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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Thank you, everyone.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, meeting number 5. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying a national public transit strategy.

Joining us today in the witness chair, from Transport Action Canada, is Mr. David Jeanes, president.

I know that you've appeared before our committee before and know the process. We appreciate your coming on short notice. I'll ask you to present so that we can move to committee questions.

Thank you.

Mr. David Jeanes (President, Transport Action Canada): Thank you, Chair.

I understand that I'm to speak for up to about half an hour and deal with questions after that. Is that a reasonable amount of time? Or would you prefer that I try to make it a bit shorter?

The Chair: Normally, it is about 10 minutes.

Mr. David Jeanes: Oh, it's 10 minutes.

The Chair: I'll give you a one-minute sign.

[Translation]

Mr. David Jeanes: Very good.

My name is David Jeanes.

[English]

I'm president of Transport Action Canada, which used to be Transport 2000, a non-profit organization advocating for better public transportation. We've been around since 1976. We're also a registered charity.

We strongly support the interest in a national transit policy. We participate in many consultation activities with all levels of government, and we also have experience internationally. For example, some years ago I participated in a very effective conference on light rail, in Washington, D.C., which was jointly hosted by APTA, the American Public Transit Association—the equivalent of CUTA, whom you heard earlier this week—and the Federal Transit Administration.

In Canada, we have no such body. Transport Canada, although it does regulate a very few transit agencies—OC Transpo and STO in

the national capital area, and the bus company in Windsor—has no real role that is comparable to the research and policy involvement that the FTA has in the United States.

I want to touch on some major reasons why I think there is a federal interest in public transit. First of all, it's safety. The federal government has been involved in extensive discussion, for example, on driver hours for bus drivers. Although this only applies specifically to the transit agencies that are federally regulated, it is a matter of safety to the public that should be of concern for development of uniform standards nationally.

The next reason is rail safety. The government has extensive expertise in rail safety, and in fact it even provides that expertise to some provincial agencies, such as GO Transit and Metrolinx in Toronto, which don't maintain their own ability, for example, to do railway safety inspections but contract that to the federal government.

Yet the federal government has no overall responsibility for urban transit safety, particularly rail safety. Agencies such as the transit systems running LRT in Calgary, Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, and the Montreal metro, are essentially self-regulating. This leads to inconsistencies across the country. Worse than that, it raises a very high barrier for other, smaller cities that wish to get into the use of railway technologies in their transit systems. Ottawa, for example, is facing very high costs to establish a railway safety competence that has to be at arm's length from the management of the planned light rail system. We feel there would be a continuing federal role that would be mutually beneficial in an area like this.

In the area of research, Canada has world-class capabilities in transit research. It was already mentioned, by CUTA, that in manufacturing we supply a large percentage of North American transit buses. Of course, you know that we also have a railway industry that has been extremely successful—for example, it supplies a large proportion of the bi-level commuter rail vehicles, such as the GO Transit and AMT cars, to many cities across the United States.

But we are not benefiting from our national needs for developing transit technologies in a way that would benefit our industries nationally. We haven't developed capabilities in the area of developing new light rail or street car systems; we are tending to depend on European research, or, in the case of the Canada line in Japan, buying from Asia.

Commuter rail is part of transit, although, as I've mentioned, it is normally not federally regulated. There are strong arguments that it should be, particularly because our largest cities that have commuter rail systems—Montreal, Toronto, and even Vancouver—could not function without these networks.

Again, there are potentials for those same technologies to be used in other cities across the country, but the barriers to entry for those cities are very high if there is no federal coordination that makes it easier for other cities that want to establish commuter rail systems. Here particularly we are talking about cost-effective reuse of federal railway infrastructure.

You may know that a good part of the Ottawa bus transitway was actually built on abandoned railway lines, as were the Vancouver SkyTrain and the Edmonton and Calgary LRT systems. In Toronto, Metrolinx is buying up railway rights-of-way to areas outside of the greater Toronto area. It is acquiring these lines from the freight railways that no longer have use for them. In Montreal, there are also major projects.

But there are lost opportunities because in many cases the local municipal levels don't have the resources to acquire these railway lines when the freight railways wish to dispose of them. Metrolinx can afford to, but we see a lot of other examples where it cannot be done. In fact, here in Ottawa, we're progressively losing a network of rail lines, radiating in many directions from the city of Ottawa, that were planned by the NCC as a coherent network in the 1950s and 1960s as part of the Gréber plan.

● (1540)

Electrification is a big issue. We are far behind the world standard in electrification of any of our railways. Apart from our urban transit systems and one commuter line in Montreal, we essentially have no railway electrification. Even the United States has extensive electrification of all its light rail systems and its passenger rail network in the eastern corridor. The problem here, again, is that there are many areas of Canada that wish to establish electrification. We know that Metrolinx, in Toronto, is under intense public pressure to electrify. The City of Ottawa is spending a lot of money, with provincial and federal funding support, to establish our first electrified passenger rail transit system. Again, the costs to entry are far higher than they would be if there were a more coherent federal approach to these systems. Some of the political issues we face, for example, in Toronto, could perhaps be avoided if we had a national discussion and national policies related to railway electrification.

Rapid transit to airports is important. The federal Department of Transport actually initiated the plan for the Pearson International Airport rail link, which is now moving forward as a provincial project. And the federal government was a partner with Vancouver in establishing rail transit access to Vancouver airport. But basically we're far behind the world standard in most of the rest of the country.

The federal presence is very much on the sidelines or in the background for Ottawa, Montreal, and other cities where rapid transit to airports should be possible.

Rural transit is something that's of great concern to us. There are initiatives being taken by various municipalities, particularly in Ontario and Quebec, to try to develop, initially bus-based transit, but also commuter rail, using railway lines where they are available. In some cases, they are moving towards community ownership of lines that would otherwise be abandoned. This is being considered, for example, in Pontiac and Renfrew counties, west of Ottawa. There's also a strong interest in eastern Ontario, to the east of Ottawa. Again, the problem here is the barriers to those municipalities being able to acquire these lines. There are areas where the federal government can get involved, for example, by agreeing to tax policies that would allow municipalities that are qualified donees under the Income Tax Act to issue charity tax receipts to the railways in exchange for getting the land and the railway tracks. This is an interesting option that deals with the freight railways' need to realize something from disposing of their resources, other than for just scrap, and also makes it possible for municipalities or groups of municipalities to overcome the high barriers to keeping those rail corridors in service.

I want to mention a couple of things that I was reminded of when CUTA was speaking to you. CUTA organized a conference in Ottawa last year, their annual conference, and had a special session devoted to rural transit. It was extremely well attended. In fact, CUTA was surprised at the level of interest in this area.

Just to wrap up, I feel that we could have developed many more national strengths in areas that are of great importance to developing a sustainable transportation system, particularly in light rail. So many of our transit systems are either already using it or are needing to modernize or are embarking on projects with light rail. Yet at the moment we're facing a very fragmented approach. And as I've said, we're not really designing or manufacturing the vehicles for those systems in Canada, except possibly by licensing designs developed offshore. We also are missing some other opportunities, electric trolley buses, for example. We have no national strategy for electric trolley buses. Toronto lost them a few years ago. Vancouver and Edmonton still have them. Again, if there were a federal approach here, this is another technology that could be encouraged and that Canadian industry could respond to.

The last point is on taxation. CUTA mentioned to you the importance of employer subsidized transit passes. We were quite involved with this more than a decade ago with the proposal developed under a project performed by Todd Litman, who is now with the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, which recommended this approach. It differs from giving individual taxpayers a tax credit for their transit passes in that it brings the employers into the picture. It gives employers an incentive—not just to provide free parking spaces to their employees, which carries no tax implications, but also to provide or subsidize transit passes.

• (1545)

I was involved here in Ottawa when Nortel developed what was at the time the world's leading travel demand management program. It was oriented towards getting employees to use transit, walking, and cycling. In fact, no comparable program has yet been developed in Canada with any other major employer. I persuaded Nortel to start selling transit passes through the company cashiers and eventually through the retail stores that were established in major company locations. But the company was not interested in subsidizing these passes because the subsidies would be showing up in the payroll process as a taxable benefit.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sullivan, seven minutes, please.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, David, for a thorough examination of all the ways the federal sphere could be brought to bear on public transit.

I know your organization is very much in favour of promoting effective and efficient transportation of people, because it protects the environment, conserves energy, promotes effective land use, and supports economic growth. One of the things we've been talking about in the House of Commons recently is economic growth and economic activity.

The Board of Trade in Toronto estimates that \$6 billion worth of productivity is lost because people are stuck in traffic. They don't need to be stuck; they could be riding efficient, modern transit systems.

Do you think having a national transit strategy would be an effective way of increasing our economic productivity, our international competitiveness, and improving our quality of life?

Mr. David Jeanes: Yes, I think so.

In order to manage the flows of people, you really have to do that. You have to manage it; you have to have standards. For 30 years I worked in the telecommunications industry, where I was involved in developing the flow of data on the world's telecommunications networks. We could not have done that through local administration only. Without the standardization that has led to the Internet—which is an international standardization, not just a national one—and the strong involvement by Canada in the United Nations telecommunications agencies that develop the standards for that system, we would not have the communications network we have today.

I believe that example also applies to our transportation networks. We are seeing significant losses across Canada of redundancy in our rail network. For example, when a line is interrupted by a derailment between Montreal and Halifax, we lose all ability to ship containers from the Port of Halifax to central Canada and the United States, because we are no longer managing our rail networks to provide the capabilities that are needed.

Now that's getting away from transit. I wanted to focus on transit standardization and fostering opportunities for cities and towns and rural areas to develop transit systems. I think the federal government can be a facilitator as well as a regulator.

• (1550)

Mr. Mike Sullivan: That was a good example, the example of the Internet being coordinated by a more senior body than individuals. Over the past little while, we have been trying to figure out what the federal government's role ought to be, given that the provision of public transit is generally a municipal jurisdiction.

Some people here would feel as if they were trodding on toes if they started telling municipalities what they should and shouldn't do. I don't think our idea of a national public transit strategy would go that far. We see it as you do—helping to fund public transit while making sure that the public transit we create is the most modern and most efficient we can provide.

Would you agree that so far the provision of public transit projects has been uneven and haphazard? They're different in different municipalities and use different technologies. Do you think that's partly because the municipalities don't have the capital base to afford a more modern approach?

Mr. David Jeanes: I don't want to suggest that the federal government hasn't been heavily involved in funding many municipal transit projects; they have. But in general, they've been done as one-off infrastructure projects rather than having any overall coherent policy.

What I've tried to touch on in my presentation are areas that I believe are areas of federal expertise and jurisdiction that the provinces and the municipalities can't afford to create for themselves or areas that are in fact federal responsibilities such as taxation policies. The municipalities cannot even do what some municipalities do in the United States, which is use the retail sales tax to subsidize their transit systems. That can't be done here.

So some of the things I've mentioned with respect to taxation policies either on transit passes or on municipalities acquiring rail lines are things that I think the federal government could have a useful role in and should have policies.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: The other thing we've talked about a lot here is the gas tax and how that is a current piece of the infrastructure puzzle, but it creates an unfairness in that communities that don't have a need for massive public transit spending, because they're too small or don't need public transit, use this funding for other infrastructure, whereas on a per capita basis the same amounts of money, which could easily be used for water and sewer projects in Toronto, tend to be needed for public transit because it's a big chunk of money. So what we're hearing from some experts is that there needs to be a separate public transit piece to this overall strategy.

Mr. David Jeanes: I was involved in consultation at the provincial level with the Province of Ontario on the mechanisms for dividing up the provincial gas tax rebates, and my feeling and impression was that this exception that you describe was really a question of fairness—not giving up on the policy that the gas tax was intended to pay for transit, but just to say that if this rule were applied without exception, it would, as you say, be unfair to the smaller communities.

But we also feel smaller communities can do many things to provide transit because they too have aging populations. Some of the rural transit initiatives that we've been looking at involve combining school bus services, taxi services, and volunteer drivers, for example. Many volunteer networks are established by hospitals, and some coordination and sharing among these things can in fact start to provide some transit solutions even for very small municipalities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I must admit that I have a great deal of respect for your organization and your familiarity with Transport 2000 Québec. I had a good friend at the time whose name was Guy Chartrand, may he rest in peace. He was already on the leading edge when it came to public transit and the like.

I would like to talk a little bit about all of this. Yes, we want to implement a national strategy and we have been discussing it. However, I would like us to check and see if it is feasible.

There will always be cars on the road. In reality, we have to achieve a balance. We have to think about strategies that will change our ways of doing things for the better.

Before looking at the types of transportation, I would like to talk about funding. The Canadian government has already invested in public transit and transportation alternatives. I am among those who approve of such measures. We have often spoken about tax incentives. We have spoken about the famous gasoline tax.

I am now wondering about something. An announcement was just made about the Champlain Bridge, which will lead to a necessary debate on how to fund infrastructure. One aspect of the debate is the toll booth. As a Montrealer, I am already paying for a lot of things. Before setting up additional toll booths, we should think about and debate this issue. What do you think about the toll booth?

Second, is it not time to plan financial measures or what we call dedicated funds, where the money is dedicated to something or we

ensure that the money we spend is truly dedicated to a specific purpose?

Finally, with regard to dedicated funds, is it better to have a Canadian infrastructure fund and devote part of it to public transit or is it better to have a fund dedicated exclusively to public transit?

That is what I wanted us to address first.

● (1555)

Mr. David Jeanes: Can I respond in English? It is easier for me.

[*English*]

I think that in general road pricing is an important tool. It won't be appropriate in all cases, but particularly where you're talking about a large new piece of infrastructure.... I remember that in 1967 the La Fontaine tunnel in Montreal was built and was established as a toll tunnel for a considerable number of years. I don't know whether the tolls eventually paid the cost—perhaps not—but that approach was used. We've seen Highway 407 as a toll road around Toronto, which seems to be working quite effectively and delivering some benefits, though it has also been controversial.

But what we have seen are other schemes not used in Canada, such as the congestion charging in central London, where a specific objective was not only to reduce the number of cars passing through the centre of the city but also to in fact speed up the movement of the automobile traffic that was there, to allow taxis to effectively move twice as fast through the city centre, and to fund a substantial increase in the number of buses. There was a case where that wasn't a tax grab: the congestion charging was specifically used to fund the transit improvements that were necessary to replace the lost capacity by excluding car drivers who were not prepared to pay.

As for tolls, although they may be difficult to impose, as they require a very high level of technology to do them effectively, as with Highway 407 or with the London congestion charging, I think it can be done, and in some cases it will be important. Obviously, the cost of replacing the Champlain Bridge, as you mentioned, is going to be very high. If it can be done sooner, and if those motorists who benefit directly from that can be involved in the financing of it, then I think that's probably a good thing.

I hope that responds to your question.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Yes, that's a good start. The fact is that if we have a recession, and clearly if we have some economic problems, we will have to find a better way to fund and to make sure that when we're funding, we're funding appropriately, right?

Mr. David Jeanes: Yes, and it's not only for the Champlain Bridge. We know that it's not only for highway bridges all over Quebec, which have been scrutinized closely, but for bridges in the rest of Canada as well.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Here's my concern now, then. We can talk about private-public partnership; it can be difficult, but it's a valid point. We can talk about tolls and all of that. But if you want to have a really efficient national strategy, it means that you have to reinvent a deal with all the stakeholders to make sure that we're all singing the same tune. How can we respect the jurisdiction, play the role that we should under our own jurisdiction, and make sure that we are efficient without having problems?

If we have a toll bridge on Champlain and you have some other bridge, like the Jacques Cartier Bridge, or the Mercier Bridge, which is also owned by the federal government, at a certain point does it mean that if we're not putting some other toll bridge there, people will take that bridge and it will create some other issue? How do you manage realistically to have a real national strategy and work on those kinds of issues that are very concrete and specific?

•(1600)

Mr. David Jeanes: I think perhaps that is a problem that is self-correcting. If people desert the toll bridge to use the Mercier Bridge or the Jacques Cartier Bridge and those bridges become very congested, then there will be more incentive for people to pay the toll. This is what we are seeing in Toronto, where Highway 401 is still there and it's still free, but people can choose whether they will pay the toll and drive on the alternative route.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Here's my last question. We spoke a lot, and rightly so, about the respect for the rural and the urban approach. There is also an issue of flexibility: you have people who are working at three o'clock in the morning and are living some specific problems socially, or we're improving the transit process, or we have to change ways. What's your point of view on that?

Mr. David Jeanes: Well, obviously you cannot deliver high-capacity rapid transit at all hours of the day, so you cannot fully meet that market with only one mode. Therefore, it's best to try to find a multimodal solution.

In eastern Ontario, there's an interesting approach being taken by the town of Casselman. In collaboration with VIA Rail, they are moving towards being able to establish commuter rail service to and from Ottawa, but that will be complemented by the ability, outside of the hours that will be served by rail, to still get back to Casselman on one of the highway buses they operate. The same park-and-ride lot in Casselman serves both the VIA Rail station and the highway buses they operate. So you can find cheaper ways there.

In the case of Nortel, which I've mentioned, we established a transitway level of bus service during the peak hours, but off-peak there was at least a basic bus service every half hour serving the Nortel campus out on Moodie Drive. Those kinds of things will become of interest as the Department of National Defence establishes itself as the new owner of that campus. But it's a similar kind of problem: you must provide service—

Hon. Denis Coderre: You won't use the F-35 for that one.

Mr. David Jeanes: No, no.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Okay.

Mr. David Jeanes: You must provide service for the people who will be working at unusual hours and the people who have to work at different hours, such as building cleaners.

The Chair: Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the presentation.

You referenced “fairness” in your response to the first questioner. The federal government is quite concerned about fairness for all regions, large cities and small communities as well.

Can you tell us more about how you see that reconciled with respect to transit infrastructure?

Mr. David Jeanes: For many smaller communities, the transit infrastructure may in fact be buying a bus.

For example, we had a presentation at the session that I mentioned, organized at the Chateau Laurier last year by CUTA, from King County transit in Nova Scotia. They are providing a transit service that is almost entirely rural. The only capital assets they have are their buses. In that case, using grant money or gas tax money for that rather than for building rail lines or stations or busways or other fixed infrastructure facilities has to be accepted as a way of meeting the needs of those smaller locations.

As I mentioned, for some communities that need to have some basic transportation, a highway bus, or even a transit bus, is too large to meet their needs. That's a case where some collaborative efforts with taxi services and school buses and so on may be another approach.

But in every case, yes, fairness is needed. The fairness can be on a pure per capita basis, or it may be weighted to recognize that the smaller communities need a little more than just a per capita share in order to do something, or it could be, as Ontario decided, a weighting based on transit use. Those municipalities that had a higher level of transit modal split would be entitled to more of the gas tax, for example, than communities that had lower transit use.

There are different options, but I agree with you that fairness is important.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

•(1605)

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): I just wanted to take the opportunity to respond to something that Mr. Sullivan was saying.

I think he correctly pointed out that smaller municipalities tend not to have public transit and therefore don't absorb those costs. I don't think there is an inequity, though, because there are additional costs associated with a small municipality that are not in place for a larger one.

For example, it costs roughly \$1 million for a kilometre of pavement. There are far fewer taxpayers along that kilometre, and therefore the per capita cost of a stretch of roadway is much more expensive in a borough community. The same is true for any form of piping, electrical lines, and related infrastructure. The distances that snowplows have to travel between homes are much greater. As a result, the per capita cost of a lot of these same things are much higher in rural communities than they are in highly densified big cities.

I would just like to put that on the record to counter any notion that perhaps municipalities of a smaller population have a funding advantage under the gas tax system. In fact they do not.

I would invite any comments you might have.

Mr. David Jeanes: I certainly didn't mean to suggest that they did. I think the way I was trying to respond to the point was that exceptions in the way that gas tax funding may be restricted in its use should be made where it's really necessary or appropriate for certain municipalities.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: You're quite right about that. I agree with you.

Mr. David Jeanes: We mustn't, however, lose sight of the fact that in an aging society, we do have an increasing population without access to the private car. With the decline of the family, the extended family as a unit, many people can no longer depend on immediate relatives to provide them with transportation as they age.

One of the goals of providing at least some basic rural transit is so that people who are aging can remain living in the communities where they've spent their lives and can still have access to hospitals and shopping and so on. It's becoming increasingly difficult in many of those communities, particularly where downtown cores are being replaced by big-box stores in the suburbs—in Carleton Place, for example, near Ottawa.

So it's a complex problem. There's certainly no single solution. I think it's certainly a national problem and it's right for federal legislators to be interested in it.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jeanes, thank you very much for your time today and for your presentation.

One of the things you talked about early in your presentation was inconsistent measures of safety. Can you give us some elaboration on that? You seem to have a great concern about how that plays out in the different areas across the country.

Mr. David Jeanes: I'll give you some examples. We have in Toronto a city that has had a subway system for 57 years. Not only

has it built up the ability to handle the maintenance and even the expansion of that subway system through its own expertise, but it is also self-regulating with respect to safety inspections. That doesn't always work well. Some years ago there was a catastrophic accident and a fire on the Toronto subway. Really it was a case of safety measures having become somewhat archaic and no longer working reliably. With an outside federal regulator, that might not have been a problem.

Of course, since that fire and incident, Toronto is now in a much better position to guarantee safety. But smaller communities can't necessarily afford those resources.

Right now, for example, Ottawa is establishing the rail expertise necessary to build and operate the downtown transit tunnel and the 12-kilometre light rail line that will operate through it. But establishing a railway safety office in the city of Ottawa just to keep an eye on 12 kilometres of track, particularly if it needs to be at arm's length from the engineers and managers who are running the system, I think, becomes very difficult. It will be difficult as well in other cities that develop rail systems, such as Kitchener-Waterloo.

I really think there is a role for the existing federal government expertise. It will be in setting a very high standard by the federal Department of Transport; in investigations by the Transportation Safety Board; and in research by the Centre for Surface Transportation Technology, which is located here in Ottawa as an offshoot of the National Research Council, which is now actually largely privately funded. Those kinds of federal resources would be of immense value to Canadian municipalities as they move into transit technologies that may be new to them.

•(1610)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you.

You also talk about research and development, and in line with that, you talk about the rail corridors that have been abandoned. They've been seen as surplus, so whoever is using them currently has seen no purpose in continuing with them.

Mr. David Jeanes: That's for freight operation.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: That's for freight operation. Correct.

How do you see those corridors fitting within a new system? If they're not seen to be in a good environment or in a good position to move freight, are they in a good position to move people, and for what reasons do you see that?

Mr. David Jeanes: The good examples are Toronto, for instance, where Metrolinx is acquiring ownership of rail corridors up to Barrie, to Richmond Hill, to Stouffville, and so on. Those lines were really marginal in the freight business for major freight railroads like Canadian National or Canadian Pacific. There's really no economic reason to maintain such lines. However, it doesn't mean that you have to lose freight service, because if the line can be used and justified economically for its passenger handling capability, it may still be able to support freight, for example, at night on a limited basis and operated by the private sector short-line railway companies. This system works well in California, for example, where the rail line in San Diego is a public transit resource that is also used for freight service.

The River Line in New Jersey is similarly a light rail system operating between Camden and Trenton, New Jersey, that is also used by freight trains at off hours in a limited way. So it still provides some basic freight connectivity even though those lines are well below the threshold at which they would be considered viable by a major railroad.

So there are options here. They are being explored in the Ottawa area by Transport Pontiac-Renfrew, which is an initiative of Pontiac County in Quebec and Renfrew County in Ontario, to take over the rail line between Ottawa and Pembroke from Canadian National, which really has no further interest in it, in order to preserve it for both freight and passenger use.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): There are different mechanisms: tax points, capital projects, capital funding, or sales tax. Are there any specific proposals that you may have that would work better in Canada, or should it be a balanced approach where you have two or three different ways of funding public transit?

Mr. David Jeanes: There are different opportunities. When the City of Ottawa—in the year 2000 it was the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton—wanted to import light rail vehicles from Germany for a pilot project, there was an attempt to get the federal government to forgive the import duties on those vehicles. They were unique. No such vehicles were made in Canada. They were to serve a public purpose, providing a rail rapid transit service in Ottawa. Yet my understanding is that ultimately the import duties on those unique European vehicles had to be paid. There are areas involving customs duties.

I've already mentioned the income tax treatment, for example, where municipalities could issue tax receipts for donations of railway corridors and railway track, or where the government could positively encourage employers to subsidize transit passes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'm sorry, I'm not sure my question was clear enough. Whether you call it a strategy or a plan or a policy framework, in it I would imagine that you would look at long-term funding.

• (1615)

Mr. David Jeanes: Yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Some of the long-term funding may be capital funding, but some might be tax points and tax credits, etc. Then there

would be a component that would do the research to help do an environmental scan to look at what is needed in different communities, large or small. Then there might be some discussion as to how to maintain the existing stock, for example.

Do you have a preference for how much or what percentage would be from capital funding and what would be from tax incentives, whether it's a gas tax or a sales tax?

Mr. David Jeanes: You're getting out of my area of expertise. I do know that it has been very important for Canadian railways to consider the capital cost allowances, for example, on acquisition of railway locomotives. We have often been viewed as being at a disadvantage against other countries in how quickly railways can write off the locomotives or other railway rolling stock they purchase. This may also apply with transit buses.

I'm afraid it's not an area where I have expertise. In general, once there is a policy of finding ways to facilitate the development and sustaining of public transit, there are obviously various fiscal tools that could be used. I'm afraid I'm not an expert to recommend one over another.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Small municipalities don't have the financial wherewithal to come up with a comprehensive plan. In Whitehorse, for example, they know the buses they got from the federal government are working and they're struggling with the operating part of it, but they also need funding for vans or buses to go to other communities outside Whitehorse so that people in those communities can shop and go to doctor's appointments and so the seniors can buy food, etc. They have no capacity to do the research on how to get the projects going.

In terms of a national transit strategy or plan or framework, do you envision that the federal government would work with the territorial government—in this case Yukon—to connect with the municipalities and the aboriginal communities to come together and say that in the next 10 or 20 years they need certain public transit projects, and then make a decision as to who is going to fund what and how it would take place? Is that the kind of environmental scan you're looking at? We have an aging population, and there is the growth of the mining industry, but one way or another people have to find a way to get to work, get to doctor's appointments, and go shopping.

Mr. David Jeanes: Certainly there has to be guidance from some source. Obviously in the north the federal government may be the only available source of knowledge and expertise to do that.

I know that the Federal Transit Administration in the United States, which I mentioned, and the Transportation Research Board in the U.S. do provide a lot of guidance of this sort in terms of guidelines or suggested approaches, which can be widely used. I think that's necessary, yes.

The Chair: Ms. James. Welcome.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Jeanes, for your introductory speech. I also want to thank you for acknowledging the large investment that has come from this government over the past number of years for infrastructure, specifically for transportation and transit. Over the last number of years I've attended several announcements, so I know the funding has gone into key areas.

Speaking of Budget 2011, back in June it was announced by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities that we were going to be working with mayors as well as community and municipal leaders right across the country. We've made a strong commitment to continue with funding over the next number of years.

Building Canada is a \$33 billion, seven-year plan that's set to expire in 2014. Based on the information that's come out in Budget 2011 and the announcement by the minister, I think we're going to have a commitment to continue with the funding.

We're talking about a national transit strategy here. Given the commitment we've already made, that we're willing to work with the mayors and the municipal leaders right across Canada, do you not agree that the context of any strategy should be included in the commitment we've already made? Or do you believe it's something separate? If so, at what cost would that be?

Mr. David Jeanes: I think the two are linked. I referred to the infrastructure projects, many of which are important and have been successful. Some of these projects could not have happened if there weren't a significant federal infusion of funds.

I'm looking at ways in which there can be an ongoing framework for providing resources—not only infrastructure funds but also expertise and capabilities to the provinces and the municipalities.

It's one thing to have a grant to build new transit infrastructure. If you're building a highway bridge or a road, then the operating costs are absorbed by the users, because they own the vehicles and pay the maintenance costs on them. Then there's snowplowing and road maintenance. But with transit systems it's quite different. When you build a transit system, you're committing yourself to a high labour cost. That has to be covered by the operating agency, usually a municipality. The cost of transit drivers is one of the largest costs in managing a transit system. And federal policies may be significant here. For example, I talked right at the beginning about policies on driver hours, which can have an effect on what it costs to operate these systems. It's the same with the fuel costs incurred by the municipalities. These costs must be managed, over and above the costs of the infrastructure. We need frameworks to address these costs.

• (1620)

Ms. Roxanne James: We need to be careful about boundaries within a provincial jurisdiction and municipalities. We don't want to overstep our boundaries. We want to work with the municipalities. I know you've touched on it, but I wonder if you could elaborate on what you think the federal government's role would be in a transit strategy within a specific municipality.

Mr. David Jeanes: Unless a municipality is large enough to afford to take on its own responsibility for safety regulation, the federal government should be able to provide that service. In some cases, it's provided automatically. In Ottawa and Gatineau, for example, the transit systems are federally regulated anyway. In other

cases, the service can be provided only if it's paid for. For example, the Province of Ontario has to contract with the federal government to get the safety inspection services for Metrolinx and GO Transit in Toronto. But smaller communities need to have access to those kinds of capabilities, without necessarily having to develop them from scratch themselves.

The Chair: Thank you. I'll stop you there.

We'll go to Mr. Chicoine.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello Mr. Jeanes. Thank you for being here.

I have a few questions regarding rail transportation in metropolitan areas. Montreal's Agence métropolitaine de transport is having a lot of difficulty negotiating with CN and CP. These companies, which are essentially private, are charging very high rates for fares.

Over the past 10 years, public transit has developed a great deal in the Montreal area but it was fairly tough going. Do you have any ideas for giving priority to public transit during peak hours and for possibly imposing regulations that require merchandise to be transported only at night or, at the very least, outside of peak hours?

[*English*]

Mr. David Jeanes: It's always a big problem.

A different approach was taken in the United States when Amtrak—I know this is in a different sector and it's intercity transportation—was founded as the passenger railway. It was written into law that there had to be certain guarantees of service in the contracts with the railways so that the railways not only had to accept the Amtrak trains but had to provide that they could be scheduled to operate in a reasonably timely way.

In Canada, both VIA Rail, on the intercity level, and the commuter agencies, such as AMT in Montreal and Metrolinx and GO Transit in Toronto, are to some extent at the mercy of their host railways. They don't have any kind of legislated protection for quality of service. In Toronto, Metrolinx is increasingly dealing with that problem by building or acquiring its own tracks. VIA Rail has done the same in some important corridors, for example, between Montreal and Ottawa. A significant portion of the corridor is now owned by VIA, as is part of the corridor from Ottawa going west towards Toronto. But in general, there have to be ways found so that the freight railways and the passenger service can coexist and share those facilities.

The railway lines were originally built as public resources. Yes, they have passed into private ownership, but other countries have found ways of managing the coexistence of freight and passenger service. In some cases, it will require extra investment. As you know, VIA Rail has received extensive federal government money to build additional passing tracks. Some of those passing tracks are actually in urban areas. For example, in the city of Ottawa, there are some additional passing tracks that have been built by VIA Rail that could facilitate commuter service. In those cases, it is possible to find ways, again with some federal participation, to arrange a coexistence between these two needs for a rail network.

The Chair: Mrs. Hughes.

•(1625)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Thank you very much.

I'm just going to continue down this road.

I am actually in a rural area. I have Algoma, Manitoulin, and Kapuskasing. I'm not sure if you've heard of CAPT.

Mr. David Jeanes: It's the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains. I know it well.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: That's correct. You have it right.

They've been advocating for passenger trains in northern Ontario for quite some time. It's a big demand up there. Not too long ago, we had to fight and advocate and prod the government to put funding into preserving the freight trains up there. We were trying at the same time to also upgrade that line, not only for the freight trains but for the passenger trains. Do you think the proper way to go would be to incorporate freight into rail, because you've mentioned this on a number of occasions?

Mr. David Jeanes: Yes, I think so. We're dealing partly with a provincially regulated railway here. But I think it's generally the case that it is possible to invest in these remote lines to provide an acceptable level of passenger service. What's acceptable may be different from what you'd expect in the Toronto-Montreal-Ottawa corridor, but I believe it can be done.

For example, you have existing remote services that are operated federally, such as VIA service from Sudbury to White River, but you have the opportunity to reinstate a Sudbury to Sault Ste. Marie service on the Huron Central Railway. But that would require upgrading the track to an acceptable level and using the appropriate type of passenger rail technology to provide that kind of service.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I have to stop it there.

Our time is up, Mr. Jeanes, and we have our next guest here. But I do thank you. I know you've appeared before this committee in the past, and your advice has always been very succinct. So thank you very much.

Mr. David Jeanes: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to take a brief two-minute recess to allow our next guest to get to the table and set up, and then we'll get right back to it.

•(1625)

(Pause)

•(1630)

The Chair: Welcome back to part two of the transport committee's national public transit strategy study. Joining us today, as an individual, is Mr. Paul Bedford. He has a PowerPoint presentation. I know he may run a few seconds past the allotted time, but I think it's important for us to have that information.

Mr. Coderre, on a point of error—I mean order.

Hon. Denis Coderre: The error will be in the answer, I guess. Is that a bilingual presentation?

The Chair: It's deemed bilingual because of the translation that is available to all members.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I will let that go today. However, as a francophone, I expect presentations and visual aids to be bilingual. I am not talking about interpretation here. That being said, our interpreters do excellent work. Some people, whether they be anglophone or francophone, cannot express themselves easily in both official languages.

If I were giving a presentation in French only, I would understand that my colleagues would want the slides to be in English too. Today, for practical purposes, I do not have a problem with it. However, the next time, I would ask, as a committee member, that we ensure that all documentation presented and the presentations themselves be bilingual. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for your intervention. I understand the presentation is mostly visual. We have had this issue raised in previous committee meetings, and it was acceptable by all sides. As long as we had interpretation, it was deemed to be presented in both official languages. We'll certainly work to improve that.

Mr. Bedford.

Mr. Paul Bedford (Adjunct Professor, City Planning, University of Toronto and Ryerson University, and Former Chief Planner, City of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you. I welcome the chance to share my comments about a national transit strategy to this all-party committee, because transit is an all-party issue across the country.

My presentation is mostly visual, so I'll run right through it as quickly as I can.

[*Slide Presentation*]

I want to start by looking at a map of Canada in terms of the major cities and the city regions across the country. If we look at Canada today, the population is about 34 million. As we know, in six short years we're going to celebrate the 150th birthday of the country. We'll probably be at about 36 million then, so we'll have added the equivalent of greater Vancouver. But I think the most important thing to focus on is where we're going to be in 2067, which is only 56 years away. We're going to add the equivalent of greater Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, the greater Toronto region, Ottawa, greater Montreal, Quebec City, and Halifax. That's what we're going to add to the country, and if we don't have a transit strategy for those additional 16 million people, we're in big trouble as a country.

Many of you know Jane Jacobs, who passed away several years ago. She was a wonderful lady. I had the pleasure of working with her. This was the last book she ever wrote, and in that book she, unfortunately, wasn't very optimistic. She looked at this dark age ahead. My position here is that we need to rise to the occasion and make sure that Canada's future is not in fact a dark age.

This is all too familiar to people in Toronto and most major cities across the country. This is the 401 at rush hour. It's basically a parking lot, notwithstanding that it has 16 lanes. The fact is that this is a very personal issue to Canadians in three areas.

First, over a 40-year working life—from 25 to 65—that we are all involved in, there are issues of lost time, lost money, and health, caused by sitting in gridlock. Very quickly, in terms of the time, if you commute one hour a day, it equals a loss of one entire calendar year over your 40-year working life. Two hours a day is a loss of two years. Three hours a day is a loss of three years.

Second, the average cost of owning a car in the greater Toronto area, according to the Canadian Automobile Association, is \$12,000 a year all in. Over a working life you're spending half a million dollars on your Toyota. It's worth nothing at the end. If you have two cars, you're spending a million dollars; three is a million and a half dollars.

The third area, of course, is health. If you're stuck in gridlock, you're not doing much exercise.

So there are a lot of issues there. I don't know about you, but I can imagine being about to pass away one day when someone insists, "How would you like three more years of healthy life and a million bucks in your RRSP?" Who wouldn't say yes? So this is a very personal issue for Canadians.

This is a shot of gas prices around the world. It varies every week, but you can see, roughly speaking, that Canada is in the middle. I can guarantee that one day we will be at the level of the Netherlands. It's only a matter of time. That has huge implications for Canadians and how they move around their cities.

This is one of my favourite pictures. It's very important, and I always show it to my friends in Toronto. There's the exact same number of people in each of those three slides—40. The only difference is there's one per car, one per chair, and then everybody sitting on a streetcar with an empty street. What this says is we have to use the road space we have far more effectively than we do.

Here's another good one. This is Union Station in Toronto. For the number of people who go through that station every day, you'd have to build 72 lanes of expressway to equal the same number of people who go through that. The same numbers would apply for Montreal and other major cities. The point is that building more roads is not going to solve our problems. Transit has to be the answer. We do have a choice.

Unfortunately, across Canada many of our suburbs look the same. They look as the slide does in the top. There's a whole movement of smart growth in all the major cities of the country to intensify and concentrate and make development more viable to support public transit, as you see in the bottom slide.

These are some of the initial conclusions that I've been aware of in my career. What people are saying in Toronto and across the country is that they want more choice. A lot of people feel stuck because they only have one option now, and that is driving. They want smarter choices.

We have to look at moving people, not only cars, and land use and transportation go together like a hand in glove. We shouldn't forget that. We need to connect the dots, because as David Crombie has always told me, everything is connected to everything in any major city and any city region. All of these dots have something to do with a city, with a region, and we have to plan in its entirety. Everything is interconnected. These are some of the images that go with that.

Here's a very simple chart that we put together when we did the Toronto official plan. I thought it might be helpful for you. Everything you see on the top are the basic components of a transportation planner's strategy. Everything you see in green you can do for free. It simply means a policy decision. Everything in yellow costs some money and the red costs a fortune. Generally, what people focus on is only the red. The fact of the matter is, we have a huge scope federally, provincially, and locally to look at all these possibilities and all these levers to in fact achieve a transit strategy that we need for the country.

• (1635)

I will just move forward in terms of where we need to go in terms of 21st century challenges. The Don Valley Parkway and GO Transit are a very important part of the picture. One train equals 1,500 people. One lane of traffic is 1,500 people. The only difference is you can run a train every 15 minutes, whereas the traffic lane is 1,500 an hour. The new subway rocket cars in Toronto are very important for the system. I took the train coming up here today, and we just read that we had the highest number of passengers ever. In the last week 1.7 million people rode the subway in one day. We're almost at 500 million a year. So it's very critical for the larger centres of the country.

One of my passions is street cars. This is on Spadina Avenue. You can't forget street cars. I know there are very few of these left anywhere. We're lucky we have saved them in Toronto. But I want to tell you, if you add up the number of people who ride the street car lines in Toronto, it's more than the number of passengers who ride the entire GTA GO service every day. They're very, very important. They're urban work horses.

Calgary Transit, light rail in Edmonton.... Many other cities are moving in that direction.

And of course Yellowknife.... You can't forget the small communities. I was up there this summer because I always wanted to go there, so I did. This is my friendly bus driver in Yellowknife. There are two buses in Yellowknife. I had a great talk with him and with the administration there.

As we've heard earlier, small communities still need transit, but it's obviously got to be in the form of buses. So it runs the whole scope.

By looking to the future and moving forward, this is the kind of system that Metrolinx is looking at building over the next 20 to 25 years. The cost of this is \$75 billion in terms of capital, operating, and maintenance, but it's going to serve a population of 10 million, and if we don't do it we're in huge trouble as an economic region.

Ottawa, as you well know, in terms of the light rail system, is tied to land use.

Vancouver is also very similar in terms of the various lines that have been built or that are proposed. I was out there last week and of course rode the line to the airport. They have an extensive transit plan as well.

Moving forward, the final piece here is in terms of where we are going to go in the future.

This is a shot of a little child. He is going to grow up one day to be a chief planner or a mayor or a member of Parliament, and the fact of the matter is I hope he has a full range of choice in terms of transportation.

If we look at international practices, without getting into any details, we are so far behind as a country it isn't funny. So many other cities and regions have all these other tools that you see listed across the top. We hardly have any, and we need to catch up.

Here are some of the tools that in fact are being looked at in the Metrolinx context in Toronto. Every single one of them is controversial, I'm going to be very blunt with you, but the fact is nothing's free. We have to have that kind of discussion, not only in Toronto but across the country, in terms of where the money comes from. Perhaps it comes from the federal government, from the province, from the locals, as well as from the community. All of these are important issues that we have to face.

I want to bring it down to a personal level, because the earlier deputant talked in questioning about road tolls and road pricing. That's one of the tools that we have to talk about. Here are some comparisons. People don't think anything about buying these commodities every day. In fact, lots of people have two Second Cup lattes, but as soon as you mention road pricing, people go crazy.

Here's another comparison. I just looked at a sample road toll price between Toronto and Oakville: 10¢ a kilometre would be \$120 a month return. People are paying \$121 now for a TTC metropass. They're already paying \$215 return for GO Transit, and you see those other figures depending on the kind of plan you have. The point is we have to make sure that people get value for money if we're going to use some of these tools.

We did an extensive consultation around the GTA region on what was called "The Big Move" plan for Metrolinx, and this is the result. I went to every one of the public meetings in all the regions and I went by transit to every darn one of them, and the fact of the matter is, as you see in number 1, there is a huge degree of support. People say they want regional rapid transit and they're willing to pay for it, and they want it to be seamless and they want it to be integrated. But that's the message we got.

● (1640)

This is one of my favourite quotes: Again, nothing's free; you've got to pay for it and you've got to figure out how we're going to pay for it.

Here are some lessons I have learned in my 40-year career as a city planner: focus and simplify the message; respect public wisdom and political action; and develop and communicate strong beliefs. There's no point in doing something marginal. You've got to get things done.

To wrap up, in terms of what I call "future proofing Canada" between now and 2067, our cities and city regions are absolutely critical for the economic health of the country. About 80% of the people live in the city regions. That's where the economic wealth is. That's where the ideas come from. And that's where our economy will grow, if we have a great transportation system in those regions.

Ottawa, as you may know, is embarking on this exercise right now. In the current *Canadian Geographic* magazine, there's a feature on Ottawa, choosing our future: looking ahead a hundred years to build a capital region. *Scientific American* has a whole feature on smarter cities.

In terms of looking at how we're going to communicate this very important issue across the country, I think your committee could take the lead, frankly, and establish what I'll call tripartite forums in the city regions across the country. You have the elected representatives from the feds, the provinces, and the local areas, with the people in the transit agencies, urbanists, etc., to have that discussion about what this national transit strategy should look like and how it should be funded.

My message to you is that we can't go on with the status quo. We do want change. I beg you to take this very seriously, which I know you are, and to make no little plans. The future of the country is very much integrated into your work.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I suspect at the time of the railway, Mr. Macdonald could have used some of the advice you've provided to us today.

Mr. Paul Bedford: Mr. Chair, thank you for reminding me to mention Sir John A. I think we have to capture the kind of spirit that Sir John A. did in building a railway, under impossible conditions so long ago. I know we can do this, though.

The Chair: Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you.

This is a hard act to follow, Mr. Chair.

You have a slide that talks about different pricing. Could you bring us back to that slide and walk us through what each of them means, and the pros and cons?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Is it that one there?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Yes, tell us more about them. What works best, and what are the pros and cons of each?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Basically, right now we hardly have any of these. We get funding for transit systems from the transit fares, of course, and a certain amount from....

I'll walk you down the list. This is something we've looked at in the context of Metrolinx. We basically figured out, as I said before—that map I showed you of Metrolinx—what we need to build over the next 25 years is a \$75 billion cost. If you translate it down over 25 years, it means we have to come up with \$3 billion of new money every year for the next 25 years.

If we're serious about building it, that's the context of this. So we took a look and said, okay, for the greater Toronto-Hamilton area, what are the possible tools? The first one is road pricing, which are road tolls, call it what you want. If you said it's 10¢ a kilometre on all the 400-series highways—the Don Valley, the Gardiner—all at once in the GTHA, that would produce \$1 billion a year forever.

If you put a surcharge of a loonie on every non-residential parking space in the region, at the shopping malls, at the office buildings, or whatever, or just a loonie a day—

Ms. Olivia Chow: Could you focus on the ones that the federal government can do? I don't think we can deal with the price of parking because that's municipal.

Mr. Paul Bedford: No, but I thought you wanted to walk down the list.

• (1650)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Sure, but those are municipal, I would assume, right?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Road pricing could be federal.

Mr. Paul Bedford: It could be. The gas tax, as you well know, is something you have done, and I'm very glad that you have. The province and the federal government are partners in that, so that's a possibility.

In terms of operating grants, capital grants, obviously those are areas the federal government could consider looking at.

The sales tax issue is obviously another one. Many cities in the United States—in fact, four years ago when the last U.S. election was on, Los Angeles County had a referendum to increase the sales tax by a penny. They needed 66% to pass; they got 68% approval.

This November, in the U.S., Atlanta and Seattle have the same proposal for a sales tax referendum. And here is the proviso: all the money is dedicated to fund transit. It doesn't go into the general coffers. Obviously, debt financing is another thing.

I would say this is the short list of about 16 tools that Metrolinx is looking at.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Is there a forum where the federal, provincial, and municipal governments can have a discussion on which fits? I would imagine the operating grants would be provincial and territorial, right?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Whereas the capital grants and the gas tax would be federal.

Have there been any discussions, has there been any forum, on who does what and how? It's clear what the funding gap is. It's clear that some money has to be found somewhere, and you have all the tools.

What I've noticed is that in Calgary, for example, the residents said their number one priority, what makes them unhappy, what would make them happier, is public transit. We see in greater Vancouver that the mayor has just said they would increase taxes—of this kind or that kind—in order to get their Evergreen Line ready.

So there are pockets of things going on, and it's not clear how they're connected with each other, or if they're connected at all.

Mr. Paul Bedford: I agree with you, and there have been discussions, obviously, with municipalities and the provinces, certainly in this context. That's one of the reasons I suggested, just for the consideration of the committee, the idea of these tripartite forums, to talk about these issues and figure out who does what. I think there's an opportunity for the federal government in certain areas here to be a partner in that context.

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Ms. Olivia Chow: There's been discussion of whether it should be a strategy, a plan, or some kind of ad hoc discussion. What makes sense to you?

Mr. Paul Bedford: I think you have to have the discussion first. It's like the image I had of the two children talking to each other. We have to have a discussion, a conversation, not an argument. The fact is—and this is why I love that this is an all-party committee—that in many ways it doesn't matter who is in power in the government, this problem is not going away. It's only going to get worse and worse. And it's related to the competitiveness of the country, the competitiveness of the city regions, and the economic health of our future.

Ms. Olivia Chow: So a dialogue—

Mr. Paul Bedford: A dialogue first—

Ms. Olivia Chow: And then from there possibly a plan.

Mr. Paul Bedford: —to figure out what the strategy or plan might look like. These things don't happen overnight, as you all know, but I think you have to start somewhere, and this is an excellent place to start.

Ms. Olivia Chow: You haven't seen that opportunity recently? There hasn't been that kind of discussion?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Not that I've been aware of, no.

Ms. Olivia Chow: And you've been around for a while.

Mr. Paul Bedford: Yes, about 40 years.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We've never had any fights here. We're just talking. At the end we'll have a group hug. It's going to be interesting.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Denis Coderre: On division.

My understanding is that you've been in the field. The only thing that disappointed me a bit is that you asked for another study or another talk. You were in the field in Toronto; you were the chief planner. Are you telling me that nothing happened when you were there, at that time?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Oh, heavens, no. Lots of things happened, but I think this is the key issue. Notwithstanding the good things that have happened, the problem is ten times bigger than the existing reality. We have to figure out, in terms of these major growth areas of our city regions across the country, how we're going to meet these needs. So far, if we continue on the path we're on, we're not going to get there.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I am going to speak in French.

I am from Montreal. We celebrated Car Free Day but since there has been so much construction, this has been a car-free summer for me. The roads have been blocked for a long time.

I hear many people talking. I am going to play the devil's advocate and also the role of a citizen. I saw the list. We talked about adding \$45 to vehicle registration fees. We are talking about a new Champlain Bridge with a toll. What do you think?

Regardless, there will always be cars. We cannot say that it is one or the other. A reality exists and we have to be flexible. How flexible are you in your planning? Where should we get the money?

The money keeps coming from the same pocket. Given the current economic situation, it may be counterproductive to impose too many taxes on people and ask them to pay too much.

These are important external factors to consider when making political decisions. We have philosophized and developed concepts together but we have to remember the reality of the user who has to pay and the worker who has no choice because there is no public transit system. Even if we did provide a public transit system, some still might not be able to access it.

In addition, although the region is 80% urban, there is also a rural reality. We cannot ask people who live in rural communities to move to the city because that is where the action is.

• (1655)

[English]

That's the reality check.

How do you manage to make sure that, through those examples I'm giving you, that kind of strategy is doable?

Mr. Paul Bedford: That's an excellent question. I will say a couple of things.

Number one, really my message is to give people more of a choice. Right now if you live in downtown Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver, you have a choice. You don't have to have a car if you don't want one. But if you are in the 905 area, suburban Montreal, or rural communities, obviously you have to have a car because there's no viable transit to get you anywhere, other than the commuter rail during the morning and evening rush hours. What I've heard from my experience in talking to people in the Toronto area is that they're prepared to pay more provided the money is dedicated to providing that increased transit service. That's the number one message I've heard over and over again.

I'll use the GO Transit system as one example. Every time GO puts a new train on, it's instantly full and it's still standing room only. It's a bottomless pit in terms of demand. In fact, what we need to do is to not have this rush hour commuter service. We need to convert the GO system into a regional rapid transit service, and it should be electrified, no question about it. But the fact of the matter is that you shouldn't even have to have a schedule. You should know there's going to be a train every 15 minutes, like in Europe. That's the direction we have to go in.

With respect to cars, there will always be cars, whether they're gasoline, electric, or whatever, and I fully understand that. The thing is that people will need to provide that range of choices and options.

Hon. Denis Coderre: So your bottom line is choice and options.

Mr. Paul Bedford: I come back to choice over and over again.

One last comment I'll make follows up on the comment earlier about the needs of seniors. If you add up the population, everyone from 0 to 16 doesn't drive, for obvious reasons; they can't have a licence. A lot of people over 65 or 75 don't drive, for various reasons. If you add up those numbers, it's a shocking number; a high percentage of the population doesn't drive. They have no access to cars whatsoever. So this is important for the daily life cycle that you talked about here earlier, the shopping, the doctors, the various needs people have. It will only get bigger and more important.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Bedford, you are not the first to say it, but I have felt from the beginning that we should be making the move from consolidated funds to dedicated funds with regard to this strategy and its funding.

There is currently an infrastructure problem. Our infrastructure is crumbling. We therefore have to think about fixing it. However, we also have to look to the future. This is not just one amount of money. In fact, this involves two amounts.

I am asking you the same question that I asked the directors of Transport Action Canada earlier. Should the federal government have a fund dedicated to infrastructure and devote part of it to public transit or, to truly be successful, should the government have a fund that is devoted exclusively to public transit?

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. Paul Bedford: Whatever the final resolution on the source of funding, whether it's dedicated or allocated to just transport or broader infrastructure, it has to be sustainable, continuous over time. That's the key issue. You cannot plan and build these kinds of transit systems in five, six, or seven years. Everyone knows that. I understand the financial pressures involved in a time-limit infrastructure program. But we have to have a solution with a mixed revenue source that's dependable over time. Otherwise, we're not going to be able to do this stuff.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you.

I appreciate your being here today. You're someone who has "been there, done that", I guess we can say. You spent your career focusing on these issues, so you're valuable to us. You can give us a good perspective, because you've spent 40 years thinking about these issues. So I appreciate your being here to share that expertise with us.

You were talking about the role of the federal government and how the interplay between the different levels of government might be marshalled to meet funding challenges. I sense from your comments that you support something along the lines of the gas tax model. What you're seeing there is a long-term, stable, predictable source of funding that allows municipalities to plan. They know the funding they can expect and are able to set priorities. This way, the city is able to look at the challenges and make the best decisions for the community. That's what I think I was hearing from you.

Mr. Paul Bedford: Local municipalities are closest to the people so they know the lay of the land. There's no question about that. I don't care whether it's Yellowknife or Toronto. Neither of them can afford the kinds of transit services needed for today and in the future. We will soon be adding 16 million people to the population. By and large, that population is going to go into major city regions.

So this problem is going to get worse and worse. I covered only what you might call a top-10 list. Each one of those lines generates \$1 billion a year in the greater Toronto area. We need to come up with \$3 billion a year. It's a piece of cake to do it, but you have to have the political will. You have to have the people supporting it and you have to pick the right combination of tools.

Two other issues you might want to think about are income tax and sales tax. In Europe cities get a portion of the income tax. It goes straight to the cities and they fund transit and all kinds of needs that way. In lots of jurisdictions around the world, like the U.S., they get a dedicated piece of the sales tax—one cent, two cents, whatever. This grows with the economy, and it's very important in meeting the funding needs of these transportation systems.

Mr. Blake Richards: You're not suggesting that the federal government alone would be responsible for our transportation needs; you're not suggesting that. You believe all levels of government should be involved.

Mr. Paul Bedford: I'll be clear: I think this is everybody's problem. I think the federal government has a role, along with provincial and local governments as well as the people.

Mr. Blake Richards: The types of projects, how a city moves forward as planned, a city's transportation strategy—these are decisions you want to see made locally. You want to see those decisions made by the communities. Is that correct?

• (1705)

Mr. Paul Bedford: Well, primarily, but I'll tell you that even now, that's not the case. The Province of Ontario has a big voice in decisions as they affect the greater Toronto area through the Metrolinx organization.

Mr. Blake Richards: I suppose this is somewhat unrelated to our topic, but it is something that was in your presentation. You mentioned something very briefly. You had a slide that referred to gas prices in various countries throughout the world. We saw Canada somewhere in the middle. You referred very briefly to Canada being in the middle, but the Netherlands is the one we see at the bottom at \$2.66. You said you felt that at some point we would be the one with the highest prices.

It tweaked me. Why do you see that being the case? What is going to change in those countries that is different from what will happen here in Canada so that you will see Canada become the country with the highest-priced fuel?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Let me be totally clear. What I'm saying is that gas will never get cheaper than it is today. That's the first principle. Whether it rises to the level it is in the Netherlands or to the level it is in France or the U.K., I don't know. But the fact is, it's going to get more expensive. Peak oil prices, for all the arguments we all know.... It's just a matter of time.

Mr. Blake Richards: Am I safe in assuming that I misunderstood you, then, with your comment? You weren't suggesting that Canada was going to become the country with the highest priced fuel. You were just—

Mr. Paul Bedford: We're going up, not down.

Mr. Blake Richards: —suggesting that whether it be inflation or whatever it might be, the price of fuel is going to continue to rise. That was your comment.

Mr. Paul Bedford: I think that's a safe prediction.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: There's no point in even starting anything else. Thanks.

The Chair: We've talked about public policy and public participation. Is there a role for the private sector in any of your equations?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Sure. In fact there is a role in terms of the build, the construction, and the manufacturing of the vehicles. There are financing alternatives that I'm sure you're all aware of. This is a national problem, and this is an issue that really needs everyone at the table.

The Chair: The reason I ask that question is that in your comments you suggested that the city of Toronto was prepared to look at these increased costs to themselves personally, in the sense of a higher fee or whatever. Does that give an incentive to the private sector to actually look at doing something like this with some financial help from public agencies, and to spearhead it, as opposed to the government setting the policy?

Mr. Paul Bedford: It might, but I want to be clear, in terms of the chart I had of those different tools, that it wasn't just the city of Toronto. That's for the entire greater Toronto-Hamilton region. That's what everybody has said out there: we're willing to pay more; we want more transit. People are going crazy stuck on that 401 in that gridlock situation that is getting worse every year. Just sitting there is \$6 billion lost in just the greater Toronto area economy each year.

The Chair: Again, the only reason I ask is that my experience has been that if you ask the public what they want and what they're prepared to pay for, they always say they're prepared to pay for it until you actually put the price on it for them.

Mr. Paul Bedford: In fact, I'll go even further. I'm not being facetious at all. Almost everybody wants all this stuff, but when it comes down to how you're going to pay for it, you have a difference of opinion. That's the discussion we have to have, because the rest of the world has already done it. We are so far behind it's pathetic. We cannot just keep our heads in the sand.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're on the same page in terms of the fact that we're so far behind the rest of the world. I've done a lot of research into where some of the rest of the world is with regard to the provision of transit. Most of the transit systems in Europe and a lot in Asia are already electric transit systems. They've already decided that fossil fuels are not the way to go. But we in Canada are still way behind.

In addition to improving productivity, there's an opportunity here, with electric vehicles, to change the nature of how we transport ourselves. Right now, generally speaking, people get in cars and turn them on, and they're consuming fossil fuels, or they get on a train and they're consuming fossil fuels. I think there's a role for the federal government to be shaping an electrification strategy for the entire public transit system, including long-distance rail. What do you think?

• (1710)

Mr. Paul Bedford: Again, with respect to electrification, a lot of people are familiar with what has gone on in the rest of the world. As you well know, the Metrolinx board voted in favour of electrifying the entire GO system. It should have happened a long time ago. It should happen much sooner than later. The fact is I totally support that. That's the kind of direction I think we need. There are opportunities for intercity rail as well as rail within the metropolitan area.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Is that kind of thing on a big, Canada-wide scale going to happen without the involvement of a strategy at the federal level? Are we ever going to be able to say we've done the right thing about electrifying our systems without some kind of support, whether it's financial or otherwise? It starts out being financial, for sure, but I also mean in terms of a national public strategy.

Mr. Paul Bedford: There is great potential for the federal government through this committee work to seriously explore that and to perhaps be a leading advocate for electrification. That is the future. That's what the rest of the world has already done.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: I have a question about the nature of the strategy. You are suggesting we first go and have a dialogue with the tripartite forum. That's one idea. It's a good idea. I'm not saying it's bad. Essentially, that's what our bill suggests. It suggests we start by building a dialogue with a view to building the structures later.

Without stepping on municipal or provincial toes, I had a conversation with the federal Minister of Transportation a couple of years ago, and he said what they get at the federal level is a demand for money. Somebody will decide they want to do a project, and then hand the federal government a bill saying, "You will owe us a third". I got the sense that minister would rather be at the table earlier, in the sense of designing a strategy.

The federal gas tax, for example, does not come with a "made in Canada" sticker. When the federal gas tax is being used, no credit is given to the federal government for paying for a chunk of the operating of the TTC, for example. We could build a strategy that recognized the federal infrastructure.

Mr. Paul Bedford: Of course, you could, and I hope you do.

Mr. Mike Sullivan: The big city mayors' caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Urban Transit Association both called for a national transit strategy in 2007. Has anything changed since then that would mean we shouldn't have that?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Well, the only thing that has changed is that the problems have gotten a lot worse, to be very honest. The fact is we are adding 100,000 people a year to the greater Toronto area. Vancouver is going to add a million people over the next 15 years. In different proportions across the country, this problem is not going away. There have obviously been changes in the part of certain administrations, as we all know, across the country, and that goes with the territory. The problem isn't going away. To me, there is a greater need now for this national transit strategy than there ever has been.

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

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

Thank you to our witness for appearing here, as well as for his presentation.

I'm feeling a little provocative here at the moment. I'm going to phrase a question, because I would be interested in gauging your response to it.

Is the federal government, on the question of urban public transit, being asked in some respects to maybe bail out municipalities for cumulative decisions when they have failed to properly densify their municipalities, or are we being asked to pick up the slack or address the budgetary pressures of municipalities because provinces have downloaded? Is it fair to say we're now being asked to sort of come in and pick up the slack for these governments?

• (1715)

Mr. Paul Bedford: It's a great question.

I don't think so, because the municipalities, as you know, have to balance budgets by law. They cannot run deficits, so they have to deal with their own bed they lie in. Some municipalities are more courageous than others in terms of the financial approaches they follow.

With respect to the provinces, I think that varies across the country in terms of how they have responded and/or funded in support of transit. But I see this in terms of the economy of the whole country, because as I said, 80% of the people of the country live in city regions. It's probably going to hit 85% or 90% in the next 20 years.

The reality is that is where the wealth is created, by and large. Jane Jacobs—I had a slide of her up there at the beginning, that last book—once told me, “If Canada did not have strong and prosperous city regions, it would be a Third World country”, because that's where the wealth is created, that's where the money comes from. In fact, I think the senior governments retain about 92¢ of every dollar that is created in tax revenue, so 8¢ goes to the municipalities.

So I think you have a role to play, and I would say you're not there to bail anybody out. If they made their own mistakes, they have to live with them and fix them, but I'm looking at the future and the future health of the country.

Mr. Jeff Watson: I appreciate your response.

With respect to some of the core questions, if you will, around a national public transit strategy, the federal government's approach typically has been.... We have an omnibus program; the Building Canada plan has several components to it. It's about seven years long—2007 to 2014—and public transit capital funding is a component. You can use the gas tax funding. Within the Building Canada fund, the major infrastructure component, I think about 40% went to public transit capital projects.

I wasn't sure of your answer with respect to Mr. Coderre's earlier question. Is that type of an approach the right approach for the federal government to take? There's an omnibus program for every community-sized infrastructure need, but we need an additional specific fund that's related to transit.

Mr. Paul Bedford: I think the best way I can answer that is to say that frankly what's needed is a dedicated, dependable, ongoing source of funding.

Mr. Jeff Watson: How long a timeframe? Building Canada is seven years. A typical mandate might be four years. We've stretched on health care to 10 years. How far out can we legitimately go in terms of committing down the road as a federal government?

Mr. Paul Bedford: That's a question probably only you can answer, with the greatest of respect, because I simply don't know.

If you're looking at the transit file, my main point is that it doesn't do much good to provide any kind of a major program over a four- or five-year period and have it end, because you can't build these systems. You can't get them up and running. It's not sustainable.

So for transit, I would suggest there should be an ongoing, dependable source of funding over a 25-year period. That's exactly what we're looking at with Metrolinx, because otherwise you can't do this stuff.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you very much for your presentation. I think the visual aspect of it is something we should all be showing our communities. I think it really hits home. As I indicated, I'm from a rural area, and a lot of the presentation was focused on urban areas. So when it comes to first nations, when it comes to places like Chapleau that can't even get a bus service there, we know that the governments of the day did drop the ball, because the people in these communities are trying to get the services they need. And they can't get them at home, of course, so they try to travel and there aren't a lot of services. Now Chapleau does have the Budd car, but again, the timing is not really that great and it's still problematic, especially in the wintertime.

You mentioned seniors. One of the communities in my riding is Elliott Lake, but whether it's Wawa, or White River, or Manitowadge, again, there are problems there, because even when there was a bus service, it still wouldn't go in.

So I think certainly the hindsight is that, yes, we have to go down that road. There was downloading that was talked about us well. Let's face it, the downloading onto the municipalities was a result of what the federal government did as well with the lack of transfer payments and the cutbacks in some of the transfer payments at some points.

You said sooner better than later, and we're already way behind. I think we've had the discussions. There have been tons of discussions. There are tons of reports out there. Tony Martin had done a lot of work on rail and other forms of transportation.

Given the timeframe we are in right now and the importance this is going to have because we know the price of gas is high—I'm still confused as to why the price of gas is so high in Europe given the fact that they do have a really good rail transit system there—what would you like to see happen in whatever timeframe? Could you design that for me?

• (1720)

Mr. Paul Bedford: I know you've had a lot of discussions, and there are probably reports that would go to the ceiling.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Collecting dust.

Mr. Paul Bedford: I'm sure. What I would love to see within the term of this Parliament is action. I don't want you to be misled when I say we should have discussions and forums. I think because this is another kick at the can, so to speak, and we have different players as a result of the provincial elections that are taking place across the country—and who knows what will happen—and we have new municipality mayors and all the rest of it, we need to be on the same page.

That can happen fairly quickly. The concept of partnership, I guess, is what I really want to get across. All levels have a role to play in this. It has to be an ongoing permanent kind of commitment and it has to work for the small communities as well as the large. I'm going to keep coming back to this because it's something we're focusing on in the Toronto area: the public has a contribution to make in this too, in terms of some of those tools that we're going to have to embrace if we're going to be able to meet the needs of the population. So it's the partnership role.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: And I think it's not just the needs of the population, but it's communities as a whole and the tourism aspect. There are a lot of tourists who come here and can't believe we don't have a rail system as they do in Europe.

I will ask my colleague here to have the final say.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: I have a few minutes.

You said that we were behind and that other countries have taken similar action.

I would like you to speak to us about a situation that is similar to Canada's and what was done in that situation. Tell us about the experience of another country that was facing a situation similar to Canada's.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Bedford: Well, obviously, the U.S. first, because it's closest to us in terms of what you see in cities like San Francisco and in the Los Angeles example I mentioned, which is the car capital of the world, yet they're building subways galore and the citizens have voted in favour of a sales tax increase to fund the transit there. Atlanta, Seattle...about to happen in November.

For all of these kinds of things, the U.S. federal government, the states, and the municipalities, through a combination of different funding sources and tools, have in fact done reasonably well in many of these cities. Some of them are a disaster area—don't get me wrong—but I think we can look to the ones that have really done some creative stuff.

So that's one.

In terms of Europe, we've talked about it, and most people are pretty familiar with the transit systems there. If you just take London as an example, because it's obviously a huge world city, I can't imagine that place working without all those commuter rail lines, the subway networks, and the bus networks, etc. These aren't luxuries. These are things you must have to make these city regions work.

Even Sydney, Australia—I was there a couple of years ago—in terms of the system they have there and how they fund it.... There are

so many examples. Quite frankly, probably the best I've ever seen is in Tokyo, which blows your mind away, because if the train is 30 seconds late, somebody gets fired. It's unbelievable. It's precision. It's just unreal.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Albas, for final questions.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate you coming in for the presentation today.

Since we were just speaking about action, I think sometimes it's important for us to just take a step back and look at what things are already in the works. What is your reaction to the government's commitment towards a new long-term infrastructure plan as announced in our budget for 2011?

Mr. Paul Bedford: I think it's positive. It's a great start, but it's not going to solve this problem.

Mr. Dan Albas: Do you agree that discussions over transit infrastructure should take place within that context?

Mr. Paul Bedford: Possibly. I think they should take place in the context of your all-party committee, and you should in fact drill down in terms of recommending a strategy that all parties buy into, frankly, and that serves the needs of Canadians.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay.

Recognizing that there have been unprecedented levels of investment towards transit infrastructure from all orders of government in recent years, can you tell us from your perspective what you see as the gaps with respect to transit federally?

Mr. Paul Bedford: The federal government has come to the table through its infrastructure program and the gas tax, and that's more than welcome, but as I've tried to say here, in terms of the magnitude of the need, of what we have to do across the country, we need a lot more.

I think the work of your committee is going to be very important in terms of pursuing some of those other possible approaches and tools in conjunction with the provinces, the municipalities, and the people of the country.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I look forward to having that discussion with all the committee members as we go forward.

The Chair: With that, I'll thank our guests. It was a very interesting presentation and we appreciate your time.

Committee members, we are on a work week back in our constituencies next week, but we will have a calendar of the future representations that will be made before the committee over the next little while.

Mr. Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, were some of the witnesses on the list I submitted contacted?

[*English*]

What's the status of the list I provided?

The Chair: Yes, and I've actually highlighted a few more that we [English]
will be bringing in after the break.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you.

The Chair: Seeing no other activity, I'll adjourn this meeting.

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