



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Tuesday, 30 October 2018

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Questions without notice
ACT Health—SPIRE project

MR COE: My question is for the minister for health. Minister, will you please table in the Assembly, by the close of this sitting week, all of the briefs that you have received regarding the SPIRE project?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take that question on notice.

MR COE: Further to this, minister, by the close of this sitting week will you include a verbal update to the Assembly on the state of the SPIRE project?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, I will do that before the close of this sitting week.

MRS DUNNE: In that briefing, minister, can you explain the basis on which you say that the construction of SPIRE will begin in 2020? Can you table the drink coaster on which the SPIRE policy was written?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, I will detail elements of the timing of that project and I will treat with the contempt that it deserves the second part of Mrs Dunne's question.

Housing—new housing strategy

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the minister for housing and relates to the 15 per cent of new buildings in the indicative land release program that will be affordable under the newly released housing strategy. Minister, can you advise the Assembly of the proportion of public, community and affordable-purchase housing that will make up this 15 per cent of affordable housing in new greenfield and infill developments?

MS BERRY: Those numbers will be decided year on year, based on need, as well as the capacity of affordable and community housing providers to build them.

MS LE COUTEUR: In that case, Minister, can you provide us with indicative figures for the 2019 land release program?

MS BERRY: The 2018-19 indicative land program is available online.

Canberra Hospital—Chief Medical Officer

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, why did the Chief Medical Officer of the Canberra Hospital announce his resignation yesterday?

MS FITZHARRIS: He announced it because he had resigned.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, has the Chief Medical Officer, who announced his resignation yesterday, advised patients that he has not resigned to pursue other opportunities?

MS FITZHARRIS: If Mrs Dunne could repeat the question, please.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: Has the outgoing former Chief Medical Officer advised patients that he has not resigned to pursue other opportunities?

MS FITZHARRIS: I have a lot of regard for the Chief Medical Officer. Mrs Dunne's question, I think, misunderstands the nature of the role of the Chief Medical Officer. I understand that Dr Fletcher has advised his colleagues, and many people in the community who hold him in high regard for his clinical work, of his intention to resign on 21 November. What I would say is that I do not intend to discuss an individual staff member's personal circumstances but I do, as I say, have a high regard for Dr Fletcher, for the work he has done in the community and the work he has done as a paediatrician here in Canberra and the region, and also wish him all the very best.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, why has there been such a high level of churn in senior management in ACT Health over the past year?

MS FITZHARRIS: I would refer Miss Burch to my previous answers on these questions.

ACT Health—elective surgery

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. I refer to a series of cost-cutting measures attached to a briefing on elective surgery that you noted on 31 August. One of the proposals was for long-wait patients to be taken off the elective surgery waiting list after “one strike” of refusing a date. Minister, what is the status of this “one-strike” proposal?

MS FITZHARRIS: None of the measures outlined, from my recollection, in that particular brief has been implemented. I know that the new CEO of Canberra Health Services is paying attention to many aspects of operations across Canberra Health Services, in particular, timely care. Within that, I know that she will be looking at how we further improve and provide even more access for even more patients to elective surgery in the ACT.

MS LAWDER: Minister, is the “one strike” proposal still a possibility, even though I note that you have just said that it has not yet been implemented? Is it still on the cards?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take that on notice. That brief was provided to me prior to the separation of the two organisations. I will look forward to discussing options for increasing access to elective surgery with the new CEO of Canberra Health Services.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what consultation occurred with medical consumer groups about this proposal, and was any consideration given to significant family events, such as a funeral or a wedding, that may prohibit people from taking up an offer of

surgery and therefore result in their being struck off the list?

MS FITZHARRIS: Many of those questions are hypotheticals but I refer Mrs Dunne to my previous answers.

Housing—new housing strategy

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the government's election commitment to deliver a new housing strategy for the ACT?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Cheyne for her interest in housing in the ACT. As members will know, I launched a new housing strategy yesterday with the Chief Minister and with many community organisations who provide vital support to people across the ACT. The strategy has been on a long journey and has been built on thousands of conversations with the Canberra community, highlighted by the summit last year.

It has been strengthened by the input of the consultative group that was made up of experts and community members from the sector, industry and community organisations, as well as public housing tenants. I want to thank them again for their important contribution.

The strategy that I tabled this morning will drive the government's priorities in housing for the next 10 years and is a significant public investment in social and affordable housing. The ACT comes to the housing challenge with a strong foundation and has been active in making housing more affordable for over a decade.

Land supply has been accelerated and ongoing tax reform, which has been led by the Chief Minister, has helped moderate house price growth and avoid the extremes of Sydney and Melbourne. In social housing and homelessness, it is a record that we can be proud to stand by: the highest ratio of social housing in Australia, the lowest rate of rough sleeping in Australia and a reduction in homelessness, despite a national increase.

That is why social housing sits at the heart of the new housing strategy and why the ACT government will continue to invest in our community to build more homes for people who are in need of affordable housing.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what are the key government actions of the strategy?

MS BERRY: There have been a number of actions outlined with the community to make housing more affordable for Canberrans on lower incomes. The ACT government will provide \$100 million in additional funding for new public housing over the next five years and build on the most extensive renewal of public housing that Canberra has ever seen. The renewal process will continue with around 1,000 further homes to be renewed, and stock will grow by at least 200.

Our government will continue to support public housing tenants and will see more public housing in our suburbs and town centres in all regions of the ACT. The ACT government will also be providing support to further grow the community

housing sector. Where we can, the government will use its scale and capability to develop mixed housing so that the public and community housing portfolios can grow together. This offers the social outcomes that we are seeking and helps community housing providers focus on the services that they are best at.

Across different sites we will initially provide 151 dwellings for community housing, including 33 in a brand-new housing development soon to be completed in Kaleen. Both of these programs will be enabled by the new commitment to maintain at least 15 per cent of all government land supply for public, community and affordable housing. This builds on the previous policy, where this requirement applied only to greenfield development. It means more than 550 dwelling sites in the current financial year. This strategy delivers on the government's election commitment to continue to make housing more affordable in the ACT.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, the 15 per cent figure which is part of the strategy, is that going to be for the whole indicative land release program or is it suburb by suburb?

MS BERRY: It is 15 per cent across greenfield and infill developments across the ACT.

ACT Health—joint replacements

MS LEE: My question is to the minister for health. I refer to a document attached to a brief from the Director-General of ACT Health, which you noted on 31 August, proposing possible cost-cutting measures for elective surgery. One of the proposals was capping the cost of primary joint replacement prosthetics to \$9,500. This would apply for 410 people who need joint replacements. Minister, what is the status of the proposal to introduce a cost cap for primary joint replacement prosthetics?

MS FITZHARRIS: I indicated in my previous answer that none of those options has been pursued, and I refer Ms Lee to my previous answer where I said that these matters are now under consideration by the CEO of Canberra Health Services.

MS LEE: Minister, what analysis has been done to assess the impact on quality of life for people undertaking joint replacement surgery, and will you table that analysis this week?

MS FITZHARRIS: As I indicated in my previous answer, these were potential measures in the very early stages. They were also based on clinical advice. I will continue to seek and take the guidance of the clinical advisers in Canberra Health Services and the advice of the CEO.

MRS DUNNE: What is the risk that some patients would not be able to get their surgery because the prosthetics would cost more than \$9,500? And was ACT Health considering giving people sub-optimal joint replacements so as to keep costs down?

MS FITZHARRIS: To the second part of Mrs Dunne's question, no. And, once again, I refer members to my previous answer and once again note the Canberra Liberals scaremongering consistently, never once having anything positive to say

about ACT Health or its staff. Not once. Not once in this term have they had anything to say about ACT Health staff. They hear the Canberra Liberals, and they have heard their relentless negative campaign against ACT Health, against doctors and nurses in our community. They have done it in the past; they will do it in the future.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Berry: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MS FITZHARRIS: What are they hiding? What are they hiding about their plans for health in the ACT?

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, please resume your seat. A point of order. Stop the clock.

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, the opposition have made several comments that, in my view, are unparliamentary, making personal reflections on the minister's work. They should withdraw.

MADAM SPEAKER: In the cut and thrust of the debate, I am not going to have anyone withdraw comments but I will say, again, members on my left: no interjections, and if you have a question for the minister, at least allow her to answer it. Minister, do you have anything further to add?

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Is that a comment across the floor from members on my left?

Mrs Jones: No. I believe it was a comment between members on the left.

Mr Barr interjecting—

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, welcome back, but please. Mr Wall is on his feet.

ACT Health—non-ACT patients

MR WALL: My question is also to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, I refer to a series of cost-cutting measures attached to a briefing on elective surgery that you noted on 31 August. One of the cost-cutting measures was to remove patients from the waitlist who were not geographically associated with the ACT. Minister, what is the status of this proposal?

MS FITZHARRIS: I largely refer Mr Wall to my previous answer but I can, of course, confirm that ACT Health, and certainly Canberra Health Services, are major providers of health services to the population of the south-east region of New South Wales. That is considered to be quite different from the broader New South Wales population. I would like to give some certainty to those patients of doctors in Canberra Health Services who are in the south-east region of New South Wales that

they do, and will continue to, receive services from Canberra Hospital, if that is what their clinical advice is.

MR WALL: Minister, what consultations has ACT Health or your office had with the New South Wales government or ministerial representatives about this proposal and what has their response been?

MS FITZHARRIS: I refer Mr Wall to my previous answers about the status of this brief and the extremely early stages at which these issues were raised.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, are you confident that the CEO is adequately considering elective surgery wait times?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, I absolutely am.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, a point of order. The question was clearly asking the minister to express an opinion. She opened with, “Are you satisfied?”

MADAM SPEAKER: I must admit that I was not listening to the question. I was distracted by another member on my left. Can you repeat your question, please, Ms Cheyne?

MS CHEYNE: No, I am good, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: You do not want to repeat it? Can you give me the question? I did not hear it.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, are you confident—not “satisfied”—that the CEO is adequately considering elective surgery wait times?

Mrs Dunne: It’s still an expression of opinion.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not believe so, Mrs Dunne. Minister, would you at least answer that?

Mrs Dunne: You have got to be kidding me!

MADAM SPEAKER: No, I am not kidding you, Mrs Dunne. Mrs Jones.

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—plumbing issues

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, I refer to reports in the media on 27 October 2018 that a ward in the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children was flooded due to plumbing issues. Minister, was a ward in the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children flooded at any stage between July and today and, if so, was it closed?

MS FITZHARRIS: I can confirm that there were some leaks. I would not agree that it was flooded. But certainly in relation to that there are two projects underway in terms of remediation in the Centenary hospital. The actual source of the particular

leak that Mrs Jones refers to is, I am advised, a pinhole in the hydraulic pipework and remediation of the paediatric medical ward is ongoing and expected to be completed by late December of this year.

MRS JONES: Minister, due to this leak, did the ward close and/or were children moved into adult wards or other wards, and how many children were affected?

MS FITZHARRIS: Certainly, those rooms that were affected were closed. The advice to me is that all patients and their families were communicated with during this period and what is known as the overflow paediatric ward was opened so that all children could continue to receive the care that they needed, and there was no clinical impact.

Mr Coe: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order?

Mr Coe: It is on relevance. The specific question that Mrs Jones asked was: how many children were affected? So far the minister has not actually answered that part of the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, you have another minute.

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take that particular aspect of the question on notice.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, is there building warranty insurance on the building or other insurance for water ingress and, if so, has a claim been made against the policy? And can you clarify: is the medical children's ward still closed?

MS FITZHARRIS: It has been relocated to the paediatric overflow surgery ward. In relation to Mrs Dunne's first question, I believe that those issues are being worked through at the moment as to whether it could be the subject of an insurance claim. I will also take that aspect of the question on notice.

Government—celebration of International Day of People with Disability

MADAM SPEAKER: I call Ms Cody.

MS CODY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know I'm wearing flat shoes; I must be a little bit difficult to see! My question is to the Minister for Disability. Minister, how is the ACT government supporting the celebration of the International Day of People with Disability in December?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cody for her question. As you know, Madam Speaker, International Day of People with Disability, or I-Day, is indeed held on 3 December each year. It is a United Nations-sanctioned day that aims to increase public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disability and celebrate their achievements and contributions.

The theme of I-Day this year is "empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring

inclusiveness and equality”. According to the United Nations, 2018’s theme focuses on empowering people with disabilities for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development as part of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

The ACT government proudly supports individuals and organisations in our community to celebrate I-Day through the I-Day grants. These grants encourage greater community participation for people with disability, showcasing their contributions and achievements, and building ongoing opportunities for people with disability to connect with their communities.

Earlier today I was pleased to announce the successful recipients for 2018: People with Disabilities ACT, Women with Disabilities ACT, Deaf Advocacy, Sports and Recreation ACT, Epilepsy ACT, TADACTION, and the Ainslie and Gorman arts centres. I would like to again congratulate the six successful recipients on their ideas on programs and events that bring together people with disability, community organisations, businesses, individuals and government. I would also like to thank DeafACT, who came out to Regatta Point at lunchtime today to give me a taste of what to expect at their “come and try” event.

The I-Day grants encourage people with disability and the wider community to connect and socialise in a relaxed, inclusive environment and build ongoing connections through art, dance, sport, collaboration and conversation. I encourage everyone to join in I-Day events and activities and take the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions, skills and achievements of people with disability.

MS CODY: Minister, what else can individuals and groups do to recognise and celebrate I-Day in Canberra?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary. In addition to attending one of the events funded through the I-Day grant program people can get involved with any number of events taking place across the territory. I would recommend that everyone check out the event calendar for International Day of People with Disability at www.idpwd.com.au and explore the range of public events happening in the community.

People with Disabilities ACT’s annual supplement in the *Canberra Times* also provides a wealth of information for I-Day, highlighting services, activities and issues facing people with a disability and promoting inclusiveness, equality and the empowerment of people with disabilities. The ACT government is proud to support this publication, which this year will be published on 1 December, ahead of I-Day on 3 December.

I would also encourage clubs, schools, community groups, workplaces, businesses and organisations to think about how they can celebrate the day, including by hosting their own event. The IDPWD website includes event planning kits to help organisations plan the perfect activity and include and celebrate people with disability. Whether it is an arts show highlighting the talents of local artists with disability, an expo showcasing local organisations with a connection to disability, a fundraiser for a local organisation that supports people with disability, an event with a guest speaker

with lived experience, or an accessible sporting challenge, you can find out more and register your own event on the IDPWD website.

Again I encourage all Canberrans, including members of this place, to start thinking about how they will celebrate I-Day and use the opportunity to reflect on the contribution that people with disability make to our community and on what each of us can do in our daily lives to promote empowerment of people with disability and ensure an inclusive and equal community here in the ACT.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what else is the ACT government doing to empower persons with disabilities and ensure inclusiveness and equality?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. Empowering persons with disabilities and ensuring inclusiveness and equality is not just the theme I-Day in 2018 but also a priority across government all year round. This government is committed to ensuring that the services and supports we deliver are accessible and inclusive for people with disability, whether they be education, transport, housing or even our national parks.

This morning I talked about how the housing strategy will promote accessible and adaptable housing and what Housing ACT is already doing to support tenants with a disability to lead ordinary lives with dignity.

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate is working with a National Disability Insurance Scheme provider to film and produce a series of virtual reality experiences of nature based activities which will be tailored for people with a disability and others who may not be able to access our parks and reserves directly.

EPSDD is also undertaking a series of accessibility road tests of our parks. Through these projects the directorate will bring both virtual reality and real-life experiences to people with a disability to ensure that they are able to experience and enjoy the wonderful parks and reserves of the ACT that most of us take for granted.

The government has also partnered with the Canberra Business Chamber and the ACT Inclusion Council to provide the inclusion in employment project. The project aims to expand employment opportunities for people with disability in Canberra's private sector. The results so far are even better than the business chamber projected. The ACT government is also committed to ensuring that community groups, small businesses and not-for-profit organisations become more inclusive and welcoming of people with disability, which is why we doubled the funding for the hugely successful disability inclusion grants in the 2018-19 budget.

Canberra Hospital—plumbing issues

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. I refer to media reports on 27 October of plumbing problems in the neurology ward of the Canberra Hospital. Have there been plumbing issues in the neurology ward at any time this year that have caused patients to be moved or receive services elsewhere at any time?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, there was a leak; and no, my recollection of the advice—and I will confirm if this is correct—is that, no, there was no impact on clinical areas. There was an impact on a clinical tearoom. I will provide further advice if that is available.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, have the plumbing problems in the neurology ward added to fall risks for patients and staff?

MS FITZHARRIS: No, I do not believe so.

MRS DUNNE: What were the plumbing problems in the neurology ward? What has it cost to fix them?

MS FITZHARRIS: I will take that question on notice and note, of course, that Canberra Hospital is a significant campus with many buildings with which there will always be a number of issues, which our very capable infrastructure and maintenance teams will address.

Light rail—stage 1 update

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, with the final rail installation happening on light rail last week and significant progress being made on the light rail stops and landscaping and dynamic testing of the vehicles now taking place, can you further update the Assembly on the construction of light rail stage 1?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Last Friday, I was very pleased to help Canberra Metro lay the final piece of light rail track. The installation of the final section of rail is a very significant moment in any rail project, and from here we expect to see more light rail vehicles being tested right along the alignment in the coming weeks.

Mr Wall interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall, no interjections, please.

MS FITZHARRIS: Significant progress is being made, and we expect construction to be completed this year. All the light rail vehicles are now in Canberra, over 25 kilometres of concrete track slab has been laid, and tree planting and landscaping are underway across the full length of the alignment. Anyone who travels the route can see the changes day by day, and it is incredibly exciting to see the progress that has been made.

Other works recently completed or currently underway include the following. At the Gungahlin terminus on Hibberson Street, the majority of the civil and landscaping works have been completed. Works are ongoing at all 13 stops. Stop canopies have been installed, with fit-out on the canopies and other finishing works continuing, including the installation of the very beautiful glass panels on each of the stops. Overhead poles and wires have been installed from Gungahlin to Alinga Street and in

most of the depot area.

It is clear to all that significant progress is being made on the project. As was released last week, services will start in early 2019. Along with Transport Canberra and Canberra Metro, I look forward to continuing to update the community on the final stages of construction and on the operations of light rail for Canberra.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what are the remaining key milestones for the construction of light rail stage 1?

MS FITZHARRIS: As I outlined in my previous answer, a huge amount of progress has been made on the construction of the Gungahlin-to-city light rail project, the first stage of light rail in Canberra. A number of important works are also nearing completion, including the energisation of the final section in the coming weeks.

Energisation of a large portion of the alignment has already occurred. There are five traction power stations along the route with stations 1, 2, 3 and 4 having been both installed and energised. Traction power station 5 has been installed on Mort Street and will soon be energised.

Another key milestone for the project will be the completion of the Mitchell depot. Current works are focused on the internal fit-out of the building, with the administration and maintenance facilities nearing completion. Canberra Metro are expected to relocate to the Mitchell depot in the coming weeks.

Like many Canberrans, the government is very much looking forward to seeing light rail vehicles running along the length of the track. Testing of the vehicles and equipment continues on the northern part of the track and we expect testing to progress southwards to Dickson in coming weeks.

MS ORR: Minister, given the remaining construction and accreditation work, can you update the Assembly on the time frame for the commencement of light rail services?

MS FITZHARRIS: Following completion of construction, Canberra Metro will need to finalise third-party rail accreditation from the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator and the Independent Certifier before light rail services can begin operations. While this means that we do not have an exact date yet, I can confirm that we are expecting services to begin in early 2019.

The ACT government and Transport Canberra are also working on a plan to design a launch weekend that will give as many Canberrans as possible the chance to ride light rail on the first weekend. We will release details about these plans soon.

As with any complex infrastructure project, there are risks that affect timing, such as weather, the testing and commissioning of rail and signalling systems, and finalising of the stops. This is the biggest, most complex infrastructure project that the ACT has ever seen, and we should not underestimate the significant progress that has been made.

The government is delivering a reliable, efficient and integrated public transport

network for Canberra. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Canberra Metro for their hard work and the community for their patience and understanding as construction nears completion. It is clear that significant progress has been made, and I look forward to giving further updates to the community.

Canberra Hospital—pharmacy service

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, you said recently, in answer to a question on notice, that 30 pharmacy staff at the Canberra Hospital had resigned in the 18 months to 30 June this year. This is 60 per cent of the relevant classifications. You also said that reasons given in exit interviews included income security, a perceived lack of career progression opportunities, and insufficient supervision. The media has reported that pharmacy services were in crisis, with patient safety at risk, pharmacists looking elsewhere, and warnings of industrial action. And on 24 October it reported that finally, after at least a year of negotiations, a deal had been reached.

Minister, why did it take you so long, to the point where there were public warnings about patient safety, concerns about income security, and threats of industrial action, to negotiate suitable employment arrangements with pharmacy staff?

MS FITZHARRIS: I do not negotiate those. They are agreed between pharmacy staff and ACT Health, and now Canberra Health Services. I very much welcomed the conclusion of those negotiations and I very much welcomed the representations made directly to me by pharmacy staff and by their union. I was very pleased to see that an agreement had been reached. We continue to work with pharmacy staff on the issues that they raised and continue to provide further advancements for them in Canberra Health Services.

MR PARTON: Minister, why must departments in ACT Health be in crisis before you will take action to address the problems they face?

MS FITZHARRIS: They will not.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, have you asked the independent inquiry into culture in ACT Health to examine why you are consistently slow to address concerns of staff that go to the heart of culture and, if not, why not?

MS FITZHARRIS: Mrs Dunne and the Canberra community can see the terms of reference for the independent panel looking into workplace culture, and I would invite her to reacquaint herself with those terms of reference and my previous statements on my expectations of the panel.

Light rail—stage 1 update

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, have you received any advice as to which month in early 2019 fare-paying customers can expect to be on light rail?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, I have.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what is that advice, and how many months of track testing need to take place before these first fee-paying passengers can be on the tram?

MS FITZHARRIS: Certainly, the amount of testing required is that required to meet the requirements of ONRSR, the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator. That is when accreditation will be received, and that is when full-fee-paying passengers can start riding Canberra's light rail.

MR WALL: Minister, how will you simulate the conditions of the winter months during track testing?

MS FITZHARRIS: As Mr Wall may recall, there has been testing during winter months already.

Canberra—sister city relationships

MS ORR: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the activities that took place last week to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our sister city relationship with Nara?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Orr for her question. Indeed, 25 years ago, on 26 October 1993, then Chief Minister Rosemary Follett signed the official proclamation for the ACT government to establish Canberra's sister city relationship with Nara. Since that time, there have been numerous delegations between the two cities, focusing on education, culture and business.

Earlier this month, in the lead-up to the 25th anniversary, I again had the honour of visiting Nara as part of a broader trade mission to Japan and, whilst in Nara, met with Mayor Nakagawa to discuss his upcoming visit to Canberra. Last week, the mayor and an extensive delegation, including more than 50 school students from Nara, arrived in Canberra to celebrate the 25th anniversary.

During his visit, the mayor and his delegation, amongst other things, undertook a ceremonial tree planting at the National Arboretum; attended a reception hosted by the Japanese ambassador; took a tour of the new light rail corridor; attended a last post ceremony at the Australian War Memorial; and enjoyed a lunch here in the Assembly, hosted by you, Madam Speaker.

Finally, on Saturday evening, the mayor and I, and the Nara delegation and about 17,000 Canberrans, attended the 16th annual Canberra Nara candle festival. I am advised that this was a record attendance, of around 17,000 people, which was up 40 per cent on last year's attendance. It was wonderful to see. It was a fantastic evening and a wonderful celebration of Canberra and Nara, indeed, of Australia and Japan.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, are there any upcoming activities planned with our other sister cities?

MR BARR: Yes, there are. This week the mayor of Wellington will be in Canberra.

The delegation, led by Mayor Justin Lester, will be discussing a range of issues, including business, tourism, culture and research collaboration. We will also be focusing on re-establishing an aviation connection between our two cities.

Later this week, perhaps on a lighter note, we will be launching a bespoke sister city beer, the Ale of Two Cities, which is a collaboration between Canberra's own BentSpoke and Wellington's Fork and Brewer.

As a follow-up, next month I will be leading our annual delegation to Wellington as part of the third Canberra Week. We will continue to raise the profile of our city in Wellington, support the development of local businesses and foster further knowledge-sharing between the two capitals.

In 2020 we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of our sister city relationship with Beijing. Work has recently commenced on a program of activities to mark this important occasion. I plan to visit Beijing in 2019.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, are you looking at the potential for any new sister city relationships?

MR BARR: We do receive regular approaches to form sister city relationships. There are only so many that we can support. So we are reviewing the guidelines and requirements for new sister city relationships. Whilst this review continues, it will form the basis for future ACT government policymaking and decisions in relation to entering into any new sister city agreements.

Members might be aware of a longstanding commitment that we have to form such a relationship with Washington DC. During my visit earlier this year as part of then Prime Minister Turnbull's trade delegation and our involvement with the national governors association, the equivalent body to COAG within the US, we did undertake some further discussions with the Mayor of Washington DC and the mayor's international engagement office. During that meeting we of course noted the commonalities between our two city-states and the similar challenges faced by each jurisdiction.

Both cities are of course home to our respective federal governments. Both are subject to a local economy very much engaged in knowledge and service sectors, and both of our governments combine the delivery of city-level municipal governance with some state-level services. As a result we have sought to establish a closer relationship with Washington DC and look at a range of potential partnerships, particularly a collaboration being led by our national institutions with the Smithsonian Institute as a practical example.

Beyond tourism we are also looking at economic development, sustainability, social inclusion and the delivery of government infrastructure. We will progress these discussions and opportunities as this is potentially a very significant economic, social, cultural and political partnership for Canberra into the future. (*Time expired.*)

I understand, in the absence of Mrs Kikkert and Mr Hanson from question time, there are now no further questions that can be asked. So I ask that all further questions be

placed on the notice paper.