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Chair: Mr. Vance Badawey



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.)): I'm going to start off by calling the meeting to order.

I welcome you to meeting number seven of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities.

Members of the committee are meeting today because a meeting was requested by four members of the committee, pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), to discuss their request to undertake a study of ministers' spending priorities.

Today's meeting is taking place in person, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, I will tell you that the webcast will show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Occupational health and safety have requested that we limit our movement in the room throughout the meeting. Individuals should always respect social distancing rules and remain two metres away from one another. Should you need to move around the room, please follow the arrows on the floor.

You will note that, to minimize health risks, limited personnel have been permitted to attend today's meeting. Staff have received a phone number where they can listen in to the proceedings in real time.

You will note, as well, that no paper documents have been distributed. All documents have been distributed electronically to all members. Should you require a copy of a document, please advise the clerk of the committee immediately by emailing the committee at TRAN@parl.gc.ca.

With that, I'll go to Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion immediately that the committee immediately undertake a study on the spending priorities of Transport Canada and Infrastructure Canada, and that the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Infrastructure each appear for one hour, separately, in the context of this study today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doherty.

Are there any questions or comments on that motion?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Minister Garneau with us.

Welcome, Minister. You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

We're pleased to be here with you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting us to present supplementary estimates (A) for Transport Canada and the other agencies and Crown corporations that make up the transportation portfolio.

I am pleased to be accompanied, virtually of course, by the deputy minister of transport, Michael Keenan, and the assistant deputy minister of corporate services and chief financial officer, Ryan Pilgrim.

[English]

I would like to preface my remarks today by noting the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the transportation sector here in Canada and, indeed, around the world.

On behalf of all Canadians, I want to thank the transportation workers who help ensure the steady flow of essential goods and services during the COVID-19 crisis. This includes truck drivers, flight and train crews, air traffic controllers, dockworkers and many more.

Transport Canada strives to be transparent. This is why the department links each grant and contribution vote to its purpose. The supplementary estimates (A) that are now before committee members include a summary of incremental financial requirements, as well as an overview of major funding requests and horizontal initiatives.

Transport Canada continues to foster a modern, leading-edge transportation system that will support Canada's growth for years to come. Canada must be ready for new technologies such as connected and automated vehicles. When new technologies can help us promote cleaner, more efficient modes of transportation, we must be ready to integrate them.

To this end, the supplementary estimates (A) include \$47.3 million to extend the incentive for the zero-emissions vehicle program. Originally announced in budget 2019, this program will help achieve key targets for new light-duty vehicles in Canada, with objectives of 10% by 2025, 30% by 2030 and 100% by 2040.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Two items relate to VIA Rail. Our national passenger rail carrier aims to provide a safe, secure, efficient, reliable, and environmentally sustainable service. In addition to service through the Quebec-City-to-Windsor corridor, and long-haul service between Toronto and Vancouver, and between Montreal and Halifax, VIA Rail also serves many regional and remote communities.

For some of these communities, VIA Rail is the only year-round transportation option.

The supplementary estimates (A) request \$264.6 million to ensure that VIA Rail continues to operate reliably and to maintain its capital assets adequately.

The second item for VIA Rail relates to proposed high-frequency rail service in the Quebec-City-to-Windsor corridor. The supplementary estimates (A) include \$14.7 million for research and preparatory work related to the proposal. Of this amount, VIA Rail requests \$12.8 million and Transport Canada requests \$1.8 million. This work is important, to consider how the high-frequency network would complement and operate in tandem with other rail services in the corridor.

[English]

The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, CATSA, is seeking \$309.4 million to help ensure that air travellers and workers at airports are effectively screened. This funding would support increased use of full-body scanners as well as other initiatives.

In budget 2019, the Government of Canada announced its intention to introduce legislation that would enable Transport Canada to sell the assets and liabilities of CATSA to an independent, not-for-profit entity. To this end, the supplementary estimates include \$2.8 million to support negotiations for this transition.

The final item I will highlight is a request for \$84.9 million for Marine Atlantic. A Crown corporation, Marine Atlantic operates ferry services on two routes between the province of Nova Scotia and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

[Translation]

I believe the items I have outlined today demonstrate the direction that the Government of Canada is pursuing to keep transportation in this country safe, secure, efficient and environmentally responsible.

I value input from committee members, and I look forward to continuing our work, to strengthen our transportation system and build a strong future for Canada.

• (1110)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau.

We'll start off with member Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here. I'll ask that you please keep your answers as succinct as possible.

Minister, are you familiar with Order Paper question 359? You signed off on it on April 11.

Hon. Marc Garneau: No. Would you remind me, Mr. Doherty, what it says?

Mr. Todd Doherty: I asked if you would be increasing a VIA Rail subsidy and you said no, yet today you're asking for \$277 million. Can you explain why?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Yes. The way it works is that we provide funding to VIA Rail at the beginning of the year and then provide additional funding as the year goes on. That's a normal process in government, as it was under previous governments as well.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, do you know aviation's global economic impact, the total amount?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I have seen IATA projections, which are in the hundreds of billions.

Mr. Todd Doherty: It's \$2.7 trillion.

Minister, do you know what the Canadian aviation sector generates in GDP annually?

Hon. Marc Garneau: It is a considerable amount. I think the percentage is somewhere under 10%, but I don't have the exact number here.

Mr. Todd Doherty: It's \$35 billion.

Minister, do you know how much travel and tourism generate in Canada annually?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Tourism is extremely important, and certainly the air sector is a vital part of it.

Mr. Todd Doherty: It's about \$100 billion.

Minister, will you extend rent relief for NAS airports until the traffic recovers?

Hon. Marc Garneau: As you know, we've extended rent relief for the remainder of this year. We continue to monitor the situation. No options are excluded, because obviously we want our airports to continue to function.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, will you work with Regional Community Airports of Canada to increase ACAP funding?

Hon. Marc Garneau: We are working with regional and northern airports to ensure that they are capable of continuing to deliver essential services today and in the near future. We have already provided \$17.3 million to the three territories.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, when was the last time you talked to Air Canada?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I spoke to Air Canada probably about a week and a half ago and I have a meeting with them next Monday.

Mr. Todd Doherty: When was the last time you talked with WestJet?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I am also in regular contact with WestJet. I can't give you the exact date when I spoke to Ed Sims, but I have spoken to him on a number of occasions during this crisis.

Mr. Todd Doherty: When was the last time you spoke to the Air Transport Association?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I have not spoken to John McKenna at ATAC recently, but my officials have.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, when was the last time you spoke with the Canadian Airports Council, or anyone from the airport industry?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I have spoken recently to some officials in our airports, for example, Ms. Flint who is responsible for the GTAA. Yesterday my chief of staff was in touch with Monsieur Rainville, who is the president of the Trudeau airport.

We keep in contact with the airports, the airlines, and with NavCan as well, all of them hit by this pandemic.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Your testimony is suspect, Minister. We're in constant contact with our aviation industry writ large. Repeatedly, entities within the industry, both airlines and airports, have written you, tried to contact your office and you. They all are coming back and saying they've had no discussions with you, limited discussions with you, and no discussions and no response during the COVID crisis.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Doherty, I take exception to what you just said. I, and my department and my officials, are very much in touch with the airlines, the airports and the organizations on how much they have been profoundly affected by this crisis.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, could you then table with—

Hon. Marc Garneau: I resent the insinuation that I am not paying attention to them because I am paying attention to them on a daily basis—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, could you then table with this committee, at your earliest convenience, any discussions that you've had with WestJet, Air Canada, any of our small tier-3 carriers— Air North, Central Mountain Air, Pacific Coastal Airlines, to name a few—ATAC and the Canadian Airports Council?

Hon. Marc Garneau: We have a lot of information, a lot of letters back and forth, telephone conversations. I couldn't possibly provide all of that information to you, but I'm telling you that we are in touch with them.

Your suggesting that we are not is totally false.

• (1115)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, that's coming from our stakeholders. That is not coming from me. I'm just reiterating their message.

Minister, Marine Atlantic will be receiving an additional \$85 million, an increase of approximately 150%. Can you explain why there is this increase?

Hon. Marc Garneau: This funding is from an off-cycle funding decision in 2020. Marine Atlantic, of course, provides the constitutionally mandated ferry service between Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada's mainland. Marine Atlantic will continue to provide its ferry services. The funding will cover the operating shortfall in capital requirements of the corporation.

Again, like with VIA Rail, this is a standard procedure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Minister.

I'd like to ask a question about the zero-emissions vehicles program. I believe there's \$47.8 million allocated to incentives for this program in the supplementary estimates.

I'd like to know what the increase was in the first year of the program. Was it in line with what you expected? Supplementary to that, are we on track to meet our target? Is it a good, positive uptake?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Originally, as you know, \$300 million was approved in the budget, and we expected that this would be deployed over a three-year period; however, the uptake in the first year was more than we expected, to our very pleasant surprise, of course, because of our commitment towards cleaner vehicle technology.

This amount of \$47.8 million is planned spending that comes from that \$300 million funding envelope as we move forward. In fact, we doubt much, although COVID has slowed down things, as you can appreciate. We're feeling in January that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. The minister cut off at one point.

Hon. Marc Garneau: —much past August to this year. That may be a little longer now.

The Chair: Minister Garneau, you're cutting out. Can you repeat the last statement you made?

I think we've lost him.

Folks, we're going to suspend for a moment until we get Mr. Garneau back.

• (1115) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1130)

The Chair: We will resume the meeting.

Mr. Scarpaleggia, you had about two and a half minutes left.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you very much.

If you don't mind, Minister, I'll move on to VIA Rail. We know that there's some planning going on with respect to a high-frequency rail link from Quebec City to Toronto. Of course, that's of great interest to my constituents, because we're along the route. I'm wondering if you'd give us an idea of where we are in terms of coming to the end of the planning stages and starting the project.

As well, in terms of COVID security, I believe it is not required to wear a mask on trains, and yet it is on planes. That sounds counterintuitive, but I'm sure you can explain the difference.

Hon. Marc Garneau: With respect to the high-frequency train, the progress is continuing. Despite COVID, we've been able to move ahead on this project. As you may know, a joint project office was struck, composed of people from the Canada Infrastructure Bank as well as from VIA, and they are continuing. They are in the final phases of the assessment of this proposed link between Quebec City and Toronto. They are making steady progress. They are on schedule. They will be making recommendations to the government later this year.

We hope we'll be in a position sometime before the end of this year to make a decision on whether we will go ahead with this project and in exactly what form it will be. We do believe this is something that shows the promise of providing a faster service and a more reliable service. As you know, it would use its own dedicated rail lines.

With respect to the measures, at the moment there is limited service operating on VIA because of COVID. There's a requirement for only 50% volumes in each of the passenger cars, no more than that, to preserve distancing. It is recommended that people bring their masks and wear their masks where physical distancing is not possible. That hasn't happened very much so far because of the low volumes. Essentially, they're below 10% compared with normal volumes.

The difference between that and aircraft is that we know that with aircraft, the whole process of going to the airport, going through security, going to the gate and getting on board the airplane is a difficult environment in which to preserve physical distancing. We felt it was extremely important to mandate the wearing of masks. We think a different approach can be used with respect to passenger ships, such as ferries, and rail operations, where the approach is to recommend that masks be worn.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Do I have time for one more?

The Chair: You do have time for a quick question, Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: This is on behalf of my colleague Churence Rogers, who couldn't be here.

Can you elaborate on the role of Marine Atlantic in supplying Newfoundland with food and other essential supplies? Can you comment on whether residents of Newfoundland and Labrador have any reason to be concerned about their province's food supply during the COVID crisis?

Hon. Marc Garneau: As you will know, the Marine Atlantic service is a constitutionally mandated service. It happened after Newfoundland and Labrador became part of Canada. It is a vital lifeline to provide the capability to move people and goods. We are very mindful of that.

I can tell you that we're monitoring the situation very closely because of the fact that one company, called Oceanex, which also re-supplies Newfoundland, reduced some of its service. We have the capability through Marine Atlantic, which also can carry a great deal of cargo, to ensure that Newfoundlanders will not go without the vital supplies and goods they need. The situation is very much under control, even though the number of Marine Atlantic ferry passages has diminished because of the low volume of people.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you very much.

• (1135)

The Chair: Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I was inspired by my Conservative colleague's questions. He asked you if you had met often with airline representatives over the past few months and I am reassured to see that you are in constant communication with them.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, have you had the opportunity to discuss the issue of cancelled flights with groups such as Air Passenger Rights, Option consommateurs or other consumer protection organizations?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, for your question.

I'm very aware of the fact that travel credits rather than refunds have been offered, partly because I get a lot of information, especially from social media, and also because you ask me a lot of questions about it. I'm very well aware of the situation and it's complex.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Minister, I understand that you have not had the opportunity to meet with these organizations, but it might be a good thing if you did. It might give you some ideas on how to better defend passenger rights.

In supplementary estimates (A), there is no additional amount for the Canadian Transportation Agency, or CTA, and yet there is \$32 million under proposed authorities.

Does the agency have enough money to enforce the act so that travellers will eventually be reimbursed for a cancelled flight?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for the question.

We have increased the agency's budget over last year. We felt that there would be more requests related to passenger rights and other issues, such as accessibility, for which the agency is largely responsible. The number of requests received by the agency is indeed higher than anticipated, which justifies the increase in its budget for this year.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: You'll understand if I'm a little disappointed. The Canadian Transportation Agency, the organization that is supposed to defend travellers and passengers, is giving the airlines permission not to reimburse their customers. It has even given them the right to not deal with any complaints about flights cancelled because of COVID-19 before October 28.

At this time, the agency has 14,000 outstanding complaints. By the time the agency starts processing these complaints, it will be so far behind schedule that it will take more than two years to clear the backlog. What's worse is that you didn't even bother to respond when you were asked about this by journalist Mélanie Marquis from La Presse. It was your press secretary who did, and she said this: "It is within the CTA's jurisdiction to investigate complaints about its regulations as it sees fit."

I wonder if you're interested in this problem and if you're ever going to deal with it.

Hon. Marc Garneau: First of all, I'm very interested because I hear about it every day. Second, I'd like to correct your description of the role of the Canadian Transportation Agency. It is a quasi-judicial body responsible for ensuring that complaints are properly dealt with, including by the airlines, and that decisions are made according to the rules. It's not just about standing up for consumers, it's also about making the right decisions about who is right and who should be compensated.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Are the travel credits offered by airlines legal tender in Canada? For example, can you pay your taxes with travel credits?

Hon. Marc Garneau: The interpretation of the rules concerning credits and refunds is contained in the airline fares. These fares do not always say that a refund must be provided. You need to read them to find out if a credit or refund is offered. I encourage people to do that.

• (1140)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: My question was more about whether the travel credits are legal tender. I'm not asking you whether, according to your interpretation, airlines are entitled to give travel credits, but whether they can be used to pay your taxes, for example. Is it a currency? I guess not.

Hon. Marc Garneau: That's a good question. I don't have the answer, but I will get back to you on that.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: All right.

WestJet announced that it would be reimbursing some of its customers. But it is not bankrupt. Yet you've often claimed that airlines

will go bankrupt if they reimburse their customers for a cancelled flight.

Air Canada, which had \$6 billion in cash at the beginning of the crisis, now has \$9.7 billion, according to analysts. Its liquidities have increased and it is not at all on the verge of bankruptcy. Air Transat, for its part, has said that it would be prepared to reimburse its customers if there was government assistance.

Is the government going to offer any assistance? If so, will it be conditional on passengers being reimbursed for cancelled flights?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I'm going to give you an overview of the airline situation. You have to consider all of them, not just the ones you mentioned. At the moment, many airlines are not operating at all or very little. So they have almost no revenue at the moment. It's quite serious for some of them.

As I have often said, I expect airlines to do everything in their power to compensate their passengers in the best possible way when circumstances permit. This is an obligation that is incumbent upon the airlines. In light of the current situation, we have some programs in place, such as the wage subsidy for airlines, and some of them are using it.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you. I believe you've answered my question.

I wish I'd known, actually...

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for appearing today. I would like to pick up where my colleague left off on the issue of refunds for passengers who purchased tickets that they were not able to use.

Maybe I'll start by just asking you very bluntly whether you are considering forcing the airlines to provide full refunds to passengers who are not able to use their tickets.

Hon. Marc Garneau: We are following the situation, as I said to the previous MP. I'm encouraging the airlines to provide the best possible compensation to their passengers when circumstances permit. Some of these airlines are not in a position to do this at this time. It's important for consumers to also be aware of what the tariffs actually say. Those are the contracts of their ticket purchase. It's not as clear-cut as many people may think.

In the best of all worlds, we would like to make sure that all passengers are happy, but as you know, the airlines have been hammered by this pandemic. Some of them are not operating at all, and some of them are operating at below 10% and yet are still facing serious fixed costs.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I would offer that many Canadian families are hurting financially as well and that the cost of an airline ticket can be quite steep.

Other authorities around the world have taken different approaches. On April 3, the U.S. Department of Transportation issued an enforcement notice. I'll just read for you the one sentence that stood out to me: "The obligation of airlines to provide refunds, including the ticket price and any optional fee charged for services a passenger is unable to use, does not cease when the flight disruptions are outside of the carrier's control...".

We've seen similar decisions in the European Union and the U.K. What does it say to you that Canada's consumer protections are so out of step with what these other countries are doing? After this situation is over, is improving these consumer protections for air travellers a priority of your government?

Hon. Marc Garneau: There's no question that this pandemic was something that was never anticipated when we were looking at putting in place the passenger protection rights—it was a totally unexpected situation—and it is something that we will be looking at so that we can know in the future how to deal with this in a clear manner.

I would say to you that's it often brought up that Europe and the United States have taken a different approach. I would ask you to look more closely at individual countries and airlines. I think you'll find that the reality is not quite the way that you presented it. It's a complex situation, and European and American airlines are suffering as much as Canadian airlines.

• (1145)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I imagine for the consumers who are out thousands of dollars the situation to them is quite stark and quite simple. I would offer that.

My next question concerns rule 40 of the CTA's code of conduct, which states, "Members shall not publicly express an opinion about any past, current, or potential cases or any other issue related to the work of the Agency...".

Assuming that the statement on vouchers from March 25 came from the members of the CTA, do you have any concern that rule 40 was breached?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I believe that the CTA made a further statement of clarification after that. I don't have that. Perhaps I can turn to my deputy minister on that, but if we don't have it with us, I know that the CTA did provide additional clarification after its initial remarks about the suitability of vouchers, although it was non-binding.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: In the interests of time, Minister, perhaps I can move on to my next question. This involves temperature checks on board airplanes. Your department recently announced that temperature checks would be required for all passengers boarding airplanes. I had those checks myself on my way here to Ottawa to attend this meeting in person.

The IATA recently presented a proposal in which it calls for an end to physical distancing on airplanes. Its argument is that these temperature checks are sufficient. That is something that has been contradicted by Dr. Theresa Tam, who says they're not effective at all at identifying who is infected. Can you commit to maintaining the social-distancing requirements on airplanes?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I agree with Dr. Tam that the most important measure is physical distancing. Canada, with all of the regulations and interim orders that are in place, is going to make sure that we continue to make that the number one thing. Measuring temperature, doing screening, asking [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] additional layers to safety.

Temperature measurements are important. They don't catch everybody, because there are asymptomatic people. There may be the odd person who has a fever occasionally who will be rejected and they just have a simple cold, but they are an additional measure that will catch some people and add to the safety. In fact, IATA recommends that as a—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, different airlines are using different temperatures as their threshold. Has your department come to a temperature benchmark to adopt across all Canadian flights?

Hon. Marc Garneau: It is CATSA that is going to be purchasing the temperature scanners and temperature guns, and we will be working with them. Those instruments specify the threshold. The same applies to the other equipment that is purchased by the airlines themselves; there is a recommended threshold above which the reading or interpretation of having a fever is applied.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Baldinelli.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here.

I just want to build quickly on the comments of my two colleagues who preceded me. They mentioned being in touch with their constituents and their concerns with regard to the airlines, refunds and so on.

Minister, my question to you is simply this: Do you believe air passengers in Canada should be entitled to the same air rights as passengers in the European Union and the United States, yes or no?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I believe that Canada's passenger protection rights were well designed, although I admit we did not anticipate the effects of this pandemic. That is something we are going to address in the future with respect to the question of refunds and vouchers.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: So you will be looking at the passenger protection of rights.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Yes. We have always said it is something that we, if need be, are going to adjust going forward. Nobody anticipated the dramatic effects of this pandemic, and it is something that requires clarification. It is spelled out in the tariffs, which are the contracts, all that fine print when you buy a ticket, so it's not as clear-cut as many people think.

• (1150)

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Minister, quickly, can you provide any assurance that my constituents and those who are writing all of us will be getting refunds if they so desire?

Hon. Marc Garneau: What I can tell you is that I am encouraging the airlines, in fact, I'm expecting the airlines, when they're in a position to compensate, to compensate as generously as possible the passengers who have had their flights cancelled. That is what I am saying at the moment.

We are, going forward, looking at addressing this issue in the passenger protection rights.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Thank you, Minister.

I'm going to move over to small and medium-sized regional airports. The Niagara District Airport in my riding, and which services my colleague's area, is celebrating its 90th anniversary.

In December, the Regional Community Airports of Canada proposed an expansion of the airport capital assistance program to \$95 million.

Minister, what's the department's response to that, and what does it currently spend?

Hon. Marc Garneau: The capital assistance program, or ACAP, has been around for about 20 years, and I believe it spends in the area of \$40 million annually. It's a very popular program, and I'm very much aware that there are airports and associations that would like to expand it as we go forward, because it is such a helpful program, especially for small airports that don't have a lot of funding.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Yes, I'm aware of our local airport putting in a \$1.5-million request.

Minister, has money flowed this year from ACAP?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I will defer to my deputy minister.

Mr. Michael Keenan (Deputy Minister, Department of Transport): Thank you, Minister.

Under the ACAP program, the money is flowing on the regular cycle, so we're going through the approvals of the submissions we have received. The 2019 submissions have been approved, and we'll be turning our attention to the 2020 submissions. The program is continuing to run at the full subscription of about \$40 million a year, as you indicated.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Thank you.

Due to COVID, is the federal government developing any other programs to support regional and community airports?

Hon. Marc Garneau: The answer is yes. Because we have to address the greatest need, we are primarily focused on ensuring, in particular, that remote and northern airports still have the capability to function so that we can maintain essential resupply and medevac and bring essential people into those communities. We know they have been hard hit, just like the big airlines, because they have had a significant drop in passengers. They're feeling the economic pinch. They have spoken to us and we are working with them.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Great.

The mix of the governance structure for a number of these small and regional airports means they're unable to apply for government funding and make use of instruments such as the wage subsidy program. Are you aware of this and working on it?

Hon. Marc Garneau: We are looking at the needs of small airports, particularly those with scheduled flights and those that provide essential resupply. That is where our focus is at the moment. The airports are allowed to access all the government programs where the organization or the individuals are eligible.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Thank you, Minister.

Also, you've allocated \$2.8 million for the negotiations of the potential transfer of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority to a non-profit entity.

Minister, what is involved in that \$2.8 million? Is it simply negotiation costs?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I do not have all the details, but I think it is substantially the costs associated with the transactions that are taking place so that we can ultimately have this not-for-profit designated screening authority, but I will defer to my deputy minister once again, if he has a more precise description of the \$2.8 million.

• (1155)

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Before he does, I'd like to know—

The Chair: Your time is up. I'll allow for a quick answer by the deputy minister.

Mr. Todd Doherty: He didn't have a question.

The Chair: I thought the minister was going to refer to the deputy minister.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Yes. You were going to have the deputy minister follow up if he had any further comment.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Yes, I'd go to the deputy minister or my financial officer, one of the two.

Mr. Michael Keenan: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to the department to assist us in negotiating with a private sector consortium to take over CATSA, as you had indicated.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baldinelli. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, Mr. Keenan and Mr. Pilgrim for being here today.

I have some questions about the zero-emission vehicle program. I have heard from my constituents in Brampton East, a riding often characterized as a bedroom community in the greater Toronto area, that many people and businesses have benefited from the zero-emission vehicle program. GHG emissions reductions in the transportation sector are critical for Canada's green future. Through our green infrastructure projects I know many new charging stations are coming online across the country, and I continue to advocate for more charging stations, making the decision to switch to zero-emission vehicles an easier one.

Minister, is the uptake close to what was anticipated in this program?

Hon. Marc Garneau: In terms of people availing themselves of the incentive, which is \$5,000 for a zero-emission vehicle and \$2,500 for a hybrid vehicle—and this can be purchased or leased—the uptake has exceeded our expectations. We feel that the \$300 million that was budgeted in 2019 will be exceeded before the end of this year. Originally we thought August, but things may have slowed down a bit. However, we're well over a year ahead of schedule.

I'm glad you brought up the question of charging stations because that is an equally important program. The charging network has to be available, and that program is also funded and managed by Natural Resources Canada. They are also funding a network to make sure we have the necessary charging stations to charge these vehicles that people are buying.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Minister.

Do you have any insight into whether the COVID crisis will have any impact on the adoption of new technologies in the zero-emission vehicle sector? I know you've briefly touched on that, but can you elaborate a little more?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I would say no, not in the long run. I would say that COVID has slowed down certain things, but not everything. It might have even sped up certain things. For example, one bright area is air cargo. That's a booming sector now.

With respect to automated and connected vehicles, zero-emission vehicles and research on heavy-duty trucks and emissions, as with everything during this pandemic period there has been some slowing down, because people have to maintain physical distancing and certain businesses have been closed. In the long run, no, I don't anticipate that it will have any significant impact.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that. I have one last question for you.

To my understanding, light-duty vehicle emissions account for approximately 50% of Canada's transportation-related GHG emissions and 12% of the country's total emissions. What kind of impact does the ministry of transportation foresee the zero-emission vehicle program having on transportation emissions when compared to conventional vehicles? It's definitely a great program. I just want to make sure that we elaborate more on that, because a lot of my constituents have questions about this.

Hon. Marc Garneau: I think you've said it very well. Transportation is responsible for 25% of our overall greenhouse gas emissions in this country, with all industries and sectors added in.

Out of that 25%, half comes from light-duty vehicles—cars—so it is incredibly important for us to make that transition toward zero-emission vehicles, because, as you've pointed out, it's 50% of all transportation greenhouse gases, so that will have a very significant effect.

As you know, our government has pledged to be at net-zero emissions by 2050 [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Paris targets for 2030. This is a way to do this in a dramatic fashion, and we're hoping that more and more people will turn towards that option.

• (1200)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for your time, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau.

I'm going to over to Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Thank you, Minister, and good afternoon.

To build on that, do you know what the average income is of someone who is claiming the electric vehicle subsidy? Do you have any idea of what that would be?

Hon. Marc Garneau: No, I do not, but I will say that some of the vehicles that are eligible are in the lower-price range as well as the mid-price range, and we have excluded the high-price range.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Okay. Thanks, Minister.

Building on the airline ticket line of questioning of my colleagues, should we have a failure of a major airline—or a small one, for that matter—is the Government of Canada willing to back those tickets sold to Canadians?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I will say, since you brought up the question of failure, that it is one option that I'm hoping we can avoid. At the end of this pandemic, even though our airlines will have taken a beating, we'd like as many as possible of them to be able to resume so that we will live to fly again and have the choices that we currently have. I'm hoping that we will not get to that point.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Thanks, Minister, and I'm hoping not either. That's why the government programs that we try to put in place are important. I'm wondering if you could tell us how many airlines have taken up the new LEEFF program, especially our major airlines.

Hon. Marc Garneau: To this point, I'm not aware of any of them having made that final decision. Some of them may be looking at it.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Why do you think that is? Why have they not taken that up quickly?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I would say that you would have to ask them that question. I don't want to speculate.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Okay.

Minister, would I be more or less likely to acquire COVID-19 at Pearson airport or Union Station, in your opinion?

Hon. Marc Garneau: In my opinion, the whole process of flying, not just being in the airport and going through security and going to the gate, and what have you, but that whole process all the way until you are back out of the airport at your destination, is a higher-risk environment than just a dedicated—

Mr. Scot Davidson: Minister, you're saying that you're more likely to get COVID-19 at Pearson than at Union Station, so the flying public should be much more concerned about that. Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Marc Garneau: You brought up the example of Union Station. That is also a place where there is a lot of GO Transit, so we're getting into provincial jurisdictions here. That's a more complicated picture than just a dedicated—

Mr. Scot Davidson: Minister, I'm proud to say our air carriers fly the newest aviation equipment. As you know, a 737 transfers fresh air every two minutes.

A number of my constituents who work for airlines feel airlines are almost being punished. You have to get on an airplane with a mask to fly from Toronto to Ottawa, but you can get on a VIA Rail train and not wear a mask. Then they're told that it's more dangerous to get on an airplane than on a train.

I'm trying to encourage the general public, and I'm sure you are, to think about getting back in an airplane and flying. Let's instill that. We shouldn't be scaring people by saying there's a much higher risk and, therefore, you have to wear a mask on an airplane, when the general public should know that there's a fresh air transfer every two minutes.

Hon. Marc Garneau: There's a risk everywhere, in all modes of transportation, when you cannot maintain physical distancing. Before we put in place temperature measurements and compulsory face coverings on board aircraft, we were approached by CUPE, which represents all the flight attendants, and by the flight crews as well, and they asked us to put in place measures to protect them as well as the passengers.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Thank you.

I know in your mandate letter you are required to work closely with VIA Rail, so this maybe a good news question. As you know Canada Day is coming up. I know everyone at this committee table is so excited about that.

Right now vets receive a 25% discount on VIA Rail, but as an extra thank you to our veterans, I wonder, has your government considered whether we could possibly make travel free for them on VIA Rail?

Hon. Marc Garneau: It's an interesting proposal. Unfortunately, I can't make that decision because VIA Rail is a Crown agency. They would have to decide that, and they occasionally have these special measures, at least on a temporary basis. They've done it with students, to get—

• (1205)

Mr. Scot Davidson: Would you support that, Minister?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I don't manage the budget of VIA directly, and I'd refer you to them on that.

I'm a veteran myself.

Mr. Scot Davidson: I know, so you're the one to ask that question. Thank you for your service.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garneau.

Mr. Bittle, you have five minutes.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister Garneau, we seem to have left off on the same tone we started with when you appeared before we shut down in March. It's unfortunate that the Conservatives are again attacking your integrity. We just talked about your service to this country as a veteran and your service in politics all this time.

I'm wondering if you can respond to the baseless allegations because it seems we left off on that in our previous study and we've gone back to it in the estimates. Would you like an opportunity to respond?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you, Mr. Bittle.

I try to ignore gratuitous statements that are not based on any factual evidence. I have spent the last three months working very closely with all the transportation sector and particularly with the airlines because they have been profoundly affected by the COVID pandemic.

Their revenues have decreased by 90% to 95% to 100%, and I or my officials have been in constant touch with the airline industry right from the beginning. I have spoken a great deal, and I know where the organizations like ATAC and NATA and ACPA and all the organizations, and CUPE on the union side, stand on different issues, and I and my department are working with them to do the best we can.

I'm comfortable that my department and I are doing the right thing.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'd like to go back to the issue of refunds. You talked about.... Excuse me, Mr. Chair. Some heckling is going on.

I didn't interrupt you during your time, Mr. Doherty, so I hope for that same level of respect.

The Chair: We were rolling along quite well, so let's try to keep it that way.

Mr. Chris Bittle: We talked about the reality of the situation with the refunds. With respect to the EU, is the reality of the situation that the refund policy is not being enforced by member nations for their national airlines?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Yes, in fact, many countries and airlines have said that they are not in the position to do it, and it is not being enforced.

Mr. Chris Bittle: With respect to the United States, the U.S. airlines received a taxpayer-funded bailout of \$25 billion U.S. Is that correct?

Hon. Marc Garneau: They actually received a total package that was larger than that. It was \$50 billion U.S. Part of it was to help with labour costs, essentially very close to our wage subsidy, and some of it, roughly half of it, was low-interest loans comparable to some of the programs we have also put in place.

Mr. Chris Bittle: My understanding of the refund mandate from U.S. authorities, and correct me if I'm wrong, is that the refund policy isn't being enforced in the United States.

Is that true, as far as you're aware?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Although the government's Department of Transportation said it needed to be enforced, as I understand it, that's not happening everywhere.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Everyone on this committee, including you, has mentioned the importance of having a national airline. If the government mandated refunds that in turn led to the bankruptcy of a national airline, then what would the value of individual tickets be, if they're an unsecured creditor in a bankruptcy proceeding?

• (1210)

Hon. Marc Garneau: Of course that's a scenario I hope to avoid, because things can get worse and we definitely don't want that to happen. I will not be able to give you a precise figure because it's information that is commercial and confidential, but there are billions of dollars involved here with vouchers that airlines have committed to passengers. There are large amounts involved.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Okay. I'm out of time.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bittle.

Thank you, Minister Garneau.

That's it for our time today, and I appreciate your taking the time to come to the committee today to answer questions from members.

Members, thank you as well.

I'm going to suspend now to prepare for the next witnesses.

• (1210)

(Pause)

• (1230)

The Chair: I would like to resume the meeting.

Welcome, Minister McKenna.

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): I'm very happy to be here.

That's nice facial hair there, Vance.

The Chair: Thank you, Catherine, and welcome. It's great to have you out today.

We're going to start off with our first member. Mr. Berthold, the floor is—

Oh, I'm sorry. I have to give the minister five minutes. Luc, I wanted to go to you right away, but...

[*Translation*]

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I'd really like to speak with Mr. Berthold, but we'll take five minutes to make a presentation, if you don't mind.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have five minutes. You're set to go.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Thank you.

Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me to speak with you today.

The health and well-being of Canadians have been and will continue to be the top priority of our government, but this pandemic has affected more than our personal health. It's having a profound effect on our economy.

[*Translation*]

Our government's historic plan, Investing in Canada, is to build a more prosperous, resilient and sustainable future for our children and grandchildren.

[*English*]

Over the last three months, we've assessed and approved hundreds of projects. We've talked with every province and territory about their changing infrastructure needs and priorities. We've put in a new chair at the Canada Infrastructure Bank, Michael Sabia, a leading businessman from Quebec who headed the Caisse de dépôt. Just this month, we announced an MOU with the Government of Alberta on an exciting proposal for a Calgary-Banff rail line. We're funding electric buses, renewable energy and water projects, as well as better broadband that will help create good jobs and help communities get back on their feet.

[*Translation*]

Our Government understands the challenging situation that cities and towns are in. I have spoken with provinces, territories, mayors, and indigenous leaders, and I've heard about the financial pressures this pandemic has imposed. That is why we are looking at ways to help them safely restart their economies—without losing sight of our long-term goals: to create jobs, and build a stronger, cleaner and healthier and more connected country.

[*English*]

Our investing in Canada plan is investing more than \$180 billion over 12 years in five key priorities: public transit, green, social, trade and transportation, and rural and northern communities infrastructure. We are making great progress.

Together, the 20 federal departments and agencies that deliver funding through the plan have already committed over \$68 billion, investing in projects across the country and making a huge difference in the lives of Canadians. Most of these projects are either under way or completed—projects like the ones I was happy to announce this morning in Waterloo. There are investments in public transit and active transportation, from improvements to bus shelters and pedestrian crossings, to new and expanded walking and cycling routes. These will help create jobs, get more people moving and make our cities and towns better places to live. It was great to be able to make this announcement with the provincial government as well as with the municipality.

[*Translation*]

We are also proposing to introduce a new COVID-19 funding stream that would allow provinces and territories to redirect over \$3 billion of existing federal funding to projects that can start quickly.

[*English*]

Communities must have the resources they need to get projects going during this pandemic. As announced on June 1, we pushed out all of this year's funding to municipalities through the federal gas tax fund, and we provided it in one single payment last week. It's a first step to help ease the immediate cash crunch.

We believe that better is possible when it comes to maximizing the value of infrastructure investments. That's why my mandate letter includes instructions from the Prime Minister to look at best practices globally when it comes to assessing and funding infrastructure needs. I firmly believe that a national infrastructure assessment, which they have established in the U.K., would benefit our country and our long-term infrastructure planning.

I also believe that there may be room to explore outcomes in a broader sense, so we consider infrastructure projects as part of overall plans to achieve outcomes for Canadians. The idea is to better connect national infrastructure priorities with long-term provincial and municipal strategies, while also improving accountability for all orders of government, for example from provinces and municipalities for gas-tax funding.

COVID has also shown that we need to ensure we are building resilient and inclusive communities. This includes affordable, high-speed broadband across the country, including for people living in rural communities and for first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples; housing for all; and more access to open spaces and nature.

Finally, I can assure you that I'm focused on getting value for taxpayers. We need to ensure that every dollar does double and triple duty, with outcomes that benefit our climate, marginalized populations and disadvantaged communities while creating jobs and growing our economy.

• (1235)

What we build and where we build matters. That is why we're focused not simply on projects being shovel-ready but also on ensuring they are shovel-worthy.

We're contributing to a safe restart for our economy, helping communities get back on their feet, supporting them to get more in-

frastructure built—such as high-speed broadband, public transit, affordable housing and clean water—creating jobs and building a stronger, cleaner, healthy and more connected country. When Canada builds, Canada grows.

I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister McKenna.

We'll start off with Mr. Berthold, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Madam Minister.

Thank you for being with us. It would have been nice to see you in person, as you live very close to Parliament. We would have liked to be able to talk to you, but we will do that when we get back to the House.

Madam Minister, can you tell us how many projects have been announced and funded under the Investing in Canada infrastructure plan?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Yes, I'd like to be there too, but we have to respect the measures in place to protect us.

We have already presented our plan to the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. This plan includes more than 33,000 detailed projects. The total also includes some 10,000 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, housing-related projects, and about 12,000 municipal projects funded by the federal Gas Tax Fund.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Minister, for three years the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that only half of the money promised under the Liberal plan has actually been invested.

In 2018, he was told the Liberals had no plan. In 2019, the Parliamentary Budget Officer asked for the list of 53,000 projects and was told that there was no such list. It has only been a few days since the Parliamentary Budget Officer received a supplementary list of projects, including the famous projects related to the federal Gas Tax Fund. He was told that Infrastructure Canada did not have the project information from CMHC.

You yourself said on May 12 that the Liberal plan wasn't working.

[*English*]

You said that it is “an attempt to be smarter and more efficient”.

[Translation]

Recognizing the failure of the previous plan, how can you have voted against additional funding for the Auditor General, so that we could find out exactly where the money went?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: The only failure was the infrastructure project under the previous government, the Conservative Party. That is surprising, because we are transparent, whereas the former government was not.

Mr. Luc Berthold: There have been three reports.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: The former government did not provide information or funding to the Auditor General.

Mr. Luc Berthold: That's not true.

I'm going to talk about another issue that shows the lack of transparency of the Liberal government.

In January 2019, Minister Carolyn Bennett signed an agreement with the Huron-Wendat Nation and Grand Chief Konrad Sioui, obliging the federal government to consult with the nation for any project on a territory about the size of half of Quebec. This agreement was signed in secret and was not revealed until December 2019, when municipalities received a letter from Grand Chief Konrad Sioui advising them of this obligation. The municipalities were never notified by the federal government or advised on this new approach. Dozens of projects under the Fonds pour l'infrastructure municipale d'eau, or FIMEAU, the municipal water infrastructure fund program, are currently stuck on the minister's desk because no consultation has taken place. Work was expected to begin soon.

Madam Minister, how many projects are stuck on your desk because of this unacceptable situation?

• (1240)

Hon. Catherine McKenna: We take our obligations to indigenous peoples seriously. It's too bad the former government didn't do the same.

As I said in my introduction, we've implemented hundreds of projects.

Mr. Luc Berthold: How many projects are currently stalled, Madam Minister? The municipalities did not know that they had to consult the Huron-Wendat Nation. The government did not advise them and did not show them how to do it.

How many projects can't be executed? I will give the example of the City of Lac-Mégantic, which is ready to award the contract. They have put out a call for tenders, but unfortunately they were told that nothing could be done.

How many projects are stalled because of this government's improvisation? We agree that there should be consultations, but the government should at least have notified the municipalities.

Why didn't you do that?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I'm going to talk about our infrastructure plan.

We work very closely with municipalities, provinces and territories. That's very important.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Minister, you're not answering my question.

My question is, how many projects are there?

At the moment there are municipalities and works that are on hold. This situation is problematic. The municipalities need money. We need to put Canadians to work. They will not be able to work because we do not know how to carry out the famous consultation.

What is your department's plan to have these projects go forward, not in the next few weeks, but in the next few days?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I know that my counterpart Minister Bennett is working very hard on this file.

I want to assure you that we are moving forward on projects that are in our infrastructure plan. In fact, I would say that in the member's municipality, we are moving forward with projects as well.

I can talk to you about these projects.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Yes, Minister McKenna.

If I tell you about the projects—

Hon. Catherine McKenna: These projects are worth almost \$240 million.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Minister McKenna, if you want, you can list 33,000 projects. You can take all the time that you need to do so.

However, this isn't the issue. Right now, some municipalities are waiting to carry out very important projects.

Minister McKenna, what will you do to ensure that these projects can be launched in the coming days?

The question is simple.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I know that my counterpart is working very hard on these projects.

We have a duty to consult.

In recent months, 262 projects have been approved in Quebec. I'm working very closely with Minister Dubé.

Mr. Luc Berthold: How many projects have stopped, Minister McKenna?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Thank you, Minister.

Ms. McCrimmon.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Minister. It's very good to see you here today.

I know we've had some really good discussions about improving public transit here in Ottawa and right across the country, so I'm going to leave that one aside and ask a couple of other related questions.

First of all, my community is very active, very engaged. They want to see us expand access to active transportation in my riding.

Is there anything in the investing in Canada plan that would give us access to funds to be able to improve that?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Of course, that is a top priority for us—public transportation but also active transportation. In fact, there was a great announcement just this morning in Waterloo, where we're investing with the city and the province on active transportation and public transportation projects that are making a real difference.

We recognize, especially right now, that Canadians want to be able to get out, to get active and to do that in a safe way. That's why we have looked at additional flexibilities so that active transportation projects can be considered not only under the public transportation stream we invest in but also under the green infrastructure stream.

We're going to continue moving forward. I know how important it is to the member's community. I think there are real opportunities to make more investment, so I am looking forward to working directly with the member to make that happen, to improve lives, to reduce emissions, to reduce congestion and to get people out and active in healthy ways.

• (1245)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you for that, Minister.

You also said things about rural broadband. My riding is part suburban and part rural. The rural broadband is an issue that needs to be addressed.

How can we do that with this investing in Canada plan? We need to make it better, especially now with everyone trying to work from home. It has to be improved.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I absolutely agree with the member. We need to be continuing to make investments in broadband across the country. I think we need to be accelerating investments.

The investing in Canada plan includes investments in broadband through our rural and northern stream. There are also investments made through ISED and through CRTC, and I think we recognize right now just how critical that is. It's no longer just a productivity issue for folks to have access to high-speed, affordable broadband. It's also an equity issue.

Many parents including me are home-schooling our children, and they need to have access to broadband. Folks who run businesses and who are now having to run businesses virtually need access to high-speed broadband. Now you can access doctors and health care services, but you need access to broadband.

This is something I'm absolutely committed to, and I know our government is looking at how we can accelerate these investments to ensure that everyone across the country has access to affordable, high-speed broadband as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate that.

We are dealing with an immediate crisis, which is COVID, but there's another crisis on the horizon. My riding has suffered two floods and a tornado in the last three years.

How are we going to be able to make a difference in tackling climate change? Can that be part of this plan as well?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Absolutely. We have a disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, which is intended to help support communities that are impacted by intensifying weather events related to climate change.

I remember working with the member sandbagging to help support residents who were going through floods in almost consecutive years. In between those years there was a tornado in your riding, so your residents know full well the impacts of climate change.

As for our disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, we've invested more than \$1.7 billion for 59 large-scale infrastructure projects, helping to protect communities across the country from the threats of climate change and natural disasters like floods and wildfires. The Minister of Public Safety has also invested in these types of projects. We need to continue doing so, because we know the impacts of climate change are real and they're accelerating. We need to ensure that we have resilient communities across the country.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you very much, Minister. Those are words I want to hear.

We're trying really hard to work collaboratively. I'm in contact with my counterparts at the provincial level and at the municipal level. How do we do that better? How do we make it so that the work we're doing actually fits into the plans that both the provinces and, probably more importantly, the municipalities want to see happen?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Thank you. That's a really great question. That was one of my priorities when I came in, to get projects approved quickly, working directly with provinces, territories and municipalities. I've worked very hard at that.

In the Province of Ontario, for example, I work extremely closely with the two ministers responsible for infrastructure and transportation. In fact, we have weekly calls where we talk about infrastructure. We also sometimes talk about the challenges of home-schooling our children.

We are moving forward on projects. We also demonstrated flexibility. We've taken the time. We recognize that we need to think about how we can be more flexible and respond to the priorities of municipalities, provinces and territories. We think that different orders of government that are potentially closer to Canadians should be setting their own priorities. We've listened to that. Also, we recognize that in the time of COVID there may be different challenges and different needs. We've worked very hard to show flexibility and to work directly with provinces, territories and municipalities because, at the end of the day, we are all here to improve the lives of Canadians.

I know full well, as do you, from all the door knocking we've all done, that people don't want to hear about fights between levels of government. They want to hear about investments that are going to improve lives.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. McCrimmon.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister McKenna. It's good to see you. Obviously, it would have been even better to see you in person.

My first question concerns the situation of municipalities in Quebec. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, their revenue has dropped significantly. They're very worried, especially since they're not allowed to run deficits. According to a study by the Raymond Chabot group, the coffers of cities in Quebec are short \$1.2 billion, and 60% of the cities' total losses are related to public transit. We're talking about \$670 million for public transit. Municipalities are losing 70% to 80% of revenue from this sector. That's a huge amount. People are no longer using public transit, but the buses must still run.

Unfortunately, supplementary estimates (A) don't seem to include any new money for municipalities. I want to know whether any money is forthcoming.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Thank you for your question.

We acknowledge the importance of supporting all Canadians in these difficult times, but also the municipalities. The loss of revenue in the public transit sector is difficult for municipalities. We'll certainly work with the provinces. As you know, municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction according to the Constitution. However, we're working very closely with the provinces. We've already provided \$2.2 billion to cities and communities. We've moved ahead with the transfer of money from the gas tax fund.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I know that you provided money through the federal gas tax fund. However, it's a bit like giving people money to buy a car and a house and to build infrastructure when they can't afford groceries. The money wouldn't get them far.

I want to know exactly when the cities will receive assistance. I understand that this falls under the Government of Quebec's jurisdiction. That's why we're asking you to send the money to the Government of Quebec so that it can give the money to the cities. I don't think that this is an issue. All the ministers in Quebec and the other provinces have asked you for this assistance. So have all the cities in Quebec and Canada. The message is unanimous. They need assistance and they need money.

Will you respond, and if so, when?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: We've already responded by advancing money through the federal gas tax fund. I was pleased to see this mentioned today in the Kamloops newspapers. With the money advanced, the city will be able to include infrastructure investments in its budget. We certainly need to work with the provinces.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you. I think that the answer is no.

I want to ask you another question, which I didn't get the opportunity to ask the Minister of Transport earlier.

Over the weekend, my leader went to Trois-Rivières to talk about the high-frequency train, or HFT, that keeps getting closer and closer but never arrives. Since 2015, or even earlier, studies have been announced and discussions have been held regarding the next steps. From one government to another, we sometimes lose hope. However, since supplementary estimates (A) include funding for studies and for VIA Rail, I want to know whether you can tell us when the work will begin.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I'm pleased to tell the member that it's a priority in my mandate letter. I think that it's really very important. VIA Rail is working with the Canada Infrastructure Bank and with our officials to develop a plan. We've talked a great deal about the high-frequency train project for the region. We certainly need to move forward, but I know that the member wants us to be—

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

I'd like to ask one last question if I have time left.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: We're careful with taxpayers' money.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: It would be good if the HFT were to come to fruition, since it was one of your election promises in 2015. It has already been five years, and not much progress has been made.

In my constituency, the Port of Montreal's Contrecoeur terminal is another project on hold. The project seems to be on track. However, we still don't know when the government will provide authorization.

Could you tell us when the work will begin at Contrecoeur?

● (1255)

Hon. Catherine McKenna: The Canada Infrastructure Bank is looking at this project very closely. Of course, work must be done. I think that these projects are very important. However, we must do whatever is necessary to ensure that these investments make sense. We must always be mindful that this is taxpayers' money. We must be careful.

I'll give the floor to my deputy minister, who may have something to add.

Ms. Kelly Gillis (Deputy Minister, Infrastructure and Communities, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): As the minister said, the Canada Infrastructure Bank is studying the Contrecoeur project and conducting analyses to determine the investment structure and how procurement will proceed. We don't have a specific date, because the bank must establish the time frame.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: From what I can see, the cities, the HFT and Contrecoeur are all on hold. However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we would have expected some projects to proceed more quickly. The process has been long for FIMEAU as well.

Furthermore, the former president and CEO of VIA Rail awarded a \$1-billion contract to the Siemens multinational company instead of to Bombardier. Siemens hired the former president and CEO. Perhaps this was a way of thanking him for the nice contract. We would have liked to put local people to work.

Have you reviewed the awarding of the contract to ensure that everything was done properly? We find that something smells fishy.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I'll give the floor to my deputy minister.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: This issue doesn't really fall within the purview of our department, but rather of Transport Canada, which will decide on the type of train. We won't be reviewing the contract.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: In your recovery plan—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Bachrach, you have two minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Minister, for joining us today by video.

You mentioned earlier the expedited gas tax funds for municipalities. As a former mayor, I know that there are very few communities that wouldn't welcome expedited infrastructure funds, but the crisis facing municipalities right now when it comes to COVID-19 isn't on the infrastructure side. It's not on the capital side. It's a crisis of operating costs, and yet we still haven't seen targeted funding to support municipalities with their operating costs during this crisis. Is that something we're going to see? Specifically, is there any way your government will consider extending the wage subsidy to municipalities and providing targeted support for transit operators?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Of course, it's incredibly important that we support municipalities. They have been hit hard by COVID-19, including not receiving the revenue they expected from public transportation. Advancing the gas tax did make a difference. I will once again re-emphasize that Kamloops now says that it's considering adding capital work back into its 2020 budget as a result of the gas tax being accelerated. We also are in a process with provinces and territories. Every week the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister meet. We are working on a safe restart agreement with provinces and territories. We announced that we will be contributing \$14 billion. That will include a whole range of areas, including supports to cities and municipalities. We need the provinces and territories to be working with us; that's incredibly important. Provinces and territories often remind us that municipalities are creatures of provinces. I think we need to show Canadians that we can work together.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Minister.

My next question has to do with the climate lens. From what I can tell, there's no way that Canadians can have any assurance the \$187-billion infrastructure spend is going to result in a net decrease in climate pollution. Some projects increase climate pollution; some decrease it. However, overall, there's no accountability

measure, and the climate lens only applies to a small portion of infrastructure projects.

Are you going to consider some sort of mechanism to ensure that our overall infrastructure investment decreases greenhouse gas emissions?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: As you can imagine, that's a very important question for me. As the past Minister of Environment and Climate Change, developing the climate plan required the reduction of emissions across the board, including through our infrastructure plan. The infrastructure reductions in emissions from the infrastructure plan are built into our climate plan. That is why we have a climate lens that applies to about 90% of all spending. It requires a climate lens in all climate-focused projects in the \$9.2-billion green stream program.

Let's talk about the types of projects that we're funding. We're funding public transit projects, infrastructure projects, adaptation projects, mitigation projects, large-scale renewable projects. All of these projects, we know, reduce emissions, but I'm very focused on ensuring that we get the reductions that we need. We have committed to net-zero emissions by 2050, and everyone needs to do—

• (1300)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, is there an infrastructure target related to greenhouse gas emissions and climate pollution?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Yes, there is a 10-megatonne emissions reduction requirement for infrastructure projects, which is why the climate lens is so important. It's also why it's so important that we're funding projects that we know reduce emissions, like public transit—getting people out of their cars—and like renewable infrastructure. All of these things are critically important to not only meeting our climate goals, but also ensuring a healthier and cleaner future for all Canadians.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I have very limited time, and I have two more questions that I'd love to ask.

The first one is that the Auditor General has previously urged the government to be more transparent when it comes to executive compensation at Crown corporations. You've alluded before to the so-called fresh start at the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I'm wondering if that new beginning at the Canada Infrastructure Bank is going to include increased transparency around the CEO compensation.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I think it's very important to understand that the Canada Infrastructure Bank is a Crown corporation. It operates at arm's length from the Government of Canada. As per the statement of priorities and accountabilities, they were encouraged to develop a compensation policy that reflects the best practices of Crown corporations and other comparable organizations, and were told that this is important. Of course, we now have Michael Sabia, who's the new chair of the board of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. He was with the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec. He's very ambitious in what the Canada Infrastructure Bank can do. We've seen that there are real opportunities to make a difference.

I'm certainly looking forward to seeing what the Canada Infrastructure Bank proposes, going forward, for projects in a whole range of areas that are included in my mandate letter, which include a \$5-billion clean power fund from the Canada Infrastructure Bank, investments in renewable energy, and opportunities in public transit. Michael Sabia was involved in the REM project—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, I have one more question, and I'm concerned that I'm going to run out of time. Thank you for that little bit of information.

I'm still concerned about the Parliamentary Budget Officer's not being able to obtain all the details on tens of thousands of infrastructure projects. In the House, you mentioned that some of these projects are confidential. I'm concerned because it seems to me that the Parliamentary Budget Officer should be able, as an officer of Parliament, to look at confidential details. Is that not the case? He's just looking for proof. He says that he believes they exist, but that "It's hard to be convinced. I have faith they do exist, but I don't have [any] proof...". Is there some way that your department can provide the PBO with proof that these projects exist?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: It's important that Canadians understand that we've provided information about all of the projects, so on 33,000 projects, we have detailed information.

I know the member would care greatly about this. When we talk about CMHC projects, those are under bilateral agreements. We've provided information on a whole range of those projects, but provinces and territories, to protect the privacy of individuals and the security of survivors of domestic violence, give us aggregated claim information for some projects. They do not provide project-level detail, but their claim information is audited by a third party. In the interest of transparency, we've included these taxpayer-funded projects in our overall count. It's important to recognize that the information really lies with the provinces and territories.

As I say, in these cases, for some of the CMHC projects, the information is not provided disaggregated to us because the provinces and territories do not want to be providing us with information that would impede the privacy of individuals and the security of survivors. This has been transmitted to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Maybe my deputy might like to add to that.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Again, with what the minister had said, we've provided the Parliamentary Budget Officer with all of the information at the aggregate level from CMHC to support the information in the expenditure, which is audited. We also provided the Parlia-

mentary Budget Officer with the information on the gas tax, because 12,000 of the projects relate to the approximate spending or the approximate projects from the gas tax annually—the \$2.2 billion that is expended on that fund—that support communities across the country.

● (1305)

The Chair: Mr. Doherty, you have five minutes.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister.

Minister, for the sake of time, wherever possible please be as succinct as possible with your answers.

Minister, is it not true that your government shut down PPP Canada despite the fact that they'd invested over \$1.3 billion in 25 Canadian projects?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I will ask my deputy to answer this.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: PPP Canada was dissolved into Infrastructure Canada in 2018. Particular projects continue to advance. We are opening those contracts right now.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, how many projects has the new iteration, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, announced?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Well, first of all, I'm very pleased. There was a great announcement last week that they're advancing working with the Government of Alberta to—

Mr. Todd Doherty: The total number of projects announced to date.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: That's one investment looking at the possibility of investing in a train between Calgary and Banff National Park.

Mr. Todd Doherty: The total number.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: They've announced investments. I'm happy to, if you just give me a moment, list them for you.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I don't need the details. I just want a number.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Well, they've announced four investments. They also have memorandums of understanding and advisory engagements on six projects: VIA high-frequency rail, Lulu Island District Energy, Talston hydroelectric, Pirate Harbour Wind Farm, Kivalliq hydro-fibre link and Calgary-Banff passenger rail.

I've been talking. I've had many conversations with the new chair of the Infrastructure Bank about additional projects. As well, I've had discussions with my counterparts in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and across the country. There are huge opportunities.

I would hope that your party would support leveraging the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] have more money to invest in infrastructure projects.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, I'm glad to hear that you're having these discussions.

How many of these projects have been completed since its inception?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: If the member would like to do a tour of the Réseau express métropolitain light rail in Montreal, I'm happy.... I've had a chance to visit it. It is well under way. It's going to make a huge difference.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Is it finished?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: It is under construction, but I think that maybe the member would probably, I would assume, want us to make sure that we are being careful with taxpayer dollars. As much as you want to go ahead quickly, these are major projects. You need to look at the business case for those projects. As I said, the Infrastructure Bank makes decisions, but we know there are huge opportunities to move forward. We're working with provinces and territories to do so.

Mr. Todd Doherty: All right. Thanks, Minister.

Minister, how much did the Government of Canada pay in bonuses to the former CEO?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Just to be clear again—I think we went through this—the Canada Infrastructure Bank—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Were those performance bonuses?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: —operates at arm's length from the Government of Canada, which asks for the statement of priorities and accountabilities. They develop a compensation policy that reflects the best Crown corporations and other comparable organizations—

Mr. Todd Doherty: But would those be performance-based bonuses? Based on the performance of the CEO, they would be eligible for those bonuses, correct?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Once again, I said that the Infrastructure Bank develops a compensation policy that reflects the best practices of Crown corporations—

Mr. Todd Doherty: As the minister of this department, are you aware of how much the Crown corporation paid out in bonuses?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I am not directly involved in HR discussions with employees at the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I'm happy to have my deputy provide more information about how it works.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: As the minister mentioned, this is an independent Crown that determines its own compensation framework and, upon recommendation of the board of directors, makes those determinations, independent of this ministry.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Minister, both the chair and CEO left very abruptly earlier this year. Why is that?

• (1310)

Hon. Catherine McKenna: There were changes in all sorts of organizations. Right now, we have a new chair, and we're focused on the future. I will say that you probably have heard of him because he was the head of the Caisse de dépôt. He advanced a number of infrastructure projects, and he also had a—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Great. I'm sure he has a great background.

Minister, can you tell us how much was paid out in separation or compensation for those two officers of the Crown corporation?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I cannot.

Once again, the Crown corporations operate at arm's length from the Government of Canada. My deputy can once again reiterate the information.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: They are Governor In Council appointees, and they are independent of ourselves, so we are not involved in those determinations, nor are we aware of the amount that would have been paid for those amounts that you've mentioned.

The Chair: Thank you..

Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to see you virtually, Minister.

I just wanted to touch a little bit on some of the questions that came out earlier.

In the previous Parliament, I had the great pleasure of working with your predecessor on securing \$70 million for 34 projects for Réseau de transport de Longueuil in my riding, including electric buses and much needed green infrastructure for our transit. We are working on a project for a tramway between Metro Longueuil in my riding to the Terminus Panama, which is the first first phase to connect up with the REM. You mentioned the REM earlier, which is under way—I can guarantee it. Every time I'm on Highway 10, there are a lot of orange cones, so the work is progressing, absolutely.

I wanted to get a sense, if you can elaborate a little more, of the importance of green projects in Quebec and of what you've been hearing.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Certainly, I've been working closely with the Government of Quebec. It is a top priority of the Government of Quebec but also of Quebeckers to advance projects of public transit. There's a huge appetite, I can tell you, for the Government of Quebec to make investments in public transit across the province, and also for green infrastructure projects.

We've seen investments ranging from electric vehicle charging stations to renewable projects, and we continue. We want to move forward with Quebec.

I think Quebec is a great example of a province that understands that their competitiveness rests on moving to a cleaner future, and they've been able to demonstrate that. They are also very fortunate with Hydro-Québec. There are real opportunities there.

I think it's a great example for other provinces of how we can partner to make a real difference to reduce emissions, to do things like reducing congestion in your own riding for residents there. We're going to continue moving forward, looking at opportunities to partner with the Government of Quebec and to improve the lives of all Quebeckers and of course all Canadians.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

I have two other questions.

Previously we had a colleague ask about the speed at which approvals are happening. I want to get a sense from you, if you could elaborate a little bit, of what you're doing to help speed up some of those approvals.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Thank you very much.

Certainly, when I came in, I had three priorities. One of the priorities was getting projects moving as quickly as possible, working in partnership with provinces and territories.

I want to give a real shout-out to my deputy as well as all the public servants who are working so incredibly hard. I will get my deputy to provide you with stats about how we've been able to reduce the timeline for projects that do not require Treasury Board approval, which is a large number of projects. We have been able to exceed the timeline required.

Also, I'll just mention one other thing that we have done in the time of COVID. I've explained how the flexibility is incredibly important. We have a new COVID stream that is intended to help provinces advance projects extremely quickly. We want to create jobs. We want to advance investments.

Maybe I'll just ask my deputy. She can just talk about the timelines, maybe, and how we're exceeding the timelines, because it's a very good-news story.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: We work directly with provinces and territories on a daily basis. We have a portal we've established where provinces and territories can download much of their information from their own systems and work with us. We have a 60-day turnaround time, and in most provinces and territories we are exceeding that particular standard. The average, nationally, is 35 days once we receive completed information.

Often, when provinces and territories are working with infrastructure projects, they also work with municipalities and need information from them. From the time we get the complete information to the time we actually provide the approval, it's within a month, which is a significantly reduced time frame from previous programs where we would approve the project, have to negotiate a contribution agreement and then move forward from that, because we have umbrella agreements with all the provinces and territories.

We continually look at how we can expedite our processes.

• (1315)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

The last thing I want to touch on is the \$14 billion for cities and municipalities in COVID-19.

I know, for instance, a lot of buses have been cancelled in my riding alone just because of lack of ridership.

Can you talk quickly about what we're going to be doing to help cities with these new expenses that are coming up and lack of revenue?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: This is an issue that does come up. I've had many conversations with municipalities, including my own here in Ottawa. It's a challenging situation.

We advanced the gas tax, which is a small but concrete measure that's making a difference. There are now negotiations on a safe restart agreement with provinces and territories. We've indicated that the federal government will be contributing \$14 billion. It's a range of measures, but it includes support for municipalities.

The key is that we want provinces to be stepping up with us. I was heartened to see a while ago that Premier Ford said they were going to be a partner in this. They recognize how important it is.

It's moving forward with provinces and territories to support municipalities so that we can ensure that we get a safe restart going but we get our economy going as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Thank you, Mr. Chair; and good afternoon, Minister.

It has been 251 days since the Deputy Prime Minister announced in the great riding of Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, my neighbouring riding in York—Simcoe, a \$40-million commitment for the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund.

I know you always say that the environment and infrastructure go hand in hand, so that makes me even more excited about that fund.

Therefore, when is your government going to announce the reinstatement of the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund to complete infrastructure projects in York—Simcoe that require attention now?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I am happy to follow up with the member with respect to this. I don't know if my deputy has any information about this.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: It is not within our ministry. We certainly can follow up with colleagues to find out the status of—

Mr. Scot Davidson: Yes, but there are infrastructure requests. I've sent a letter regarding a dam that needs rehabilitation. These are important environmental projects that have to happen. No one has actually responded to that letter, and as I said, we're still waiting on that.

I just wonder if you could comment on the reinstatement of the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I believe this was something that was involving Environment and Climate Change Canada funding. I'm happy to follow up with my colleague and I certainly support the broader objectives. We do need to be working together to ensure that we clean up contaminated sites, that we improve the environment, and as I said, I'm happy to follow up with my colleague and get an answer to the member.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Minister, you talked about good outcomes for Canadians, and that's what I expect. That's what people have put me here for, so I would appreciate a follow-up on that.

I'm going to yield the rest of my time to my colleague Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

Minister McKenna, we learned today that we still lack many answers.

We don't know how many FIMEAU projects were blocked in Quebec as a result of the issue with the consultation process. We don't know the severance package for the former president of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. We don't know how many billions of taxpayer dollars were invested in housing. We don't know how much money will be provided to municipalities for public transit and to help them stick to their upcoming budgets. Municipalities can't run deficits.

The government moved ahead with providing the money that it already owed municipalities. However, we don't yet know how the new program will work. What's a "shovel-ready" project?

The federal government announced \$14 billion. However, the federal government is telling the provinces and municipalities how to use the money. It doesn't trust them. Many projects are ready to begin. Unfortunately, the federal government is slow to move forward and to allow municipalities to launch projects.

Why aren't you helping municipalities deal with the public transit crisis?

Why aren't you helping municipalities deal with the costs incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Right now, there's no agreement, and municipalities aren't receiving any funding.

• (1320)

Hon. Catherine McKenna: You're raising many points in your questions. I'll address the issue of municipalities. You're asking for better accountability and for detailed legal responsibility. You're also asking for a blank cheque for the provinces. What exactly do you want?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Does this mean that you don't respect the jurisdiction of provincial and municipal governments and their ability to make the best possible decisions for their areas?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Of course we respect this. As I said with regard to the gas tax fund, Quebec doesn't provide information

on projects, in keeping with the agreement negotiated by the Conservative Party. At the time, your party didn't ask for any detailed accountability. However, today, you're asking me why I don't have the information required for each project in Quebec. You can't have it both ways.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Minister McKenna, you keep boasting that over 50,000 infrastructure projects have been completed. Yet you're telling us that you don't have the detailed information. How can you come up with 50,000 infrastructure projects if you don't know the number of projects in Quebec? It doesn't make sense.

We're asking the Auditor General to conduct an investigation to set the record straight on the infrastructure program. Why did you vote against our motion to ask the Auditor General to conduct an investigation into the investing in Canada plan?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I'm always pleased to provide information, unlike the former Conservative government.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Minister McKenna, we're talking about you and your government. You're currently investing billions of dollars. We're asking you for answers. It's all well and good to keep looking back. However, we're asking you about the billions of dollars needed for economic recovery. We're asking you about future spending and how we'll be accountable.

Unfortunately, we can't say right now that the first years were very good. In an interview, you acknowledged that you needed to be smarter and more effective. Why then did you vote against our request for more funding for the Auditor General? Why did you vote against our request for an investigation?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

A quick answer, Minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I want to remind everyone that the Conservative government cut the budget for the Office of the Auditor General.

I think that we can always do better. The 10-year agreement signed by the Conservatives doesn't require all the provinces to provide detailed reports.

Mr. Luc Berthold: How are you doing the math if you don't have the figures?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold. Thank you, Minister.

We'll move on to Mr. Bittle for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I was wondering if you could take a little time to talk about your department's duty to consult with indigenous peoples. I know we haven't discussed it yet during this opportunity, but I believe we should.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I will say, I was a bit surprised by the previous view that seemed to be espoused that we shouldn't have a duty to consult. It's actually a constitutional obligation, the duty to consult with indigenous peoples. But it's not just a constitutional duty; it's how we get better outcomes. Right now, we're having a discussion across the country, across the world, about systemic discrimination and racism. We need to get better outcomes, and duty to consult is not red tape. It's how you make sure you're advancing reconciliation, getting outcomes for indigenous peoples. I think we should all agree that every indigenous child should have the same opportunities as our children, the same opportunities to succeed, the same investments in infrastructure. That is what we want as a country, and I think that's incredibly important.

That's a reflection that I have had recently as there's been a discussion about systemic racism. What are the social determinants of infrastructure? How do we make sure that it's not just how much money we invest, but it's where we invest and who we're investing in and who we're supporting? Think about the community centres in communities that have a lower socioeconomic status. We need to be making sure that those investments are being made, that we're working together with indigenous peoples. We know there's been an underinvestment in infrastructure. This is incredibly important.

The duty to consult is part of that. It is not just a constitutional obligation. As a lawyer...it is a constitutional obligation, so we need to take it very seriously, but it's also about outcomes. I think at the end of the day, I know all of us got into politics because we believe in building a better Canada. That is exactly what the duty to consult is about. It's about building a better Canada for all Canadians, not just some Canadians, but all Canadians, including indigenous peoples.

• (1325)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you very much, Minister.

I am wondering if you could also expand on the climate lens because we see that, even during this pandemic crisis, the crisis of climate change continues. We don't have to look very far. We saw what happened in Alberta with the recent storms; there's story after story. It seems that we hear from the Conservatives that this is red tape, not something worthy of discussion, but the costs of inaction are so great. It's unfortunate—I know you can't see them—but they're laughing at that notion.

This is fundamentally serious. I'm being shouted down on one of the most fundamental questions of our lifetime, and they continue to think that it's funny to talk about climate change. However, Minister, I hope that you have the opportunity to expand on the climate plan, the importance for the government—

Mr. Todd Doherty: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

In no way in any of the testimony of mine or my Conservatives have we said anything to the fact that Mr. Bittle has said—

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'm not talking about you, Mr. Doherty.

The Chair: Mr. Doherty, that's not a point of order. That's more debate, so I'm going to go back to Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: You have a few other colleagues and a few other members of the Conservative Party and Conservative premiers across the country who scoff at climate action, and you were scoffing at climate action when I was talking about it a second ago. You continue to shout me down and try to take away from this opportunity for the minister to discuss the importance of a climate lens.

It's interesting that I have the floor and that Mr. Doherty continues to talk and continues to shout me down. We've heard Mr. Doherty, I believe, specifically denying the existence of climate change and stories in the press about that, and so have others of his colleagues.

Minister, can you please go ahead and discuss the importance for your department—

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make it clear that the other colleagues he was mentioning are not me.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I just want to be on record, as I have been very clear that I do believe in climate change.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doherty.

Minister McKenna.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: That's good. You all believe in climate change and that it's man-made and that we can do something about it, which is great because that is exactly what we're doing with our infrastructure plan.

We believe the climate lens is incredibly important, and I want to give a shout-out to my parliamentary secretary, Andy Fillmore, who you all know, because it was through his private member's bill that we brought in a climate lens.

As I said, we had already said that we needed to get a 10-megatonne reduction in emissions through our infrastructure plan. I could talk about climate change in many ways, but let's just talk about how it saves us money in the long term. Think about where we need to get. As a country, we've committed to net-zero by 2050. Why we are doing that? We are doing that because we know that if we don't do that, the impacts of climate change are going to be so severe that they're going to have a huge impact on every aspect of our lives. You've heard Mark Carney, former governor of the Bank of Canada and former governor of the Bank of England, talk about this.

That's why we look at the investments that we are making that are going to help reduce emissions. Those can be investments in renewable energy; those can be investments in public transportation. Also, what are the investments that are going to help us adapt to the impacts of climate change? That's why we have the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund that has been a huge success and oversubscribed.

We need to be making sure that we think about how we're building. I like to say that when you build, you can either increase emissions, or you can reduce emissions. You can either become more re-

silient or less resilient. That is the work that we're doing with municipalities that are on the front lines of climate change. You don't hear many municipalities doubting whether climate change is real because they have to deal with the floods, as Ms. McCrimmon said of her own riding where they were sandbagging once every few years.

We're making those investments, and we will continue to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ministers Garneau and McKenna, thank you for your time today and for coming out and answering questions from the members of this committee.

Members, thank you for making the time to travel down to Ottawa to be a part of this session.

Most importantly, thank you to the people beside me and behind me, the team who made this happen. Thank you very much. I know we're under challenging times right now, and for you folks to pull this off and allow us to have this meeting is really appreciated.

With that, I will adjourn.

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