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Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)): We'll call today's meeting to order. I'd like to thank Minister Lebel for being here, along with his staff.

Before we start, members, I want to remind the committee that we have some committee business at the end of the meeting today, including passing supplementary estimates (B). I propose that at 4:20 or thereabouts we release Minister Lebel; it will take a couple of minutes to change up for Minister Raitt, and then we'll carry on. At approximately 5:15 we'll break for committee business. Is that okay with everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: With that, once again, Minister, thanks for being here today. With no further ado, I'll turn it over to you.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It is always a pleasure and an honour to be here.

[English]

First I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chair, for your election as chair of this committee, and all committee members for their appointments. I've already had the pleasure of working with many of you on this committee in the past, and I'm looking forward to working with all of you in the coming months.

Today my officials and I are here to discuss the 2013-14 supplementary estimates (B) for the infrastructure, communities and intergovernmental affairs portfolio, and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

Joining me today from Infrastructure Canada I have the deputy minister, Louis Lévesque; the assistant deputy minister, program operations, Natasha Rascenin, and the assistant deputy minister, corporate services, Su Dazé.

Today I will provide you with an update of the work that has been done in my portfolio since the introduction of economic action plan 2013, and our plans for the coming months.

As you know, economic action plan 2013 delivered on our government's commitment to establish a new long-term infrastructure plan beyond the current Building Canada plan, which has been an enormously successful infrastructure program. Since 2006, our government has supported over 43,000 infrastructure projects in

Canada, always working as a strong partner with the provinces, territories, and municipalities, and always respecting their jurisdiction. This project has created jobs, generated economic growth, and contributed to a higher quality of life for all Canadians.

[Translation]

No other government in Canadian history has invested more in Canada's infrastructure than our Conservative government, and I am very proud of the results.

As a direct result of our significant and sustained increases in federal infrastructure investments since we took office, the average age of public infrastructure in Canada has declined from a peak of 17 years in 2004 to 14.4 years in 2011. The average age of Canada's core public infrastructure is now lower than the average of 15.4 years over the period from 1961 to 2011.

This demonstrates that our infrastructure investments are making a real difference in communities across Canada.

[English]

We are continuing to do more. The economic action plan of 2013 announced that our government will continue making record investments in Canada's infrastructure. We will invest a total of \$70 billion over the next ten years in federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal infrastructure across Canada. This is the longest and largest federal investment in job-creating infrastructure in Canadian history.

The largest portion of this investment is the \$53 billion new Building Canada plan, which will support provincial, territorial, and municipal infrastructure through three funds: the community improvement fund, which includes an indexed gas tax fund, and the GST rebate for municipalities. Together this initiative represents \$32.2 billion for municipalities over ten years.

The new Building Canada fund will provide \$14 billion over ten years through two components. The first is the national infrastructure component, a \$4 billion merit-based envelope, and the second is a provincial-territorial infrastructure component, which will provide \$10 billion in allocated funding for each province and territory in our federation.

Finally, the P3 Canada fund has been renewed with \$1.25 billion over five years. This fund will continue to be administered by PPP Canada.

•(1535)

[*Translation*]

The new Building Canada plan reflects what we heard through extensive consultations with our partners, the provinces, territories, municipalities and industry, as we built this historic infrastructure plan. Close to 700 partners and stakeholders provided input through round tables, meetings and written submissions.

As we work on developing the outstanding parameters for the new Building Canada Fund, our existing programs will continue to provide funding to infrastructure projects across the country. This represents \$6 billion that will continue to flow to projects beyond 2014-15. I am talking about projects such as the following: the St. Catharines Art Centre in Ontario; the Toronto-York-Spadina Subway Extension; the upgrades to drinking water plans in Lévis, Quebec; and the construction of a truck bypass on Highway 39 in Estevan, Saskatchewan.

Work is also underway to sign new agreements with the provinces and territories to renew the now-permanent gas tax fund. These agreements are ready for signature now and will ensure that the \$2 billion in funding scheduled for 2014-15 can be transferred to municipalities, so they can continue to use this predictable funding for their local infrastructure priorities.

[*English*]

I would like to remind the committee members that it's our Conservative government that has extended, doubled, indexed, and legislated the gas tax fund as a permanent program. This significant improvement will see Canada's gas tax fund grow by 2% per year going forward, which means an additional \$1.8 billion for municipalities over the next decade.

We are also adding more flexibility for municipalities under the renewed gas tax fund by expanding the number of eligible project categories. In addition to the current eligible categories, which are public transit, waste water, water and solid waste infrastructure, community energy systems, local roads and bridges, and capacity building, starting in 2014 there will be new eligible categories: highways, local and regional airports, short-line rail, short-sea shipping, disaster mitigation, broadband and connectivity, brown-field redevelopment, culture, tourism, and sport and recreation. This means significant new flexibility for municipalities to use their federal gas tax fund allocations to invest in their local priorities.

I have said on several occasions, and will repeat again today, that provinces, territories, and municipalities can start planning for new projects now. We have always worked closely with provinces, territories, and municipalities to support their infrastructure priorities and we will continue to do so.

The new Building Canada plan will continue to provide meaningful benefits for Canadians in every region of the country. As I said in the House, the parameters for the new Building Canada fund are currently under development. We will have the new plan in place to ensure that we do not miss a construction season next year.

[*Translation*]

Since I am here with you today, I would like to take this opportunity to review the commitment and the effort made by our

government to build the new bridge over the St. Lawrence and, of course, the maintenance of the Champlain Bridge. As you know, the Champlain Bridge is one of the busiest bridges in Canada. Over and above its role as a major commercial corridor, it is part of the daily commute for thousands of users.

I don't want to dwell on the past, but one fact must be faced. The reason we are now in the situation where the bridge must be replaced without delay is that the previous government was extremely negligent with regard to the funding and maintenance required to preserve the Champlain Bridge. Although a number of ministers from the former government came from the Montreal region, oddly enough, a former mayor from Roberval is now working on this file.

Unfortunately, there is no magic formula to erase past mistakes, but our government is pulling out all the stops in terms of the effort and budget required to remedy the situation as quickly as possible.

At last Friday's press conference, we categorically stated that we would accelerate the commissioning of the new bridge and that a new schedule would be published within the next few weeks. We also held a press conference, on October 2, to launch the construction process of the Nuns' Island causeway. We disseminate information regularly.

The safety of users is a key priority for our government. Therefore, we should keep in mind all the efforts made to maintain the Champlain Bridge. We have invested \$380 million for the maintenance of the structure. In addition, we have already announced we will make the necessary additional funding available to the Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated organization to carry out the work recommended in the Buckland & Taylor report, which was received in late September.

As I often say, a project of this size calls for team work. That is why we are working closely with our partners. Since the start of the project, we have been looking at ways to shorten the original time frame, and we are reaching this objective. You may rest assured that our government is determined to deliver a new, reliable and safe bridge as quickly as possible.

I would also like to take a few minutes to speak about the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. Our advisors provide direct assistance through our 12 business offices to SMEs, economic development stakeholders and organizations by offering them guidance and financial support. Announced in Budget 2012, the Community Infrastructure Improvement Fund, or CIIF, is another fine example of a national initiative launched by our government across Canada. The fund, with a budget of \$150 million, supports the rehabilitation and improvement—including the expansion—of existing community infrastructure, such as community centres, sports fields, recreational trails, and so on.

Across the country, this program was a great success with over 6,500 applications, totalling more than \$1 billion in requested funding. As of September 18, over \$150 million has been approved for 1,800 projects. In Quebec, there are 311 approved projects for potential funding totalling \$33.5 million.

Last June, we launched the Canadian Initiative for the Economic Diversification of Communities Reliant on Chrysotile. I want to remind you that the current Quebec government said that it would no longer provide support for the chrysotile asbestos industry. That is when we announced the creation of an initiative that allocates up to \$50 million over seven years to support the economic transition of the Appalaches and Les Sources RCMs affected by the decline of the chrysotile asbestos industry. We are working with economic stakeholders to ensure delivery of this initiative. To date, numerous meetings have already taken place to discuss concrete projects.

Seventeen days after the Lac-Mégantic catastrophe, given the lack of programs for that sector—as that was not a natural catastrophe—we announced \$60 million in funding in aid of the assistance and rehabilitation efforts in Lac-Mégantic. Of course, our thoughts and prayers are with the families that lost loved ones to this tragic accident. The Conservative government will be there to help the people of Lac-Mégantic, as we have always said. We are currently working on an agreement with the Marois government for aid beyond the first \$60 million.

• (1540)

[English]

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, I would like to thank you for offering me the opportunity to speak to you about the important work that Infrastructure Canada, Transport Canada, and the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec are doing for the country. Thank you for your time. My officials and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Minister.

We'll move right into questioning.

Ms. Chow, you have seven minutes.

Just as a reminder, because our meeting is cut up into two one-hour segments, or slightly less, I'm going to be strict on the seven minutes with everyone today.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Minister.

I've looked at the figures and I note that despite the \$171 billion infrastructure deficit in Canada, there will be a cut of \$5.8 billion over the next five years. This is the figure that came from the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I was hoping to see an increase rather than a decrease in this funding. However, that being said, there's still some money here.

There are only five months left for the municipalities to submit applications to meet the deadline for the construction season, which is April 1. How would you go about negotiating agreements with the provinces and designing the program? How are you going to be able to meet this deadline? The municipalities need to start planning now,

since they have to apply on April 1. They have to start planning their projects and they need to know the criteria and some of the areas that you will be considering. How would you expect this to occur, since the time is so tight?

• (1545)

Hon. Denis Lebel: I want to thank you for the question.

First of all, there is no cut. There is no cut. As you know, we'll balance the budget. The 10-year infrastructure plan, the new plan, will be there, and it will be there to support municipalities, provinces, and territories.

As you know, la Fédération canadienne des municipalités has been a partner since the beginning. They know exactly where we are, and we have discussions with them frequently. On November 5 we sent the new agreement for the gas tax fund renewal to the provinces and territories. They already have it in their hands. We're hearing all of the municipal associations across the country ask the provinces and territories to sign it as soon as they can. They've had it in their hands for two weeks.

We have had some new categories, for sure, but the rest is close to the agreement we had in the past. We hope they will sign it quickly. You and I have been involved in municipal politics. It's time for the budget now. They know; they just have to plan it and ask the province to support it. The budget will be done in municipalities from now to the beginning of December. They have time to do it. Now we enjoin the provinces to sign that as soon as they can, respecting the fact that we want to have this money available for the Canadian population for the next construction season.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Since there's no design that is public about this new program, how did the City of Toronto manage to get over \$600 million for the subway? What application process did they go through? The application process won't come until April 1, so how did they manage to get approval? Other municipalities are asking how they got the approval. The application forms are not out yet. The program is not yet designed.

Is this funding confirmed, or is it that maybe if it fits later on, on April 1, and once we see the application, perhaps they will get the funding? Is it real or not?

Hon. Denis Lebel: No, it's real. It's real, but like we said when the announcements were made, the provincial-territorial component of the Building Canada plan will have money reserved for Ontario, as we will have for other provinces. If they decide that's a priority, this project, for the municipality and the province, at that time we will do it—if that's their own priority. We respect their jurisdictions, municipal and provincial, and if they prioritize that, we will do it. But if they don't, that will be their choice. That's why we have set aside this amount of money. When the total amount will be sent to the province, we will reserve this amount of money. But that has to be a priority for them, both the municipality and the province.

I repeat exactly the same message. Quebec is asking for a new train on the new bridge. If they want to reserve that amount of money, they can do it right now. For the Building Canada infrastructure and national economic development, that's another thing. We can't reserve that now because that will be done on merit. But for this part of the envelope, we can reserve it if it's their own priority.

Ms. Olivia Chow: So the provinces and the municipalities, no matter which province or which municipality, will have to determine that project A is their top priority and B is their second priority. Therefore, they will get their funding accordingly, if it's their top priority. In order for the City of Toronto, for example, in Ontario, to achieve the subway funding, they will need to put it as a top priority in order to qualify for funding. Am I correct in that?

• (1550)

Hon. Denis Lebel: The top or one of their priorities.

Ms. Olivia Chow: One of their top priorities.

Hon. Denis Lebel: If that fits in their envelope, they will have an amount of money. But they can't expect more than this envelope.

Ms. Olivia Chow: No, you can't do that.

Hon. Denis Lebel: But if it's their priority and it's in the envelope and they want to have it—

Ms. Olivia Chow: Speaking about budget envelopes, I know that rural municipalities are very concerned. They want, and New Democrats also want, to see a dedicated small communities component so that their funding is protected, so that they won't get crowded out by big projects that are from big urban centres, because those are billions of dollars.

Will there be a dedicated small communities component so that rural Canada will get their fair share of funding?

Hon. Denis Lebel: I've been the mayor of a small city of 10,000 people. We never had before...our government made the gas tax fund permanent, with a predictable amount of money year after year. Now the small municipalities in the country can plan for 10 years to come because they know how much money they will have in the new Building Canada plan. Large cities want to have their plan, as do small and mid-sized cities, too.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'm not talking about the gas tax. I'm talking about the Building Canada fund, the grants program.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Yes. First of all, the tax fund goes to municipalities that set their own priorities. The other part of the program goes with the provinces and territories.

Ms. Olivia Chow: So will there be a dedicated small community component on the grants side?

Hon. Denis Lebel: We work with the provinces and territories, and in this part of the plan, in Building Canada, if you split the gas tax fund and what goes directly to municipalities, what's left.... The parameters are not public now; we're working on that.

The Chair: Okay, thank you. Your time has expired.

Mr. McGuinty, you have seven minutes.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Minister.

Minister, last Tuesday, November 12, a routine inspection revealed a 2 mm crack on the Champlain Bridge's concrete girders. One of the three lanes in the south shore direction was immediately closed and will reopen in only about four weeks. That will cause major traffic congestion issues for the city of Montreal.

January 2014 will mark eight years of your government being in power. Ministerial briefing notes indicate that the government has known since 2006 that the Champlain Bridge had serious issues. Those issues were so serious that, a week before the 2011 electoral campaign, your government sent Senator Larry Smith to make an announcement on the subject. Mr. Smith was appointed to the Senate three days before declaring that he would run as a Conservative candidate in his riding. His comments are still posted on your website. They concern investments and the importance of making progress in the Champlain Bridge file.

I have a number of questions to ask you for the benefit of those who are following this issue. I would like you to write them down and answer them at your convenience.

First, why will the light rail system planned for the bridge only be ready at the same time as the new bridge, which, unless I am mistaken, is to be completed by 2021?

Second, you said that there would be no bridge without a toll. Could you provide the committee and Canadians with the analyses conducted on the potential distributional effects, such as increased traffic on the other non-toll bridges? Have such analyses been carried out?

Finally, why did the government award a contract of over \$15 million to a sole-source provider that is not very familiar with the Champlain Bridge file?

I think that Canadians deserve answers to these important questions.

Hon. Denis Lebel: The issues with the bridge did not come to light in 2006, but much earlier. The Liberal government was then in office, and some key ministers were from the Montreal region, but no one did anything.

Since we took office, we have invested \$380 million to maintain the current bridge, and we are hard at work on building a new bridge. It is very important to us to respect the jurisdictions in this file. The province has jurisdiction over public transportation and is supposed to make decisions regarding the light rail.

I want to come back to the infrastructure envelope, which was discussed in the previous question. In the last envelope of the Building Canada Fund, your own province of Ontario decided to invest over 70% of the funding in public transportation, while that figure was 9% for Quebec. I am not questioning the choice made by your province, but you cannot have your cake and eat it too. If the province decides to build roads with that money, it will not implement any public transportation initiatives. Any future decisions on public transportation are the responsibility of the province of Quebec, which will be in charge of building the new train's corridor.

We are committed to building the tracks for the new light rail that the province chose. The new bridge will have the railway tracks the train needs. As for the actual train and the company that will build it, as well as the location of stations, the Government of Quebec is responsible for making the relevant decisions. So if the train is not delivered when the bridge is ready, that will have to do with the Government of Quebec, and not the federal government.

• (1555)

Mr. David McGuinty: So it's Quebec's fault.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Public transportation comes under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec. Consequently, the province will be responsible for any delays in the light rail project. I am not saying there will be any delays, but we will see. This is Quebec's file. The province is responsible for carrying out the project.

To us, it is clear that, without a toll, there will be no bridge.

[English]

It's important to remember that that's the only place in the province where the country owns the bridge.

[Translation]

We own interprovincial bridges in other parts of the country.

[English]

Between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and between Gatineau and Ottawa, between two provinces—those are the only places in the country.

[Translation]

We own 100% of the Jacques Cartier and Champlain bridges, and we own 50% of the Mercier Bridge, with the other half belonging to the Government of Quebec.

At the same time, we are carrying out another project—the Windsor-Detroit bridge. That bridge will also have a toll. As in the greater Montreal region, the users will have to pay to use the new bridge. We think that is necessary. We also have to work on reducing the costs for Canadian taxpayers, who will pay for part of the bridge through the application of the user-pay principle. The Prime Minister reiterated this on Friday.

As for the ARUP firm, I must first point out that the contract was awarded to it by Public Works and Government Services Canada because the firm was already working on the business plan of the project for the new bridge on the St. Lawrence. You talked about studies on tolls. I am talking about ARUP because I want to discuss the business plan. The next important stage for us in the new bridge on the St. Lawrence file is receiving the business plan, which will lay out various toll scenarios. That means that 13 different architecture scenarios for the bridge will have been analyzed. Once we receive the business plan, the studies on tolls will be analyzed, and we will be able to decide how to work going forward.

The ARUP firm, which has been hired, is a partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers, which is developing the business plan. The firm has been working on this file with PricewaterhouseCoopers from the beginning. It was also involved in Quebec's Highway 30 project, which was a success and cost over \$1 billion. People are

claiming that ARUP was hired without any experience. However, the firm did work on a road project worth over \$1 billion. This is a company with a strong international reputation for its work on bridges around the world. It is incorrect to say that the firm is not familiar with bridges.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to Mr. Braid for seven minutes.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister, and your officials here at committee today. We certainly appreciate you devoting some of your time and providing us with an update from your department.

Minister, in your presentation you spoke a little bit about the various federal government programs to support infrastructure. In 2007, of course, our government established the original Building Canada fund. That fund is in its final number of months at this point, as we speak. In the meantime, in our most recent budget economic action plan of 2013, we renewed the Building Canada fund, now the longest and largest infrastructure fund in Canadian history, with over \$50 billion.

In developing that renewed Building Canada fund, Mr. Minister, I presume that significant consultations must have taken place, consultations with important stakeholders, with provinces, with municipalities. Could you update us on the various consultations that did take place and how they contributed to the development of our renewed Building Canada fund.

• (1600)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you.

Since the beginning of the process to renew the Building Canada plan, we have held 13 round tables all across the country. More than 700 partners, stakeholders, have been involved in the process for renewal. In any region we have visited, at all of these meetings, la Fédération canadienne des municipalités has been present, and they were very happy with what we had announced for the new Building Canada plan.

We held meetings with the private sector because it was important for us to hear their ideas, or their point of view, on the new Building Canada plan. These consultations have been very successful, and since the announcement of the new Building Canada plan in the last budget, all of these stakeholders have been happy and proud of what we have done together. We will continue to work with them. They are still involved with us. We don't think that in Ottawa we have all the solutions for what is good for the citizens of a city or a region of this country. We respect the jurisdictions, and that's the way we want to continue to work.

Mr. Peter Braid: The important issue of public transit has come up today. We hear from provinces and municipalities that public transit is a priority for them, but there are many opportunities for the federal government, through our infrastructure programs, to help provinces and municipalities meet that public transit priority.

Could you speak to that, Minister?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Yes. This government has invested over \$5 billion in public transit, while totally respecting regional and local authorities. As I said before, it's very important for us to respect the fact that a city council somewhere in the country is the best place to find solutions for a city. Here in Ottawa, we have no solutions for Vancouver, Toronto, or any other city that has a public transit system.

We want to continue to work on that. Often we hear national transit programs or.... What they want is more money, and now they will have more money to do that.

Public transit is eligible in all four categories of the Building Canada fund. If a city decides to do that...some municipalities and, I have to be honest, most of the big cities in this country have invested all of their money from the gas tax fund in public transit. That's their decision, and we have supported that. We know public transit is very important for traffic and for the economy of the country.

We have been a great partner. We will continue to be, but we will never make decisions on behalf of the people who were elected by the population of a city—their city council.

Mr. Peter Braid: That's wonderful. Thank you.

To clarify an earlier point, the federal government, through the Building Canada plan, for example, or the gas tax fund, will only support a public transit project if both the municipality and the province have also identified it as a priority, whether it's a subway extension in Toronto, light rapid transit in the Waterloo region, or another transit system in another part of the country. The federal government will be there as a full partner if the province and the municipality deem it a priority. Is that correct?

Hon. Denis Lebel: Absolutely. You're right. That's what we have done in the past, and we want to continue the parameters of the Building Canada plan. We're working on the second part before the gas tax fund. We will continue to work on that. First of all, that's the choice of the municipality and the province.

Mr. Peter Braid: That's great.

Mr. Minister, I know you have been very busy with the Champlain Bridge in Montreal, including last week.

[*Translation*]

I would like to ask you a question in French about the Champlain Bridge.

You clearly indicated that the goal was to deliver the new bridge as quickly as possible. Since then, a number of actions have been taken to accelerate the building of the new bridge. Could you elaborate on what has been done to accelerate the construction?

•(1605)

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you for the question. This is related to the answer I gave earlier to our Liberal Party colleague.

When Public Works and Government Services Canada had to award the \$15-million contract, it chose efficiency by selecting the ARUP firm in order to accelerate the process. That firm was already very familiar with the file of the new bridge. When we announced, on October 2, the building of the Nuns' Island causeway, we also

published an engineering report. We regularly request engineering reports to get an idea of how things are going.

As for the state of the bridge, the Buckland & Taylor report asked for even more commitments, both for preserving the current bridge and for reviewing the time frames for the new bridge. Over the next few weeks, we will publish a new schedule. We are working very hard to be ready as soon as possible and, of course, to preserve the current bridge. However, public safety is of the utmost importance for our government and for the Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated corporation.

That 2 mm crack was found at 3 a.m. during one of the nightly inspections, before the morning traffic on the bridge. The fact that the work is being done is reassuring for people. Clearly, a crack is not reassuring, but we are doing what needs to be done. That shows how serious we are about maintaining the Champlain Bridge. We have 100 to 200 people working on the current bridge daily. We are making sure that the bridge is safe when it is open, of course, and we will build the new bridge with great diligence, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired, Mr. Braid.

We'll now move to Mr. Komarnicki for seven minutes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister, to this committee.

I know you mentioned the numerous infrastructure programs that have taken place across the country, and I can say to you that in my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain a number of projects have been well received by municipalities. Of course, there is always great need in the infrastructure area, and we've had two major projects in my city with respect to the gas tax fund. In talking to the city manager and the mayor, I know their particular issue was one of flexibility with respect to how they might apply the fund and where they might apply it. Generally, I can say the municipalities throughout the constituency received what we've done with respect to the gas tax very well, not only the doubling of it, the indexing of it, but the extension of it.

One of the factors they've talked to me about is the flexibility they may have to do what they need to do to grow their communities. Infrastructure is always a significant part of that.

In talking to the stakeholders—and you said you've talked to many of them—what were their views with respect to the options that might be available to them concerning the gas tax refund?

Hon. Denis Lebel: That's why we have added new categories to the gas tax fund, but we will still continue to think that they have to face.... Before the grand opening of an arena, we have to face a water problem. That's part of what we are, but we have added new categories. That's why, in addition to the current eligible categories, which are public transit, waste water, water and solid waste, infrastructure, community energy systems, local roads and bridges, and capacity building, we have added highways, local and regional airports, short-line rail, short-sea shipping, disaster mitigation, broadband connectivity, brownfield redevelopment, culture, tourism, and sports and recreation. That's because municipalities and stakeholders have asked for it, and we will continue to follow that very carefully.

But we are working with the provinces. When this plan started in 2006-07, I was involved in municipal politics. When they asked us if we had a plan for our infrastructure, this was okay for my city, but some others didn't know where their pipes were. Now we are a lot better than we were. It's not only the age of the infrastructure, but the knowledge of our infrastructure is a lot better. With the addition of these categories, I'm sure municipalities and stakeholders will be very happy.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There's no doubt that this extension will be well received. I noticed in my riding we have short-line rails that are looking for funding, regional airports, local airports, and highways. They're all big ticket items.

I recently met with the Town of Midale and a number of municipalities, and they were looking at putting together a regional package, potentially for application, to provide water from one source for each of these individual municipalities. They thought if they could get together and make an application to deal with each of the communities, it would be cost-efficient, and it would certainly provide something the city needs to grow. I take it that I can safely tell them that it's a category that would be under consideration with respect to the gas tax fund, and I would suspect there would be categories along that line in the other infrastructure programs you have in mind, particularly for smaller communities.

●(1610)

Hon. Denis Lebel: It's something we're seeing more and more, but as I said at the beginning, we have to respect the jurisdiction. I've answered this before—during the entire process we met many stakeholders—but it depends on the province. In certain provinces, to build this new plan we have to discuss it with the municipal affairs minister, the transport minister, the infrastructure minister, and the intergovernmental affairs minister.

That said, we have worked with many ministers in many provinces. We work with provinces to respect their jurisdiction, but municipalities first have to answer, independent of provinces and territories. When we see some municipalities working together for a waste water plan, that's mainly under the original provincial jurisdiction, but we are good partners and we want to continue to be.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I understand you are awaiting the execution of an agreement with the provinces and territories to put into effect some of the things we've talked about, but I also understand that in the course of time, the communities can expect the program will be defined and applications will be put in place so they can deal with

the broader applications outside the gas tax fund with respect to the other components of the infrastructure program. Is that correct?

Hon. Denis Lebel: As I said, all of the gas tax program agreements were sent to the provinces November 5. We hope to have some signatures very soon.

For the parameters of the rest of the Building Canada plan, we have said that we will work to ensure that the municipalities and provinces don't miss the construction season. We will finalize these parameters soon, and after that we will have to sign these agreements with provinces and territories. We hope that will be done in the same way, because they want to have their money, and we want to give them their money, for projects for the Canadian population.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you, Minister.

I see there was mention of the construction of a truck bypass on highway 39 in Estevan, Saskatchewan, which is my community. I know they're anxiously awaiting that construction. I'm happy to see that those funds are reprofiled for future construction, which I am assured will commence next year.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: There's one minute left.

Hon. Denis Lebel: May I make a comment?

We have not cut moneys. It's the provinces and the territories that send us the invoices, the bills, and we pay them. Sometimes if they have a delay in a project...we have not cancelled any project because of the date; we have delayed it. That is the only thing we have done. We have a cash management process to respect in the budget. That's why we have moneys that have been reprofiled, but we have not cancelled any projects because of that.

That's why we have to pay. If a province does not send us the bill, we can't pay it. That's the way it works. When we receive a bill, we pay it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lévesque, did you want to add anything?

[*English*]

Mr. Louis Lévesque (Deputy Minister, Department of Transport): The issue that continually comes up with the appropriations for infrastructure is exactly as the minister has described. We have to have enough appropriations in a given year. Should the claims come from the recipients...very often, because of either delays in work or claims that do not come in, these appropriations lapse. But the amounts are not lost. Basically that's what we do in the supplementary estimates. We ask for them to be reinstated, and now that we expect the claims to be coming, we have the authorities to make the payments.

The Chair: Thank you. We're out of time. Sorry.

We now move to Mr. Mai,

Because we're running out of time here, I'm going to go to one question for Mr. Mai and then one more question over here.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): You said I had five minutes.

The Chair: In a normal situation, Mr. Mai, with a two-hour meeting.... This is broken into two segments. You're going to get one question. It's the way it's always done.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai: Thank you for joining us today, Minister.

My question covers a number of aspects.

You are talking about the September 26, 2013 Buckland & Taylor report, which unfortunately did not find any issues with the girder. However, I will quote the following passage from the report:

Buckland & Taylor Ltd. (B&T) did not perform on-site inspection or detailed review of components other than the approach span edge girders [...] Detailed structural analysis and conclusions were developed based on the documents provided by PJCCI representing the condition of the structure.

Will you publish all the documents provided by the Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated corporation?

We do have a concern when it comes to the ARUP firm you mentioned. A first \$15-million contract was awarded without a call for tenders. You said that this was an emergency. Will you use the emergency excuse again, even though you have been dragging your feet in this file?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Mai, that's actually two questions, so let the minister respond to them, please.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel: We had another meeting last Friday. Since the beginning of the new bridge on the St. Lawrence project, 60 meetings have been held between Transport Canada and Government of Quebec representatives. Another 50 meetings have been held with municipal representatives and 50 meetings with various partners.

In your second question, you say that this is a first contract, but ARUP was hired to respond to a contract that had already been awarded to Buckland & Taylor. Your statement contains many wrong elements. It is totally wrong to say that this is a first contract, since \$380 billion has been invested. So contracts had to be awarded at some point.

We want to shorten the timeframes. The Buckland & Taylor report includes certain requests. Additional amounts of \$400 million to \$500 million will have to be invested to maintain the current bridge until the new bridge is ready. I hope that you will vote in favour of this measure, this time. A number of contracts have been awarded, and ARUP was hired because the firm was already involved in the file, as it was a stakeholder in the business plan following its engagement with PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Mr. Hoang Mai: That is one of our concerns.

Hon. Denis Lebel: This firm has done work. It is established around the world and has a great deal of experience in bridge building. Everything was done in compliance with the rules of

Public Works and Government Services Canada. We will continue to ensure that each step is followed. Public safety is of the utmost importance to us.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Toet, you can have one question.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister for being with us. It's always great to have you.

With regard to the supplementary estimates, I think it's very important to note that our government has been focused on deficit reduction. We want to bring our deficit under control and make sure we have a zero deficit going forward. Notwithstanding that, maybe you can confirm to me that we're seeing a net increase in the Infrastructure Canada supplementary estimates (B). I think that's a really good news story. It's showing Canadians we are very much focused on infrastructure renewal.

In your introductory remarks you mentioned a lowering of the age of infrastructure from 17 to 14.4 years, outstripping the average age from 1961 to 2011, so we're seeing a great gain there.

I wonder whether you could confirm that is indeed the case, that we are seeing a net increase.

Hon. Denis Lebel: That's the case, and given the fact that we will continue to support it, I'm sure the numbers will be better some years from now. That's exactly what we have done. We will balance the budget and we will continue to support municipalities, provinces, and territories in this renewal. In the end, infrastructure is money, it's jobs, and it's possible to grow the economy because this infrastructure brings more investment.

The Chair: Thank you very much for being here, Mr. Minister.

I'll allow one minute if you have any additional comments for the committee. The time is yours, if you want it.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have only to tell you that we want to continue to work with your committee; the Canadian people expect us to do good things for them. We did with the infrastructure plan, and that's what we will continue to do.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

We really took that seriously, Mr. Chair. I was appointed to the Department of Transport in May 2011. We announced the building of a new bridge on the St. Lawrence 140 days later. We are making an effort to turn that new bridge into an economic tool. Had that decision been politically motivated, we might have announced it during the 2011 electoral campaign, but that's not what we did.

I hope you will give us credit for getting the work done, making sure that the bridge is safe, installing sensors and monitoring the situation professionally. I hope that you will not frighten Canadians in order to win votes. We are doing a good job of ensuring public safety.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks again, Mr. Minister, and thanks as well to Ms. Dazé, Ms. Rascanin, and Mr. Lévesque for being here.

We are going to suspend for a couple of minutes to allow Minister Lebel to leave the table and Minister Raitt to come.

• (1620) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1625)

The Chair: We'll call our meeting back to order.

Welcome, Minister Raitt. Thanks very much for coming.

Mr. Lévesque, Ms. Borges, and Mr. Morency, thanks to all of you.

With no further ado, I'll turn it over to you, Minister.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport): Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much for inviting me today to meet with you and your committee members. I'm looking forward to your counsel and support as committee members as I deliver my duties in my new portfolio.

It is the first time that I am before you as the Minister of Transport today. I'm really happy to be here to speak to our department's supplementary estimates (B). We are seeking \$12.9 million in new funding for Transport Canada. My officials and I will be happy to go into detail on that matter later, explaining the reasons for this request and outlining how the tax dollars will be put to work for the benefit of Canadians.

But while I've come to talk about budget matters, my real mission today is to reinforce the necessity of and my personal commitment to, and of course our government's unwavering commitment to, safe transportation in the country. A good example of our commitment to this is Bill C-3, which is called the Safeguarding Canada's Seas and Skies Act, tabled in Parliament last month as part of our government's comprehensive measures to establish a world-class tanker safety system here in Canada. As a trading nation, Mr. Chair, Canada depends heavily on marine shipping for economic growth, for jobs and long-term prosperity. The safe navigation of oil tankers is a critical element in our efforts to increase trade, because that generates jobs and that generates growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians. The Safeguarding Canada's Seas and Skies Act reinforces this commitment to protecting Canada's coast and shores by ensuring the safe and reliable transport of Canada's natural resources. Bill C-3 amends existing acts and introduces one new piece of legislation.

The proposed amendments to the Marine Liability Act will actually help fill a critical gap in the current liability and compensation regime. They would implement into Canadian law a new international convention that covers incidents involving the release of hazardous and noxious substances from ships. This can include substances like chemicals, refined oil products, liquefied natural gas—those things that are carried in bulk or in containers in the marine transport system. The convention would make ship-owners strictly liable for damages, including any impacts of pollution incidents, and would create a new international compensation fund. The total compensation would be up to approximately \$400 million for any single incident. Canada has actually been

instrumental in the development of this convention at the International Maritime Organization.

Related changes to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, would strengthen the current requirements for spill prevention and preparedness at oil handling facilities. They would also increase Transport Canada's oversight and enforcement capacity, as well as enhance Canada's response to oil spill incidents. Among other things, the changes would extend the use of administrative monetary penalties for pollution prevention and response. This is an additional enforcement and compliance tool that actually allows marine inspectors, who are the ones on the front lines, to issue fines in cases where the Canada Shipping Act is violated.

Mr. Chair, I can assure you that safe navigation of oil tankers is our priority. Preventing spills through strict regulation and enforcement and being prepared for spills will ensure that we are on the right path. We've implemented new safety measures for pipelines and tankers and tough new rules to punish polluters. I would remind committee members that last March our government announced that we are boosting the number of inspections of all foreign tankers. We're increasing the funding for the national aerial surveillance program to keep a watchful eye on tankers moving through Canadian waters. We've also expanded scientific research on non-conventional petroleum products. We've also ensured that a system of aids to navigation be installed and maintained. These are buoys, lights, markers—devices that actually warn of obstructions and mark the location of the preferred shipping routes.

Additionally, Mr. Chair, our government announced the creation of a tanker safety expert panel to review Canada's current tanker safety system. The panel met with more than 70 stakeholders to discuss tanker safety, and I thank the committee for all its work. Pursuant to its mandate, which was announced in March, I have received the report as of November 15 and officials are reviewing it. When the report has been translated into both official languages, we will release it publicly.

Since I became minister in July, I have personally met with first nations and municipalities as well to discuss our government's actions on tanker safety.

If you take all of these together, with meetings and measures we will help to make oil tanker passage safe, environmentally responsible, and, more importantly, world class.

•(1630)

Mr. Chair, if I may, the other issue I want to touch on before taking questions from the committee is the action we've taken on the transportation of dangerous goods and rail safety. We're going to take a similar approach to that of world-class tanker safety initiatives on the marine side, developing and focusing on prevention, response, and liability. As the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic and other recent derailments have made clear, there is no higher priority than ensuring the safety of Canadian citizens, and that's a responsibility I know we in this room all take very seriously.

In the immediate aftermath of Lac-Mégantic, I issued an emergency directive to railway companies under the Railway Safety Act, with six mandatory actions. More importantly, we also issued a ministerial order obligating rail companies to develop rules that comply with these requirements on a permanent basis. As well, I directed Transport Canada officials to accelerate the development and implementation of regulations that reflect our recent amendments to the Railway Safety Act. But, Mr. Chair, we're not stopping there. We recognize and we know that the growth in the volume of dangerous goods moving by rail across the country shows that it's imperative that we strengthen the safety culture in Canada's rail transportation system. And that's what we pledged to do in the Speech from the Throne. We're going to wait for the results of the investigation into Lac-Mégantic and the other incidents, but we are taking targeted action to further increase the safety of the transportation of dangerous goods.

In October I announced a protective direction requiring parties importing crude oil or offering it for transport to have conducted, or have to conduct, classification testing of crude oil. They need to make these test results available to Transport Canada upon request, and they have to update their safety data sheets and immediately provide them to the department's Canadian Transport Emergency Centre.

The Speech from the Throne also signalled that we will require shippers and railway companies to carry additional insurance. As efforts to clean up and rebuild Lac-Mégantic demonstrate, railway companies and shippers have to be capable of bearing the costs of their accidents. This is why the government will require shippers and railways to carry sufficient insurance so they can be held accountable.

Last month I met with the Advisory Council on Railway Safety to underscore the importance of industry and government working together to ensure a safe rail transportation system. In a few days I'll also be meeting with the Transportation of Dangerous Goods General Policy Advisory Council, seeking its input into actions that we can take to improve public safety when dangerous goods are being transported.

As I heard at the September meeting of the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation, municipal and provincial governments are calling for even stronger rail safety measures. They also want improved information sharing with communities and local first responders, and we're examining whether additional steps can be taken to address their concerns right now.

But today, Mr. Chairman, I am turning to your committee and I'm looking for help. I'm hoping I can count on this committee to undertake a safety review of Canada's transportation system. I'm most interested in the transportation of dangerous goods, or TDG for short, in all major parts of Canada's transportation system. It doesn't matter whether commodities are being moved on the ground, in the air, or on the high seas; we want to make sure that these things are moved safely.

I welcome the advice of your members about what more we should be doing, whether issuing regular progress reports on our targeted actions, strengthening regulations, or imposing stricter penalties for failure to meet high safety standards. Specifically, I'm seeking answers to the following question: what additional measures could be taken to strengthen the transportation of dangerous goods safety across all modes of transportation?

Mr. Chair, I'd also welcome your committee's advice regarding stronger safety management systems across all transportation modes. Our government is committed to safe and secure transportation, and a safe and secure transportation system is vital to the well-being of our citizens. It's equally essential to ensuring the success and continued growth of these crucial sectors of the Canadian economy.

Over the past decade, Transport Canada has introduced safety management systems precisely to advance these goals. I would like your members to examine the progress being made by answering the following questions: What is the current state of SMS implementation in all modes of transportation? Has the implementation of SMS improved the safety of our transportation regime? As well, what additional measures could be taken to increase the adoption and improve the integration of SMS in air, marine, and rail transportation?

•(1635)

I do recommend that to answer these questions fully you meet with industry and government stakeholders to get their perspectives and their advice. I encourage you to look at all sides of the issue and to reassure Canadians that their health and safety is of utmost importance.

I would hope that your study could provide an interim report to me by the summer of 2014.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, each of these targeted actions, coupled with the legislative improvements I have highlighted, demonstrate that our government recognizes the importance of a safe and a responsible transportation system. We know that it's crucial to the welfare of citizens and communities across the country and to Canada's economic well-being, and we're committed to ensuring that all responsible parties understand and abide by their responsibilities for the transportation of dangerous goods at every step in the process, from origin to destination and every point in between.

The areas I've outlined today underscore our government's commitment to protecting the public while supporting long-term economic growth, jobs, and prosperity. They also reinforce the necessity of adequate funding to advance this ambitious agenda, the topic of today's discussions.

I welcome your questions or comments about any aspect of my presentation. Thank you very much for your attention.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Minister.

I just want to point out that both the minister and I were in Lac-Mégantic this summer, just days after the minister was appointed to her new role. I think she would agree with me, based on her comments, that Lac-Mégantic is something we sure never want to happen again, if it's at all avoidable. It was a real tragedy, but to see it with our own eyes....

With no further ado, I will turn it over to Ms. Chow for seven minutes. I understand you're splitting your time with Mr. Rousseau.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I really thank you for the offer to study rail safety and the SMS system. I've been talking about it since 2006. It was formerly in Bill C-7 and then in Bill C-6, etc., and then in the transportation of dangerous goods.

In fact, I have a motion that is ready to be moved by the end of this meeting, because we need to deal with the agenda of this committee. I will certainly take up your offer to do so.

I have two or three very specific questions. I note that four years ago there was one federal inspector for every 14 trainloads of oil, and now there is one inspector for every 4,000 tankloads of this dangerous cargo. With only 35 rail inspectors, how are they possibly able to have the time and the resources to do proper inspections?

Given that backdrop, why is it that the rail safety budget is now being cut by 19%?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I'll turn to the deputy on the budget question.

Thank you very much for your acceptance on the report. I think it would be a great exercise in terms of getting views on the table on all aspects. The committee can do some excellent work there if it chooses to do so.

In terms of the inspectors, the system of safety is more than just inspectors. I concur that what we have seen in the past 18 months are increased numbers in the shipping of dangerous goods in terms of oil via rail. That is a function of the fact that the oil has to make it to market and it's going through the rail system.

With respect to our system of safety, we have safety management systems, which I've asked you to take a look at. That really does make sure that the culture adopted in the rail companies is one of safety and that it's in everything—it's in their people, it's in their manuals, it's in their procedures—and we have seen a decrease in the number of accidents as a result.

At Transport Canada we have rules and regulations that we've had for a number of years, which we expect to be followed. When they're not followed, they are enforced. We have inspectors who do their work across the country in both the transportation of dangerous

goods and with the Railway Safety Act itself. I believe we have 35 inspectors for the transportation of dangerous goods, and we have about 100 inspectors on railway safety.

But it's a system that works from within. It is a layering effect: it's the safety management system, it's sound regulation, and it's having inspectors there as well.

Perhaps there'll be a discussion at the committee with respect to the need for inspectors versus having enforcement in other ways, shapes, or forms, so I look forward to the results from the committee.

In terms of the budget with respect to rail safety, I defer to the deputy on that.

● (1640)

Mr. Louis Lévesque: There are no reductions in the budgets allocated to inspections of rail safety. As the minister mentioned, we have 100 rail inspectors—

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'm not talking about the inspectors. I mean the entire rail safety budget has been cut by 19%. Right?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: In terms of—

Ms. Olivia Chow: Am I correct in that?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: There have been no cuts to the budgets affecting inspection and rail safety.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I'm not talking about inspection. I'm sorry.

There were two separate questions. One was about the inspectors; the other was that the rail safety budget has been cut by 19%. Am I correct?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: I'm not sure what number you're referring to. I know for a fact that there have been no cuts to the budget allocated to rail safety inspectors.

I also know—

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, since I don't have much time—

Mr. Louis Lévesque: —that the actual departmental spending in relation to its appropriation varies from year to year. But there have been no cuts to the budgets that have been affecting—

Ms. Olivia Chow: That wasn't my question. I'll move on then.

The Chair: You have....

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Minister, how do you plan to phase out the DOT-111 tank cars, and why wouldn't you make the automatic braking system mandatory, as in the U.S.?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Those are two separate questions.

On the DOT-111 tank cars, as you're probably aware, the Association of American Railroads made a recommendation last week to the American regulators with respect to how they think we could move forward with respect to the DOT-111s, both in the case of not only retrofitting but what they think the specs should be.

In September I met with Secretary Foxx, who is the U.S. Secretary of Transportation. We spoke on the phone in July. We know this is a North American issue, so we have to work with our official counterparts in the United States, and we'll continue to do so. The AAR took a step last week with their letter and their proposal. This is the first step, but it's not in isolation; the railways don't own these tank cars, the shippers own them, and that's why we're also meeting with those involved in the chemical industry, for example, and those who are involved in the transport of oil.

There is no question that we need to make sure we take a serious look at these issues of the DOT-111 tank cars. We've already indicated as well that going forward from 2012 we would have the new design of the DOT-111 tank cars here in Canada. That's being implemented, and the new cars that roll off are doing so in that sense.

But there are 70,000 cars in North America and the majority of them are American. You have to work with counterparts in the United States because it's an integrated North American market. We'll continue to do so, and we'll continue to make sure we get to the right place.

With respect to the other issue on positive traction, the Via Rail incident in Burlington, in the GTA...one of the recommendations from the Transportation Safety Board was that we take a look at a physical restraint system. I wrote back to the Transportation Safety Board in September of this year that we would have a study group under the advisory council take a look at the issue, working with industry, the unions, and people who understand the issues, and report back to me by April 30, 2014, with their recommendations to deal with this.

Again, the Transportation Safety Board is looking for action, and we are certainly sending the message that we anticipate we'll hear recommendations and comments from this committee. I expect they'll be reporting to me on April 30 next year.

• (1645)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Rousseau, the seven minutes just ran out.

We now go to Mr. McGuinty for seven minutes.

Mr. David McGuinty: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Minister, I want to make a few comments and get your reaction, if I might.

As I understand it, in the last fiscal year, 2012-13, your department spent approximately \$34 million on rail safety. I think the number was \$34.25 million.

There are conflicting views as to whether or not Transport Canada is spending all of its allocated resources actually on rail safety, but I wanted to raise this on behalf of all Canadians in the wake of the Lac-Mégantic tragedy and what are clearly now massive increases in the transportation of fossil fuels by rail. There are longer and longer trains carrying more and more material combined with heavier and heavier cargo. There are no signs of this slowing down. We know for a fact, Minister, that even if all current pipeline projects are approved in Canada, in 10 years from now national oil production will exceed

pipeline capacity by one million barrels a day. There's going to be a lot of pressure on the rail system to carry more and more oil, if indeed we see a doubling of the exploitation of the Alberta oil sands. This is further compounded by the Bakken field in North Dakota, where the only way to get that oil out economically is by rail.

I want to review a few things with you.

First of all, we also know from the public accounts that marine safety has been cut by 25%, from 2011-12 to 2012-13, and road safety has been cut 5.5% over the same years. Aviation safety has been cut 11% over the same years. I think we've seen a very small increase in rail safety funding over those same two fiscal years, but just to put that in context, given the risks inherent in what we're seeing in rail safety in this sector, your government spends more money every year on economic action plan advertising than it does on rail safety. Your government is now averaging \$40 million a year on economic action plan—let's be honest—propaganda ads.

Mr. Chair, for gosh sake, the government has even gone as far as to shrink-wrap GO Transit trains in downtown Toronto with EAP shrink-wrapped plastic for advertising. It's never been seen before; we're even advertising skills training programs, Mr. Chair, that don't exist.

I just want to ask, on behalf of Canadians, how is it possible that we've seen cuts in marine, road, and aviation safety, and very small increases in funding for rail safety, but your government has found \$670 million for advertising since it arrived seven years ago, including \$120 million on economic action plan advertising?

Minister, can you help us explain this to Canadians?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Well, Mr. Chair and colleague, what I would say is this. I know we have spent \$100 million on rail safety in our government. I know that we have significantly invested in things such as grade crossings and in things such as ensuring that we have 100 inspectors. Those are the matters that are within our purview, that we take care of, and that we control.

But as I said to your colleague on the committee, the concept of rail safety in Canada isn't just about government regulation, and it isn't just about government involvement. There's a firm responsibility on the rail companies to operate in a safe manner. We have legislated that through regulations that are in place, but as well, we have safety management systems that are audited, that are reviewed, and that are implemented by the companies.

What the companies will tell you.... First of all, let me be very clear that CN and CP are the safest class 1 railways in North America, safer than the ones in the United States. They're very proud of their safety record, and we've seen a decrease in accidents in the past number of years. But my job isn't to be here to speak for the rail companies; my job is to ensure that we have rules and regulations, that we inspect their safety management systems, that we audit their systems, and that we're there to ensure the protection of the health and safety of Canadians.

What we can draw from Lac-Mégantic and what we can draw from the increased shipments by rail of crude oil is the fact that we need to take account of these changes, and we need to make sure we do the right thing going forward. That's why I'm asking your committee to do the review of the transportation of dangerous goods. That's why we're taking a hard look at the DOT-111 tankers, and that's why, moving forward, we're going to ensure that we're doing whatever we can to have the ability to move these goods as safely as you can. The statistics—

• (1650)

Mr. David McGuinty: Minister, I—

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Yes, of course. I'll let you talk.

Mr. David McGuinty: Minister, I agree, and I think most fair-minded Canadians would reasonably conclude, that it's a partnership between the regulator—the governments—and industry. I think people understand that.

From 2011 to 2012, in one year, the amount of oil that's being transported by rail has tripled: tripled. We have gone from 6,000 train carloads in 2009 to 15,000 this year. It's accelerating at such a pace that the railway companies, that you rightly point out are strong in safety, have rolled out \$1 billion in rail infrastructure investments and placed orders for over 30,000 new tanker cars designed to do what? To carry oil.

Minister, unless I'm missing something, I don't know how we can make the magic of using the same amount of money or smaller amounts of money available to deal with safety, and fill that void, by simply saying that we're going to be good regulators and we're going to count on safety management systems that are administered by the private sector.

Are you saying now to Canadians that we don't need to increase the amount of money for rail safety in Canada?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: What I'm saying is that in the transportation of dangerous goods in general, 99.997% of the time the good makes it from its point of origin to its point of destination. As the increase in the shipments occur, then you will see more individual accidents and incidents. But what we have to do as regulators is to continue the work with respect to educating the rail companies in terms of SMS, the importance of a safety culture, which, as I have already pointed out, they have embraced in the last ten years. They have seen significant improvements in their own operations.

With respect to how that translates into the size of a budget, well, I'll let the department inform me as to what tools they need in order to carry out the level of enforcement and inspections. But as we move along, as I said in my opening comments, we are doing things in smarter regulations as well too, putting into the hands of the inspectors the ability to issue fines on the spot and ensuring that in inspections there is good coordination between the railways and Transport Canada. You know, 30,000 inspections were done in this country last year by Transport Canada officials. Both CN and CP have inspections that are ongoing all the time as well.

What I can say to you is that we will continue to take very seriously the issue of rail safety. We'll continue to put our resources into it. We'll continue to look for ways to do things more safely for Canadians.

Those goods still need to move; you know that. The goods need to move in the country no matter what kind they are. They are dangerous goods, but they still need to move for the benefits that are attributed to whatever those goods may be.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Watson, you have seven minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, and the officials for being here today.

I hope Mr. McGuinty is not suggesting that we now reverse the system of safety management systems, layered with regulations that were brought in by previous Liberal governments. I think instead we have an opportunity here to look at how we can improve that.

Minister, before I get into questions related to the study you have suggested, I want to divert for just a brief moment on a matter of economic importance not only nationally but also locally and regionally back home. That's the Detroit River international crossing project. I always take the opportunity when ministers are here to ensure that we get an update on that.

I understand you met with Governor Snyder during the adjournment last week, the constituency work week. Perhaps you could provide some means of update on that and where we are at with respect to this project.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Yes, I was able to travel to Lansing, Michigan, to meet with Governor Snyder and his officials on the matter. It's a terribly exciting project. We know that a new bridge is needed there. It is the busiest Canada-U.S. border crossing.

Those are the kinds of things that Governor Snyder and I talked about, but we also talked about the thousands of jobs and the opportunities that will be created on both sides of the border. We figure that in trade, generally, about eight million American jobs and two million Canadian jobs depend on trade and investment between our two countries.

When you reiterate and you move forward together on opening yet another stable transportation link like the Detroit River international crossing, it's very important. It's an alternative that is very much needed. That, in and of itself, is expected to create between 10,000 and 15,000 construction jobs in Canada and the U.S.

In terms of moving forward, the governor and I said that we would meet again. We have agreed that oversight of the project and strong management between the two of us will be important, especially in the coming years. There is a lot of work to be done on the project, but we both have the shared goal to make sure that we can do this in a timely fashion, because the sooner we have the new bridge moving forward with respect to opening up trade, the better off both countries will be. We are completely in sync on the matter.

• (1655)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Minister, I'm pleased with your comments today on engaging the committee in a study with respect to safety management systems and the transportation of dangerous goods. I think Canadians will be pleased that you're engaging all parliamentarians through this particular committee in what would be a long-range and very in-depth study.

I think it's timely with respect to rail transport, which will be an important issue for this committee, and of course we'll get to look at the current status of the system of safety management systems, plus the additional layer of regulations and how that can be improved.

But more than just rail, you've recommended other modes. Can you explain briefly why it's important that we consider a comprehensive look at the other aspects and not just rail exclusively?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I think it's important, if we're going to take an approach in this country—which we have—of having a safety culture that's in our manuals, our hiring policies, and how we do HR, that if you apply it to one mode, you should apply it across all other modes of transportation as well. It's good to take a look at the other ones. The reality, too, as you know, is that dangerous goods travel by all modes of transportation, so it's very important to ensure that you cover it all off in that context as well.

The final thing I would say is that perhaps my time at Labour made me realize the importance of occupational health and safety and how important that is to the functioning of the economy. As well, if transportation is the underpinning of our entire economy—how we move goods—then we want to make sure it's safe. This is the best way to do it, so I'm grateful to the committee for looking at both aspects.

Mr. Jeff Watson: I may direct this next question to the deputy minister.

When this committee was called on in the summer to consider whether to look at the aspect of rail transport and rail safety, it was important at the time that we had departmental officials in the field, both in terms of the investigating of potential breaches to the Railway Safety Act and in assisting other government officials in investigations relative to Lac-Mégantic. If we were to embark on a study, would officials be available to this committee to give us their expertise?

Mr. Louis Lévesque: Absolutely.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay. Very good.

Minister, of course it's the prevailing expectation that rail companies bear the primary responsibility and investment for ensuring rail safety. With respect to our oversight efforts, I understand that we continue to hire inspectors. Is that correct?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay.

Last year, if I understand it correctly, there were 32,000 inspections conducted.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: That's correct.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you.

Safety management systems, some have been wrongly suggesting, are a form of deregulation. Would you be prepared to give your comments on that?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Yes, certainly. I don't think that's a fair estimation. Even the chair of the Transportation Safety Board says that safety management systems are the way forward.

These are the ways in which we ensure that a culture... I know that I've been talking a lot about the culture, but it's so important to

change the culture of a system in order to ensure that safety is top of mind every single day. Again, in my work when I was at Labour I used to speak to the Teamsters frequently, and I know that safety is the number one priority for them. They want their men and women to make sure that when they go to work at the beginning of the day they return home safe; "safe" has to be part of it. Transportation can inherently be dangerous just by the nature of what it is, whether it's rail, road, air, or marine, and we should do things as safely as we can.

Safety management systems are internationally recognized as the way forward and as the way in which we should be taking a look at things to ensure that the culture is implemented in everybody's everyday life in their work. I'm very comfortable with it. I absolutely think it's a system where you need both. You need a safety management system with the companies, and you need to have the regulation and the work of the enforcement on the Transport Canada side, too, in different ways. It's not the way it used to be in terms of how things were sought out and searched for. It's very much a progressive, smart way that ensures everybody has as their first priority the safety of the movement of the goods.

• (1700)

Mr. Jeff Watson: And railway operating rules, once approved by the government, carry the force of regulation, correct?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: That's correct.

The Chair: Your time has expired, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: I'll now move to Mr. Albrecht.

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. Congratulations on your appointment and your new role in this portfolio. I certainly remember well your responsive nature in your previous portfolio in labour.

There's no question that Lac-Mégantic occupied much of our thoughts this summer. It certainly was a tragic incident. On July 5 and 6, I was 100 kilometres from Lac-Mégantic, in Lennoxville, in Sherbrooke, Quebec, and I can tell you that the smaller communities are very concerned about the kinds of things being shipped through their communities.

I do recall as well that very shortly after the incident you and the chair of the committee were present at Lac-Mégantic to indicate your support and to address the safety needs of our rail system.

I'm just wondering, Minister, if you could outline for us some of the changes in the work you're overseeing now in terms of improving that safety. I think you mentioned it in your opening comments, although I don't remember you articulating the specific items you've mandated that need to be changed in the regulatory system in terms of the emergency directives your department is implementing.

If you could comment on those, that would be great.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Thank you very much for that.

In the days post-Lac-Mégantic, after our visit, I can tell you that I did meet with the mayors in the area. I'm glad you brought it up, because the resilience of the communities.... Although they definitely felt what the effect was, they knew that they still wanted to have rail service through their communities; they wanted it to be as safe as possible.

The deputy and I, with officials, went to Montreal. We met with the mayors in the surrounding areas to hear from them.

That dialogue is extremely important. It's more than just talk. It's about getting on the table the real issues of the people. One issue we heard was their concern about knowing what's going through their communities. That indeed has been brought up a lot. We've been working with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' working group and we've been working with rail, with CN and CP, to get to an agreement for the parties in terms of what kind of disclosure will happen between the company and the municipality so that the first responders, so that the fire department, can have the information in a timely fashion and we don't have difficulties.

I anticipate and I fully expect that these two parties will have an agreement with respect to what makes sense in terms of information sharing. I hope we'll be able to talk about that in the coming days.

First and foremost, in terms of vision, you don't want this to happen again. You want to do everything you can as a government, and I think as a Parliament, to ensure that we have the many steps in place to make sure that we prevent this from happening.

There's another thing to note from Mégantic. It was an incredible loss of life, and it was also an economic loss to the community because of what happened with the devastation of the business community, but it was also an environmental loss. One of the realizations was the fact that the railway company did not carry sufficient insurance to cover off the liabilities.

That's why in the Speech from the Throne...and why I said in my speech earlier as well that we're going to require shippers and railways to carry additional insurance. First and foremost, you don't want an accident to happen, but if something, God forbid, does happen, you want to make sure there's enough accountability there for it.

That's in a broad sense, I guess, the best way to put the big issues.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you, Minister.

Having crossed those very tracks literally hours before the accident at Lac-Mégantic, and having slept in a community 100 kilometres away from there, it makes you realize how vulnerable all of us are. I'm grateful to see the interest you're taking on this file.

Mr. Chair, do I have any more time?

• (1705)

The Chair: Yes, you do.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: The other safety issue in terms of rail relates to level crossings. Again, all of us, some of us right in this Parliament, were deeply impacted by the OC Transpo accident here in Ottawa.

I'm wondering, Minister, if you could update us on what action our government is taking in terms of improving rail safety at the level crossings.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: As municipalities get bigger, they have housing in different areas. The train tracks have been there for a hundred years. As municipalities grow, of course you're going to have that interaction between a community that wants to be able to cross the rail line, and the rail line communicating with the community what needs to be put in place in order to have a crossing.

In the past number of years, the government has invested heavily and made funding available for communities, municipalities, and rail companies to do grade separation, if they choose to do so, in their areas. As well, we have programming and funding available to improve the safety of railway crossings at grade—if you wanted to add extra lights, replace bulbs with brighter LEDs, and do the other kinds of things needed in order to ensure a safe passage of traffic, rail in one way and road in the other.

Again, it was such a sad incident with respect to the loss of life that you just want to make sure you do all that you can to ensure that you balance the need for the transportation of people and the transportation of goods and the safety of all those concerned.

Most importantly, though, the Transportation Safety Board is investigating. We will see what their recommendations are. Of course, Transport Canada always responds and acts.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you. I do applaud you again for the overall vision you have for the department. You are not simply addressing one issue at a time but have an overall vision that you're clearly articulating in your request of our committee today, and I'm looking forward to participating in that study.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have just over a minute, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Minister, you mentioned that 99.997% of all shipments in all modes related to the transportation of dangerous goods make it to their destination safely. When you look at Lac-Mégantic and Gainford, it's obvious that the 0.003% can in fact be devastating. Can you talk about some of the actions being taken to improve rail safety in Canada? Specifically, again, I think what's important is the reiteration that directives and rules, once confirmed and accepted, carry the force of regulation in this country.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I appreciate that. Obviously you learn lessons from tragic incidents like the one at Lac-Mégantic as you move along. The Transportation Safety Board has been instrumental in ensuring that as they progress through their investigation, they're providing us with feedback. One such piece of feedback was regarding the content of the cars in Lac-Mégantic. Indeed, as a result, we issued the directive I pointed out at the beginning of my speech, to ensure that any crude oil being transported be properly tested to ensure that it's rated at the right flammable stage and to make sure that whatever data sheets are being carried with the train or are available for the train match up with the actual contents. That's their directive now for the companies doing business in Canada as well.

Finally, in the case of this incident in Lac-Mégantic, a number of things were reported by the Transportation Safety Board, which we have been made aware of: it was a single-operator train; the cabin wasn't locked; and the train was left unattended. Those are the things on which we did emergency directives. There were further directives to the companies to make these regulations and orders permanent.

Those are the things we learn and we take into account as we move along, and we ensure that whatever we learn from the incident we implement and will continue to do so as the Transportation Safety Board continues to discuss its findings with us and with the Canadian public.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Is our transportation system safe?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you. You're out of time.

Mr. Mai, you have five minutes.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll share my time with my colleagues.

Thank you, Minister.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

As part of my tour on rail safety in Quebec, I discussed rail safety issues. I heard many comments about the government not applying the recommendations issued by the Transportation Safety Board of Canada. I would like to read parts of the November 15 news release regarding the investigation into the VIA Rail train accident in Burlington. The report is fairly scathing. It says the following:

The TSB believes a voluntary approach does not go far enough and will not ensure that the vast majority of locomotives in Canada will be equipped with essential recorders.

The following passage is especially critical:

Citing a lack of firm action, the [TSB] is concerned there is no clear strategy in place to address the rail safety issues identified by the Board.

What does the minister have to say about this?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Thank you very much for the question.

The Transportation Safety Board in June of last year issued their report on the investigation into the Burlington VIA crash and had three recommendations for Transport Canada: one was to implement physical fail-safe train controls; the second was to require that mainline operations be equipped with the in-cab video cameras; the third one was to require that “crashworthiness standards” for new locomotives apply to rebuilt passenger and freight locomotives. I tell you these things in detail because we are working on all three of these things.

I wrote back to the Transportation Safety Board in my capacity as minister on September 3, and I gave our response to them. We accepted all of these recommendations. I guess what the Transportation Safety Board reported in November was that they're acknowledging our progress on these three items. With respect to crashworthiness, they're optimistic. With respect to the in-cab video cameras, they acknowledge the fact that VIA Rail is putting these in

place voluntarily, but they would prefer to have it as a regulatory measure.

I can tell you that I have spoken with CN and CP and with the Teamsters—all—on the matter of in-cab video cameras. I wish it were as simple as it's stated there in the recommendation. It is not an easy situation. I encourage you to talk to your colleagues involved with the Teamsters on the issue of putting cameras into cabs, because it is a specific issue and we're trying to work through the nature of it in order to satisfy the concern of the Transportation Safety Board.

On the third one with respect to physical fail-safe train controls, I think it's important to note as well that in their report in June the Transportation Safety Board actually referred to this as a “fundamental” change. Fundamental changes are difficult to make at any given time, let alone in the wake of an accident such as the accident in Lac-Mégantic, but what we said was that we would put together a serious working group, including the union, the rail industry, and officials from Transport Canada, to take a look and report and make recommendations with respect to this matter. A hard deadline of April 30, 2014, was applied.

Fundamental changes need to have time to be discussed at all levels, and that's exactly what's happening. If they don't report back by April 30, 2014, they'll hear from me, because we take the matter of serious deadlines very seriously. We expect and anticipate that the people involved will come to us and will tell us the right path forward.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Thanks a lot.

The Chair: Mr. Rousseau, you have just over a minute, and that's for the answer as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): No problem, Mr. Chair.

As you know, rail transportation should soon resume in the Mégantic region. But people want to know what the freight cars passing through their region will carry. They are very worried about that. Some time ago, the municipalities were told by the companies that the reason rail transportation was slow in their region was that the freight cars contained dangerous goods. They were not even told what those goods were.

How can we ensure that, once the rail activity takes up again in Mégantic, that information will be provided to the municipal authorities?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: In a previous response, I indicated that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the rail companies have been working together on devising a protocol for this. I would anticipate that the information will be coming out in the coming days, and for Lac-Mégantic—

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Before the railway goes back...?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: No, I understand, and I believe I can give you more information with respect to what I think the goods are that are going to be going through Lac-Mégantic first. I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure that it's going to be dry goods only at the beginning—

•(1715)

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Okay.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: —but I'm happy to have a conversation when we have more time so I can give you some assurances as to exactly what's going on there.

I fully agree with you. The sensitivities of rail through that community again are very important, and we want to make sure we get it right for the community—

The Chair: Okay—

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Because before they arrive in Mégantic, they cross my riding, with 70 kilometres...

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I agree, Monsieur. We will talk about it, okay?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

I apologize, Mr. Rousseau, but we're almost out of time.

Mr. Komarnicki, for one question.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you.

Minister, I'll take advantage of my one question and welcome you to the committee. I've followed you in various portfolios, certainly, and it's good to see you in this one.

I come, of course, from southeastern Saskatchewan and the Bakken oil field. Not only is it in South Dakota, but it's also in southeastern Saskatchewan. They haul oil by truck, by rail, and by pipeline, and of course they're meeting all kinds of constraints. They want to be sure that they're able to transport the material, but they want to be able to do it safely.

I know that we transport very safely even now, but if there's some preventative action that can be taken, they want to see that. If there can be a response in the event of an accident, they want to see the best response possible, and of course liability by the railroads.

I know that you opened by saying that you wanted this committee to play an active role in reviewing transportation safety in Canada. Why do you feel that's important? How might it address the issues that our communities—particularly, say, in southeast Saskatchewan—view as very important?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Very quickly, Mr. Chair, along the lines of what Mr. McGuinty said, I'm very cognizant of the fact that we are shipping more oil by rail, and people in Canada see that happening. They see the cars going through their communities. That's why we found it was really important for us to go...I didn't go to Saskatchewan, but I did go to Manitoba, and I visited a newly built transloading facility for transferring oil from a pipeline directly into tank cars. It was just commissioned in September of this year.

I think the committee should see and hear about that. They should see where these things are developing, because an industry is developing around the need to ship our natural resources in a way that makes sense, and that's why I think it's important for the committee to take a look at it. These things are happening already, and we need to ensure that we are keeping pace, that we understand the issues, and that as good legislators we're doing what we need to do to ensure the safety of Canadians. So I look forward to hearing

the results from the committee. I appreciate any feedback, and I'm glad to hear the officials will be helping this along as well.

The Chair: There's never enough time, Madam Minister, but we appreciate having you and your officials here, and we thank you for that.

Before we suspend for a couple of minutes, I would like to ask to go in camera, due to committee business and the limited amount of time we have left.

I would ask everybody to leave the room as quickly as possible as soon as we suspend, and thank you very much.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have the letter to the committee with respect to my request. Can I leave it with you?

The Chair: That would be great.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I don't know what the technical...I don't know if I table anything.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, why are we going...?

Mr. Chair, a point of order. Don't we need to—

The Chair: Yes, we're going....

Ms. Olivia Chow: Before you adjourn—

The Chair: My apologies. Yes, before we suspend, we have to deal with the supplementary estimates we have here.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That's the main item.

The Chair: Yes, it is.

We have two different items here: one under Infrastructure, Communities, and Intergovernmental Affairs, and the other one under Transport.

With your unanimous consent, we can deal with this all together, or we can go through it. What are your wishes?

All together? Is there any opposition to that?

Mr. David McGuinty: Chair, could we please clear the room? I can't hear you.

The Chair: Order, please.

We're on supplementary estimates (B) for 2013-14.

TRANSPORT

Department

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$9,621,769

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures.....\$2,410,440

Vote 10b—The grants listed in the Estimates and contributions—To authorize the transfers of appropriations listed in these Estimates.....\$1

The Federal Bridge Corporation Limited

Vote 45b—Payments to The Federal Bridge Corporation.....\$1,338,293

The Jacques-Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc.

Vote 50b—Payments to The Jacques-Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc.....\$70,976,409

Via Rail Canada Inc.

Vote 60b—Payments to VIA Rail Canada Inc.....\$152,600,000

(Votes 1b, 5b, 10b, 45b, 50b, and 60b agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Shall the chair report the supplementary estimates (B) 2013-14 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: With that, we shall now suspend—

● (1720)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chair, why are we going in camera?

The Chair: Because we have to deal with the steering committee report.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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