



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND CITY
SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25](#))

Members:

**MS L CASTLEY (Chair)
MR A BRADDOCK (Deputy Chair)
MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2025

**Secretary to the committee:
Mr J Bunce (Ph: 620 50199)**

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.

APPEARANCES

City and Environment Directorate	57, 82
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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.00 am

Appearances:

Steel, Mr Chirs, Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development,
Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport

City and Environment Directorate

Peffer, Mr Dave, Director-General

Smith, Mr Jeremy, Executive Group Manager, Transport Canberra

White, Mr Mark, Executive Branch Manager, MyWay+, Transport Canberra

Vallance, Mx George, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Light Rail Operations,
Transport Canberra

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services for its inquiry into the annual and financial reports for 2024-25. This morning the committee will hear from the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and the region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it will be useful if witnesses use these words, "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We welcome Mr Chris Steel MLA, Minister for Transport, and officials. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We are not providing opening statements this morning, so we will proceed to questions. I will hand over to Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: I want to start with MyWay+. Minister, I want to ask a series of questions around MyWay+ and the government's relationship with NEC Australia. I think it is fair to suggest that the transition to MyWay+ has been a failure, on a lot of levels. It is difficult to argue against that; it has resulted in your censure by the Assembly earlier in the month.

Now we see that the government is considering withholding payment from NEC Australia as the contract has not yet been finalised. On page 399, in the capital works table, the "delivering a smart technology ticketing system for Canberra's integrated public transport system" line item is marked as having a revised practical completion date of March 2025. If the project was completed in March 2025—clearly, it was not—

why are numerous media outlets and everyone in this town reporting that not all completion milestones have been met?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Transport Canberra officials in a moment to talk through the timelines which have been adjusted forward to November for the practical completion date.

I disagree with the premise of your question that the entire system is a failure. It is not. It is a functional system. It is one that we will have in place for 10 years, and we still believe that it will deliver the ticketing solution that Canberra needs for its public transport, both buses and light rail.

There are issues with the system, many of which were experienced in the days after launch, which were resolved. There are a range of other issues that we continue to work through with NEC, including following the practical completion date, and that is the process that is underway at the moment. I will hand over to officials to talk through the issues.

Mr Smith: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Mr Parton, thank you for your question. In regard to the practical completion date, the date that you stated was the original date under the contract. There was a variation; there have been a number of variations against the contract. Variation 5, specifically, saw the change to the practical completion date under the milestone to 1 November 2025. That is the milestone date as it sits right now.

At this point in time, NEC has not lodged the claim against that milestone. We are continuing to work in good faith with NEC towards completing; then we will move forward to assess that milestone. That is the point in time when we will be able to define whether the milestone has been met in its entirety or whether it has been met partially.

MR PARTON: Are we working on what has actually been delivered up to 1 November, or is that date fluid now? Obviously, it is past 1 November; when we are assessing whether things have been completed, are we assessing it as of 1 November, are we assessing it as of now, or is there a new date that is going to be—

Mr Smith: It will be up to the vendor, NEC, to put forward a claim against that milestone. That milestone will have various components to it, like any IT or infrastructure project, or large contract. The territory will then, as I said, assess against that in regard to the completion of the components of that milestone.

MR PARTON: This is milestone 29?

Mr Smith: That is correct.

MR PARTON: What about milestone 30?

Mr Smith: Milestone 30 under the contract—

Mr White: Milestone 30, which is project completion, is 1 January 2026.

MR PARTON: Given how MyWay+ has failed to achieve its goals, in terms of accessibility, delivery timelines and in-service performance, is there a consideration of any further financial remedies in regard to the relationship between ACT government and NEC?

Mr Peffer: Thanks for that question. At this point in time the territory is keeping all of its options open. We are obviously working in good faith. It is a partnership that needs to endure for many years. This is not a one-year project, then everyone walks away. It is a partnership that needs to endure. However, we are keeping our options open in terms of contractual remedies and what that looks like.

MR PARTON: It has been stated at this hearing that you are working in good faith with NEC. If you are working in good faith with NEC, why are you considering withholding payment?

Mr Peffer: We meet frequently with NEC. I am meeting fortnightly with their regional chief executive and other officials that are working on a day-to-day basis with the team from NEC. Ultimately, what we want is a great experience for our passengers and the citizens of Canberra interacting with public transport. That is our overriding objective.

As we take steps with NEC to resolve outstanding matters, we have to do that in partnership. We cannot do that in isolation ourselves. It is a good-faith relationship that we are working through. At the end of the day, we are both contractually bound—the territory, obviously, to contribute financially, and NEC to produce a ticketing solution for our public transport.

That does provide us with various options for where we might go in the future. But all of that is speculation at this point in time. As Mr Smith has said, we are waiting for the submission from NEC in terms of where they feel they have delivered against milestone 29, and we will assess that when we receive that submission.

MR PARTON: Minister, you have effectively disagreed with the premise of my question; in particular, with my characterisation of the transition to MyWay+ as a complete failure. In disagreeing with my characterisation of the transition as a complete failure, are you genuinely sitting here, having had the censure motion bestowed upon you by this Assembly only several weeks ago, and suggesting that it has been a success?

Mr Steel: No, what I am saying is that there are issues with the system, many of which manifested directly after launch, which were resolved. There are some issues which are remaining, which we are obviously continuing to assess and working with NEC on. But to characterise, in the first question—not the rephrased, reformatted question that you just asked—that the system is a complete failure, is not true. They have delivered a ticketing system that we believe will continue to serve the community for the next 10 years. But that is not to say that improvements cannot be made. I have acknowledged the issues and taken responsibility for those issues in the Assembly and publicly, and I will continue to take responsibility for improving the system to make sure that it provides a great experience for Transport Canberra's passengers.

MR PARTON: Are you personally proud of the rollout?

Mr Steel: I have acknowledged those issues very publicly. But we do have a system that has provided the outcome of credit and debit card payments being able to be used to pay for public transport, which was not possible under the old MyWay system. That functionality is there, but there are improvements to be made in a range of other aspects.

At the moment, Transport Canberra is working very closely with NEC to understand how they have met the milestone. I know that both the Director-General and I would like to seek the technical assurance necessary to make sure that they have achieved the requirements under the contract, and that is something that we are going to be seeking from an independent technical expert.

MR BRADDOCK: What components of functionality have not yet been delivered against milestones 29 and 30?

Mr Steel: That is the work that is being undertaken now to get an understanding of that, and we will be seeking assurance from an independent expert to understand exactly what NEC has delivered under the requirements of the contract.

MR BRADDOCK: You are not clear in your mind as to what they have or have not delivered out of the contract?

Mr Steel: That is the advice that we will be seeking in the work that is currently occurring with NEC. Until they provide that information to Transport Canberra, as part of the claim, we do not have all the information in front of us to be able to properly assess that, and their requirements under the milestone that was meant to be completed by 1 November. That is the work that is happening right now. The milestone has only just passed, so the assessment needs to happen.

MR BRADDOCK: Do we know whether it is Disability Discrimination Act compliant yet?

Mr Steel: I understand that a range of different improvements have been made by NEC in relation to that issue. I want to seek assurance from an independent body, Get Skilled Access, to give us assurance that they have not only met the requirements under the contract, but have gone beyond that in terms of the recommendations that they have made for further accessibility improvements. We are waiting on that assurance to be provided. I will hand over to Mr White to talk about the accessibility aspect.

Mr White: Mr Braddock, in regard to the question around accessibility, there has been considerable work undertaken by NEC, including improvements being made to all their web interfaces. Most recently, there was the final component of the work being done on their customer portal, which involved lived experience testing with people with a disability, who provided the testing and testing results to NEC that would then result in a change.

That testing is being undertaken this week, and we should see it being performed by the independent body that the minister mentioned, Get Skilled Access, who will be providing an independent report on that compliance shortly thereafter.

MR BRADDOCK: To be clear, there have been some improvements made to website

usability and testing is currently underway. We do not yet have the assurance that we are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act?

Mr White: I would only offer the correction, Mr Braddock, of not usability, but accessibility.

MR BRADDOCK: Yes.

MS CARRICK: With the contract, there are certain milestones, and the functionality to deliver an account, the app and the debit-credit card functionality. Is there anything that you are particularly concerned about that they have not delivered? With some of it, you might know that it has been delivered.

Mr Smith: Is there anything we are concerned about that they have not delivered?

MS CARRICK: Yes, because there was a contract with milestones. Is there anything in particular that you are concerned that they have not delivered?

Mr Smith: “Concern” is a broad word. We would have liked them to have completed all components under the relevant milestone, which is milestone 29 at the moment. We know there is a concerted effort from NEC around the accessibility component. As Mr White has pointed out—and I am happy to talk about it—there was a failure under the accessibility, which is—

MS CARRICK: Apart from the accessibility; we know that is an outstanding issue, but with the general functionality—

Mr Smith: There are a few items that have not been delivered. Are we worried about those? No, we are not worried about those. For example, with social media logins for the MyWay platform, there is a legible and reliable login methodology for those. There are a couple of items there that we would happily take, in time. We would like stability in the system to be the primary focus of NEC at the moment. That is the concerted effort that they are making at the moment. Am I concerned? No. Am I a little bit disappointed? Yes, in regard to the usability of the system for our customers as they board buses or as they jump onto a light rail platform.

MS CARRICK: Maybe you could take it on notice and reel off a few things that perhaps have not been delivered. With MyWay+—

Mr Steel: Mr Peffer wanted to—

MS CARRICK: Yes?

Mr Peffer: That might be a little hard for us to take on notice at this point. We are still waiting for the submission of evidence from NEC which essentially tells us what it is they have done and how they have gone about it. We can then form our view and undertake our assessment. As the minister said, we are engaging with a number of groups, and we will pursue independent assurance of the particular milestone to be delivered. I am not sure that we can take that on notice at this point, because we actually cannot produce the document.

THE CHAIR: You talked about stability. What stability issues do we have?

Mr Smith: At the moment customers will at times experience validator functionality. They may board a bus and one of the couple of validators will be out. That is what I am talking about with stability. We would like to see a higher level of stability around validator performance so that customers can board, pay their fare, tap on and off et cetera.

THE CHAIR: I imagine we are losing quite a bit of money from that. Is that something you will be seeking to get back from NEC?

Mr Peffer: That is not something that we are specifically looking at, at this point in time. There are remedies under the contract, depending on the timeframe in which milestones have been delivered and the functionality around those milestones. That is our focus. Again, we will seek that independent assurance of exactly what has been provided and form a view after that.

MR BRADDOCK: Talking about the MyWay+ patronage data, why hasn't this been published over the past year? I have seen that you are still collecting this tap on and tap off data.

Mr Steel: Yes, is the answer.

Mr White: With The work that we have done in collecting data, you are quite correct, Mr Braddock; that information is being collected and warehoused, and currently it is being moved over and mirrored over onto directorate data warehouses as well.

We have been cautious in getting that information and ensuring that we can corroborate it against past performance data, so that we have consistency of measurement. Given that we now have a different technology that is involved with collecting the data and planning journeys et cetera, that changes data format ever so slightly. We need to do that work to ensure that we are being able to represent the data in the future that represents a line from the past, so that we can see whether we have moved the dial regarding patronage et cetera.

That caution and that approach have meant that both the directorate and NEC have been delayed in being able to move forward with that. We have been in constant dialogue with NEC in moving forward those data outcomes, including the addition of having that mirror database within the directorate.

The main reason for that is that the toolset NEC use is a toolset that is harder to upskill or learn, and it does not necessarily have a wide availability of data analysts who are familiar with it. With our own, the directorate's data warehouse and data analytics capabilities, we have those. By being able to mirror the data over onto the directorate, we will be able to do the data analysis.

With the next stage of this, as I say, the data has moved. We have also moved, just recently, in the last two weeks, the historic data going back to September, October and November. Before we actually went live, we have some patronage data in there as well.

We have moved the beginning of that data over into our data warehouse, and we will be doing the data assurance work over the next three weeks, which is what we had planned, with the goal, subject to that testing, of being able to release that for public consumption in the new year.

MR BRADDOCK: Given the potential for impact from validators not working or being non-operational, have you conducted an audit of how frequently those readers are malfunctioning and hence the impact that will have on the patronage data?

Mr White: We have asked NEC to do that work, and we are currently right in the midst of that.

MR BRADDOCK: Your annual report, on page 22, says:

... internal monitoring conducted by operations staff demonstrated a high level of service availability was being provided to the community.

ABC Radio, in their assessment, found one in three readers were not working. Are you tracking at all in terms of what the availability range of those readers are?

Mr White: I will say it again, Mr Braddock: we are working with NEC, and NEC are currently conducting very vigorous, very thorough analysis of validator performance.

MR BRADDOCK: We had media outlets reporting about a notice that was put up for bus drivers in the Belconnen depot, reading, "Please do not place out-of-order signs on validators today. If they are not working, please just ask the passengers to take a seat." Can you please explain what that was all about?

Mr Smith: That photo, as you said, was taken in the Belconnen depot. It was taken on a Monday morning. What we know is that, within the fleet, as I stated earlier, we have some buses where the validator stability is not perfect. We know we have enough buses on the weekend with stable validators that we can run and meet our weekend network. We sent the buses out on the weekend with stable validators. The sign there was to remind drivers that there is a process where a validator fails, and it should be reported through to the comms centre, who then report it to the fleet services team, and the fleet services team investigate the failure of the validator. We would expect the drivers to welcome our passengers onto the bus, and advise them that the validator may not be working, by saying, "Jump on and ride," because we do not leave people behind. That is the context around that sign.

MR BRADDOCK: That is the context, but that sign did not contain any of that information about the proper process. That was purely instructing drivers not to put up those out-of-order signs. I would like to know what consideration was given to those customers who are blind, who have vision impairments. How are they meant to be instructed by the drivers appropriately, and why are you denying them the understanding of what is the status of the validator?

Mr Smith: If a passenger is blind, they would not be able to read the sign; therefore we would expect our bus drivers to communicate with them.

MR BRADDOCK: Sorry, I should rephrase that: for those who are deaf or who have hearing impairment.

Mr Smith: That is a reasonable question. There are various ways that the validator can display non-performance. It can have a notice on there, on its screen, to say that it is not performing. We do know there are instances where a validator just fails to recognise a payment device. We would expect some form of communication, even if somebody is deaf, potentially being available between the driver and the passenger. I recognise that drivers cannot do Auslan sign language et cetera, but I am confident that, in society, we do have methodologies where we can communicate with people, even with challenges.

MR BRADDOCK: Given we do not know the availability rate of the validators, and we have anecdotal information that one in three are not working, are we ready to start fare enforcement, given people will be struggling to actually tap on and tap off?

Mr Steel: No, we have always been clear that the first stage of enforcement is always education, and it is at the bottom of the compliance pyramid. You start with education, and that is part of what this new team will be doing. They will be a visible presence on the bus network, educating consumers about how to pay for public transport. There are also other purposes, of course—to deter, and to manage antisocial behaviour at the same time. The answer is no, we will not be undertaking the harder compliance before we have undertaken education. We will not be undertaking that harder compliance in terms of issuing infringements until we are absolutely satisfied that the reliability of the validators is there.

MR BRADDOCK: Firstly, how long is scheduled to do that first stage of education compliance? Secondly, what would be the milestone or the availability rate before the government will shift to the harder compliance enforcement?

Mr Smith: In regard to the education component, we would be looking at one to two months worth of education to the community. We will do a comms campaign. We will put messaging out on our fleet, at our interchanges. We will utilise social media, radio, et cetera in regard to that education. We will have transport officers, as well as the new crew of transit enforcement officers that the minister just mentioned, out there in the field, travelling on buses, at interchanges et cetera. We have our partners at CMET with their customer service officers on light rail platforms as well, that will engage in that education. That will be a one- to two-month campaign that we will do.

In regard to the percentage of validator performance, we would want it to be high, so we are talking in the high 90s, realistically. We will think that through logically, though, as we move towards stabilising the validator performance. In regard to the ability to check, it will be quite easy for our inspection officers to have a conversation with passengers. They will have a device which will show whether there has been a tap on, an attempt to tap on et cetera. That device will give quite a bit of information, and they can have a logical conversation with that traveller and determine whether there should be a warning or, ultimately, an infringement at a point in time.

Mr Steel: The expectation is that there would be a very high level of stability and reliability of the system.

MR BRADDOCK: I will come back to one element about the patronage data. If I read page 391 of the annual report correctly, it describes the business rules about MyWay+ patronage. It says, “If someone taps on but fails to tap off on one bus, then taps on to a different bus, their tap on to the second bus is treated by the MyWay+ system as a tap off from the second bus.” Is that not underestimating the level of patronage, in terms of it not actually treating it as a tap on for that second bus?

Mr White: I can certainly answer that. Under our fare rules, we have a situation where you have a free fare where you transfer from, say, one trip to a second trip within 90 minutes. What is described in the annual report is what we term as a “synthetic tap off”. We create that within the data system so that it records two trips, but one journey. One journey is what is charged for, which is the charge for one trip, because that condition under the fare rules is met.

MR BRADDOCK: Where it is called “boardings” in the annual report, that is actually the start of a journey, not necessarily the boarding of an individual bus?

Mr White: That is correct.

THE CHAIR: Can I go back to the validators? Can you identify the validators that are not working or is it a system—

Mr Smith: We are able to identify the validators that are not working. As Mr White mentioned before, NEC are working on improving reportability to the directorate in regard to those validators that are not working. On a regular basis throughout the day, we will be able to access reports from NEC which show those validators that are not working. It is worth noting that the MyWay+ system is a supported system, so the territory does not maintain that system. It is up to NEC under the contract to maintain the system, so it is in their best interests to report and then address validators that are not operating because, once we move ultimately into the maintenance phase of the contract, there will be an opportunity for the territory to abate under the contract, if KPIs around validator performance have not been met.

THE CHAIR: Going back to payment with a credit card, if there are people who are able to look at your device and check whether you have tapped on or off, I do not know that it turns up on my credit card straightaway. How would I prove that I have paid my fare?

Mr White: Getting down into the technology, a token is passed through into the back-end system, and what we are looking for is what token has passed. It will go down two paths; it will either go to our banking gateway, or the NEC banking gateway, which is an EMV or a debit card-credit card transaction, and that will show a trace. It is that trace that we are looking at; it will be the data point that we are checking. If you have paid in any other form—a MyWay+ card, a QR code or something like that—it checks, “Has that token also gone to the ABT system, the account-based ticketing system?”

MR BRADDOCK: Mr Smith, going to your answer about the validator availability, earlier in your evidence you said that you currently do not have that information and you would need to go to NEC to get the information. Does the ACT government

currently have this, or is this part of that functionality that NEC has not yet delivered, to provide the ACT with the validator availability?

Mr Smith: That is functionality that we are working through developing now. We have been working on that with them over the last few weeks, in regard to specific validator performance reports which will show—and we have asked for that on a daily basis. NEC are working on starting to produce that for us, so that we will be able to get validator performance on a daily basis. NEC, as the provider, can jump onto their system and look at validator performance in real time.

Mr Steel: We will take it on notice, though, to see whether we can get a specific number for the committee from NEC.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR PARTON: In evidence that you have given this morning, you have certainly given an indication that fare compliance activities as we know them are not being undertaken, for the reasons that you have stated, at the level that you would expect when everything is rolled out. How does that balance up against the fact that minimising fare evasion was a part of the Capital Metro light rail project agreement? I am assuming that that is one aspect of the CMET agreement which they just cannot deliver. Is that a fair assessment?

Mr Steel: Firstly, we are only just in the process of recruiting the team of transit enforcement officers to undertake the education, broader compliance activities and the workplace safety activities that they will be doing. That will take a little bit of time. Yes, you are right to note that there is a requirement under the CMET contract that we have for compliance activities. That has been very successful, and it is, in fact, the model on which we are basing part of what the transit enforcement officers will be doing on the bus network. It has resulted in the past in a very high level of compliance with paying for fares.

I will hand over to George Vallance to provide some further information about what we have been doing during the transition to MyWay+ in terms of the CMET contract.

Mr Vallance: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Yes, correct; within the public-private partnership agreement with Canberra Metro, there is the opportunity to conduct twice-yearly fare compliance surveys, where we go out with the Canberra Metro operations team and conduct those surveys to determine the level of compliance across patronage.

Since the commencement of MyWay+ we have paused that activity, so that we have been able to integrate that system and provide customers with education and a process on how to use the system. We are now—as discussed by others—in that education phase, making sure that customers are aware of where the validators are, and how to use them. There is a current plan around the return to formal fare compliance that is being negotiated now with our operator.

MR PARTON: My understanding is that Transport Canberra's fare revenue was down \$7.4 million when compared with 2024. Of course, that is in part because of the free-

fare period during the MyWay+ transition. With these other challenges that are presenting themselves, you are bleeding revenue faster than a mad Monday trip to the casino. What forecasts internally are being made here about where those numbers are going to end up? Based on everything that is going on now, I would certainly expect—and, Minister, could you agree or disagree—that that figure for fare revenue is going to be even lower when it is next reported. Would that be correct?

Mr Steel: We are partway through the financial year, so we will obviously be assessing revenue as it comes. As we have discussed before in committees—and I appreciate that you may not have been part of those committee inquiries in the past—there is a range of factors that influence fare revenue. The transition to the ticketing system is absolutely one of those. We have also had fare-free Fridays, which has had an impact on revenue.

MR PARTON: Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, too, by the sound of it.

Mr Steel: Also, in relation to the budgeting, currently it has been based on pre-COVID patronage levels, which were higher than what we believe they currently are, so that has impacted on revenue. That is something that Transport Canberra is currently reviewing at the moment around the future budgets and whether it needs to be adjusted. Like other cities, we have not seen a 100 per cent return to pre-COVID patronage levels. All those factors have had an impact on revenue. The transition to the ticking system is just one of those.

MS CARRICK: Regarding the validators, you said that NEC can do reports, but you are still working on one to come through. Have they, at any stage, told you what validator performance is? You said you wanted to get it into the high 90s, as a percentage. Do we know what it is now?

Mr Steel: We have just taken that question on notice.

MS CARRICK: And how often they fail?

Mr Smith: That would be a direct correlation with the percentage of availability. As the minister said, we will take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: The information displays have been blank at bus interchanges since September 2024. What is happening with them?

Mr Steel: I think we have had this discussion before. It was not part of the NEC contract to provide the displays at the interchanges. What was part of the contract was the provision of data which can then feed into the customer information displays. In the future, it is intended that Transport Canberra would seek budget funding to potentially procure those services. It will be a later-stage delivery of that particular component. It did not form part of the scope of the contract with NEC to deliver the displays, but they have the requirement to deliver the data feed.

MS TOUGH: I am interested in how Transport Canberra will continue to build on the momentum to accelerate the shift to a zero-emissions fleet. What are the next strategic priorities to ensure the electric bus transition is not just delivered but also sustained going forward?

Mr Steel: The government's commitment is to transition the entire fleet by 2040 or earlier to zero emissions. We are leading the nation in terms of the proportion of buses transitioning. In the budget, we have funded an additional 30 buses. At the moment, Transport Canberra is working on the procurement methodology for the purchase of those buses. That will come on top of the existing fleet. We expect to have 106. The team can provide some detail on exactly where we are at the moment, in terms of the total number of zero-emissions buses.

Mr Smith: As the minister said, we have a current contract for the provision of 106 battery electric buses. As at late last week, we had approximately 90 of those buses in the fleet. They operate out of both the Woden and the Tuggeranong depots. As the minister said, there is a commitment for an additional 30 battery electric buses. We are actively working through the procurement process and methodology around that, so I cannot talk in great detail. Those buses will ultimately come into the fleet. We are also doing further works around the Zero-Emission Transition Plan, exploration of futureproofing the Tuggeranong depot and the potential for the fourth bus depot as well, which would be a full electric bus depot from the start. I am not sure that there is any more information, Ms Tough.

MS TOUGH: Regarding the Woden electric depot, what is its current housing capacity?

Mr Smith: The Woden bus depot has capacity for 100 buses. It has capacity to charge 96 of the 100 buses at once, so it is quite easy for us to cope with the additional four. The depot still has traditional diesel fuel capacity as well and holds diesel. The maintenance facility, whilst designed around battery electric buses, can also maintain the diesel buses.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. How will Transport Canberra measure and report the environmental and financial benefits as the electric fleet grows? And how will that data be used in the future for cases of further investment?

Mr Smith: With the move to battery electric buses, we will be able to measure CO₂ reductions. We know is that battery electric buses produce dramatically less CO₂ than diesel buses. We are pulling from, effectively, a sustainable grid here in the ACT with the previous investments the government has made. We will be able to directly correlate cubic metres of CO₂. That will be ripe to put into a benefits report that we can do and will support further investment in battery electric buses and other technology like that associated with the depot. We are also looking at solar at the Woden bus depot to further improve the green footprint of Transport Canberra as an operation.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Thank you. Going back to my first supplementary question, you said Woden has capacity for 96 buses and some of the buses are at Tuggeranong. What is the capacity at Tuggeranong for electric buses?

Mr Smith: There is capacity for 100 buses and charging of 96 at Woden. At the moment, we have charging capacity for 12 buses at Tuggeranong. It accepted a dedicated feeder recently, and we are working through stage 2 of the inside-the-fence works. That is the installation of the required technology to move bulk power to

dedicated feeders. Those dedicated feeders will be subject to a future budget process.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: Page 177 of the annual report talks about how TCCS emissions are down by 2.6 per cent from the previous year but 14 per cent above the emissions reduction plan. Could you please elaborate on why we are above the forecasted emissions in your plan and how significant emissions reductions will be realised over the coming years?

Mr Smith: I would have to take that on notice for the finer detail. I could surmise, but I do not want to surmise for the committee.

MR BRADDOCK: All right. You referred to the fourth bus depot. What is the status of getting a north-side zero-emissions bus depot?

Mr Steel: The Belconnen depot has some charging capacity, but it is fairly limited because of the grid constraints in that particular region of Canberra. Work is happening at the moment around due diligence, site selection and so forth for a future fourth depot. That is continuing at the moment. Government has not yet considered the outcomes of that piece of work. We know that having that extra capacity on the north side will be important for the future growth of the fleet and the growth of the city, to manage extra services that may need to be delivered to new suburbs and improve frequency of services in the northern part of Canberra. It is part of the Zero-Emission Transition Plan to look at a fourth depot. The decision that we made to not only build Woden but also retrofit Tuggeranong meant that the criticality of the timeframe for the fourth depot was moved back. That was updated in the refreshed transition plan.

MR BRADDOCK: How long do you anticipate it would take to get through due diligence before you can get to a government decision on that new depot?

Mr Steel: We cannot build a depot unless we have a site that is relatively free from constraints in order to deliver this type of large-scale facility. It is critical that occurs. It is dependent on whether we can deliver a depot. We looked at some sites that had some environmental constraints which meant that they would not be feasible, so that has required that further due diligence would be undertaken on additional sites.

MR BRADDOCK: You mentioned the criticality of time being pushed back. How far was that pushed back in the refresh?

Mr Steel: You would be able to see it. Both versions of the document should be online, so you should be able to compare. A timeline is set out across two pages of the document that you could compare.

MR BRADDOCK: You are not willing to provide that; you are asking me to check two previous documents?

Mr Steel: It is publicly available. If you would like to look at it, it is there.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay.

MR PARTON: Hydrogen is mentioned in the ACT government zero-emissions strategy to help us get to targets. It is my belief that the South Australian government, in partnership with one of their bus operators, has been trialling a small number of Foton hydrogen fuel cell buses as part of Adelaide Metro's transition to a zero-emissions fleet. Given the fact that we have a hydrogen refuelling station in Canberra, have hydrogen fuel cell buses, like those that have been offered by Foton, Toyota and Mercedes, been considered at all for operational deployment in Canberra?

Mr Steel: The general technology was considered, and it was considered in the first version of the Zero-Emission Transition Plan, which, by the way, was developed with quite a bit of technical input from WSP at the time. We certainly did not close the door to hydrogen technology buses. Over time, thinking has changed around hydrogen vehicles generally. Certainly, the cost of them was also a factor that was considered. There is a much higher unit cost for a hydrogen bus, and, of course, there is also a fuel cost associated with it, and that can be higher than electricity. That was part of the consideration that was taken at the time.

The refreshed Zero-Emission Transition Plan made some adjustments around the policy around potential procurement of hydrogen buses. I do not think they are totally ruled out in the future. What we are seeing in cities around the world is that they are largely adopting battery electric bus technology as the main technology to transition away from fossil fuels. Given that we already have, as has been noted, 100 per cent renewable electricity here in the ACT, the benefits are even greater here in terms of using the electricity grid to power our buses than would be the case in another jurisdiction in Australia.

MR PARTON: That is a good answer. Thank you.

MR PARTON: I want to go to some nerd questions on ticketing. My understanding is that the original MyWay system used Mifare based contactless smartcards and Parkeon's Wayfarer200 driver consoles. People are nodding.

Mr White: That sounds about right.

MR PARTON: That system was very similar to the Transperth SmartRider system, which used the same Mifare based smartcard and Parkeon hardware as MyWay. The WA government have been able to transition to an updated ticketing system, as you would be aware, that also allows contactless card payment without needing to reissue smartcards. I understand that there was a similar arrangement in Adelaide when they upgraded the metroCARD, and it will be the same in Melbourne with their new Myki system when it comes online. My question is this: given Transperth was able to seamlessly upgrade their ticketing infrastructure without the need to reissue smartcards, and SmartRider is an incredibly close relative of the old MyWay system, why is it that Canberrans had to seek out entirely new smartcards? Why?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Mr White to talk about the technical aspects.

Mr White: Thanks for your question, Mr Parton. I share your nerd appreciation for ticketing systems.

MR PARTON: Good.

Mr White: I will cover two or three elements. Firstly, decisions on why it went to the NEC solution were certainly founded on the ability to go to the next-generation ticketing system, which is account based ticketing, of which the other jurisdictions have partial capabilities. They go to the ability to transact with debit and credit cards but at the cost of wide-scale validator replacement. The existing validators that work with the existing smartcards need to be changed to handle different fare media.

The second area that I will go to is that those other jurisdictions were not seeking to also replace the transit management system. The MyWay+ system is a two-part system, being both a transit management system and an account based ticketing system. What you are comparing with your apples and oranges analogy, unfortunately, is ticketing systems—just the ticketing side of it. We looked at replacing both parts of that and having a more thorough transit management system to allow us to manage the complexities of a growing and enlarging bus network.

MR PARTON: MyWay+, to the best of my knowledge—and I am sure that, if it is wrong, you will be able to correct me, Mr White—is the only ticketing system in Australia and one of a very small number across the world that offer QR codes as a form of ticketing. Why was the QR coded ticket chosen over, for argument's sake, a digital wallet card like Myki in Melbourne? Why did we go with a QR code?

Mr Steel: To make the link between Perth and Canberra, which you made in your original question, there is an active discussion around potentially adding a digital token to pay for public transport. Basically, they are trialling some of that technology in Perth at the moment. I think that will be an Australian first in potentially implementing some of the Apple proprietary technology there. We are looking at how we can add that to the system with NEC. It would be in addition to the scope that is currently required in the contract. Obviously, that is our priority at the moment, but we are very much interested in the alternative payment methods that could potentially be added to make it even easier to use the account based ticketing system. We absolutely acknowledge that the QR code may not be the easiest way to pay for public transport for most customers.

MR PARTON: You reckon?

Mr Steel: That is why communications have gone out quite regularly from Transport Canberra to encourage people to use the easiest way to pay, which is a traditional travel card or using a debit or credit card, or using a smartphone and debit or credit cards—smart payments, which are, of course, digital as well. There is a range of options available for people. It is important to note that, under the old legacy MyWay system, there was only one way to pay, and that was to use a traditional card. The new system has opened the opportunity to add more forms of payment. We are continuing to look at opportunities to add further options, including potentially using Apple transit systems, which they offer in cities outside of Australia. That may become available in Australia, based on discussions that Perth is having and we are having with NEC.

MR PARTON: Thank you.

MS CARRICK: We were having discussions about emissions earlier in the week with Minister Orr. I will build on Ms Tough's questions about it, but more in the context of mode shift—attracting people to public transport to get them out of their cars. We have missed our emissions target this year, and the Climate Change Strategy discussion paper said that transport makes up 65 per cent of our emissions and 70 per cent of it is coming from private transport. In that context, I go to mode shift. The 2022 household travel survey found that Tuggeranong had the highest number of people using private cars, at 83 per cent. In 2021, in the YourSay survey, 58 per cent of people said that the common barrier to using public transport was travel time. It is about services to get people out of their cars and into public transport.

I refer to my motion, where you will provide a concept design of the network for stage 2A in June. In that context, what work will you do to ensure that we get the highest level of mode shift that we can? We are not like Gungahlin or Belconnen, where the light rail will go to the town centres, because we have Woden, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek, Molonglo and the Inner South all using the corridor. How will you ensure that we get the best mode shift that we can?

Mr Steel: This is a big focus of Minister Orr's work in shaping the next stage under the Climate Change Strategy. Transport was obviously identified as being a large part of the emissions that we have remaining in the ACT. It is a key focus of that piece of work. There is consultation underway on that, and mode shift is a critical part of that. Regardless of whether someone is catching a diesel bus or an electric bus, there are still lower emissions than from someone using private transport, depending on what is being used. Electric vehicles will also be part of the discussion on the continued transition, and we are leading the country in relation to that at the moment.

There is further work to do in relation to encouraging people onto public transport, and light rail is a key driver of that because we know that people are more likely to want to take light rail than use a bus. But, of course, the light rail system does not operate in isolation; it will be integrated very closely with our bus network, so people from the regions that you mentioned will connect with it to access new stop infrastructure that will be built under the project that was not available before, particularly for public servants who work in the employment hub around the Inner South, and also in private business hubs in Deakin, for example. They cannot access those currently via Rapid bus. Light rail will provide that opportunity and they will be able to interchange with light rail from a bus to access those stops. People will still have the opportunity to take a bus from the south side—for example, Tuggeranong, as you mentioned—to the city directly. We will do some work around future planning for routes, including new Rapid routes—the government committed to that at the election—including Tuggeranong, Belconnen and Molonglo. We will do some work to add new Rapid routes to serve the population and encourage modal shift.

The other key part of this—and this is something that I flagged in my Statement of Planning Priorities—is that we want to very closely integrate transport planning with land use planning. In practice, that means that more people living near Rapid transport stops and light rail will support people to use public transport. That has a very positive feedback loop in terms of being able to see extra patronage on the system and respond to it, potentially through improved frequency over time. Then we will see more

opportunities for more housing and other facilities being provided on the line.

There are major plan amendments. Two major plan amendments straddle the Federal Highway on the north side associated with stage 1. A future integrated land use plan is being developed for the Southern Gateway as well, which we will consult with the community on, and then a transit-oriented development plan will be developed for Tuggeranong as well, based on Ms Tough's motion to the Assembly. There is a lot of work happening to have more people living next to the services that they will use and there is also planning for new routes to provide opportunities.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. I am more interested in the people who do not live next to it. Have you done a stated preference survey to determine the tolerance for journey times and the number of changes people have to make?

Mr Steel: In the past, there has been quite a lot of surveying of customers. We might be able to provide some of that on notice. I remember, when I was not the minister—prior to Network 19 being introduced—that a lot of work went into the preparation of that, in terms of understanding community needs. One of the clear preferences from people is that frequency is a key driver of people using public transport. The reason for that is that you do not have to think about when a bus will show up; it will come within a reasonable time period after you show up to a bus stop or light rail stop. People can then be much more reliant on public transport than they would otherwise have been. That is why we have had a big focus on introducing the Rapid buses and then expanding them. We have future plans to expand the number of Rapid services that will serve some of the population that is not currently served by a Rapid bus. They might be served by a local route, for example, that does not provide that 15-minute, or better, frequency.

MS CARRICK: I am really keen to hear you talk about travel times. You said that Tuggeranong will have a direct bus, and I understand that Weston Creek will too. What alignment will that take? Will there be a dedicated bus line from the south to the city?

Mr Steel: There are already some bus priority measures in place. There is a current study looking at some opportunities for further bus priority measures onto Cotter Road. There may be opportunities in the future. This is why light rail, especially in the way that it is been delivered in Canberra, is so beneficial: it has its own dedicated right of way, running on the median strip; it is not competing with vehicles. Buses compete with vehicles on the road. Even with bus priority measures, they are held up by vehicles. That is the problem that we will encounter when the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge closes for a year for each span, over two years, from this month onwards. The buses will be caught up in that congestion. Beyond that period of construction, as the city grows, congestion will get worse. Light rail will play an important congestion-busting role in running in its own dedicated right of way. It will be able to move a large number of people efficiently across the city. The performance time and travel time of the buses now will not be the same in 2060.

MS CARRICK: Regarding 2060 and futureproofing, are you looking at how you could get some dedicated busways—not just bus priority measures but also actual busways—from the north to the south?

Mr Steel: The government will continue to look at those opportunities, and future

governments will need to continue to look at opportunities to provide priority measures where possible. That includes not just dedicated bus lanes but also bus jumps, and other measures that may be required. That is the work that is happening now on the Cotter Road and the work that is happening on Haydon Drive and Belconnen Way as part of the Belconnen Transitway feasibility work that is being updated. So, yes, there will be opportunities around the place. That has to be balanced across the broader functioning of the network that includes private vehicles and the impact that has.

I want to really make it clear that, when you add a dedicated bus lane, it may mean taking out a lane for the rest of the network, for private vehicles, including freight. That is why we did not agree with the alternative proposition of putting a busway on Capital Circle and on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, because it would have reduced the capacity of the transport network more broadly. Capital Circle goes down to two lanes, so taking one of those lanes away would leave just one lane for broader general traffic, which would cause a significant bottleneck on the transport network. We are about to experience what that might look like, because of the construction project. We do not agree that is the right solution to provide more frequent and better public transport systems in that particular area, but it may be applicable in others where there are more lanes available to use for public transport. Maybe it is used not just for a bus lane but also bus jumps. It will depend on the circumstances of the road where the study will be undertaken.

We certainly think that light rail, by adding that capacity through a new bridge over what is a major bottleneck in our transport network—the lake—will deliver a capacity of about 2,400 extra trips per hour to the overall movement of people across the lake, in addition to the six lanes of traffic. That will be something that I think is worthwhile investing in, rather than taking away lanes from Commonwealth Avenue Bridge for public transport. I know that others have different views about that.

MS CARRICK: I understand that a dedicated alignment is the way to go because it is not conflicted with traffic. From the north, you will have light rail from Gungahlin, you will have light rail from Belco, and you will even have the transitway from Belco that you are talking about. There are potentially two dedicated alignments for public transport coming out of Belco, so that is at least three for the north. From the south, we will have one tram stopper into the city and one all-stopper out.

Mr Steel: There is a dedicated priority lane currently on Adelaide Avenue.

MS CARRICK: But you get to that bottleneck that you were talking about.

Mr Steel: That is right: there is a bottleneck. I absolutely agree with that, and we need to make a judgement call around what the best use of that road space is. But there are also priority measures on the Cotter Road, and at the moment we are looking at whether we can expand that. We are not discriminating between north and south; we are looking right across the network for the opportunities.

MS CARRICK: I am just saying that we do not have the—

Mr Steel: It also has to be balanced against the broader functioning of the road network. There is a potential circumstance where you add a bus priority measure, like a bus lane,

and you hold up the buses, because you are causing bottlenecks for the rest of the traffic, and then they end up causing conflict with the buses when they come out of the bus lane, for example. All of this has to be based on evidence and extensive traffic modelling that needs to be undertaken at different points of the network to understand what the impacts of measures are, and sometimes they are counterintuitive.

MS CARRICK: At the moment, Tuggeranong people use their cars the most, so, when you do the traffic modelling, how do you encourage mode shift when they do not have a dedicated bus lane into town? How do you reduce emissions in transport without dedicated bus lanes?

Mr Steel: Many of the buses run unimpeded with general traffic on transit—

MS CARRICK: But you were just saying that, as we reach 2060 and congestion, they will not.

Mr Steel: At the moment, many of them are. But, yes, we will need to look at further opportunities in future years.

MS CARRICK: But we are not futureproofing now.

Mr Steel: We are. We are doing work on the Cotter Road, we are doing work on the Belconnen Transitway, and we are building light rail to have its own dedicated right of way on the median strip of Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen. We are providing that infrastructure. We have done it on the north side and we are continuing the extension of it on the south side, because it is proven that it attracts people to public transport in a way that buses do not, even when they have a bus lane.

MS CARRICK: If you could tell us how we get mode shift from Tuggeranong, Weston Creek, Molonglo and the Inner South, that would be really good.

Mr Steel: That is the work that we are consulting on at the moment. We are interested in ideas from the community as part of the consultation. When we integrate the Planning and Transport Strategies, which will be part of a review of the Planning Strategy, we want to get the focus on mode shift into the documents. It is one of the reasons the machinery of government changes have been so important, in bringing all the different parts of government together to work on this. Environment, Transport and Planning are all working together to address this issue, which is obviously important to address our major source of emissions.

MR BRADDOCK: I note that the government has already stated that it has missed its legislated climate targets and agrees that transport is the largest source of emissions. What are the current mode-share targets, in terms of use of public transport?

Mr Steel: That is something that will be considered as part of that review of the Transport Strategy. The last Transport Strategy was developed during COVID-19, in 2020, at a time when people were not using public transport because of the major global pandemic, which obviously caused a range of issues for transit systems right across the world. It was not appropriate to set a target then, when we knew that people were actively advised not to use public transport. There is an opportunity now to re-evaluate

where we are at the moment, in terms of patronage, based on data from the ACT and Queanbeyan-Palerang Household Travel Survey, and opportunities to look at what actions will make a tangible difference to improving people's take-up of sustainable transport options.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

MR PARTON: I love that you are still talking about my transport policy, Mr Steel. I love it. Mr Smith gave a number earlier—I did not jot it down—of how many zero-emissions buses we have currently operating in the ACT. I think it was—

Mr Smith: It is around 90.

Mr Steel: We can take that on notice so we can provide you a specific number at a specific point in time, if you would like.

MR PARTON: That would be good. Are the Custom Denning Element 2 buses finally in route service?

Mr Smith: The Custom Denning Element buses are running in route service at the moment. There are ongoing reliability challenges with those four buses, which we are working with the vendor on. We have seen an improvement in the performance of them. They also operate in New South Wales. The ACT has a slightly different variant to those in New South Wales. The main work with the vendor is on how we retrofit to effectively the same performance outcomes. We obviously cannot change the whole bus, but what can we do is pick up the technology that now operates in New South Wales, as a—for want of a better description—version 2 of those buses and bring our version 1s up to the same performance. That is a process we are working through at the moment. Yes; they are operating in the network.

MR PARTON: How many more of the Yutong E12s are still to be delivered and transitioned into service?

Mr Steel: We will take that on notice.

Mr Smith: It will be a balance between the 106 under the current contract and the exact number that we would accept—

MR PARTON: My understanding—and please correct me if I am wrong—is that the remaining Yutongs that are still to come will not be able to replace the CNG buses in a like-for-like manner. When we get to the end of the process, it will leave 15 or so unreplaced. Is that correct? If it is, what is the replacement plan for those CNG buses?

Mr Smith: Could I clarify that they will not be able to replace like for like. Is there any more context around that?

MR PARTON: It is just my understanding of the process. It has been explained to me, by people who are closer to it than I am, that we will not have a situation where we just replace an outgoing CNG with a Yutong and that they will all be replaced. There will be 15 that cannot be replaced in that manner.

Mr Smith: That is not my understanding. The intention is to replace the CNGs. As the battery electric buses come into the fleet, we are required to replace a number of those CNGs. They are reaching end of life, primarily around the gas tanks on top. The intention is to replace all those buses in the near future.

MR PARTON: My understanding is that the Steer Tag fleet is considered a bit of an oddity in the fleet because of the fact that they are the only sub-fleet without bike racks fitted. Is that a fact? And is retirement of the Steer Tags being considered ahead of the MAN A69 diesel fleet? Is that how we are going to roll with that?

Mr Steel: Yes.

Mr Smith: “An oddity”—I guess you could call Steer Tags in the fleet that. They are a high-capacity vehicle. Given the length of them, under the heavy-vehicle regulations they cannot have a bike rack on the front of them. With regard to whether we retire them before the MANs, that is unlikely. We will always balance the retirement of a bus on its reliability, availability for spares, its performance, its emissions, outputs et cetera. There is a whole range of things that we put in there, including passenger-carrying capacity et cetera. It would be hard to definitively say that all the MANs will go before the Steer Tags. We will do a robust assessment around the retirement of any bus.

MR PARTON: Could anyone tell me off the top of their head—do not take it on notice, because I do not want to give any work to anyone—how many Steer Tags we have in the fleet? Ian will know.

Mr Steel: The Zero-Emission Transition Plan had all this information, but, obviously, it was at a point in time. We will take it on notice, unless you have it, Ian.

Mr McGlinn: Not accurately.

Mr Steel: We will take it on notice, as to today.

MR PARTON: I was just trying to get you into the hearing, Ian—that is all! I was letting you get your hands on the footy!

Mr McGlinn: That is why I am sitting here.

MR BRADDOCK: What are your targets for electric bus acquisition for 2026, 2027 and 2028?

Mr Steel: The procurement methodology is still being worked through, but the budget is there. It is outlined in the *Budget Outlook*, around the profile of that funding for the 30. Then future budget considerations will need to be made about further investment in buses. The government is committed to purchasing another 110. The 30 are part of that 110, so we will have to consider that over the term, in terms of appropriate timing. Again, that will be aligned with the factors that Mr Smith outlined: when the CNG buses come to their end of life and when other buses also reach the end of their reliable operational service.

Mr Smith: To get it on record and answer Mr Parton's question: there are 26 Steer Tags in the fleet.

MR BRADDOCK: Transport Canberra used to have accountability indicators in its budget, but, in 2021-22, a lot of them were moved and put into the back of the annual report. These include things like public transport, passenger boarding, service reliability, the percentage of scheduled services operating to completion, and service punctuality. I understand the pertinence of putting them aside during the pandemic, but why have they not been brought back in as budget accountability indicators?

Mr Steel: Updates have been made relatively recently to the strategic indicators and accountability indicators to provide clarity, and changes have been made to some of the indicators relating to zero-emissions transition. Particularly, there was an out-of-date indicator around the number of disability non-compliant buses. We no longer have any disability non-compliant buses, so we are not reporting against it. Changes will be made to indicators. I do not know whether you have any further detail on that one. We might take on notice some of the indicators that you have expressly mentioned. But, obviously, the committee made recommendations about indicators in the report of inquiry in previous years. I am sure you will be looking at that again. We will take that into account and respond.

MR BRADDOCK: Coming to reporting against punctuality, the target is 75 per cent of services running on time. I note there is a definition of one minute early or five minutes late—that sort of thing. We achieved exactly 75 per cent. Is 75 per cent good enough in terms of punctuality, given there is already that window of time?

Mr Smith: Punctuality measurement is an interesting one right around Australia. Jurisdictions measure punctuality in different ways. Here in the ACT, punctuality is measured on a bus not being three minutes late through a timing point or one minute early through a timing point. Throughout a route, you will have a number of timing points, depending on the length of the route. Transport Canberra utilises a methodology where we measure punctuality through every timing point. Other jurisdictions—New South Wales, for example—will only measure punctuality on the first timing point. A bus would commence the journey and would go past the first timing point, and that is where punctuality is measured in New South Wales. We use different metrics with regard to 75 per cent. I think the question was: do we think that is enough?

MR BRADDOCK: Is that a good enough service for the community, in that 25 per cent of our buses are not running on time?

Mr Smith: We would always like to improve punctuality. That is probably the best answer I can give.

Mr Steel: We face challenges, and one of those challenges is not just the growth of the city and further congestion on the road network but also the period that we are in regarding construction. That will impact the reliability and punctuality of services. Transport Canberra will do all they can to try to make sure that buses are running according to the timetable. That timetable is in the process of being adjusted to account for what we expect, through traffic modelling, will be the impact of that construction work. It will be somewhat unpredictable. That will cause some issues over the coming

years, in terms of that metric. I want to foreshadow for the community—and I think I have done that reasonably well over the past couple of months—that there will be impacts on the delivery of bus services in the ACT because of all the public and private infrastructure projects that are being built around the territory, particularly the road works on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. But there is a range of other roads as well, such as the Monaro Highway, for example.

MR BRADDOCK: Given the MyWay+ tech issues we have had, how can we have confidence in the 75 per cent that we are reporting we achieved?

Mr Smith: MyWay+ is not the only way we can measure the timing of buses. We have other systems that operate within the bus—the scheduling system, for example, which also measures the movement of buses throughout the network. So we can still measure the movement of a bus through the network. In saying that, MyWay+ also does it. The Transit Management System, or TMS, as we know it, measures the movement of buses as well. We have a number of systems with which we can measure and validate.

MR BRADDOCK: For the 25 per cent of services that are not running on time, what is the breakdown? How many of those are running early and how many are running late?

Mr Smith: I would have to take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: What systems or processes do we have in place to ensure that the buses do not run early? That is worse for a consumer outcome than running late.

Mr Smith: There are methodologies that bus drivers will employ in the network. They will either dwell or they will slow-run between stops. That needs to occur in a safe manner. Obviously, we cannot have them dwelling at bus stops when they are blocking the road, and we cannot have them travelling really slow in a high-congestion environment. But the drivers are trained to stay as close to timing as possible. From time to time, we monitor performance. They are the primary methods to avoid running early.

MR BRADDOCK: What incentive structures exist for drivers to ensure they do not run early and run to schedule?

Mr Smith: We do not have an incentive structure.

Mr Steel: The timetable is updated generally on an annual basis or as needed. That takes into account feedback from drivers about the time between stops—the timings that need to be taken into account, particularly with changed road conditions and so forth. We work closely with the workforce, who undertake dummy runs of routes to make sure the timings are as close as they can be. Ultimately, they are trying to run to a timetable and, if the timetable is not taking into account impacts on the network, it makes it harder to make sure the bus is punctual.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you.

Mr Peffer: I could expand on punctuality. For light rail, it is 98.87 per cent. Reflecting

on the minister's comments earlier about the benefit of having a dedicated transitway, that is the sort of punctuality you can deliver with that service.

THE CHAIR: The last time I caught light rail, it had a display saying it was running slow or late. What is that about? What could be the congestion on light rail?

Mr Smith: It would likely have been that an incident had occurred on the light rail system. That could be that a car had broken down on the tracks. That is an extreme one. It could be that there was a medical episode for a passenger at a platform or on a light rail vehicle. Medical intervention will always take precedence over punctuality. There is a very robust system where CMET will notify passengers, as well as Transport Canberra, that they are running off service. The expectation is that we then notify that through the travel system.

THE CHAIR: Could we get on notice how often this happens? Is it daily or multiple times a day? How often is the service delayed? I am happy to put that on notice if you have—

Mr Smith: We have it as a percentage. The minister or Mr Peffer read out the percentage. As a percentage, it will be the difference between that and 100 per cent. As to whether it happens daily, no; I do not think it happens daily. It is—

Mx Vallance: It can occur as a result of high passenger boarding, operational delays or asset issues, where there might be a mechanical issue. Our targets are 99.5 per cent and 98 per cent for the on-time and available services. They consistently hit above those.

MS CARRICK: If 75 per cent are on-time and the tram is over 98 per cent, does that mean the buses are even slower, with 75 per cent being on time?

Mr Smith: No. We measure them separately.

MS CARRICK: So it is not an average of the network.

MS TOUGH: I refer to bus stops on high-speed roads. In Tuggeranong, there are a lot of bus stops on 80-kilometre-per-hour roads. Some pull off the road and some are in the lane thing. I know that the location of bus stops is for a different part of the directorate, but I get a lot of community feedback around people feeling that sometimes, when they stop on the road, they feel unsafe. I am wondering about the rate of actual incidents with the different types of bus stops.

Mr Smith: I do not have data in relation to traffic accidents correlating with where a bus stop is. Generally speaking, for bus stops on newer arterial roads, the intent would be to develop bus bays for them, so that they can pull off. That is sometimes impacted by availability of space and infrastructure associated with electricity, gas, telcos et cetera on the side of the roads. There needs to be a value-for-money assessment undertaken in relation to investment in a bus bay. We know that it improves road performance, but that investment calculation is really important as well. Generally speaking, in newer estates that might be developed by the Suburban Land Agency, there will be a dedicated bus route through them. A lot of the bus stops will be on the road network, in a slower speed environment, and are therefore safer.

Mr Steel: As we look towards new Rapid bus routes being introduced, where there was not a Rapid bus running before, including potentially in Tuggeranong, on roads like Drakeford Drive, for example, where there are buses but they are peak buses—they do not run all day and they do not run particularly frequently—there will be the need to assess the investment required in infrastructure to support the route and provide safe services. For the opportunity to provide a bus stop where there is currently no bus stop at all—noting that, to do that, you need to have an opportunity for people to cross the road safely as well, whether that is at a signalised intersection or by way of a pedestrian bridge, and there are a number on that road which are currently not near a bus stop—we need to look at the infrastructure.

We also receive feedback from members of the community about particular bus stops and opportunities to improve them. They are assessed by the team and considered, but it requires investment, particularly where infrastructure like a bus bay is required. That is a quite expensive improvement to make, to provide that heavy-duty concrete pad for a bus to pull off the road and stop. Of course, it provides a benefit to the broader traffic network. I reflect on Northbourne Avenue prior to the introduction of light rail, where we had Rapid buses running and stopping on the roadway. That caused significant congestion on that major arterial road. The benefit of not having buses stopping on the road as a result of the introduction of light rail stage 1 in April 2019 was significant. The benefits were not just for public transport; the benefits were seen by the broader traffic network. We hope to see some of those benefits extended in the future to other areas.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We will call it a day. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance today. Many questions were taken on notice. Please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Hearing suspended from 10.29 to 10.46 am.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation

City and Environment Directorate

Fitzgerald, Mr Bruce, Deputy Director-General, City Services and Transport

Marshall, Mr Ken, Executive Group Manager, City Operations

Clement, Ms Sophie, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure Delivery

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and officials. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions. I would like to ask some questions about sportsground availability. On page 413 of the Transport Canberra and City Services annual report for 2024-25, it states that the directorate manages 452 hectares of sportsgrounds, 286 of which are irrigated. Page 395 of last year's annual report has the same figures.

Many community sporting organisations and individual athletes have been in touch with concerns about the availability of sportsgrounds in the ACT. Can you confirm that there has not been an increase in available sportsgrounds since 2023?

Ms Berry: Since 2023? Actually, we have added some sportsground facilities from our public schools to the booking system, which will help, and it has been received warmly and positively by the community. We have the highest sports participation rates in the country, which means that we have very high use of all our sportsgrounds and facilities, which is great.

THE CHAIR: Is the annual report wrong?

Ms Berry: No. It is just that we have recently added—is it three?

Mr Fitzgerald: The figure listed there is measured by what the sport and rec team within CED manage. Some of those ovals that the minister referred to are managed as Education assets, so they are not included as part of our maintenance regime, but they are included as part of the booking system.

THE CHAIR: How do you make the decision to add new sportsgrounds? What goes into that?

Ms Berry: Mostly, we have been concentrating on new areas in particular—areas that do not have any sports facilities—and adding sports facilities in those areas. In existing areas, for example, in west Belconnen, fields were added in Holt because of the sale of the land to the Kippax Fair shopping centre owners, who will be redeveloping that site. At the moment it is an add, but those fields will decrease once the Kippax shopping centre does their development.

We talk with sports communities all the time; we are very closely engaged with individual clubs about their needs and making sure that we can meet them as much as possible, which is why there has been a lot of emphasis on putting lights on sports fields so that they can be utilised at night. Of course, that increases capacity at those fields, but it also means that sports can look at options for how we adapt to the warmer weather, sometimes, and be able to play at night rather than in the warmer weather during the day.

The decision is based on the data that is provided by clubs about what they would need and how we can meet that; and, of course, decisions of government through budget processes.

THE CHAIR: Are dryland ovals included in this figure?

Mr Fitzgerald: Dryland ovals are not included in that figure. That figure is with respect to the bookable ovals. We are looking at options to reuse or revitalise some of our dryland ovals, not necessarily to allow them to be bookable but to take some of the pressure off, particularly for areas of junior sport, where they might not need the same level of maintenance activities. In the next 12 months, we hope that we will see two dryland ovals come back online, and they will take up some of the additional capacity that we need in the system.

THE CHAIR: How does the directorate determine in which sportsgrounds it will install irrigation systems?

Ms Berry: Of the dryland ovals that we have in the ACT, around half may already have some kind of irrigation there, from 20 or 30 years ago. Some of it works; some of it does not. We have been doing that work with the grounds team to investigate the possibilities for a partial turn-on, if you like, which is what we have been investigating at Melba. It looks like that is possible, because the irrigation system seems to be working, which is amazing. But that might not be the case for the others, which means increased investment, in looking at whether or not an initial, partial turn-on is a possible or an efficient use of funds, or whether we look at it in different ways and find other sports fields that can be partially turned on in the meantime. They could still be used for junior training and play, but you could not use them for higher grades.

MR BRADDOCK: What is the timeline for the community consultation about the dryland ovals' possible reactivation?

Ms Berry: Consultation happens per oval, when a decision is made, not as an all-ovals decision. That work had already begun at Melba, for example. With Canberra High School, it is not part of the sport and rec team's maintenance program—or is it? Has it been switched over?

Mr Fitzgerald: No.

Ms Berry: That is a high school oval, but it has been reactivated as well. Obviously, there is communication with Canberra high about that process. Florey is probably an example of where a decision was made, and community consultation happened as part

of that decision-making process.

MR BRADDOCK: If I remember correctly, Ms Clay's motion in the last term about dryland ovals was seeking an exploration of their reactivation or alternative uses. Are you looking at it purely through the prism for reactivation for sporting use or are you looking for other potential uses of those sites, if they are not suitable for sporting use?

Ms Berry: Yes, a number have been identified for potential future sporting use. Those are ovals—or spaces, dryland ovals—that can have capacity for more than one field, a pavilion and other kinds of infrastructure. The other ones that have been identified are either attached to a school or are too small, and it would not be an efficient use of funding; they are separate and far away from other fields, so they do not work for the sports clubs, either. There have been no decisions made on their future use or individual future use, and there are no plans for any of them, apart from Florey.

MR BRADDOCK: The only one with plans is Florey; with the rest, theoretically, in the future, they may be reactivated. You do not have a list that you would prioritise for reactivation?

Ms Berry: We did Melba. That was a priority. With Stirling, there is the previous turf farm. With Canberra high, we are working with Education.

MR BRADDOCK: You can take this on notice: I would be interested in the full list of the 32 ovals and what their current plan is, as to whether the government is planning to reactivate or not, as the case may be, for each one.

Ms Berry: It is all available on the website. I would say that it has only just gone up. We had tried to get it up about a month ago; for various reasons, it did not get up, but it is up there now.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay; thank you.

MS CARRICK: In the answer to a question on notice from November 2023, it shortlisted 14 as potential candidates. What is happening with those 14?

Ms Berry: They are potentially for future decisions of government to reactivate.

MS CARRICK: How would you get reactivation? If a club wanted to reactivate one of those and use it as their training ground, is there a way to progress the reactivation of an oval?

Ms Berry: As I responded to Ms Castley's questions earlier, yes, we work with our sports clubs all the time about sportsground hire and usage. One of those conversations was around the growth at Melba, with the Sharks Rugby League Club. They had significant growth with their juniors, so their fields were under a lot of pressure.

Working with them, we were able to identify one of the dryland ovals for a partial turn-on, which means that it can be irrigated. It will not be completely upgraded, as that costs millions of dollars. It is available and open now for junior rugby league, in order to train and perhaps to play on it, depending on how the field looks when it has been

rejuvenated.

MS CARRICK: I am pretty sure that I know of a club. With the allocation of fields through Capital Football, they lose a ground, and it is not very secure, with the grounds that they get. I am pretty sure they have approached you about reactivating a ground, and they will even do a lot of the work. How do you progress that? It does not seem to have gone anywhere.

Ms Berry: Which club is it? That might help.

MS CARRICK: White Eagles. We will write again.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: On the dryland ovals, of the 14 that have been marked for potential revitalisation, none of those are in Tuggeranong. There is another section of those ovals that have been looked at that are flagged for potential repurposing, four of which are in Tuggeranong. What is repurposing? What could that encompass?

Ms Berry: It would depend on the conversations with the community. At the end of the day, it all comes down to decisions of government and budget. At Florey, for example, with the previous dryland oval there, part of it has been used for a pump track and a small kick-around space, which is irrigated, and some nature play spaces that have been incorporated there.

That was done because the fence around the school had meant that its play space was restricted, so they were able then to access the oval and have a proper play space down there. There was also a commitment through the election for an all-abilities playground there. There could be a range of things like that. There could be micro forests. There could be pump tracks, which some dryland ovals already have on them. There could be other forest-type things that people might want to put in.

All those opportunities are there. They are pretty big spaces, so it is not something that would happen all at once. With Florey, for example, there is a process, and communication and consultation are happening with the community about what that looks like.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I was going to what repurposing could mean. It sounds like it is generally community use, but a different type of community use, as opposed to a big load of grass.

Ms Berry: Yes. I think I have made the commitment previously that there is no plan to do anything else with these open spaces, other than the 14 that could be turned back on, and the others for some other use. There is no plan to build on them, for example.

MR BRADDOCK: The 2025-26 budget included Stromlo District Playing Fields and Taylor playing fields having synthetic grass surfaces. I fully note the government response to my motion, which was tabled in the last sitting, in terms of some of the issues with this. I want to ask about either of those projects. Have you decided on the infill that will be used for those particular projects?

Ms Berry: They would sit with iCBR, but I can say that there has been no decision

around turf or synthetic fields. Innovation with making them more sustainable is occurring continuously. For example, they have recently replaced Watt Field at Hockey ACT. The fill is not the rubber fill that had been used previously; I think it is cork or something similar. The plastic is not the same kind of plastic that had been used previously. A lot of the petroleum that is used to make the plastic material has been removed.

I am probably not using the right language, but you will get the gist. The ACT government reuses the synthetic field that has been removed in cricket pitches, and places like that on other fields, or in overused areas on sports fields, around pavilions and spaces like that. We do a lot of work in the sport and rec team to make sure we are reusing all the turf that might be removed and replaced. It is used and utilised across our sports fields and stored centrally. Do you know where it is stored?

Mr Fitzgerald: No, I do not.

Ms Berry: It is stored somewhere. I think everybody recognises the work in this space and that we need to continue with that innovation, sustainability and reuse. The synthetic fields do take pressure off our grass fields. They do not require as much water and there is less maintenance.

MR BRADDOCK: Can I check what percentage is actually reused?

Ms Berry: The whole field, I think.

Mr Fitzgerald: We do seek to reuse as much as possible. They are generally used as a replacement for cricket pitches that, over many years, have required replacement. That is where the majority of the material goes.

MR BRADDOCK: We do not know exactly what percentage is reused or how much is actually disposed of as end-of-life?

Mr Fitzgerald: No.

Ms Berry: My understanding—and we can double-check the hockey one, for example—is that it was all being reused, the whole field.

MR BRADDOCK: Okay. Do we do any analysis of the environmental impacts of run-off of synthetic fields?

Ms Berry: Yes; not so much analysis, but there is work happening around the country around those challenges. That will be taken into account with the new field at Stromlo.

MR BRADDOCK: Do we do any modelling to understand what the surface temperatures would be on these synthetic playing surfaces?

Ms Berry: They get hot in summer. That is pretty well known by everyone. That is pretty obvious. Alternatively, when it is raining, they can be used and not damaged in the same way that grass fields are. It is a bit of a balancing act, with the use of both. We do not have many in the ACT. New South Wales has a couple of hundred, I think. We

are not replacing all our fields with synthetic, but they are part of our sports allocations, and our sports clubs are calling for them.

MR BRADDOCK: Do we have any information on the availability or not of the synthetic playing fields on account of heat? Do we know whether there is a certain percentage that will not be available, on average, each year due to that?

Ms Berry: I do not believe so. I do not believe there has been an impact.

Mr Marshall: I am not aware that we have statistics. I am also not aware, particularly, of an issue with unavailability. Notionally, the surfaces are available for booking. There is not a decision-making process where we are monitoring any attribute—heat, surface heat or any other—and closing the facility. Users may choose not to book the facility in circumstances where it is not ideal, but they are not closed for that reason.

MR MILLIGAN: This term, there was a motion brought forward for the government to do an inquiry and a report into the use of astroturf. I think Ms Orr is working on that report and will be tabling it very soon, no doubt. My question is: depending on that report, will it affect the future of astroturf playing fields in the ACT, particularly new fields and/or existing fields? Is there a guarantee that, no matter what the report suggests or what the recommendations are, future builds of synthetic pitches on astroturf fields will not be affected?

Ms Berry: I am not sure which report you are talking to.

MR BRADDOCK: I believe you are referring to the report relating to my motion, which has already been tabled, Mr Milligan.

Ms Berry: That report. As I said, this space involves constant innovation, with new and better ways for synthetic turf to be used that are more sustainable. The directorate keeps up to date with all those opportunities. That is what we are doing, and you will see that work happening with synthetic field placement across the city. I just referred to the one at Hockey ACT, their replacement field, and the use of the previous field sustainably in sport and rec facilities across the ACT.

There may be more innovation that makes them even more sustainable by the time we get to the one at Stromlo. Certainly, with hockey, for example, unless there is some other alternative to synthetic, that sport would not be able to continue to be played.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I refer to the commitments about the Gordon ovals and the cricket nets that were made in the 2024 election. Gordon oval has already received some investment, but there was a promise to install a portable grandstand at the square playing fields in Gordon. Is that for this session or should I ask that in the next session?

Ms Berry: I think Ken can talk to this one.

Mr Marshall: Yes, there is a modification to the facilities at Gordon that is in the design phase at the moment. The intention is that it will involve a couple of containers fitted out with changing rooms and other facilities that will be located behind the existing permanent structure. That change will also involve the relocation of the existing

temporary shipping container facility that is on that site to a more suitable location.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have been asked about the grandstands, the portable grandstands for the square oval that were in the list. Where are they up to? How many people will be able to sit on those seats around the square, with the rectangular rugby pitch?

Mr Marshall: I do not have that detail. I would have to take that question on notice.

Ms Berry: Mr Marshall and I went out to Gordon. It was cold and windy.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: It is always cold!

Ms Berry: We spoke with the club about the things that they wanted to move around—refitting the containers and putting them behind the existing pavilion facility, and removing the very big storage container, which is in the wrong spot, as it hides the field from the car park, so you cannot see what is going on. There are weeds that are taking off a bit, on that particular field.

It is interesting, when you look at the fields across Canberra, that, with that same weed—I do not know what it is called; red something—there is not much of it in the north and west part of Canberra, but it seems to like Gordon. The cockatoos provide some challenges for us as well.

I think most of the fields now—Mr Marshall can correct me if I am wrong—have little sensors that can identify the level of pH in the soil, so that you can adjust whatever kinds of fertiliser you use, to make it the best possible environment for grass, the rye and buffalo—or couch grass?

Mr Marshall: A mix.

Ms Berry: A mix of grasses and eliminate that weed growth. Yes, Gordon is getting a bit of attention at the moment because of those specific challenges that it is having.

Mr Marshall: I can add that, since our visit, there has been weed treatment on the oval and there are plans for top dressing and reseeded, which will happen later in the growing season.

MISS NUTTALL: Does the ACT government remain committed to the grandstand at Gordon oval?

Ms Berry: I believe so. I will check the detail on that because I cannot quite recall that commitment.

MISS NUTTALL: It was costed as one of ACT Labor's 2024 election commitments for \$40,000 in the 2025-26 budget, if that helps.

Ms Clement: I have read and understand the privilege statement. I am advised that it has already been delivered. We are just waiting for some advice on the number of people that it would hold. That might have to stay on notice, if it does not come through

during the session.

Ms Berry: There you go; thank you.

MISS NUTTALL: Is this the right session to ask about the ACT community sport recreation and sports facilities needs assessment and the social infrastructure audit, or would that be the next session?

Ms Berry: It is probably the next one.

Mr Fitzgerald: I believe that is being run by the planning team, so I am not sure whether it even fits into the next session.

MISS NUTTALL: I would be interested in the variance on sportsgrounds, given that it is relevant now. In that case, I might ask about mountain biking and track maintenance. What is our current track maintenance budget for mountain biking?

Ms Berry: That is not us. That is Parks and Conservation.

MISS NUTTALL: More generally, in Tuggeranong, we have heard concerns from sports groups that there simply is not enough space for all the teams. It makes it really difficult for scheduling. I appreciate the work that you are doing in the lighting space. I think we heard earlier in the hearing that your focus is on more sportsgrounds in newer areas. Are there spaces in Tuggeranong that you are looking at for new sports fields?

Mr Fitzgerald: Not at this stage. What we are looking at, though, is the actual utilisation of some of those sportsgrounds. There are locations in Kambah and Banks that we know are underutilised at the moment. That can be for a variety of different reasons, whether it is the associated facilities or location when it comes to other amenities.

Some of the opportunities that we are looking at to improve the usability include decommissioning the use of diesel lines. Diesel lines make it quite rigid, in terms of the potential use of sportsgrounds. We now have the facility for robotic line marking, which gives the functionality, so that we can change the configuration quickly, to be able to support other sporting groups. That is primarily our focus at the moment.

As the minister mentioned as well, installing lighting does wonders in providing additional capacity at sportsgrounds. It also allows us to free up maintenance or to reduce the maintenance burden on some of those sportsgrounds, because we can turn on lights in particular areas and, particularly for training, we can limit the use of a particular area, so that it can regenerate; we encourage users to use other parts of the sportsground. There are a multitude of different practices that we are putting in place to try and improve some of that availability.

Mr Marshall: As the minister has already mentioned, we continue to collaborate with Education to bring those facilities onto the booking system, where it is appropriate and possible.

MISS NUTTALL: With the particular ovals in the Education space where you are

seeing heavy utilisation, does it indicate that you might need more sportsgrounds in the area? Are there particularly popular school sportsground zones where you are seeing greater use?

Mr Marshall: Beyond Canberra high, which the minister has already mentioned, we have also been looking at Kingsford Smith and Deakin high—the facilities there being made available.

MISS NUTTALL: Going back to Banks and Kambah, you mentioned that the ovals there are, in some ways, underutilised. What are the utilisation rates for those ovals? Do you have that data to hand?

Mr Fitzgerald: I do. It is a difficult one to talk to. Banks 1 last year had a total of 47 hours of use. That included 27 light hours, so that is a good indicator; it is one of our lowest utilised fields, particularly with lighting. Gordon 2 also was a sportsground that had low utilisation rates. It was 239 hours, and 130 light hours. With the other one, Kambah, I do not have the data with me. But if you compare that to some of our other sporting fields, Gordon 1, for instance, had 2,627 hours. It is about getting that balance right.

THE CHAIR: Is that data available for us to see across Canberra?

Mr Fitzgerald: I cannot see why it would not be. We can take that on notice and provide it.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you have any explanation for why Banks 1 and Gordon 2 have such low utilisation? For Gordon 2, was it the lack of infrastructure for spectatorship? Is Banks just too far away from public transport? Do you have that kind of feedback from people?

Mr Fitzgerald: I do not have that with me, but it is certainly something we can take on notice and provide some additional information, if there is additional background that we can provide.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you have a policy to check with users, when utilisation rates are that low?

Mr Fitzgerald: Certainly, the team are out there weekly, if not daily, talking to sporting groups. There could be a range of reasons. There may have been an issue with availability of the sportsground itself because of maintenance activities. These are raw numbers; they do not necessarily give the full story as to why.

MS CARRICK: I would like to ask about the Waramanga playing fields. There are a few issues that have been identified over the years. One is lighting. Do you know whether the lighting has been upgraded there?

Mr Fitzgerald: It has. Waramanga has recently had the construction completed for the lighting upgrade.

MS CARRICK: Brilliant.

Mr Fitzgerald: I should point out that it is not operational at this point. We are waiting for Evo to complete the connection. But the construction is complete.

MS CARRICK: That sounds good; it is nearly there. I have heard about waterlogging in the grounds there.

Mr Fitzgerald: I am not aware of the specifics of the issue at Waramanga. We do see that from time to time. The construction of a sportsground has varied over the years, and we do see newer sportsgrounds constructed with much better drainage to deal with those issues. We have installed water meters at all our sportsgrounds to monitor that, to make sure that we are not over-saturating the ground. It is particularly important as we go into a heavy rainfall season, because if we have irrigated and the turf is already at saturation, you do get that boggy ground, unfortunately.

MS CARRICK: There is not an easy way to remediate boggy grounds?

Mr Fitzgerald: Drainage on sportsgrounds is particularly difficult without wide-scale renovation, which is quite costly, because you have to re-establish the sub-base and put the drainage in appropriately.

MS CARRICK: With both Waramanga playing fields and Mawson playing fields, what is the status of their facilities as far as upgrading for the women's change rooms, the disabled toilets and the general aged clubhouse that they have, with those facilities?

Ms Berry: Waramanga was upgraded in about 2018. They did have some upgrades done at Waramanga, and it was one of the first clubs where we used Wi-Fi access to unlock doors, rather than using keys and things like that. We already had the female-friendly upgrades and easier technology to get in and out of the rooms. I cannot quite remember when that happened, but that work was happening there. I am not sure about Mawson.

Ms Clement: Mawson is on the program for a female-friendly upgrade. It is not in this first suite this year; I think it will be next year.

MR MILLIGAN: Does the government still offer the soil replacement program?

Ms Berry: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: What has been the uptake of that? Have there been many requests come through? Has demand for it increased?

Ms Berry: I do not know. We continually remind sports clubs that it is available, if they have not utilised it. I am not sure whether there has been an uptake or anything, but it is definitely still available on sports fields. If you go to a sports field, you will see a round concrete container. If you are wondering what that is, that is the soil. They can use some of that soil to replace divots, high-use areas and things like that.

MR MILLIGAN: Does the government monitor these containers and refill them when they do get used?

Ms Berry: Yes.

Mr Fitzgerald: Absolutely. It is part of our maintenance regime for each of the sportsgrounds.

MR MILLIGAN: Obviously, this is topsoil for these fields, but you also have soil moisture sensors that are deployed across a number of different sites around Canberra. What was the cost of deploying these, and how were fields determined? Which fields were determined to have these sensors installed?

Ms Berry: I am not sure about the moisture sensors, but I know there are other sensors that monitor the pH levels. I think nearly every field has one of those, if not every field. I do not know about the cost.

Mr Fitzgerald: We would have to take the cost on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Take it on notice.

Mr Fitzgerald: The long-term vision is to have as many of these sensors installed as possible, right across our sportsgrounds, because it has revolutionised the way that we can manage the sportsgrounds, in making sure that the irrigation is achieving the best results and making sure that we are presenting fields in the best possible shape.

MR MILLIGAN: Does it improve the management of these fields? What data does it send back? How do you use that data? What was the initial instigation for putting these sensors in the fields in the first place, and how has it improved maintenance?

Mr Fitzgerald: It has improved maintenance. It has improved the management of the entire surface. With maintenance, it is obviously important for us to understand how and when we undertake mowing activities and the like. It also makes sure that we are providing sufficient water and that we are not over-watering; that is just as problematic as under-watering sportsgrounds.

It allows us to adapt the watering regime based on the type of turf that we have at the different sports fields, and that will change based on the activities that are undertaken on those sportsgrounds. It has been quite wide-ranging in its benefits to the team. The team have apps on which they can access all the sportsgrounds, so that they are able to see in real time those sportsgrounds and where they are up to, in terms of moisture content. It gives us a useful guide as to how we plan the activities of the team.

MR MILLIGAN: Is government mainly using potable water for watering of these sports fields or have you looked at other ways of obtaining water through grey water, bore water, water capture off roofs, tanks or other mechanisms? Using potable water can become expensive.

Ms Berry: Probably the biggest expense with the maintenance of our fields is the water.

Mr Fitzgerald: We have looked at opportunities for alternative water sources. The Inner North Reticulation Network services a number of our sports fields in the inner

north, which is based on a network of ponds between Flemington Road and Lyneham. That has been exceptionally useful for us as an alternative source. That also provides for water retention onsite. But it is fair to say that it is location specific. It is where the opportunity to tap into some of those non-potable water sources exists. We have looked at those options, but they are the minority of our sportsgrounds.

MR MILLIGAN: When the government builds new sporting precincts, districts and so forth, do you look at what will be the water source for that? Even the synthetic pitches and whatnot need water as well. Does the government look at alternatives apart from potable water—building dams or other water retention for these new sites?

Ms Berry: I do not think we have to date. I know we have used it in some of our education facilities. On sports fields, it would only supplement. It would not be able to take the whole load off. Our watering schedule changes, depending on the weather. In some years, when it is hot, we have to water more; in some years, when it is wet, we do not use a lot of water at all.

The water sensors have been a bit of a game changer in that space, and in making sure that we have efficient watering systems—that the sprinkler heads are pointing in the right direction and they are more modern. Those are the kinds of adjustments we have made. It will not reduce or release the cost, because it costs a lot of money to water all of that grass.

MR MILLIGAN: In terms of the maintenance, too, the government collects ground hire fees. As I understand it, that covers a very small portion of the overall cost of maintaining those sports fields. Do you know roughly what percentage ground hire fees actually cover, when it comes to the cost of maintenance of a field?

Ms Berry: About 14 per cent overall.

MR MILLIGAN: Fourteen per cent.

Ms Berry: Fourteen to 16 per cent, depending on rain.

THE CHAIR: With the sensors that you talked about, do they help inform whether you will close an oval over a weekend because it is too wet? Is that what gives you that data?

Mr Fitzgerald: It certainly assists in making that decision. We will still undertake a visual inspection before closures take place, because it is not until you see the actual surface of the sportsground that you will be able to make that determination.

THE CHAIR: How much notice is given to sporting groups that the oval will be closed?

Mr Fitzgerald: We try to give as much time as possible. Generally, it is the day before, and we will look at the weather forecast. Obviously, our approach to closing sportsgrounds is different, say, on a weekday compared to a weekend. We will preference closing down sports fields during week days to reduce the training load on the sportsgrounds. We will take a different approach to a weekend where, obviously,

match play is a lot more important to local clubs. But if the conditions are unsafe or it will cause unnecessary damage, we will still take that position to close the sportsgrounds.

Chair, I have an answer to an earlier question taken on notice, if that is useful.

THE CHAIR: That would be great.

Mr Fitzgerald: The capacity of the two grandstands at Gordon is 48 people each—a total of 96.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: They are installed?

Mr Fitzgerald: Yes.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested broadly in sports facilities and sportsground planning. Could you outline what data you use to make decisions about where new sportsgrounds will go? Is it based on usage rates of facilities around the area?

Ms Berry: What do you mean by “new”?

MISS NUTTALL: When you decide ultimately to establish new sportsgrounds, how do you make that decision? Is there a standard process where, if fields in the general vicinity reach a certain usage rate, you would expand? How does that work?

Ms Berry: I do not think we have developed new facilities that were not already existing facilities at some point. For new areas like Gungahlin and Stromlo, that is different. The land has been previously identified, as part of the development, and sports fields are brought on, once there is critical growth within the new suburb area and usage of those facilities would be appropriate.

MISS NUTTALL: I suppose the opportunities for infill, for sportsgrounds in existing areas, come down to whether you can reactivate dryland ovals?

Ms Berry: Also, the work that we did on the 32 dryland ovals was to understand what the position was, and we talked with our clubs as well. With a single-field sports field, whilst there might be some existing around the space for historic reasons, the best use for a club is at least a double sports field. I think that is all we have left, with the dryland ovals. There is no precinct like Harrison, for example, which has multiple fields. That is what we look at as well, in working with the clubs, as to what is there. If it is just a single, it is not much use to anyone. They would use it, but the better use is a double.

MISS NUTTALL: What are the utilisation rates? Is there a utilisation rate that starts to raise alarm bells, if it is consistently a case of, “We might need to look at where people could go, if not these ovals”?

Ms Berry: Yes. That is the work that we are doing in Tuggeranong, with Banks and Gordon, for example—trying to get some more usage out there. I know they are a bit out on the edge of Tuggeranong; that might be one of the reasons why they are less utilised than others. Nothing in Canberra is very far away, and people might not even

be thinking that they can use them, so it might just be a matter of communication with them.

MISS NUTTALL: I meant more on the high side of utilisation rates, if you are consistently reaching capacity.

Ms Berry: Yes. We then look at lighting. Across the city, we have increased lighting across all our fields so that they can be utilised at night, as well as during the day, and played on at night, as well as during the day. That has made a difference when it comes to the availability of the fields. It changes the maintenance program of fields that have a higher usage than others, and it provides some challenges.

Mr Fitzgerald: The other aspect is that we look at utilisation per field. Often, we find that, even in some of our bigger areas—say, Mawson—you will have both really high utilisation rates and really low utilisation rates. There is clearly a preference from clubs, whether that is the actual turf surface or other factors—proximity to change rooms and to other facilities—that are driving those decisions. We are looking to deploy, where possible, temporary facilities to try and bolster the use of some of those other grounds that may be less utilised, and that spreads the pressure on those grounds.

MISS NUTTALL: Are there any areas right now where you have a cluster of ovals with consistently high utilisation rates, where they have lighting installed, so they have high light hours, too, and they are kind of popping up against the top of their capacity? Are there any areas right now like that in the ACT?

Ms Berry: The answer to that question is that it fluctuates over the seasons. With the management of it, it moves with the sportsground use. If you ask clubs, they will tell you that every one of their fields is over-utilised, and that they need more space; and we recognise that. The availability of space in existing areas is challenging. With respect to how we manage those existing facilities, it is through lighting, maintenance, moving goalposts around, and things like that. That is how we manage the health of the field.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: The Gowrie cricket nets project is listed on the City Services website as undergoing planning and design. I want to confirm—because there are two ovals at Gowrie and both have cricket nets—which of the nets the project is relating to and what the timeline is. Presumably, the project will not be ready this summer, but is summer 2026-27 feasible?

Ms Clement: I would probably need to take that on notice, to clarify which of the cricket nets it is, and check the timeframe for that one.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Okay; thanks very much.

MS CARRICK: I was wondering about the Deakin ovals, along Adelaide Avenue. They are on what I guess would be the planning corridor for the southern gateway. Are they at risk of being densified?

Ms Berry: No.

Mr Fitzgerald: No.

MS CARRICK: Good. Is it the same for the ovals around the mint? There are the ovals around the mint, plus there is the area where the netball is; they are very busy.

Ms Berry: Yes.

MS CARRICK: They are not at risk?

Ms Berry: No.

MS CARRICK: Excellent; thank you.

Ms Clement: I have a point of clarification on the Waramanga lighting upgrade. There are two parts to that. One is complete and waiting for the Evoenergy connection. There is another area where we are undertaking that work at the moment, and it will be finished before the end of the year.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. If you have taken questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

On behalf of the committee, I thank everyone who has assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. I also thank broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If members have any further questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible, and no later than five business days from today. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 11.39 am