



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES**

**(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2005-2006)**

**Members:**

**MS K MACDONALD (The Chair)**  
**DR D FOSKEY (The Deputy Chair)**  
**MR R MULCAHY**  
**MS M PORTER**  
**MR Z SESELJA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY 24 MAY 2005**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Ms S Leyne (Ph: 6205 0490)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

**The committee met at 9.33 am.**

Appearances:

Mr S Corbell, Minister for Health and Minister for Planning

Planning and Land Authority

Mr Neil Savery, Chief Planning Executive

Ms Dorte Ekelund, Deputy Chief Planning Executive

Mr John Meyer, Director, Business and Information Services Branch

Mr Ian Sakkara, Manager, Corporate Resources

Land Development Agency

Ms Anne Skewes, Chief Executive Officer

Mr Gerry Ryan, Chief Finance Officer

ACTION Authority

Mr Peter Wallace, Chief Executive

Department of Urban Services

Mr Brian Quirke, Senior Manager, Finance and Administration

Ms Karen Greenland, General Manager, Road Transport

**THE CHAIR:** I will begin by reading the card that must be read. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal actions, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

Can each witness on coming to the table state their name and the capacity in which they appearing. Please clearly identify when you are taking a question on notice. It is then your responsibility to check the transcript and respond to the question. Responses to questions taken on notice are required within five full working days. The transcript will be emailed to the minister and the departmental contact officer for distribution to witnesses as soon as it is available. Proceedings are being broadcast to specified government offices and the media may be recording proceedings and taking visual footage. Can all witnesses and members please ensure that mobile phones are not used in this room.

We will follow the orders set out in the detailed daily program. As chair, I will try to ensure that we adhere to timeframes. Can I remind members and witnesses that we have limited time, so please refrain from entering into argument and debate. Maybe if you want to have an argument or a debate over the way to actually run the planning authority, the LDA or something like that, you can save it for morning tea or afternoon tea. Minister, welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Corbell:** Simon Corbell, Minister for Planning. Thank you, Madam Chair, and committee members for the opportunity to be here today to provide you with a brief overview on the initiatives that are affecting the planning portfolio. I will confine my comments immediately this morning to those that affect the ACTION Authority, given

that that is the first item this morning.

**THE CHAIR:** We are dealing with ACTION and public transport together this morning.

**MR SESELJA:** Public transport—not just ACTION Authority?

**THE CHAIR:** No. You have got public transport people here as well?

**Mr Corbell:** That is correct. The budget is a positive one for public transport. The government has committed over \$6 million new funding for a range of public transport initiatives in the portfolio areas of ACTION and that part of the Department of Urban Services that reports to me.

In particular, the government has made and continued its commitment to improving and modernising ACTION's bus fleet. In this respect \$4.84 million has been set aside for 11 new wheelchair accessible compressed natural gas buses to continue our bus fleet replacement program.

The modernisation of the ACTION fleet has been a hallmark achievement of this government. It has led to improved public perceptions of public transport in the ACT and has been very favourably received by those who use ACTION's services. It also means that we are creating a more modern fleet and a fleet that meets the territory's obligations in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act, which will require 25 per cent of the fleet to be accessible by the year 2007 to meet the standards under the Disability Discrimination Act. I am pleased to report to the committee that we are on track to meet those obligations.

Of course, there is a range of other initiatives in the budget that reflect the need to maintain a viable public transport system. Notable among these is \$1.7 million for an increase in the cost of diesel fuel, which ACTION simply must have to run its services and just over \$900,000 for increased maintenance costs of the ACTION fleet. Whilst we do have a significant renewal of the ACTION fleet under way—we will see by the end of this coming financial year 73 new vehicles purchased for the ACTION fleet—we will still have an increasing older fleet which will require a high level of maintenance to ensure that it stays on the road and provides the services that ACTION needs to deliver to the Canberra community.

I think the bottom line, of course, for all of us is to recognise that public transport is an important social good in that it provides accessibility to those members of the community who don't, can't or chose not to have other forms of transport. It is also a social good in that it helps reduce our city's reliance on the private motor vehicle and the impact that the private motor vehicle has on our natural environment through the emission of greenhouse gases.

The government's sustainable transport plan recognises the need to boost patronage in public transport, in ACTION, as part of meeting our obligations to become a more sustainable city. I am very pleased to advise members that the patronage figures for ACTION continue to show improvements in the overall use of public transport.

Members would be aware that the new flexibus service is now up and operating and I am

sure you have all seen the advertisements around that new innovative service. I am pleased to say that flexibus boardings in week one were 1,572 but by week four had grown to 2,036 or a 30 per cent increase. So people are taking up the service and responding very favourably to it. This is a innovative service. It is demand-responsive travel with the use of the telephone to book a bus service to get it as close possible to your door, if not at your door. It really is demonstrating ACTION's commitment to providing innovative public transport services.

Overall patronage to the year to date is 3.1 per cent higher than it was for the previous year. So patronage continues to grow and we are well above our sustainable transport plan targets through to April this year, with an additional 65,500 boardings in the year to date above the target figure. So ACTION really is providing, I believe, a strong level of service and one which Canberrans are responding to, and we are seeing more people catch ACTION services that ever before.

The other elements of the public transport policy area include funding for the area in the Department of Urban Services that is responsible for areas of public transport policy, and I would be very happy to answer questions in relation to that particular function. I should also advise members that there is one public transport initiative not in the areas that report to me but is in the planning authority, and that is the government's real-time information project. Six million dollars has been allocated to that. With your agreement, Madam Chair, it will be more appropriate for that be dealt with when the planning authority is present this afternoon. They have carriage of that particular project. But with that, I am very happy to answer this morning any questions in relation to ACTION or other areas of public transport policy.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you minister. I am happy to hear questions.

**MR MULCAHY:** I have got a couple of questions, chair. Are you happy to take ACTION, minister, but leave real time to later? Is that what I heard?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. Real-time information is a project that is under the auspices of the planning authority and officers will be available from the planning authority at a later stage to answer those questions.

**MR MULCAHY:** I have just a couple of questions on ACTION. Minister, do you have at your disposal, either on a daily or a weekly basis, the revenues and the recurrent costs for ACTION—what your weekly or daily intake of income is versus outgoings excluding capital costs and depreciation?

**Mr Corbell:** Not to hand, Mr Mulcahy, but I am sure that we can provide that figure.

**MR MULCAHY:** Is that something that can be reasonably provided? Just a minor matter, minister: where are we up to with the bike rack project that was part of your sustainable transport plan that was due to be brought in, I think, last year?

**Mr Corbell:** That project is ongoing and I understand will be up and running by around the middle of this year. I might ask Mr Wallace or Ms Greenland to provide a bit of an update on where that is at.

**Ms Greenland:** My name is Karen Greenland, and I am General Manager, Road Transport, Department of Urban Services. The bike rack project: we are in the process of finalising a contract with the supplier. The supplier of the racks will be a US supplier. We expect a contract to be signed probably within the week. We are anticipating that the delivery of the racks will be within about 28 days—that is what has been advised by the supplier. So we should take delivery of the racks next month and then, with ACTION, we will be working on getting those racks fitted and putting the appropriate training in place. So we are looking still at a mid-2005 roll out of the racks.

**DR FOSKEY:** I have got a supplementary to that, Mr Mulcahy, if that is okay?

**MR MULCAHY:** Yes. I have only got one other.

**DR FOSKEY:** Are there any other options being considered? I guess these racks will be on the front of buses.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes they will.

**Ms Greenland:** Yes that is right.

**DR FOSKEY:** For instance, bikes going inside if some seats were removed or going on the back. I am just interested in knowing whether you have considered some other options as well as trialling these front-end ones.

**Mr Corbell:** I am certainly aware that other countries provide for bicycles in a range of ways on their public transport fleet. In both Europe and the UK some public transport providers do permit bicycles within the bus or the tram, the light rail vehicle. That does involve more extensive modification of the vehicle. As you highlight, Dr Foskey, it can involve the removal of a seat or a series of seats. Also, traditionally, particularly in buses in the United States as I understand it, the bikes can actually be hung up on a hook, if you like, inside the bus.

The government considered when it announced the bike racks on buses initiative in the last budget—not the budget currently under consideration but the previous one—that bicycles on the front of buses were more appropriate. We were uncomfortable, as a matter of policy, in permitting bicycles within the bus because of the potential inconvenience it may cause for other passengers and that it was more appropriate to have the bicycle accommodated on the outside of the bus.

We also drew on the experience of the only other jurisdiction in Australia that has accommodated bicycles on its bus fleet, which is Brisbane City Council and the Brisbane bus service there. They have also used the fold-down rack on the front of their buses. So we are drawing on that experience and believe that it was the most appropriate methodology to trial.

**MR MULCAHY:** Minister, I have just a broader question about the direction of the bus services in Canberra. You mentioned a growth in numbers. You mentioned the real-time growth project and also broad increased numbers. Would you be able to provide to us—I would not image you would have it at your fingertips—in percentage terms what your projected growth is in the number of people in Canberra using public transport over the

next three years? I am not sure if you have that to hand.

There is a related part to that question. The second part, minister, of the question is: does your government have plans to drive passenger numbers through tax policies in relation to motor vehicles? Is that something that you have been considering to increase the numbers of people using the bus services? Do you understand where I am coming from? Have you got the message?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I think you will need to elaborate on that.

**MR MULCAHY:** Well, there has been a pattern in a lot of different jurisdictions where they have applied greater taxes and charges to private vehicle transport in order to drive more people onto the bus services. I am wondering if that is one of the options you have explored to try and improve the utilisation? I am not advocating it but I am just wondering if it is one of the options you are looking at to improve utilisation of the bus services.

**Mr Corbell:** On your second questions first: the sustainable transport plan sets out the government's broad policy framework for how to create more sustainable patterns of transport choice within the territory. And it certainly does signal that in the long term these are options that could be considered by a government—charging policies, whether they are in relation to parking, whether they are in relation to registration charges, are recognised as a policy tool to influence choices people make.

We have at this stage only chosen to influence by charging primarily through pay parking policies to encourage people to understand the full costs of their transport choices. The issue of motor vehicle registration charges is not one that I am directly responsible for. It is reflected in general terms that it is an option open to government. But the government has made no decision on whether or not that should be pursued and it is certainly not on the government's agenda at this time, although it is acknowledged that it is a potential policy tool down the track.

In relation to our patronage figures, the government's target is to get nine per cent of all journeys to work by public transport by 2011, and that is outlined in the sustainable transport plan. The overall target is 16 per cent of all journeys to work by public transport by 2021. That is the long-term goal for public transport. The medium-term goal is nine per cent by 2011. Currently we are at 7.6 per cent of all journeys to work by public transport. So we are working towards nine per cent by 2011.

Our patronage growth in the past couple of years has been significant and we are certainly on track at this stage, if the current level of growth is sustained, to meet that target. We do not measure by number of people. The way we measure is by number of boardings, so if the overall number of boardings goes up that is a good indicator for us. But we can't actually identify individuals and say how many of these individuals have caught the bus. It is the number of boardings because we don't identify individuals obviously.

**MR MULCAHY:** Excluding school-aged and, I guess, recreational customers of your service, is there a particular reason why you just focus on those to and from work or is it just accepted that that is a reasonable indicator?

**Mr Corbell:** Journey to work is adult journeys, and it is essentially the discretionary journey. That is where we want to influence change.

**MR MULCAHY:** Competing with a car—motor vehicle competitors.

**Mr Corbell:** Obviously school children do not have a choice a lot of the time. They catch the bus to school and in many respects they are recognised as a captive market. So we are not including them in our figures. Our figures and our targets are focused on that discretionary journey to work by adults whom we assume have a number of options open to them—car, taxi, bus, cycling, walking; they have got a choice as to how they get to work.

**DR FOSKEY:** Can I ask a very good supplementary?

**Mr Corbell:** Can I just also correct a figure. I stated that growth for flexibus had been up to 2,036 by week 4 or 5. I am advised it is actually 1,977. So that is just a slight error in that figure.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, I wanted just a little bit more clarification about the adult patronage that you were talking about. You gave us some figures just now about the percentage increase. How much of that is this adult patronage that you are aiming to get or is that total adult patronage?

**Mr Corbell:** The figures I am referring to, Ms Porter, are all adult patronage.

**MS PORTER:** It is the total adult patronage.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. So when I talk about growth in patronage I talk about it in the context of adult patronage unless I say otherwise because, as I have just said to Mr Mulcahy, that is where we want to capture more people using public transport, convince more people to use public transport. People who don't have a car have no choice really. They are going to use bus, share a car with someone else, get a cab, walk or cycle. But if we want to become a more sustainable city it means convincing people to make the choice of not using their car and using public transport. So we focus very much on that adult full-fare paying passenger.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, I was wondering if you could give us some further detail on the sustainable transport plan. Obviously, that is one part of the platform. What about other parts of the platform?

**Mr Corbell:** Some major other initiatives are under way, Ms Porter, which the government has funded in both this budget and in previous budgets. The objective is to grow the level of patronage—as I have said, nine per cent by 2011 of all journeys to work by public transport; 16 per cent of all journeys to work by public transport by 2021.

These are ambitious targets, they are tough targets, especially in a city like Canberra, which is designed and built to favour motor vehicle use. We don't have the levels of density or the levels of congestion that would assist us in convincing people to use public transport which other cities have; so we have to focus on the reliability of service, the

frequency of service, the quality of the journey—that is why new buses are important—and also the timeliness or the period of time it takes to undertake a journey. So all of the government strategies are focused on this.

In terms of flexibility, that is why bike racks are important because putting bike racks onto buses will appeal to a segment of the public transport market. It won't be a huge segment of the public transport market but it will appeal to a segment, especially those people who feel they can cycle to their local interchange and then get on the inter-town for the longer journey into Civic, into the town centre that they are going to. So that is about flexibility. The same with flexibus. That is what that's all about—it is about providing more flexible choices after hours rather than just relying on fixed routes.

In terms of frequency of service, the government's Xpresso services have made a real difference in growing patronage, and we are seeing a lot of our growth during the commuting hours in the morning and the afternoon through the Xpresso services. So those higher frequency direct services from the suburbs to places where people work without needing to go through the interchanges is where we are growing our patronage, our adult passenger numbers.

Equally, the quality of the journey. We have now put with the new network all of our green buses, our new green buses, onto those inter-town routes. So you know you are going to be ending up in the city or the town centre if you are on a green bus. Again, that is rewarding people for making the choice to use public transport. You are getting on a nice new bus, comfortable bus, heated or airconditioned, low floor, wheelchair accessible, it's a comfortable ride, it's a high quality ride and it's attractive to people to use that service.

The government is also focusing, of course, on issues to do with the reliability of the service and that is where real-time information comes in. Removing perceptions of the unreliability of a bus service can be achieved through real-time information. If you know when the bus is going to be there, how far away it is, you don't show up at the bus stop and think, "Oh, have I just missed it? Was I early? Was it late? Was it early?" Those sorts of question marks are resolved with real-time information, and that has been shown in other cities to have a real positive impact on increasing patronage and that is why that initiative is so important.

And finally, the busways projects between Gungahlin and the city and Belconnen and the city are designed to address the issues around time. Faster journeys to work from those outer lying areas into the city centre and the parliamentary triangle are also important. We have to make the bus competitive with the motor vehicle in terms of time, and that is why the busways projects are important.

There is \$3 million in this year's capital works budget to continue the work on Belconnen to city. The first stage of Gungahlin to city will be built this financial year along Flemington Road and that contract is well advanced. So all of these are really the suite of measures the government is bringing in to ensure that we are able to implement our sustainable transport plan.

**MR SESELJA:** I refer to the busways. I know that there was a figure quoted between 85 and 150 for the Belconnen to Civic. Are you able to confirm for us the total projected



cost at this point—as good as possible at this point—for all of the busways. Can you tell us exactly how many there will be, their total cost and whether that is in today's figures or whether they are projected figures for when it is expected that they will be built.

**Mr Corbell:** I can answer some of that detail this morning, Mr Seselja. With your agreement, though, it may be that if you want to have more detailed discussion we do that when the planning authority witnesses are present because they have responsibility for that project and the relevant officers would be here then.

But in general, the government has committed to two projects. The first is Gungahlin to the city and the other is Belconnen to the city. Ultimately the sustainable transport plan identifies the need for high-speed right-of-way transit, a busway between all the town centres connecting all the town centres and the city centre.

At this stage the government has chosen Gungahlin and Belconnen corridors as the two that should be worked on first. As I have indicated, the Gungahlin project is well advanced with stage 1 along Flemington Road and just under \$1 million will be spent along Flemington Road in stage 1 this financial year.

**MR SESELJA:** That is the stage 1 high occupancy vehicles—the \$900,000 figure?

**Mr Corbell:** That is correct. Yes.

**MR SESELJA:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr Corbell:** That is under way this financial year. The Belconnen project—\$6 million over two years to do the feasibility, forward design and detail design for the Belconnen to city busway. We are about to commence the second year of activity. Work on that project is well advanced. Contracts have been let for a preliminary assessment, as required under the land act, prior to the development application for the development of that project. Detailed engineering studies have been completed and are also ongoing, as is discussion and negotiation in terms of land access with the institutions along the route, in particular the ANU, CSIRO, Calvary Public Hospital, Canberra Stadium and Radford College.

In terms of the final capital cost of the project, that will be able to be determined once we have finalised the preliminary assessment and other feasibility work that is under way. So, at this stage we only have a parameter for the project and that is why, as you previously indicated, further work is needed to be done through the feasibility process before we can confirm an exact figure and how that will be financed.

**MR SESELJA:** You say it is just at a parameter stage, so those figures were just announced in Belconnen. Are there similar parameters or is there an estimated figure for the Gungahlin project?

**Mr Corbell:** Again, the key issue with Gungahlin to city will be how to manage the Northbourne Avenue corridor, and that is the reason that Gungahlin was identified as the second project or second cab off the rank. Even though it will have some improvements done up front along Flemington Road, which is relatively easy to resolve, the work along Northbourne Avenue is not in any way as easy. I think members just have to reflect on

a number of intersections along that road and the busyness of that road to understand that it will require some fairly detailed resolution.

On top of that, the National Capital Authority has planning control over that corridor. It is an approach route of national significance and they have a very important say as well. So we are in ongoing negotiations with the NCA around how that can be best addressed and once that work is resolved we will be in a better position to outline what the preferred approach is for Northbourne Avenue.

**MR SESELJA:** This might be getting into planning but just a quick follow on from that. Has the NCA expressed a view in terms of the use of that median strip down Northbourne Avenue for busways? Has there been any initial view, or has nothing clear come from the NCA at this point?

**Mr Corbell:** There is no formal view from the NCA, although I think they are cautious about the use of the median strip.

**DR FOSKEY:** First of all, I would like clarified the kinds of things I can ask questions about. I gather that cycles and pathways come under Urban Services?

**Mr Corbell:** You can certainly ask those of me.

**DR FOSKEY:** Okay.

**Mr Corbell:** To some degree.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of how it fits in with sustainable transport.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** And the Belconnen busway—you can answer some but not perhaps—

**Mr Corbell:** I am happy to answer any questions on the busway but I am just saying it may be easier when the planning authority is present because they have the officers involved in that project.

**DR FOSKEY:** I will wait until they come.

**Mr Corbell:** I am responsible for that project.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes, possibly you can answer some of the question I have got.

**Mr Corbell:** I will give it a shot.

**DR FOSKEY:** I will start with the busway, seeing we were there before. I was just wondering if the consultation on the proposed Belconnen busway will look at all the possible routes and consider using the existing roadway, Belconnen Way, with the option of turning one lane into a dedicated busway or instituting some of those mechanisms of

tripping off lights and other ways of giving priority to buses.

**Mr Corbell:** The answer to that is yes. The contract that has been entered into or the tender that has been issued to Purdon Associates and—I forget their name—an engineering firm to do the preliminary assessment will look at all of the options for the route. In particular, the area of interest I know is the route as it comes to the area around the Bruce Ridge, Calvary Hospital location. It will be looking at the costs and benefits of using existing alignments along with creating new alignments. So the answer to that is yes, and there will be a range of options presented to government through that work.

**DR FOSKEY:** Will an increase in frequency of service be a key factor in making your decision as well as decreases in trip time?

**Mr Corbell:** In terms of the route the key factor is trip time. The frequency of service is not unrelated but its not directly associated with the decision on the alignment. The alignment is fundamentally about journey time and the costs and benefits of the possible alignments. For example, there are some benefits in having as direct an alignment as possible between Belconnen and the city. That has to be weighed against the costs of potentially traversing areas of Canberra Nature Park adjacent to Calvary Public Hospital and Canberra Stadium. So these are the issues that the preliminary assessment is designed to address. They will certainly look at the utilisation of the existing infrastructure. Regardless of the alignment chosen, we do anticipate that priority measures at existing road intersections, traffic light intersections, will be part of this project. But to what degree are intersections bypassed and to what degree are existing intersections upgraded with priority will be work that is undertaken as part of this preliminary assessment investigation.

**DR FOSKEY:** Forgive me if I didn't hear this, but when did you say that preliminary assessment should be completed?

**Mr Corbell:** We anticipated it would be completed towards the end of this calendar year.

**DR FOSKEY:** That is December-ish, November?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Going back to the bikeways and so on, I am wondering why only \$1.2 million of the election promise to spend \$2.2 million in 2005-06 to improve bikeways and walkways has been delivered. Were previous promises of funding fully spent?

**Mr Corbell:** Are you referring to the current financial year or to the coming financial year?

**DR FOSKEY:** Of the \$2.2 million, which was the election promise, the current budget has \$1.2 million.

**Mr Corbell:** The government made a commitment to seek to ensure that \$2 million was provided. We did not say absolutely \$2 million will be provided. We said we would aim to try to deliver \$2 million. We have not been able to achieve that. We have instead

delivered \$1.2 million.

**DR FOSKEY:** In terms of the maintenance of shared paths, the government committed to providing \$4 million over three years, but the budget suggests that only \$2 million will be provided over three years. I am not quite sure about the different sums of money here, but in each case there seems to be a shortfall.

**Mr Corbell:** Maintenance of shared paths is primarily the responsibility of my colleague Mr Hargreaves as Minister for Urban Services. Those questions would be best directed to him. However, I would say in general that the government is working within a tight budget environment across the board. The provision of capital funding, as much as the provision of recurrent funding, has had to be considered within that framework.

**DR FOSKEY:** I want to make a point here about the cycleways on roads and the off-road bike paths. Whilst I commend assisting people to cycle on roads, I would really implore the government to continue to maintain the off-road cycleways. I have concerns that, because you are putting money into cycleways on roads, we will see a neglect of that other system, but the kinds of people who could be encouraged to ride to work and so on—the recreational riders, people like me—are just not quite game enough to get on the roads at those times but feel that it is safe to ride their bikes on the off-road bike network, which is a thing that has made Canberra very special. Lots of other cities are catching up to that now.

**Mr Corbell:** I agree, Dr Foskey. The government's policy is to provide as broad a range of choice as possible. There are cyclists who prefer to use on-road facilities because they consider them the most direct route in many circumstances and I think it is entirely appropriate that we provide dedicated lanes on main thoroughfares to give them the assurance that they have a piece of road that they can use safely to take the most direct journey.

At the same time, though, it is important to maintain the off-road network or the recreational path or shared path network. The government has committed funding to do that. The on-road network in many instances is facilitated when it comes to the re-marking of lines on existing carriageways. As members would know, many of Canberra's carriageways are exceedingly wide, well above national averages, and it is quite feasible when it comes to re-marking those lanes to add another metre or so as a separate lane for cyclists.

That is the main way that we are facilitating on-road cycling, with the exception of some projects, such as Northbourne Avenue through to Woden. The Downer to Woden link is a different example of that which required infrastructure development, not just line marking, to create. We are spending money also on off-road cycle lanes, on off-road tracks. I am probably in the same category as you, Dr Foskey. When I choose to cycle to work I prefer to use the off-road lane simply because I feel more comfortable with that, but there are other cyclists who are quite happy to ride on the on-road lanes and we make provision for them also.

**MR MULCAHY:** I have a supplementary question on this issue. Minister, I have heard it said that this all being built according to Australian standards, but my concern relates to what many observe, that is, when cars are exiting at a point where they arrive at the

exit at the same time as a cyclist it is necessary to brake and, of course, motorists following are travelling along in the expectation that the people in front will be going at a certain speed—they should not, but that is what happens—and I have seen a number of near misses. Is there a model that you have looked at anywhere in the world where the experiment that is reflected in the design that we have here has been successfully implemented? I have not seen it anywhere and I am just wondering if there is a guiding model, or are we carving out a new frontier here in terms of this experiment?

**Mr Corbell:** I think the technical specifications are best directed to urban services, because they are responsible for delivering the projects; but I would say that, as I understand it, we deliver these in accordance with the Australian standard which is agreed to by all transport ministers ultimately through their ministerial council and the various arrangements that support that council. Increasingly, you will see on-road cycle lanes in other Australian capital cities. If you go to another Australian capital city you will see infrastructure similar to the types of infrastructure that we are providing here. Particularly notable are Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, which provide facilities quite similar to our own and pretty much as extensive as our own. Overseas, there are all sorts of models. Certainly, in many European countries the provision of dedicated on-road cycleways is quite common.

**MR MULCAHY:** With a barrier, normally.

**Mr Corbell:** Sometimes they have a barrier, sometimes they have a little median strip, others do not; so it does vary. I think the important thing is that what we deliver is consistent with the Australian standard. I think it is as much a cultural thing as anything, especially in Canberra. In Canberra, we are very used to flying around all over the place on great roads, wide roads, and not having to worry about stopping or slowing down for anything. That is something that is going to change in Canberra over time.

First of all, we will see increased levels of congestion. Even if we meet our targets under the sustainable transport plan, we will still see increased levels of congestion on key arterial roads around the city. An increased level of congestion is a consequence of a growing city, of a developing city. We want to minimise congestion, but congestion is part of the overall mix. Motorists will, over time, get used to increased levels of congestion. At the same time motorists, I think, will come to adapt to understanding that cyclists are legitimate road users.

I think that is the bottom line: cyclists are legitimate road users. Roads are just that: they are public roads; they are not just car roads, even though the car is the dominant vehicle or use on our roads. The provision of cycle lanes allows for motorists and cyclists to cohabit public roads in as safe a manner as possible. The cycle lane itself and the infrastructure around it can provide a level of safety but at the end of the day, when you are sharing a public road with another person on a different transport mode, you need to take it into account. It is as much education and familiarisation as it is providing the physical barrier and safety that you can.

**MR MULCAHY:** I understand the noble objective. My concern is that we really are more akin to an American city in terms of our freeway system than a European city and, whilst that cultural objective may be desirable to be achieved, my concern is about the loss of life or injury whilst we get to that point and that is the bit that troubles me about

the open system.

**Mr Corbell:** We could talk about this at length, but I think the government's position is clear. We believe it is appropriate to permit cyclists to use our public road, our arterial roads, as a choice for commuting and it will take time for people to adapt to that, but I think Canberrans have adapted very well to that. There is always a bit of angst around it, but what we are doing is certainly not revolutionary; it is increasingly common.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, I think that this is an area that needs to be discussed with Mr Hargreaves in his capacity as Minister for Urban Services rather than with you, although it does fit in with sustainable transport. Whilst I am supportive of on-road cycle paths, I was perturbed a few weeks ago when driving home to see a cyclist on the white line dividing the road and the on-road cycle path and coming across into the lane that was actually reserved for cars. This is an issue I would like to take up with Mr Hargreaves. I agree that motorists need to work out that cyclists are legitimate road users as well, but—

**Mr Corbell:** Cyclists are no more or no less responsible than motorists. You have good drivers and bad drivers. You have good cyclists and bad cyclists.

**THE CHAIR:** That is exactly right. I would like to take it up with Mr Hargreaves in terms of having a pamphlet or something else that could deal with that issue.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes, I think that we may need to talk a bit more about that.

**MR PRATT:** Chair, am I able to ask a supplementary question at this point?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. I would like to move on. I do not want to stop discussion on the issue, but I do not want it to go on for too long, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** I have just one question and then I shall bend to your wishes so that we can move on and concentrate on raising most of my queries with Minister Hargreaves. Minister, in terms of your planning responsibilities and your experiences with the road cycle lanes program, can you confirm whether the one vulnerable point that I think exists in this otherwise quite laudable system—that is, the green lanes straddling exit ramps for cars—is a model that is repeated around Australia? Is that a fairly standard model or are we breaking new ground or, as Mr Mulcahy was saying, breaking into a new frontier?

**Mr Corbell:** I think it's probably best if you confirm it with Minister Hargreaves, but, as I understand it, the use of the green designation for cycleways is consistent with the national standard, which is that cycleways are designated green, particularly where they overlap with other lanes. It is the same with busways. Busways are red under the national standard. When we start building our busways, particularly at the entry and exist points where the busways merge out of the common public road into the dedicated right of way, you will almost certainly see the red designation so that people are clear as to who is meant to use that laneway. So, as far as I am aware, it is consistent with national standards, but you would need to ask Mr Hargreaves about the details.

**MR SESELJA:** I don't think the question was actually in relation to whether it was in accordance with national standards; it was whether the exit ramps priority for cyclists has

been done anywhere else in Australia.

**Mr Corbell:** It's difficult for me to answer that question. The only reason for that is that Canberra's road system is somewhat different from other road systems in that we do have these fairly high speed arterials close to city areas and the great big on and off spaghetti ramps or spaghetti junctions that you don't often see in the same configuration—they certainly exist but not in the same configuration—in other cities. I am aware that these lanes exist on large, high-volume roads in other cities and they do exist in places where traffic has to merge or go on and off the road onto another road. So the use of these sorts of lanes is not unusual in that respect.

**DR FOSKEY:** Can I ask some more questions about ACTION?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. It would be good to move on. I am happy to deal with this area when we have Minister Hargreaves before us.

**DR FOSKEY:** I notice that one of the accountability indicators on page 234 is the timeliness of ACTION services, which is important. It is especially important because, if you don't have many bus services and you have to walk to a bus stop, you want to make sure that you do not miss a bus because the next one is going to be at least half an hour. Have you given thought to the frequency of services, using that as an indicator, because studies show that this is often a more important factor for people making the shift to buses than timeliness and the length of the trip time. I really think that the length of the trip time is not nearly as important as both timeliness and frequency. It seems to be the emphasis with buses to reduce the trip time by a few minutes. I digressed there. What do you have to say about frequency as an accountability indicator?

**Mr Corbell:** The government did a very extensive study in its last term. I forget what it was called and cannot give you the exact title, but the government did a very extensive investigation of what were the issues that affected people's choice to use public transport or not. Overwhelmingly, the majority position was that it was the journey time of the service. That's why the busways were identified as an important measure. Overwhelmingly, the figures showed that, if you could provide a journey time that was comparable or at least competitive with the motor vehicle, that was really going to influence people's choices.

Yes, the frequency of service was also a significant factor. Frequency of service and the journey time were very significant. The price, as long as it wasn't exorbitant, was not a big factor. That put to bed the furphy that if you provide free public transport everyone will catch it; it's just not going to happen. But the length of journey, in terms of how long it took, and the frequency of journey were very important. That's why the busway is an important project in that regard. We have the data, we have the investigations, to back up the policy decisions we are taking here. We have a well-informed policy base, based on research.

**DR FOSKEY:** I am interested in seeing the report.

**Mr Corbell:** The report is publicly available and I'm happy to arrange a briefing for you on it, if that would assist. I will ask Mr Wallace, if you like, to give you a bit of information on the frequency of services to try to indicate what we are doing around

frequencies.

**Mr Wallace:** Frequency obviously is important, and we are concentrating on that. But the travel time has been identified as a major factor. Our current intertown network operates every five to seven minutes from about 7 o'clock in the morning until about 8 o'clock at night and, when that goes down, about 20 minutes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Is that from Woden to Civic and Belconnen to Civic?

**Mr Wallace:** Because they are interlinked, they will run from Banks in the south through to Spence and Fraser west in the north. Those feeder services come through the suburbs of both ends of town and then link into a service every five to seven minutes during the day. They are well used, obviously, in the peaks and they are supplemented, where necessary, during the peaks with the Xpresso services, et cetera. But the travel time has been the main factor that people come to us about. Off-peak, in most cases, we have gone to 90 minutes, but the new flexibus system reduced that to an hourly frequency. So we are seeing, as the minister quoted, some figures of growth in the evening use of services.

One of the major factors in putting in the flexibus service was to support our daytime patronage. If an adult worker is looking to go to work in the morning and knows that they are going to be working late that night, if they are comforted to know that they will be able to get home on a bus after hours, they are more likely to take a bus in the morning as well. It's all about supplementary policies and initiatives to encourage that growth, to meet the target put down in the sustainable transport plan. Frequency is obviously important but frequency costs money and we are managing the services that we provide within the available funds.

This year, we received funding to do the Xpresso services and we've also done the flexibus network. Next year, network 06, our primary target for our new network will be straightening out a lot of the runs, particularly in the peaks, so that people have more competitive travel times to get to work. That will be a major focus of next year's network. We bit off quite a bit to chew this year and chewed like hell and it's been very successful. We're hoping to have the same success next year.

**Mr Corbell:** I guess the issue in terms of frequency is that that is what the Xpresso services are about—greater frequencies at peak times when people are taking the journey to work and from work—because that's the target. If you want to grow patronage, the place to grow the patronage is overwhelmingly in the journeys to and from work, an increasing frequency during those hours, and that is what the Xpresso initiative in the current year is designed to achieve. There is an extra \$1.3 million to increase frequency during the peak times.

**DR FOSKEY:** Is the travel smart program to be talked about here or later?

**Mr Corbell:** Under the planning authority.

**DR FOSKEY:** I refer now to the increased funding for bus maintenance, \$923,000, on page 225. Could you give us some more details on that? It is mentioned that the additional maintenance relates primarily to engine transmission and differential rebuilds



on older buses. Is that just maintenance or improving them in some way?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Mr Wallace to answer that.

**Mr Wallace:** We had a bit of a hiatus, I suppose, between the purchase of new buses. The last new bus was purchased in 1997 until the recent program of bus purchasing and acquisition. Associated with that was a decision to move from replacing buses at 12 or 13 years of age to 20 years of age. That enables us to have a steady program of bus replacement of about 20 a year so that we don't have peaks in our requirements. In the past it has been feast or famine; we replaced 60 or 70 buses in one year and then none for a couple of years. It smoothes that out, but in moving from having buses for 12 years to 20 years we have an increase in the cost of maintenance. We are doing more engine rebuilds as a result of that. There is a cost benefit, obviously, in replacing buses at \$400,000 each and maintaining them for an extra \$900,000. We are in front in the budget stakes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Do you have your own workshops?

**Mr Wallace:** We have our own workshops in Tuggeranong and Belconnen, very well equipped workshops and the envy of a lot of my colleagues. The reason behind keeping our buses longer is that when we were selling them other bus operators would buy them and operate them for many years after us. It just seemed to be more economic for us, the government and the people of Canberra to keep those buses longer. The consequence is a minor increase in the maintenance expenses. You will note that it is only for one year. That is as a consequence of the funding agreement that we are negotiating with the Treasury department, so any future requirements should be incorporated into that.

**DR FOSKEY:** Finally, did you have any comments on the new sustainability indicators or how they work for you, being the indicators that you would use just to test the progress of satisfaction with public transport? As these indicators are something new, there is an opportunity to look at them and see if next year we might look for different indicators.

**Mr Wallace:** We have been involved in the development of our indicators and the performance output measures, and we are obviously looking to make them more relevant to the sustainable transport plan, triple bottom line strategies, et cetera. We are heavily involved in that. Counting boardings is important because it measures the number of people that use us, but there are other measures of satisfaction, et cetera, that we need, obviously, to be mindful of.

**Mr Corbell:** The key measures for ACTION are all about sustainability because, as members would appreciate, it's about growing patronage and reducing private motor vehicle usage. ACTION is all about getting people to leave their cars at home for at least some of their journeys and to consider using the bus instead. I think ACTION has got a pretty simple sustainability measure in one regard, that is, if its boardings continue to increase, it is doing the right thing. I appreciate that it is a somewhat more complex question than that and I think that the accountability indicators try to take that into account.

It has just been pointed out to me, Dr Foskey, that if you look at output 2.2 on page

234 you will see a new measure concerning the percentage of the fleet which meets the Euro 3 emission standard. That is the highest possible standard for emissions and that is obviously an important way of measuring how the ACTION fleet contributes to air quality in Canberra.

**DR FOSKEY:** So that each time you buy a new bus you increase the percentage because that is one of the criteria?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, I want to ask you a question about the new buses. Is it the plan to replace the whole fleet with those types of buses over time?

**Mr Corbell:** The key requirement is to make sure that the fleet is 100 per cent accessible to meet the new accessibility standards by 2022. That is the key priority, otherwise we would not be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. We have combined the issue around accessibility with the sustainability of the fleet, as well as passenger comfort; so we will certainly want to maintain the fleet at a high quality in terms of its being an airconditioned fleet and at an accessible standard. In terms of fuels, at this stage the use of CNG is preferred. It is a cleaner fuel to use and it is a cheaper fuel than diesel at the moment as well. Obviously, other fuels, other technologies, could become more viable or available and we will certainly look at those over time as well.

**THE CHAIR:** I refer to page 169 of budget paper 3 page and the bus replacement program with regard to complying with the Disability Discrimination Act 1997. Minister, you are purchasing 11 replacement buses, which is great. I have heard, however, that there is an issue with some of the buses with access for the disabled in terms of the training of drivers in how to use them and that there is also an issue in terms of having to wait for people in wheelchairs to get on and off.

**Mr Wallace:** There is no particular issue with training. The new feature for gaining access for wheelchairs is a flip-out ramp. It is fairly light and very strong. It is rated to over 300 kilograms to meet the standard. There is a minor issue with our older accessible buses in that the ramps are rated to a lower weight, but we are in the process of upgrading those. There is no particular issue regarding accessibility factors on the buses.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there an issue about some drivers not wanting to take the buses with the ramps?

**Mr Wallace:** Not that I'm aware of.

**THE CHAIR:** It was something that was mentioned to me last year. It was hearsay and innuendo.

**Mr Wallace:** One person who may not enjoy doing it. Drivers pick their shifts. The vehicle used on that shift is identified on the shift card and, with the changes that we have made with the new network, all of the intertowns have the green buses. They're the ones with the flip-out ramps. If they choose that shift, they have that bus.

**Mr Corbell:** Certainly the drivers I've spoken to who are driving the new vehicles love

them. They are very comfortable, easy buses to drive, and they get a lot of good feedback from their passengers, which is nice. Maybe for the first couple of weeks drivers were a little bit unsure about the new buses, but that is to be expected. By the end of this year we will have 70-odd of these vehicles, both the IRIS bus and the Scania bus. The Scantias are the CNG ones and the IRIS are the other green ones, Euro standard diesel, and there are 20 of those. They are all in the same livery. They're starting to become a significant part of the fleet now and drivers are getting very used to them.

**THE CHAIR:** What's the proportion of wheelchair-accessible buses out of the entire fleet?

**Mr Wallace:** We're just on about 25 per cent. The question mark over those older ones has bumped it down a bit, but once they are upgraded they will be back up to the level what we require.

**Mr Corbell:** I should clarify that. Some buses were purchased in the mid-1990s when the standard was different and they now have to be modified to meet the new standard.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, I take you back to BP4 at page 507 and your earlier comments about replacing the ageing bus fleet. One of the comments there is about progressing the implementation of safety management measures. What measures have already been implemented and what safety management measures are yet to be implemented?

**Mr Corbell:** Previous measures have involved door safety for rear doors. A couple of budgets ago, we completed a door safety project that ensured that people could not be inadvertently trapped in rear doors when they were closed. A new sensor-type device was put in to prevent entrapment and to stop a bus moving away with someone trapped in the door. That has been completed. The safety measures alluded to in the budget papers are around security cameras in buses. All new buses that we purchase now have a surveillance camera in them for the safety of both drivers and passengers.

**MR PRATT:** Will you be looking at applying those sorts of safety measure to the older part of the fleet?

**Mr Corbell:** The government, at this stage, hasn't done that, but it is certainly on the table for consideration in future budgets.

**MR PRATT:** Particularly the security camera safety measures.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, security cameras in them. We are able with the bus fleet replacement program at very minimal extra cost to have the new buses that we purchase installed with a camera. The issue is to what extent we can afford to retrofit the existing fleet. That's not something the government has been able to find the resources to do this coming financial year, but we will consider it in future years.

**MR PRATT:** What about buses employed in a school bus role? What sorts of measures are you applying there? Is there another set of measures, given that schoolchildren are another challenge when it comes to bus safety?

**Mr Corbell:** I am advised that we use the standard vehicles that are available for the rest

of ACTION's operations, so there is no difference in terms of the vehicles. If there are particular issues on school runs, drivers are able to request the assistance of transport officers to assist with the management of students onto and off buses and any behavioural problems that may come up.

**MR MULCAHY:** The issue of crowding on those buses must raise safety issues. I understand that one of the problems with school buses is that they have large numbers of people standing. In the event of sudden stops, that must be a greater risk to passengers. Is that a concern of yours?

**Mr Corbell:** Buses are licensed to carry a certain number of people standing, so it is permitted, and drivers have an obligation to ensure that they do not exceed their licensed carrying capacity, both seated and standing.

**MR PRATT:** What about the case where you may have smaller children without a seat? Under existing specifications for buses picking up school kids, are they able to hang onto something or is that an issue that you might want to look at for improving the safety standards for younger children who can't quite reach the overhead bars?

**Mr Corbell:** It is not just overhead bars; there are also the vertical as well as the horizontal bars, as well as handles, and the backs of all the seats also have a handle on them. There is a wide variety of holding points in a bus. This is an issue that ACTION treats very seriously. ACTION's drivers are very conscious of the need to ensure that children, especially younger children, are adequately managed and that proper and due concern is given for their safety whilst they are on the buses.

Where issues arise around behaviour or concerns from the school or parents about the number of children on a bus, they are discussed with the school and with individual parents. If necessary, additional services are provided or schools are advised of the range of options that are open to them in terms of other services to meet the journey needs of the children. These things are treated very seriously and are overwhelmingly resolved through discussion with the school and parents, but ACTION does not permit overcrowding of its buses. It is not allowed to. We do not cram people onto buses. Buses have a licensed carrying capacity and drivers are required to ensure that they do not exceed the licensed carrying capacity.

**MR SESELJA:** Do you conduct safety audits to see whether those loads are exceeded?

**Mr Wallace:** Often, particularly in response to a complaint or somebody mentions that that might be the case. Often it is the driver who says that the route is becoming popular, or another school that may be nearby has picked up that this one might be more direct to where they live and they will utilise their services suddenly and the driver will report that and we will make changes.

**MR PRATT:** Are you satisfied that at most schools where buses operate the, shall we call it, juvenile crowd control is well in hand? Have you had any concerns? Clearly you will not have enough transport officers to deploy at every school.

**Mr Wallace:** It is usually supervised by teachers at schools as well.

**MR PRATT:** Are you are happy with the cooperation from the schools?

**Mr Wallace:** We get very good cooperation from the schools, as a matter of fact. By comparison, when we do a Brumbies match we carry 3,000 or 4,000 people away and at some schools we do that on a daily basis. It is a big job and we have very professional people that are able to assist. We have school liaison officers at both of our depots who, on a daily basis, resolve issues that might arise, particularly about student behaviour, sometimes even driver behaviour.

**DR FOSKEY:** I just want to know about the security cameras on the buses. Where are they being monitored or is what happens just being taped in case it is needed later?

**Mr Wallace:** On the new buses, we have three cameras planned: one that it is at the front of the bus looking towards the back, one that is over the driver looking out the door and one that is half-way down the back looking towards the back of the door, which covers the rear door.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, but is it taped or does it actually go back to base?

**Mr Wallace:** It is on a hard drive recording mechanisms which lasts two weeks and, if any incident happens, we can go back and get the hard drive out of that bus and view it or keep it for the record. But if nothings happens, nothing is reported, it will just be overwritten after two weeks.

**MR PRATT:** It is not going back to base.

**Mr Wallace:** Not back to base. That would be a highly intensive data process.

**Meeting adjourned from 10.49 to 11.06 am.**

**THE CHAIR:** All right, we'll get going. Welcome back. We still have a few more questions on ACTION and then we'll try to get you out the door by half past the hour. I think that should be reasonably achievable.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, could you outline for the committee the technological improvements that are scheduled to be undertaken as part of the review of the current ticketing system?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Mr Wallace to give you the detail, Ms Porter. It's probably worth highlighting that our ticketing system is ageing, and it is leading to increased levels of maintenance to maintain the system. At some stage in the every near future, we will need to consider options for a new ticketing system and the funding of a new ticketing system. The government has not provided funding in the coming financial year for that, for the actual replacement of the system, but ACTION will continue to monitor and do some analysis around the best possible approach. I'll ask Mr Wallace to elaborate a bit on that.

**Mr Wallace:** We are still moving forward with examining options for a ticketing system. We're obviously looking at technology that's been introduced in other jurisdictions, which is around the smart card technology. Rather than go out and spend a lot of money ourselves, we have been talking with people who have just gone through the processes,

particularly in Perth and Sydney. Sydney is an interesting case in that they first went to tender in 1999 so that the technology that they are now implementing is probably four or five years old. The one that is going now in Perth has much more functionality and has a different operating arrangement. Believe it or not Hobart and Tasmania are on the verge of making some decisions as well. They've done a lot of work and spent a lot of money in their preliminary work and a person from there is coming to see us next month, I believe, to go through what they went through and how they came to their conclusions or where they'll be going in the future.

Traditionally we've looked to government to provide funding. I think funding is always going to be tight, and we'll be examining other funding mechanisms that could possibly make it happen sooner. If we can do that in ACTION that would leave those funds available for other purposes. The new innovative ways of providing tickets rather than ACTION issuing tickets is that the tickets are available from, say, agents. With some of the models that have been examined—and I think Perth is looking at this—the schools would be the agents for school tickets. So if a child lost their ticket, the school would charge them to replace it. We would get our revenue from charging the card with our bus fares. That part of the administration and costs that we may incur now would be transferred and would make it a viable option for us sooner. There are a number of options that we're looking. That's just an example of what we've been looking at.

**MR MULCAHY:** I don't want to get too micro here but you did allude to the fact that school buses transport a lot of people on a daily basis so they are an important group. And I assume it is not just economics that drive it; it's obviously a service and you are trying to encourage people to use it. Issues have been raised with me on two fronts in the Woden Valley area. The first is that there appears to be a reduction in services, tell me if I am wrong, in relation to students travelling from Tuggeranong, Weston and the Woden area to Radford where they change buses at Woden. Parents are telling me that older children have to make way for younger pupils and have to catch regular services making them late for classes. That is one service that appears not to be adequate, and you may want to look into it. The other one is the sweep service through the Woden suburbs of Farrer, Mawson, O'Malley, Isaacs, and so on, servicing the schools of St Peter and Paul and Garran primary. Whilst there is an outbound service, I understand some time back a morning service was withdrawn, and I am wondering whether that might be examined or if you have got any direct information on that?

**Mr Wallace:** With the second example of St Peter and Paul, we work very closely with the schools to develop viable options for providing services for getting children to and from school. If that has been a problem for parents, we will obviously look at that and we always do.

**MR MULCAHY:** Can you look into that and get back to us as soon as possible, if you would not mind?

**Mr Wallace:** Yes, we can do that. We will certainly look at that for you. Regarding Radford, there has been no reduction in service for students going to Radford. The transportation direct to Radford is out of Woden so students in Woden and Weston Creek transfer at Woden. The transfer of older students to regular services is obviously a preferred one. As I mentioned earlier, we have a bus every five minutes at that time of the day heading from Woden to Belconnen and there is a bus stop right out the front of

Radford College. That is on their main inter-town route so it would be far more convenient for the older students to use that service as an option. As I said, it is every five minutes so if somebody chooses to catch one that gets to Radford later than their school start time, that is obviously an—

**MR MULCAHY:** This is not an individual case. I mean groups of parents have banded together and written and I have made a speech in the Assembly on it.

**Mr Wallace:** Okay. We have an ongoing discussion with the parents from Weston Creek in particular. We met with them last week and are examining options for them. We have had a couple of instances where they have provided us with a petition. Unfortunately, the petition was only signed by eight people that lived in Weston Creek so it has been a matter of getting the actual data of people who do wish to travel directly out of Weston Creek, in particular, and the Woden Valley. We do this on an ongoing basis and where we recognise a demand we rejig services but we are within an existing pool of resources and rejigging sometimes means someone else misses out. Where there are adequate alternative services, and in this case I think there are more than adequate alternative services to students—that is, the normal network—we obviously will give priority to areas where there is no other coverage available. Half the student validations now are on the regular network.

**MR MULCAHY:** You are saying there is not an issue that these parents have raised with us?

**Mr Wallace:** Every parent who feels they should have some sort of service is an issue but we look at every one on its merits, and we are looking at this one actively at the moment.

**MR MULCAHY:** All right. Thanks.

**Mr Corbell:** Mr Mulcahy, I too have received representations from parents in that regard. I can only repeat what Mr Wallace has said: that there has been no reduction in service. Importantly, in writing back to those parents, I have stressed to them that there are a wide variety of regular services that service that school. Some parents have taken the view that they want additional, dedicated school services. ACTION's position—and I think it is reasonable—is that there is no need for an additional dedicated school service when there is a very high frequency regular network service happening between Woden, Belconnen, Tuggeranong which, as Mr Wallace says, goes right past the doorstep of Radford College. The school is well serviced by both dedicated school services and also by the regular network. I think it is just about getting that information out to parents and letting them know that they have choices about how their children can utilise the bus network.

**MR MULCAHY:** Does that suggest that you do not put on enough buses to meet the direct demand for schools? That is what I think I am hearing here, because you are saying that there are more students than there are buses provided therefore they have got to use the public network.

**Mr Corbell:** As Mr Wallace has said, ACTION has finite resources and where a school is well serviced by regular network routes, priority needs to be given to those schools

that are not so well serviced in terms of additional dedicated routes. Radford is extremely well serviced by the regular network and, given that a very large number of Radford students would be senior year students, they're quite capable and responsible enough, I'm sure, to use the regular bus network at a student price. I think that it's a reasonable position and one that makes the best use of ACTION's resources.

**MR MULCAHY:** So, if they can't get on the school bus and have to take the regular one, you're saying that they'll make it in time for classes?

**Mr Corbell:** Absolutely. I mean they need to plan, obviously, to make sure that they know which regular route bus to take, but the services are available.

**THE CHAIR:** On page 507, under the highlights, you've referred to continuing workplace reform to further improve productivity and reduce costs. Can you outline for the committee what workplace reform is taking place at ACTION?

**Mr Wallace:** We've been working closely with union representatives and our staff regarding productivity improvements that can be made. I think our prime area of interest at present is the workshop area. We're looking at better ways of doing things based on suggestions from the staff. In the past, we've introduced things like refrigerant recycling, recycling of oils and a number of other cost-saving initiatives that came from the staff as suggestions. We had a major change several years ago in the driver ranks that made them as productive as they could be, based on the current network that we run. I think my predecessor used to say the only way they can be more productive would be to drive two buses at once.

**THE CHAIR:** There may be the technology in the near future, you never know!

**Mr Wallace:** Yes, run by remote control. We are continuing to look at areas where we can improve the way that we operate. Obviously that's a very general statement that's been made there that will cover anything that we can think of during the three years of the current agreement.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of productivity and cost reduction, it is no secret that this has been a fairly tight budget for all agencies. My question is not so much about job shedding but—and I have raised this with every area that has come to the committee—the possibility of offering part-time positions in order to reduce costs and provide more family friendly working hours.

**Mr Wallace:** We have a fairly large number of part-time workers now, about 40 per cent of our work force works part-time—either part-time in a straight block of hours or a part-time split covering the morning peaks. That's obviously because we have a business that has demands at peak times. It is double what it is in the normal network during within those peaks. Progression through the organisation is that you usually start as a part-timer and pick up extra overtime on weekends and build up your hours and then progressively move to being a full-time operator. There are certain external breaks on people wanting to come back full time to part time, and that's primarily to do with superannuation arrangements. We wouldn't prevent that from happening.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that their preference, though, that they don't want to cut back their



hours because of the impact on the superannuation.

**Mr Wallace:** That's right, because of the impact on their future superannuation arrangements. We try to be as family friendly as we can, but we are a business that works seven days a week and probably 20 hours a day, apart from Sunday. So it's very difficult for us to say, "Don't finish that half of the run and off you go." We have internal, mostly informal, arrangements for people with particular requirements. Supervisors are able to cut and paste runs to enable people to meet their obligations or their desires. We are mindful of those sorts of things but, overall, we have a service that we have to deliver and that usually takes precedence. But people can be accommodated at the fringes.

**THE CHAIR:** And not all of the people who work at ACTION drive buses. There are a few people who are in the office.

**Mr Wallace:** Yes, that's true. I always fall into that trap of thinking that there are only the drivers. The clerical staff has access to flexitime and other normal public service arrangements so we have family friendly attitudes towards those. Indeed, our new agreement, which is the same as for other ACT public servants, has those included in that agreement.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there a utilisation of part-time positions within the desk area?

**Mr Wallace:** We certainly have a number of part-time people in the clerical area. We don't have any current applicants who are wishing to move to part-time. The main area where we have part-time people is in our scheduling area. We have several people who were full-time but who left for childbearing reasons and have now come back part-time. We have a number of people in the call centre who are working part-time hours.

**THE CHAIR:** What about fathers, I'm not just looking at mothers?

**Mr Wallace:** If we have a request from them we can obviously consider them but, as I say, we have no current applications from people who are currently full time and want to work part time.

**THE CHAIR:** You should be aware that I'm giving this grilling to everybody who comes before me. I believe that most positions within the ACT government service are advertised on a full-time basis as opposed to a part-time basis. I believe there may be some people within the service who might prefer, while they are going through their child raising years, to have some time at home and go to a four-day week or whatever.

**MR MULCAHY:** Mr Wallace or minister, do you have statistics indicating a percentage of your work force that's unionised?

**Mr Wallace:** We don't have formal numbers on that but I understand that it's nearly 90 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** I fail to see how union numbers has anything to do with family friendly hours, Mr Mulcahy.

**MR MULCAHY:** No, it relates to workplace reform, chair. I'll explain it to you some

time.

**THE CHAIR:** There's no need to patronise the chair, Mr Mulcahy.

**MR MULCAHY:** You asked the question about the workplace reform.

**THE CHAIR:** I take a very dim view of that.

**MR MULCAHY:** Well, you should not dismiss my question so frivolously.

**MR SESELJA:** Minister, in relation to the sustainable transport plan, I wanted to clear up what seems to be a bit of a contradiction, and you might be able to help me out. I will need to give the committee and you a bit of background. We spoke in annual reports hearings in February about the sustainable transport plan. On page 6 it refers to investigating road pricing in the future and we had a bit of a discussion around that and you said that the government has no intention of bringing in tolls. The summary of your position was that you had no intention of bringing in tolls and also that road pricing is about "looking at the costs and benefits to the community of investing in road infrastructure". That's to quote you from Hansard. Subsequent to that, I've had discussions with officials responsible for the sustainable transport plan, and they seem to be contradicting that by saying that road pricing is about finding out what the cost is and then passing it on to users, most commonly through tolls but also other forms. I looked up the academic literature on it and I couldn't find anything that suggested that road pricing was anything other than charging drivers for the use of roads in one way or another. Are you able to just clear up that contradiction for us?

**Mr Corbell:** I don't think it's a contradiction. We might just be having a semantic argument, but I think I made the government's position pretty clear. We're not investigating tolls.

**MR SESELJA:** I understand that that's the government's position and that's where I think the contradiction is. I'm happy to table all of this academic literature. The Victoria Transport Policy Institute encyclopaedia says that road pricing means motorists pay directly for driving on a particular roadway or in a particular area. Given that the government's policy is not to do that, or even look at that, wouldn't the statement in the sustainable transport plan be contradictory to the government's position? Wouldn't there be a case for removing it, because it does seem a bit misleading? People might look at that and say—or cynics might—in 10 years, "Well, it's been there all along. You should have known about it." You're saying to us that it is not about tolls but any reading of the literature on it—and in fact your own officials say it—says that road pricing means passing on the costs to motorists. Aren't you concerned that by leaving it there, given the government's policy is not to introduce tolls, you could be misleading the community?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I think we're just having a bit of a semantic argument.

**MR SESELJA:** Well, it's not semantic at all.

**Mr Corbell:** I've made the government's position clear: we're not investigating tolls.

**MR SESELJA:** I understand that, and it goes to the inherent contradiction. Let us say

you were going to investigate apple farming, but you had no intention of investigating apple farming, you actually had an intention of investigating orange farming. That would be a bit silly to leave it in there. If you had no intention of bringing in tolls, and road pricing essentially means passing on those costs directly, why is it in the sustainable transport plan and shouldn't it be removed?

**Mr Corbell:** I think I've just answered your question Mr Seselja.

**MS PORTER:** Minister, I was wondering whether, in the future, we are going to give consideration to alternative forms of public transport in the ACT?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, Ms Porter, in the future, the government certainly will want to. It certainly won't be within the term of the current government but the sustainable transport plan does recognise that future governments may wish to consider the introduction of other alternative transport modes, in particular light rail. The planning and research done by the government that underpins the development of the sustainable transport plan, highlights the fact that, as Canberra's population grows towards half a million, and as population densities along public transport corridors and in particular nodes that are serviced by public transport grow, the viability of alternative technology such as light rail will increase.

The government has put together in its policy work the development of busways as the first stage towards an ultimate light rail network for Canberra. The busways project is one that will involve, in the first stage, the provision of dedicated right of way for buses with train-like stations to service the institutions and other stops along the route. The development of the busways will take into account the potential requirements for placing light rail line along those routes. Issues such as the gradient of the route, the turning circles, and other infrastructure related issues will be taken account of so that in the future it will be possible to develop light rail along the same route, once a future government decides, if and when a future government decides, that that is what it wants to do.

We're not planning to build the busway in such a way that it rules out light rail or that it contradicts the capacity to build light rail in the future. In fact, the development of the busways is essentially the first stage of developing a light rail network, because the infrastructure will be built in such a way for the busway as to support the laying down of light rail in the future. I like to say that, essentially, we are laying the foundations, literally, for a light rail network with the development of the busways because we are physically providing the literal foundations for a light rail network into the future. The government in its policy, the sustainable transport plan, identifies that light rail is a longer-term option for Canberra, and we make a provision for that in our current infrastructure projects.

**MR MULCAHY:** In relation to the Woden interchange relocation, I see on BP 4, page 240, there's provision for \$745,000 for forward design of the relocation at Woden bus interchange. It says that the forward design of this relocation is due to be completed on April 2006. Can you indicate when the relocation will occur and where it will be located?

**Mr Corbell:** That funding is through to ACTPLA but I'm happy to try to answer the

detail of the question now. The work is to finalise options and the preferred option for the relocation of the interchange. There are a number of opportunities coming up at Woden. With the development of the new Woden police station the existing police station site will become redundant. I'm sure members would be familiar with the fact that that Woden bus interchange is not a particularly attractive or safe public environment for anyone. It might have been good when it was built in the 70s but it certainly isn't now.

The opportunities are to reconfigure the street network that is currently closed off by the interchange and to release a number of sites, particularly the police station site, for potential commercial or retail development sites and to reconfigure the Woden bus interchange so that it becomes more of an integrated interchange, with retail and commercial facilities immediately abutting it. We want to take the approach at Woden that I've been advocating and which the government is progressing at Belconnen. It is to have an integrated bus departure/arrivals lounge-type development, integrated into commercial or retail facilities as much as possible in Woden. The interchange would remain in generally the same location as it currently is. However, it would be smaller as it does not need to be as large as it is currently

At the moment the layover of buses occurs in two bus-parking areas around the building that the Woden Bowl used to be in, the Sir Keith Camber building. The bus layover areas are a very inefficient use of fairly valuable land in the town centre. We would be looking to relocate bus layovers to somewhere in the Phillip business district or in the old Woden bus depot, which is still owned by the government. That would free up land for future commercial and other development, rather than having these great big open tracks of concrete and bitumen, which are not a very good urban outcome. The final resolution of the design is still under way. Perhaps rather than me trying to explain it to you, I'd be happy to offer you a briefing from the relevant officers in the planning authority. The work is fairly well progressed and there has been extensive discussion with the Woden Community Council, in particular, who are taking a strong interest in the issue. I'm sure that you would equally be quite interested in the options that are being canvassed.

**MR MULCAHY:** You are obviously cognisant of the issues I'm concerned about with safety and so on there. Are you looking at putting CCTV into this new centre, to hopefully curb some of the crime and harassment issues that occur there?

**Mr Corbell:** CCTV is always an option but that is at a detailed development stage. What we are trying to achieve, through the relocation and the planning issues, is to design out crime. We are going to apply what are called the CPETD principles, or crime prevention through environmental design, to design out crimes. The layout of the new bus interchange facility will need to be open and prevent blind corners, alleys, dark recesses—all of the sorts of problems you have at Woden—improve lines of sight, have attractive street furniture. An attractive urban design outcome makes crime much more difficult to occur in the first place. Now cameras can be part of the solution. Certainly in Brisbane, with the development of their busway stations on the south-east busway and the new inner north busway, I think it is called, you will see that the quality of the design of the stations and so on is very much focused on visibility, on removing corners for ambush and other undesirable activities. They have also included security surveillance as part of that. We will certainly be looking at that as part of the upgrade of Woden.

**MR MULCAHY:** Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you Mr Wallace, Mr Quirke and Ms Greenland for your attendance this morning. We will move onto the Land Development Agency.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Chair, Mr Mulcahy asked me a question about the average weekday cost to run ACTION and the average weekly cost to run ACTION as well as revenues. On a weekday basis to run network 05, which is the current network, it costs the ACTION authority \$87,061.00 a day. The average weekly cost to run the network is \$485,036.00. Average weekday revenue is \$66,000 and average weekly revenue is \$358,000.

**MR MULCAHY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, did you wish to make an opening statement in relation to the Land Development Agency?

**Mr Corbell:** I do not have any particular specific comments to make in relation to the LDA. The LDA is not a directly budget-funded entity so the government does not appropriate money to the LDA for its functions. Its functions are financed from its own source of revenues through land sales. However, the LDA has an important role in delivering a number of the government's policy objectives. The first of those is in relation to improving and creating high quality residential environments in both new suburbs and in redevelopment areas, and the focus is on sustainable development as well as on improved quality of residential amenity for residents.

It also assists the government in issues of housing affordability, through a number of the initiatives which the government has tasked the LDA to undertake, in particular the moderate income land ballot process. Finally, the LDA has an important role in providing direct grants of land on behalf of the government to community not-for-profit and other organisations. So it performs that function as well. The LDA, as a relatively new organisation, is I believe travelling very well. It is lifting the standard in terms of residential development in new suburbs, and that is extremely important from my perspective as minister. We simply must do better in the quality of our residential estates in new suburbs. And the LDA is, I think, responding to that challenge very well. There are a whole range of projects that the LDA is responsible for and I am sure members will have questions on a number of those, so I will leave my preliminary comments at that.

**DR FOSKEY:** We've had quite a few calls from community groups asking whether free or subsidised land is available through the land release program for ACT housing and community housing providers to enable them to develop low cost housing options. Minister, was this considered in the budget process? Are we likely to see any such arrangements between Housing ACT and the LDA in the next financial year?

**Mr Corbell:** It's not normal for the government to consider charging policies for land as part of the budget process, for the reasons I've indicated. The LDA is not a budget funded entity; it is funded from its own source revenues. However, the issues you raise are important policy matters, which are considered by me and by the government as part of our broader approach to dealing with the issue of housing affordability. There is a range of charging regimes in place for the direct grant of land. For example, for aged

care facilities a discounted charging regime exists for certain types of aged care development. In relation to land that is a direct grant to ACT Housing, that is usually direct granted at full market value. I will ask Ms Skewes to give you a bit more of a run down on how that process works and what the arrangements are.

**Ms Skewes:** The land development agency, through its direct grants program, has an active relationship with a number of the community housing organisations that are keen to progress innovative housing schemes for their clients. Over the course of the last 12 months or so, we have been working with a number of community housing providers that have brought forward proposals to advance particular schemes, notably in Gungahlin and other areas.

The approach we would see through the government's direct grant program is continuing to really assist those groups with their proposals. Often they come forward with very detailed applications around the particular client groups they're looking to serve and the particular criteria and philosophy they're seeking to pursue in their community housing initiatives. We take all that information forward and do a thorough assessment, to enable the government to make a decision about whether they would be prepared to support those particular initiatives or not.

**DR FOSKEY:** As a supplementary question, I understand the LDA makes direct grants of land on occasion. I'd like to know which organisations you make these grants and concessions to, how they are determined, and whether you make them available to ACT Housing community housing providers.

**Mr Corbell:** The answer to the last part of your question is yes. In fact, there's a development which has only recently opened in Gungahlin—in the last six months or so. That development was done by Community Housing Canberra in the Gungahlin town centre itself. It has a range of adaptable and affordable housing options for people who are eligible through Community Housing Canberra's program. That was the result of a direct grant by the Land Development Agency.

You've asked this question of me before in a question on notice, and I have sought to provide the detail you've just asked for in the answer to that question on notice. It's not possible here and now to outline all of the disallowable instruments and the criteria within those instruments that govern the direct grant of land. There is a range of DIs which outline the criteria applicants must meet to receive a direct grant of land and there is a range of organisations that have received direct grants over the past 12 months. Indeed, there has always been a direct grants process but I assume you're asking in respect of the last 12 months or so.

I'd need to take the detail of what you're asking on notice, as to who has received direct grants, but I'm happy to provide that information. In relation to the criteria, there is a significant number of disallowable instruments that set out the criteria for direct grants. If appropriate, I'm happy to offer you a briefing on what those DIs are so you can better understand what the criteria are for particular types of applications.

**MR SESELJA:** The 2003-04 annual report had 37.6 full-time equivalent staff on 30 June 2004. Are you able to tell us what the current staffing position is, whether you anticipate that that will grow over 2005-06 and, if so, by how much? Are you able to

give us a bit of a breakdown of where that jobs growth, if any, is likely to come in the organisation?

**Ms Skewes:** Thank you very much for the question. I'm certainly able to give you a current status report on our staffing levels. As at 30 June 2005 the organisation had a current number of staff of about 52. My projection is that our staffing will probably increase to about 65 over the next 12 months or so, mainly due to the range of projects and initiatives we have under way and the increasing number of priorities we're required to deliver on behalf of the government.

Having effectively got to 65, I think that's where we'll be plateauing for some period of time. I think that would be our full complement. If I recall, I think that number is not too far off the starting point in the organisation when it was first combined with the resources of the land group, the Gungahlin Development Authority and the Kingston Foreshore Development Authority.

My expectation is that we will get to about 65 in the next 12 months or so. I recognise that it's not always easy to recruit people into the sort of business we've got. There are certain challenges in getting the right sort of project management capability into the organisation and getting the right sort of skills set. I suspect that, once we're sitting at about 65, that would be pretty much where we would sit for the next period of time.

**MR SESELJA:** That leads me to my next question. I assume that that growth from 37 in 2004 to 65 at the end of next year will be a lot on the development side of things, rather than the land release. You mentioned Kingston Foreshore. That's no longer there so, to some degree, this might replace that. In the objectives on page 499 of BP4, it says:

It is expected that over time LDA will undertake a greater proportion of land development activities in its own right.

Are you able to give us an idea of what proportions that might entail?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. Perhaps I can provide a bit of an overview, and then Ms Skewes can give you more detail. The government's position is that we want to see the LDA deliver land through a range of development mechanisms. That includes development that is done by the LDA directly, it includes joint ventures and it still includes some level of in globo land sales—that is, raw land sales by auction or tender. The exact mix will be determined by the LDA board in consultation with the government and, in particular, with me as minister, so we choose the best delivery vehicle to meet the market requirements in terms of making sure land is available in a timely way.

Public sector development is an important objective of the land development agency. It's not reasonable to specify exactly the percentage; only that it is part of the overall mix of delivery vehicles the LDA has available to it. I'll ask Ms Skewes to elaborate a bit more.

**Ms Skewes:** Obviously the objectives of the agency are very much to akin our land development strategies to the priorities of a particular release—what the government is seeking to achieve when it develops a piece of land and the priorities it sets in place. For example, over the next 12 months or so, as you are well aware, we are progressing the Wells Station development. It is one that we are doing in our own right. We have been

able to advance that project significantly in the last 12 months but we are only halfway through it.

We are progressing releases at Franklin, which is an area just adjacent to Wells Station. That is a long-term development front for the Land Development Agency. We also have undertakings for projects in and around the Gungahlin town centre. Those are current projects that we are looking to progress to the market. Just those activities in themselves require more project management capability by the organisation. The capacity to move those projects forward to the market in a timely manner is absolutely critical to our business. With the range of activities we have under way currently, it is expected that we would certainly augment our resources over the next period of time.

**MR SESELJA:** Given that the LDA is obviously able to control how much land it releases and also how much land it develops or otherwise, are you saying that you cannot give me even a ballpark figure as to what proportion of development is expected to be done by the LDA in the next year and in the forward years?

**Mr Corbell:** I think it is possible to give a general indication, as Ms Skewes has just done, of which estates in the coming 12 months in particular the LDA expects to be developed through the public sector model, which through joint venture and which through raw land sales or in globo sales.

As Ms Skewes has just indicated, the development of the remainder of Harrison through the Wells Station project and the suburb of Franklin are both public sector or public land development deliveries. The suburb of Forde, as I announced on Friday, is a joint venture between the Land Development Agency and the private sector.

As Ms Skewes has indicated, there are a number of more commercial-type sites in the Gungahlin town centre which will also be developed directly by the Land Development Agency; and there will also continue to be a level of auction to the private sector, or tender to the private sector, where land is sold raw. The full details will be outlined in the LDA's business plan and the land supply strategy, which I will be releasing shortly. I think that gives you a fairly general indication of activity over the next 12 months.

**MR SESELJA:** Given that the LDA will be taking a greater role, has an assessment been done on the impact on private sector developers in the ACT?

**Mr Corbell:** These matters were well canvassed and debated by the Assembly prior to the establishment of the Land Development Agency in the last Assembly. There was a significant level of investigation by estimates committees at that time that questioned the financial and other aspects of the government's decision and policy to establish a land development arm. In the last Assembly it was agreed to establish a land development agency. So I think these issues have been well tested and debated in previous Assemblies.

**MR SESELJA:** As you say, the general point was debated but this is obviously now a fairly significant increase in activity from the LDA. Has that particular issue been investigated in terms of the impact on pricing?

**Mr Corbell:** As I say, the whole issue of having a government land developer, public



land developer or community land developer, which took significant responsibility for delivering new land, developed land, to the market was extensively and exhaustively discussed in the last Assembly. Nothing has changed since that time. What the LDA is doing now was envisaged, debated and scrutinised by the Assembly when the LDA was first established by legislation in the last Assembly.

**MR SESELJA:** So there is no ongoing analysis from the LDA?

**Mr Corbell:** The point I am making is that it is not necessary to go back to laws and question the desirability of a land development agency that was debated and passed by the Assembly in the last term of the Assembly.

**MR SESELJA:** Surely the market changes, so you would be monitoring that at some level?

**Mr Corbell:** Your question is around the level of activity. The level of activity being undertaken now is no different from that envisaged when the LDA was first established. There is no need to revisit a debate and investigation that has already occurred.

**MR SESELJA:** So market conditions have not changed since the LDA was established?

**Mr Corbell:** No. Your question was around the impact—

**MR SESELJA:** This is another question.

**THE CHAIR:** Order!

**MR SESELJA:** I am asking you to answer the second question, not the initial question.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Seselja, let him finish the sentence.

**Mr Corbell:** Chair, the question from Mr Seselja was: what is the impact of the LDA's activity on the private sector? That is essentially an in principle debate about whether or not it is appropriate to have public land development. I know the Liberal Party's position is not to support public land development. I understand that, but that debate has been had; the Assembly has voted on that; it has passed legislation to establish a public sector land development agency; and that agency is now getting on with its work.

**MR SESELJA:** Perhaps I could just finish—I am being verbally. I asked that question, and now I have asked you the separate question whether, given a changing market, that has been investigated—or are you still relying on what happened before the debate when the LDA was established?

**Mr Corbell:** Can I ask for clarification? Has what been investigated?

**MR SESELJA:** Whether or not there will be a more, or less, significant impact on the private sector now, with the LDA taking on a greater share of development responsibility.

**Mr Corbell:** I think I have answered that question. The scope of the LDA's activity is no

different now, compared to what was envisaged when it was first established.

**MR SESELJA:** It was envisaged, but the market moves on, doesn't it?

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Seselja, let's not argue backwards and forwards.

**Mr Corbell:** The market moves on, but it's not reasonable to say that, because the market changes, we have to go back to taws on whether or not there is a land development agency. Land development agencies are established in almost all mainland jurisdictions in Australia. In New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia there are public sector land development agencies which operate in the market and are subject to the fluctuations of the market, in the same way as the private sector.

It was always envisaged that when the LDA was established there would be fluctuations in the market. In that respect the factors that were predicated when the LDA was established are the same factors. The market will vary, demand will vary and the LDA, as much as any private sector developer, will have to respond to that. Nothing has changed in terms of the issues that were considered when the LDA was established. Yes, the market will vary and the LDA will need to respond to the market in the same way a private sector developer takes account of changing market conditions.

**MS PORTER:** I note on page 499 that one of the highlights, one of the strategic and operational issues to be pursued in 2005-06, is the building of a positive relationship with industry and government bodies in their delivery of the financial, economic, social and environmental outcomes. I was wondering if you wanted to enlarge on how it's intended that the LDA will build those positive relationships with industry.

**Mr Corbell:** I will ask Ms Skewes to give you the detail on this because she is responsible for that at a day-to-day level. What I would say, however, is that the LDA engages with the private sector and the community sector, as well as other government entities, at both a territory and a federal level, in delivering land to the market. It's essential to have a constructive and positive relationship. I think, overwhelmingly, the Land Development Agency has that, because of the efforts of the chief executive and the board to build and maintain those relationships.

I think that is best exemplified by the variety of delivery mechanisms the LDA is prepared to consider to deliver the outcomes the government is looking for. You only have to look back to last Friday, with the announcement around Forde—a significant joint venture between the territory and the private sector. The LDA will enter into a joint venture with Delfin Lend Lease, which is a major national Australian land developer, and Canberra Investment Corporation, which is a local Canberra business, to develop the suburb of Forde. I anticipate that this project will give us a leading edge residential estate; one that will set the benchmark for future residential development either by the LDA on its own, or the private sector into the future.

That's an example of the LDA taking a very holistic view as to the range of options out there in the area of delivering land, recognising also that it has an important role to deliver public sector land though the public sector to get an improved return for the territory. I'll ask Ms Skewes to outline some of the forums and approaches they adopt in engaging with the private sector in particular.

**Ms Skewes:** As the minister has indicated, the LDA takes very seriously its relationships with the industry, with government and with the community groups. It has a very active program that we've been pursuing for the last period of time, oriented towards understanding very clearly what the market requirements are for land and what release mechanisms might be able to be adopted for particular sites.

We work very closely with industry associations; in particular, we've set up forums with industry associations. We have regular forums where they come together with us. We talk openly about the circumstances of the market and how we might best respond to the particular market conditions. We also rely on very effective and productive working relationships with our government partners because, obviously, the land development and land tenure process in the ACT requires clear cooperation from a number of the key agencies responsible for land management and land delivery to the marketplace.

Our relationships right across the board with government agencies are taken very seriously. We engage them in our planning processes around land release and the preparation of land for the market; we work with them on our annual program so it is in accord with the government's land supply and strategic strategy for sequencing and development of land. We also work with them at a very detailed level in preparing particular sites for the market, and the lease and development requirements for those pieces of land.

There's a range of issues to do with government engagement in our land release program that relate to servicing, presentation of the land to the market and also, importantly, to the provision of well catered for communities. At the end of the day, we're trying to create communities that have a good range of well located facilities and services that give people a very good quality of life. So having the full breadth of engagement of government agencies is absolutely critical.

In respect of community involvement, particularly in respect of community consultation where we're taking projects out to the market, we try to ensure that we have very active communication with local interest groups who may have a particular aspiration for a certain piece of land. In the last while we've also been able to forge, I think, very productive community development initiatives in our main development areas like Gungahlin. We've tried to forge positive relationships and communication processes with that local community in particular.

I and my staff try to respond very actively where we have particular community interest around a piece of land. We ensure that we make ourselves available, and that we can supply information. Importantly, through the direct grants program, we engage a lot with particular community interest groups around progressing their applications forward for the government's approval. So we have quite a broad ranging focus on community engagement. Building our stakeholder relationships has been fundamental to the development of our business in the last 12 months.

**DR FOSKEY:** When the LDA undertakes development in its own right, is there a requirement that a degree of affordable housing is stipulated?

**Mr Corbell:** I've certainly made very clear the government's view that, as part of the

development of estates, they need to focus on the affordable end of the market as much as the prestige or more expensive end of the market. The LDA board itself has a very strong view that that needs to be the case. I'm pleased that there's no specified level, but it's expected by the government that there is a level of affordability built into new estates. That is done explicitly through the moderate income land ballot process in a number of estates the LDA is currently developing. For example, as part of the Wells Station estate we have offered moderate income land ballot parcels.

There will be affordable housing options developed as part of the new joint venture of the Forde estate. One of the options that will be explored and developed further as part of the winning tender between LDA, Delfin Lend Lease and CIC is the option of affordable house and land packages, rather than simply land packages as part that estate.

The LDA is very aware that, in land developments in other parts of the country, government land development agencies have provided affordable house and land packages. The housing is built to a certain standard and the construction techniques applied provide a more affordable housing product. It's that sort of opportunity that I and the LDA board are very keen to achieve through some of these new estates. That's the general policy approach. Ms Skewes can probably elaborate a bit on that.

**Ms Skewes:** The LDA in its planning processes has been seeking to develop affordable and moderate income housing initiatives. As the minister has outlined, with the government's support and encouragement, we were able to put the Forde development forward to the marketplace with a very strong project objective around moderate income housing and affordable housing. In fact, we've been delighted with the response received in relation to the preferred submission. That highlights some very innovative approaches to the delivery of moderate income housing.

One of the particular initiatives we are seeking to pursue, as the minister has indicated, is working with the building industry. One of the aspects we're very aware of is that we can certainly offer land through a moderate income land ballot, but there is often still a challenge for people in delivering an affordable house on that piece of land.

We have had very good support from industry groups in looking at some initiatives that we might be able to progress with the building industry over the next period of time, to seek their engagement in more innovative schemes. The agency is seeking to progress affordable housing initiatives in the Franklin estate, which will be progressed over the next 12 months. There are in excess of 1,300 blocks in that development, which will probably be an eight to 10-year project. We have responded to the government's desire which is part of its affordable housing strategy to progress some innovative schemes in relation to the Franklin development.

I would expect that affordable housing is a key objective of the organisation as we develop Forde with our business plan over the next 12 months. I expect we will be able to offer a variety of people in the Canberra community, in addition to the land ballot program, opportunities to have building products on those blocks in a more affordable form.

One of the views the agency takes about affordable housing is that we believe the best outcomes are offered in our land development and community development projects

through offering a range of housing styles for people and a range of allotments. We believe communities are best made to be viable, vibrant communities if they can genuinely have a range of housing styles and types for people and attract a range of income groups. That's one of the philosophies we build in very strongly to the urban design character of the sort of developments we are seeking to create.

**DR FOSKEY:** I have quite a few questions around this. I'm interested in the fact that you are using the term "moderate income earners" when talking about affordable housing. Is the Franklin estate near the Kingston railway station? Where's Franklin?

**Mr Corbell:** No, it isn't. Franklin is a suburb in Gungahlin, on the other side of Flemington Road from Harrison.

**DR FOSKEY:** Did I hear you mention earlier on, Ms Skewes, that you were working with some land around the Kingston railway station?

**Ms Skewes:** No. I have not mentioned Kingston.

**DR FOSKEY:** I heard the word "station". You must have meant Wells Station.

**Ms Skewes:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** I'm sorry about that confusion. Could you elaborate on the definition of "affordable housing" as it is going to relate to the suburb of Forde? For instance, is it going to be purely related to land purchase and house building, or is there a possibility of working with ACT Housing or community organisations to deliver social housing in other ways? It's fairly clear that it's at the rental end of the private market where we're really struggling to help people.

**Mr Corbell:** Firstly, on the broad policy setting, the government's policy looks at housing affordability in a continuum. That is everything from social or public housing activity, all the way through to home ownership or land ownership by individuals. They all have an important role to play. Obviously, allowing people who are currently in the rental market to get into home ownership assists in the overall affordability equation because it frees up the rental market for those who cannot yet afford to go into home ownership but are perhaps not eligible for community housing, social housing or public housing, but can be in rental accommodation as part of the progression ultimately, I think we all hope, towards home ownership. It's all part of the equation.

In terms of development of new estates, the LDA looks at both home ownership and land ownership by individuals. That is what the moderate income land ballot is about, as will be other options Ms Skewes has highlighted around house and land packages. But, equally, the policy of the LDA and the government is to make sites available for ACT Housing and other community housing providers to enable them to provide housing options for those people who are not, because of their income levels, able to either rent privately or take out home ownership in their own right.

The government currently provides, and will continue to provide, sites for community housing providers, whether they be ACT Housing, Community Housing Canberra or other low income housing providers, in new estates. We want to assist that end of the

housing market as much as we try to assist the general housing market to enable people to own their own properties. Again, Ms Skewes can elaborate on that.

**Ms Skewes:** I think the example of Forde was referenced as an opportunity to progress some of the affordable housing initiatives of the government. The approach that's been promoted through the joint venture arrangement will seek to pursue arrangements with community housing providers also working with ACT Housing, who have an important role in relation to the provision of affordable housing. That is certainly the government's broader strategy in relation to the Affordable Housing Taskforce. It is very much a multifaceted approach because we are also seeking to work very actively with the building industry. We will develop that strategy over the next 12 months, once that joint venture is commenced in the next few weeks.

I think it's quite important that we can both put a strategy in place and monitor what the outcomes have been from that strategy to the proposed delivery arrangement. We expect it will create something very different from the Canberra market and, importantly, help people who can't currently get into home ownership. It will provide them with an opportunity to both work with the industry and to pursue opportunities through community housing provider schemes.

**DR FOSKEY:** I would like to tease out the land ballots issue a little. I think it is probably the appropriate time. For instance, in December 2004 and April 2005, through the land ballot scheme there were blocks of land for \$150,000 and less, which I understand is less than the average cost of land in the ACT. Even so, that cost was determined on market value. You can correct me if I am wrong on any of this.

**Mr Corbell:** That is correct.

**DR FOSKEY:** Can you explain how the value of blocks offered for sale in the ballots has been set and how the LDA ensures that these blocks are more affordable than those available on the open market?

**Mr Corbell:** The way the moderate income land ballot works, Dr Foskey, is, first of all, the LDA identifies blocks of land that are worth \$150,000 or less. That is done by an independent valuation, but the size and the scale of those blocks warrant a market price at that level. The LDA cannot, as a rule, sell land for less than market value. It is required by legislation to sell land for market value, so it has sought to identify land parcels whose market value is \$150,000 or less. This is generally smaller blocks for sale.

The issue that we have identified with the moderate-income land ballot is that, whilst the land value is significantly below the average price, the average price being close to, if not over, \$200,000 per block, the cost of construction is still a significant factor for individuals who have purchased these blocks. As Ms Skewes as outlined, we are therefore looking at a range of other options to deliver both land and house packages where new construction techniques and the design of homes are done in such a way as to deliver a more affordable overall product into the market.

I really see the LDA's role as leading the market to consider these options because what has been very clear from the moderate income land ballot is that housing affordability is not just about the price of land. It is also about the price of the house you

put on the land and how much it costs to construct that dwelling. So we are looking very closely through the initiatives that Ms Skewes has outlined for Forde and other estates to deliver house and land packages that again target the sorts of individuals, couples and families that we are targeting through the moderate-income land ballot process.

**DR FOSKEY:** I understand that at the 26 February general land ballot, less than half of the lots offered for sale sold. I just wondered if you have done a review to see why in this case this very important initiative of the government to increase affordability would seem not to be that successful. So could you tell me how you are working to examine the effectiveness of the ballot and what measures might be undertaken?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. I have asked the Land Development Agency to review or to get feedback from those people who were eligible but did not proceed with taking out a block of land through the ballot process for moderate-income earners so that we can try and establish what were the factors that led to their not taking up that opportunity. The LDA will be conducting and seeking feedback from people who registered but did not proceed with a purchase of land through that ballot so that we can understand what is going on and, if necessary, adjust the policy settings around that process.

The LDA is also represented on a cross-government forum, which represents all the relevant agencies, including Housing ACT, the planning authority, the LDA, Chief Minister's and so on. We will also be participating in that forum to monitor and, if necessary, revise some of the policy settings so that we are better able to meet demand that we know exists. So there is a range of things happening and it is my view and the government's view that we need to keep our minds open. If something is not working as well as we hoped it would, we need to look at the policy and see what we can do to improve it further.

I have to stress, though, it is working for some people. There are people who are taking up the land. There are Canberra families who are taking up that opportunity. We would just like to see more of them doing that because we know there are more people out there, and that is what we will try to do.

**MR MULCAHY:** Minister, I just take you to the highlights. One of the highlights is implementing a predicted modelling capability for land supply and demand. Can you tell us a little about the cost of that capability, when it will be implemented and what is actually involved in that? Are you developing software or are you doing something different?

**Mr Corbell:** I will ask Ms Skewes to answer that question, Mr Mulcahy.

**Ms Skewes:** The project that we are developing to assist in our monitoring of market conditions and our capability to assess our future requirement for land is one that we are progressing with the Australian Housing Urban Research Institute. It has been a piece of work that they are in the process of developing in conjunction with a variety of academic institutions nationally. The interest that they have actually shown us is actually assisting at the ACT level in developing a specific piece of work that can assist us in our forward projection and our forecasting of land supply requirements.

That piece of work was commenced in a very preliminary way in the current financial

year and will be progressed forward in 2005-06. The current estimate is that we will see that work in the second half of next financial year. It is based on some broader national modelling that is under way at that moment. The framework for that particular model is under further development. So we would expect to see some opportunities to provide ACT data into that model and have that tested in the second half of next financial year.

**MR MULCAHY:** I think I asked about the cost, but also I am curious to know how you will apply this, assuming they can develop the model. Is this going to basically be your barometer for determining land release or matters of this nature? How do you see the applications? What is this exercise costing?

**Ms Skewes:** The anticipated cost of the exercise is \$80,000 to develop the model. I would have to say that that is not the full cost of the exercise that AHURI is undertaking. They are involved in a much bigger modelling exercise. We are simply building the ACT part of that particular approach. We have been able to benefit from the expertise of AHURI and the other academic institutions that are party to that really large-scale model development.

For us I think it is going to be very strategic and very important. It will also be of benefit widely, I think, within the government to assist in its predictive capabilities. It certainly, in my mind, will have a very important part to play in that, and I am not able at this stage to give you further details of the model because it is really under development. However, I would expect that it would be quite critical to our forecasting capacity in relation to land supply and in relation to demand. I think one of the values in the ACT is that we should be able to get quite specific information in relation to general sectors of the market and the requirements for land.

**Mr Corbell:** It is worth emphasising, Mr Mulcahy, that previously all governments have relied on both the historical trends, what has occurred before, and on advice from industry through private sector advisory bodies, both in the commercial land supply area and in the residential land supply area, to make an assessment of what is the required level of demand.

That process will need to continue. We will still need to engage with the private sector in getting their advice on what they anticipate demand will be. We will obviously also rely on Treasury predictions around the anticipated levels of stamp duty transactions and so on to indicate what the level of activity is in the market overall. But this piece of work will greatly add to our capacity to predict what demand should be and what the level of supply should be. It will inject more rigor into that process, and I think that is a very positive thing for policy making overall.

**MR MULCAHY:** Do you contemplate the private sector being able to access this predicted modelling capability once you have got it settled to avoid some of this boom and bust-type cycle that we seem to experience all too often?

**Mr Corbell:** Land supply is the responsibility of the government of the territory for new land. Primarily it will be used for that. Obviously the private sector does rely on the government's assumptions, as published through the budget, land supply strategy documents, and so on. The private sector will be able to take advantage of that information in the context of the information that is supplied through those sorts of



documents.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Seselja, and I understand Ms Porter has one question. I think Dr Foskey has a remaining supplementary on that area that she was talking about before. Mr Seselja?

**MR SESELJA:** Just a couple of question on Forde, if I may. Col Alexander from CIC was reported in the *Canberra Times* on Saturday as saying that he felt the company could handle the scale of the development but clearly the government wanted a big firm from Sydney or Melbourne to ensure better quality and so he was forced to use an interstate partnership. Is there a policy within the LDA? I guess I am trying to get an idea of where Mr Alexander would have got the idea that that was the government's policy.

**Mr Corbell:** Those are Mr Alexander's comments, not mine. You would need to ask Mr Alexander that.

**MR SESELJA:** So is there any LDA policy on the use of non-local firms to ensure better quality?

**Mr Corbell:** The answer to that is no. The LDA conducted an open tender process and assessed all comers on their merits.

**MR SESELJA:** I note you made comments at the beginning of the process, Mr Corbell, that you want a bigger developer like those from Sydney and Melbourne to lift the standard of development. Is there a concern, Ms Skewes, about those kinds of comments going on during a tender process? Did they influence the LDA at all?

**Mr Corbell:** Well, I think the answer to that, Mr Seselja, is no, absolutely not. I think my comments have to be put in the context in which they were made, and that is that it is very clear when you go to other greenfield development areas around the country that the large private sector land developers are building a better quality product. If you go to Mawson Lakes in South Australia, to greenfield development sites in other cities—Sydney, Melbourne or Perth—you see a higher quality of residential estate. If you look at who develops those estates, overwhelmingly they are being developed by major private sector consortiums, which involve large national companies, as well as local developers.

That is the point I was making in the comments attributed to me in the *Canberra Times*, that the Canberra market has traditionally been a very closed market. Traditionally it has been a very inward looking market, and I think we have paid the price for that in that our residential estates have not kept up with the standards that other Australians now get in some of the larger cities. The LDA's process was deliberately a very open one. It looked at all comers on their merits but sought to be outward looking, not just assuming that what we have done before was okay. We wanted to lift the standard, and we make no apology for doing that. I think we got the best possible tender partner with the announcement of Delfin, Lend Lease and CIC as a joint venture partner with LDA.

**MR SESELJA:** I am interested in Ms Skewes's views on whether or not those comments did influence it, given that Mr Alexander then, it seems, changed the tender in response to them or was certainly looking for a partnership that met the government's

requirements, as stated by you in the media. I am interested in Ms Skewes's views as to the helpfulness of comments during a tender process and whether or not they influenced the process at all.

**Mr Corbell:** Mr Seselja, I am very happy for Ms Skewes to answer the question. I would just add, however, that the government's requirements were those that were outlined in the tender, full stop. Those were the government's requirements. That is the criteria against which tenders were assessed. I am happy for Ms Skewes to answer the detail of your question.

**Ms Skewes:** I have no particular comments to add, apart from LDA conducted a full probity process in relation to this tender. It was done in accord with those probity requirements.

**MS PORTER:** I just wanted to ask a very quick question about how land is identified for aged care. On page 499, under highlights, it mentions releasing land to contribute to affordable housing, which we have already dealt with, and aged care as well.

**Mr Corbell:** I am sorry, Ms Porter. What is your—

**MS PORTER:** Under the highlights in page 499, it refers to “releasing land to contribute to affordable housing, aged care and community development initiatives”. Is that just part of that whole plan or is there a particular policy within LDA with regard to aged care?

**Mr Corbell:** I think that dot point simply reflects the fact that the LDA's role is to deliver land to meet certain government policy objectives, whether that is affordable housing through our affordable housing policy, whether that is aged care through building our ageing community policy or, indeed, for community development more generally, provision of land sites for churches, other places of worship for different philosophical and cultural beliefs, scout halls or a range of other activities such as that. This just reflects that the LDA has an important role as the deliverer of that land and consistent with government policy.

**MS PORTER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I realise it is 12.30. We may as well get it finished, rather than have the LDA come back after lunch.

**DR FOSKEY:** I have a supplementary question. I also have a question that may take us into a slightly new area, but you may decide we can pursue that question this afternoon without Ms Skewes having to be here.

**Mr Corbell:** Sure.

**DR FOSKEY:** On 4 May I asked what happens to land that did not sell at the land ballots. Mr Corbell, you were not able to answer at that time. I was just wondering if you are perhaps in a better position to answer the question now?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, Dr Foskey. In fact, in the last sitting, later that day—I think you were

not present in the chamber—I did provide an answer, and that is that land made available through the moderate-income land ballot that is not taken up at ballot is available for sale over the counter through the LDA for people who are eligible for the moderate-income land ballot.

**THE CHAIR:** How do they package that up over the counter? I am just kidding.

**Mr Corbell:** It means you can apply in person, rather than have to—

**THE CHAIR:** I understand. It was a flippant comment.

**DR FOSKEY:** So that land remains at the offering price and just becomes part of the suite, but you do ensure that it goes to—

**Mr Corbell:** It is only available to those people who meet the criteria.

**DR FOSKEY:** It is not an investment property?

**Mr Corbell:** No.

**DR FOSKEY:** The second last dot point under highlights refers to “setting higher standards for ecologically sustainable development in the residential market”. I am just wondering if you are going to actually put more effort into that in the next year. I do think that your own minutes of the various meetings indicate that you have not always succeeded in ensuring that developments do have high standards, particularly for energy efficiency. So I was just wondering how you could actually strengthen that in the coming year.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. We are focusing very strongly on strengthening that, and I will again ask Ms Skewes to give you some detail there, but in general terms what we are doing, in particular in new estates, is focusing very strongly on greater water and energy efficiency of developments in Forde. Again, Forde very much is our landmark project to try and drive better standards, which can then be replicated hopefully in other projects. There is a very strong emphasis on water reuse. The Forde project in its tender documentation highlighted the fact that they want to go beyond the standards as required under BASIX, which sets out the New South Wales government’s water efficiency targets.

The Forde project will focus very strongly on water reuse. It has significant water features as part of the project proposal. Obviously all of these will need to be firmed up through the joint venture process, but I expect, and the government expects, that we will achieve those high standards. Water reuse for irrigation of open space areas, recreational areas, will be fundamental. Capture of stormwater through individual residential dwellings and then use of that water for irrigation of the estate will lift the quality of the estate. It will give better quality, higher standards of public open space, public parks, ovals and so on. Also reducing our reliance on the potable water supply will be a very important element of Forde.

Equally, energy use will be strongly focussed on. The layout of the subdivision will be designed to optimise northern orientation and the opportunity for more solar passive qualities to be built into housing. The individual quality of housing will be driven again,

in particular, by the joint venture committee, which will look at the types of products that the builders who access land will be building. The planning authority itself, and it is probably worth highlighting this, is continuing to investigate the development and implementation of the New South Wales BASIX system in the ACT, which is for all new residential buildings, single dwellings, and that system obviously has a very strong emphasis on water efficiency and energy efficiency. I am not sure whether Anne would like to elaborate on that, but that, I think, gives you a general direction.

**Ms Skewes:** Thank you very much, minister. I think the point that I would like to emphasise is that we particularly see the opportunity in our new development areas to develop a sustainability template for all our development projects. So where we are delivering new projects to the market, we very much embed in them a template that provides the framework for energy efficiency, water reuse, waste management and urban design characteristics that highlight energy performance and also sustainable development outcomes. For us as an organisation, innovation in sustainability and delivery of development projects that achieve that are fundamental to the direction of our business.

It is also very important that Kingston Foreshore has achieved a number of milestones in its recycling targets, which it achieved. In fact, 90 per cent of its material was actually recycled in the development activity for that particular site. We also continue to monitor its performance in relation to energy demand and usage in residential buildings where our requirement is that we have a 50 per cent reduction in energy demand for our residential buildings and also a 50 per cent reduction in water consumption in buildings developed within the sites.

So those are very important indicators for us and we have now a process for starting to monitor the performance of the organisation in relation to what we see as its sustainability performance, but also its triple bottom line delivery for the government. That is fundamental to the new communities and the development projects that we are creating in to the future.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. We might finish there.

**MR SESELJA:** We have still got several questions. Is it possible for us to come back after lunch for a short period?

**THE CHAIR:** I did not notice that you were indicating that before.

**MR SESELJA:** I was certainly indicating, and Mr Mulcahy has only gone away because he had a 12.30 meeting, which is normally when we adjourn. But there are a number of question that have not been answered.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you give me an estimate of how many?

**MR SESELJA:** I have got about three.

**THE CHAIR:** And Mr Mulcahy?

**MR SESELJA:** I cannot speak for him, but I would say one or two.

**THE CHAIR:** We can ask the LDA to come back after lunch. I apologise that we did not get through it. That was my aim. If I had known that we were going to be coming back after lunch—you could have indicated that to me before, Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** I certainly indicated earlier.

**THE CHAIR:** No, you could have indicated that to me because I made a comment that I thought that we would be able to let the LDA go and that is why we ran over time.

**MR SESELJA:** We did have some very long answers in the intervening period.

**THE CHAIR:** Some questions require full answers, not just yours.

**MR SESELJA:** I cannot predict that.

**THE CHAIR:** Not just yours, Mr Seselja. If the minister—

**Mr Corbell:** We are in the committee's hands, Madam Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** If the LDA can come back, that would be great. We will try and keep it very brief after lunch.

**Mr Corbell:** Thank you.

**Meeting adjourned from 12.40 to 2.05 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** We will resume with some questions from Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** My first question may well cross over a number of agencies, but I want to ask it here. It may well be that I will need to ask it under the ACTPLA section, but it is relevant to the LDA and any assistance would be appreciated. I have had representations from constituents in relation to a block of land in Yerrabi and the crossover, I guess, between Actew, ACTPLA and the LDA. When the LDA releases land—I guess it would have been the predecessors of the LDA, the Gungahlin Development Authority, in this case—does Actew have a say in setting out the specs? In particular, I am thinking of the easements on either side of a block and at the back of a block. Does Actew have input on that? If so, what is the nature of that input?

**Mr Corbell:** Ms Skewes will correct me if I am wrong but, as I understand it, Actew indicates to both ACTPLA and the LDA what the requirements are in relation to easements and access to utilities on leased land.

**Ms Skewes:** That's right. The lease and development conditions require a very extensive consultation process throughout government and with government agencies. Certainly, all the major infrastructure agencies are engaged in the process of developing those lease and development conditions.

**MR SESELJA:** To put it in context for you, the representation I had from the constituents was that they bought this block in Yerrabi which had certain specs on it,

1.5 on other side, and the plans were approved within those boundaries but after they were approved by ACTPLA—obviously this is getting across the agencies—Actew turned around and said; “No, it’s actually 2.2, not 1.5.” Are you able to shed any light on that for us?

**Mr Corbell:** I am aware of the case, Mr Seselja. It’s a matter that ACTPLA are raising with Actew. It would appear that there was some retrospective changing of Actew’s requirements after the approval was given. This has come up before. I remember it coming up a few years ago. When I first became minister there was a similar case. I thought the matter had been resolved. It appears to have come up again and ACTPLA are seeking to resolve the situation as we speak. If you like, when Mr Savery arrives you can get some more information from him.

**MR SESELJA:** That would be very helpful because it is a concern. We have spoken to the MBA and it is not an isolated incident; it has happened in other cases.

**Mr Corbell:** It comes up occasionally, but not very often.

**MR SESELJA:** I am not saying that it is really widespread.

**Mr Corbell:** There seem to be some communication issues more than anything else, but Mr Savery can provide you with some more information.

**MR SESELJA:** I would appreciate that. I will revisit it with Mr Savery.

**MR MULCAHY:** The dividend for 2005-06, I believe, is anticipated to be \$118 million, which would represent an increase of 61 per cent. Could you help us understand why the dividend can be increased so greatly in a softening property market?

**Mr Corbell:** I will ask Ms Skewes and Mr Ryan to outline the issues for you, Mr Mulcahy.

**Ms Skewes:** I will ask Mr Ryan, our chief finance officer, to outline the change in our dividend payment.

**Mr Ryan:** The dividend for 2004-05 is budgeted to be \$73 million and the dividend for 2005-06, as you say, is \$118 million. In 2004-05, at the time of planning the budget, the LDA was seeking to purchase, and subsequently did purchase, a block of land at Crace from the commonwealth. Those negotiations were carried out just at the end of the previous financial year and the purchase was completed early in the 2004-05 financial year. That was agreed, through Treasury, to be funded through working capital. On that basis, the dividend agreed for 2004-05 would be subsequently somewhat less than it may have been in a normal situation where LDA wasn’t making large-scale acquisitions. That \$40 million for the purchase of Crace against the dividend that was being provided in 2004-05 would bring it up to around the same sort of level, \$113 million or \$114 million.

**MR MULCAHY:** Are you saying that the dividend, under different circumstances, would have been relatively close to the forecast dividend?

**Mr Ryan:** The forecast dividend was \$73 million.

**MR MULCAHY:** Sorry, to this year's dividend, I should say.

**Mr Ryan:** That's right. They would be relatively similar sorts of dividend payments, based on retaining the working capital float for the agency.

**MR MULCAHY:** That still leaves the question that all the indicators since last August, I think, have suggested a softening of the market in the ACT. Do you have a view on how you will be able to sustain that level?

**Ms Skewes:** I could perhaps augment that question: we certainly are very conscious of market softening and the market conditions, but one of the things that we have been fortunate in doing is being able to rely, particularly over recent months, on a very active commercial release program which has supported our revenue returns to the government and, obviously, underpinned the dividend payment. Certainly in the residential market there is softening and price moderation. With our land release program we have been able to augment, if you like, the softening in the residential market with further commercial releases, and those have generally been well received by the market.

**MR MULCAHY:** Are those mainly in the Gungahlin area?

**Ms Skewes:** Our commercial releases are right across Canberra. We have had a range of commercial releases. We will probably put to the market in the vicinity of 20 to 25 sites over the course of the 12-month period. They can be local centre sites, commercial sites adjacent to centres, and they can be town centre sites. There also have been a number of releases within Civic. Those generally have all been extremely well received by the market—a good market response. We have prepared the program for the forward years based on some continuing moderation in the residential market, but certainly also expecting that the commercial market will continue to perform reasonably well for the period.

**MR SESELJA:** How many residential blocks do you expect to release in 2005-06, and how does that compare with this financial year?

**Ms Skewes:** Our sales program for 2005-06 is predicated on the release of just over 1,000 blocks to the market. This would be in information that is currently before the government in our business planning program. That's spread across both our greenfield releases and our existing areas. So, all up, around the 1,100 mark and we're progressing that forward, expecting that the market in 2007-08 and 2008-09 will be in slightly improved conditions. We're suggesting that there will be slightly more, about 1,300-odd releases, over those two latter periods.

**MR SESELJA:** And 2006-07?

**Ms Skewes:** For 2006-07 we predicate about 1,100 as well. However, having said that, our program is very much subject to market conditions, market demand, and, as we have explained previously, we monitor market conditions and we release in accordance with market conditions to ensure that there is, in fact, equilibrium in the market.

**MR SESELJA:** How many do you expect to have released by end of 2004-05?

**Mr Corbell:** We might take that one on notice, Mr Seselja. We just don't have that information immediately to hand.

**MR SESELJA:** That's fine, thank you. Page 504 of budget paper 4 makes reference to the delayed sale of the Gold Creek Country Club. What are the reasons for the delay in the sale of the country club?

**Ms Skewes:** The Gold Creek Country Club is, in fact, undergoing a sale process as we speak, with tenders expected to close tomorrow for the sale of Gold Creek Country Club. This item was carried forward from the previous financial year. There was quite a bit of preparatory work that needed to be done to prepare the site for the market. As you could imagine, a golf course operation is quite complex, with a range of leasing matters to be dealt with and a range of ownership matters to be represented to the market. That tender process commenced in the November-December period and we have proceeded with that tender. In fact, the second stage of that tender closes tomorrow. We are well on track with that now, but it was the preparatory work that needed to occur that meant that that site was held over from 2004-05.

**MR SESELJA:** Is it expected that that delay will lead to a lower price?

**Ms Skewes:** I do not think the delay is a reflection at all on how the market would respond to it. In fact, I think the additional time that has been taken to prepare that site for the market and to have good-quality information assists in its presentation to the market and hopefully will enable tenderers to come back with some strong responses.

**MR MULCAHY:** Minister, I am not sure of the capacity in which it is appropriate to ask this question: concerning the release of blocks for aged care developments, which has been an issue in the territory, do you have more scheduled for release to meet the obvious growing demand, which obviously would take pressure off your other hat in the health system?

**Mr Corbell:** I am very pleased that the government has got a comprehensive program to manage land release for aged care facilities. We do this basically through two mechanisms. The first is the direct grant of additional land to existing operations, and there are a number of operations already extant in the territory that have sought to expand. Goodwin Homes in Monash and Farrer is a good example of that. St Andrew's Village in Hughes is another one that has sought to expand existing facilities and we have directly granted land or are in the process of directly granting land to those organisations.

The other is the release of essentially greenfield sites for new facilities. We have done that through a range of mechanisms that the previous government initiated and we completed—the direct grant of land to the Little Company of Mary for an aged care facility in Bruce. The LDA has recently been very successful in what is an Australian first with the site on the shores of Lake Ginninderra for an aged care facility and independent living units. A 100-bed aged care facility and 150 independent living units are to be built by the Illawarra Retirement Trust on the shores on Lake Ginninderra.

It is an Australian first because we were able to link the land to the bed supply, to the



funding for the beds from the commonwealth government. The commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing agreed to work with us and tie the funding for the beds to the release of the site. It gave greater certainty to the successful tenderer that they had both the land and the bed funding tied together and they could get on and deliver that facility. That work is ongoing.

The government has identified through the planning authority additional sites, including sites in Nicholls, Greenway and in Gordon, certainly one large site on the north side and one large site on the Southside as well as a number of smaller sites, for adaptable living type units and we will continue to progress the planning work needed to release those sites over the coming year.

**MR MULCAHY:** Do you feel, with accelerated demand, that there is not a case to accelerate the release of land for development, or do you think you are keeping up with the demand?

**Mr Corbell:** I think we are now keeping up with demand and the key factor that influences demand is the availability of commonwealth funding for beds. Aged care providers will not proceed with development unless they are able to secure funding for the operation of the high and low care beds, or the high care beds, and the commonwealth has a certain number that it releases each year. We will be seeking to release additional sites in the same way that we have for the Lake Ginninderra site, where the land and the funding for the beds have been tied, so that you do not have the situation of an aged care provider saying to the commonwealth, "Give us the funding but we don't have the land," and saying to the ACT government, "Give us the land but we don't have the funding."

**MR MULCAHY:** You had commonwealth places, did you not, that were available but had not been taken up last year?

**Mr Corbell:** The government does not. The funding for the beds is provided to the individual providers. There were a number of facilities or operators that had funding for beds provided which had not yet been made operational. The most obvious of those is the Southern Cross homes site in Bruce, adjacent to Calvary Hospital. The others, though, are very much under way now. I was fortunate to be at the sod turning for the Southern Cross homes development in Garran about a month ago, which is a high care and independent living unit facility.

Goodwin Homes is well progressed with proposals for the redevelopment of their Ainslie site. A very significant redevelopment is under way there. We have also directly granted land to Goodwin Homes in Monash and that direct grant has been completed. We are also in the process of doing so for St Andrew's Village in Hughes. I think we are very much on top of the game. I believe we are now meeting the demand and we have got a land bank in place to continue to meet that demand.

**MR MULCAHY:** Just finally on St Andrew's, there seems to be some time being taken. Is that because they are still struggling their way through the planning process?

**Mr Corbell:** St Andrew's wanted to acquire land that was designated as urban open space in the territory plan. That meant that the territory plan had to be changed before the

land could be considered for direct sale to them. The territory plan now has been changed, has been considered by the Assembly committee and so on, and we are now in a position to progress the direct sale of that land to them, and that is ongoing.

**MR SESELJA:** Minister or Ms Skewes, how much of the advertising budget for the LDA has been spent this year and how much is it envisaged will be spent next year?

**Mr Corbell:** I will ask Mr Ryan to answer that question.

**Mr Ryan:** The LDA's expenditure budget for marketing in 2004-05 is just over \$4 million and that includes the costs of selling, the costs associated with the legal side of sales, and also marketing and promotion activities for marketing and selling the land, which includes advertising. So a portion of that, a subset of that, is the advertising component, if that is answering your question. We can get more details about the specific advertising component.

**MR SESELJA:** If you could get more details on the actual advertising component, that would be good, and also the projections for 2005-06 with a similar breakdown.

**Mr Ryan:** Okay.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Chair, Mr Seselja's asked how many residential blocks would be released in the current financial year. I am advised the figure is 1,505, we anticipate.

**MR SESELJA:** In this financial year?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, and that includes land in Forde, Wells Station and Ginninderra Ridge.

**MR SESELJA:** Thank you. As to the contract for advertising, is there one main provider that provides the advertising for the agency or do you go through several?

**Ms Skewes:** We have a range of activities, but we undertook a procurement activity a while ago and we actually have a principal provider for the preparation of our promotional type material, but we also have some flexibility because particular projects might require a particular service. Generally, through our procurement activities, we have an ongoing relationship there to assist us in all our project marketing. Just on our marketing and our sales activity, we do benchmark our marketing and sales costs against industry standards and certainly we expect that our projects will perform well in relation to the benchmarks we set. Basically, they are industry type standards that we follow and, particularly for our new developments, we are very much focused on ensuring efficiency and value for money as part of our sales and marketing activities.

**MR SESELJA:** As to industry standards, has the LDA in its assessments compared favourably, better or worse, or around the same?

**Ms Skewes:** Actually, in some of our activities we would be performing well under what other industry parties probably would be doing in relation to sales and sales agency arrangements.

**MR SESELJA:** Do you mean in the total spent on sales?

**Ms Skewes:** Yes. We have very efficient sales agency arrangements in respect of a number of our projects. Our overall marketing budget, however, is within the industry benchmark. We have some very good arrangements underpinning some of our projects, and certainly overall we are well within the industry benchmark.

**MR SESELJA:** You were suggesting—I might have misunderstood—that there was one main provider and then several smaller ones; is that misreading what you said?

**Ms Skewes:** I think that in this discussion we have to separate our sales and marketing. They are obviously, as you know, quite different functions. Marketing is a lot of the preparation of advertising material and the like, as opposed to sales agency arrangements, but effectively they are all brought in under a particular cost structure so they were able to benchmark those.

**DR FOSKEY:** I want to confirm something that I asked before and I think it requires a yes or no answer. I just want to ask you whether the LDA makes direct grants of land to ACT Housing in particular—not community housing providers, just ACT Housing. If so, in what instances; if not, is it under consideration?

**Mr Corbell:** The answer is that we do sell land direct to ACT Housing.

**DR FOSKEY:** Sell, not grant?

**Mr Corbell:** It is because of the nature of the lease, I'm advised. They receive what's called an executive lease. They don't hold title in their own right; they hold title on behalf of the territory. So it doesn't go through the direct grant process as with, say, giving land to Community Housing Canberra, because they are a separate entity, not a territory-owned organisation. So it's a separate process, but we do sell land to them directly. A direct grant, I should say, is, despite the language, also a sale process. That may be where you are confused. Whilst it's called a direct grant, that simply indicates it's not a competitive process.

**DR FOSKEY:** I wonder if I could ask, as a question on notice, for more detail about that. It is something that I would like to understand better.

**Mr Corbell:** Sorry, about what exactly?

**DR FOSKEY:** About the process. You have, rightly, comprehended my ignorance on this topic and I give you the opportunity and invite you to educate me.

**MR MULCAHY:** Chair, it might be better as a briefing.

**Mr Corbell:** I was about to say that, Mr Mulcahy.

**DR FOSKEY:** I would like it as a question on notice.

**Mr Corbell:** We are happy to answer it as a question on notice, if that is your preference, Dr Foskey.

**DR FOSKEY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Skewes and Mr Ryan, thank you very much for your attendance this morning and this afternoon. I welcome the officials from ACTPLA. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement in relation to ACTPLA?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. I think it would be worth while to give an overview to the committee on the key elements of the planning authority's budget, initiatives and other issues. The government has sought to continue to resource the key initiatives that the government has outlined in its strategic planning documents; in particular, the continued implementation of the Canberra spatial plan, the focus on the revitalisation of the city centre, a range of transport-related initiatives which I will be happy to elaborate on, given our discussion this morning, and also, and most fundamentally, reform of the development assessment and other planning tools that exist in the ACT.

The most significant piece of work in many respects is the funding made available for the continuation of the government's planning reform agenda. This is stage 2, or the second wave, of reform of the planning system in the ACT instigated by this government. The first term of the government saw reform of the governance arrangements that exist in the planning system. We established an independent planning authority; we established an independent chief planner, through the office of the Chief Planning Executive, which Mr Savery fills; and we established the Land Development Agency and the Planning and Land Council. These governance reforms really laid the basis for further reform.

The government has been very focused on wanting to create a best practice model for planning administration in the territory and our structure is very much focused on that recommended by the Development Assessment Forum, a national initiative between the Property Council of Australia at a national level and the state and territory governments and, indeed, the commonwealth government. The DAF model recommends the establishment of an independent planning agency, one where decision making on development applications is made at arms length from elected officials. That's what we have established through the ACT Planning and Land Authority.

The second stage of reform is around creating a more streamlined development assessment process. The government has provided funding for the continuation of that very important piece of work and I will be making an announcement very shortly on the details around the government's proposed reforms and the opportunities for public comment on those reforms.

The government is also seeking to continue, along with this reform, a very strong emphasis on sustainability in terms of development assessment and approval; so \$160,000 has been allocated in the budget for the government to investigate the feasibility, and potentially implement pending final agreement, of the system known as BASIX, the building sustainability index, which is used by the New South Wales government. BASIX requires all new residential dwellings at this stage to achieve enhanced levels of water and energy efficiency and sustainability. We are keen, and I am keen as minister, to see this progressed in the ACT and I am pleased the government has chosen to allocate money to allow us to continue this very important initiative.

Other very important projects funded in the budget include a continued focus on the revitalisation of the city centre. New investigations are being funded into the management of traffic around the city centre, particularly around City Hill. That is a level of continued support for the government's very important Canberra central program and those budget initiatives will further support the work of the new Canberra central task force, which the government revamped and announced a few weeks ago.

As part of that work, a very significant project, a capital works projects, is the redevelopment of Childers Street in City West. The City West project identified Childers Street as a very significant cultural street for the city centre and money has been allocated, approximately \$6 million, to allow for the redevelopment of that site, new street furniture, redesign of the streetscape, opportunities for eat and meet and drink establishments, and cultural activities. Childers Street will become a very strong focus for the western side of the city and an important linkage point between the ANU and the city centre. The design work for Childers Street is extremely well advanced and I am confident that this project will be delivered in the coming financial year. It also complements very well the work the government is doing with the ANU for the revitalisation of City West and the City West precinct agreement that we have with the Australian National University.

The other important funding that has been made available in the budget is for the real-time information project which we discussed briefly this morning—a significant commitment, approximately \$6.5 million, to roll out real-time information in the ACT. Real-time information provision has been shown to greatly improve passenger perceptions of the reliability and the frequency of bus services and has also led to improvements in patronage of public transport. Real-time information is now used in a number of cities in Australia, notably Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and parts of Perth and Melbourne, but our rollout will be one of the largest in the Southern Hemisphere.

A similar project has just been completed in Auckland of approximately \$7 million worth of investment. Our \$6.5 million is a very significant investment, but we have decided that it is time to make that investment to improve the perception of the reliability and frequency of our public transport use, to give passengers greater confidence as to when a bus will be coming, and to make it easier for more casual journeys to be undertaken by bus without the need to plan so much because you are able to arrive at the stop and see immediately when the bus will be coming. You do not have to plan and you do not have to have a timetable on you or so on. You do not have to be necessarily that familiar with the bus system to find your way around it with real-time information. This investment will see significant provision of real-time information at high-volume stops across the city to improve patronage further and to help us as a community to meet our sustainable transport targets.

There is a range of other issues in the planning portfolio's budget and I am sure that we will come to those in time but that, hopefully, gives members a bit of an overview of the key issues and what we believe need to be focused on in the coming year.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. There is only one output class. Rather than segmenting it into the overview, capital works and initiatives and then into output classes, I suggest that we just let it flow. I hope that that is okay.

**MR SESELJA:** I would agree, chair; I think that makes sense.

**MR MULCAHY:** I heartily endorse that approach.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Mulcahy has the call for the first question.

**MR MULCAHY:** Minister, yesterday we heard evidence from several business organisations—I am not sure if you had the opportunity to listen. Keeping in mind the eloquent dissertation we just heard about how you are progressing through reform of planning, it did trouble me to hear that I think at least two of those three organisations told this committee that the single largest area of complaint amongst their membership related to planning in the ACT, for which you have had responsibility for 3½ years. Do you have a view why the business community of Canberra is so obviously dissatisfied with the performance of the agency?

**Mr Corbell:** I think it is quite common, Mr Mulcahy. Indeed, if you go to any city in the country you would find their business advocacy groups making similar observations about their city's or their state's planning system. Indeed, it is interesting that last time I was in Sydney I heard the Property Council of New South Wales say that the New South Wales planning system was the most inefficient and complex in the country. And that is exactly the same sort of language you hear here too.

I make this observation not to diminish the comments that industry makes from time to time because it is acknowledged by me and by the government that our planning system needs to be improved in terms of development assessment and the other elements, the other tools, that our planners use. I simply make the comment, though, to make the point that planning is inevitably an area that attracts criticism, particularly when people are unhappy with a decision.

The recent Auditor-General's investigation into development assessment processes found that the planning authority's decisions were overwhelmingly fair and supported, when challenged, in the large majority of cases by the AAT. What the Auditor-General fundamentally found, though, was that the system took too long. So the government's focus is on making the system work in a more timely way, a more effective way, and for simpler applications in a way that involves less process, less overview and less examination for what should be straightforward proposals. The government's reform project is designed to address these issues.

The planning authority and the team responsible for the reform project within the planning authority have been meeting intensively with industry representatives, environment representatives and community representatives, to talk about the key issues of reform—reform that is needed because our Land Act is one of the most complex and difficult to administer pieces of legislation the territory has. It has been amended many times on the floor of the Assembly. It has been the victim of minority government and, in particular, I believe undue amendment by crossbench and minor party members, particularly when it was born in the early 90s when it was amended certainly at least over two to three dozen times on the floor of the Assembly during its passage.

We have had an essentially very difficult to administer piece of legislation for over

a decade now and the time is right to fundamentally reform it, and that is what the government is doing. I think industry groups will strongly welcome the reforms. I think community and environment groups will also welcome the reforms because it is about getting our priorities right and making sure there is a good level of scrutiny and oversight of major, complex and often controversial proposals. But for simpler proposals, for proposals that fit within agreed streams of development, of types of development, then they should be able to proceed in a far more streamlined way than they do at the moment.

**MR MULCAHY:** Thank you. Obviously, minister, with not having to contend with the crossbench obstructing the way in which your legislation rolls out, you will be in good position to deliver the sort of performance that, I think, a lot of the development community wants.

Just a couple of administrative questions, minister: I raised previously the issue of your mission around the world to look at things in the United States and in the UK. Can you give us an indication at this stage as to who is actually participating in this mission—who are the people—what their roles will be and do we know yet what this is going to cost the taxpayer? I am keeping this in mind with Mr Hargreaves's announcement last night that the community of Canberra, in his words, is really being asked to tighten their belts. Can you give us some more information on that mission?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, I am very happy to, Mr Mulcahy. I am obviously travelling, as is my planning advisor from my office. The other people accompanying me will be staff of the planning authority, in particular staff who are directly responsible for land development issues and planning of new subdivisions in new residential areas. There will be three officers of the planning authority accompanying me, and my planning advisor. The cost of the journey is yet to be fully confirmed but will be reported in the usual way to the Assembly. I am looking forward to what I think will be a very interesting and informative visit.

**MR MULCAHY:** Those three officers from the planning authority, minister: do we have the details of who they are, and is this coming out of departmental funding or ministerial travel?

**Mr Corbell:** My travel is funded by allocations made to the executive, and the same goes for my advisor. The travel of the departmental officers is funded by the planning authority.

**MR MULCAHY:** Okay. Do you have any more detail on what the nature of the visit will be other than the broad report?

**Mr Corbell:** I beg your pardon?

**MR MULCAHY:** Can you provide the committee with a little more detail on what exactly is going to be gleaned from this mission?

**Mr Corbell:** I am very happy to. In the United Kingdom I will be visiting a range of new developments. For example, I will be meeting with an organisation called One Planet Living, which is responsible, with the World Wildlife Fund, for developing very

innovative forms of urban development, including what is called zero emission development—that is, developments that essentially are zero emission in terms of their greenhouse gas emissions—so, highly sustainable forms of development. There are some world leading best practice examples in the United Kingdom, particularly in London in the Thames gateway, which is otherwise known, I think, as the docklands area of London. I will be looking at a number of buildings there. I will also be meeting with the department of the Deputy Prime Minister, who are responsible for urban development policy in the United Kingdom, and we will be discussing with them their approaches to sustainability and sustainable development.

I will also be visiting a number of the original garden city towns where the garden city concept was first established. These towns are now at the very edge of the growth of the Greater London area and are facing significant growth pressures as a result of that. It is a very relevant visit because they have to manage the pressure for redevelopment in similar ways to how our garden city suburbs are having to manage redevelopment pressures because of changing demographics and proximity to the centre of the city. So it will be a very valuable experience in that regard. I am looking forward to those discussions. I will be meeting with officials in those towns.

In the United States I will be visiting, first of all, in Florida a number of what are known as master planned communities. These master planned communities are generally recognised worldwide as some of the best examples of what is called new urbanism—the new urbanism style of development. That is a strong emphasis on public spaces, walking and cycling, as compared to planning suburbs around motor vehicles, which has been the traditional approach here in Canberra. I will meet with elected officials and planning officials in those jurisdictions, and visit those developments.

I will then be travelling to attend a three-day conference, which is organised by the Urban Land Institute of America. They are probably the leading professional body that, I guess, coordinates and represents the views of people involved in land development in the United States. Again, the opportunity will be there to meet with elected officials and planning officials on developments in residential development policy, particularly issues around sustainability, transit-oriented development and other related issues.

Finally, I will be travelling to Portland on the west coast to meet with elected officials of the City of Portland and also their planning officials to discuss their approach to transit oriented development again and how they achieve greater densities within a confined development boundary similar to the one that we have put in place through the Canberra spatial plan. You would probably be aware, Mr Mulcahy, that the spatial plan identifies that we should contain growth in the City of Canberra within 15 kilometres of the city centre. It is a similar approach that they have adopted in Portland but they are much more down the track in terms of managing that growth and managing urban containment. They have had to do that through increased levels of density and increased density in particular around public transport nodes and facilitation of public transport. We will be obviously looking at some case examples there and discussing those issues with planning officials and elected official in Portland.

**MR MULCAHY:** Thank you. Are you catching up with Mr Blair when you are over there?



**Mr Corbell:** I think Mr Blair is well out of my league, Mr Mulcahy.

**DR FOSKEY:** I just want to say that I think it is actually good that you are looking into what I see as a whole variety of approaches to planning. I would hate to think that we had a planning minister that didn't look into best practice around the world. Portland has some of the most innovative and earliest initiatives in the United States that set precedents for groups here. I wondered if that was one of the reasons why you chose Portland. Secondly, I would like to ask you if you have ever visited Scandinavian cities—

**THE CHAIR:** I think Ms Ekelund is probably well aware of this.

**DR FOSKEY:** where, in fact, there is a lot more expectation and quite a different approach to, for instance, housing people, affordable housing and home ownership and also the development of so-called eco-communities, particularly in Denmark. Are you aware of those and have you visited them?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I have not visited them. I am aware of some examples in Europe and in some of the Scandinavian countries. I think there is a particular housing development in Copenhagen which sort of started out as a commune and became more of a co-housing type development and which has become much more formalised and recognised by the city government there. But I must admit I am not that familiar with that part of the world.

The reason I am going to Portland is precisely the reason you cite, Dr Foskey. It is internationally recognised as a city in a developed country that has really taken significant strides to improve sustainability. Many of the people who have participated in the transport debate in Canberra over the past four to five years—indeed, for as long as I have been in the Assembly—have often cited Portland as a place which Canberra could learn from. I have certainly read a lot about it. Given the size of Portland, whilst it is larger than Canberra, it is not a major metropolis either, and so its relevance to Canberra is more than perhaps you would see in a very large metropolitan area in the United States. So, yes, it is for those reasons that I am going.

Then other reason that is worth citing is that Mr Steven Ames, who is a planning official associated with Portland and has previously visited Canberra on a number of occasions, has provided advice to ACTPLA and its predecessors on sustainability policy. I will be taking the opportunity to meet some of his colleagues, past and present, to discuss the relevance of some of the lessons they have learnt and how they can be applied to the ACT.

**MR SMYTH:** Could I ask a supplementary before we change subjects? Along with Portland, obviously Vancouver across the border is also renowned for planning, and we have had also Canadians come.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth, surprisingly I am having trouble hearing you. Could you speak up a bit please?

**MR SMYTH:** All right, I will speak up. Across the Canadian border is Vancouver. The Liberal Party is not against ministerial travel per se. We just want to make sure that the taxpayers get best value for money out of this.

**Mr Corbell:** Right. Is that what the position is. That's interesting to know.

**MR SMYTH:** Was there any indication of going across to Vancouver and perhaps seeing the Butchart Gardens to save the Chief Minister that leg?

**Mr Corbell:** Well, the Chief Minister obviously has his own responsibilities and his own interest that he wishes to pursue. I did contemplate Vancouver because they have done some interesting work, in particular with busways and transit-oriented development. Unfortunately, we can't do it all.

**MR SMYTH:** Okay. So you won't be going to Canada this trip?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I won't be going to Canada on this journey.

**DR FOSKEY:** Okay. I will just roll out these questions. What percentage of cut has there been for the ACTPLA allocation for this coming and future years?

**Mr Corbell:** The amount is \$1.4 million, which equates to around five per cent of the total ACTPLA budget.

**DR FOSKEY:** And is that likely to translate into similar cuts in staffing?

**Mr Corbell:** We anticipate approximately nine full-time staff positions will be lost as a result of the savings.

**DR FOSKEY:** The chair was about to roll out her questions, too. Did you want to do that?

**THE CHAIR:** No, you finish yours and I will follow my normal routine.

**DR FOSKEY:** Have you identified the areas in which those cuts will be felt?

**Mr Corbell:** That work is still ongoing and won't be confirmed until later on in the new financial year. However, I can advise the committee that I am advised that we anticipate five positions will be lost through natural attrition and a reduction of four positions will need to be achieved through voluntary redundancy.

**DR FOSKEY:** Were there any unspent funds in 2004-05? I have heard—you may as well know what is being said—that around \$8 million has been an underspend. I would be interested to know what the programs were and whether they have been rolled over.

**Mr Corbell:** I am advised that that figure is not correct, and there has not been any underspend of that level.

**DR FOSKEY:** It is always good to check these rumours. So is there an underspend of any level?

**Mr Corbell:** I will ask Mr Savery.

**Mr Savery:** At this stage, our end-of-year forecast is that we will not be underspent in any area.

**DR FOSKEY:** Can I just check that with sustainability indicators; then I am through with this general stuff.

**THE CHAIR:** Just before you go on to that, I want to ask my usual question. It relates to the issue of employment. Mr Savery, through the minister, of course—

**Mr Savery:** Excuse me, Madam Chair. Just to clarify that that is in relation to our recurrent operating capital works budget: we have forecast some items there where we will not have completed the budgets.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay. Mr Savery, I am raising this with all agencies that come through. It is normally Mr Seselja who asks the question; then I do the follow on. He has been very lax today I would have to say. But I know he asked a question in the Assembly in May about cuts for ACTPLA.

The issue that I am curious about is that there is a tendency—it is my perception and, I believe, more than a perception—that most jobs within the ACT government service are advertised on a full-time basis. There are some savings to be made. Obviously not all savings can be made this way, but there are possibly some savings to be made by offering to existing staff the ability to go part time from a full-time basis, especially if they are parents of young children who will be looking to achieve a bit more of a family-work-life balance. I am curious to know from each of the agencies whether this is being considered and whether existing employees are being given the option of looking at going from full time to part time.

**Mr Savery:** There are two parts in answering the question. Firstly, we already have a significant number of our staff who work in a part-time capacity, largely to enable them to achieve that work-life balance. Bear in mind that many people who work within the ACT Planning and Land Authority are women who in many cases have young families and it would be almost impossible for us to be able to fill all our staff requirements if we weren't able to offer those flexible employment arrangements.

Secondly, though, in terms of what we are doing immediately in order to address these staff initiatives associated with the budget: we are preparing a staff change management program in accordance with a policy direction established by the Chief Minister's Department that will examine a number of options on how we address the savings target. I can't foreshadow yet whether or not that is going to include any further opportunities for part-time employment, but it is one of the things that will be looked at in order to achieve our savings targets.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I wouldn't want you to pre-empt, but I would also mention that many fathers want to be able to spend time with their young children, not just women. Dr Foskey, you had one question that you wanted to ask; then I will go to Mr Seselja.

**DR FOSKEY:** I wouldn't mind, Mr Savery, if you would expand on the comment that you quickly gave just before Ms McDonald asked her question. You said that no, there

had been no underspend but yes, there had been in capital works. I invite you to expand on that, please.

**Mr Savery:** Okay. There are a couple of projects that we foreshadowed before the end of the financial year—we are obviously still in the financial year—that we wouldn't be able to complete spending on due to a range of issues. Principal within that is the Cohen Street extension, which is associated with the works in the Belconnen town centre. That has been necessary in order for us to complete our design and planning for the Belconnen to city busway and also because it is associated with changes to the Belconnen bus interchange, which is associated with works around the Westfield shopping centre. So until those matters are resolved it is difficult for us to complete design work and undertake construction for that activity.

Also some of the design works associated with the Belconnen to city busway are foreshadowed to be carried across into the next financial year, largely because we haven't been able to undertake the preliminary assessment associated with that work until the latter part of this year; so there is some carryover there. I think they take up the large part of any underspend in the capital works program. There are a couple of other minor items. Dorte, do you want to expand on those?

**Ms Ekelund:** There was also an item for the Bonner water quality control pond, which is proposed for construction between the suburb of Bonner and the suburb of Forde. That has been delayed pending the outcome of the Forde joint venture that was recently announced. So that was really just a timing issue to ensure that that infrastructure coincided properly with the release of that land in Forde.

**DR FOSKEY:** Did you have any comments on the new sustainability indicators or any feedback on them?

**Mr Corbell:** I would welcome yours, Dr Foskey.

**DR FOSKEY:** You will get them.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. At this stage, I think this is very much a work in progress, but I am quite pleased with the indicators that are currently in the budget papers. I certainly acknowledge that they will evolve and be refined over time.

**THE CHAIR:** Have you finished with the sustainability indicators, Dr Foskey?

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I will pass over to Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** Thank you, chair. Welcome, officers. I have a couple of questions, following on from Dr Foskey's remarks in relation to staffing. The Auditor-General's report into the DA processes made some recommendations regarding individual officers assessing and then approving the same DA. ACTPLA's response was that, whilst the authority will review the merit of a similar approach to simple DAs, it would have to be balanced against its practicality, cost effectiveness and benefit, and have regard to resources and impacts on the timeliness of such approvals. Minister, given the loss of

jobs in this budget, will it be more difficult now for ACTPLA to respond to some of the recommendations in the Auditor-General's report?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I don't believe so. The development assessment is very much a core function of the planning authority's responsibilities, and I do not see that being impacted upon in any significant way by the redundancies that are proposed.

**MR SESELJA:** Do you guarantee that there won't be any job losses in those areas?

**Mr Corbell:** No, I can't make any guarantees in any part of the organisation. That is a matter that will be worked through by the chief planning executive and his management team. The issue, though, is that what the Auditor-General recommended, in the government's view and certainly, I know, the authority's view, is that, by adding another layer of checking, if you like, to the process of simple DAs, it was difficult to see what it would add to the process. But it was very clear what it would take away from the process, and that would be timeliness. If you required another officer to check or to verify the work of another officer for what was a simple development application, you are actually adding layers of bureaucracy, not removing them.

Whilst the Auditor-General was critical of timeliness, in my view and, I know, in Mr Savery's view, the recommendation actually worked against the issue of achieving greater timeliness because it meant more work had to be done for simple applications. The government's philosophy—and I think members will see this when the reform package is released very shortly—is to streamline the time taken for all development assessment, but particularly for development assessment that is simple and straightforward. Extensions to existing dwellings, where they are not heritage listed, for example; new dwellings in new suburbs—these sorts of developments should be straightforward and should be managed in a very quick way. Our time frames are very good for these types of developments but there are ways that we can improve things further. That will be outlined in the planning reform package I will be releasing shortly.

**MR SESELJA:** On page 209 of budget paper 4, right down at the bottom, in fiscal responsibility, it says that the total cost of services is in accordance with the budget. I am not quite sure exactly what that means. It goes up from the estimated outcome in 2004-05 of around \$39 million to \$58 million in 2005-06. Are you able to explain to us what that means and what the effect of that is?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. I will ask Mr Sakkara if he can answer that question.

**Mr Sakkara:** The target of \$58 million represents the expenditure budget of the authority. It is simply a performance measure to ensure that we meet our fiscal responsibility under the FMA, and that same figure is reflected in the operating statement on page 214 as target expenditure.

**MR SESELJA:** Why the significant difference between 2004-05 and 2005-06?

**Mr Sakkara:** The major item represents the other expenses line, which is the last item on that operating statement—

**MR SESELJA:** This is on 214?

**Mr Sakkara:** Yes, sorry, page 214. The \$21 million that is for other expenses in 2005-06 represents the transfer of our complete capital works projects to the Department of Urban Services upon completion. It is just an expenditure, an accounting treatment, for the transfer of those capital works.

**MR SMYTH:** Can I ask a supplementary on that, please? Is the same treatment conducted in the 2004-05 year or, if it is a different treatment, why have you chosen to do it this way in the coming year?

**Mr Sakkara:** The same treatment is there for 2004-05. There is only \$300,000 included as completed projects in 2004-05.

**MS PORTER:** During your introductory remarks and when you were referring to the work that you are going to be doing overseas, you mentioned sustainability and the BASIX system. I was just wondering if you could give us some more information about how that system will improve sustainability in Canberra.

**Mr Corbell:** Thank you, Ms Porter. BASIX has been introduced by the New South Wales government in the Sydney metropolitan area and is already a mandatory requirement in order to apply for development approval in the Sydney metropolitan area for single dwellings. It will shortly be rolled out and made mandatory across the state of New South Wales by the middle of this year. By 1 July, all new areas, including the local government areas immediately around us in Queanbeyan and so on, will be required to have all new residential development, single dwelling development, receive a BASIX certificate before development approval can be granted.

Basically, the way it works is that you are required to get what is called a BASIX certificate. You can access this from the web, where you can feed into the web the specifications of how you plan to achieve the mandatory levels of water and energy efficiency of a new building. There are certain levels that you must meet.

The beauty of the BASIX system is that it doesn't say, "You must have a solar hot water system or a rainwater tank or north-facing windows," or whatever the case may be. But it does say that you must meet these standards, these thresholds of energy and water efficiency. You can propose to get that through any range of measures. How you do that is up to you, but you must meet those standards; otherwise you don't get a certificate. Obviously you get more points towards getting that certificate if you do things like solar hot water systems, rainwater tanks, water efficient gardens and so on.

The beauty and the importance of this from an ACT perspective is we don't currently, in our planning legislation, have any mandatory requirements that drive people looking at putting in place energy and water efficient devices or practices. The only tool we have at the moment is ACTERS for home energy rating. A minimum standard must be achieved against ACTERS. But this goes well beyond ACTERS; it is a more vigorous system; it is one that seeks to actively reduce the average cost of running a house in terms of water and energy; it seeks to actively reduce the average amount of energy and water used in a dwelling. It is a very significant step forward.

We still need to do a fair amount of work to determine whether or not BASIX should be

implemented in the ACT. That includes things such as undertaking impacts in terms of the impact of regulation, the desirability of it fitting in with our existing systems, our ability to make the software available in a web-based form to ACT residents, and a range of other matters. And that is what the \$160,000 is designed to assist us in doing. It will also reflect the potential licence cost of purchasing, if you like, the right to use the system from New South Wales and the New South Wales government.

I have had initial discussions directly with the assistant planning minister in New South Wales, Diane Beamer. She has indicated to me that New South Wales is certainly prepared to consider the ACT using the system and, in principle, has no objection to the system being used in the ACT, subject to a satisfactory contract being reached with them over the licence cost. That is something that can now progress because of this budget allocation.

**MS PORTER:** It is for new dwellings. Is there anything at all for major renovations? Will it be further down the track? Have they introduced it in New South Wales? Are they introducing it?

**Mr Savery:** Through the chair: it can include major renovations. I think the minister also indicated that the tool is now being developed to apply to multi-unit residential developments. They are also, at this stage, developing the tool so that it can be applied to commercial and industrial buildings. Obviously, they have just spent the better part of the last 18 months applying the first tranche of the BASIX tool in New South Wales. As they are doing that, they are developing it or continuing to develop it for other means.

**DR FOSKEY:** I am interested in why we need a feasibility study of BASIX. I guess that we probably ride a lot on the back of New South Wales work. I think you have said a bit about the study but I would like to know a bit more about what it will entail and whether there will be a regulatory impact statement. To clarify the budget amounts here: we have got 164 this financial year and then 30 for next financial year. I wonder what that 30 is about. Does that also indicate that there is no way we will be implementing this until the financial year after next, seeing there is no budget amount for it?

**Mr Corbell:** There will probably be an upfront cost to purchase the system from New South Wales and also pay the New South Wales Department of Planning and Natural Resources to plug into the system the data around the ACT climate. The BASIX tool is one driven by the climate type in which it is applied. You have to indicate, when you go into the BASIX system on the web, where you live. Then the tool assesses what is needed in terms of energy efficiency and water efficiency, based on what the climate is that you live in.

Obviously our climate is identical to the climate of Queanbeyan; so there isn't an enormous amount of difference there. Nevertheless, that data will need to be put in. We will be paying New South Wales potentially to do that work as well as license the tool from New South Wales through an upfront payment.

Yes, there will be the need for a regulatory impact statement. We will, however, as you identify, Dr Foskey, be able to draw on the work of the New South Wales government in their own regulatory impact assessment processes; so that is to our advantage. The other point you raise is the timing of introduction. It is subject to final government agreement

and approval, and that is subject to the outcomes of the regulatory impact assessments and cost benefit assessments, which I think we need to do before we require industry and homeowners and developers to use it.

However, we are working towards a date of 1 July 2006 for the implementation of the system. Once the system is up and running, we anticipate there shouldn't be any significant ongoing costs. The only potential costs that will emerge may be additional licence payments down the track. That is to be negotiated with New South Wales and won't prohibit us in the first instance getting the system up and running, I believe.

The second issue that may involve extra costs is if we need to pay New South Wales to update our data or to update the software associated with the BASIX tool. That is obviously costs on a case-by-case basis as and when it arises. I think that I can assure you, Dr Foskey, that, subject to government agreement to proceed with BASIX and to make it a mandatory requirement, there is no significant ongoing cost that can't be met from within the authority's existing resources.

**THE CHAIR:** A few people have indicated they have questions, but I am curious to know whether any of them are supplementary on the BASIX. No? Okay. I will go to Mr Pratt, then to Mr Seselja and then to Mr Smyth.

**MR PRATT:** Could I go to BP 4, page 212? Can we address now the real-time information system for ACTION. The project, \$6.76 million, will be completed in June 2007. Can you perhaps explain what this funding will cover exactly, where will the system be installed and down to what level of the transportation system?

**Mr Corbell:** Sure. I will give you a bit of a brief overview, Mr Pratt. I am sure Mr Savery, Ms Ekelund or another officer can provide more information. The real-time system: what we get for that money is, first of all, the installation into our bus fleet of the necessary transponders that track the buses in real time using a GIS system. We also get the technology to support the transponder and relay the information to the signs. Finally, we get the signs at high-volume stops in the ACT.

At this stage, the feasibility work that the government has commissioned to date identifies that, obviously, interchanges and other high-volume stops and stops where there is potential for growth in patronage would benefit most from the provision of real-time information display. That display could be in any number of forms; it could be a plasma screen display at large stops—interchanges, for example—or on our busway stops, or it could be a smaller, press-button, digital display at smaller, less significant stops. That is the general philosophy and approach. You get the signs; you get the transponder; and you get the IT infrastructure to support the operation of the system. I don't know whether Neil has something on the detail.

**Mr Savery:** Just to add to that if I could, through the chair. What the technology enables us to do is locate real-time information services in any number of locations; not only along the routes and specifically associated with bus stations but, for instance, in student union bars or other places where people may be meeting or gathering; in shopping centres, so that you could actually take the opportunity to determine if you have got that extra 10 minutes to do some extra activity before you hop on a bus. The technology is such that you could actually use your mobile phone to plug into the real-time information



system, so, even if you were slightly remote from the immediacy of a screen, you can still dial into the system.

I think it is also fair to say that there are a number of technologies currently available and we haven't at this stage determined which is the best. One very strong piece of advice we have received in our research to date is that it might be wise not necessarily to go with the leading-edge technology because, as we all know, one of the keys to any of these IT systems is reliability. If you are actually going with the path-finding technology you may find yourself, down the track, in situations where significant repairs or updates have to be undertaken; whereas if you are borrowing from someone who has already trialled the system, whether it is Adelaide or Perth or maybe overseas, you can test the reliability of that system. That is some of our current thinking. We obviously have to prepare a specification now to test what technology is available within the price range available to the ACT and determine the precise scope of where it would be rolled out.

**MR PRATT:** I gather you will be trialling this. How long will that trial take, and when will it start?

**Mr Savery:** Though the chair: part of the specification that we would prepare is to identify, through the technology providers, what the best way is to trial the system. Given that we have got a June 2007 deadline for the total rollout, you would imagine that you wouldn't want to be doing this for much more than a few months. Part of that trialling, depending on which technology you seek to approach, might be going and seeing it in practice in another location within Australia if it is available.

**MR PRATT:** The design concept of what you come up with, the question of how many large plasma screens and where, the number of perhaps, if I can use the term, smaller VDUs which you might put at various high-volume stops around the city, will be determined in the trial, or will you carry out a concept analysis of the type of equipment and systems before the trial start? Is the trial simply an application?

**Mr Savery:** The answer to that is that they would be happening concurrently. At the same time as you are potentially trialling the applicability of the preferred technology, you are developing your network, primarily based, as the minister has said, on high-volume areas along your principal transport corridors. For instance, the city centre is obviously going to be a high-volume area where you would identify not only infrastructure at the key locations, the key transport locations, but also areas where people are likely to be visiting in the city centre, whether it is shopping centres or commonwealth government departments, those types of things.

**MR PRATT:** In terms of the user requirement, how far do you think you have got to be able to get the signs out into the community? What number of sites do you think you need to be able to cover for the amount of money that you have now allocated to this program to really make it worth while, to make a real difference to our transport system and to encourage a significant increase in passenger boarding stats? What is your aim? How far down the chain are we going?

**Mr Corbell:** The feasibility study, which was conducted by the Department of Urban Services, identified that, for the amount of money you were spending, you could potentially do it at 160 sites. Whether or not that is the ultimate number that is serviced is

subject to the further work that Mr Savery has indicated will be done. It may be that we want to consolidate the dollars we have available into a lesser number of sites but a higher quality appearance. The type of technology we use will obviously play a factor in that. So there is a range of issues still to be worked through.

I had a very instructive meeting with the consultants who did the initial feasibility work for us and they emphasised to me that, in their experience, having seen similar systems recently rolled out in Auckland in New Zealand, for example, you had to make sure that, wherever you delivered the signage, you could be assured that the buses were going to run according to timetable—there is no point in having real-time information saying there will be a bus along here every 10 minutes, half an hour or whatever it might be, if they are routinely not running to schedule. Then people say, “What’s the point of the signage? They can’t even run according to timetable.” You had to deliver a reliable service as well as provide real time; you had to identify high-volume routes.

It is not necessarily a case of having to cover every single bus stop in the ACT, but where you get a high level of passenger use. For example, the bus stop outside the Assembly, on London Circuit, is very well used in the evenings and the mornings by commuters. It is an ideal example of the sort of site where you could potentially put real time, because a lot of people are using this stop and connecting through to services that go south and north of the city. They are potentially changing at interchanges along the way as well. So it is a great example of the sort of site that you would consider, outside of an interchange or a major shopping centre.

**MR PRATT:** If I can just ask one more, please? Perhaps we will revisit this later, but if I could just ask—

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Seselja has a supplementary on this issue. I am sure it is kicking up a few questions around the room. I would like to pursue this en bloc and then go to afternoon tea.

**MR PRATT:** May I squeeze in one more, chair, before we waddle off to afternoon tea?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, you may.

**MR PRATT:** For the amount of money that we are outputting on this project—we, the community; you, the government—what is the breakeven point? What increase in patronage do you think you must get to to know that this trial and this concept, the introduction of this service, have been successful? What is your measurement—how many more passenger boardings?

**Mr Corbell:** I think there are two things to say here. There is no clear, breakeven point. This technology should be seen as a factor in contributing to the government—we, as a community—meeting our nodal split as outlined in the sustainable transport plan, which is nine per cent of all journeys to work by public transport by the year 2011.

The feasibility study commissioned by urban services in the current financial year, however, indicated that—and certainly from my discussions with consultants, they indicated it—if we achieved around a five per cent increase in patronage on the routes serviced by real-time information, that would be a pretty good indicator that it was

making a difference.

**MR PRATT:** That is a performance objective, is it?

**Mr Corbell:** The performance objective is to get to nine per cent by 2011. That is the performance objective. The other point worth making about RTI is that the technology also allows the buses to link into the traffic light control systems and give priority to buses as they approach intersections. The transponder on the bus allows you to link into the traffic light control system and change the lights to give priority to public transport. That is the other advantage, which—I often forget about it but I am reminded here—is a fairly important one for improving travel time for public transport.

**MR SESELJA:** Before, minister, you said that Auckland, I think, was doing a similar thing. Correct me if I am wrong, but I think the figure you said was around \$7 million in Auckland. Last time I checked I think Auckland was about three or four times the size of Canberra population-wise. Is there a reason why it would cost about the same to roll out in Canberra as in Auckland?

**Mr Corbell:** I don't know; I'm not that familiar with the Auckland example, except for the information I gave the committee earlier.

**MR SESELJA:** It would suggest that it is either a much better system or it is being delivered less efficiently, I would have thought.

**Mr Corbell:** I don't know what the specifics are of their rollout; so I really couldn't say.

**MR SMYTH:** Is there a preferred provider of the system, or will you be going out to tender?

**Mr Corbell:** We will need to go to a tender process.

**MR SMYTH:** And it is expected to go to tender when?

**Mr Corbell:** I am advised at the beginning of next calendar year; so the middle of the current financial year.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any other questions on this area? If not, we will go to afternoon tea.

**MR PRATT:** Could I possibly revisit this later, please, chair?

**THE CHAIR:** I would rather get it out of the way, if that is all right, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** May I ask it?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. I am not trying to stop you asking the questions, Mr Pratt; I am just trying to manage the process.

**MR PRATT:** I know you are, chair. You are very benevolent.

**MR PRATT:** If I could ask you, minister: you surely must have been lucky to get this amount of money from the Treasurer to get this project up and running this year, in a year of massive deficit, when we have other priorities to feed. Could this program not have waited for 12 to 18 months? Surely the existing ticketing management systems and information systems that we have will do for the time being. While I think this is a great program and we should get there, could we not have waited, given the other priorities that we have across the territory?

**Mr Corbell:** I think you could say that about any project, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** What about CFUs?

**Mr Corbell:** I am not responsible for CFUs. My colleague Mr Hargreaves is. But the issue is: this is not just a cute system. It certainly sounds very attractive and, superficially—

**MR PRATT:** I have a lot of confidence in it, minister.

**THE CHAIR:** Order! Mr Pratt, let the minister answer the question.

**Mr Corbell:** It is important, and it is important because we are not trying to get people onto buses just for the hell of it. No, we are trying to get people to view public transport as a real alternative, because that is about reducing and assisting the congestion in our city but, most importantly, in reducing car use, which is about reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The impact of greenhouse gas emissions on our environment, locally and globally, is evident for all of us to see, right now, in my view, and we need to take steps to address that. The government has taken the view that this program, this initiative, is an important part of contributing towards that goal. It is not the only part but an important part.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we might be done with real-time information.

**Meeting adjourned from 3.38 to 3.59 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome back. Mr Seselja, you had a question.

**MR SESELJA:** I do, thank you, chair. I have given an informal heads-up to Mr Savery in the afternoon tea break. This is an issue I raised with—

**THE CHAIR:** What is that, to give him a sporting chance?

**MR SESELJA:** Mr Corbell and with the LDA. Through you, minister, I was wondering if Mr Savery could give us an update of where this case is. Just for context and for *Hansard*, it is a case of a builder in Gungahlin who purchased a block, had certain specs in terms of easements for Actew services, submitted plans that were approved by ACTPLA and has now been rejected by Actew. Are you able to take us through where that is at at the moment?

**Mr Savery:** As best I can, through the chair. You are correct in saying that the authority has issued a development approval for development on a subdivision that dates back

some three years now and which, in our view, precedes some of the more recent agreements that have been negotiated with Actew on setback arrangements to enable them to have access to easements.

In this particular case we formed the view that there was adequate setback distance in terms of the nature of the service that Actew might want to access, not only with respect to this particular block, but also bearing in mind that the neighbouring property, which is set back, on my understanding, some three metres from the side boundary and is in fact the property where the manhole for this particular service exists, and provides Actew with all the access to that particular service that is necessary.

**MR SESELJA:** That is actually information we were not aware of, sir. Go on.

**Mr Savery:** What would appear to be the case is that when the building certifier has come to seek Actew's concurrence on the certification of the building approval plans, Actew has put a stamp on the plans that says that Actew does not support or does not approve this building plan. Now, at this particular point in time, our authority, in conjunction with the Land Development Agency, is seeking legal advice as to the legitimacy of that particular stamp from Actew in terms of its ability to override the legitimacy of the development approval that we have issued. At the moment we are obtaining advice from the Government Solicitor's Office in respect of that with a view to being able to advise the solicitors acting for the builder and also to be able to advise the building certifier of what their rights are.

The difficulty at the moment, as you are probably aware, is that the building certifier has formed the view, as a result of this Actew stamp, that he is not in a position to approve the plans. Now, we intend very quickly to clarify that matter so that the certifier can then form the view that he has every entitlement to sign that plan without any recourse from Actew Corporation.

**MR SESELJA:** Have you had any meetings with Actew to try and resolve the issue?

**Mr Savery:** I have not met with them. I have written to Actew outlining my views as to the appropriateness of our approvals and the fact that that entitles the building certifier to proceed with approval of the building plans provided they are in accordance with the development approval.

**MR SESELJA:** Now, would Actew have had the opportunity when these blocks were released to comment on the specifications?

**Mr Savery:** I think part of the history of this is that, at the time the subdivisions were taking place some three years ago, it was not practice to establish easements for some of their services. So for these historic subdivisions what they have been doing, on a site-by-site basis, is determining whether or not they can achieve access.

At that time an easement was not established, even though the service is in the ground. We have now reached an agreement with Actew—and I cannot remember what the post date is, but let us say in the last year or so—that all new subdivisions will identify an easement over the properties and, where an easement exists, there will be a discussion with Actew or a referral to Actew as to the adequacy of access to those services. Having

said that, though, our understanding is that the guideline practices for access to services has been met through both this particular proposal, as well as the adjacent site.

**MR SESELJA:** Are there other similar cases that you are aware of, similar to this one?

**Ms Savery:** Not in terms of the way in which this has played out, with Actew actually imposing a non-approval, so to speak.

**MR SESELJA:** So what has happened in other similar cases?

**Mr Savery:** We have certainly had previous cases on, again, subdivisions that have preceded the more recent agreements where Actew has come to us and been critical of our approval of developments, which they believe will reduce their ability to access their services in the event that something goes wrong.

**Mr Corbell:** Perhaps I can add, Mr Seselja, that this was an issue when I initially became minister, probably within the first year of my becoming Minister for Planning following the 2001 election. At that time I instructed the then Chief Executive of the Department of Urban Services, because planning was still a division of urban services, to resolve the matter with Actew, and an agreement was reached, which is what Mr Savery was referring to. There was a new protocol put in place. I am surprised that this matter has arisen again, but I am confident that it can be resolved without any need to alter the plans as they have already been approved.

**MR SESELJA:** If Actew does not move on it, will you seek to get some sort of resolution at a higher level with the relevant minister?

**Mr Corbell:** Absolutely. If it comes to that, I will certainly be raising it with my colleagues who are responsible, and notably the Treasurer. However, I am hopeful that it will not get to that point.

**MR SESELJA:** Because it would be of wider concern, obviously, to the industry. Even one or two cases can certainly affect confidence in their ability to progress these things.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, absolutely. I agree absolutely with that. I thought the matter had been put to bed some time ago, and for the overwhelming part it has been because there is now a clear process in place. But, as Mr Savery indicates, this is a block that was sold some time ago prior to that agreement and there seems to be some retrospective action on the part of Actew that we need to address. I am confident that it can be addressed and, if necessary, we can also explore options for the authority to certify the building plans. It is an option that is worth their exploring also.

**MR SESELJA:** Could I just ask that you keep us informed of progress? Obviously this is a concerned constituent. He is pretty keen to get it resolved and we would like to know where it goes, too.

**Mr Corbell:** Sure.

**THE CHAIR:** When you say ask—

**MR SESELJA:** I am sorry. I mean my office. But obviously, if there is anything that comes up while the committee is sitting, then that would be helpful, too, if he could provide information.

**Mr Corbell:** Happy to do that.

**THE CHAIR:** Just, of course, keeping in mind that we have an end date. Mr Mulcahy had a supplementary.

**MR MULCAHY:** Yes. Just on that, you indicated, Mr Savery, that you were getting legal advice. Do you have to go to the Government Solicitor or external legal advisers or do you just have that undertaken in-house?

**Mr Savery:** Through the Government Solicitor. We do not have an in-house legal capacity.

**MR MULCAHY:** It may be because of my relatively recent election to parliament, but I am, I think like Mr Seselja, a bit bewildered that we have got this turf war going on between agencies. Is it not possible to pick up the phone and speak to Mr Costello about this seemingly unreasonable approach they are taking, or does it not work that way? You have got a person out there who is being affected, who is a leaseholder, and there seems to be a lot of toing-and-froing and legal opinions and advice. I would have thought that the objective ought to be to accelerate and settle this matter expeditiously, and if it were government officials or a government corporation, would that not be the fast track?

**Mr Savery:** Through the chair, the fast track, in my view, is actually to identify that the non-approval that has been put in place by Actew is invalid; therefore we can instruct the certifier to proceed and then I can deal with the broader issue. That is on the basis that we have an established protocol that should not see these circumstances arise. My view was that it is quicker to just get that legal advice that the certifier can certify the plan and then I can deal with Actew on the broader ramification side. I immediately wrote to my counterpart, recognising that we are not actually equivalent departments. One is a corporatised entity.

**MR MULCAHY:** I understand. Could we see a copy of that correspondence? Could that be provided to the committee?

**Mr Savery:** That is not a problem from my point of view.

**THE CHAIR:** The minister's in agreement with that?

**Mr Corbell:** Happy to do that.

**THE CHAIR:** I might go to Dr Foskey. Sorry, Mr Smyth.

**DR FOSKEY:** Were you already in the queue?

**MR SMYTH:** I believe I was.

**MR MULCAHY:** I jumped the queue because I asked a supp.

**THE CHAIR:** Everybody should just behave. You are making my life difficult.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, budget paper No 4, page 207 states that part of ACTPLA's objectives this year is assessing development applications and related processes. One of the big complaints about the whole system is the lack of certainty in it. When does the planning process of a DA complete? How does somebody know when they have done everything in accordance with what they are meant to have done?

**Mr Savery:** Through the chair, there is no final sign-off, as such. Once a development approval is issued, that is subsequently followed by a building approval that enables someone to proceed. There are conditions often attached to a DA, some of which do not necessarily have time limitations to them. For instance, if a condition says that the landscape plan should be prepared and then the landscape shall be maintained in an orderly fashion or, for instance, if there is an industrial development where a condition identifies that certain practices have to be instituted, those conditions are fairly open ended.

It is almost a milestone point in terms of getting your DA, which says, "Okay, you can proceed," and it may have conditions attached to it. You get your building approval, but there is always the prospect that, depending on the nature of the activity, there may be some open-ended conditions that the authority will be expected to monitor over time to ensure ongoing compliance with a particular activity. It is not like a building approval where you have a certificate of occupancy that says you effectively have completed this structure in accordance with your plans; it is now safe for people to occupy the building. You do not have that finality. That is common to all jurisdictions. That is the nature of the planning approval process.

**MR SMYTH:** Does the certificate of use, of occupancy, constitute planning approval at the end of the process?

**Mr Savery:** In my view, it does not, but I know that that is contested in some quarters. My view is that the primary purpose of the certificate of occupancy is to identify that the building meets standards under the Building Code of Australia and is consistent with the building approval plan. There is inevitably an overlap with components of the planning approval because the BA is expected to be in accordance with the DA, although it is at a far more detailed level and therefore, when a certificate of occupancy is issued, undoubtedly certain components of the development approval are being signed off as well. In my view, and this may be something that has to be resolved through other forums, the certificate of occupancy is not, if you like, a certification that you have met all of your requirements under planning approval.

**MR SMYTH:** I have documents from a constituent and, minister, Mr Savery is aware of the case, because we have spoken of it. The document says, "The issue of the COU does not constitute planning approval." For a single residential, either a new building or an extension, when does the resident reach the end of the process? When do they have that certainty that they have completed their project and it is okay?

**Mr Savery:** In the case of single residential, which is probably easier to deal with than, say, industrial or commercial developments where you tend to have some of these



ongoing conditions attached to them, typically your plans constitute the basis of your development approval. If the development has been completed in accordance with those plans, it is unlikely that there is going to be any revisiting of those issues. As you are aware, and it is no doubt related to the nature of your questions, where there are matters relating to heritage or significant trees or other legislation, there may be other parts of the system that require some ongoing monitoring in order to maintain compliance with those other pieces of legislation.

**MR SMYTH:** So if the C of O does not constitute planning approval at the end of the project, what does? Is there a document that says you have completed the process and, for instance, you can on sell the house with certainty?

**Mr Savery:** No, there is no equivalent document to a certificate of occupancy under the planning process. But if, for instance, someone were on selling their property, typically through the conveyancing process, there would be the identification of any matters of non-compliance with the development approval. If someone has either built something that has not completed all of the expectations of the development approval or, indeed, they have gone beyond their original development approval and done other things, they potentially get picked up through that conveyancing process. But it is not as if someone can come to the planning authority and say; “Can you now sign a document for me that says I have met all of my conditions?” There is not an equivalent planning document to the certificate of occupancy.

**MR SMYTH:** So if such a document does not exist in the current planning system to give certainty to a future purchaser that all development conditions have been met, are you therefore saying that all approvals are open ended, subject at any time to future ACTPLA actions?

**Mr Savery:** They are open ended to the extent that, if there is a condition that has not been met or that someone then subsequently does something that has not received approval or is inconsistent with that original approval, then there will be an expectation that we will revisit that matter.

**MR SMYTH:** That then leads on to: what is the effect, then, on, say, the building and the real estate industry in the ACT if they do not have that certainty? How do they know that a building is compliant with the process? Minister, there is a huge concern out there. I have spoken to a number of industry groups who have always assumed that the C of O is the end of the process and, once the C of O is occupied, that they could on sell with certainty. From what Mr Savery is saying, that is now subject to some doubt.

**Mr Corbell:** The certificate of occupancy is generally recognised by the construction industry as an indication and an approval that all of the relevant requirements of the building approval have been achieved, that is, that the structure is safe to inhabit and has been built in accordance with the building approval. So there should not be any doubt in people’s minds about whether or not the building is safe and has been constructed in accordance with the building approval. If you have got the certificate of occupancy, that is what that document demonstrates.

The issue, I think, that you are pursuing and which Mr Savery is trying to answer is the issue around what happens to a planning approval. Once a planning approval has been

granted with conditions, or even without conditions, but once an approval has been given, at what point does that approval cease to have effect? I guess the answer to that is it does not. If someone seeks to vary their structure so that it is at odds with or different from the approval without getting a new approval, then potentially the authority has the capacity to take compliance action if a complaint is made about unauthorised work or non-compliance with the condition of approval, that is, the colour of a fence or whatever the case may be, and that has always been the case.

It has always been the case that this has been an open-ended question. It really comes down, in my view, to a matter of compliance and what is a reasonable way of managing compliance. These are matters that are being considered. Issues to do with how compliance is managed are being considered through the systems reform process. When that is announced, that will indicate new ways of dealing with compliance matters. So it is more of a risk management approach. The issue that we are exploring here is not something new. It has always been the case since self-government that an approval is potentially subject to non-compliance with the conditions of a planning approval. A development approval has always been subject to potential compliance action.

**Mr Savery:** May I perhaps try to clarify, given the nature of your last question about certainty? Potentially there is absolute certainty in the process, that if you have achieved your certificate of occupancy, then the building certifier has said that the building that has been constructed in accordance with the building approval is consistent with the development approval. That is the nature of the way the process works, that you get a building approval on the basis that it is consistent with the DA.

But there are components that the building approval has no relationship to. For instance, if you are talking about a nightclub, just as an example, there may well be a development approval condition that says noise shall be within so many decibels. Your certificate of occupancy never removes that obligation. There is a risk to you, the owner or operator of that premises, that if you step outside that, planning will come back in and seek compliance with that condition. Your certificate of occupancy does not say you have now met that particular obligation. It is very much around the structural integrity of the building, its habitability in accordance with the new approval plans.

**MR SMYTH:** I understand that, and the same with compliance. You must keep your block in a neat and clean way and you must have a garden and you must have all those things. I think we all understand there are some ongoing issues. Minister, particularly with reference to built form, you just said that it has long been considered by the building industry that the C of O is the end of the process. Do you consider that to be true?

**Mr Corbell:** For the purposes of a consumer, a homeowner, being satisfied that their home has been built in a way that is consistent with the structural standards with the building approval, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, the constituent I have been contacted by is *[By resolution of the committee, a name and address were here expunged from the record]*.

**THE CHAIR:** Do not name people.

**MR SESELJA:** Permission has been asked and given.

**MR SMYTH:** I have a letter here, if you want, saying I can table documents or speak on their behalf. They have a certificate of occupancy that includes certain features of their building, which has been approved by a certifier. Yet action is now being taken by both the heritage unit and ACTPLA to insist that they remove some of those features. You have said you believe that when you have got the C of O, for most residential or for the normal residential, that is the end of the process.

You have said that that is the agreed norm and standard of the building industry. But we now seem to have a different interpretation on this one particular site that has led to 18 months of angst and uncertainty for this family when their original DA had no objections to it. They had a late objection that came in some days later signed by a single resident. They have gone through the process. They have got a C of O. Yet now, 18 months later, they are still fighting the system to be able to complete their home. How is that certainty for them?

**Mr Corbell:** I think, Mr Smyth, that you are aware that this is a very long and convoluted case. I know that you have had a detailed discussion with Mr Savery about the matter privately and I acknowledge the concerns that you are raising on behalf of [*By resolution of the committee, a name was here expunged from the record*].

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, can I just stop you there? I ask everybody not to name people. We are going to have to blank that out. I know that you have permission, but we really do not want it in *Hansard*. It is fine to continue talking about it.

**MR SMYTH:** But why not?

**THE CHAIR:** This is the advice that I am getting, Mr Smyth. I am happy for you to continue talking about it. Just do not name the people and where they live.

**Mr Corbell:** The constituents involved have, I know, raised the issue with Mr Smyth. I know that Mr Smyth has had a detailed discussion with Mr Savery at a private briefing on the matter. It is a fairly long and convoluted case and it is probably not the forum to go into all the detail around it. The point I would make is that the issues around a certificate of occupancy relate, as Mr Savery said, to whether or not construction has been done in accordance with the Building Code of Australia and is structurally sound and safe for habitation. It does not relate to compliance with conditions of the planning approval, the development approval.

**MR SMYTH:** If that is the case, I go back to my original question. Where is the end point for an individual who is building their home or extending their home? When do they have certainty that the process is over and that ACTPLA cannot come back at a later stage and say, “We are unhappy. We want you to change this. We want you to change that.”

**Mr Corbell:** The planning authority—

**MR SMYTH:** Because—and let me put it in context—in this case they received their building approval, which included in this case a built wall, a masonry wall. The certifier certified that it was in broad agreement with the development application and after

several other things had occurred, and only after several other things had occurred, was the issue of the masonry wall raised. These people have had a wall that was built, that was seen, that was certified, that was seen by ACTPLA staff, that was seen by heritage staff, that was rendered, that was painted and only many months after other things had occurred was the issue of the wall raised. So, I ask you again: how can this family, representative of all families, therefore, have certainty in their process that at some later stage someone cannot consult their file and come back and ask that rectification work be undertaken?

**Mr Corbell:** The point I would make is that the circumstances are extremely specific to this case, and they relate, in particular, to compliance with heritage requirements in the area where this family lives.

**MR SMYTH:** Which were not in place when the wall was built.

**Mr Corbell:** These issues have been discussed in some detail with you previously, I understand, and I think it is fair to say that the planning authority is simply doing its job in that it has been advised by the people who do have statutory authority for heritage matters that certain aspects of the development should not be allowed. Now, the timing around that and the detail around those matters are things that clearly, I think, leave quite a lot to be desired. However, the statutory responsibilities are clear. The planning authority is instigating action because of advice it has received from the heritage council about whether or not certain aspects of the development on this family's property are consistent with the heritage council's requirements.

**MR SMYTH:** I will take up heritage with the Chief Minister next week. I was hoping that the new head of—I forget BEPCON's new name—would be with us today. He is not with us?

**Mr Savery:** Construction occupations licensing.

**Mr Corbell:** No.

**MR SMYTH:** Is there a reason for that?

**Mr Corbell:** He just is not. There is no particular reason.

**MR SMYTH:** Normally officers from all those areas are here.

**Mr Corbell:** No particular reason. Mr Meyer, who is responsible for that part of the planning authority, is here.

**MR SMYTH:** You are saying ACTPLA is now acting on advice from the heritage council?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** The resident has actually received advice from BEPCON that, as far as BEPCON is concerned, the process is finished and the wall, if it is approved, is an approved structure, that C of O does offer certainty and, as far as BEPCON is concerned,

they do consider it to be the end of the process.

**Mr Corbell:** I imagine what BEPCON is saying there, and I am happy to stand corrected, is that the wall has been built appropriately, that is, it is not going to fall down and hurt someone.

**MR SMYTH:** No. They are saying that if it is approved through the C of O, then it is approved.

**Mr Corbell:** I am advised that the approval, the issuing of the certificate of occupancy indicates that, as far as the regulatory area of ACTPLA around building approvals is concerned, the building work has been completed in accordance with the building approval. However, I am advised that the heritage council's view is that the wall in question should not have been built, is inconsistent with the original development approval and, therefore, is required to be rectified.

**MR SMYTH:** Even though at the time, before two subsequent variations to the territory plan, similar walls of similar dimensions exist. I can provide you with photos of a number of sites throughout the Reid heritage precinct that also exist and no action has been taken to remove those walls.

**Mr Corbell:** I am not familiar with those circumstances. So I am really not in a position to comment on them.

**MR SMYTH:** The AAT, I notice—

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** It is just a related matter. I notice that under 1.1(d)—

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth, can I just bring you to order for a second. We have been going on this for a long time now. Mr Seselja has indicated that he has a couple of supplementaries on this issue as well. He has also indicated that he is happy for the department to take his questions on notice, if necessary. This is almost turning into a private chat. That is all. I do appreciate that it is an area that you would like to talk to the department about and I have allowed that to actually take place. I have not stopped you from asking questions, but I would like to move on.

**MR SMYTH:** Well, it is an important area. The MBA are interested, the HIA is concerned, REIACT is interested, the Property Council is concerned—

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth, there are a lot of important areas. If I allow you to continue asking questions, they will not get addressed. It is always the case. You know it is always the case that we have limited time when it comes to estimates and we have to try to fit as much in as we can. I will allow you to ask one more question. Then I will move to Mr Seselja. Then I would like to move on.

**MR SMYTH:** I note on page 209 of the accountability indicators numbered “d” in output 1.1 it says, “Percentage of AAT decisions that support the authority's position”—and that you are aiming for 100 per cent. Minister, are you aware that, in this case, with the

tribunal, it did go to the AAT subsequent to other things happening, and that the AAT did not support ACTPLA? In fact, I will read it. It says:

The tribunal drew attention to the fact that in doing so the planning authority had made the same error as was revealed in Unibuild Technology and Minister for Planning...and Srbagi and ACT Planning Authority...

One was in April 2003 and one in October 2003. It continues:

In the latter case recommendations were made by the Tribunal that were designed to avoid the further repetition of the error.

Here are two cases that were lost by the authority in your time—April and October 2003—and yet the tribunal had to go on and make the following comment:

The tribunal would expect that prompt action would be taken by the planning authority to implement the decision.

After that rejection of ACTPLA's position, it took another nine months. How is it that we can have the AAT bringing it to the attention of ACTPLA and, indeed, writing to the Chief Minister with regard to this, and it takes nine months to get the decision? Are you certain now that processes have been put in place to avoid this?

**Mr Corbell:** As I understand it, the AAT's decision remitted the matter back to the authority for further consideration. The AAT did not make a final decision on the application itself, it remitted the matter back to the authority for further consideration in accordance with section 247 of the land act. In relation to authority decisions, I think it is appropriate that the authority sets itself a target that it wants its decisions to be subject to scrutiny and to stand up to scrutiny.

As the Auditor-General noted in her recent audit, over 90 per cent of all matters referred to the AAT upheld the authority's decision. The authority has a strong record for fair and reasonable decision making, based on the Auditor-General's opinion, but it is appropriate to continue to strive to improve that further. I think that is what that particular measure is designed to do.

In relation to this particular matter, this circumstance I think highlights the problem of the way referral agencies work in the planning system, where the planning authority itself is required to refer a matter for decision to another agency, in this case the Heritage Council. There are obviously others such as the conservator of flora and fauna; in relation to significant tree issues, there is another referral agency, Environment ACT itself is another referral agency, and so on. It is desirable, I think, that we clarify the ability of referral agencies to reconsider matters after they have provided advice to the planning authority and the planning authority has provided that advice to the applicants.

I think that's an example of what has happened in this case, where the referral authority—in this case the Heritage Council—changed its mind after its initial advice. I think that is unacceptable. The changes that the government is now considering as part of our system reform project are designed to stop this sort of toing-and-froing, backwards and forwards to referral agencies. Referral agencies have an important role to play, whether it is Actew; DUS, with roads and waste; environment with trees; or

heritage with heritage. But they need to get their advice straight and they need to give it to the planning authority so the planning authority can give it to the applicants upfront without the matters being continually revisited.

I think this particular case highlights a weakness in the existing system. It is a weakness we intend to fix through the reform process. When I release the reform work I will be outlining how that will be the case. At this point in time—and this has been the case ever since self-government—there is no restriction on referral agencies within government reconsidering, revisiting or changing the advice they give to an applicant in relation to a DA.

I think it is an unreasonable imposition. It can cause a lot of angst for the applicant and it can also cause a lot of angst for the planning authority, which ends up being the piggy in the middle, if you like, in these sorts of circumstances. The issues you raise are important and I think the complaint on the part of [*By resolution of the committee, a name was here expunged from the record*] is not without foundation. They are matters we are taking into account in the overall system reform.

**MR SESELJA:** Referring to [*By resolution of the committee, a name was here expunged from the record*], apart from what Mr Smyth was getting at regarding certainty, there are some serious allegations of unlawfully entering the property and harassment. Has the validity of those claims been investigated by the agency?

**Mr Corbell:** I am not aware of any complaints like that, but Mr Savery may remember.

**Mr Savery:** I'm aware that formal complaints were made to Heritage ACT, or it may have been Environment ACT as the parent body, and they were followed through. That's obviously a matter for you to take up with environment. I'm not aware that the ACT Planning and Land Authority has received a formal complaint. I'm certainly aware of the concerns the constituent has. I have indicated to him that, if he wishes to pursue the matter, he can lodge some sort of formal complaint or inquiry. I am aware, obviously, that both he and his partner have raised matters with the ombudsman and that material is being collated for the ombudsman's inquiry.

**MR SESELJA:** Given that he has spoken to you and raised serious issues, even though he has not put in a formal complaint, are you not concerned enough to investigate further?

**Mr Savery:** I was concerned enough to take the issues up in an informal capacity with the officers responsible, who have denied the claims that have been made.

**MR SESELJA:** Given that you have acknowledged that this is a less than ideal circumstance, and given the serious claims—you have acknowledged that you were not aware of some of them—will you personally lodge an investigation with a view to making sure this sort of thing doesn't happen in the future, looking at this case in particular and seeing how that can be avoided, and with a view to possibly giving some sort of compensation to the constituent involved?

**Mr Corbell:** Without knowing the specifics of the allegation, I am not really in a position to comment.

**MR SESELJA:** Even apart from the ones I have just raised?

**THE CHAIR:** Let him finish the answer, Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** Yes. Aside from that, with the broader issues here.

**THE CHAIR:** Let him finish the answer. He was about to say something else.

**Mr Corbell:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Look, I am not aware of allegations and I am certainly not aware, therefore, of any specifics of allegations. I think that, if someone is concerned about those allegations—concerned about the conduct of authority officers—they should raise that by making a complaint. I'm sure—I'm confident—that it will be properly investigated by an independent person who is not directly involved in the matter. At this point, given that I am not aware of the issues, I accept the judgment of Mr Savery as the chief executive responsible as to how the matter has been handled to date.

**MR SESELJA:** As I said, apart from the specific allegations, the other things referred to today are the length of the process, the unsatisfactory nature of it and the way it has gone back and forth. Will you be investigating that, or asking Mr Savery to investigate that, with a view to making sure this does not happen in the future?

**Mr Corbell:** As I have indicated, the broader issue this case raises is the framework in which referral agencies within the government operate when it comes to a development approval. Their role is an open-ended one; they do not have any timeframes within which they have to operate, unlike the authority itself; and they are able to revise or completely change their advice in relation to a particular development application.

That is, in my view, unhelpful in the planning system overall. The government's objective is to achieve greater certainty. Achieving certainty for all includes making sure that advice from relevant government agencies where it is required—i.e. heritage—is provided first in a timely way and, second, in a consistent way. That is an objective of the planning system reform process. This particular matter of how referral agencies operate is going to be specifically addressed in the system reform work that is about to be announced.

**DR FOSKEY:** I'd like to ask a few questions about sustainable design. Is ACTPLA required to oversee improved energy and water efficiency in non-residential buildings?

**Mr Corbell:** Only if it's subject to a development application.

**DR FOSKEY:** So that's there only for new applications, new buildings?

**Mr Corbell:** It depends. If the work requires a development application, obviously the planning authority has a role. I'm advised that there are currently no mandatory requirements for energy and water use in non-residential buildings. However, when the authority receives development applications for those types of buildings it seeks to push the proponents, if they haven't already indicated how they will improve the sustainability, on the design of energy and water use in particular of those buildings.



**DR FOSKEY:** Are there any plans, in the next financial year, to make such standards mandatory?

**Mr Corbell:** In its election commitments before the last election the government indicated that it wanted to move towards implementation of the green star building policies. That is a set of industry policies put together by the Property Council of Australia—I am sorry, the Green Building Council of Australia—which has come out of the property industry. The property council is certainly involved in that. There is a range of other types of measurements for commercial and non-residential buildings that are worth investigating.

At the moment there is no single nationally recognised policy in the country that drives sustainability in commercial buildings. The focus on sustainability and mandatory sustainability policies has overwhelmingly been in residential buildings, and the BASIX system is one example of that. The New South Wales government has indicated that BASIX is being further developed for potential application in commercial and multiunit residential buildings. But these buildings are recognised as the most difficult in which to achieve mandatory standards because of the complexity of their construction and the high level of mechanical intervention that's required in relation to cooling, heating, ventilation and so on.

I'm advised that in May next year there will be an amendment to the Building Code of Australia to introduce minimum standards for commercial buildings. Obviously we will seek to, and will be committed as a government to, abide by new Building Code of Australia standards and ensure that those are abided by in individual development applications. I would hope that, down the track, we'll be able to achieve higher levels of mandatory sustainability outcomes through the continued application of BASIX when it becomes a tool for commercial non-residential buildings, and also through the measures being introduced into the Building Code of Australia.

**DR FOSKEY:** There has been recent criticism by the Productivity Commission. Do we have any indicators, or is information being collected so we can argue one way or the other in relation to the case, of how energy and water efficiency is being improved?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Mr Savery to answer that question.

**Mr Savery:** The Productivity Commission report focuses primarily on the future role of the Australian Building Codes Board and the Building Code of Australia. At present, all governments, including the ACT, are renegotiating an intergovernmental agreement which will have as one of its key features investigations by the board into the establishment of new standards for sustainability in buildings, which has not been a feature of the Building Code of Australia to this date, other than the preliminary steps for energy efficiency. That's because the primary focus of the Building Code of Australia has been around occupant safety and structural integrity of buildings.

As a result of the Productivity Commission report and the support of all governments, it's now been determined that it is appropriate that the building code enter into the development of minimum standards for sustainability. The building codes board has determined that there are primarily four areas in which it can influence sustainability

outcomes in buildings. Those are energy efficiency, water efficiency, materials and internal air quality. It focuses on those four things because they are what the Building Code of Australia can influence directly.

Other matters are really the domain of planning policy. This is where planning and building have to interface to achieve complementary outcomes. The minister mentioned the building code amendment in 2006. Introducing new minimum standards for commercial buildings is simply the first of what I imagine will be a series of amendments over time to the building code that will impose additional minimum standards on construction for issues of sustainability.

**DR FOSKEY:** That sounds like progress. It is of concern that, while the government talks the talk of energy efficiency and high quality sustainable design, we still have quite significant developments like the “Space” development in Turner and the Kingston Foreshore development—which, while it does have some energy efficiency measures that were quoted to me this morning, is definitely a lost cause—which do not demonstrate the standards the government says it espouses. I just hope there are measures in this budget to ensure that the principles the government espouses are implemented.

**Mr Corbell:** As I’ve indicated, across the country there are very few mandatory controls around commercial buildings and large multiunit developments in respect of energy and water use. However, planning agencies around the country—and the ACT planning authority is no different in this regard—are seeking to push the development industry to consider and put in place measures to improve the energy and water efficiency of buildings.

I think there is still much more work to be done, but we are heading in the right direction. Increasingly we are seeing water re-use becoming a central element of new developments. The real issue, I think, is this: these buildings are very complex to build and service. Therefore, the willingness of the construction and development industry to make changes to them is difficult, because of the complexity and cost of construction of these buildings in the first place.

The opportunities are there and we are pushing very hard on those. As I’ve said, water re-use is becoming increasingly prevalent and energy re-use is becoming better. We still have a long way to go in relation to commercial buildings and multiunit residential buildings because of their sheer size and some of the difficulties involved in achieving maximum solar orientation for very large buildings with multiple facades and therefore multiple points of solar access.

It is a difficult issue, but the government’s objective is to say that we will push wherever possible, through both the planning and land council and the planning authority, to get improvements. We will start using systems like BASIX, first in residential and then hopefully in multiunit and ultimately commercial buildings. But even tools such as BASIX do not take account of some key environmental factors such as embodied energy.

There is no tool around at all that we can apply in a consistent way to address issues like embodied energy. That is something that is going to evolve over time. The planning profession is extremely aware of these issues and our planning systems are adapting to

address them. I think we're making significant strides in the ACT by looking at initiatives such as BASIX. It's a way of starting to lift the standard, first and foremost, of the majority of dwellings where people live. It is then moving into large multiunit developments, commercial developments and so on.

**MS PORTER:** What type of energy was that?

**Mr Corbell:** Embodied energy. Embodied energy is how much energy is required to produce the building material. For example concrete, which is used in all multiunit and multistorey buildings, has an extremely high level of embodied energy because it takes so much energy to produce that product, whereas timber potentially has a lower level of embodied energy because it's more sustainable and therefore energy use for its production as a building material is less.

**MS PORTER:** You mentioned the Childers Street development in your opening remarks, and I note the allocation there for this work. I was just wondering how this funding will help realise the priorities outlined in the City West master plan.

**Mr Corbell:** The Childers Street project is a really exciting one because it allows us to showcase a new standard for the public realm in the city. The government is committed to using the Childers Street project as a flagship project. It will be used to inform the redevelopment of other public places in the city in deciding the range of street furniture, street lighting and so on to be used in other parts of the city.

In relation to the Childers Street project itself, Childers Street has been identified in the City West master plan as an important street because it links the ANU with the more commercial parts of the city around Hobart Place and towards the law court precinct. It has a number of very significant cultural institutions on it already—the school of art, the school of music and the Street Theatre. The opportunity for public art and cultural activity is very significant along this street.

The commitment we have with the ANU to develop this area is designed to facilitate the development of the area in a way that brings the existing cultural elements—be they residential, commercial, research, retail or entertainment-type activities such as cafes, restaurants and so on—onto Childers Street. That is going to be facilitated in the first part of this project.

We will create paved open spaces, install new street furniture and facilitate management of traffic, thereby decreasing the emphasis on through traffic and creating a more shared use or shared zone for both traffic and pedestrians in this area. The design work for Childers Street is very well advanced and \$6 million has been allocated in the budget to be spent in the coming financial year for the final detailed design work, documentation and construction of the first element of that street.

The thinking at this stage is that we'll commence development of a community park at the northern end of Childers Street, which is near the existing childcare centre. There will be road infrastructure and associated works, and new street furniture for the central part of Childers Street, to accommodate a range of pedestrian activities. There will be opportunities for outdoor festivals associated with the cultural activity that's already there, and a custom designed framework element for the central part of Childers Street,

including integrated light poles, shade structures and artwork.

We're trying to create an urban street which is would more befit inner city Sydney or Melbourne in that it's compact, quite dense and has a lot of activity—cafe activity, social and cultural activity—with young people from the university mixing with business people and others. In doing so we will create a cosmopolitan atmosphere. That is very important for the overall objectives of the City West master plan and the government's economic and social objectives of creating a city for all Canberrans, a city that complements our very good suburban amenity with excellent urban amenity in the city centre.

**MS PORTER:** There are some significant community groups along there as well, aren't there?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes, there are. In the ROCKS precinct there is the group known as the Residents of Childers and Kingsley Streets. Organisations such as the conservation council and the environment centre in particular have a strong interest. The government's commitment is to work with those groups and provide alternative accommodation in the City West precinct as the redevelopment of the area gets underway.

**MS PORTER:** What timeframe are we looking to in the future for the completion of that whole development?

**Mr Corbell:** It is anticipated that the funding for this element of the Childers Street works will be completed around the middle of next year.

**MS PORTER:** Then the rest of the development will be over time from that point?

**Mr Corbell:** There will be other parts to Childers Street that will then need to be upgraded. That will be subject to further capital works bids. As Mr Savery points out to me, the issues around the development of the City West precinct are very much over a 10 to 15-year timeframe.

**DR FOSKEY:** The spatial plan states that the government will introduce lease and development controls on selected sites to ensure a minimum provision of affordable housing. I'm not going to go too much into the general questions, which I'm sure I know your answers to, but is it the government's position that we have affordable housing only in some developments, not all? For example, I'm told that East O'Malley and Kingston Foreshore have no degree of affordable housing. How do we choose which developments will have a level of affordable housing? Are we committed to social mix?

**Mr Corbell:** I'm very strongly committed to social mix, but that does not mean that every single development site in the city must have a component of affordable housing or social housing in it. Take, for example, Kingston Foreshore. The view and the position of ACT Housing and of my colleague Mr Hargreaves, and before him Mr Wood, was that Kingston has one of the highest levels of public housing in the city as a percentage of the total dwelling mix in that suburb. It was difficult to justify a need for additional public housing at Kingston Foreshore, given the percentage of public housing in the rest of the suburb and the demand for new public housing in other locations that have much lower percentages of public housing as a percentage of the total number of dwellings in

the relevant suburbs.

East O'Malley is deliberately designed as a more upmarket development, and that is dictated purely by block size. The blocks are large—deliberately so—not only to accommodate the existing trees that have been retained as part of the development but also in keeping with the block size of the rest of the O'Malley subdivision, which is traditionally much larger than many other suburbs in Canberra. That does not, however, preclude ACT Housing or other community housing providers from spot purchasing developments in areas such as East O'Malley. There are a number of townhouse multiunit sites in those suburbs and in that subdivision in particular.

A good example of the government's approach is in City West. City West has been identified by the government as a prime opportunity for inner city and residential use. That is reflected in the City West master plan and the government will be ensuring, through its agreement with the ANU, that those objectives are met because that is what has been signed up to.

The ANU has signed up to the City West master plan as part of its agreement with us for the precinct. We expect those elements of the City West master plan to be adhered to, as indeed we expect all the elements of the City West master plan to be adhered to. That is an example of the government's approach on this matter. The provision of affordable housing and social housing is driven very much by location and access to services and facilities, as well as taking into account the existing mix in a suburb.

**DR FOSKEY:** In respect of City West and affordable housing I notice that, on 3 March, block 1 section 90 in City West was sold to the Willemson Investment Corporation and that this block may be used for a number of things, including residential use. Are there any requirements on this developer to create affordable housing if indeed they do choose a residential development? Will they be required to provide any space for community facilities?

**Mr Corbell:** I understand that the developer at this stage is contemplating a commercial office development. If that is their decision, obviously the issue around affordable housing does not arise. However, I understand there is a range of issues there. I might ask Ms Ekelund to elaborate on those.

**Ms Ekelund:** One of the issues that were taken into consideration for the planning of that site was overshadowing from the adjoining sites. It was suggested that affordable housing might not be the best outcome on that site because there could be overshadowing into the residential units. A similar approach is likely to be taken for the other bookend, on the southern side of the Leyton building, which is relatively tall. We have the view that, where affordable housing is to be provided, we should ensure a high standard of amenity for the people likely to be living in there, rather than a lower quality amenity. We want to ensure people living in social housing or affordable housing are not located on the south side of buildings above the basement, essentially.

**MR MULCAHY:** Among other things, one of your objectives in the budget papers is declared as implementing the territory plan. I want to draw your attention to a business regulation review committee report of September 2002 that you may remember. In that report they talked about home-based business activities—and I differentiate between

“home-based occupation” and “home-based business”.

That report was critical of the predecessor to ACTPLA in relation to the approval of change of lease purpose clauses for home-based businesses. Your colleague the minister for economic development talked about there being 3,500 home-based businesses in Canberra, which is quite an extraordinary number. Is that number of home-based businesses reflected in the approvals going through your agency, or do you believe there are still significant outstanding issues with home-based businesses not being recognised through those changes?

**Mr Corbell:** Do you mean whether or not they have an approval?

**MR MULCAHY:** Correct.

**Mr Corbell:** I will ask Mr Savery to try to answer that or take it on notice. Can I just say that I believe our regime in relation to managing home-based businesses is a very reasonable one. It is a matter that attracts complaint from members of this place to me on behalf of constituents from time to time, and from constituents directly. However, on the whole, I believe the home-based business arrangements in the ACT are reasonable. They permit a wide range of uses within the home. Basically, our philosophical approach is that, as long as it does not impact detrimentally on neighbourhood amenity, then it is entirely reasonable for people to conduct their business from their home.

The sorts of complaints I receive from time to time usually revolve around traffic and parking issues and, occasionally, storage of materials, loud noise and so on. Those things I think are generally dealt with in a fairly prompt way by the planning authority’s lease compliance area. Most people are pretty good in responding to that, I must say. I think we have a reasonable regime, but I will ask Mr Savery to try and answer more of the detail of your question.

**Mr Savery:** If you want precise numbers, then I would have to take the question on notice.

**MR MULCAHY:** Please.

**Mr Savery:** As a general rule, we are not observing that there are significant difficulties with the establishment of home-based businesses through the planning approval process. It’s more often the case that a complaint arises from a neighbour in relation to a home-based business potentially expanding beyond the capacity of the particular premises, and they seek intervention through compliance with the authority.

Our view is similar to the minister’s view; that, if there is no difficulty being generated as far as impact on neighbouring properties is concerned then, in the main, those types of activities can go relatively unnoticed. In some, if not many, cases they might be deemed to be as-of-right activities. In other words, they do not need a development approval under the system.

**MR MULCAHY:** That’s why I differentiated very carefully between home-based occupations and home-based businesses. According to the territory plan, as cited here, home-based businesses are the ones that might involve disruption. So my question was

whether your change of lease approvals were in any way related to the number of home-based businesses. Do you see a comparable number of applications, or is there is no relationship there?

**Mr Savery:** I would have to take that on notice.

**MR MULCAHY:** Thank you. The second area, minister—and this is possibly one you may want to refer to Mr Savery—is just an administrative matter that has been raised with me. I believe the agency was represented at the 2005 Planning Institute of Australia National Congress in Melbourne and Bendigo in April. I understand officers of the agency attended that, including one who had already resigned their position. I wonder how thoroughly the agency scrutinises those sorts of matters to ensure suitable use of taxpayers' funds. In that particular instance, is there a reason why you'd be sending people off who were leaving the agency? Do you wish to take that on notice?

**Mr Savery:** The individual I believe the member is referring to hadn't resigned at the time we first agreed to her participating in that event. One of the primary reasons for us supporting her attendance at that event, and continuing to do so once she had resigned, was that she was the recipient of a fairly significant award that she had committed or devoted almost two years of her professional life to. I think that in some cases it's appropriate that there are adequate levels of recognition for people's work. It's probably not appropriate for me to go into some of the commitments that that person and other individuals have made, but I think it was appropriate that she continued to attend that particular event.

**MR MULCAHY:** Just the principles there make me a little bit uneasy, in that we've got what I'd suggest are reasonable rates of remuneration for people. If you're extending outside that and rewarding people with trips, I wonder if that is a practice that is prevalent.

**Mr Savery:** No.

**MR MULCAHY:** Was that a one-off instance? It seems very unusual to be spending public funds in that capacity.

**Mr Corbell:** It was a one-off instance. It's not often that a piece of planning work by the ACT government is recognised in a national forum. That was the case. The Canberra spatial plan received a merit award for its consultation and community engagement processes. I think having it recognised nationally as an outstanding way of engaging the community in the planning policy making was a very strong endorsement of the process the government used in developing the spatial plan. I think it's reasonable that the officer responsible for that work was able to be in Melbourne to receive that award.

**MR MULCAHY:** The last area relates to output 1.1g—customer satisfaction. There's a curious term there that caught my interest. You talk about your target being increasing positive results. These measurements of customer awareness and satisfaction with processes are usually measured in a far more precise fashion. Can you expand on what's intended there, or what you're trying to achieve?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Mr Meyer to answer this question.

**Mr Meyer:** That is an indicator that we have established for what will be the first of a series of customer surveys. The last survey we undertook for the authority—in fact, it was for its predecessor—was about three years ago, so we don't have a reliable series of indicators to set a target at this stage. This time we will be undertaking a customer survey, probably in the next month, and we will set ourselves a series of benchmarks based on the outcomes of that survey so that what you will see in budget papers in future will be specific targets of customer satisfaction against specific indicators.

**MR MULCAHY:** Do you have an expectation of where you would like it to be now? Normally, you would do these surveys and, from my knowledge of this field, which is pretty complex actually, you would expect figures in the 90-percentile range with any service delivery organisation.

**Mr Meyer:** We would certainly be expecting high percentages, taking a lead from the surveys that we had conducted of the organisation in past years; but, with the establishment of a new authority and new planning policies and directions, there is always a period where you want to establish just how those services are being delivered. We have introduced a range of new initiatives; so it's a bit hard to gauge specifically what those figures would be. Like you, we would certainly be expecting the levels of satisfaction to be in the 80 or 90-percentile range.

**MR MULCAHY:** The 90s, I think, as a minimum. Who is doing this work for you?

**Mr Meyer:** We are just in the final stages of awarding a tender there. The evaluation has been done. About three proposals were put forward.

**MR MULCAHY:** So they will be external specialist providers in this field.

**Mr Meyer:** Correct, yes.

**MR MULCAHY:** The reason I am so preoccupied with it is, as I mentioned at the very commencement of this section of our hearings, that we did hear this issue, whether you accept it's justified or not, of concerns about your agency raised by all of the groups that appeared yesterday in the business sector and I hear it as a member and had heard it repeatedly prior to the election. Obviously, getting an improved level of satisfaction amongst your client group, particularly with the more complex developments, would be a step in the right direction.

**Mr Corbell:** We certainly consider it an important measure of people's satisfaction or otherwise with the activities of the authority.

**MR SESELJA:** I have a few questions around section 84 in Civic. Minister, I understand that last week—I think it was last week; correct me if I'm wrong—you called in part of the development in relation to section 84, the QIC development. Are you able to give us reasoning as to why?

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. I considered that the project was one of territory significance because of the scale of investment involved, over \$350 million worth of investment. Secondly, an important element of the revitalisation of the city centre is to provide a greater range of



retail, entertainment and commercial activity in the city centre. Thirdly, I did not believe it was in the public interest for the development to be further delayed by what was a very small number of objections, which were principally to the policy decision to develop the site. Given that that policy decision had been made by the previous Liberal government, supported by this government, it seemed to me that the public interest would not be served by objections which sought to revisit that fundamental policy issue which had been decided by this and previous governments.

**MR SESELJA:** Is that the new standard? I know that the act is relatively broad on the reasons for using the call-in power, so you could probably use it in relation to many developments, as they would fit one or other of the headings. Is it going to be a new benchmark for you that, if it is of territory significance and contributes significantly to the centre of Canberra, it will be called in?

**Mr Corbell:** I have used the same criteria in considering every development application where I have chosen to exercise my discretion to approve or reject a development myself. So the benchmark I have set is no different from the benchmark I have set in relation to any other previous call-in that I've exercised in my time as planning minister.

**MR SESELJA:** Okay. So, with the revitalisation of Civic and City Hill a number of big developments planned, is it likely, given that benchmark, that we will see many more developments called in?

**Mr Corbell:** It would be inappropriate to speculate on that, Mr Seselja. Every development application must be considered on its merits. When I indicate to the planning authority that I wish to be the decision maker, I consider the development on its merits, and that will be the case for any potential future call-in, but that is the process that I would use. Every development application where call-in is requested or raised with me by either the proponent or others is considered by me on its merits.

**MR SESELJA:** You would acknowledge that, with the revitalisation of Civic, there are likely to be a number of buildings that could fall within that category.

**Mr Corbell:** Obviously, there could be over the next five to 10 years a number of significant redevelopments in the city centre. That does not necessarily mean that they are all going to be subject to a call-in. That is speculation. We do not know what the issues will be around those hypothetical developments and we do not know the specific issues that may or may not be raised in the public notification process. That's why I say that every development subject to a call-in must be considered on its merits.

**MR SESELJA:** As to the size of the QIC development, there have been some public comments, certainly some concerns, about the increase in size. Are you able, for the committee's benefit, to take us through it? Initially, I understand, it was approved for a building of approximately 20,000 square metres in office space. My understanding is that the call-in took that building up to 49,000 square metres, and I understand that there are other buildings and other DAs going through a process at the moment that would make it bigger. How big are the buildings on section 84 likely to end up being?

**Mr Corbell:** I'll ask Mr Savery to answer some of the detail of your question, Mr Seselja, but I want to make the point, as clarified in the *Canberra Times* of today or

yesterday, that my approval of those buildings was consistent with the master plan for the site in terms of the gross floor area. My approval was consistent with the approved amount of gross floor area for the site, as outlined in the section 84 master plan. So I did not vary the master plan or add additional floor space beyond that which is already in the master plan. I approved it consistent with the master plan. But I'll ask Mr Savery to give you a little more detail around how this development has progressed over the couple of years it has been happening.

**Mr Savery:** The original master plan allowed for in the order of 100,000 square metres of floor space, which was a mixture of retail, office, hotel, and serviced apartments. In fact, there was some flexibility within the lease purpose clause, or the holding lease, that enabled some mixture of those particular activities. The more recent master plan, which was approved in 2004 and involved a lease variation as well, allowed in the order of an extra 35,000 square metres. So the total development capacity under that master plan is approximately 135,000 square metres.

**MR SESELJA:** When was the initial master plan approved?

**Mr Savery:** It was around the turn of the century, if I could put it that way.

**MR SESELJA:** It seems such a long time ago.

**Mr Savery:** It does, doesn't it? It makes it sound very ancient. The more recent master plan still talks about the flexibility and variety of uses. As the minister has indicated, the matter that he called in recently still operated within the total floor space expected for office. I can't be precise about the figure. Perhaps something that is confusing people, and I'm not necessarily suggesting you, is that there is now this proposal for the ATO, the Australian Taxation Office, potentially to go onto that site and the Queensland Investment Corporation has indicated that, in order to achieve that, it will be seeking a further variation to its lease and therefore a change to the master plan to enable an additional 15,000 square metres over and above the 135,000. That is the subject of an application. It was not the subject of the call-in and obviously, as the minister has indicated, has to be assessed on its merits.

**MR SESELJA:** So, if that were approved, there would be 150,000 square metres in total.

**Mr Savery:** Of floor space, yes.

**MR SESELJA:** In April 2004 the Planning and Land Council expressed concern at the increased intensity of development on one side of the city, referring to section 84, which has the potential of impeding future developments throughout the city for a number of years. Firstly, do you agree with that? If not, what is the alternative view and is anything being done to avoid that scenario that the council has expressed concern over, the impeding of future developments throughout the city?

**Mr Savery:** I think that there were sensible observations made by the Planning and Land Council that, if you were to invest all of your development capability within that one precinct, it would have the potential to skew the whole shape and form of the central city area. I think one of the key reasons why the government has asked the ACT Planning and

Land Authority to undertake the Canberra central exercise is to identify a broader urban design and development framework for the centre of the city, which has included, obviously, the development of the ANU precinct.

I am not putting that down primarily to the planning authority, but obviously it's a key part of the government's thinking about how you can balance development on the west and east, the whole area around the Melbourne and Sydney buildings constituting another precinct, factoring in the outcome of the Griffin legacy, where you've got West Basin and Constitution Avenue and how they plug into the whole development to the centre of the city, and then more recently the whole debate around City Hill itself, so that what you get is an emergence of a series of precincts, with a variety of activities, looking at the way pedestrian linkages can be promoted and traffic management and car parking arrangements can be progressively implemented to ensure that there is that complementarity across the city.

Also linked to that has been the land release program or the land supply strategy identifying new land releases, which have predominantly in the last 12 months focused on the City West area, around section 61. You've got the development of section 6 with the Metropolitan building. I think the counsel of the Planning and Land Council was quite sound in terms of, "Don't just allow this to be the totality of your development in the city. You've got to see and actively promote opportunities for development in other parts of the city." That is very much what the Canberra central program is about.

**MR SESELJA:** Obviously there is only a certain amount of demand and the 135,000 square metres, potentially 150,000, could potentially take away from demand for office accommodation and other accommodation on City Hill, I would expect.

**Mr Savery:** Bear in mind that that 150,000 square metres—sorry, at the moment there's only approval for 135,000 square metres—cannot all be taken up by office development, only a proportion of it, and the vast majority—

**MR SESELJA:** What proportion?

**Mr Savery:** I'd have to take that on notice; I can't be precise. But a large proportion of it is actually invested in retail, entertainment and accommodation development.

**Mr Corbell:** It's worth making the point, Mr Seselja, that at the same time as that development has gone ahead the market has actively sought additional land releases in the city over the past two years and, as a result of that, new commercial development is now under way or planned—for example, on section 88, down on Akuna Street, there will be a major new building for the Department of Industry, Science and Technology, which is a very important investment in the city. Equally, the government has sold two sites through a competitive process on Marcus Clarke Street. On top of that there is the NICTA site on London Circuit. So the market has indicated that it wants a range of product in the marketplace. It's interested in buying it; it's taking it up; and it wants to develop those sites. This has been happening at the same time as development of section 84 is continuing.

The government's view is that the level of investment activity in the city is very significant at the moment. It is in many respects probably the most significant level of

investment and development activity in the city for well over the past decade, if not since self-government. It is a very significant level of activity, a level of activity that we want to support and facilitate because it is about revitalising the city centre; it is about enabling capital to invest in the city. All of those issues were factors, obviously, around my decision for section 84, along with the ones that I've mention to you previously. As Mr Savery points out, we are seeking to view the city as a total entity, but the section 84 development is an important contribution to the revitalisation of the city centre. It will assist in making the city an attractive destination for people to come and enjoy and use.

**MR SESELJA:** Planners hear about there being thousands of square metres and know exactly what it refers to but, for the rest of us, how would 135,000 square metres compare with, say, Woden Plaza? Would it be bigger or smaller than Woden Plaza?

**Mr Savery:** Well, for 135,000 square metres there are probably two immediate comparisons I can make. That is the entire commercial development of the Woden town centre. Just because the comparisons have been made previously, the airport development, the office development you see out there, currently represents somewhere between 60,000 and 80,000 square metres and has a total capacity of 120,000 square metres.

**MR SESELJA:** Significantly more than what is at the airport so far and about the same as Woden Plaza.

**Mr Corbell:** I notice Mr Savery points out it is not all commercial. There's a mixture of commercial, residential, retail and entertainment uses. Consider some of the development that will occur on that site. For example, there will be a significant new bank of cinemas developed there. For a city like Canberra, the number of cinemas we have in our CBD is paltry. In terms of the city being a destination for an evening out, that is an important issue that has to be addressed and section 84 allows us to do that. Also, there needs to be a greater range of retailing. For example, our CBD has one supermarket. Are we seriously saying, if we want our city to be a place that people live in, that the city can get by with one supermarket? These are the sorts of issues that section 84 is seeking to address.

It's also pointed out to me that you have to view the total amount of gross floor area available in the city centre. Civic, the city centre, has just under one million square metres of commercial office space. So, in the context of the overall level of supply in the city centre, section 84 by no means dominates the total provision of gross floor area for commercial uses in the city.

**MR SESELJA:** Are you able to confirm, Mr Savery, whether the amount of parking required by the parking and vehicle access guidelines for section 84 is going to be met or is it likely to be given a dispensation to have less parking?

**Mr Savery:** I would like to be able to confirm it, but my understanding and advice is that it will exceed the guidelines.

**MR SESELJA:** My understanding was that there would be less, but if you're able to take that on notice.

**Mr Savery:** I would like to confirm it, but I believe it will exceed them.

**Mr Corbell:** Madam Chair, earlier Mr Seselja asked when the original master plan was agreed for this site, section 84. It was agreed on 12 October 2001, when the deed between the territory and QIC was signed, and the master plan was an annexure to that deed.

**Mr Savery:** Madam Chair, could I make one other point for the member? It may have been at the same Planning and Land Council meeting that you drew upon before, but my recollection is that at either that meeting or some other meeting where section 84 was an item they were actually critical that it was overproviding car parking.

**MR MULCAHY:** I have a supplementary question on the QIC, chair, just one question.

**THE CHAIR:** No, I'd like to move to Dr Foskey now because we have only 25 minutes left.

**MR MULCAHY:** It's only one question.

**THE CHAIR:** That's not an argument that I am willing to hear.

**DR FOSKEY:** We need to time it.

**MR MULCAHY:** We need to time your questions, I think; an excellent idea.

**DR FOSKEY:** Please do so tomorrow.

**THE CHAIR:** Order! You will run the clock down yourselves if you keep arguing amongst yourselves.

**DR FOSKEY:** I have had representations from families that would like to build or purchase housing for relatives with a disability, mental health issues or elderly parents. They suggested that they would be more able to provide housing solutions if there were some form of assistance with costs, such as concessions or reductions on stamp duty and/or land tax. Is the government considering any strategies in this regard?

**Mr Corbell:** Not that I am aware of. But it is not an issue that directly relates to the planning portfolio. It is a matter that relates to either my colleague the minister for disability, who has responsibility for policy in that area, or indeed the Treasurer. I am afraid I can't help you with that.

**DR FOSKEY:** I will just ask this question. It is a much larger question and is related to the discussion about City Hill and Mr Seselja's recent inquiries about block 84. One thing that the ACT Planning and Land Council has said about the Terry Snow proposal for City Hill, which could be said also I think about the ACTPLA proposal, is that the proposal, as it reads, is inconsistent with the Canberra spatial plan, the territory plan, the recently released Griffin legacy, the ACT government's own planning for Canberra central and the recently released City Hill concept.

You were talking just now about block 84. Everything that I have read, including the

spatial plan itself, appears to indicate a diversion away from the idea of Canberra as a place with multiple town centres towards a focus on Civic, where we are inevitably going to see neglect, I believe. I believe there has been neglect of the other town centres. This feeding of resources into Civic and encouraging more office space there is, by default, even if it is not stated, a denial of the kind of approach Canberra had before.

I am not sure that we have ever had that debate that made that decision. We have never as a community made that decision that we wanted Civic to be the centre and then develop a radial town and, effectively, dormitory suburbs. This is something that the Gungahlin Community Council is most particularly aware of. I don't think they are the only ones.

**Mr Corbell:** I guess you raise two issues there. The more minor one that I will address first is that the Planning and Land Council has actually given its support for the Planning and Land Authority's concept for City Hill. It does not consider ACTPLA's proposal for City Hill to be inconsistent with the other planning framework. Indeed, they have indicated it is highly complementary to the broader planning framework.

That aside, the issue you raise about the focus on the city is an important discussion. I think in many respects it is a discussion that we have had as a community, most notably through the development of the Canberra spatial plan. The Canberra spatial plan, in principle, says that, to develop a more sustainable city, we must constrain the future growth and development of the city in terms of how far it goes out into undeveloped areas. That is why we have developed an urban containment boundary for the city of 15 kilometres from the city centre.

More importantly though, the spatial plan also identifies that, within 7½ kilometres of the city centre, is the opportunity for urban intensification. That relates to both residential and commercial uses. Within 7½ kilometres of the city centre, if we want to build a more sustainable city, that is where the opportunity needs to be taken to consolidate residential, commercial and other activity.

That does not deny or ignore the reality that we have a polycentric city with many centres, the town centres obviously being important. Nor does it deny the need for continued policies to allow for the revitalisation, development and redevelopment of those town centres. But it does acknowledge that the city does need one identifiable centre. The territory plan itself and the national capital plan acknowledge this as well. Both of those documents say that Civic will be the pre-eminent centre for commercial and cultural life in particular in Canberra.

Existing planning framework recognises that Civic is more than just a town centre. Civic—and this is a term I like to use—is the first amongst equals. It is more than just a town centre; it is the pre-eminent area for cultural life, for governance—and that is why our key public institutions are here, the Assembly, the courts and so on—and it is also the pre-eminent place for commercial activity.

That is very important in developing a stronger sense of identity, particularly for people who arrive in the city for investment in the city and for cultural life and activity in the city. It is the same reason that the government has chosen to host and celebrate in the city events that affect all Canberrans. For example, the New Years Eve's fireworks last New

Year were held in the city as a way of recognising that this is our focal centre point.

That doesn't diminish the role of town centres. Town centres play a very important role in servicing the populations that immediately surround them. The town centre model is a very valuable one; it is a very valuable legacy because it allows us to consolidate density in each of our districts across the city in the town centres. Canberra will never be a traditional radial city in the same way that Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and other places like that are because we have these other town centres. The spatial plan identifies that density will be achieved within each of those centres, within Civic itself, and along the corridors that connect those centres to each other.

These two things are not at war with each other; it is not a competition. They are complementary. A strong Civic centre will assist us in having strong and viable town centres and vice versa. I think philosophically that discussion has been had. It is reflected in the principles in the existing territory plan, the national capital plan and the spatial plan. So I think the discussion has been had. As a government, as a broader Assembly, we have recognised the value of reinforcing our city centre. We recognise that it is not to the detriment of our town centres.

It is also worth highlighting, as Mr Savery points out to me, that the OECD report into the future of Canberra also made recommendations along these lines. That was a very significant peer review exercise of the future growth and development of our city by prominent and pre-eminent people in the international sphere.

**DR FOSKEY:** Was social sustainability one of their criteria?

**Mr Corbell:** I can't recall the details of that report, but I am certainly happy to make it available to you. The OECD does take a very broad and holistic look at future growth and development of cities and doesn't focus solely on economic issues.

**MS PORTER:** I want to go to page 209 of the accountability indicators, budget paper 4, where it mentions the targets for the Molonglo Valley planning investigations. Could we have some update on that?

**Mr Corbell:** The Molonglo Valley, as members would be aware, has been identified as a future urban development front for the city. Most recently, the government, in conjunction with the National Capital Authority, completed an investigation of the future urban capability of the Molonglo Valley. It confirmed three locations within the Molonglo Valley as most suitable for urban development. It confirmed that the area could be developed consistent with the national capital values that the National Capital Authority obviously has an important mandate to protect and enhance.

What will now occur is that there is additional funding in the budget to conduct further investigations in the Molonglo Valley, which will assist in forming an ultimate variation to the territory plan, an amendment to the national capital plan and an environmental impact statement into future development in the Molonglo Valley. I might ask Ms Ekelund if she can elaborate a bit on that work.

**Ms Ekelund:** We, within the last couple of months, have gone out to seek tenders for three major components of this additional work. One was to look at hydraulic

infrastructure, in particular water quality control infrastructure, whether we have a pondage system, wetlands, et cetera. Members might be aware that both the Weston Creek catchment and the Woden catchment currently drain into the Molonglo River, effectively without water quality control treatment. Our investigations into the development of Molonglo seek to address the current poor water quality management coming out of those two older catchments, to bring it up to speed and up to date, and make it state-of-the-art water quality management. That is one of the three studies. Another one of the studies is about engineering infrastructure requirements for the area. The third is broad structure planning for the area.

Having those three broad pieces of work done will enable us to also then proceed to have an environmental impact statement prepared for the Molonglo Valley. As the minister said, that will inform, we hope, a draft variation to the territory plan and an amendment to the national capital plan.

We propose, early in the financial year, to commence consultation processes with the community to seek their views about what the critical issues are in developing the valley. We are also proceeding with a number of environmental studies in conjunction with Environment ACT. In particular, they are studies where we have engaged our universities to look at matters such as the pink-tailed legless lizard and the various raptors in the valley that probably feed on the pink-tailed legless lizard. Particularly the lizards along the river corridor are considered to be fairly important, rare and endangered communities.

We are working with other agencies as well as academic people to look at issues of water quality management, the state of the Molonglo River, how we deal with water quality management and the facilities and services required, from both an engineering perspective and that of social services that would support an area such as this. We anticipate that we would have one subregional centre, or a large group centre, something the size of Erindale or Dickson, to support the area. Planning will be undertaken in that structure planning work to look at those sorts of issues as well. But essentially we would be completing studies in the expectation of working up to an environmental impact statement by the end of the financial year.

**MR SESELJA:** Minister, you have referred a couple of times to the Canberra central task force. I may have missed this, but when are you going to announce the members of the task force?

**Mr Corbell:** Very soon.

**MR SESELJA:** When was the decision made to go ahead with the task force? Obviously it was announced about two weeks ago.

**Mr Corbell:** Yes. The revamped task force?

**MR SESELJA:** Yes, the revamped task force that you announced.

**Mr Corbell:** About two weeks ago.

**MR SESELJA:** That was made fairly recently. Is it common practice to announce the



task force before you know who is going to be on it?

**Mr Corbell:** It was the request of cabinet that I do so.

**MR SESELJA:** It just seems a little odd; it seems like it might have been policy on the run, given the short time frame. I am concerned about the time frame for reporting back. I understand, and you can correct me if I am wrong, that the task force is to report back on options for City Hill in August. Is that correct?

**Mr Corbell:** By the end of August, yes.

**MR SESELJA:** Why such a short time frame?

**Mr Corbell:** The government felt it was important that this issue not be deliberated on forever. By the end of August does not mean that that is the end of discussion about City Hill. What it does mean is that by the end of August the government believes it is important that we have a clear way forward on managing the issues around City Hill in the context of the future development of the Canberra central area overall.

Given the high level of media interest and the public interest in this particular matter, we thought it was important that the task force be given a prompt reporting date on the next steps that were required. But the task force itself is not necessarily going to come up with the definitive answer for City Hill. In fact, in my view, the task force will provide the government with future options on the delivery of development around City Hill, with the best ways of achieving that, as well as the best ways of resolving the design issues, traffic issues and so on around City Hill.

**MR SESELJA:** It is a way forward. It could potentially report back and say we need to consider more options, have an international competition or set up a statutory authority. Are these the sorts of things that the task force will consider?

**Mr Corbell:** The task force has been asked to consider issues around the delivery vehicle for future development of that precinct. The issue of a statutory authority has been raised. It is certainly within the task force's brief to consider those options. At the same time, the task force has also been asked to consider the viability of large-scale development in that area, given the issues that we discussed earlier this afternoon about the level of commercial office space supply in the city centre. Those are important considerations. The traffic considerations and how those are best resolved will also be a point of reference for the task force. They will give us advice on the future way forward. They will not, again, necessarily give us all of the answers but they will certainly give us a future way forward.

I think what is important about the task force, from my perspective and the government's perspective, is that it allows us to better engage with the private sector on the future growth and development of the city, acknowledging also that this is not a matter of interest just to the private sector, commercial property owners or investors and developers; it is also a matter of interest for all Canberrans. It is, after all, our city centre. The task force's role would be to better engage with those stakeholders who invest in the city centre but also to go out and engage with the broader community on the best ways forward for managing Canberra central as a whole.

The task force has two roles. The first is to provide some immediate advice to government around City Hill. The second, though, which is just as important, is to monitor and oversee the delivery of the government's Canberra central program, which is about managing the growth, development, planning, traffic and other issues across all the central Canberra area, in conjunction with the National Capital Authority and its Griffin legacy work. That is why I have extended an invitation to the chief executive of the NCA, Ms Annabelle Pegrum, to be represented on the task force. They have an important role to play as well. I think we are coming together with a model that will have a greater level of ownership from key stakeholders and will be able to engage with a broader range of stakeholders as well.

**MR SESELJA:** How much will the task force cost?

**Mr Corbell:** The task force itself, in terms of its secretariat support and ongoing investigations, has already been funded by the ACT government through an initiative in last year's budget. That is \$1.5 million over a period of four years for that program.

**MR SESELJA:** There is no additional cost as a result of the revamp?

**Mr Corbell:** There will be some additional costs in relation to the sitting fees of non-government and non-public service members of the task force. Those costs are yet to be finalised.

**MR SESELJA:** Finally, those non-government members will be drawn from retail, business and development. Is that a reasonable summary? Are there any other areas where they will be drawn from?

**Mr Corbell:** We will also be seeking to include people who have experience in social planning and social policy and people from the design professions.

**MR MULCAHY.** Minister, BP 4, page 210, speaks of the authority holding a large unfunded liability for employee benefits. I think further down it is referring to a figure of about \$7 million. Can you indicate how you plan to address those liabilities, which, I assume, are primarily superannuation?

**Mr Corbell:** I will ask Mr Sakkara to answer that question.

**Mr Sakkara:** Those unfunded liabilities relate to rec leave provision and long service leave provision for our employees. It arose when we first became an authority and split away from the Department of Urban Services, where we were required to disclose those entitlements on our balance sheet, but we were not able to secure any funding from either the Treasury or urban services to offset that liability.

It is not considered to be a major risk on our balance sheet because we wouldn't expect that all of our employees would call upon their long service and rec leave entitlements at any given point in time. It is just something that is an ongoing accrual that is normally paid out on either an employee's desire to take a long period of leave or when they leave the service of the authority. We are catch-managing that through our normal—

**MR MULCAHY:** Are you saying that you are making provision in the accounts or are you just recognising the liability?

**Mr Sakkara:** We just recognise the liability. We have no provision or funding to build up any reserve to meet that obligation.

**MR MULCAHY:** I was curious, minister, because it was only a matter of weeks ago that your colleague the Minister for Industrial Relations reminded us all that it was an obligation of employers to formally, under accounting standards, make provision for long service leave within 5 years rather than simply know they owe the liability. It seems inconsistent with the policy expected of the rest of the city.

**Mr Corbell:** I am not privy to the details of accounting standards or obligations of private sector employers. It is not an area that I am particularly aware of, but the approach that we adopt is standard process for government agencies, I understand.

**Mr Sakkara:** Our financial statements are in compliance with the accounting standards. We recognise the provisions for the leave in accordance with the standards. The only bit missing is that we have no cash reserve to fund that, if we were called upon to pay up every employee we have got.

**Mr Corbell:** I think the fundamental difference is that the government is not going to go broke tomorrow and therefore renege on their responsibilities to their employees.

**MR MULCAHY:** Most businesses probably won't either. I don't think you are about to go broke either.

**Mr Corbell:** I think that is the difference.

**MR MULCAHY:** It is the procedure and the way in which you treat them that is of interest to me. In terms of the spatial plan, minister, are you still standing by your population forecast in that plan of about 500,000 people by about 2030? When you look at the projections in the budget papers, the rate of population growth in Canberra is less than one per cent, on those forward estimates. If you tie that in with your plans to build in the centre of Civic something bigger than the Woden town centre, are we going to have the growth in population that will make this sort of activity viable or are we going to be shifting activity, which I think was what Dr Foskey was alluding to, from town centres into another area?

**Mr Corbell:** The spatial plan is a document designed to be a long-term guide to the future growth and development of the city over the next 25 years. Because of that, it has worked on a number of assumptions. That includes an assumption that we could potentially grow to a city of half a million people in that time. That is at the high end of population projections, but it is deliberately a precautionary approach that the plan has been developed on that basis. It does not assume that we will necessarily achieve that population level within that time, but it makes provision for it in case we do.

The government takes an ambitious view that we can grow our population and that it is desirable to grow our population within the ACT at a rate faster than is currently the case. The plan makes provision for that. It is not a target; it is a provision in case the city

grows to a population of half a million.

**MR MULCAHY:** Finally, minister: with some of these exciting plans that are on the table, have you taken any interest in, for instance, sourcing of funds for groups like QIC? Are you familiar with their major investment partners? Have you met any of them? Or hasn't that been an issue that you have applied your mind to?

**Mr Corbell:** In what relation?

**MR MULCAHY:** Are you aware of where the funds are coming from for QIC? Where are they sourcing those funds to do all these major developments?

**Mr Corbell:** You mean their current development?

**MR MULCAHY:** The ongoing development, the expanded development, yes.

**Mr Corbell:** No, I don't pay much attention to where their funds are coming from. That is a matter for them as investors.

**THE CHAIR:** The time is 6 o'clock. I would ask that members place any further questions on notice. Minister and officials, thank you very much for your attendance today. We will reconvene at 9:30 tomorrow morning.

**The committee adjourned at 6.01 pm.**