



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 15 May 2025

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Thursday, 15 May 2025

Ministerial arrangements	1
Questions without notice	1
Budget—interest payments	1
Budget—debt	2
Roads—traffic	3
Waste—recycling—costs	4
Kingston Oval—maintenance	4
Roads—traffic	5
Budget—program terminations.....	7
Health—bulk-billing	7
Gaming—electronic gaming machines	9
ACT public service—recruitment	10
Woden town centre—community centre.....	11
Planning and development—Kambah.....	12
Budget—taxation	12
Roads—traffic	13
Roads—traffic	14
Canberra Institute of Technology—Woden campus.....	16
Sport and recreation—Tuggeranong ice sports facility.....	17

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (14.01): Minister Orr is absent from the Assembly, so Mr Pettersson will step up and take questions on Minister Orr's portfolios today.

Questions without notice

Budget—interest payments

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer. In February, the budget review estimated the government would receive \$2.7 billion in own-source revenue this year and incur interest expenses of \$532 million, meaning that around one dollar in every five dollars raised in local taxes is being spent on interest. At the end of the forward estimates, this figure grows to more than one dollar in every four dollars. Is this expense impacting the government's ability to deliver services?

MR STEEL: I thank the opposition leader for her question. The ACT government is well placed to service our net debt. Of course, at the same time, we continue to invest in delivering the services that Canberrans rely on, particularly in health care, community services, education, transport and so many other areas that are critical and that the Canberra community relies on. We will continue to make sure that is sustainable, and that is part of the budget deliberations that are occurring at the moment for the 2025-26 budget. That also means we need to have sustainable revenue lines as well.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, are interest costs or the government's \$15 billion of debt impacting capital expenditure decisions or delivery?

MR STEEL: No. We are getting on with the job of delivering our infrastructure pipeline. Of course, we always make sure that, throughout each budget process, we look at the sustainability of the capital pipeline. Our city is growing and infrastructure is required to support the growing population—new housing, new transport infrastructure, and new health and school infrastructure as well. We will look at that as part of the 2025-26 budget—how we can deliver on the commitments that we took to the election in a sustainable way.

MR COCKS: What discussions has the ACT government had with the commonwealth about providing debt relief, financial support or other assistance in managing the ACT's liabilities?

MR STEEL: Ministers, particularly those who are engaged in the infrastructure delivery part of government, are engaged with their respective colleagues in the federal government about securing financial support for projects. In many cases, we have been clear that projects cannot get off the ground without federal support. We have been clear about that regarding light rail stage 2B. It requires a 50 per cent contribution for it to get up, and we have secured that for the planning and design of that project. We will continue to engage with the commonwealth in relation to our infrastructure projects and, indeed, other programs where there is a shared responsibility between the federal government and the ACT government. Acute health care is a key one of those that we will continue to engage with the commonwealth on as part of the negotiations on a new

five-year National Health Reform Agreement. We just wrapped up negotiations in relation to the schools agreement, which has seen a great outcome for the territory. So, yes, we are engaged. With the new federal government being sworn in, it is an opportunity to meet with both new ministers and those who are continuing in their roles, to make sure that we put our best foot forward for the territory and receive our fair share of funding for a range of services and infrastructure across government.

Budget—debt

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Treasurer. The budget review estimated the government has \$14.9 billion in total borrowings this financial year, rising over three years to \$19.8 billion. When does the Government expect borrowings to peak?

MR STEEL: We set that out in the budget review and in the budget, transparently, about the level of net debt. It is something we will continue to look at it in future budget processes, making sure we can continue to service that debt. We can do so at the present time, but we do need sustainable revenue lines and we also need to make sure we are keeping a close eye on expenditure, particularly as we do see extra demand in key services, particularly in health care. It is a balancing act that we have to make, but it is made harder when the opposition does not support revenue measures like we debated over the last few weeks.

Mr Cocks: Point of order.

MR SPEAKER: I thought the minister had finished his answer so—

Mr Cocks: The point of order was on relevance.

MR SPEAKER: Was it? Okay, make your point of order Mr Cocks.

Mr Cocks: The point of order is on relevance because the question was in relation to when debt would peak, which the Treasurer has not gone to, rather he has gone to issues around revenue raising and those sorts of issues.

MR STEEL: Just on the point of order, I do not think that what happens in the Assembly here is divorced from government decision making and the financials of the budget have a direct impact on the amount that we are borrowing.

MR SPEAKER: But again—and if we could stop the clock with 40 seconds on it, please—I am assuming you are done with your answer Minister?

MR STEEL: I am.

MR SPEAKER: I think there is merit in a relevance point of order because I do not think you went anywhere near answering the question, but Ms Castley, you have a supplementary?

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when does the government expect borrowings to peak?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the answer I just provided.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, has the government received any concerns or warnings from ratings agencies, financial institutions or bondholders about the territory's liabilities and, if so, could you please provide a summary of what issues have been raised?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice. I think there has been some public commentary from S&P, directed at all state and territory governments, about their finances in the lead up to the budgets that are being delivered this month and next month. We have already seen the Northern Territory budget delivered. They are looking at the rate of expenditure growth and they have made comments around the level of services and investment that was made to support the community and business during COVID-19. I will not verbalise those comments as they are there to see. I am happy to provide a short summary of some of those comments on notice.

Roads—traffic

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Simultaneous projects in the centre, east and south of the ACT have created a perfect storm of congestion, which is blowing out travel times for huge numbers of Canberran commuters this year. Minister, can you please tell us what is the point of an infrastructure plan if it means the government ends up scheduling a number of disruptive projects at the same time?

MS CHEYNE: I think this question is for me, Mr Speaker. There are a lot of projects underway at the moment; that is absolutely correct. The most disruptive of these is the closure of Coppins Crossing for the Molonglo River Bridge. I appreciate that that has blown out times, particularly in that area of Canberra with the Tuggeranong Parkway.

I also note that with other areas where there is significant work underway, like the Monaro Highway, the actual traffic movements have shown that it is better than what we had modelled. I believe that has even been your experience, Mr Speaker.

We do provide as much notice as we can. The closure of Coppins Crossing will end on Saturday. The crane is being dismantled as we speak and being moved across to the other side of the bridge. That is when Coppins Crossing will reopen.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will the congestion ease—not just for Coppins Crossing but as a whole?

MS CHEYNE: A lot of this work is about easing congestion: the duplication of William Hovell Drive; the Monaro Highway upgrades; this incredible project with Molonglo River Bridge; and the duplication of Gundaroo Drive—which, imminently, is going to return to 80 kilometres per hour along the entire route. Different areas of Canberra are being affected at different times. And, of course, there is the major light rail project. We need to close roads to be able to undertake some of this work safely. Ultimately, it is about planning and delivering for the traffic movements of a growing city.

MS BARRY: Minister, with a more organised approach, would you have staggered disruptive projects to minimise congestion?

MS CHEYNE: Certainly, we would love to stagger these projects as much as we can, but there are a lot of external factors at play here. The weather can have an enormously disruptive impact on road projects, in particular. Of course, there have been approvals that have, because of how long they have taken, delayed the William Hovell Drive duplication from getting underway.

What I would say about Molonglo River Bridge in particular is that it is a huge undertaking. I know that the community would have preferred it to have happened largely in the school holidays, but we were relying on the availability of Australia's second largest crane—in fact, at the moment, it is the largest, because the largest is out of action. So we were waiting for the availability of that. It had to be transported in pieces. We were also relying on the delivery of the girders, which were being manufactured in Newcastle and needed to be transported down here. So none of that work could get underway until those materials and the crane arrived. I think a lot of this is explained in publicly available information.

We are trying to give us much notice as we possibly can when there are road closures, so that people can make other arrangements.

Waste—recycling—costs

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, the ACT government is building a new recycling facility at Hume to replace the one that burnt down in 2022. It is a big contract. Veolia has announced that it is worth over \$800 million. The ACT government have said that they will pay Veolia \$259 million over 20 years in capital and operational costs, which is \$13 million per year in ACT government funding. We used to pay around \$2 million per year for our recycling. Can you tell me why our recycling costs will increase from \$2 million per year to \$13 million per year?

MS CHEYNE: I may have this information in front of me, but it is not easily found—at least in this moment. I will take it on notice and, if I can come back before the end of question time, I will.

MS CLAY: Minister, how much did the old recycling facility cost to build?

MS CHEYNE: I definitely do not have that available to me, but I will seek it.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are there any types of standard packaging that the old facility would recycle that the new facility will not recycle?

MS CHEYNE: I do not believe so, but, if that is not correct, I will correct the record.

Kingston Oval—maintenance

MR EMERSON: Mr Speaker, my question is for the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, I recently visited Kingston Oval and was surprised by the level of disrepair of the grounds and the facilities there. Seniors footy can no longer be played at Kingston Oval. This oval is both leased and maintained by the Eastlake Football Club but remains open to the public, making it a rare asset for the community.

Given the long-term investment, ongoing costs, and volunteer time that Eastlake has contributed as the lease-holder—I understand it to be over \$1.4 million since 2002—how much has the government invested in this facility, as its owner?

MS BERRY: Thank you. I will have to take on notice the exact detail of the amount of funding that has been provided to upgrade and maintain that facility, but there was funding after the 2020 election when female-friendly pavilion upgrades were made to the Kingston Oval. I also understand that there is some nature conservation work happening at the oval, which is taking some time. I know that has been frustrating for the club. However, TCCS, I think, are working with Eastlake to develop a conservation management plan with regard to the trees at Kingston Oval.

I think there are also some heritage concerns or questions that are also being worked through. Again, when you have some of these older facilities, these are the kinds of things that—working with the community and the government—we can get some really good outcomes on.

I understand that the club also received funding in 2023—again, I will check on the actual number—and some of that funding will go towards upgrades to lighting and to the upgraded maintenance of the field. Again, I will just double-check on the actual number of the funding that has been provided by the ACT government in more recent years.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what level of government investment in the Kingston Oval master plan, which has been prepared by Eastlake Football Club, can we expect in the upcoming budget, or future budgets, particularly with regard to the essential high-priority items it identifies?

MS BERRY: I have not spoken to Eastlake. My office has not been contacted by Eastlake or Ainslie for some time, so I might have to take that question on notice around what their aspirations are as far as their master plan is concerned. But, of course, I am very happy to work with any sports club across the ACT on meeting their aspirations and a pathway to do that through the sport and recreation infrastructure grants, as well as the participation grants.

MS CARRICK: Is the government committed to completing the six actions identified in last year's ACT Heritage Conservation Management Plan for Kingston Oval within the required 12-month timeframe?

MS BERRY: That is not a question for me, but I will take it on notice and see if I can get an answer for that project.

Roads—traffic

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. One of the three missions of the government's economic development strategy is to be "a city that gives you back time". But the inept scheduling of transport projects means that Canberra's commuters are losing up to three hours per day. Minister, why is one arm of the ACT government undermining the goals of another?

MR STEEL: It is not inept; it is investment that we are making for the future of our city, to give people back time. We are obviously in a temporary period of disruption, and that will end when those infrastructure projects are delivered. Of course, there is disruption when that infrastructure is being built, but it is critical for the future of the city that we get on with that work and deliver those projects for the growing region of Molongo, with the John Gorton Drive extension and the new Molonglo River Bridge, for example. We appreciate that that causes disruption, but at this particular time the disruption will be short, with the closure of Coppins Crossing. We are looking forward to that opening later this month, which will help to relieve congestion in the short term. The opening of the bridge will be critical for that region.

That is why our government has been investing in those things. It is extraordinary that the opposition is criticising us for getting on with those infrastructure projects which are so important for the future of our city. We are investing in the Monaro Highway project as well, and we are sequencing that so that the Athllon Drive works are not occurring at exactly the same time as the Monaro Highway project, because that would see two arterial roads under construction at the same time. We have looked clearly at the sequencing of the infrastructure program, to make sure that the projects are deliverable, and that we get value for money for those. We continue to look at the broader infrastructure market nation-wide to make sure that we are sequencing projects in the best way possible and in accordance with the advice of Infrastructure Canberra, which is the expert agency on that.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, does the government track how much time commuters are losing because of congestion caused by these overlapping projects?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question. As I outlined yesterday, we do have a traffic management centre. There was a good amount invested in that centre. I have visited it. I know Minister Steel has visited it. There are hundreds of CCTV cameras across the city, and it means that we are able to monitor where there is congestion. It means we are able to update the variable messaging boards across the city, to explain if an area is particularly congested, and how long it might currently be taking to go down a particular road. I would encourage people to look at those variable messaging signs, see what the current timeframe is for a particular road, and take a different route, if it makes sense to do that.

We are constantly monitoring how traffic is moving about this city. Yes, this is a particularly disruptive period, but it is not without warning. As Minister Steel rightly pointed out, this confluence of closures will end. One of the most significant closures, of course, will end on Saturday.

MR HANSON: Minister, have commute times become better or worse since the strategy's goal of "giving back time" was announced in 2022?

MR STEEL: Of course, we are in a period of construction, so there has been disruption for the city as the government invests in these transformational transport infrastructure projects which will provide significant transport benefits into the future. We can expect during this period that there will be disruption to people's commutes, while we invest in this infrastructure, but it is critical that we get on with that work.

There is an alternative, of course, to that policy, which is not to invest at all in the transport infrastructure that our city needs. Of course, that would see, longer term, a worse outcome for the city. The reality is that our city is growing. We have one of the fastest growing populations in the country, of any city. We do need to invest in a range of forms of transport to move more people more efficiently around the city. That is what the transport strategy was about. It was about making sure that we are not just investing in roads but also that we are ramping up investment in public transport infrastructure—in particular, mass transit light rail and active travel—to provide opportunities for people to choose different modes of travel that do not compete with cars on the roadway.

Light rail will predominantly run in a completely defined section of the median strip on light rail stage 2, on Adealide Avenue and Yarra Glen Drive. We will be consulting with the community soon about the designs for that, as part of the draft EIS consultation process. Of course, it also delivers that outcome on stage 1, running in the Northbourne corridor, and having priority. That is critical, because we cannot augment Northbourne Avenue any more than what is already there, with six lanes. So we have to invest in sustainable transport modes. Our government is. We have a vision, and you have opposed it every single step of the way.

Budget—program terminations

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the incoming ministerial briefs released under freedom of information show that 50 programs had funding terminating within the forward estimates period and that continuation of this funding would directly impact the feasibility of the government's planned surplus. Treasurer, will you provide a list of these programs and the number of staff affected?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. That information was published in the *Pre-election budget update*, so I refer him to that document.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, do any of those 50 programs terminate this financial year?

MR STEEL: Again, I refer him to the *PEBU*, where that information was released for parties to make their election commitments. He should look at those papers. It is extraordinary if he has not made reference to those papers.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, how many staff are affected by the termination of these programs?

MR STEEL: The government will, of course, through the budget process, consider the continuation of programs. We are in that process at the moment. I am not going to make an announcement in question time. We will have further information to provide when I hand down the budget.

Health—bulk-billing

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Health. During the federal election we saw commitments to triple the bulk-billing incentive. In the context of Canberra, however, both experts and ACT Labor Senator Katy Gallagher have stated

that “It remains to be seen” whether these changes to the incentives will actually translate to more bulk-billed appointments. Senator Gallagher also noted that, “It is a matter for doctors to decide, the government can’t force a doctor to bulk-bill.” Given this, what model do you anticipate will be used for the promised three new, fully bulk-billed GP practices?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It would be helpful if Mr Rattenbury was able to identify what three new fully bulk-billed practices he is referring to. I know that federal Labor has obviously made a commitment in relation to the Interchange Health Co-op, where that has been a fully bulk-billed practice which was originally supported with some capital funding from the ACT government. We have also supported Interchange over the years with a total of about \$1.4 million of funding. They have also had our support—

Mr Rattenbury: Point of order, Mr Speaker. Perhaps I might help the minister. I am referring to a press release issued by Senator Katy Gallagher, Mark Butler, Andrew Leigh, Alicia Payne and David Smith, in which they promised three new fully bulk-billed GP clinics in the areas that needed them the most in the ACT.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It would therefore seem that Mr Rattenbury’s question is one for Senator Gallagher, Mr Smith, Ms Payne and Mr Leigh.

MR RATTENBURY: Given that the minister has consistently informed us that “General practices are private entities that determine their own billing arrangements,” will these new bulk-billing clinics instead be publicly owned?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think again Mr Speaker, Mr Rattenbury is quoting Senator Gallagher in relation to that matter, but we know from around the country, and we know from experience here in the ACT, that there can be ways of facilitating practices to recruit doctors who commit to fully bulk-billing. This is an experience that other jurisdictions have. This is an experience that we have had here before. So I think the answer to Mr Rattenbury’s question is no, it is not necessary—

Mr Rattenbury: On a point of order.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am just trying to answer your question.

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order. If we could just stop the clock if we could.

Mr Rattenbury: I am sorry if the minister misunderstood but the quote that I offered was a quote from her in a question on notice. I am trying to understand how these practices are going to be bulk-billing clinics, given the government keeps telling us that GPs are private and they cannot control them, but they are promising fully bulk-billed clinics.

MR SPEAKER: All right. Minister for Health?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: My understanding is the way that other fully bulk-billed practices do this around the country is that they recruit GPs who are willing to commit to fully bulk-billing.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, can you provide the Assembly with an update on bulk-billing rates here in the ACT this year and the progress in increasing bulk-billed appointments by 160,000 annually as outlined in the Labor-Greens supply and confidence agreement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Miss Nuttall would be aware, we are currently considering proposals through the budget process. That is the standard way of delivering on election commitments. The information in relation to bulk-billing rates is published, so I can certainly provide Miss Nuttall and the Assembly, on notice, with a link to that public data that is publicly available and that the Greens could search anytime that they wanted to.

Gaming—electronic gaming machines

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the progress of the latest round of the voluntary surrender scheme, which ended on 1 May?

DR PATERSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. The latest round of the Voluntary Electronic Gaming Machine Surrender Program ended on 1 May this year. This round saw a reduction of 296 authorisations since March 2024. As of May this year, there are now 3,494 EGM authorisations in the ACT. This represents a reduction of almost 30 per cent since 2018. A total of 28 different venues surrendered gaming machine authorisations as part of this program. The Vikings Group and the Southern Cross Group both led the way, with 40 surrenders each. The Canberra Raiders club surrendered 38.

The ACT government remains committed to reducing gambling-related harm, and we will continue working with local clubs to build a sustainable industry, one that fosters community connections without depending on gambling revenue.

I thank the venues for their participation in the voluntary surrender process, but there is still significant work ahead. We remain committed to seeing these progressive reductions continue, to reach our target of 1,000 by 2045.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, did any clubs go pokie-free during this period?

DR PATERSON: Thank you. As part of the program, both the Statesman Hotel in Curtin and the Canberra Bowling Club in Forrest have voluntarily surrendered—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

DR PATERSON: I would think Mr Hanson would like to listen to this, given these are venues in our electorate: the Statesman Hotel in Curtin, Mr Hanson, and the Canberra Bowling Club in Forrest. These are both excellent clubs that have gone poker machine free. I visited the Canberra Bowling Club on 2 May to see the work being done to shift their reliance on pokies. I will be visiting the Stateman Hotel tomorrow and look forward to supporting them on their journey to being pokie free.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how does this program help support the government's overall gaming reform agenda?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. I am committed to leading the ACT government's gambling reform agenda to see the harm caused by gambling reduced. A major commitment was to see machine reductions reach 1,000 by 2045. I remain steadfast in this commitment, and this round of reductions is the first step in achieving that goal. I will also be working with both the community sector and the club sector to start progressing the cashless gambling work. I remain committed to seeing this implemented in the 26th to 27th year. I look forward to providing further updates to the Assembly as this work continues. Thank you.

ACT public service—recruitment

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service. Minister, the public service has been in a recruitment freeze for some time. As any experienced public servant knows, extended recruitment freezes create psychosocial risks and undermine sound workplace planning. With machinery of government changes now announced, are you able to advise the Assembly when the recruitment freeze will be lifted?

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, are you taking this?

MR BARR: Yes, Mr Speaker. I am not announcing government policy in question time, but the process outlined continues until the end of the financial year, at this point. We will make future decisions and announcements in due course.

MR BRADDOCK: Chief Minister, has the recruitment freeze resulted in any recommendations from the public service on work programs to be cut in order to manage the frozen resources and, if so, what are they?

MR BARR: Not that I am aware of—and, of course, there are exemptions to that freeze as they relate to frontline positions and essential staff.

MR RATTENBURY: Are you able to, perhaps on notice, provide the Assembly with a monthly breakdown of EAP utilisation rates for each of the ACT government's directorates over the current financial year compared to the last three financial years?

MR BARR: I will consider that and the resources associated with doing so and am happy to take that on notice. But, obviously, we are still in the financial year. So I will take it but, at the conclusion of the financial year, we can then do a comparison against the three previous ones. The *State of the service* report might also provide that information anyway.

MR SPEAKER: So, Mr Barr, can I just be clear: you said at the start of your answer that you were going to consider taking that on notice.

MR BARR: I will take the question on notice. I will consider what information we can provide based on the level of resources that would be required to prepare it.

MR SPEAKER: Excellent. Thank you.

Mr Rattenbury: A point of order, Mr Speaker: I would be happy to receive it up to the most recently completed month, if that assists the Chief Minister.

MR SPEAKER: Excellent.

Woden town centre—community centre

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Twelve years ago, in the 2012-13 budget, funding was committed to start planning a community centre in Woden. In 2018 you said, “Woden is the only town centre without a dedicated fit-for-purpose community centre, and so I am bringing agencies from across government together to consider the options for a future community centre in consultation with the community.”

In July last year, there was an article in *Riotact* in which you were quoted to say construction was “expected to begin in 2026”. Before the last election, you again committed to this project.

Minister, after seven years, or 12 years, why hasn’t a development application yet been submitted for this project?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take this question in my role as Minister for the Public Service, and Infrastructure Canberra’s work in relation to the development of the Woden Community Centre. I can advise Ms Carrick that we are working through some matters in relation to the site and design of that project. Ms Carrick might be aware that a tender went out for design consultants for detailed design of the centre. That tender came back significantly above budget, and so that process has had to be terminated in terms of that particular tender. We are now considering next steps in that project. But I can assure Ms Carrick that we remain committed to a community centre in Woden to be delivered as quickly as we can.

MS CARRICK: Minister, when will a development application be submitted for this project, and when will construction commence?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not able to answer that question in detail at this point, unfortunately, given the issues that we have faced in relation to this project, but I am happy to provide an offer of a briefing to Ms Carrick, if she is interested. I am not sure how much we will be able to tell her in terms of detail at this point, because there are a range of considerations, but of course, I am always happy to have that conversation with Ms Carrick.

MR SPEAKER: So you are not taking that on notice; you are offering a briefing as a response. Is that—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes; I cannot take it on notice, because I will not be able to answer it.

MR COCKS: Minister, can you confirm whether the full cost of construction of the Woden community centre has been included in the budget?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice.

Planning and development—Kambah

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, expressions of interest are now closed for block 24 section 286 Kambah. I have since spoken to community groups who have been advised that the Kambah EOI will not be proceeding to the next stage. Minister, where is the EOI process up to, and can you confirm whether there has or has not been a successful applicant?

MR STEEL: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. I am not in a position to make an announcement on that today, but I look forward to doing so soon.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when will we know if there has been a successful applicant?

MR STEEL: When I make the announcement; I will update Miss Nuttall at that time.

MS CLAY: Minister, do you have plans in place to consult the Kambah community on their needs and aspirations for the site?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The purpose of the EOI process is to find out what community organisations would like, to do something that is community based on the land, and for them to put forward, in a merits-based process, those proposals. That is obviously what has been assessed on six blocks, and that process still has not come to a conclusion, so I will not be making an announcement until there has been a decision on all of those blocks.

Budget—taxation

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. What is driving the significant reductions in territory own-source revenue, including payroll tax and lease variation charges, given the rates of these taxes have not been reduced?

MR STEEL: I am happy to come back on notice with some further information. But we have noted that the federal government's insourcing process for the public service has resulted in fewer consultants being used. Payroll tax would apply to them. That has affected revenue as that policy has continued over time, but, of course, we will provide updated estimates of revenue in the budget soon, so I look forward to commenting further on it then. I am happy to direct the member to the most recent budget review where there is an explanation of the revenue lines and some of the effects on them.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, what modelling have you undertaken to understand the impact of federal Labor's cuts to contractors and consultancies on ACT revenue, such as through payroll tax? And when did you commence that analysis?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Treasury, as part of their work on forecasting revenue over the forward estimates, will make a range of assumptions based on the best information that they have available. They will continue to do that through every budget process and will provide information in the budget papers. I look forward to delivering those in around six weeks.

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, have you asked the federal government to compensate the ACT for lost revenue?

MR STEEL: It already forms part of the GST process. The ability to raise payroll tax is taken into account in GST methodology. There is some level of support provided through that process.

Roads—traffic

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, traffic congestion from my electorate has been massively impacted by congestion. Since the major street closures in Canberra due to light rail, commuters have noticed a significant increase in delays, with one Coombs resident reported as saying: “In the last six months, the commute has probably doubled. What’s this going to look like in another six months’ time?” Minister, how long will commuters have to put up with double the commute time, or is this the ‘new normal’ for residents of Woden, Weston Creek and Molonglo?

MR STEEL: Well, it will look a lot better because Coppins Crossing is opening this weekend! That is the source of the congestion that we have been seeing on the Tuggeranong Parkway and the Cotter Road because it is the only entry point into the Molonglo Valley at this particular point in time. That will change in a week and then Coppins Crossing will be available. It will also change significantly when the bridge opens. The whole purpose of that bridge is to provide a northern entry point into the Molonglo Valley but it is not the only major road project that we have going on in Molonglo. Our government is committed to getting on with the Molonglo-Parkway Drive connector. We are getting on with that work. Planning is also underway for the Bindubi Street extension to John Gorton Drive, which will provide another access point, a fourth access point, in the future, into the Molonglo Valley to and from William Hovell Drive.

So road projects are part of the solution, but they are not the only thing we need to do because as our city grows, we do need to invest in sustainable modes of transport and they are exactly the sorts of modes of transport that the opposition has continued to campaign against at every election. What we are also doing, with my planning minister hat on, is looking at integrated land use planning with transport planning. That is the purpose of the transit oriented development work that is occurring on the Southern Gateway, and of course we had that debate around Tuggeranong as well, so that more people are living close to transport so they do not need to rely on a car as our city grows. So we are taking steps to address this issue, but as you make that investment, as you construct those projects, there will be a temporary period of disruption. The community should believe that if the opposition is criticising us for getting on with the construction that they do not support these projects.

MR HANSON: Minister, when will congestion for Molonglo residents driving out of Coombs actually end?

MR STEEL: I think I have answered that comprehensively in my last answer.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when will the government consider installing bus prioritisation measures as part of any road infrastructure projects?

MR STEEL: We are already doing that in relation to Cotter Road. It is already funded and it is work that is underway to look at the options. We are also doing that with the Belconnen Transitway with the updated feasibility study. We have already done it in the city as part of the disruption taskforce's work in implementing measures to support public buses to move around the city during the construction period. We have done it on Vernon Circle and we have done it on the Coranderrk intersection to support traffic flow, which has been a brilliant measure, by the way. It has made a massive difference and I hope it continues beyond the construction period.

Roads—traffic

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, I refer to reports of a Canberra worker who faced a two-hour commute from his home in Molonglo Valley to work in Barton. Another instance was of a 16-year-old Denman Prospect resident who took two hours to get to school in Dickson on a weekday in March.

Minister, many promises have been made, but Canberrans in my electorate face two-hour commutes. Minister, if you are going to choke traffic in this city with tram works, why have you not actually provided a better alternative for commuters right now?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. We have built stage 1 of light rail. You opposed it the whole way through. That has reduced congestion on Northbourne Avenue by around 20 per cent. It has made a significant difference, and that affects the entire transport network. We have also done that by duplicating the Cotter Road, which was an important measure to support traffic coming in and out of the Molonglo Valley. We have done it in the most recent term 2 bus update, by providing extra bus services into the Molonglo Valley for the R10 and the 47 route bus, which runs from Denman Prospect through Whitlam, to provide sustainable transport options. Every single person who takes a bus or light rail takes a car off the road, for those who need to travel on our transport network.

So we are taking measures, and we will continue to take measures. Every time you criticise the construction, it is simply a reminder that our government is investing in the infrastructure that is required for our growing city.

MR HANSON: Minister, is it acceptable for schoolchildren in this city to have a two-hour commute?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. At this present time, there are, of course, some temporary periods of congestion resulting from construction. That will change this weekend, when Coppins Crossing reopens.

Also, we have seen some unanticipated car accidents. I was caught in one last night on the Tuggeranong Parkway, and there was one the day before in the morning on William Hovell drive as well. Those are unfortunate and do impact on travel times, but they are accidents, and the government does not have a great deal of control over when those happen. We try to make sure we respond as quickly as we can through our emergency services to clear those away, but they do have an impact on the transport network.

Our government is getting on with the infrastructure work—

MR SPEAKER: Stop the clock, please. A point of order, Mr Cocks.

Mr Cocks: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have given the minister some time before I raised the point of order. It is on relevance. The question was very simply about the acceptability of schoolchildren having two-hour commutes.

MR SPEAKER: If it is possible for the minister to be more direct—

MR STEEL: I think I have addressed that, in that it is temporary. I was talking about a very temporary period.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, on the point of order on relevance: the minister is saying it is temporary, but these reports are previous to the bridge shutting. What does he mean by temporary? Is it a decade?

Mr Steel: I have a point of order. I think the member is debating the point of order.

MR SPEAKER: I think so too. And I think that the minister has, in a very small part, answered the question.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how can Canberrans trust your promises when so many of your promises have been broken?

MR STEEL: I object to the premise of the question, because we have delivered. We delivered stage 1 of light rail. We have delivered the transport benefits for our city. We delivered more services as part of the term 2 network update for Transport Canberra into key areas of the city that were facing demand, like Belconnen, with more services for the R2, and like Molonglo Valley, with more services for the R10 and the 47 route bus.

We have actually shown that we are delivering better transport services, and the construction period that we are in reminds every single person, including the opposition, that we are investing in infrastructure. We are the party and the government of infrastructure, and you are the party that does not support infrastructure. You never supported light rail, and you continue to now argue against road projects.

Mr Cocks: I have a point of order, Mr Speaker. The minister has very clearly entered into a world of debating things which are not even in the realms of reality.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister is debating. Minister, do you have more to add to

this?

MR STEEL: I do not.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Woden campus

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training, and Industrial Relations. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on construction of the CIT Woden campus? What social and employment outcomes has this project provided to the ACT community?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for her question and her commitment to vocational education in our city. I am pleased to say that construction on CIT Woden is well on track and nearing completion. This \$375 million project is the single-largest investment into vocational education in our city's history. This new campus will be a worldclass facility and demonstrates this government's ongoing commitment to providing education pathways to people in the ACT.

It is not just after completion that this project will have a positive impact. The construction phase of this build has been designed to maximise positive social and employment outcomes during the build. We set ambitious targets during the build to create this positive impact, and I am very pleased to say that we have met them. One of these goals was that 10 per cent of workers engaged on the project would be apprentices. This target was set to ensure that this project contributed to and supported the development of the next generation of construction workers, apprentices and trainees. I am pleased to advise members that we achieved 12.2 per cent apprentice employment as part of this project. Of these apprentices, we said that we wanted 30 of them to be new apprenticeships or traineeships specifically for women. I am pleased to say that 30 women have found their start in the construction sector, thanks to the CIT Woden build.

The positive impact of major infrastructure projects always extends beyond the final delivered build. The ACT government remains committed, when building the infrastructure our growing city needs, to maximising social and employment outcomes for Canberrans.

MS TOUGH: Minister, as part of this commitment to social and employment outcomes, how much of the CIT Woden build was delivered through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses?

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Ms Tough, for the supplementary. The positive impact of delivering major infrastructure projects is not limited to the number of jobs created. When we invest as a government, we do so in a way that improves economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. This idea underpins our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement policy. As part of the CIT Woden build we set expectations in line with this policy: that the CIT Woden project would see economic opportunities afforded to these enterprises. I am pleased to say that, through this project, \$24 million was successfully procured through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. This spend was spread across multiple subcontractors and is an achievement that should be celebrated.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what percentage of the workforce employed on the CIT Woden build were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. As I discussed in my previous answers, we always aim to make sure that our infrastructure projects deliver positively to the community both during and after the build. As part of this project, we set a target to achieve four per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, providing meaningful economic and employment opportunities to ATSI workers in the ACT's construction sector. I am pleased to say that we also met this target.

Guided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, the government remains steadfastly committed to supporting the economic participation of this part of our community. In doing this, we aim to ensure that we provide meaningful opportunities, as the government delivers its infrastructure agenda for Canberrans.

Sport and recreation—Tuggeranong ice sports facility

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, nearly a decade ago, in 2015, the government committed to building a national ice sports facility in Tuggeranong. The Built for CBR website says that the project is expected to be completed in 2025.

Minister, after nearly a decade of broken promises, can you promise Tuggeranong residents that the project will, indeed, be completed in 2025 as the website suggests?

MS BERRY: Thank you for the question. Clearly, it is not going to be completed, so we will have to make sure that we update that website. I am disappointed, as much as the community and the ice sports and skating community are, that the joint-venture partners, Pelligra and Cruachan, have not been able to get themselves legally organised to be able to build a new ice rink.

The government still has committed \$16 million to the project, and that is sitting there waiting for the project to begin. The land has been identified. The last contact that I had from the joint-venture partners was that they were very close to being able to make some kind of announcement that would give the community some confidence that they would begin work on the ice rink. I do not have a further update than that at this stage in time, but as soon as I am aware of any more information going forward, I will let the community know. Yes, it has taken some time.

I think one of the reasons why we have stuck with Cruachan and Pelligra is that it is a very niche sport and a very niche project as well. There are not very many people in Australia who can build ice rinks of this nature, so it is a project that has provided, and probably will provide, some further challenges going forward. But we are as committed as ever, as a government, to building an Olympic-sized, sheet ice skating centre in Tuggeranong.

MS MORRIS: Minister, has a development application for the project been lodged yet?

MS BERRY: No.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you commit to releasing the full details of the accepted tender, once we are there, to ensure transparency for the community?

MS BERRY: I will release whatever is publicly appropriate to release, understanding that most of the conversations that have been had between the joint-venture partners are between each other. So that will be information for them to be able to provide if they see fit. But I am certainly happy to be as open as we possibly can be.

Mr Barr: That is now it. Further questions can be placed on the notice paper. Thank you.