof Auty: It was done by Professor Andrew Macintosh, who is well and truly an expert in this field, with assistance from the ANU. It was randomised, as I understand it, but I am happy to confirm that.

MS LEE: Was that the same with the shopping centre interviews as well?

Prof Auty: Absolutely, yes.

MS LEE: The ANU contract for consultancy referred to on page 73 is for \$104,208.50 from March to December 2018. Is that for that work?

Prof Auty: Yes, for the whole of the technical report.

MS LEE: Can you explain what the plastic shopping bags ban 2010 options analysis

means?

Prof Auty: That is also part of that technical report put together by Professor Andrew Macintosh.

MS LEE: Can you provide a breakdown of the work your office did and the work Professor Macintosh and the ANU did?

Prof Auty: I will take that on notice. Professor Macintosh provided the technical report, in consultation with my office. Ms Kirilly Dickson was involved most obviously in all of that work. She is on leave at the moment, but we will respond to your question. The ultimate report is in a way a distillation of what was put together by Professor Macintosh. The technical report is a very large document and this has been distilled for the purpose of trying to ensure that the report is understood by others, to put it crudely.

MS LEE: So both reports are in the public arena?

Prof Auty: Yes.

THE CHAIR: For the benefit of members present today who might not have read the technical report in depth—

MS LEE: I am sure Professor Macintosh will be devastated.

THE CHAIR: It is on the Christmas reading list for many of us, I am sure. Would you mind giving us a brief overview? You made reference to other jurisdictions that were bringing in biodegradable plastics, compostable plastics and plastics that did not have as high a content count. What views did the commission take, or what advice was given, in regard to those and how they would fit into the plastic bag—

Prof Auty: Yes, that may be something that I should respond to by way of a question on notice so that we can be really specific about that. But the chapters that are outlined in the report that you have before you, which is the report that has been filed by my office and tabled with the minister, take you through the analysis that has been provided by Professor Macintosh. The report goes through the range of the observations that have been made.

For instance, chapter 9, on the analysis of reform options, is one that has been taken from that particular large technical report. The question of costings has also come from that large technical report. The technical report itself, in my view, notwithstanding the rigorousness and robustness of it, would have been probably pretty unreadable for the person on the street. We have tried to make sure that this report can be accepted, analysed, distilled, read and understood by others other than those who might come to these reports as experts in the field.

THE CHAIR: Where I was going with my thinking, and what was behind that question, was a little more towards the argument that is out there from some people—not from me personally; I am happy to put that on the record—that perhaps we do not need a ban, given that we have these alternatives. Does the commission, for the record,

want to give a viewpoint on that idea?

Prof Auty: That we do not need a ban?

THE CHAIR: Yes, a ban, because we have alternatives with biodegradables or compostable plastics.

Prof Auty: The view that I took in relation to the four recommendations is that they are the appropriate recommendations, on the basis of the work that has been done by Professor Macintosh and also by my office. While there are alternatives, we do need to be, at this time, building on the ban that has been in place previously. It would be, from the point of view of where the ACT needs to take this, probably not optimal to engage in a total ban, if that is what your question was alluding to. The conversations that I have had with Professor Macintosh lead me to conclude that we needed to be thinking about nudging this along in the way that we have with the recommendations that are made in the report. Does that assist?

THE CHAIR: It does assist, yes. It was more in the sense, I guess, of playing devil's advocate a little and saying that I have had this position put to me. As I said, it is not my personal view; it is actually quite far from my personal view. Yes, I am trying to get a better understanding from the commissioner for the environment as to how best to respond to that argument that is out there as to why do we do not just get biodegradable bags, softer plastic bags and those sorts of things. Like I said, my personal view is probably a bit more at the other extreme of that debate.

Prof Auty: It is a little more complex than just having biodegradable bags, because they require a certain methodology for disposing of them, anyway, and they retain a certain plasticity in any event. In relation to compostable bags, there is also the issue of how you determine what happens to them at the end of the chain. So it is not—

THE CHAIR: It is not an easy fix.

Prof Auty: It is not an easy fix. What happened with this particular reference is that when it was first discussed with me by the minister I thought we would have it done by 30 June because, I must say, I was not as aware as I probably should have been of the complexity with which we needed to deal. When you sit and conduct the analysis, it is evident that this is a complex matter that requires a whole-of-waste-chain analysis. There is not a simple answer to what we ultimately do about bringing our groceries out of retail stores. There just is not a simple answer to it.

THE CHAIR: Okay. That is great. Thank you.

MS LEE: I have a couple of other supplementaries. You mentioned, commissioner, that it was actually quite hard to get some info out of the large retailers. Was it the case that you requested it and they just refused to respond to you? Was it as simple as that? Is that where the recommendation came in?

Prof Auty: In a word—

MS LEE: Yes.

Prof Auty: Yes.

MS LEE: You mentioned that from some of the smaller retailers you had a bit more luck. Do you know from the information or the data that you have gathered, keeping in mind the doubt that we have with the larger retailers, how many Canberrans are actually purchasing the bags and how many are not? Have you got that level of data?

Prof Auty: A view as to whether it is robust?

MS LEE: Yes.

Prof Auty: Small retailers were very happy to talk to us because they were doing what they knew ought to be done and they were comfortable with being able to explain what they were doing. To the extent that they were keeping records, and we explored that, I am confident that they were as accurate as they could be in the circumstances. Can I say that I do not think large retailers have a difficulty about their data; we just could not obtain it.

MS LEE: In terms of the data that you got from the small retailers, were you able to distil from that data, for example, the average cost per household?

Prof Auty: The cost question is outlined in chapter 7. You have obviously read that. We know that if certain scenarios are adopted, we will be looking at costs that are associated with the household use of bags. The shopping costs in 2017-18 were approximately \$4.20 per household per annum on the analysis we received from Professor Macintosh. I am comfortable that that is as robust as it can be in the circumstances.

MS LEE: Yes, and in terms of the recommendation that you made about setting a minimum price, do you think that that is going to make a difference? If people are paying 15c and they have to pay 20c, does it really matter?

Prof Auty: We will not know until we do it—

MS LEE: Right, yes.

Prof Auty: in my view, and we will not know even then unless we monitor what has been occurring. Our difficulty will always be: what was the benchmark from which we launched that question with the big retailers? Clearly, what has happened here in the ACT is that people have responded with a level of enthusiasm for what has happened. People take a degree of pride in what they are doing. So we can work on the assumption that that might continue to be the case. But we do know from our surveys that there is what I would describe as a relatively significant small rump that resists this and that will continue to do so. They may well be the people who complain most about the fact that they will be paying for the use of a plastic bag.

MS LEE: Finally, in terms of a response from the minister to those recommendations—

Prof Auty: For these recommendations?

MS LEE: Yes.

Prof Auty: It is now the new minister and the new minister—

MS LEE: That is true: now the new minister.

Prof Auty: Yes, it is now the new minister, and we will be getting a response to the recommendations in six months, as I understand it.

MS LEE: Six months; is that from the date of the report?

Prof Auty: From the date the report is provided to the minister. That is governed by the legislation.

MS LEE: So that should be another three months away—something like that?

Prof Auty: Let me find it.

MS LEE: Something like that.

THE CHAIR: Is that your last questions, Ms Lee?

MS LEE: Yes, that was the last question.

MISS C BURCH: Going to your performance indicators, why were there no commissioner-initiated investigations and what are the requirements for a commissioner-initiated investigation?

Prof Auty: Commissioner-initiated investigations are about an action of an agency. There has been one in the time of the commission, in 1999. I have not initiated any investigations. In relation to the KPIs, we have responded to that KPI about the performance indicators, saying it is 100 to 100. I do not think that is correct. We have had discussions over time with the directorate, and those discussions are continuing. We used to actually report on that KPI as not applicable. It is applicable. It should not be reported as not applicable, it should be reported as either a hundred to zero or zero to zero, depending on how that is analysed.

We had some discussions in June last year. We also spoke to the Auditor-General. The response from the Auditor-General is sensitive. It does not contain anything controversial, I do not think, but it is sensitive. I cannot discuss it but we have elevated those discussions about the KPIs and will be continuing them. We had a discussion this morning with my colleague here, Ms Le, about the need to further that, and we have also corresponded with the directorate about that. That answers the question, in my view, about the performance indicators to the extent that I can at this time.

In relation to initiated investigations, there is a very interesting dilemma in this act, which is that a special report initiated under section 21 by the minister—that is, a

direction given to the office—and the *State of the environment report* both require under section 22:

The Minister must, within 6 sitting days after the day of receiving a report under section 19 or 21, or a recommendation under section 19 (4)—

which is also to do with the *State of the environment report*—

present the report or recommendation to the Legislative Assembly.

Then after that there is the six-month period. That does not include an investigation, subject to my particular views about what might be investigated about the actions of an agency. It is a nice legal point, I suppose, but the reality is that what has occurred, as I understand it, in the past is that, when a commissioner has had a view that there ought to be an investigation into the actions of an agency, the commissioner has discussed that with the minister and they have invariably become special reports which require this particular section 22 response. An independent-initiated investigation does not meet those requirements under section 22 of the legislation.

MS LEE: Sorry, can I just clarify: in the beginning you said that for commissioner-initiated investigations that is of an agency; is that right? Is that what you said?

Prof Auty: Yes, of an agency.

MS LEE: In terms of why none have been given—and I understood the longer answer—does that mean that you have not seen any need at the agency level to initiate—

Prof Auty: In my time?

MS LEE: Yes.

Prof Auty: In my time I have not. And in the time of previous commissioners, that would appear to be the case as well, pending that other explanation. The question of investigations by the commissioner is provided for in section 12. It is a function. It is simply a function, but there is no requirement of the minister to take the recommendations to the Legislative Assembly, as is the case with sections 19 and 21.

MISS C BURCH: There were also no complaint-generated investigations; is that correct?

Prof Auty: That is correct. What I will say about the complaints process, though, is this: we receive complaints of varying degrees and about a range of matters. The most recent complaint that we received about the eastern grey kangaroo cull, for instance, did not proceed to an investigation but, having received the complaint, my office sought an independent specialist expert opinion in relation to the complaint.

The expert was provided with the documents upon which the complaint was being made. The expert was asked for an opinion in relation to that. That material then went

back to the complainant and also was the subject of ongoing commentary in a discussion with experts within the directorate. While it was not an investigation, it certainly lent itself to what I would describe as something which could be called a quasi-investigation, to the extent that we did not just take it into the office, comment on the material and send it back to the complainant. We had expert opinion investigate it.

MISS C BURCH: There were six issues raised but not formal complaints. Are those issues treated in the same way as official complaints, or how would you classify them?

Prof Auty: It depends on the matter. There have been matters that were settled at ACAT, for instance. The question about the little eagle was settled at ACAT. The issue of a planning decision was settled at ACAT. When that occurred, those complaint forms upon which the person had lodged the complaint were deemed concluded and to that extent there were not any, what you might describe as, full-scale investigations.

MS LEE: Out of all the complaints and the issues raised, were any related to environmental issues arising out of the Ginninderry development?

Prof Auty: The little eagle question.

MS LEE: Yes; that is why I brought it up.

Prof Auty: The little eagle question certainly was, yes. In relation to that, we had ongoing discussions with the little eagle complainants about that matter. As I understand it, as that complaint came into my office, they lodged an application in ACAT and then the matter settled on a confidential basis in ACAT, into which I am not entitled to inquire.

MS LEE: If the complainant makes a complaint to your office and goes to ACAT at the same time, do you take a step back while that ACAT process is happening or do you do it independently and in parallel?

Prof Auty: I am not entitled to have a second guess at what might happen at ACAT, and the legislation is quite explicit about that. I think it is in relation to section 14.

MS LEE: Does that mean that the complaint to your office stops until the ACAT—

Prof Auty: Until the ACAT matter is resolved, yes. Can I say this about this legislation? It has been on foot since 1993, and there are no references to ACAT in this legislation. There is a reference to the Supreme Court being a place to which you take litigation about matters that may be causing some concern.

MS LEE: That is a job for us, then, isn't it?

Prof Auty: There is no reference to ACAT or to a tribunal of that nature.

MS LEE: You are assuming that the same rules will apply in that regard?

Prof Auty: Yes. Section 14(4) says:

If a complainant has caused or causes action to which his or her complaint relates to be reviewed by a court, or by a tribunal ... the commissioner must not investigate, or continue to investigate, the action unless the commissioner is of the opinion that there are special reasons justifying the investigation or the continued investigation.

That means I opt to deem that in abeyance until it is resolved, in my view.

MS LEE: And that is your practice?

Prof Auty: That is my practice. I cannot comment for other commissioners. I think it would be the state of play for other commissioners because of that section.

MS LE COUTEUR: When are we going to have the next environmental footprint for the ACT worked out? I know it has taken you a long time to do it.

Prof Auty: Thank you very much for the question. We have been in discussions with the expert, who undertakes that work for us, for the last six months. We have contracted that work out. There was to have been some material on my desk by last week; it has not arrived. We are continuing to pursue that. I am told by the person who I have contracted to do that—it is Dr Dey, who has done the work in the past—that he has made inquiries for data, and he is waiting for data to be made available to him from a number of data providers, like Icon et cetera. So the matter is moving. In the event that that is done before the *State of the environment report* becomes available, which will be not until December next year, I will make it available to the public.

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. I hope it is available before December next year.

Prof Auty: So do we.

MS LEE: Sorry, did I just miss who you contracted that work out to?

Prof Auty: Dr Dey, who has done the work in the past for the office. So we will have the capacity to pick up the trends from a person who has done the work in the past.

MS LEE: Going back to contracts again, on page 73 there were two line items on graphic design services and design, typesetting and accessibility services, which total \$104,245, which seems quite a lot. It is certainly the biggest item there if you combine those. Is that in line with what other independent authorities spend on design work?

Prof Auty: I cannot comment on what other independent authorities do, but I can say that graphic design services in the sum of \$32,580 were for the ISR, the climate change report; the annual report; and also the Gungahlin report. That covered all three of them. In relation to the other matter of \$71,665, that was in respect of Molonglo plastic bags, this annual report, and the lower Cotter report, which is still to be concluded. That is going to cover all of those reports.

MS LEE: It was done by way of quotation. How many quotes did you receive?

Prof Auty: Can I take that on notice? I will provide that.

Ms Le: Usually we do three, but we will take that on notice and check to make sure. It is quite a robust and competitive process.

MS LEE: Yes. And while you are taking that on notice, are you able to confirm how widely the office sought quotes? Was it all Canberra based or was it broader?

Ms Le: We will take that on notice; we should be able to give you a response.

Prof Auty: That is in relation to the graphics only or the other reports?

MS LEE: The two items.

MR MILLIGAN: Was that cost associated with just the artwork design or did it include printing?

Prof Auty: It involves the generation of the artwork, subject to ongoing discussions with my office about the way in which infographics might be used to display the information. We do not just send the information to the graphic designer and say, "Do it." There is an ongoing process of creating the article that goes into the report. That has been the manner in which we have done all of the reports to date.

MR MILLIGAN: Does that price include printing those reports?

Prof Auty: There is no additional price for printing.

MR MILLIGAN: Were any of the reports printed?

Prof Auty: The Molonglo report was not printed, but we have had requests for that, so I have given a direction that I would like some copies of that printed. The Gungahlin report was also not printed. So we have not printed some of those. We printed copies of the implementation status report on climate change. In respect of the lower Cotter report that is coming out, we will probably print some copies of that. That is a very lengthy document; it is about 200 pages at this time. We are trying to avoid printing documents if we can.

MS LEE: Ms Le, while you are taking those questions on notice, given that you are the CFO for the directorate, are you able to provide a comparison with the contracts for other environment-type reports within your directorate?

Ms Le: Yes; we can have a look at that.

MS LEE: That design work.

Ms Le: We can have a look and get back to you.

MS LEE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance this afternoon. We are asking that answers to questions taken on notice be submitted to the committee within five business days of the proof transcript becoming available. I remind any members present that if you have a supplementary question on notice, please lodge those with the committee support office within five business days of the transcript becoming available. Any responses to those supplementary questions on notice should be submitted to the committee office five days after the questions are received. On behalf of the committee, I thank all the witnesses who have appeared today. The hearing is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 4.32 pm.