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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I'm calling the meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. We gather today to study the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, referred to the committee on Thursday, October 26, 2017.

We have nine votes to consider today, namely: vote 1b under the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority; votes 1b, 5b, 15b, and 20b under the Department of Transport; vote 1b under Marine Atlantic Inc.; votes 1b and 5b for the Office of Infrastructure of Canada; and, vote 1b under the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority.

On behalf of the Department of Transport, we have before us Mr. André Lapointe, assistant deputy minister, corporate services and chief financial officer; Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau, assistant deputy minister, programs; and Ms. Lori MacDonald, assistant deputy minister, safety and security.

Welcome, all of you.

For the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, we have Mr. Mike Saunders, president and chief executive officer, along with Ms. Andie Andreou, vice-president and chief financial officer.

Finally, on behalf of Marine Atlantic Inc., we have Mr. Paul Griffin, president and chief executive officer.

We welcome everyone to our committee today, and we thank you for coming.

I'll start the discussion by calling vote 1b under the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.

Mr. Lapointe, we'll go over to you for five minutes.

Mr. André Lapointe (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Transport): Thank you.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting us here today to discuss Transport Canada's supplementary estimates (B) for 2017-18.

[Translation]

Transport Canada's focus for the coming year remains the safety and security of our transportation system. At the same time, we have

an important role to play in advancing innovation in the transportation sector, ensuring we have the infrastructure and the services in place to facilitate the movement of people and goods. We also need to adapt to climate change, reduce air pollution and embrace new technologies to improve greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector.

[English]

Almost a year ago, Minister Garneau unveiled a vision for the future of transportation up to 2030. Transport Canada is working to implement that vision through programs and initiatives that are centred around five key themes: enhancing the experience of the Canadian traveller; building a safer, more secure transportation system that earns the confidence of Canadians; investing in a greener, more innovative transportation sector that embraces new technologies to improve Canadians' lives; protecting Canada's waterways, coasts, and the north; and, improving Canada's transportation infrastructure and trade corridors to get products to global markets more efficiently.

Through our supplementary estimates, Transport Canada is seeking a total of \$72.5 million in funding to help support some of these goals. Of this amount, over half is for investments in transportation services, infrastructure, and the development of environmentally sustainable transportation.

We are requesting \$47.5 million in new funding announced in budget 2017 for four key initiatives: the ferry service contribution program, which provides funding to support interprovincial ferry transportation in Atlantic Canada and eastern Quebec; implementing the trade and transportation corridor initiative, which will support investments in infrastructure and measures to support innovative transportation; adapting to the effects of climate change and reducing Canada's greenhouse gas emissions; and, the indigenous advisory and monitoring committee for energy infrastructure projects.

Our request also includes \$24.3 million in existing funding that is being carried forward from the last fiscal year to 2017-18 to match the department's level of funding with its expected spending this year.

In addition, a number of transfers to other departments for various programs will reduce Transport Canada's spending by \$900,000.

Finally, there is an item of \$1.6 million for statutory employee benefit plan costs related to the projects I've mentioned, and an internal transfer of \$200,000 to allow the listing of the grant for the northern transportation adaptation initiative.

•(1535)

[*Translation*]

To sum up, the funding I have outlined today will allow Transport Canada to continue delivering on its mandate, supporting government priorities, while also ensuring we are prudent and responsible in managing our resources.

Madam Chair, my colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions the committee might have.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lapointe.

Mr. Griffin, I understand you have some opening remarks.

Mr. Paul Griffin (President and Chief Executive Officer, Marine Atlantic Inc.): Yes, I do.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and Madam Chair. I would like to thank you and members of the committee for your invitation to the meeting today.

As background for those of you who are unfamiliar with Marine Atlantic, we're a crown corporation that was created to fulfill Canada's constitutional mandate to provide a freight and passenger ferry service between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. We report to Parliament through Transport Canada.

Our objective is to provide a safe, reliable, and efficient ferry service. We operate on two routes. Our primary route is between Port aux Basques and North Sydney, which is about a 200-kilometre route. We also operate a seasonal ferry service between Argentia, Newfoundland, and North Sydney. That covers approximately 500 kilometres.

In budget 2016, the Government of Canada announced \$21.7 million for improvements to Marine Atlantic's terminal infrastructure in both North Sydney and Port aux Basques that would improve the safety, reliability, and efficiency of its operations. The infrastructure funding covers three projects.

The first is the replacement of a storm sewer system in the Port aux Basques terminal. This project was required to replace infrastructure that was at the end of its useful life and created periodic interruptions to our operations. The budget for this project totalled \$5.3 million: \$1.7 million in 2015-16 and \$3.6 million in 2017-18. This project will be completed on time and on budget.

The second project involved the replacement of dock fenders in both North Sydney and Port aux Basques. Fender systems protect both vessels and dock infrastructure from damage caused by vessels when docking. The older fender system was inadequate and created unnecessary risks for the corporation. The budget for this project totalled \$8.4 million, with expenditures of \$2.4 million in 2016-17 and \$6 million in 2017-18. This project will also be completed on time and on budget.

The third project, which is the subject of these supplementary estimates, will provide an automated mooring solution for the primary docks at both North Sydney and Port aux Basques. Our current mooring operations involve a significant amount of manual

intervention, and this creates safety risks that can be mitigated with the new automated system. The initial budget for this project totalled \$8 million: \$2 million in 2016-17 and \$6 million in 2017-18.

Automated mooring systems are highly specialized and engineered to meet the requirements of specific vessels and specific dock configurations. Upon initiating the project, we realized that we had underestimated the time required to engineer a solution and select the supplier. Because of these delays in selecting an appropriate system, we have been unable to spend any of the budgeted funds for this project in 2016-17.

As such, in supplementary estimates (B) for 2017-18, we're requesting re-profiling of \$2 million for this project from 2016-17 to 2017-18. The remaining \$269,000 requested to be re-profiled was regular operating capital not spent in 2016-17 that will help supplement the mooring budget in 2017-18. Our intention is to finish this project completely by the end of 2017-18.

Madam Chair, I would be happy to answer any questions related to our requests.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Griffin.

We'll go for six minutes to Ms. Block.

•(1540)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thanks very much, Madam Chair, and thanks to all of the departmental officials and our folks from CATSA for joining us today.

Before I ask my questions, I congratulate you, Madam Chair, on being one of the parliamentarians of the year for providing mentorship to other colleagues.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Kelly Block: My questions are going to be directed to CATSA first.

It is my understanding that airlines are required to register and collect the air travellers security charge. However, under Bill C-49 we know that CATSA will be allowed to enter into a contract with airports, both designated and non-designated airports, in order to provide additional screening services on a cost recovery basis. How will airports pay for this additional cost? Can you comment on that?

Mr. Mike Saunders (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Air Transport Security Authority): Yes. There are currently two airports paying for it through a cost recovery process. Both Toronto and Vancouver raise that through their airport improvement fees. They pay out of their own funds generated by the airport.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you. In the 2016-17 fiscal year, the government collected \$768 million from the air travellers security charge. Is that correct?

Mr. Mike Saunders: From our understanding, that would be correct, yes.

Mrs. Kelly Block: According to CATSA's 2017 annual report, government funding amounted to just over \$673 million. Is that correct?

Ms. Andie Andreou (Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer, Canadian Air Transport Security Authority): Government funding for 2016-17 amounted to \$617 million on the operating side and capital of \$142 million, for a total of \$759 million.

Mrs. Kelly Block: In the supplementary (B)s, the proposed authorities to date being requested by CATSA are \$760,684,214. Do you have a way of forecasting or estimating what amount the government will collect from the air travellers security charge?

Ms. Andie Andreou: We don't have access to that information. That is collected by the finance department through CRA.

Mrs. Kelly Block: You don't have access to that?

Ms. Andie Andreou: We don't have access to that.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay. Can you tell me if the air travellers security charge is used to fund any other air security measures?

Mr. Mike Saunders: If I may, I think we should defer that to Transport Canada.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay. I will put that question to Transport Canada.

Mr. André Lapointe: Thank you.

Part of the air travellers security charge that is collected flows back to the department for certain activities, namely, those related to air security. The exact amount that flows back I don't have with me. I can get back to you on that.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I would appreciate that.

I look at what's in the supplementary estimates (B) today, and it is my understanding that, with the adjustment, this is still less than what was collected last year. Is that correct?

Mr. André Lapointe: Again, for the full collection, I don't have the numbers. This is done—reviewed—by the Department of Finance.

Mrs. Kelly Block: You can't answer that question for me?

Mr. André Lapointe: No. I'm afraid I cannot.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay.

Thank you. I think I'm done.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I want to refer to a Canadian Press article from October 29. I'll read the first sentence of this news article, and then we can delve into the details behind it: "Transport Canada is planning to stop evaluating pilots who perform checks on their counterparts at the country's largest airlines and will instead give the responsibility to the operators, a change critics say erodes oversight and public safety."

Who among you can respond to this and tell us what's going on?

Ms. MacDonald.

Ms. Lori MacDonald (Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Security, Department of Transport): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The check pilot program action in Transport Canada has been around for about 30 years now. Very clearly, the intent is to continue with that program so, first and foremost, the program is not ending. In fact, Transport Canada is going to enhance that program in taking the resources that we have now and using them in a more effective and efficient way. What that will do for us is enhance the safety and security that our pilots have in terms of their responsibilities, while at the same time providing us with a more robust system that we can use in terms of checking pilots.

Specifically, what happens is that we have a set of inspectors who go out and test pilots yearly or every two years, when they come up for their annual testing period. Sometimes our inspectors do it, and sometimes we use check pilot program people from our industry. They receive the same amount of training that our pilots do to do this particular responsibility, and we do that so we can broaden our area of scope in terms of being able to use more resources.

Transport Canada has approximately 1,200 or 1,300 inspectors right now, of whom about 675 are responsible for civil aviation. We look at all those resources and then we focus them on the task they need to do. In fact, we're not cutting any resources. We're not changing the program in terms of the amount of assessment that gets done, but we're focusing it on the key high-risk areas to ensure that we have the safest and most secure aviation system.

•(1545)

Mr. Ken Hardie: What would be the ratio of tests done by Transport Canada versus the check pilots?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: I don't have that broken down in terms of numbers, because they're all trained to the same level, to be able to do the same type of testing, regardless of whether they are a check pilot working in industry or an inspector working for Transport Canada.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Previously, or at least to this point, all of them—those with Transport Canada or with the airlines themselves—would have had evaluations done. How often?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Depending on the pilot and the type of plane they're flying, it could be every year or every two years. This is a type of program that's used around the world. It's not just a Canadian phenomenon to use this check pilot program and to use industry and a combination of Transport Canada inspectors and others. It's common in the United States, in Europe, and so on.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Do they continue to check their check pilots and government inspectors?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Absolutely. In fact, we also test our checked pilots, the people doing the testing. We have an oversight program for them as well to ensure that they're at their optimal in terms of doing the test.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What's changing, then?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: The actual change is that we're focusing more on high-risk areas. One of the advantages we have is that we've collected data over several years, and what that tells us is that in our very low-risk areas we have a very high percentage of conformity, meaning that there is a rate of very few errors.

What we see is that in higher-risk areas we want to pay more attention to them to ensure that we're testing pilots in such a fashion that we can catch those kinds of errors, look at any kinds of trends that are happening, and adjust in terms of the testing.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What I hear is that the check pilots continue to perform very well with a very low error rate, but you've identified areas of higher risk. What would they be?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: It would depend on the pilot. It could be anything, from how they use the equipment.... Of course, aircraft are evolving. New aircraft come in. There are new consoles and new types of equipment in the flying program. We look at what is the error rate with this new equipment. We look at how they respond to training in stress situations in simulators. We look at what we see with respect to trends and how well they perform in those kinds of situations.

Mr. Ken Hardie: How would you respond to folks who would say that we're leaving the fox to guard the henhouse here if we're subletting, if you like, the authority of Transport Canada to the airlines to monitor themselves? What do you say in terms of public confidence in that process?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: I would say a couple of things. Because it's a program that's used around the world, I think it's important to recognize that there's confidence in airlines in like-minded countries that use this program. It is very robust, but I also think it's important to take a look at what evidence is out there.

As an example, the Transportation Safety Board presented a report to Parliament last year that showed there was a 25% reduction in accidents over the past 10 years. That's due in large part to the kind of robust oversight that Transport Canada has put in place, including this check pilot program.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I think that's enough for now. Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Aubin, welcome back. We have missed having you at committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Likewise, Madam Chair. Thank you for your welcome.

I would also like to thank my colleagues, whom I'm happy to see again.

First, I want to point out that we are going to welcome the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities during the second hour, and that seems appropriate to me. However, I am a little disappointed that the Minister of Transport, whose credits we are studying, is not here in the first hour to answer questions.

It would be all the more relevant for us to vote on the motion I sent you a few days ago. Its purpose is to request that the Minister of Transport and François Collins, the director of National Operations and Civil Aviation at Transport Canada, come to testify, in an

attempt to shed light on this issue, which follows from the brilliant study we carried out on aviation safety.

Do you want us to vote now or wait until the end of the meeting so that we can spend as much time as possible with the witnesses?

● (1550)

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's go with your suggestion. If you're moving it now, we could vote on it at the end of our meeting, Mr. Aubin, just so we have the officials for the maximum amount of time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I'm therefore relying on the fact that we can vote at the end of the meeting. I'll now move on to my questions. I have many.

My first ones are for the CATSA representatives. It would be good if the questions and answers were short, so I can ask them all.

An amount of \$721 million was raised last year through the air travellers security charge. However, the amount submitted to you was \$678 million. I imagine the difference is paid to the public purse.

Do you think this financial model is sustainable in the medium and long term, given the growth in air traffic?

Mr. Mike Saunders: I don't think we can really comment on CATSA's funding model to determine whether it is appropriate or not. We have no direct relationship to the amount of money raised through the fees. Our entire budget comes from Parliament.

Mr. Robert Aubin: All right.

Could a representative from Transport Canada comment on this process?

Mr. André Lapointe: Are you talking about the process for the allocation of funds?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Yes. I'm talking about the fact that the total amounts collected by travellers for security do not go entirely to security.

How is it that some money goes to other purposes and we are being asked for additional budgets to provide security services, when all the money isn't spent on it?

Mr. André Lapointe: This is a known issue. We regularly evaluate the adjustment between the tax rate and the amounts collected. For now, this is something the government is looking at. We have not determined what's next, but it's being studied.

Mr. Robert Aubin: We heard the Minister of Transport repeat many times that safety was his top priority.

How can Canadians believe you when, between 2012 and today, for example, the Liberal government seems to have followed what the Conservatives had started, in other words annual and recurring cuts to safety. In fact, in 2015-16 and in 2016-17, the budget was reduced by 12%.

How can the claim really be made that safety measures are robust, while the budget is reduced from one year to the next?

Mr. André Lapointe: Are you talking about the budget of the Department of Transport?

Mr. Robert Aubin: I'm talking about the budget allocated mainly to aviation safety, because that's the first topic I addressed.

Mr. André Lapointe: With regard to aviation safety, budgets generally fluctuate from year to year. Some projects are completed, including research-related ones. All sorts of initiatives are put in place and many investments are made in capital. When these projects come to an end, the allocations will decrease from one year to the next. This partly explains the fluctuations.

Mr. Robert Aubin: There may be fluctuations, but it is a steady decline over five, six or seven years. I find this a little difficult to grasp, especially since the aviation market is constantly growing, as are the needs.

Mr. André Lapointe: The number of resources dedicated to surveillance has increased over time. We also allocate our resources differently. Ms. MacDonald spoke earlier about the reallocation of resources based on risk, something we do on a regular basis. If the risks are higher, we redirect resources toward those risks, but we reduce them if the risks are lower.

•(1555)

Mr. Robert Aubin: I'll come back to what you said, Ms. MacDonald, because your comments made a lot of sense to me.

I'm trying to understand what is behind the bureaucratic language. In terms of pilot assessment, is Transport Canada doing more and more paper assessments or recognizing paper assessments done by other inspectors, rather than devoting itself to assessing pilots in flight?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I think it's important to recognize—

The Chair: Is it possible to give Mr. Aubin a short response? It's just because we're way over the time.

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Yes.

In fact, we are doing more inspections in person. I'll give a quick example. We have two very new simulators. We bring our pilots in and observe them in person doing their training over a course of four hours to a day, so that we can see what they're doing in a real, live situation. We always have a combination of hands-on training that we're testing, as well as oversight training.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, Mr. Aubin. Your time is up.

Mr. Fraser.

[Translation]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to ask Mr. Lapointe a quick question.

[English]

The speech you gave at the beginning referenced in passing the interprovincial ferry services in Atlantic Canada. I'm curious to know if the supplementary estimates deal with the Caribou-Wood Islands service and if you could you provide a brief status update on the process to award the long-term service contract to a provider for that key link.

Mr. André Lapointe: The funding we're requesting here is for the current year for the three Atlantic services: Northumberland Ferries, Bay Ferries, and CTMA. For the longer term, that is still being reviewed.

[Translation]

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's the only question I wanted to ask.

I'm offering my time to Mr. Aubin, so that he can ask questions about the decision to transfer the responsibilities for assessing pilot proficiency.

Mr. Robert Aubin: In fact, I would like to ask more questions about CATSA. Besides, I have one that is very clear.

Bill C-49 indicates that if regional airports want to obtain security services for chartered flights, at the international level, for instance, it will have to be done on a cost-recovery basis. It's also true for designated airports, but it's very true for smaller airports, like the one in my riding of Trois-Rivières.

Have you been able to evaluate, in any way, what the cost recovery is for a regional airport?

Mr. Mike Saunders: Yes. We have already made commitments with 10 or 12 airports that want to become designated airports. There were document transfers, and we had meetings to explain the costs and the steps to take before becoming a designated Transport Canada airport.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Can the steps for the process be submitted to the committee? It would give us a better understanding of the magnitude of the ticket surcharges that these services represent for a regional airport.

Mr. Mike Saunders: We can provide the committee clerk with the relevant information on the costs.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I would now like to come back to the request contained within the estimates. The following is an excerpt from CATSA's corporate plan summary 2016-17 to 2020-21:

... provided CATSA with \$29M in additional funding to maintain a service level of approximately 85% of passengers screened in 15 minutes or less in 2016/17.

Mr. Mike Saunders: Exactly.

Mr. Robert Aubin: That's the status.

You are now asking for \$25 million. How do you manage to maintain or increase your service level by 85% if your request for funding is lower this year than last year?

•(1600)

Mr. Mike Saunders: We did some calculations for this year. According to our models and our information, \$25.3 million is enough to maintain the level of service at 85% this year.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Okay.

Your goal isn't to increase the level of service from 85% to 90% or 95%?

Mr. Mike Saunders: We receive our budget and our funding from Parliament. If we have more money, it will obviously change the waiting time.

Mr. Robert Aubin: So you're telling me that you have not been asked to increase your 85% target. Based on your calculations, \$25 million is enough to meet the 85% target. Is that right?

Mr. Mike Saunders: For this year, yes.

We are working closely with Transport Canada to see what our options will be in the future.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Okay.

You expect to reach a service level of 85% with \$25 million, while last year it cost \$29 million to reach the same service level. What has changed in relation to how you do things?

Mr. Mike Saunders: Our model's margin of error is 3%. So it can be included in this 3% of the calculations for this year.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I'm finished, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a few questions for everyone seated here. Thank you for being here.

My first question has to do with your budgeting and, of course, your over-year budgeting when it comes to managing your assets. I'm hearing that your forecasts and the actual work you're doing are becoming more volatile. I'm assuming that one of the reasons you're asking for less year after year is that you may have had surpluses in reserve that you can now apply to capital projects.

Have you established asset management reserve accounts looking after the life cycle and therefore the repair, maintenance, and ultimate replacement of your assets? Have you established those accounts to therefore be more consistent and sustainable with respect to the financing you're requiring to look after the management of those assets?

Mr. André Lapointe: In terms of capital budgets, we have a yearly base of about \$56 million or \$57 million for capital renewal and investment. We have a five-year investment plan that is renewed periodically, where we map out our needs and investments and look across the system for what we need to invest.

We don't have reserves per se, but we have a regular influx of capital investment money. That goes to airport supports. It also goes to our IT infrastructure within the department.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Especially as it relates to your five-year or ten-year forecasts, instead of coming back year after year in this environment asking for capital funding, would you find it more advantageous, for the sake of better, more sustainable, and smarter planning, to ask for or to create in your operating budget a contribution that would otherwise go to capital accounts, so that therefore that work can be done?

Mr. André Lapointe: In addition to the base budget that we have every year, we've had, as you'll see if you look back, a number of periodic influxes of infrastructure money above and beyond. That permits us to accelerate the renewal or the construction of some of our assets on the ports and airports side. That has been extremely helpful. We've had two influxes in the last five or six years, which has permitted us to accelerate some of our renewal.

In terms of planning ahead, I think our investment plan does a good job of forecasting what we'll need and when. In addition to our regular capital, the additional capital that comes in is sufficient for our requirements.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I have a comment on that before I go to my next question. This is just my opinion, and what do I know compared to what you folks who are in business every day know? It may be advantageous to look at that forecasting being the basis of your operating contributions to a capital reserve. That would then create a discipline to be strictly focused on what contributions have to be made, versus not made and then having the assets crumbling and of course not being sustainable, thereby driving against revenues that can be foreseen to offset the ultimate cost through that forecast five or ten years down the road.

An example of that is the St. Lawrence Seaway. Look at the condition of the St. Lawrence Seaway today. If a proper asset management plan had been disciplined and had been followed in the same fashion, it might have driven a lot more revenues to help offset the overall costs of the asset itself in terms of capital, as well as bringing down the cost of operating for those using the asset on an annual basis.

To that end, in 1974, as you may know, a bridge came down in the Welland Canal, which is a portion of the St. Lawrence Seaway, dissecting a community, the city of Thorold. When that bridge came down, they started a ferry service. I won't say that it ultimately took care of the challenge of having to cross over the canal in one city, but it helped. Right now, that ferry service is being looked at. Although there has been a one- or two-year extension to the ferry service, I believe, they're looking at taking it out after that and/or at least funding it for the folks down in the city of Thorold.

Is this something that Transport Canada is looking at or should be looking at? Ultimately, the request of t part of my constituency is to maintain this service well into the future, albeit it has been running since 1974, so that this community could be closer together rather than being dissected apart, with the Welland canal being a part of that city that is, again, dissecting it right down the middle.

• (1605)

Mr. André Lapointe: I have to say that I'm not familiar with that service. Is it provincial? I'm pretty sure it's not federal.

Mr. Vance Badawey: It's federal.

Mr. André Lapointe: It is?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Yes.

Mr. André Lapointe: Okay. That's news to me.

Mr. Vance Badawey: In fairness, Mr. Lapointe, what I can do is get you some information on it. Ultimately, the intent here is to sustain that funding so that the service can be sustained and they can have an easier time travelling throughout the community, versus having to travel—especially if they're pedestrians or cyclists—around a loop that is miles long instead of simply crossing the canal, which is in their backyard.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Badawey.

We'll move on to Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you very much.

The first question I have—and forgive me if this has already been brought up—is on the \$25.3 million. I'm not sure if you mentioned it, and I didn't see it in your notes, but what exactly will that money go towards?

Mr. Mike Saunders: The \$25.3 million would be devoted to our pre-board screening, which is essentially what most people are familiar with in terms of CATSA services when they go to a security checkpoint. That would be operating funds that would augment all the checkpoints across the country.

Mr. Ben Lobb: That's the money goes into funding the staff who are there. Is that the idea?

Mr. Mike Saunders: The labour, yes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay.

Let's take the example, the case of Pearson airport and Vancouver. I think Ms. Block mentioned that they are now paying for labour as well as what is already provided. Will any of this \$25.3 million go back into Pearson and Vancouver, or does it go to the other airports?

Ms. Andie Andreou: The appropriations we receive are received so that we can maintain an 85-15 service level, which means that 85% of the passengers will be screened in 15 minutes or less.

In the case of the GTAA and Vancouver, they'd like a higher service level, so they come to us with what they would like, and they pay for additional screening services.

Mr. Ben Lobb: On that 85-15 number, is that calculation over a 24-hour period? Is that how you calculate that?

Mr. Mike Saunders: No. It's done on an annual basis per airport, so it's not done on a 24-hour basis.

Mr. Ben Lobb: No, but I'm saying that it includes all 24 hours of the day.

Mr. Mike Saunders: Yes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Do you have numbers that you can identify each hour to see how your performance is? Do you have those numbers?

Mr. Mike Saunders: I would say that I believe we do, yes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is that a document that you could share with the committee? It can't be a private number; it must be a public number. Is it?

Mr. Mike Saunders: I think that's something we can share, yes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I would venture a guess that 85-15 is pretty achievable, because I'm sure all members of this committee have travelled in all areas and at all hours of the night and day. I would argue that from evening hours into the late flights it's probably a couple of minutes to get through security, but I also, like some of my colleagues, I'm sure, have walked through the front door of terminal one at Pearson on a Monday morning between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m., and I don't know if it's ever been 85 and 15. I'm curious as to what those numbers are. Could you table those?

• (1610)

Mr. Mike Saunders: I think, sir, that you're referring to the peak hours. Those are a little different, but it's all factored into the 85-15 that we're seeking as a target annually.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay. Thank you.

Again, I don't know.... Maybe you can't talk about this or you don't want to, but the repaving of Pearson airport runway 05-23.... Is that how you say it?

Mr. Mike Saunders: Sir, it would have nothing to do with CATSA. That's not within our mandate.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'm sorry.

To the witnesses who are here, can anybody comment on that?

Mr. André Lapointe: That would be under the airport authority, so we wouldn't have a line of sight on that at all.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Does Transport Canada not have any say at all in that?

Mr. André Lapointe: No. The operations of the airport are managed by the airport authority.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Fair enough, but the Minister of Transport is responsible for travel in this country. There were over 1,000 flights cancelled or delayed due to that runway. When they are going to repave a runway as vital as that one, is there no discussion between Transport Canada and the airport authority? Is that what you're telling me?

Mr. André Lapointe: No, there wouldn't be.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is that an opportunity, do you think, where there could be some corrections made in the future on timing or what have you? Because ultimately, as a consumer.... In the House of Commons here, we are discussing the Transportation Act and the modernization of travelling and making it much more efficient. For me, as just a regular guy walking the streets, I would say that this would be something that the Minister of Transport and the airport authority should be working in conjunction on, because that was a disaster this spring. Maybe I'm naive, but to think that the minister has no information or discussion with Air Canada itself and the authority I think is a little surprising.

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Thank you for the question.

I'll just add that through our safety and security area and working with our civil aviation and aviation security experts, we have a constant dialogue on issues with airports across the country and with various airlines. In those conversations, we talk to them about the impacts of the airport, but we don't direct things such as when and how they would pave a landing strip, as an example. However, we have conversations about the things that are happening, and we give input and provide thoughts and advice on certain issues.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay. Back to CATSA, then—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lobb. Your time is up.

We'll go on to Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to take advantage of the fact that we have some Transport Canada officials here to look for some information that you probably won't have, but I'll ask you to supply it to us. It has to do with a study we're doing right now on the tanker moratorium off the north coast.

One question that has come up a few times has to do with the threshold amount of oil that can be barged between communities in that area. Right now, the legislation is proposing a threshold of 12,500 tonnes. We've heard from several witnesses that this is an awful lot of oil on a barge, and that it isn't necessary. The average village up that way, when it's being replenished, needs maybe 3,200 tonnes. I'm wondering if somebody can get back to us with the rationale for where that threshold number of 12,500 tonnes came from.

Mr. André Lapointe: We'll certainly take that back.

Mr. Ken Hardie: The other piece of this, though, hopefully would start showing up on your budgets fairly soon. Transport Canada will have obligations to enforce. In other words, if a ship enters the zone, it needs to be checked to make sure that it doesn't have the wrong type of material on board or too much of the wrong type of material. Have there been any provisions made to improve Transport Canada's capacity to enforce in that area?

• (1615)

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Thank you for the question. Maybe I can start and then turn it back to my colleague in terms of any numbers or costs.

Earlier, I spoke about the oversight program that we have in place on the inspection program. We also have responsibility for marine safety and security. As part of that program we have a strong oversight system as well. At this time, we have approximately 350

oversight personnel in place. Much like in our civil aviation program, what we do is take a look at where we channel our resources and in what particular area, and focus on those higher-risk areas.

We also have a centre of expertise for enforcement. As part of that centre of expertise for enforcement, we work very closely with oversight to ensure that in fact for what we see and what we're assessing we have the capacity to put measures in place to address any of those issues—

Mr. Ken Hardie: But that's not the question.

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Okay.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It has to do with what you see and what you assess. Do you have the capacity to see and assess what's going on outside of Prince Rupert on the ocean?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: At this time we have sufficient resources to carry out our oversight and our enforcement program and we can come back to you.... I'll turn to my colleague to determine if there is one specifically identified for that program.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Last year we had an opportunity to visit Lac-Mégantic and look at the situation there. There are two issues. First of all, there is the status of the rail bypass, for which that community has been looking for quite some time, and there are also ongoing questions—deep concerns, in fact—about the level of rail and railway inspections.

Again, do you have the capacity to actually go out and examine short-line railroads such as that one and determine whether or not they're being operated and maintained in a safe way? As well, what is status of the bypass for Lac-Mégantic?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: On the first question with respect to the bypass, a number of studies have taken place. A decision hasn't been taken at this time. We're working very closely with the community. As you can appreciate, a number of lenses that have come onto this conversation with respect to what is most appropriate for the community. Those conversations continue.

With respect to the rail safety, we actually have a robust system in place at this time, both with rail safety inspection and with our transportation of dangerous goods. Both of those areas have significantly increased their oversight and the processes put in place with respect to monitoring the transportation of dangerous goods. Research and education are also included with the rail safety program for people working in direct contact with rail safety and the transportation of dangerous goods.

Mr. Ken Hardie: With respect to direct contact with the people working in the industry, again, how much of it is on-the-ground inspections versus SMS audits?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: We are on the ground doing inspections every day across the country on rail safety systems, and we're constantly doing SMS audits.

Mr. Ken Hardie: More of what? More SMS...? We get the impression that the needle has swung more to the SMS audit and away from on-the-ground inspections. Is that the case?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: I wouldn't say so. I don't have the numbers in front of me to show you the difference with respect to how much of each there is, but I would say to you that we work very closely with the railways and with our rail safety program to ensure that there are real, live inspections taking place on rail every day—both us and the railway companies themselves.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): I'll pass my time to somebody else who has questions on this matter.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I will follow up on the previous comments in terms of the robust system in the transportation of dangerous goods.

I'm sure you're aware that in Bill C-49, there is an exclusion clause when it comes to TIHs. I'm wondering why an exclusion clause like that would have been put into that bill. We moved an amendment to have it removed because it didn't address the concerns around captive shippers that are shipping dangerous goods or chemicals that are considered dangerous.

If we have a robust system in the transportation of dangerous goods and we know we have another piece of legislation that governs it, why would we need to have an exclusion put into Bill C-49?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: I'm sorry. I don't have that clause in front of me. I can't reference it off the top of my head right now, but I would say to you that the transportation of dangerous goods system is constantly evolving. We're always looking at ways to improve that, including research, working with other countries on research, working with industry, and looking to improve the system. I can get some information on that particular clause and come back to you.

• (1620)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

Ben, do you want to follow up on the question on the \$25 million that you wanted to continue with?

Mr. Ben Lobb: I can.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have three minutes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Can anybody comment on the genesis of the transportation renewal on the voice and video recorders? Can anybody comment on that?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Could I ask you to repeat your question?

Mr. Ben Lobb: On the Transportation Safety Board, did they recommend that those be installed?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: Yes, they did.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Who will manage the data that is collected on both the video and the voice?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: It will be a combination. We will regulate exactly what the requirements will be for putting the system in place: the type of equipment to be purchased, how the data will be collected, and what the parameters will be around that. The data will be used both by Transport Canada and by the Transportation Safety Board in different fashions, as well as by railway companies. There are different parameters around each of those pieces, including things like random sampling of the available data, but solely for the purpose of determining safety issues with respect to—

Mr. Ben Lobb: I think that brings up an interesting point, then. Will the information that's collected be stored on a Transport Canada server or will it be stored on a CN Rail or CP Rail server?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: The company will own the equipment and the data that's collected, but there will be a very specific privacy framework around the use of that data.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is it the railways that pay for the recording systems?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: That's correct.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Transport Canada doesn't pay for any of that.

Ms. Lori MacDonald: No. The companies will pay for that.

Mr. Ben Lobb: The primary purpose—or the only purpose, I guess—for this was to ensure that in the case of a crash there's further information in order to be able to review it. Is that correct?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: There's more than one purpose for it. That is one purpose, for sure: to be able to review what happened in the case of an accident, as we've seen many cases where there are serious accidents, particularly where there are fatalities. I can think of one from a few years ago—I think it was in the Brampton area—when all three people on a locomotive were killed. It was very difficult to determine what happened in that situation. Certainly, the Transportation Safety Board would want to use that information in investigations.

Mr. Ben Lobb: You also said in your statement that you believe companies such as CP Rail and CN Rail will be able to use that data for a spot check in auditing for safety. Is that correct?

Ms. Lori MacDonald: I wouldn't use that language. I would say that they can use that information that's pulled randomly to make determinations with respect to identifying trends, to issues they may be seeing in the cab that have an impact on direct safety of the program—

Mr. Ben Lobb: Outside—

The Chair: We're running out of time again.

Mr. Aubin, we have two minutes left.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to come back to aviation safety. Earlier, I mentioned a 12% cut between 2015-16 and 2016-17, and I'm trying to determine where this cut had an effect.

What training resources have been removed because of this 12% loss?

Mr. André Lapointe: Are you talking about civil aviation safety?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Yes, I'm talking about aviation safety.

Mr. André Lapointe: I could give you a specific answer later about cash flow from one year to the next.

As I mentioned, projects often end during the year, and the funds decrease. In addition, there is an increase for inspection and monitoring staff.

• (1625)

Mr. Robert Aubin: So I'm to understand from your answer that, despite a 12% cut, none of the services were affected.

Mr. André Lapointe: I'll check about the 12%, but it could be projects. I don't have the details, but I'll get you this information.

If we end up in a situation where there is a budget cut—it can happen—we will allocate staff to the areas most at risk. We do this regularly in the case of all modes.

So I'll provide you with information on the cash flow later.

Mr. Robert Aubin: I have a question that may be a bit finicky, and if you have the answer, great, if not, we'll look for it.

How many hours does Transport Canada spend training an inspector who will be able to supervise pilots?

Mr. André Lapointe: You're talking about pilots—

Mr. Robert Aubin: I'm talking about pilots who supervise pilots.

Mr. André Lapointe: To train an inspector at the department, it can take six to eight months. They need to learn the rules. Someone from the industry, on the other hand, is already aware of the regulations and should be familiar with them.

As for the check pilots, we will be able to give you the details of the training, and the time it takes to train someone as a check pilot. However, if you look at different modes of transportation, whether it's rail, marine, or air, the periods may vary, but there is mandatory training, be it in regulations, investigations, and so on.

Mr. Robert Aubin: So the pilots you train at Transport Canada arrive with some expertise.

Mr. André Lapointe: Yes.

Mr. Robert Aubin: So, do the pilots hired by a private company who have to do this work with the pilots of the company in question receive the same training from Transport Canada before they do the work?

Mr. André Lapointe: I'm not sure, but we could give you an answer later.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Aubin.

I want to thank our witnesses today. It's been very helpful. Thanks very much to all of you for the information. There were several things asked, and if you could report back through the clerk so that the committee has that information, we would appreciate it.

Thank you very much to all our witnesses.

Mr. Sikand.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): I'm sorry, but do we have time for a question?

The Chair: Do you have one short question?

Mr. Gagan Sikand: I have a very short question.

The Chair: Okay. We'll have one short question and a short answer.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Mr. Lapointe, you mentioned that there is funding for or that you're taking care of air pollution as well. I wanted a quick answer as to what initiatives you've taken to address air pollution.

Mr. André Lapointe: Thank you.

You can look at the main estimates under new funding. We have funding to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If you look down in the list, you'll see that it's \$349,000. That's for this year to start work on retrofits for heavy-duty vehicles. That work is ongoing. We will be working with the provinces and other departments in the federal system to address that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Again, thank you, witnesses. We are waiting for our next officials. You're free to leave. We'll reset and refocus ourselves here.

Mr. Aubin, while we're waiting for witnesses to switch—I haven't suspended—do you wish to speak to your motion now, or shall we wait until 5:15?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: We could do it now, if you want. I'll be brief.

In my opinion, the first hour of this meeting with the Department of Transport leaves us with more questions than answers. I think it would be quite appropriate for us to have the Minister of Transport and François Collins, director of National Operations and Civil Aviation at Transport Canada, appear to testify about Transport Canada's decision to transfer the responsibility for assessing pilot proficiency to airlines. That's what the motion says.

We see that many questions are still unanswered, and unfortunately we ran out of time while I still had questions. We are told that many countries are doing the same thing, but the article that Mr. Hardie mentioned and a few others that I have read suggest rather the opposite, and say that Canada seems to be doing a lot of work on this issue.

In all logic and, I would say, for the sake of continuity of the study on aviation safety that we have conducted, it seems to me that we owe it to ourselves to provide clear answers to the public following the matter and to all those who travel by plane. That's why I'm seeking the support of my colleagues so that we can devote a meeting to the Minister of Transport and to Mr. Collins in this regard.

• (1630)

[English]

The Chair: Would you like us to vote on that now?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Is there any further discussion? Questions?

Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I want to state my support for Mr. Aubin's motion. There have been a number of concerns raised in regard to this issue from various stakeholders that I've had the opportunity to meet. I was interviewed on this issue. I would support him on this motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I would note that we've just had an opportunity to ask questions. I did.

Mr. Aubin, you used some of your time. Ms. Block and others didn't. My guess is that we've actually received the information, the essential elements of the information that we needed. Whether or not we agree with it is another matter, but it may be an issue that we can take up in future studies, because these people will be back, that's for sure.

The Chair: All right. All those in favour of Mr. Aubin's motion, please raise your hands. Opposed?

(Motion negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

We will continue with our witnesses in order not to lose too much time.

Minister Sohi, welcome. Thank you very much to you and to your officials. We have a vote at the end on our amendments, so I don't want to take time away from the committee's opportunity to ask you questions.

We will now continue with our study of supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

I'm delighted to welcome the Honourable Amarjeet Sohi, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, along with his officials: Ms. Kelly Gillis, deputy minister; Ms. Darlene Boileau, assistant deputy minister of corporate services and chief financial officer; and, Mr. Marc Fortin, assistant deputy minister of program operations.

We also have with us, from the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority, Mr. André Juneau, chief operating officer, and Ms. Linda Hurdle, chief financial administrative officer.

Thanks very much to all of you for coming today.

Minister Sohi, the floor is yours for five minutes of opening remarks.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for introducing my officials. I want to let you know that Marc Miller is also joining us here.

Thank you so much for inviting me to speak with you.

I have been invited to speak to you about Infrastructure Canada's supplementary estimates (B), which were tabled in the House of Commons on October 26. Through supplementary estimates (B), Infrastructure Canada is requesting a net increase of \$113.1 million in funding.

The funding we've requested includes operating funding for Infrastructure Canada to manage and administer the Investing in Canada infrastructure plan; the re-profiling of operating and capital funds from 2016-17 to 2017-18 for the new Champlain Bridge and Gordie Howe International Bridge projects; and, a transfer of capital funds to the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority for remediation activities associated with a Canadian property.

We're working with central agencies to reset the profiles of several programs, and this will result in moving funds from this year forward to future years to ensure that funds remain available for our partners as and when they require them.

It is important for me to clarify that Infrastructure Canada's spending matches the pace at which our partners build their projects and submit claims to the department for reimbursement. Once projects are approved by Infrastructure Canada, our partners can begin work immediately.

The re-profiling of funds will ensure that funding is available in future years when it's needed by our project partners for already approved projects. We will also continue to work closely with them to move their priorities forward and provide the flexibility necessary to meet their requirements.

To support the needs of communities across Canada, I'm proud to say that Infrastructure Canada is the lead in delivering our government's historic investments in infrastructure, which will invest more than \$180 billion in communities across the country.

We are working closely with other federal departments and in close partnership with the provinces, territories, municipalities, indigenous partners, and stakeholder organizations to make sure that our investments are responding to the needs of Canadians, while also supporting our government's overarching priorities. We want to support projects that will create long-term growth, improve the sustainability of our communities, and grow and support the middle class.

What do these investments mean for Canadians?

Over 800 older buses are being replaced with newer, more reliable, and more efficient vehicles. This is in addition to 835 new buses that have been ordered to expand existing transportation networks, offering up over 28,000 additional seats to commuters, as well as 772 public transit accessibility initiatives to help ensure people with mobility challenges are able to get where they need to go safely and efficiently, and 120 kilometres of new active transportation trails to support better integration with public transit networks.

As well, 3,817 new affordable homes have been built. We've also provided more than 115,000 families of low-income households with much-needed renovations and repairs, and over 2,275 small communities saw improvements to their water, waste-water, and stormwater management systems, leading to more modern and reliable services. We've also funded flood risk reduction projects in over 260 communities to better protect families, properties, and livelihoods.

We also made significant progress on two major projects: the Gordie Howe International Bridge and the new Champlain Bridge. I will let my colleagues from the WDBA speak more about the Gordie Howe International Bridge. For the new Champlain Bridge, we announced recently that we have introduced a series of measures to ensure we meet our December 2018 completion date, while also ensuring the existing bridge remains safe for travellers. My officials and I are happy to answer any questions the committee may have about these.

● (1635)

In conclusion, I will hand things over to my colleagues before we take your questions, but I want to first thank the committee for the opportunity to be here today to discuss our infrastructure plan. I'm very proud of the work that my department has been doing to build stronger, middle-class, sustainable, and inclusive communities for all of us to live in.

Thank you so much once again for having us here.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Sohi.

Mr. Juneau.

Mr. André Juneau (Chief Operating Officer, Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for welcoming us here today.

First I should say that I'm the chief operating officer of the WDBA, and I'm accompanied, as you said, by the chief financial and administrative officer.

I want to talk first about the supplementary estimates that you have in front of you. Of the \$58.9 million requested through these

estimates, \$38.7 million is re-profiled operating and capital funds from 2016-17 to 2017-18, and \$20.2 million is a transfer from Infrastructure Canada for remediation of the Canadian land. The funding is aligned with our priorities of what we call "early works", utility relocations on both sides of the border, property acquisitions in Michigan, and the ongoing delivery of the P3—public-private partnership—procurement process.

As the minister said, we are making real progress on the Gordie Howe International Bridge, with more than \$350 million in ongoing works at the Canadian and U.S. project sites. These activities include construction of an access road, placement of fill to address soil conditions, construction of stormwater management ponds, and utility relocations. On the U.S. side, these activities include acquisition of properties, environmental site work, and utility relocations.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

The Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority is undertaking these preparatory activities on both sides of the Canada-US border now so that our project is ready for our eventual private-sector partner to begin construction as quickly as possible in 2018. I will come back to that.

Our partners at the Michigan Department of Transportation are responsible for US property acquisition and have been actively working with business owners and residents. A year ago, when WDBA last appeared before this committee, the Michigan Department of Transportation had approximately 50% of required property under their control. Today, they have 80%. The Michigan Department of Transportation is adhering to a detailed timeline that will see property available for our eventual private-sector partner when it is needed for construction. I will add that all required Canadian property has been acquired.

We are currently in the second stage of our two-stage procurement process to identify a private-sector partner to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the Gordie Howe International Bridge project.

We have three highly qualified international proponent teams who are currently preparing their proposals in response to the detailed technical and financial requirements we have identified. Next year, we will complete our procurement process as these proposals will be submitted, we will undertake a fair and rigorous evaluation process, a preferred proponent will be named, and we will finalize negotiations. Our private-sector partner will be on-board in September 2018 and construction on the bridge will begin.

Consistent with best practices, our entire process is overseen by an independent fairness monitor who ensures transparency and fairness among the three proponents.

[English]

As part of all P3 procurement processes, proponents will submit detailed construction schedules and contract costs as part of their proposals. We look forward to the completion of the procurement process, when we'll be able to present the construction schedule, including the bridge opening date and the contract value of the winning proposal.

In doing all this work, we work daily with Infrastructure Canada, the Michigan governor's office, the Michigan Department of Transportation, the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, and Canadian and U.S. border agencies. We meet regularly with the City of Windsor and the City of Detroit, elected officials, community leaders, business owners, and so on.

We try hard and we devote a lot of energy to listening to our stakeholders. It has been one of my priorities since becoming chief operating officer to meet a wide range of stakeholders and to demonstrate our commitment. In fact, on November 24, we will host our third annual public meeting in Windsor, and we're working on our annual public meeting on the U.S. side shortly thereafter.

As Minister Sohi said, the Government of Canada is committed to building the Gordie Howe International Bridge, and we think this is evidenced by the work we've accomplished so far. We are on track to deliver this priority project.

I thank the honourable members, through you, Madam Chair, for having us here today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Let's move on to our questions.

Mr. Lobb.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair, I have a question.

The Chair: I have Mr. Lobb first on the list. Would you like...?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, if you don't mind.

The Chair: That's fine.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

I first want to ask Mr. Juneau a couple of questions.

You're asking for \$20 million for land remediation—I think it's pretty clear what that money is for—and you're asking for an additional \$38.7 million. I assume that's for operating expenses. Is that correct?

Mr. André Juneau: The first point to make is that it's a result of a re-profiling.

Let me ask Ms. Hurdle to give you the specifics on this.

Ms. Linda Hurdle (Chief Financial Administrative Officer, Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority): It's a mix of operating and capital dollars. The re-profiling is mostly due to some of the utility work we're doing with Hydro One for utility relocation on the Canadian side, and from some P3 procurement costs as well.

• (1645)

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

I think a lot of us are very concerned about this project. Last summer, the CEO of the authority was put on leave. We've also had delays in this project. It was recently announced that the selection from the short list of three contractors will not be made this year but will be delayed well into next year, and possibly even into the fall of next year. Also, we've just recently had the approval permit being granted to the Detroit International Bridge Company to construct a new Ambassador Bridge.

When you put this all together, it could very well be the case that the new Ambassador Bridge will open before this particular bridge, the Gordie Howe bridge. In the context of declining cross-border traffic numbers in recent years, this is a cause for concern. Will we be saddled with a bridge that opens after the new Ambassador Bridge, one that won't be able to generate the tolls necessary to pay for the costs of this bridge, which could be in the \$4-billion plus range?

Maybe you could speak to the delays that are taking place and to why it's taking so long, despite parliamentary appropriations for operating and capital costs that have been approved each and every time. Why are these delays taking place and how sure can we be that this bridge will be completed in the time that has been suggested, which is now 2023, three years after the time in the original commitment that was made? That commitment was made not just by the previous government, I might add, but also by the bridge authority's board and the Michigan governor's office.

Maybe you can speak to these delays. Why are these delays taking place? What is being done to make sure there are no further delays in this bridge, particularly in the context of the permit that the current government has granted for the new Ambassador Bridge?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I'll start.

First of all, I want to be very clear that our government's commitment to the Gordie Howe International Bridge is unwavering. We are committed to this bridge, and we will build this bridge. When the initial business analysis was done, there was always an understanding in the business case that we need two crossings, so the permitting related to the Ambassador Bridge does not impact upon the business case of Gordie Howe International Bridge.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, with respect, when the Gordie Howe bridge was proposed, it was in the context of an old Ambassador Bridge with only four lanes. We are now looking at a new Ambassador Bridge with 50% more capacity that could very well be completed ahead of the Gordie Howe bridge.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Mr. Juneau will speak to the particular details overall, but I can assure you that the business case is strong, and that both crossings are needed, based on the business case.

On the delays, I want to assure you that we are taking a very responsible approach to this bridge. When we got into power, a very nominal number of the properties that are required to build this bridge were in possession at that time, and now we have the vast majority of the properties on the U.S. side under our control to start construction. It's a more responsible, more appropriate, and less risky approach than the approach taken by the previous government.

Mr. Juneau.

Mr. André Juneau: Thank you, Minister.

I don't need to add to the basic points the minister made, but I will say in respect of the timing of the work next year, we've adopted a very careful timetable. It's my priority to make sure that we are able to move through that timetable with our partners.

The delay you referred to was one that allowed us to do some work with the proponents on the timing and the cost, and we are satisfied that we got a positive result out of that delay. I'm confident that with the support of the government and our other partners.... As I said, we're devoting a lot of energy to working with them. For instance, I met with Governor Snyder recently, and the minister spoke to him last week, I believe, so we have our American partners onside to meet a demanding timetable, and I think we will meet it.

• (1650)

Hon. Michael Chong: Quickly, have you done any—

The Chair: Mr. Chong—

Hon. Michael Chong: Is my time up?

The Chair: Yes. I'm sorry.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here this afternoon. I appreciate your presence and that of your staff and the members of the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority.

Minister, last week the Canadian Press reported that the government planned to re-profile to future years about \$2 billion in planned infrastructure spending. With that, some folks have speculated that this means funding would be lost. Can you explain how federal infrastructure dollars flow to these projects and are generally managed within the Infrastructure Canada program?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you so much for this question.

Since taking office, we have approved more than 4,000 projects with a combined provincial, federal, and municipal investment of \$35 billion. Once we give approval to a project, we are committed to supporting that project so construction can proceed immediately after the federal approval.

As you know, it takes a number of years to build a particular infrastructure project. Our proponents usually don't send us the invoices until the project is completed. The money that we may have budgeted in one particular year may not be paid out in that particular

year because we are still waiting for the invoices. That's why you see the \$2 billion being re-profiled from one year to the next year.

It is very important for us to understand that this \$2 billion is committed to projects. It is not money that is not making a difference. Because of that approval and that commitment, jobs are being created, and communities are getting the benefit of having clean water to drink, or roads are being paved, or bridges are being constructed. All the work is taking place, but we have to wait until we get the invoices. Then we pay out on those commitments that we have made to our partners.

Mr. Vance Badawey: You're essentially putting that money into a reserve, protected for that project and, of course, for the timeframe of that project in which it otherwise would be paid out.

Now, when that money is sitting here, are we—I'll use these words—taking advantage of investment opportunities, such as the percentage we're getting back because the money is sitting in the bank? Or is it just sitting there being stagnant?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: That money is within the federal government's fiscal framework. That is allocated to Infrastructure Canada on an annual basis, based on the projection of how much funds we can flow. There's always a lag time between the project approval and project construction and when we get the invoices; at that time, we pay the money. The money is there. The money is committed to those particular projects. Because of that commitment, those projects proceed. That's the commitment we have to honour with our partners.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Minister, we're two years into the government's mandate and, with that, I'm wondering where things stand generally with the government's infrastructure plan to this point. It's very robust. We all recognize that, regardless of which side of the floor we're sitting on. All 338 ridings, I'm sure, are taking full advantage of the infrastructure funds you've announced, and again, regardless of what party or what part of the country they're from.

What has been achieved to date and what's still to come? For example, I know you're now in the process of negotiating long-term bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories. Is there anything you've learned from phase one that is helping with negotiations and the design of long-term programs with sustainable funding for those programs? As well, are we recognizing other residual benefits to those investments in terms of the outcomes that are being achieved from those individual investments at the municipal and provincial levels?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: I am extremely proud of the work we have been able to accomplish in partnership with the provinces, territories, municipalities, the non-profit sector, and indigenous communities. I gave you the number of projects that we have approved. There have been more than 4,000 projects approved, with a combined investment of \$35 billion. The vast majority of those projects are currently under way.

What our partners have told us is that they want a more collaborative approach to decision-making, the development of the criteria, and the project approval, and a streamlining of some of the process. We have done that and we are still engaging with them. Another thing they told us is that the kind of ad hoc, one-time infrastructure funding approach is not really a good approach. What they're looking for is long-term predictability. They're looking for long-term sustainable funding.

That is why, after listening to them, we have initiated discussions on a 10-year plan. We want to make sure that every province knows how much money they're going to receive from the federal government under the different funding envelopes and in such a way that they can start aligning their capital plans and their priorities with the federal capital plans and federal priorities. That's one thing we have learned: to give them the sustainability and predictability.

● (1655)

Mr. Vance Badawey: You see that alignment—

The Chair: Thanks very much, Minister Sohi.

We'll go on to Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, thank you for being here. We greatly appreciate it.

My first question is on a topic that certainly hasn't escaped you, Mr. Minister.

Increasingly, the voices of all citizens are rising loud and clear across the country. They are finding it increasingly difficult to accept that the great fortunes of this country, whether they are held by businessmen or businesswomen or by large corporations, do not pay their fair share of taxes and resort to tax havens. And now the Paradise Papers are adding a layer to that.

In setting up this infrastructure bank that you sponsor, have you put in place mechanisms to prevent the bank's clients from being big companies that use tax havens to move some of their profits and not to assume their responsibilities for taxation?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you so much for that question.

The reason we have created the Canada infrastructure bank is to build more infrastructure that our communities need, along with giving them a historic amount of grant funding that we will continue to provide to them. We are tripling our investment and we see that the public sector and private sector can work together to undertake projects that are large and complex and may not otherwise get done.

With regard to the infrastructure bank, we want to make sure that we have the right type of expertise in the bank that will allow us to always protect the public interest, to make sure that we have the right board, the right chair, and right staff. Their goal is to make sure that whatever deal is structured, it is structured to make sure the project is in the public interest, but that the deal itself does not put dollars at risk, that we make sure the private sector is able to absorb this—

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Am I to understand that it will be up to the board of directors, and not the minister, to put in place measures to prevent people from doing business with companies that use tax havens?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: The bank will table its operational plan annually in the Parliament. It is also accountable to the Parliament through reporting. There's accountability built into the structure, such that everything the bank undertakes can be scrutinized by the Parliament.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: On another note, government documents have shown that members of BlackRock, the largest asset manager in the world, have worked closely with the federal government to build this infrastructure bank.

My question has two parts. Will BlackRock be allowed to bid on projects that would be managed by the Canada Infrastructure Bank? If so, isn't there at the very least an appearance of a conflict of interest?

● (1700)

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you once again for that question.

In the lead-up to setting up the Canada infrastructure bank, we consulted a wide range of stakeholders. We consulted unions, pension funds, the provinces, municipalities, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Our consultations were very large and very wide-ranging.

As for which company can do business or which pension funds can bid on projects or work with the bank, that decision will be made by the experts at the Canada infrastructure bank. We will not give any preference to any organization or pension fund. It will be done in such a way that we are getting the best value for Canadian dollars and building the infrastructure that is needed by our communities.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: The most recent report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer quite clearly showed that 70% of the funds allocated to this program, which you described as historic in your preliminary remarks, were still not allocated.

In your opening remarks, you also said that you are proud to have approved 4,000 projects, but these projects are not necessarily under construction at this time. There's a difference between the amounts granted and the amounts that are really used.

Since the Parliamentary Budget Officer tabled his report, has that 70% gone down? That would mean that more projects had been accepted.

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you so much.

As I said earlier, the way in which infrastructure commitments are met is that we approve projects and attach the funding to that particular project, and then, once the project is complete, we pay out the invoices. We always have to wait. This is a choice that our proponents make. They can send us invoices earlier and we can pay their money out earlier, but it is easier for them to wait until the project is completed. That's why you see this gap between project approval and the flow of funds.

What I can tell you is that, based on the information that has been given to us by provinces and municipalities, out of the 4,000 projects we have approved, the vast majority are under way. I gave you the example of close to 1,600 buses that are being bought. They are being bought because of federal dollars committed to those buses, right?

I also talked about thousands of the water and waste-water projects—

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Right, but has the 70% rate changed?

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Aubin. Thank you.

Thank you, Minister Sohi.

We'll move on to Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to Minister Sohi and his staff.

I want to focus on transit, which is a favourite subject of mine. I've been working in that sector, as in fact has Minister Sohi.

I want to start not so much with the big city transit, but in fact quite the opposite. We've heard a few times of the difficulties and dangers involved with the absence or growing absence of intercity transit services, up north especially, in remote areas. I know that in British Columbia, along the Yellowhead highway, which is also called the "Highway of Tears", it's an issue not just of mobility but of safety, especially for first nations women. Has there been any thought of...or, more particularly, have there been any submissions for infrastructure funding to establish and operate that kind of service?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you so much for asking that question, because accessibility is very important. In the situation you have described, we just can't imagine the pain and heartache of those women and girls who didn't have access to transportation and got into these very difficult circumstances.

The federal government under Infrastructure Canada does not fund intercity bus service because that is based on a commercial arrangement. Companies such as Greyhound are responsible for providing that service, but we encourage buses and we do consultations with indigenous and rural communities.

What I can share with you is that the investment we're making in transportation networks within the cities and in helping provinces with municipal infrastructure and municipal public transit systems is freeing up resources for provinces to look at creative ways of providing intercity transportation systems.

In the case of British Columbia, I understand that BC Transit was able to expand its service to link rural communities because of the resources we made available to them within the city service. That freed up resources that they were able to use to provide service into areas in which we don't have an area of responsibility.

● (1705)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Another area has to do with commuter rail. I'm thinking specifically of some of our major corridors, which also, of course, have to carry trade. In British Columbia, we're certainly looking at growth in trade, which is obviously a very good thing, but also a growing demand for commuter rail services, and one may choke out the other. In fact, in the grand scheme of things, trade will win, which would be a huge barrier to the growth of commuter rail in a large and spread-out area like metro Vancouver.

Have you and the transportation minister been talking about some approach that could make both things happen?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, I know that Minister Garneau is working with Via Rail on that particular area within his department. He will be able to give you a more fulsome answer about what steps are being taken.

Where we see the potential for expansion of rail service or intermunicipal and interprovincial public transportation service is in the possibility that provinces and municipalities can identify projects to be looked at through the Canada infrastructure bank. I think we see potential in that, or in cities and provinces working together to expand that service. We are always open for discussions with them about how Infrastructure Canada, Transport Canada, provinces, and municipalities can work together to expand options for mobility choices for people.

Mr. Ken Hardie: With respect to bus procurement, have there been discussions with the municipal authorities about ensuring that the buses they buy are low-floor ones and accessible to people with disabilities, and that there's some sharing of available funding toward custom transit? There is an aging population and a need for access to that kind of service, especially as we ask seniors to age in place but still access the services they need.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Yes. As I said earlier in my remarks, the number of accessibility transit projects that we have funded in the phase one investment speaks to the commitment of the provinces and municipalities to making sure that the transit fleet is accessible. They're buying low-floor buses and buying electric buses. Maybe they're buying community buses that go into smaller communities.

They are also buying buses that are accessible to wheelchairs; they have wheelchair ramps. Paratransit buses are also being included in the fleet.

We're seeing great improvements in improving accessibility for communities. This is something that we are absolutely passionate about as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I want to thank you so much for being here, Minister, and we actually have a natural segue on the issue of small community transit.

First and foremost, I think there was a lot of fear around the initial plan to invest in infrastructure, because a lot of people back home, in the small communities I represent, feared that big cities were going to be a sponge when it comes to infrastructure money. I was extraordinarily pleased to see specific money set aside for small communities in the \$2-billion rural and remote community fund when you announced phase two.

One of the struggles we have is that a key part of my riding depends not on municipally owned public transit, but instead on non-profit groups that have community transit initiatives. These are funded by municipalities, but not owned by municipalities, so they don't qualify for the public transit funding.

Would projects like this potentially be eligible under the small communities fund so we can get people moving and help seniors, people living in poverty, and people living with disabilities?

• (1710)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, we are very proud to be establishing this dedicated funding of \$2 billion for rural communities. This is the largest investment in rural and northern small communities that we have seen in recent history. Having said that, those rural communities still qualify for funding under other funding streams, so they can get support on that.

On localized areas and the non-profits, I'm going to ask my staff to comment on that.

Marc.

Dr. Marc Fortin (Assistant Deputy Minister, Program Operations, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Thanks for your question.

For those kinds of projects, there are many other opportunities in terms of funding. There's a gas tax that municipalities can use, and there's the small community fund itself, but for the big transit ones, we are talking about different categories.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm not thinking about the public transit fund. I'm thinking about the rural and remote communities infrastructure fund. Will there be flexibility in the negotiations with provinces if they say that a priority for them is to support a different kind of infrastructure that may not be typical in other provinces, such as community transit? Would that be a subject of negotiation?

Dr. Marc Fortin: We would have to see the type of project that we're talking about and the ownership and that kind of stuff. That needs to be looked at.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay.

I have another question on small communities. Your parliamentary secretary will be familiar with one of the great struggles that I have

in a community named Moser River, where his father was born. It falls within a very rural area of a large urban municipality.

The Halifax Regional Municipality has hundreds of thousands of people in it, but there are certain communities that have hundreds or, potentially, a couple of thousand people. There's a struggle here, because there are real communities with maybe 400, 1,000, or 2,000 people and they'll have a hospital, but they may not qualify for this small community fund. Is this a problem that you would be willing to sit down and work through with me in order to talk about how they might access funding that's designed for small communities, but that due to an odd municipal arrangement they currently wouldn't be eligible for?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, thank you for the question. The current definition in the Building Canada fund of a "small" community is a community that has a population of less than 100,000. Smaller provinces have only a number of communities that are larger than that.

What we want to do is sit down with the provinces and really understand how they see a small community, how they define a rural community, and create that flexibility for every province to see what role the federal government can play in supporting those communities. We are not going to be defining from a federal perspective what a small community should look like. I think that cookie cutter approach is not really effective and has not worked. We're going to sit down and we'll be flexible in finding more appropriate ways of supporting those rural, northern, and small communities.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you. Just before I ask my next question, I just want to say that I sincerely appreciate that. Right now, there are federal programs designed for rural communities that benefit communities 10 times the size of some I represent, which can't access the same ones. I do appreciate your comments.

Finally, if I have time, Madam Chair, the timing of the agreements with the provinces around phase two could present a challenge. Some, such as the warden of Antigonish County, for example, raised this with me. If we roll out programs that don't kick in until the summer, it can be more expensive to fund projects, because the contractors are all busy.

I understand that you're negotiating these things quite soon, and if we can get a deal in the winter, say, when things are slower, this might enable small communities to build one extra project. What's the rough timeline of the infrastructure agreements so that we might be able to take advantage of this cycle?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Yes. Phase one investments are being made now, and for the long-term plan we have started negotiations. Our goal will be to conclude those negotiations by the first quarter of next year. Please keep in mind that this is a 10-year plan. I think it will be better for provinces and municipalities to know how much money they're going to get so that they can start planning. There's no pressure such as you are describing. That pressure is there just when there's short-term funding available. With a long-term, consistent approach, those pressures may not be as prevalent.

• (1715)

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Sohi.

We'll move on to Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a brief question for Minister Sohi.

You're asking for a significant increase of \$61 million in operating funds for the Champlain Bridge. Can you assure the committee that the bridge is going to be completed on time, in December of next year?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Absolutely. I can tell the committee that we have taken a number of steps in working with the proponent of that particular project to ensure the project actually gets built on time. I want to also assure you that the existing Champlain Bridge is safe for commuters, and we are very committed to that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to bring the focus back to the Windsor-Detroit crossing. I am dumbfounded as to why the government would approve a permit for the construction of a second bridge, the new Ambassador Bridge, when the owner of the existing bridge has fought Canadians' interests at each and every step of the way for the last decade or more, whether it was by failing to keep the existing bridge in a good state of repair or by fighting us on the construction of the Gordie Howe crossing.

I'm dumbfounded as to why we would approve a second Ambassador Bridge. We have four lanes on the Detroit-Windsor crossing right now, on the St. Clair River, and we're now going to go from four lanes to twelve lanes, a tripling of capacity, at a time when traffic is plummeting. The latest data I've looked at shows that at the Windsor-Detroit Ambassador Bridge crossing traffic dropped from 12.2 million cars and trucks in 2000 to 6.8 million cars and trucks last year.

This is not an isolated phenomenon. At all of the border crossings between Ontario and upstate New York, and between Ontario and Michigan, traffic is down. In that context, I'm dumbfounded as to why we would approve a second bridge crossing that puts at risk Canadian taxpayers. The latest rumours are that the bridge is going to cost upwards of \$4.8 billion. The only way we get to recoup these costs is through the tolls that are applied on this bridge. The original modelling was for the tolls to recoup the cost over a period of three decades, and that toll revenue is at risk.

My one question to Mr. Juneau, through you, Madam Chair, is this: has the authority done modelling on the new border crossing numbers in light of the second bridge crossing, and does it show that

the government is still going to recoup its costs? Or does it show that the government is going to be on the hook for billions of dollars to pay for this Gordie Howe bridge?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Before Mr. Juneau answers that question, as I said earlier, the business analysis done by the previous administration, of which you were a part, sir, demonstrated that there's a need for two crossings at Windsor-Detroit to improve trade. Based on that analysis, we are proceeding with this bridge. We feel that it is necessary.

As for the owners of the Ambassador Bridge taking the federal government to court, people make decisions for various reasons, but I feel very proud that we're succeeding in winning every challenge. For every challenge that has come our way, we have won that challenge.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, with respect, I agree with you that the analysis done by Wilbur Smith Associates showed that there was supposed to be a 4% increase in vehicular traffic crossing that border from the period of 2016 to 2025, but clearly the facts have changed. Clearly, traffic is down significantly even in the last year, when your government was in power, so why in September of this year the government would issue a permit for the construction of a second Ambassador Bridge that increases the capacity from four to six lanes is beyond me.

I don't understand. We're not talking about a \$100-million bridge. The latest estimates are that this Gordie Howe bridge could cost \$4.8 billion. This, to me, could turn into a financial burden for Canadian taxpayers, because they could be on the hook for paying billions of dollars without any revenue stream to recoup that.

The other thing I would point out, and the other thing that I'm dumbfounded about—and this is not necessarily laid at your feet, Minister—is that the Detroit International Bridge Company, now that it has the permit to proceed with the second bridge, estimates that they're going to build the whole thing for \$1 billion U.S. On a Canadian dollar basis, that's about \$1.3 billion.

Why can they build a bridge for about \$1.3 billion Canadian dollars while we're looking at up to \$4.8 billion for this Gordie Howe bridge and \$4 billion plus for the Champlain Bridge? Ordinary people look at this and come to the conclusion that governments can't get things done. I empathize with that sentiment when I see these kinds of numbers vis-à-vis seeing a private corporation, which, frankly, has worked against Canadians' interests, getting this project done for a much lower cost than we seem to be able to do as government. That's the second point I'd make.

• (1720)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, I can't really comment on the cost difference. We will know what the cost of Gordie Howe International Bridge is going to be once we close the financial deal. Until then, it's mere speculation about what it's going to cost.

As far as the permitting of the Ambassador Bridge is concerned, it is given with very stringent conditions, which include the demolition of the existing bridge. There are also other conditions related to that. It's my understanding that as a government you cannot unreasonably withhold a permit from a proponent that wants to build a piece of infrastructure, and that's why this permit was granted. I can assure you that our commitment to the Gordie Howe bridge is unwavering. It is based on the business analysis that was done, and we believe in that business analysis. That's why we're proceeding with it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

A few weeks ago, there was a lot of news about both the new and the old Champlain bridges. I want to ask about the new bridge. What is the government doing to ensure that the new bridge will be built on time?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Once again, I want to assure everyone that our government is taking every step to ensure that the existing bridge remains safe, and it is safe. I'm very proud of our Montreal office and how hard they're working on this. I'm also very proud of the JCCBI and how they look after this bridge.

As for making sure that the new bridge is on time, Infrastructure Canada has taken a number of steps in partnership with SSL, the project proponent. A new shift is being added. There are enhanced hours of construction being implemented. With those steps, we are very confident that we will be striving to have the bridge open by December of 2018.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: A lot is being written in the media about the state of the Champlain Bridge, which is causing concern among users.

What is Infrastructure Canada doing in the agreement to finalize the new bridge to ensure the safety of users?

I know you briefly touched on that in response to an initial question, but what concrete steps is Infrastructure Canada taking now?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: JCCBI is the organization that is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the existing bridge. We have given them the appropriate support and resources to make sure that bridge remains safe, and it is safe. There's no concern whatsoever related to that.

At the same time, we want to make sure that we build the new bridge on time. That is why I talked about us working with SSL. I'm going to ask Marc Fortin to talk in more detail about the steps that are being taken.

[Translation]

Dr. Marc Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated is responsible for the administration of the current Champlain Bridge. The company's business plan already contains a maintenance plan. Maintenance measures are in place, as they are every year, notwithstanding the work being done under the Champlain Bridge. The company has the necessary funding to continue its maintenance activities, while closely monitoring the current Champlain Bridge.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: *Merci.*

Madam Chair, I'll be giving my time to my colleague Gagan.

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: I'll preface my comments with a thank you, because Mississauga has received \$22 million from the gas tax fund for 2016-17 and 2017-18. My riding alone has received a million dollars through the clean water and waste-water fund, and there is other funding that we receive. I know that Mississauga and my riding appreciate that.

In regard to my question, I believe you referred to a re-profiling or repurposing of funds that haven't been paid out. The way I see it, this just seems like good governance. If you've allotted funds to a project and, as you referred to it, it's pay to pace, if we're measuring it over a year, that's not really an accurate measure now, is it? These things take over a year to be completed.

Could you speak to this quickly, please?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Through you, Madam Chair, let me say that absolutely we want to make sure that we pay out invoices after reconciling the information. It takes a number of years to build a project. That's why there's always a lag time. You're absolutely right. This is a more responsible approach for us to take.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: That's the only question I had.

The Chair: We would like to know what bridges these photos show.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: This shows the new Champlain Bridge, showing you the state of construction as it is now.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: It is proceeding really...

Ms. Kelly Gillis (Deputy Minister, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Yes, and this one shows the Gordie Howe.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: This shows the groundwork being done at Gordie Howe International Bridge to show our commitment that we're proceeding on that bridge too.

The Chair: Thank you, everybody.

I'm sorry, Mr. Aubin, but we're out of time. We have to vote on this. I'm sorry that you didn't get another opportunity.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), the committee will now dispose of the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

Under the Minister of Transport, we have vote 1b under the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority; votes 1b, 5b, 15b, and 20b under the Department of Transport; and vote 1b under Marine Atlantic Inc. Under the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, we have votes 1b and 5b under Office of Infrastructure of Canada; and vote 1b under Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority.

Do I have unanimous consent to deal with all of the votes in one motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Shall all the votes under the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities for the supplementary estimates (B) 2017-18 carry?

CANADIAN AIR TRANSPORT SECURITY AUTHORITY

Vote 1b—Payments to the Authority for operating and capital expenditures.....
\$25,300,000

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$35,258,582

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures.....\$3,200,000

Vote 15b—Grants and contributions—Transportation infrastructure.....
\$25,116,838

Vote 20b—Grants and contributions—Other.....\$8,199,232

(Votes 1b, 5b, 15b, and 20b agreed to on division)

MARINE ATLANTIC

Vote 1b—Payments to the corporation.....\$2,269,000

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

OFFICE OF INFRASTRUCTURE OF CANADA

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$83,706,418

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures.....\$48,340,156

(Votes 1b and 5b agreed to on division)

WINDSOR-DETROIT BRIDGE AUTHORITY

Vote 1b—Payments to the Authority.....\$38,689,600

(Vote 1b agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report these votes to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Thank you to the minister and his staff.

We look forward to the next opportunity to have you back at our committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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