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**Chair**

**Mr. Merv Tweed**

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## Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)):** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the second meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. The orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), are the supplementary estimates (B) for 2008-09: votes 1b, 5b, 10b, 20b, 30b, 35b, 40b, 45b, 55b and 75b under Transport, referred to the committee on Thursday, January 29.

Joining us today is the Honourable John Baird, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities; and the Minister of State for Transportation, Mr. Rob Merrifield; and I see Mr. Louis Ranger.

We thank the minister for attending. As you're probably aware, there are several questions members would like to ask you, and if you can get through your opening comments as conveniently and quickly as you possibly can, we'll get at it.

With that, Mr. Baird, I'll welcome you. Please proceed.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to be before the committee. I thought that at the outset I would ask each of my colleagues from the department who are at the table to introduce themselves and give their position, just for the record and for all members of committee.

**Mrs. Mary Komarynsky (Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Group, Department of Transport):** I'm Mary Komarynsky, Transport Canada, assistant deputy minister of programs.

**Mr. John Forster (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Communications Branch, Infrastructure Canada):** John Forster, assistant deputy minister, policy and communications and infrastructure.

**Mr. Marc Grégoire (Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Security, Department of Transport):** Marc Grégoire, ADM, safety and security.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll proceed.

**Hon. John Baird:** Excellent. Thank you very much for having us here before the committee.

I'm particularly pleased that, from the reports of the committee's work in recent years, by all accounts it's one of the most constructive committees. It's not a partisan or political committee; it's one where people work together and accomplish things. I was very pleased to

learn that. I look forward to working with each and every one of you in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

We're here today to talk about the estimates, though. From the last number of times I've been before estimates committees, often there are questions that fall outside that, which I'd certainly welcome a dialogue on. We're committed to working together with members from all parties on the important issues of transport and infrastructure.

Since being asked by the Prime Minister to accelerate our infrastructure investments, I've travelled across the country and consulted with provincial, territorial, and municipal leaders. These consultations have really bred an unprecedented consensus. All levels of government have come together and agree that we need to get federal approvals done more quickly and get infrastructure projects moving right across the country, from sea to sea to sea.

During this time of global economic uncertainty, I think it will be an important part of our economic action plan. That's where we were able to find agreement on a five-point action plan that we presented to first ministers not a few weeks ago—and I'll have more to say on that shortly.

As you know, as I look back at the work of this committee, I especially want to highlight the work that's been done by many of you on making recommendations to the Navigable Waters Protection Act. This act is one of the oldest pieces of legislation still on the books. In fact, it was passed during the days of Sir John A. Macdonald and is badly outdated, as many of you have argued at this table.

We're moving quickly to cut the red tape that the act ties around so many projects in Canada, both large and small. We're giving the act teeth so that we can make a difference in what really counts. The amendments based on the input of this committee will speed up many projects significantly while ensuring that we maintain environmental protection where it needs to be for major works. Veteran members of this committee can be proud of the work they've done on that act, and I look forward to working with the newly elected members of the committee on these issues as well.

I congratulate you on your election to the committee and desire to work with a committee that is working on issues that are at the top of the government's agenda and the public agenda. The government wants to keep Canadians working and keep Canada strong. We're doing this by making strategic investments in projects that are building roads and bridges, border crossings, and transportation hubs. The value of these projects is twofold: it will help get people working today and also make a difference in the lives of Canadians for many, many years to come.

I've been working with other levels of government to make sure their infrastructure investments have the desired result. Since being named minister, I've met with premiers and infrastructure ministers from every province and territory. I've also met with dozens of mayors and other municipal leaders. These people represent different political points of view and various levels of government, but as I mentioned earlier, I did find a broad consensus.

That led us to our five-point action plan to speed up infrastructure approval and investments that we announced last month after the first ministers met here in Ottawa. The plan includes working with provinces and territories to put key major infrastructure projects on a fast track through the Building Canada major infrastructure component, offering all remaining provincial- and territorial-based funds over the next two years in order to start more infrastructure projects in the short term, accelerating projects and funding in smaller communities to create jobs over the next two construction seasons when our economy needs these most, reducing duplication and streamlining federal processes to address potential environmental and other impact of projects, and fast-tracking federal review and approval processes to get important projects started sooner.

The first ministers unanimously endorsed a consensus document that supports all these objectives. Premiers from all political stripes agree that this plan can help create jobs and build a better Canada. We all want to cut red tape and duplication, simplify the application process, and have a clearer, less bureaucratic process for the Government of Canada to approve projects.

Our infrastructure plan delivers results for Canadians now, during the economic storm, and in the future, when our investments will give us a competitive edge. We have agreements in place that determine what's eligible and what's not, and we are committed to promptly paying invoices sent by the provinces and municipalities as they come in. Remember, they are the ones that implement these projects, so they need and we need their commitment to help us ensure that Canadians are working at building a better Canada.

History, though, has shown us that major infrastructure programs can take time to properly launch, and there are a good number of examples in recent years under the previous government on those. We are moving as aggressively as we can to make things happen, to give a green light from the federal government so that funds can flow and the construction projects can begin and be taken forward.

I'll give that as my abbreviated remarks and ask Minister Merrifield whether he has any other issues he'd like to raise.

• (1535)

**Hon. Rob Merrifield (Minister of State (Transport)):** There are a couple of things.

It's a privilege for me to be able to be here, and I want to start by saying how much I admire the work of committees. I've spent a fair amount of time on committees over the years, and I certainly treat committees' work with a tremendous amount of respect.

With that, I want to say thank you for the job you did with regard to railway safety. I'm going through that at the present time. I congratulate the committee for years gone by and some of the work that you've done.

I want to talk about some of the new money in our economic action plan. We have not only the \$33 billion in the Building Canada plan, but another \$12 billion of new money for infrastructure spending. This includes \$4 billion in an infrastructure stimulus fund that will help the provinces, territories, and municipalities to get their projects started as soon as possible. There's another \$2 billion to accelerate construction of colleges and universities, so this is actually good news on that front. There's \$1 billion in the new green infrastructure fund; \$5 million in support for the construction of new community recreational facilities; and also accelerating the base funding, which is, as you know, \$25 million over a seven-year period per province.

As the Minister of State for Transport, I have the privilege to oversee many of the crown corporations that fall under the Department of Transport. Some of these you may not know, because I certainly didn't know, until I got into the portfolio, just how many of them there are. There are 15 that I'm directly responsible for, crown corporations such as Canada Post, the Canadian Mint, Marine Atlantic, VIA Rail, and many others. They play a very important role in the day-to-day lives of many Canadians, so I take the job very, very seriously.

As Minister Baird has mentioned, we need to work together to keep Canada working, to keep it strong. Our economic action plan includes the support of these crown corporations as well. One of those happens to be, as was mentioned in the budget and as you well know, the Champlain Bridge, under the Federal Bridge Corporation. It's Canada's busiest daily crossing, vital to the transportation and commercial links of the island of Montreal and the province of Quebec.

Very important as well is VIA Rail: \$407 million for VIA Rail, another \$71.8 million in rail safety. VIA Rail is very important, particularly the connection between Quebec and Windsor. Actually, the Montreal-Windsor-Ottawa-Toronto corridor is very important, and some of the work that will be done here is very exciting for VIA Rail and to help get Canadians moving.

When you think about what rail does for this country, there is a tremendous amount of traffic as far as passenger traffic is concerned, and that's what VIA does. But over 75% of the land movement of goods happens by rail in this country. It's very important that we get that right.

We'll discuss these measures a bit more, I'm sure, in the 2009-10 main estimates. We're pleased to be able to be here to work together for a prosperous future, at a time when the economic slowdown that is happening internationally is of utmost concern and very, very important. It'll be on the backs of all of us to be able to make sure that we, under our watch, work together for the betterment of all Canadians.

• (1540)

[Translation]

**Hon. John Baird:** We are happy to be here. We welcome your questions and comments.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Volpe's going to lead off, with seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to welcome the minister and his officials, notably Mr. Ranger whom we have known for a long time. The others are new officials, except for Mr. Marc Gagnon, whom we know quite well.

[English]

Ministers, I'm glad to hear that you have such a positive view of where we're going. Certainly we've given an indication that we want to cooperate in moving forward, but in moving forward we'd also like to get to some pretty specific issues.

I noted that in your presentations neither of you talked about the supplementary estimates, so I wonder if you'll allow us to deviate from your presentation for a moment and go to them. It will only be a moment or two.

There are two things you mentioned in particular that I'd like to ask some information about. I don't know which of the two ministers wants to address the issue of the National Capital Commission—perhaps Minister Baird because it's in his backyard.

I noted that in the supplementary estimates you are looking for an additional \$5.4 million for operating expenses and an additional \$10 million, which represents something in excess of 40% of the amount that was initially allocated over the previous budget. That \$10 million was for capital expenditures. Do you want to give us just very briefly, in about 10 seconds, those projects that weren't thought of in the last budget but that, between the budget presentation and when you became minister, became really crucial?

**Hon. John Baird:** I'll say two things before I turn the floor over to officials, if you have further questions.

While the National Capital Commission reports to our portfolio, Minister Cannon is the minister responsible for the NCC, so it's

properly before this committee. I'm happy to give my best answer and then I'll look to officials.

When the NCC mandate review came forward when budget 2007 was issued—the NCC lost its capital budget in the late 1980s—I was one who was concerned, as were many local members of Parliament of all political stripes, that they were selling off assets. So they were given a \$10 million or \$15 million capital operating budget increase in 2007, and that only kicked in once the full report on the NCC mandate review came forward.

Is there anything else?

• (1545)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** So it came forward? And is that why you gave them the extra \$10 million?

**Hon. John Baird:** That's the best answer I can give you. I can turn it over to my officials.

**Ms. April Nakatsu (Director General, Crown Corporation Governance, Department of Transport):** Yes, that's precisely it. Having it in the estimates is allowing the NCC to access the funds that were given in budget 2007, so it is exactly what the minister said.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** For what specifically, though?

**Ms. April Nakatsu:** The capital is to replenish their acquisition and disposal fund. They have been using it over the years to cover their operating costs, so this is being put back in so the NCC can start acquiring some of the lands in Gatineau Park. It has approval to purchase lands under certain amounts, so it's putting back into the NCC some of the money it has been using.

**Hon. John Baird:** Back in 1989, the government of the day eliminated the capital budget, and this puts significant pressure on when they have to fix up things like the parkway and bridges and make land acquisitions in Gatineau Park. In the 2007 budget, they were given a \$10 million capital budget and \$5 million for other operational issues. A hold was put on that \$10 million pending the mandate review, which I think was a logical thing, and now the mandate review has been completed and the money is available to the NCC.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I'm sure your officials would only be too happy to give some indication of where that money has gone. For which specific acquisitions?

**Hon. John Baird:** We would be very pleased to get a full accounting to you.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Great—through our chair.

I wonder if I can turn to Minister Merrifield for just a moment on VIA Rail, because you highlighted it, and I noted that while you're a proud spokesman for VIA Rail, you didn't talk about projects down the road in terms of rail transportation.

The hot issue of the day, of course, is whether we'll go into high-speed train travel and the kind of investment we would want to make. Without going into the budget, the action plan, but still sticking to supplementary estimates, the line for VIA Rail has \$335 million, which is an increase of about 52% over 2007.

I'm one of those people who believes that yes, we should build more rail, so don't think I'm going after you, but I am concerned about what we get for our money.

Thinking in terms of the billions of dollars that Minister Baird said we are going to expend for infrastructure and stimulus spending—more about that later—it comes out to about 130,000 jobs for every billion dollars of expenditures, each job being valued at about \$75,000 including benefits. But with VIA Rail, since you've expressed such positive views on it, I'm looking at their last report, which goes to the end of 2007, and it has a passenger capacity of only about 55% usage. With government input of an additional roughly \$135 million—roughly, I say, because it might be off by about a couple of million—what are we getting (a) in terms of jobs, (b) in terms of efficiency, and (c) in terms of making the system more workable? What kind of construction are you putting into place or have you authorized to justify that kind of expenditure for VIA Rail?

**Hon. Rob Merrifield:** I'm not exactly sure where your second number came from, but \$516 million in capital out of the last year's budget, right? That's what was there, and there's \$407 million again in this budget's action plan. I can speak to where we'd like to go with that, and that's in infrastructure as well—building new cars, building new engines, and also laying a tremendous amount of track. I think there is a projected 66 miles of track, all in the goal of moving traffic faster, particularly in this corridor between Windsor and Quebec—and not all of it there, because some of those cars are going to go right from the Prairies, right from Vancouver all across the country. But this track laying will happen, parts of it third rails so movement can be increased. I think the goal is 30 minutes' increase in time, which will give a tremendous amount...not only more capacity or more traffic on the track but also efficiency of—

• (1550)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I'm looking at the report here, and it says that the average passenger load factor is only 55%. Yet the government increased its amount from \$213 million to \$335 million. Again, if we're going to spend that money, I want to know where it is that we're putting the money. Yes, you say you're laying down track, you want to spend money on locomotives, you want to make the thing more efficient. Where are you buying those locomotives? Do we have a buy in Canada policy? Do we have a policy that says we are going to lay track—we're not just acquiring land, we're actually laying down the track—and exactly where it is? It seems to me that an additional \$135 million isn't going to get you very much. I'm wondering where you picked up that \$500 million figure, because that \$500 million figure was the one that the government announced in the Building Canada fund for transportation when about 40% of it, \$200 million, was going to go to Ontario, all of it for the Peterborough-Toronto line.

Where did this money come from?

**The Chair:** I'll just ask the minister to be very brief. We're at the time limit.

**Hon. Rob Merrifield:** In that case, what I'll do is get you the actual facts of it. Most of the money that I think you're talking about is in last year's budget. I'll let Louis Ranger speak to that.

**Mr. Louis Ranger (Deputy Minister, Department of Transport):** As Mr. Merrifield said, last year... The government is committing a lot of money to the corporation, you're right: \$516 million last year and another \$407 million in the budget that was announced a couple of weeks ago. We can ask the corporation to report back on where that money is going. We know exactly where it's going. A good part is going to track, building a third track, both on the Kingston subdivision between Montreal and Toronto and also on the line between Ottawa and Toronto. VIA will have express trains that will run at three hours and 30 minutes, which is pretty impressive. They have told us they will increase the traffic by a set amount, and we will monitor them against that.

We will be pleased to provide you with a breakdown of where that money is going.

**The Chair:** Could you send that to me, and I'll see that it's distributed.

Monsieur Laframboise.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** I'd like to conclude with the issue of VIA Rail. As opposed to the Liberals I believe that these are good investments. By increasing the frequency of trains, we are increasing the ridership, which is beneficial for the environment as well.

You stated that the new investments would be used to fund line extensions or the construction of a third line. Will there be investments of that order in Quebec, in the segment that crosses Quebec, or the Montreal-Quebec corridor and the lines that link Montreal with the rest of the province?

**Mr. Louis Ranger:** Certainly. Major work is planned in the Alexandria subdivision, between Côteau and Montreal. We can give you information in this regard.

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** I would appreciate that.

Mr. Baird, this brings me back to the first question on infrastructure that I wanted to put to you. There is a request for an increase in the supplementary estimates, but in the year's expenditures there were to have been investments of some \$3 billion in infrastructure. Of that sum, \$1.9 billion have been spent. In other words, \$1.1 billion still has not been spent. I know that some agreements have not yet been concluded, among others with the Province of Quebec.

Can you provide us with some details? Are things moving in your department? Before the holidays, you had made a nice passionate speech, stating that this file would move forward. Will the agreement with the Province of Quebec be concluded?

**Hon. John Baird:** Thank you for your question. We met with Minister Jérôme-Forget at a meeting in Montreal. We discussed the large investments during a few hours, as well as the plan we wanted to prepare together. For the smaller projects we cooperate with Minister Normandeau. We were ready to sign an agreement. I think she sent it back. I signed the agreement and she sent it back with a few changes. We want this agreement to go forward as quickly as possible. We had a list. Both levels of government are ready to give their support to it. We respect provincial jurisdiction. We have to work with the provinces because most projects fall under their jurisdiction. I hope that you will be seeing the announcements in the next few weeks.

• (1555)

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Chantiers Canada is mentioned here. With regard to the new announcements you have just made which amount to \$4 billion, will there be a new agreement between Quebec and the other provinces?

**Hon. John Baird:** I decided that we would not have time to negotiate an agreement with each province and territory. However, we will work on this after the budget is passed. We will have the money on April 1 and we will be ready to work in the same way with Quebec. We will be working directly with the two ministers responsible for infrastructure. As regards their plan, an important list of projects is ready. Of course we also have our own interests. As Minister of Transport some projects are a priority for me. We are ready and I hope that we will act very quickly. Chantiers Canada is almost ready. That is my highest priority. I hope that an announcement will be made in the course of the next few weeks. In light of the elections in Quebec it is very important that it follow the other provinces and territories. I met with the minister who was re-appointed after January 1. We would be ready to act in the course of the next few weeks.

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Could you tell us about some of the projects, among those you support, that are planned for Quebec?

**Hon. John Baird:** As former Minister of the Environment, I strongly support the projects that aim to protect the environment. Water quality is one of my priorities. Public transit is another example of projects that are favourable to the environment. I wear another hat. Ports are important, as are small airports as well for economic development. I examine the priorities. Fairness is a very important factor. We don't want to spend everything in the same place. There are many regions in Quebec and I am aware of that, but I'm also aware that because of provincial areas of jurisdiction, we must work with the provinces.

As a former provincial minister and member, I know that the provincial governments do not work for us. They are all accountable to their legislature, their attorney general and their citizens, but not to me. Given this important economic problem, it is very important that we respect not only their areas of jurisdiction but also the fact that the larger part of the responsibility for this project falls upon them.

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** There remain the \$500 million for community sports equipment. In the budget, you seem to suggest that it would be incumbent upon the Economic Development Agency for the regions of Quebec to negotiate that amount.

**Hon. John Baird:** The rules are a little different. This isn't entirely for hockey. Other fields are admissible.

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Are you going to be dealing with Quebec or will you negotiate directly with the cities?

**Hon. John Baird:** Ah, but it is important that we work with Quebec because of the provincial jurisdiction. A law was passed by the National Assembly and we respect it. Today, Minister Verner announced assistance for Shannon. Of course we asked for the province's support and I think there will be a meeting with cabinet to obtain its support for that request. If we work with the municipalities, we have to do the same thing.

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** I saw that some \$2.5 million were being allocated to the return of lands to farmers in Mirabel. Do you have any dates? Are there any timeframes? Is the agreement on the value of the lands ready?

**Hon. John Baird:** I signed a large number of agreements a month and a half ago. I will put the question to my deputy minister.

**Mr. Louis Ranger:** This is not cheap. We had to make significant expenditures for surveys and prepare legal documents in order to make certain lands available. I will give you the exact dates involved. We now have all of the authorizations, i.e. that of treasury board, cabinet, and so on. I even created a team in Mirabel to manage the lands. When the applications come in, we will be ready to act quickly. As you know, the former owners will have the right to the value of the land with a discount. I will get you the exact date on which the value of the land is to be set.

• (1600)

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** Do you have a final date?

**Mr. Louis Ranger:** We are open for business.

**Hon. John Baird:** If you would like a briefing on the whole Mirabel project, we are willing to provide one for you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bevington.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister. And Minister Merrifield, it's good to see you here.

I see that you did bring up the issue of the Navigable Waters Protection Act, Mr. Minister, so I guess I feel confident in talking about it now. As an issue, I must say that I'm a bit surprised and shocked to see it in the budget implementation bill. I fully expected that we would see an important bill like that back in front of this committee for debate and discussion, but that's not going to happen.

I see this as an abrogation of federal responsibility in this area. Certainly the provinces would be alongside for that, but that's simply not a reason to give up federal powers in this area. Some of the justification that's been given for this bill: it can already be accommodated within existing legislation, or the preliminary screening process that is available for small projects on small rivers is not an encumbrance to get projects forward. But this bill really just turns over the very important responsibility that the federal government has, or gives the minister the ability to turn over that responsibility.

I'd like you to perhaps take a minute or two to justify moving this bill ahead in the fashion that you have.

**Hon. John Baird:** I'll say a number of things. One, I think it's part of infrastructure, it's part of our economic action plan. We want to see things happen; if there were an easy way to make things happen, it would have been done a long time ago.

I took the opportunity to meet with every territorial government and every provincial government, and with municipal representatives from every part of the country. They to a person, virtually every single one, mentioned this as being a major barrier to infrastructure development. I believe one premier called it the biggest job killer in his province.

I certainly saw the good work that the committee had done in the previous Parliament. I think we're facing a significant economic challenge. While it started in the United States, it has certainly arrived in Canada, and Canadians want action.

As I said, there was virtual unanimity that it was a major problem. A good number of folks wanted us to just repeal the whole thing outright. I think we took a balanced approach. We need that to get infrastructure projects moving, and that's why it's part of the budget bill.

We'd be very pleased to offer you or any member of the committee a full briefing on what's been done. I certainly welcome any comments and feedback, but we are looking for speed. I don't hide that or apologize for it.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Certainly a briefing would do me a lot of good in the timeframe that's available for that.

**Hon. John Baird:** You can have one tomorrow morning.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** As well, when we look at moving ahead in the future, we can't simply look at...and it's something that I'd say we should take very careful interest in when we look at how we're constructing infrastructure programs, how we're moving ahead with stimulus packages, not to move us into a situation where our economy is less green rather than more green.

Clearly we see that across the country, the demand that we move our economy in a direction that can leave us, when we come out of the recession, in a position to have a better and stronger country. Whenever we think of standing back on our ability to protect our natural environment for the development of economics, we are taking a step backwards. There are many projects that we can go ahead with in this country that don't have environmental characteristics attached to them, that don't need those types of changes to environmental laws to get them in place.

Quite clearly, this is a direction in which we need leadership. Certainly by putting this bill forward in the fashion your government has, it doesn't allow us an opportunity to put forward those arguments. And by not putting forward those arguments, we're failing in our duty as parliamentarians.

● (1605)

**Hon. John Baird:** If I could respond, obviously we're putting forward changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, a piece of transport legislation.

With respect to the environmental assessment, we're looking at using existing authorities and not making any changes to law. One of the things that have become very clear to me from my experience, both as environment minister and now in this position, is that we have established over many, many years a lot of laws and regulations to stop bad things from happening, but have very little to facilitate good things happening. I think of waste water treatment; I think of public transit. So I think there are many areas where there's going to have to continue to be a full federal environmental assessment, but if the provinces have already done one, I think we have to be more streamlined in that.

The NDP and Mr. Layton have long advocated for the gas tax as a way to fund infrastructure. When those gas tax moneys flow, there's no obligation for any federal environmental assessment with them. If we spend \$1 under Building Canada, a full federal environmental assessment is required.

I think it's one in which we have done a lot of listening to municipal leaders. I listened to Premier Doer, I listened to Mayor Miller, I listened to all the premiers, and I think there was a broad spread of consensus that this was the best thing.

The changes proposed by regulation using existing authorities will be for two years to deal with this economic challenge. There are many projects that will require it; I think they should. When you look at the South Perimeter Road outside of Vancouver, there should be a full federal EA for doing a four-lane highway through a national park. There should be a federal EA.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** There was one other question I had on that topic. You're putting money into air transport security in a rather large fashion in this budget. I'm curious about this; I'm curious about whether our air transport security at airports is adequate. If it's not adequate, what types of directions are we going to take? Are these going to be more intrusive to passengers? Are we looking at body imaging in the equipment we're going to be putting into airports? What's going to happen here with the investment that you're proposing in the budget?

**Hon. John Baird:** I'll make some opening comments, and then I'll turn it over to Mr. Grégoire.

I can tell you that we're making some significant new investments in air security, both in terms of volume and obviously in terms of technology. They're ones that have been recommended and that I'm comfortable with. Like any issue before government, they're not going to be cheap, they're not going to be free, so we have come forward with a request to Parliament for additional resources. I'm satisfied that they're fair and reasonable. We'll be keeping a close eye on them.

I can give my assistant deputy minister an opportunity to be specific.

**Mr. Marc Grégoire:** Thank you, Minister.

The majority of these funds are not for new security projects or things, but are actually to sustain CATSA. When CATSA was first implemented back in April 2002, it was given a base budget for five years, but at the end of the five years, it was not renewed at the full height of this budget. For the last couple of years, and in the budget last year, for instance, which you will see in supplementary estimates (B), a significant amount of money was given to CATSA, not for new things but to sustain itself. So the majority of the funds for this year are for the same thing: they're for the sustainability of CATSA.

But there are a number of new things, and they are mainly to keep pace with the other countries. We are in constant talks with the U.S., our European Commission partners, and Australia, and to stay at par we do have to introduce new things. One of the things we have to do is to change the equipment that was put in place in the last seven years.

**The Chair:** Mr. Watson.

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister and his officials for appearing.

I want to continue for a moment with the topic of the Navigable Waters Protection Act and the proposed amendments. First, allow me to say that I think it actually honours the work that was done by this committee. We spent a number of weeks working very diligently and, I would suggest, with a high degree of consensus on the direction in terms of informing the government of suggested changes to the NWPA.

I think the inclusion of this in the budget implementation act accentuates the priority of expediting the funds quickly for projects. I know that members in the House from various parties have stood to urge the government to move the stimulus forward quickly. I think this actually achieves that, so I think it's actually right to have it in the budget implementation act. I wouldn't want to hive it off now and delay it further.

I know that Mr. Bevington wasn't here for the committee at that particular time during some of that work. I don't know if you want to comment, perhaps for his benefit or for that of any of the new members here, on some of the recommendations the committee made that have now turned up as NWPA amendments.

I don't know if you want to handle that, Minister, or the officials.

• (1610)

**Hon. John Baird:** I think I'll say a number of things.

Obviously what we heard in our pre-budget consultations, particularly with provincial and territorial municipal governments, was a significant concern about this issue. I think we've done our best to retain every recommendation made by this committee with respect to navigable waters, and I think we come forward with reasonable positions. I'm certainly very pleased, as I mentioned earlier, to provide briefings to anyone.

We are facing some pretty significant economic challenges around the world, and Canada is not immune from them. I'm not satisfied that we've done everything we can do to speed up these investments. Failure to do so has been one of the problems identified to me, and

we're responding. I suppose in a perfect world we could have a year or two to study everything up and down ten times, once over, twice over, three times over. Certainly when I talk to people, whether in my constituency or across the country, they want to see action. I think this is one of the vehicles with which we can do that.

Do the officials have anything to add?

**Mr. Louis Ranger:** Marc could add some details.

**Mr. Marc Grégoire:** As you mentioned, we spent several hours here at this committee testifying with other experts as well as those from other departments. Your colleague Peter Julian attended all of those meetings.

We took the SCOTIC report, which this committee did, and we turned it into legislation. So what was tabled last week we thought had the consensus of all the parties, given that it was made from the recommendations of this committee.

**The Chair:** I'd like to put on the record that it was Mr. Masse, not Mr. Julian.

Mr. Watson.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm wondering if you can comment a little bit on the fund for colleges and universities for a moment. Clearly, from where I'm sitting, there have been major investments in labour market agreements. I think it was \$3 billion in 2007, and there were additional measures in the economic action plan of, I think, about \$1.8 billion toward retraining. We need places to put people, so we need expansion on our campuses, for example. Talk a little about that for a moment, if you will.

The idea of construction jobs for today laying some foundation for knowledge jobs for tomorrow through this type of fund, as well as any details about the fund you can share with the committee at this particular point, would be helpful as well.

**Hon. John Baird:** I think in the budget the minister laid out investments both to rehabilitate buildings and to build new buildings on college and university campuses. He certainly singled out that a certain minimum must be used for colleges. The Department of Industry is going to take the lead with respect to delivery of that. We have a significant amount on our plate. I think it does show that learning and economic development are key.

One of the projects highlighted in the budget was for Algonquin College here in Ottawa, which has a program to train more of the skilled trades. I think that will be absolutely essential in our long-term infrastructure proposals, so the industry department could probably give you some more specific answers. I think we did a lot of listening, though, in the pre-budget process and adopted a number of the recommendations that we received. I think everywhere we went, people said we should just spend the money on hospitals or just spend the money on municipalities or just give it to the provinces. Certainly we heard that there should be a significant amount for colleges and universities and responded as part of the economic growth package.

• (1615)

**Hon. Rob Merrifield:** Regarding that, I did run into some information this summer at a conference in the United States at which they were talking about their educational problems. Believe me, they're far worse than Canada's. They actually had a person from Standard and Poor's who was talking about some of the data around the world and comparing educational systems.

You'll be pleased to know that they said to us there that as far as post-secondary education went, the country that had the number one best record in the world was Canada, followed closely by Japan. The United States was far down the list. Not to say that we're there, but this money will go a long way to keeping us competitive internationally. I think the importance there is that our youth are our future, and it's important that we have good infrastructure for them for a long time to come.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just briefly here, in budget 2006, I believe it was, we set aside \$2.1 billion in a borders and gateways fund. In budget 2007 there was a \$400 million line item for what is now called the Windsor-Essex Parkway to connect Highway 401 to a new international border crossing between Windsor and Detroit. These are clearly some steps toward improving international border crossings. Can you talk about how the economic action plan builds on this or expands on our commitment to international border crossings beyond just the Detroit-Windsor corridor?

**Hon. John Baird:** I'll start.

Obviously it is going to cost substantially more than \$400 million for that initiative. We will be there as a partner with the Government of Ontario on that. Our relationship is excellent there. Clearly we have some struggles with the Ambassador Bridge and legal issues. We have a good relationship with the State of Michigan. I've already spoken to the new Secretary of Transportation in the United States and highlighted that. Certainly for Canada it is undoubtedly our most important infrastructure project in the country; \$130 billion of trade goes over the border between Windsor and Detroit. This is a significant priority. It can also have a substantial benefit in economic growth if we can get the project started. It's not an easy one. It hasn't been an easy one for this government or the previous one, but I think we're making some substantial progress.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kennedy.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, it's good to have you here on estimates again.

I also want to welcome the bureaucrats who are here today.

I'd like to focus my questions on the underlying actions that the ministry is capable of. You're here to get more money for estimates. For the last couple of years that you got supplementary estimates you didn't spend the allocations that were given to the ministry. Last year \$1.1 billion was returned and \$300 million the year before. You have specific line items and so forth, but particularly in the context of what's being promoted for the next stage, which is a stimulus-inspired spending—you had \$9 billion allocated in the 2007 budget—can you tell us to date, as best you can see with the end of the year now in sight, what you will have spent in those two years? What will you have spent this year, actually out-the-door moneys spent? You are here seeking more dollars, and the record so far has been to leave dollars behind and let them lapse. I am wondering if you could give us a sense of where the ministry is headed on infrastructure in terms of getting dollars out the door by the end of this year, compared to the plan you published in 2007.

**Hon. John Baird:** As of today, I understand all our invoices, 100%, are paid. Any one that was more than 30 days ago has been paid. That includes the entire gas tax transfer, the GST rebate, that goes to municipalities for infrastructure. Some of the initiatives we pay on reimbursement, as we get an invoice from provinces.

One of the challenges we have, for example, is on the base funding. There is \$25 million available to each province. They can request it this year, or they can request it next year, or they can request it in 2014. One premier gave me the required one-page letter. It was the premier for Mr. Bevington's riding. He gave me his request for approval for his base funding. It was approved within three hours and the cheque forthwith issued.

In many provinces we have not got that request; for example, our home province of Ontario. They have not put in the request, so we haven't funded the money.

Many of the initial projects—I'll use the example of the Spadina subway—have a significant amount of engineering work, a significant amount of environmental work. They weren't able to proceed right away. They took two years. I understand they are about to break ground, so the invoices will all be paid within 30 days. That's our commitment.

We have come forward with an action plan to get at some of the regulatory burdens. We're also reducing some of the bureaucratic burdens so that projects can proceed. In most cases we're not holding the shovel. Obviously, having said that, we wouldn't be bringing forward a five-point action plan to speed this up if we were satisfied with the progress we're making today. This year we'll have spent a record amount in Canadian history on infrastructure. That, in my judgment, is not enough. We'll be spending even more next year.

• (1620)

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** You've mentioned a record amount. That means you know the amount. How much is it?

**Hon. John Baird:** It's more than we spent last year.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** That's not good enough, with respect, Mr. Minister. We are being asked to allocate to you an extra \$443 million here today. This committee is supposed to acquiesce and say that we know everything is in good order, and we're supposed to be basically sending you on, in a budgetary sense—the vote there—with \$9 billion to spend this year. Good intentions aren't going to cut it. I think it is fair for you to share with the rest of these parliamentarians where you are at. We'd like to know more than the generalities, and if there are problems, which ones should we anticipate in terms of getting dollars out the door, stimulating the economy, and the double grace of having them actually do some good in terms of structural help for the economy? Are there no numbers and is there no list that you can share? Surely, given the amount of emphasis the government is putting on infrastructure, you must have the information systems in place. Can you not tell us where you are headed?

You want extra money. Is the \$2.9 billion you've already been allocated going to be fully spent this year? Can you give us that assurance?

**Hon. John Baird:** Every province that submits an invoice will be paid 100%. We can't pay for invoices that we don't receive. I'll give you an example.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** Minister, I have to interject because I know our time is very brief. You were saying that the only reason for delay is provinces or other entities not submitting invoices, and these are the only dollars that are delayed. Is that correct?

**Hon. John Baird:** If we haven't got an invoice, we can't make the payment. So each project requires an approval and requires a contribution agreement, and then the invoices can be sent by the provinces and they're fully paid.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** So none of those delays come from procedures that you might want to fix or change within your own ministry?

**Hon. John Baird:** I think we've got to speed up the negotiation of contribution agreements, because I think they're too long. I think we try to substitute our judgment for the provinces'. In my response to Mr. Laframboise's question, I think I've spoken to this, and I can send you copies of the Hansard from a previous environment committee.

The approach I'm taking in working with the provinces—the Government of Ontario in this case—is that the provinces do not work for the federal government. If they've got a project they're requesting us to partner with them on, we're a financial partner; we're

not a management partner. We're not interested in going in and repeating all of the due diligence that they do. So we've come forward with a policy that we are going to be streamlining contribution agreements and that all invoices will be paid within 30 days. I could write the cheque today to the Government of Ontario and to every single province for the full amount, but not a single job will be created and not a single shovel will get in the ground.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** So that's your story, that it's all on their hands and none of it is on yours? So you've talked to municipalities and you've talked to provinces and there will be no problems with anything in your ministry? This is your chance to share with us and tell us how we're going to get the rest of it, but that's what you're saying?

**Hon. John Baird:** I just explained the problems as I saw them. You summarized it rather differently.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** They are other people's problems. I got it.

**Hon. John Baird:** No, I didn't say they are other people's problems. In fairness, I said there are bureaucratic problems on both sides, both the provincial and the federal sides. I am undertaking to cut back that red tape for us. I'm undertaking the change in the Navigable Waters Protection Act so that projects can be sped up. I'm undertaking to streamline the environmental procedures so that it can be sped up. I'm undertaking to streamline the Fisheries Act so that can be sped up. I don't know—

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** I don't know how many of those are red herrings, Minister, but you've got to give us some specifics here. We're parliamentarians. We deserve to see the specifics on where the money is, where it is at now, and where it is going to go. And if you want to give us a briefing tomorrow morning, we'll take it.

**Hon. John Baird:** There's not a single invoice that's more than 30 days late. I'll give you an example. We announced the Spadina subway expansion almost two years ago. We could have given them a cheque for a billion dollars then, and they are only breaking ground now. So as soon as they break ground and get in invoices, they'll be paid within 30 days. It's a guarantee, they'll be paid within 30 days.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** It's your plan.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Gaudet, Five minutes.

**Hon. John Baird:** If you wanted me to give invoices for projects that haven't started, that would be an interesting—

**The Chair:** Mr. Gaudet has the floor, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Minister, the AMT, the Agence métropolitaine de transport de Montréal (Montreal metropolitan transportation agency), has a commuter train project in the works for Montreal East, Repentigny, Legardeur, Mascouche, Terrebonne and an area to the north of Lanaudière, which is in my riding. You said that you had preferences with regard to the \$4 billion envelope.

Are commuter trains part of your preferences in Montreal? Is your department holding any discussions with the AMT?

• (1625)

**Hon. John Baird:** The priority for me is economic growth as well as the quality of life of Canadian men and women and the environment. In the course of the next few weeks I will, I believe, have a meeting with the Montreal public transit agency. This is certainly a matter that I will discuss with Ms. Jérôme-Forget. This is an area of municipal jurisdiction and we respect these boundaries. Of course, a large number of projects to further public transit will be receiving aid, but within the framework of the Fonds Chantiers Canada, \$4 million in new money was announced in the budget, and two things are essential. Firstly, it must be a new project. If we are only replacing federal money with municipal money or replacing provincial money with federal funds, there will be no increase in job creation. Secondly, we need the stimulus to take hold in the next 25 months. That will be essential, unless there are several \$10-million projects for the municipalities and public transit associations everywhere in Quebec and in Canada. This is a priority I have made my own on behalf of the government, but also as Minister of Transport.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I have another question. Whether we are talking about Quebec, Ontario, Alberta or Vancouver, everywhere there are small communities. Would it be possible for the federal government, rather than contributing 33%, to go to 60%? The provincial government could contribute 30% or 40%, and the municipal contribution could be only 10%. Could this fit into your plans?

**Hon. John Baird:** We have about \$2 billion to allow municipalities to borrow a third of the money. I am convinced that a large number of municipalities will come up with that third. The problem will be, rather, to choose among the municipalities that will be ready. Perhaps all municipalities will not be able to participate, but if one no longer wants the money, another one will.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I am from the municipal field, I was a mayor for 12 years. I can guarantee you that there is money, but the same people are footing the bill, whether in Ottawa, provincially or municipally. The municipal taxpayer also pays federal and provincial income tax; it is always the same taxpayer paying. Since the government is investing money in infrastructure, it might be good for it to increase its share and decrease the part to be provided by the communities, the first payers.

**Hon. John Baird:** If we provide a larger sum of money—

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I am not talking about municipalities such as Toronto or Montreal, I am talking about small municipalities, small communities. There are still many that have populations of less than 1000 residents.

**Hon. John Baird:** That is one of the reasons why we created a 2-billion-dollar program allowing them to borrow.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Yes, but when you borrow, you have to pay the money back.

**Hon. John Baird:** That is true, but the same thing applies to the federal government. We borrowed money which allows us to help the municipalities. We have to borrow too.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** I agree with you, Mr. Baird, the federal level borrows, the municipal level borrows, everybody borrows everywhere.

**Hon. John Baird:** If we work together, if the federal government invests a dollar, if the provincial level invests a dollar and if the municipal government invests a dollar, we can go three times further, three times faster. If we must reduce the municipalities' contribution to 10% we won't be able to bring as many projects to fruition.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** It all depends.

**Hon. John Baird:** There are only 2 billion dollars a year.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Perhaps you could launch a greater number of small projects which will be more profitable for communities, rather than a big project in a big city that will never end.

**Hon. John Baird:** It will be difficult to launch big projects in a two-year timeframe. If you want to complete a project in 25 months, that will be difficult. I'd like to emphasize that this is only for small projects. We are not discussing new subways to the tune of \$1 or \$2 billion. The money will probably be used for small projects that will start as quickly as possible and can also be quickly completed.

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** Thank you, but we must never forget that it is always the same taxpayer who is paying.

**Hon. John Baird:** The mayor of Toronto said that he had no money. I consulted the reports of the City of Toronto and saw that that city had not spent \$200 million last year. That would be a starting point.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Gaudet.

Ms. Hoepfner.

[Translation]

**Mr. Roger Gaudet:** We could talk about it. I agree with you.

**Hon. John Baird:** If you have some ideas for Montreal, I can certainly listen to them. I have already heard the ideas of some of your colleagues.

• (1630)

[English]

**The Chair:** It's a vigorous discussion, I'm sure, but it is Ms. Hoepfner's turn.

Ms. Hoepfner.

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to take this opportunity to thank Minister Merrifield and Minister Baird for being here. As a new member of Parliament, I feel very privileged that I can ask you some questions and get some specific answers, so thank you for being here.

I represent the riding of Portage—Lisgar. It's a riding located in southern Manitoba. I also really appreciate the support of the people in Portage—Lisgar. I want to make that clear. They're a very hard-working group of people who seem to tackle problems head-on. I've been touring the riding over the past few months. It's a riding made up of numerous municipalities and small towns. I've had an opportunity to speak with many of the mayors, the reeves, and the councillors, and I find that these are people who work full time, they run businesses, they have jobs, maybe they run farms, and then in their off time they're helping their municipalities to succeed.

Can you expand and let me know how you've been working together with municipalities and provinces in coming to some of the decisions regarding the funding for infrastructure for municipalities?

**Hon. Rob Merrifield:** I can take a run at this.

I also come from the kind of community and riding that's full of small towns and full of volunteerism. Also, I'm directly responsible for Alberta infrastructure, so I know of similar concerns that you would have in your community.

When it comes to the community component, we're accelerating it as quickly as we possibly can so that the municipalities, together with the provinces, together with us—it's sort of a follow-up on some on the dialogue that was happening—are all working together, because it's the same taxpayer base. We work together for communities and leverage as much money as we can to stimulate our economy, put Canadians to work, and build infrastructure that will sustain us into the future. If we do it smart, we'll do it in a way that will put us at the leading edge not only of infrastructure but of competitiveness into the 21st century. I think that is the goal of every small community. Every mayor I talk to wants the same thing, every provincial MLA wants the same sort of thing, and we certainly do.

We want to streamline these moneys so that we can get them out. To be honest, we're not too happy with it being as slow as it has been. That's why Minister Baird has gone to the lengths that he has done to streamline navigable waters, environmental studies, as well as some of the processes in place. It's so that these moneys can actually achieve that goal. It's not easy, but we're getting tremendous cooperation from our mayors, MLAs, and provincial counterparts.

Actually, we met in Vancouver with all the western provinces. It was a very productive meeting, with all of us on the same page. Municipalities as well as the provinces were all working as Canadians should work, which is with the ultimate goal of getting ourselves out of this situation and coming through it in as positive a way as we possibly can.

**The Chair:** I'll have to interrupt. I know the minister was fairly tightly scheduled, and the hour is up. There's been a request to ask you to stay, but I know you have other obligations.

**Hon. John Baird:** I have a meeting with a premier from northern Canada.

**The Chair:** Perhaps we can bring you back to this committee at a future date. I'm sure there'll be lots of discussion to be had.

Mr. Volpe.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** Mr. Chair, with all due respect and with deference to the northern premier, I was wondering whether both ministers have to be at that meeting. We really only want both of

them for another 15 minutes, but if one has to leave, could the other one could stay? Is that a possibility, or are you a team?

**The Chair:** I was advised that they were both available for this one hour.

**Hon. Rob Merrifield:** Yes, for one hour, as I have an obligation that follows.

**The Chair:** I think what we'll do is put out an invitation to return at another date.

I do thank you for your time today. I know there's a lot more infrastructure and transportation questions.

If I may, committee, we can go through the clause-by-clause. If we don't, it will be deemed agreed on Thursday. Do we want to do clause-by-clause or just let it go?

Mr. Volpe.

• (1635)

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** As a point of order, I just wanted to make a slight correction while the official is still at the table.

Monsieur Grégoire probably heard me refer to him as Monsieur Gagnon, as somebody I knew really well. I want to be Shakespearean with him for a moment, if you don't mind; that is, a rose by any other name must surely smell as sweet.

So Monsieur Grégoire, even though somebody put something on my tongue, obviously I still think highly of an official who gets beaten up every time he comes here.

**Mr. Marc Grégoire:** Apology accepted.

**The Chair:** Thank you, everyone.

We will let this go back to the House, where it will be deemed reported and accepted on Thursday. I would like to acknowledge that on Thursday, February 12, we will reverse the order of what we were going to do today. We will have a subcommittee meeting—a notice will be sent out to the members of that committee—where we will plan the future business. We have a break week and then we'll come back and have everything in place for the committee to work.

Are there any other comments?

**An hon. member:** Have we voted on this?

**The Chair:** It'll be deemed voted whether we do or we don't. It's your call.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** Will it be deemed voted even if we vote against it?

**The Chair:** It'll be reported without amendment.

Are there comments?

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** I want to register for the record, Mr. Chair, that I'm not happy with the level of discussion. I guess there is a larger arrangement afoot in terms of different ministers and so on, but this has a particular relevance to the budget going forward and so on. In no way am I satisfied that the allocation asked for has been adequately explained today.

**The Chair:** The record will show that.

Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to register my concerns about this as well, particularly if I look at the Asia-Pacific gateway. Indeed, we can see that Canada's economic future lies in Asia, and infrastructure is a key.

If I look at the numbers from 2005 in the Liberal budget, I note that \$211 million was committed to the Asia-Pacific gateway. If I look at the 2006 budget, I see that only \$91 million was committed, and in budget 2007, \$108 million was committed. Budget 2008 does not show any numbers. The number is zero for that important project, and the future of Canada's economy lies in that. According to the records, there's only \$47 million. This has to be clarified.

Also, as we look at this, we see that the minister is trying to flow the pine beetle numbers through the Asia-Pacific gateway as well. It should be one or the other. Those issues have to be clarified and dealt with. I'm not personally satisfied with the way it's put together. We have a parliamentary secretary sitting here. Maybe he can address those issues if the minister is not here.

**The Chair:** I am going to go to Monsieur Laframboise.

I would say that the experience of this committee has been that if you were to actually put that in writing to the parliamentary secretary, I think you'd find that he's been very cooperative in finding the information the members want.

Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** You know, colleagues, I enjoy sitting on this committee very much. We have some new Liberal colleagues, which I also am happy about. The fact remains that we are going to support the supplementary estimates which are always the object of a confidence vote. I can imagine that the Liberals will want to topple the government on the supplementary estimates. However, if you wish to propose the adoption of the estimates, we are going to support you wholeheartedly. We can proceed to the vote today, if you wish.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments?

Mr. Volpe.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I think we could probably satisfy the request from my colleagues by having some of the officials here in order to go through the details we have raised today. Perhaps in that instance, whether they're here or not, the parliamentary secretary can address some of those questions. I think that would satisfy everybody around the table.

**The Chair:** Mr. Jean.

**Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC):** Absolutely. As the chair has mentioned, we would be happy to forward any questions to the department on any particular issue that you have issues with, but after today, we're done with these. If you want to deal with the supplementary estimates on what's being spent and why it hasn't been, I can put that forward to the department and the minister's office. I'm sure they would be happy to answer.

Obviously these are quite lengthy, but the reality is that after today they are done anyway. If we're going to have a vote, let's deal with that. This side will abstain and you can deal with it accordingly—no, I'm just kidding.

If you want to deal with it, let's deal with it. If you have questions, forward them to me. As I've mentioned to all members here, I'm happy to answer anything I possibly can. I'll work to make sure I answer them before you have an issue, not afterwards.

I've mentioned that to you, Mr. Kennedy. As well, Mr. Volpe and I have been working together for years, and he knows that on anything he asks me, I get back to him very quickly. Mr. Laframboise knows that as well.

• (1640)

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** With all respect, Mr. Chair,

[*Translation*]

As the member said, I am new on the committee and I hope that we will share the following idea.

[*English*]

It's real work we're trying to do on behalf of the people. Infrastructure finds itself in a special circumstance. It's been asked to be entrusted with more dollars than it's ever had—by a multiple—and I assume the interest is just as genuine on the other side of the committee. We're not going to get that work done in these supplementary estimates. I assume we're going to have another chance at that.

I would ask this of the parliamentary secretary. We've been trying to get the second part of our briefing, which was cut to 45 minutes, for the last four days. As a gesture of goodwill, I'd like to see that briefing scheduled soon so we can do our part of this obligation in terms of basic information being made available in a timely manner.

I guess I would just register this, Mr. Chair. Knowing the minister of infrastructure from the past, I think he would accept the obligation. It's his job to explain what happens or doesn't happen. Paper being shuffled back and forth doesn't do that.

When it comes to the main estimates or moving forward, we'll need to have a chance to look at that, but I am interested in getting the basic information from the ministry. I know it's busy. We don't want to delay what has to get done, but there are some very relevant things we'd like to find out.

**The Chair:** Mr. Jean.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Absolutely, I agree 100%. I think you noticed that the minister asked for your suggestions in relation to speeding up infrastructure in relation to particular items. Again, we would ask for your suggestions. I would like to reinforce that. We're looking for suggestions. The minister is open to that.

We've talked about several different options we could put in place to speed up infrastructure investments across the country. If you have some ideas, please...or if you want to meet with me, I'd be happy to, if you don't like shuffling paper. I did that for so many years, as a lawyer, and it seemed to work quite well there. But if you want to meet in my office, I'd be happy to. And if there is any kind of briefing you want, I'd be happy to be at that as well. In fact I would encourage that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kennedy.

**Mr. Gerard Kennedy:** There may be enticements to come and visit, but I think the basic thing is real accountability. With all respect, you're helping with that, but there is somebody else who bears that responsibility.

We cannot make suggestions in good faith until we know what's broken. You offered \$9 billion to the Canadian people, and you've given them...we don't even know what. The minister is a few weeks away from the end of the year and he can't even tell us how much money he's going to get out the door. I think that's highly problematic. It's confidence-busting. I would strongly suggest that this get addressed in order for us to be constructive in solving the problems.

In getting that basic information, I assure you I will have lots of suggestions for the ministry on how to improve.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Great.

Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Volpe.

**Hon. Joseph Volpe:** I think you'll all agree that Mr. Kennedy made some excellent points. And Mr. Jean's desire to address them will probably be resolved in our steering committee meeting, which I think is on Thursday. We can itemize some of those issues so we can get back on track and do what we need to do.

I accept Mr. Jean's suggestions as an indication that he really does want to comply with some of the requests that have been made by members on this side. The only issue here is whether we, in the steering committee, can do that expeditiously.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Laframboise:** If during the discussion of future business the committee decides to discuss this, to hold meetings specifically on infrastructure and to have officials here, I would be entirely in agreement with that. I have a problem with holding this debate during the study of the supplementary estimates, but I have no objection at all to talking about this in a separate discussion.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, I see no other comments around the table. These will be reported tomorrow at five o'clock.

I thank the committee for their indulgence today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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