



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 003

Thursday, November 5, 2020

Chair: Mr. Vance Badawey



Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Thursday, November 5, 2020

• (1610)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number three of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. It's our opportunity to speak with the minister, as well as to ask questions of the minister and have some time with him. I will be asking the clerk how much time we will have upon completion of my comments.

I would like to start this meeting by providing you with some information, following the motion that was adopted in the House on Wednesday, September 23. The committee is now sitting in a hybrid format, meaning that members can participate either in person or by video conference. All members, regardless of their method of participation, will be counted for the purpose of quorum. The committee's power is to sit; however, this is limited by the priority use of House resources, which is determined by the whips. All questions must be decided by a recorded vote, unless the committee disposes of them with unanimous consent or on division.

Finally, to ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow throughout the meeting.

For those participating virtually, members may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either "Floor", "English" or "French". Before speaking, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are done speaking, please put your mike on mute to minimize any interference.

All comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. If a member wishes to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, the member should use the "raise hand" function. This will signal to the chair your interest to speak and create a speakers list. In order to do so, you should click on "Participants" at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see next to your name that you can click to raise your hand.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the use of headsets—as you all know—with a boom microphone is mandatory for everyone participating remotely. Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me.

Please note that we may need to suspend a few minutes as we need to ensure all members are able to fully participate in this meeting.

For those participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the directives from the Board of Internal Economy regarding masking and health protocols. Should you wish to get my attention, signal the clerk with a hand gesture, or at an appropriate time, call out my name. Should you wish to raise a point of order, wait for the appropriate time and indicate to me clearly that you wish to raise a point of order.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain the consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Let's move on to the order of the day.

I am happy to welcome today Minister Garneau and his officials from the Department of Transport for the consideration of the main estimates 2020-21 and the supplementary estimates (B), 2020-21.

I will remind all members that the supplementary estimates (A) were adopted by the House on June 17, 2020, and were not referred to this committee. The supplementary estimates (B), 2020-21, were tabled in the House and referred to standing committees on Thursday, October 22, 2020. They can be found on the Treasury Board website.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), each committee may "consider and...report, or shall be deemed to have reported," the votes in the supplementary estimates (B) "not later than three sitting days before the final sitting" of the supply period ending not later than December 10, or "three sitting days before the...allotted day in the current period", which has not been allotted as of yet. May I suggest that we report them back to the House at the same time as the main estimates? The deadline is Friday, November 27.

Once again, we welcome Minister Garneau.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Of course, as a result of the subsequent points of order after question period and then the votes, we now see the clock at 4:14, unfortunately.

I just want to have the assurance that we will have the minister for the full hour, as well as the department following the minister for the full hour.

We're dealing with both the supplementary estimates and the main estimates here. Unfortunately, due to the timing, we missed the opportunity in the spring and the summer since we weren't sitting at that time. There certainly are issues of great importance before the entire Canadian economy at this time.

I'm hoping to get the assurance that we will, in fact, have the minister for an entire hour and his departmental colleagues for a full hour following that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kusie. I will finish my remarks, because I was about to mention that.

Welcome, Minister Garneau.

Minister Garneau will be with us for the first hour only, but his officials will remain with us for the second hour to answer questions from members of the committee.

I want to confirm with the clerk that we will have the available resources until a certain time. Mr. Clerk, if you could answer before I go to the minister, what time that will be, we would all appreciate it.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte): I asked all the services. I'm still waiting for answers. I'll come back to you as soon as I have clearance from everybody. Technically we should be able to, but I'll let you know.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Minister Garneau, the floor is now yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to appear before the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and answer questions today on supplementary estimates (B) 2020-21. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all the new members of this committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on Canada's transportation system, as well as the work of Transport Canada. Much has changed since the beginning of the pandemic and we have had to adapt to the situation. However, other priorities and responsibilities still need to be addressed.

[English]

The supplementary estimates (B) for the 2020-21 fiscal year include items that required adjustments for a variety of reasons. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented crisis in remote communities that rely on aviation. Air travel is the only safe and reliable way to reach a number of communities for much of the year. Air travel is a lifeline for them. It provides an important link to people and services.

While necessary restrictions on travel have kept many remote communities safe, they have also contributed to a 90% decline in revenues for our smallest air carriers. Many of these carriers are

owned and operated by the first nation and Inuit communities they serve.

The supplementary estimates (B) include support for a new contribution program to support air carriers that provide service to remote communities. These communities must have access to essential air services for food, medical supplies and other necessary goods and services.

We must also ensure that our communities can be connected to our vital transportation networks.

[Translation]

Last year, Transport Canada announced plans for a new, permanent replacement for the MS *Madeleine*, the ferry that provides service between Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Quebec, and Souris, Prince Edward Island. The current vessel is 39 years old, and is at the end of its service life. However, designing and building the replacement vessel will take several years.

Supplementary estimates (B) include funds for purchasing a temporary replacement vessel, to ensure that efficient ferry services will continue until the new vessel is ready. When that new vessel is ready, the temporary replacement will be put up for sale. This delivers proper value to taxpayers, in addition to ensuring service will continue in the short term.

[English]

The Speech from the Throne emphasized that, as we work through this global pandemic crisis, we must build back better together.

The Speech from the Throne also indicated that the Government of Canada is committed to making zero-emission vehicles more affordable and accessible. Canadians' quality of life and Canada's future growth are deeply connected to the environment. We need to invest in a cleaner and more sustainable future to protect the things that Canadians rely on for their success: an affordable cost of living; good, well-paying jobs; and resilient communities.

The supplementary estimates (B) include additional resources for the incentives for the zero-emission vehicles program to help meet Canada's zero-emission vehicle sales targets.

While certain circumstances may have changed and certain priorities have been magnified, our goals remain the same.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

As the Speech from the Throne pointed out, the pandemic's economic impact on Canadians has already been more significant than the 2008 financial crisis, and the consequences will not be short-lived. We must take action now, for the sake of Canadians now, and in the future. This is not the time for austerity.

We have an opportunity to take action—with smart, targeted investments, as we continue to do through the national trade corridors fund, which also has dedicated funding in this year's supplementary estimates (B).

This is a time for building stronger communities, and a more resilient economy. This is a time for building a healthy, sustainable future for Canadians.

Thank you for your attention, and I am ready to take your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will start off with Ms. Kusie for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister. It's always a pleasure to see you.

I'm just going to start this meeting with a bang. The cat is out of the bag. After eight months, the Financial Post is reporting that you will finally have a plan for airline sector. It comes, finally, after losing between \$27 billion and \$37 billion of GDP, after losing 400,000 to 500,000 jobs in this sector, after all other G7 nations gave a median of \$30 billion to their sectors before us, after Canada lost 14% of our transatlantic share, and after rapid testing was implemented by the private sector at YYZ and YVR, when that should have been the lead of your government.

Most importantly, Minister, it's after families have been crying and calling me because they have lost their jobs. They didn't know how they were going to provide livelihoods for their families. It's after CEOs of airlines were phoning me saying they felt devastated laying off workers and wondered how they were going to face their employees day after day. It is after families were sending me photos of themselves in their uniforms with their children, Minister.

Why has it taken you and your government eight long months to respond to the airline sector and provide them this week with what we hope is finally a plan?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you very much for the question.

For a bit of historical context, when this pandemic started back last winter, our government's energies were focused on helping Canadians. We came up rapidly with programs like the emergency response benefit and the wage supplement, measures to help with rent and measures to help small businesses and seniors, etc.

Since that time, of course, we have evolved. At the time, we had no idea how serious this pandemic would be or how long it would last. Now, over the intervening months we have been able to get a good sense of how much this has impacted the air sector. You are right. It certainly has impacted the air sector in many ways, chiefly

because they have lost approximately 90% of their revenues. That is why, as I have indicated many times in the past few weeks, we have been working on a set of measures that are focused on ensuring that when we come out of this pandemic—and during the time that we are in it—we will still be able to have an air sector that is viable, affordable and safe.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Minister.

I have been very proud to act as their advocate during the time that I have been shadow minister for the transport minister. Today, as you go to announce your plan, I will continue to act their advocate.

Minister, can you assure me on this call today, in this meeting today, that you will include within your plan protection for workers so that when this money is issued there will be no further layoffs in the airline sector? Will that be a part of your plan for the funds that will be provided to the airline sector? Can you assure us that there will be no more layoffs when you give this money, please?

• (1625)

Hon. Marc Garneau: Let me say first of all, Ms. Kusie, I have no problem with your questions. You are doing your job, which is to ask those questions.

I can tell you that we are looking at a series of measures. Those measures do include the workers who have been affected. I have met with the unions. I have spoken to them. I have heard their concerns. I met with all of the stakeholders, whether it was airports, the airlines themselves, mayors or provincial representatives. We are looking at the whole picture in terms of coming up with a series of measures. When we have landed on those measures we will, of course, make them public.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Minister.

Will you provide within your plan protection for consumers—those tens of thousands of Canadians who have not received refunds from the airline sector as a result of your inability to provide viability for the airline sector—by providing what I hope is finally viability for the airline sector? Can you make the commitment today, please, that you will also take care of these tens of thousands of Canadians who have spent tens of thousands of dollars, who have gone into debt and who have not received refunds? Will you ensure that these consumers are protected, Minister?

Hon. Marc Garneau: As I have said, I am certainly aware of the fact that there are many consumers who would have preferred to have a refund as opposed to a voucher. They have expressed themselves very clearly on that. Again, as I said, we are looking at the whole picture in terms of the effects of this pandemic, not only on the air sector itself but also on the passengers who make use of that air sector.

Of course, as you well know, being a politician, I'm not at liberty to come out today in this committee and discuss all of the details of what we are going to do. I can only reassure you that we're looking at the whole picture at this time.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I believe I have 20 seconds left, Mr. Chair, according to—

The Chair: No, actually, we're over by 25 seconds. I'm sorry.

Next we have Ms. Jaczek for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Pardon me, but do I not get six minutes?

The Chair: Did I have you at five minutes? I do apologize.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That's okay, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you kindly, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I would also ask, kindly, that you tie to the plan, please, compensation restrictions for executives so that these funds will not go to executives, and please take care, Minister, of all regional routes. I am asking you on behalf of all regions of Canada to ensure that all regional routes are taken care of in Canada.

Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Mr. Minister, do you have a short comment?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I'll be very quick.

Again, thank you for your input, Ms. Kusie. We have very clearly said—in the Speech from the Throne, in fact—that regional routes are a priority for us. We actually highlighted it in the Speech from the Throne.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Now we have Ms. Jaczek for six minutes.

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today and answering all our questions.

As you referenced, there are additional resources for the zero-emission vehicle program in the supplementary estimates (B). In fact, a considerable increase is called for—apparently, some \$52.8 million for the funding of this program—in addition to the \$58.5 million requested in this year's main estimates and the \$47.8 million already approved in the supplementary estimates (A). It sounds like this program is going to be expanded.

I know that when Ontario had a similar incentive program, many of my constituents took advantage of that, and it proved to be very popular.

Could you tell us—quantify for us, in essence—what you're seeing as the results of this program since it came into force? What sorts of progressions are you looking at, or what kinds of numbers are you looking at over the next couple of years?

Hon. Marc Garneau: As you will know, half of all the greenhouse gas produced in Canada within the transport sector comes from light-duty vehicles or cars, which is a quarter of all greenhouse gases produced in Canada. It's a significant producer. We are committed to encouraging the transition from internal combustion engines to zero-emission vehicles.

The incentive program we put in place a couple of years ago has been incredibly popular. We want to continue to build on it, and that's a question of building momentum. That's why we're also, in parallel, building charging stations.

First, our goal is that, by 2025, 10% of sales of vehicles will be zero-emission vehicles. By that time, the prices will also be much closer to each other as prices come down for zero-emission vehicles. Second, we'd like to reach the 30% target by 2030 and 100% by 2040. That's what we're aiming for.

• (1630)

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Could you also then describe to us what you see as the effect on the environment in terms of the actual emissions? Obviously, this is part of our fight against climate change. Do you have some idea of what the impact will be of this increase in sales?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for the question.

These vehicles are going to play a significant role in helping Canada reach its targets, as light-duty vehicles currently account for, as I said, 50% of Canada's transportation emissions. Transport Canada estimates that the average new ZEV can save 3.4 tonnes of emissions each year, when compared with the average new internal combustion vehicle.

I will add the caveat that the recharging of those vehicles, obviously, should be coming from a clean source of electrical energy. That's also a requirement, and overall, from a government point of view, we're moving towards electrical energy that is clean energy.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Minister, you mentioned charging stations. As someone who's pretty new around here—since 2019—I'm still a little confused as to exactly who does what. In terms of that type of infrastructure, what is the role of the Department of Transport as it relates to providing assurance that there are sufficient charging stations?

Hon. Marc Garneau: That's a very good question. It can sometimes be confusing, which department is responsible for what. The building of charging stations is actually under Natural Resources Canada, Minister O'Regan. He has the funding to build charging stations, to build a network across the country. We've put a significant amount of money into it.

I will also add, to give them their credit, that some provinces are also investing. My own province of Quebec, for example, has spent money to build up the charging network in the province. It also has incentives for the purchase, as does B.C.

It's a team effort here. The more we get involved with this, the better our chances of meeting our climate change goals and our ZEV targets.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: One question that I think a number of people have, as we have more zero-emission vehicles out there, is what the potential is for used vehicles. Is there any potential for resale incentives of these particular vehicles?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I'm glad you asked the question. It is something we are looking at, now that the base is beginning to grow. At the moment, roughly 3% of light-duty vehicles in the country are ZEVs. As time goes on, there will be a market for used vehicles. We are looking at that. We haven't reached any decisions with respect to used ZEVs, but it's potentially an area that we might address.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Are there any other areas that are part of the program, particularly as you're looking at zero-emission vehicles, that you would like to elaborate on?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Roughly 30% of transport-related greenhouse gases come from heavy-duty and medium-duty vehicles—in other words, light and heavy trucks. That is going to grow because we're the second-largest country on earth, and a lot of merchandise moves by truck.

There is potential in the early years for us to move towards zero-emission vehicles in the light and medium truck sphere, and also for trucks that do short distances, those that work within cities, that kind of vehicle. There are, in fact, companies in Canada now that are focused on zero-emission medium-sized trucks. There's a very promising future there. That is an area we hope to put more and more emphasis on in the coming years.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, thank you for being with us today. We miss you at the committee. We would like to see you more often.

I'll start by asking you questions about air travel.

You know that this sector is going through a huge crisis right now. Unfortunately, we have the impression that nothing is happening at the Department of Transport. For the past nine months, a crisis has been going on in the airline industry, and people in distress are calling us to tell us that they are losing their jobs and they are asking the government for help. Yet, while everywhere else in the world help is being provided to the airline industry, here the minister seems to be sitting on his hands. You do consultations, and you wait.

We have heard that there may be a plan to help. Can you assure us that it will happen and when, Minister?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for your question.

I'll do a brief recap. When the pandemic began, all of the government's efforts were focused on helping Canadians who needed help. Let's be frank, we did not know how widespread the pandemic would be, how severe it would be, how long it would last, or how it would affect certain sectors, such as the airline industry.

We now have a much clearer picture of where the airline industry stands, whether large or small airlines, small or large airports, NAV CANADA or the aerospace sector that supplies the supply chain. As I've mentioned several times, in response to your questions in fact, we are working on a comprehensive plan to help this sector, because we want it to survive.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I'm trying to understand. You're telling me that the government couldn't foresee everything that was going to happen; but neither could the other countries. Yet other countries have taken steps to help the airline industry. Why are we the only ones not supporting our air industry?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Our country does its own analysis to know what measures it should put in place. I can assure you that we are talking to all the organizations involved, not only those working in the air sector, but also the unions and the mayors of the cities affected by the fact that their small airport has lost service. We are looking into all of these things thoroughly.

I can assure you that I'm not twiddling my thumbs these days. We are working on a plan that will ensure that the airline industry survives and thrives after this pandemic.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I'm glad to know that a plan is in sight. I just hope it will be ready very soon.

I'd like a guarantee that this plan will take into account the thousands of people who want their airfare reimbursed. There are billions of dollars up in the air and these people want their money back, and not when they die or their children have grown up.

Hon. Marc Garneau: I agree with you that there are billions of dollars at stake. Given the difficulties that the airline industry is going through, it's a very difficult situation. I understand that people want to be reimbursed, but by the same token, that reimbursement would put some airlines in very serious financial difficulty.

This issue is part of our current study to arrive at measures that will eventually be announced.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Do you not think that airlines should respect the law?

Hon. Marc Garneau: You will understand the dilemma, Mr. Barsalou-Duval. Some airlines are so close to bankruptcy that they would not be able to continue their operations. It's a very difficult decision for the company. I think you will agree with me that we want the airline sector to still be there after this pandemic. This is not an easy situation to manage.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I understand from what you are saying that you don't necessarily want companies to comply with the law.

I have one last question to ask you about regional air travel. Throughout Quebec, airports and regional carriers are struggling. There have been huge cuts in services.

A task force on air transport has been set up in Quebec. First, can we be assured that you will respect the conclusions of this Quebec task force? Second, why did you refuse to meet with the crisis unit of the Union des municipalités du Québec?

• (1640)

Hon. Marc Garneau: I talk to my counterpart in Quebec, Minister Bonnardel. We are very well aware of this. Minister Joly, who is responsible for regional development, is also working on this file, as is Minister Fitzgibbon on the Quebec side. We understand the magnitude of the challenge. That's why, in the Speech from the Throne, we recognized that maintaining regional air service is a priority, although not everything is put in a Speech from the Throne.

If it's any comfort to you, it was in the Speech from the Throne, and it's a promise that should be kept.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I'm very happy to hear that it was in the Speech from the Throne, but I would just like to have the assurance that you will respect the decisions that Quebec will make on this issue.

Hon. Marc Garneau: We are working on this file with the province of Quebec, with which we get along extremely well, as you know, as well as on several transportation-related files.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you for your replies.

I believe I understand that we can't expect much from you regarding the reimbursement of airline tickets. There are people who handle complaints at the Canadian Transportation Agency. But the person responsible for handling complaints has been excluded from the Bar. Are you comfortable with this situation?

In addition, I would like to know the process for selecting the people you appoint to the Canadian Transportation Agency's board of directors. You appointed the spouse of someone who does lobbying for airlines.

Hon. Marc Garneau: I will not comment on the people who work at the Canadian Transportation Agency.

As you know, it is a quasi-judicial body independent of Transport Canada and makes its own decisions. Having said that, I can assure you that a very fair system is used to select the people who work at the Canadian Transportation Agency. Rigorous checks are done before someone is appointed to this very important agency.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: So you have no problem appointing spouses of lobbyists to the agency?

[*English*]

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

I'm now going to move on to Mr. Bachrach for six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us today, Minister.

Minister, across Canada and in the part of the world that I represent in northwest B.C., every day hundreds and thousands of men and women climb into locomotives and operate trains that are kilometres long and carry thousands of tonnes of goods. Some of them are dangerous goods. They do this with the expectation that their employer and their government are protecting their safety. As you know, in February of last year Daniel Waldenberger-Bulmer, Andrew Dockrell, and Dylan Paradis tragically lost their lives in British Columbia after the train they were operating derailed. It derailed despite concerns and warnings that the train was not safe to operate.

The families of these workers want a criminal investigation to take place. I would like to know what you would say to those families who are asking for you to call on the RCMP to conduct a criminal investigation.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for the question.

First of all, I address my condolences to the families of the three CP employees who tragically lost their lives in the tragic B.C. incident.

I do not have the authority to tell the RCMP to investigate. They make their own decisions with respect to these matters. I will tell you that very shortly after this incident I put out a ministerial order with respect to procedures that would have to be adopted when a long train had to make an emergency stop on a mountain grade—1.8 degrees or steeper—to ensure that hand brakes would be put on, so that we could prevent this kind of incident in the future. That has since become a permanent measure.

In addition, when a train must stop on what's called an emergency stop, they have to report that to Transport Canada. These are new safety measures in the follow-up to this tragic incident.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, with regard to that same incident, according to the CBC, the investigation of the CP derailment has been riddled with irregularities. The Transportation Safety Board's lead investigator was removed from his post after recommending a criminal probe by the RCMP. CP's internal police service shut down its investigation prematurely, prompting their lead constable to resign in frustration.

I'm wondering if you can comment on the accountability here. Do you personally feel that there has been accountability in this specific case? Do you feel that the families of the three men who were killed received the answers they deserve?

• (1645)

Hon. Marc Garneau: I will tell you, Mr. Bachrach, that the Transportation Safety Board is an independent board that does its own inquiries when this kind of incident occurs. They are in the middle of it. They have not rendered their final report. We must respect their arm's length authority to independently investigate without Transport Canada being involved at all, because sometimes they will have recommendations for Transport Canada after they've completed their inquiries.

We also do not oversee CP police, as that comes under the Canadian Pacific company.

Finally, I will say that Transport Canada did perform an occupational health and safety investigation on behalf of labour Canada as a result of this tragedy. We have given our report to CP. That part has been completed by Transport Canada.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'll ask just very briefly, Minister. Do you feel that a criminal probe is warranted, given what you know about this incident?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I believe that the Transportation Safety Board will tell us what actually happened. That is what I am focused on now, as well as seeing if there are things both the railways and Transport Canada can do to make the system safer.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Minister, shifting to a different subject, the NDP has sent your government a series of recommendations with regard to any sectoral support for the airline industry. A few of the points covered in those recommendations are the following: first of all, that airline companies respect their workers' rights and that financial support should not be used to compensate CEOs, executives and shareholders, but rather to protect the jobs of the workers who work for those companies; secondly, that the government take equity positions in airlines to ensure that the public's interest is protected through public ownership; and thirdly—and very importantly—that passengers be refunded for tickets they purchased that were cancelled due to COVID.

I think everyone agrees that when you buy something and you don't receive what you bought, you should get a refund.

I'm wondering if you agree with these principles. Will you commit to making any sectoral support for the airline sector reflect these principles that I've listed?

Hon. Marc Garneau: What I will say, Mr. Bachrach, is that I appreciate the input that you and your party provided. We went out and consulted and received input from all parties and sometimes from individuals. We also received some from the Senate. We very much appreciate it.

Of course, this is part of the process of deciding how we are going to proceed now that we've had the benefit of a lot of recommendations and suggestions. I can tell you that, with respect to workers, I have met with CUPE and with Unifor. I am very much aware of their requirements as well.

We want to ensure that, when we come up with a final set of measures, we have taken into consideration all of the important input provided to us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Is that it? Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sorry about that.

We are going to be going on to the second round right now.

Mr. Kram, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee today.

When it comes to air travel, I think it's important to distinguish between airlines and airports. That's because all the help in the world for Canada's airlines won't do much good if they don't have any place to land or take off from.

I'm wondering if the minister can tell the committee whether the government is planning to do anything in particular for Canada's airports, or is the plan to just let the smaller regional airports go bankrupt over the coming weeks and months?

Hon. Marc Garneau: We're very much aware of the fact that the airports have been heavily impacted. If you don't have passengers flying on airplanes, you don't have passengers in airports. We're very conscious of that.

When this pandemic occurred last March, we did provide a rent-free subsidy to 21 of the largest airports for the whole of 2020. However, we also realize that it's not just the big airports that have the largest volumes. The small airports also have to be able to stay open if we're going to be able to fulfill our responsibilities in terms of regional routes, so, yes, they are part of what we are looking at.

• (1650)

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you.

On what date can we expect the government to release its plan to save Canada's airports?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I can't give you that date. All I can tell you is that we are working very hard on finalizing something. As you will know, in going through the necessary processes that occur within a government, there are a certain number of steps that have to be followed. I can't give you a precise date. Let me just say, though, that it is something with which we are very seized.

Mr. Michael Kram: I understand that you cannot give us a precise date. Will it be before Christmas?

Hon. Marc Garneau: As I said, I can't give you a precise date. Any minister or politician who is foolhardy enough to give specific dates is usually going to turn out to be wrong. What I'm trying to tell you is that we're doing it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Michael Kram: All right.

Other countries released their plans to save their airports a long time ago. New Zealand announced its plan last March to help airports with their operating costs during the pandemic. The United States passed the CARES Act into law last March, which earmarked money specifically for airports.

Today, the calendar says November, and the Canadian government still has not announced its plan to save our airports.

Can you explain why it takes the Canadian government eight months and counting to do what the Americans and the New Zealanders did in one month?

Hon. Marc Garneau: To answer your question, you have to compare apples to apples. If you compare, for example, airports in Canada to airports in the United States, they operate differently. They receive funding from different sources. It is important not to make direct comparisons between the two.

As I said, now that we have a good understanding of the impact on the air sector, we are working very hard to come up with measures to address it. We did some things right from the beginning. For example, many airport employees were able to access the wage subsidy program. We're very proud of that. Twenty-one airports were allowed to get a rent holiday for the year 2020. We have put in place some measures.

In the case of northern airports serving remote areas, we have provided funding of \$192 million to make sure that those 140 remote communities, which are so important in the north of our country, could still rely on airlines and air transport companies could service them.

We have done some things as we moved along, but we're looking at the big picture now.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay, thank you.

Can you tell us if the plan to save the airline sector will include any help for rapid testing?

Hon. Marc Garneau: That's a parallel activity we've been working on with the airlines and with the airports as well. In Canada, we worked very constructively with the airlines and the airports to put in place measures that would minimize the possibility of infection when somebody did go to an airport and took a flight to another destination. Lots of safety precautions have been put in place, like wearing masks, taking temperatures, asking certain questions and trying to minimize contact. The airports have done a great job cleaning and sanitizing their airports. The airlines themselves clean the aircraft after each flight. The air ventilation system on board these aircraft are extremely efficient at minimizing the possibility of transmission, but we also have the rules with respect to wearing masks.

Your question is very important. If we can find a rapid test that's reliable and efficient, it will allow us the potential to reduce that 14-day quarantine that exists when somebody comes in from outside the country. That would make a very big difference. We're watching very carefully what's happening at the Toronto airport, as well as the pilot tests we are involved in with the Government of Alberta at the Calgary airport.

• (1655)

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

We'll now move on, for five minutes, to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Good evening, Minister Garneau. Welcome to the TRAN committee.

I have a couple of questions for you. We've had a lot of questions on airlines, but being from Newfoundland and Labrador, surround-

ed by water, and from Atlantic Canada, I'm going to focus on questions around the ferry service.

First of all, I noticed in the documents we received that your department allocated \$2 million for a number of capital projects for Marine Atlantic, which is greatly appreciated. However, there's a bigger ask for a new support building, in the town of Port aux Basques, for the route between Port aux Basques and North Sydney. I was just wondering if you could update us on the status of that plan and the request for funding approval to complete that project.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you very much, Mr. Rogers, for that question.

First of all, MAI is a great organization. They have done really well in a very difficult pandemic. Even though the number of passengers has decreased, I tip my hat to them for maintaining this constitutionally compulsory service between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

With respect to your specific question, we're looking at this extremely seriously. We are now currently waiting for MAI to submit, in the coming weeks, its corporate plan with details with respect to the building you described. We are certainly aware of the need for that. We're going to look at it very seriously.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thanks, Minister.

You're correct in saying that it's a badly needed building. I know our MPs have been lobbying for that particular piece of infrastructure.

Also in budget 2019, your department and our government provided multi-year funding to support the modernization of its ferry fleet through the procurement of a new ferry. What is the approximate timeline for the new ferry that will sail between Port aux Basques and North Sydney? When do we expect to be able to see a new boat sailing on that route?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for the question.

I'm looking around to see if anybody has the specific date for a replacement ferry to service Port aux Basques. Do we have an answer on that?

I will relay that to you in a second, very quickly.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Okay, sure.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers, do you want to go ahead with another question? The minister can get back to that in a second.

Go ahead.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Minister, staying with the ferry theme, I wonder if you could comment on the *Madeleine* ferry, which is the one, of course, between Quebec and Prince Edward Island. How does that fit into a longer-term ferry strategy?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for the question.

The *Madeleine*, which currently services between the Magdalen Islands and P.E.I., is 39 years old. Although we have already made the decision to have a new one built, in fact by Davie Shipbuilding, along with another ferry to replace the *Holiday Island*, which goes between Nova Scotia and P.E.I., those ferries will not be ready until 2026-27.

In the interim, now that the *Madeleine* has really begun to degrade very seriously after 39 years, we made the decision to purchase, on an interim basis, a modern, available, used ferry, which is from Spain. It will come into service next year to take over from the *Madeleine*, to ensure that the people living in the Magdalen Islands—I know there are 13,000 of them—will continue to have access to the mainland.

With respect to your question on MAI, the procurement process is under way with MAI. We think that delivery will probably be within a couple of years.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Do you have a quick question, Mr. Rogers?

• (1700)

Mr. Churence Rogers: No. In fact, they were the key questions for now, and I thank the minister for his time and his direct answers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

We are now going to go to Mr. Barsalou-Duval, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to return to the issue of regional air travel. In the midst of a crisis, NAV CANADA has imposed a 30% rate increase on all regional air carriers, which I find appalling. It has come to our attention that prior to imposing this increase, NAV CANADA had turned to your office for help, but you refused to give it.

Now, in addition to the 30% rate increase for regional carriers, who were already in trouble, NAV CANADA is considering reducing service. For example, the list includes Blanc-Sablon, Natashquan and Sept-Îles in Quebec, as well as the city of Rouyn-Noranda in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, which has been struggling for years to get acceptable service from NAV CANADA.

First of all, could you guarantee that there will be no additional service reductions for the regions of Quebec?

Second, could you get the rate increases to stop, since this is the worst time to impose them and the companies are already in trouble?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

NAV CANADA controls air traffic. It's a completely independent organization, and because there are no planes in the air, it is losing about 80% of its revenue. The situation is improving slightly, but like any organization, it has debts to pay. So it had no choice but to increase rates, by 29%. This is another indication of the difficulties facing the airline industry in general.

In some cases, there are discounts because there are almost no services. So there are discounts in terms of the hours when services are provided. However, I can assure you that this goes through Transport Canada and that decisions made by NAV CANADA will not compromise safety.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Barsalou-Duval, do you have a quick question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Regional air transport is essential to the economic development of these regions. You cannot decide to close the airports in the Quebec regions. It is absolutely unthinkable, and I hope you will understand that.

I have one last question for you. I recently tabled Bill C-249 to ensure that passengers who purchased a ticket and did not receive service get a refund.

Will I be able to count on your support for this bill?

Hon. Marc Garneau: As for your first comment on the importance of air service in the regions, we are on the same wavelength, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

As I told you, this was in the Speech from the Throne. It is important for us to treat all citizens of Canada equally and to provide them with access to the same services, whether they live in the regions or in major centres. Rest assured that this is one of our priorities.

With respect to the issue of repayments, as I said to you, we are aware of this situation and we are looking at it in the context of a broader plan that we are developing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Bachrach, we will go to you for two and a half minutes.

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

Minister, as you are aware, there are class action lawsuits in the United States against Canadian airlines for failing to refund American passengers. Those American passengers are leaning on a Department of Transportation notice from April that basically laid out the obligation of airlines to provide refunds, even in cases where flight disruptions are outside the carrier's control. This is a very different message from the statement on vouchers that came from the CTA.

I'm wondering if you can comment on what it tells you that foreign passengers appear to be better able to assert their consumer rights than Canadians are.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Bachrach, when we put together the passenger protection rights that came out about a year ago—and I was very proud of them—I'm afraid we did not anticipate that there would be a pandemic or that there would be a situation where the airlines would have to stop flying for reasons beyond their own control.

Without getting too technical, when you buy a ticket you also have to remember that there's a tariff associated with it. That's the small print, the contract between you and the airline. Very few people read these, but it's important to know that they have language with respect to certain conditions. It has resulted in some people feeling that—

• (1705)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm familiar with the argument, Minister. I believe you shared that with us last time we asked about this.

Hon. Marc Garneau: All right. I'll just say that, yes, there are class action suits against the airlines. I'm not going to comment on how the airlines will deal with those.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay.

I'll move on very briefly to the issue of passenger complaints to the CTA. I'm wondering, Minister, if you could share with us a ballpark of how many complaints have been received by the CTA since the pandemic began.

Hon. Marc Garneau: As a ballpark figure, I would think it's about 10,000. If you have questions about it, you can, of course, speak to the CTA.

The Chair: Mr. Bachrach, you have time for just a quick question.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm wondering if you know how many of those 10,000 have been investigated by the CTA.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Again, I would ask you to refer that question to the CTA.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

We're now going to move on to Mrs. Kusie for five minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, thanks so much to the minister for being here today.

Minister, I'm going to go back to one of the questions of my colleague on this committee as to the timing of the plan, which I'm a little bit confused by. The media today—it was actually Reuters, my apologies from before for not clarifying the right media house—did indicate that this is impending and will arrive within days. It gave me, as well as I'm sure many airline sector employees, incredible hope. What I'm hearing from you now is that you're not certain or you're not willing to provide information as to when this will be.

My colleague, Mr. Kram, asked if we would see this by the holidays. You said you have talked to many stakeholders. I have also talked to many stakeholders within the airline sector over my time as shadow minister for transport. They are telling me, Minister, that if they are not up and running by the holiday season, and of course

leading to spring break, this is the end of their corporation and perhaps the end of the airline sector.

I'm really looking to you for some type of assurance as to when we can see this support. As I said, according to the media, this is any day now. I was so happy to read that and so happy for the dozens of airline employees and airline individuals who have been contacting me.

Can you please, again, try to provide me and the sector with some comfort as to when we can expect to see this support, which I will remind you we have been waiting eight months for?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I'm aware of the article as well. I read it this afternoon. Far be it from me to cast any aspersions on the media, but I believe they quote a number of unnamed sources. I have no idea who those sources are. I think it is probably worth being careful about interpreting some things such as time frames. I can't say any more than that, but I can assure you that I was not interviewed for that article.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Minister.

You know what they say: If you read it on the Internet, it's most certainly true.

Minister, I'll return to two assurances I asked for, and unfortunately did not receive, within my first round. Again, those are regarding the workers, the airline employees. Can you please commit that this sector support, when it is given, will assure that there are no further layoffs?

Second, as I asked and as my colleagues across several parties asked, can you assure that within this sector support, within this plan, consumers, passengers, will be finally reimbursed?

I asked you in the first round. I was really hoping to get some assurance for both the employees of the airline sector, who are clinging to their jobs, hanging onto their jobs, hoping to ride out this difficult situation, and for the many Canadians who are looking at their Visa bills or Mastercard bills with charges of \$1,000, \$3,000, \$5,000 or \$10,000 from long ago for these flights and who need to be reimbursed. Are you able to provide any type of comfort or reassurance at this time regarding workers or passengers?

• (1710)

Hon. Marc Garneau: Ms. Kusie, hats off to you for your persistence in asking the question. Unfortunately, as you know, I cannot give you specifics at this point, other than to tell you that I'm very, very aware of the two points you raise, one with respect to the protection of workers and the other with respect to passengers who would like to be reimbursed. I can tell you on the side that many of those passengers have written to me, so I'm extremely aware of the fact that they're not happy with the current situation. We are taking those things into consideration as we try to elaborate on a program that will address the air sector.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Mr. Sidhu, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be sharing my time with Mr. El-Khoury.

Minister, thank you for being here today. As you know, I'm a big advocate of electric vehicles and charging infrastructure. I appreciate the additional resources for the incentives for the zero-emission vehicles program. This program will provide the residents of Brampton East, my riding, cleaner transportation solutions and reduced pollution, while helping to meet Canada's zero-emission vehicle sales targets.

I want to talk about the air travel sector. I know the wage subsidy has helped many in the air travel sector to keep their workers on the payroll during these challenging times. Speaking more about the air travel sector, can you comment on the importance of air travel for a large country like Canada, please?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Yes, it would be my pleasure to speak about that because I feel very strongly about it.

I believe that the air sector is extremely important to Canada, and not only for the obvious reasons that people often bring up: that it allows us to travel for business, for tourists to reach destinations, for families to be reunited. Those are all the obvious points that are brought up, but let us remember that Canada is the second-largest country on earth. In some cases, there are no other practical options, and I think the air sector, even though it is sometimes maligned, plays a critical role in terms of unifying us as a country, because it allows us to see each other and to communicate with each other face to face. That is something that we may have taken for granted but is extremely important. It's a bit like the railway at the beginning of Canada as a young nation, which suddenly allowed us to reach from one end of the country to the other end of the country.

It's important for sovereignty reasons as well. I would like to think that a Canadian could get on an airplane in Canada and pretty much reach almost any other part of the world, instead of having to depend on going across the border to catch a flight or to go to another spot in Europe to take another flight to get to their final destination. I'm reminded of the tens of thousands of people that the airlines brought back to Canada at the beginning of this pandemic. We brought them back because we had the ability to do it, because we had airlines that could provide that.

Finally, I want to talk about and tip my hat to the smaller airlines that serve the north, the regions of the country that have small communities, sometimes in very remote areas, and that absolutely have no other alternative but to receive their support that way, whether it's for medicines, whether it's a doctor coming in, whether it's food or whether they need to be evacuated for hospital care in a larger centre. There's no question; the air sector in our country plays a critical role for this country.

• (1715)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that, Minister.

I'll turn it over to Mr. El-Khoury.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, Minister. We are pleased to have you with us. I think all Canadians recognize the great and heavy responsibility that rests on your shoulders.

I've had several conversations with you. I am extremely grateful to you for taking my concerns into account, including the need to ensure the safety of my fellow citizens and to guarantee them services. I know that this is important to you as well, and that you will do your utmost to secure the jobs of all those who work in the airline industry. We're very pleased about that, Minister, and we thank you for it.

I have a question for you. The Prime Minister has pledged \$41 million in emergency assistance to Canada's northern airlines to maintain services to remote communities. Can you please explain the importance of allocating those funds to this region?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for your question, Mr. El-Khoury.

As you know, the pandemic has hit the airline industry hard, including small airlines serving the north and remote areas of our country. Without passengers, they have no revenue and hence cannot continue their operations.

We recognized that it was essential for these small companies to be able to continue to operate, so that they could provide remote areas with goods such as medicines and food, as well as bring doctors to these areas. We are talking about 140 locations in northern Canada. The government needed to provide funding to help keep the small companies serving remote areas going.

We worked with the provinces and territories. Costs are shared between the federal, provincial and territorial governments to ensure that these companies have enough revenue to continue to provide these essential services. It's absolutely necessary.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Does the Quebec government—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury. The five minutes has lapsed.

Minister Garneau, thank you for your time here today and thank you for taking on all these questions from everyone. I understand that you have to depart the meeting right now, and we're going to move on to questions with your officials. Once again, I want to thank you for your time today.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all the members.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll take a two-minute pause and get everybody ready here, primarily those on board with respect to the officials.

• (1715) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1715)

The Chair: We're going to start off with Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Shipley, you have six minutes.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll direct these questions towards Deputy Minister Keenan, please.

Mr. Keenan, due to COVID-19, Canadians have lost millions of dollars in cancelled plane tickets. Airlines are currently providing vouchers for future travel, but vouchers don't put food on residents' tables. Many Canadians believe they should be reimbursed for their airfares. The CTA has yet to address many of the 10,000 complaints they've received from Canadian consumers demanding reimbursements for flights cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is your department's plan for addressing this issue of travel refunds as vouchers are not sufficient?

• (1720)

Mr. Michael Keenan (Deputy Minister, Department of Transport): As we've seen over the past hour with the questions to and discussions with the Minister of Transport, this is an area of significant discussion and significant work. It is one of the key issues in the air sector, and there's a significant impact on Canadians.

I'd say two things. In terms of whether, under the current system, passengers are entitled to refunds that they have not yet received, this is under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Transportation Agency. There have been a large number of complaints filed and the CTA is looking at those, but questions would have to be addressed to the CTA.

In terms of the government's response to the crisis in the air sector, including the outstanding refunds, it's difficult to really add any more than what the minister said over the last hour.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you.

A situation was brought to my attention just last night involving some of the smaller, more regional airports. Their operating costs are usually divided up amongst many different commercial airlines. Some of those are no longer flying out of those regional airports. The operating costs are still the same for those airports. They're now dividing those costs up amongst the smaller remaining users of the airports, such as charters or private planes or even, quite frankly, some government aircraft. One example of those costs would be for snow removal. The bills are getting quite significant for these smaller users. They're already suffering. A lot of these regional lines service the north and are much needed.

What's being done to help the airports absorb some of these operating costs and not just pass them on to the smaller airlines that are still trying to get by?

Mr. Michael Keenan: The member raises a really good question. In the process of understanding some of the extreme impacts on the sector and advising the government on options for address-

ing them, the department is in pretty well constant contact with a wide range of air operators and airports. We have seen exactly the dynamic the member is describing. Airlines are incurring large financial losses, extremely large financial losses. Airports are as well. Airports have to stay open, and they have fixed costs. The snow has to be removed whether there's a full slate of flights or a very reduced one. We are very conscious of the impact on airports. We're working closely to understand them, to make sure that those harsh realities are reflected in the analysis and the discussions that are under way.

It's hard to say much more than that at this point, other than that the member is exactly right in terms of the very difficult dynamic a lot of small and regional airports are facing.

Mr. Doug Shipley: It's nice to hear that you are at least aware of that. I think that is definitely a very pressing issue that needs to be looked at quite quickly, because a lot of these airlines are servicing passengers up north and the airlines are all those people have left to get them their services. Thank you for letting me bring that to your attention.

I'd like to move on to rapid testing, Deputy Minister. Based on the Coutts land border crossing and the Calgary International Airport rapid testing pilot trials, when could we expect to see some results of this program?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question. Again, it's a very important question and a very important issue.

Increasingly, you can see that particularly in air travel. There's also the goods land travel, but in the air travel system, the world is edging its way towards some kind of system where testing will be a part of international air travel. We're working closely with ICAO and we anticipate seeing a bit of blueprint come out of ICAO in the next few weeks. In Canada, there are three sets of pilots under way.

One of the really interesting ones is the one the member referred to, the one in Alberta at the Calgary airport and Coutts. Those pilots are going operational literally this week. I think they have been operational for a few days. We're watching them very closely. We're working very closely with the Province of Alberta, and the federal government, Transport Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada are working really closely. We are hopeful that we will see in those pilots some success factors that can be built on for a broader testing system that can eventually come into place in Canada.

There is a second pilot that is happening in Toronto with Air Canada, the Toronto airport and McMaster. It's a different kind of pilot, but it's creating a good baseline to understand, for international arrivals, what the infection rates are.

There is a third pilot in Vancouver, which is actually, on a pilot scale, looking at predeparture testing so that passengers outward bound from Canada can head to an international destination already having had a negative COVID test.

We're working very closely with our partners in monitoring these pilots, and we hope to learn from them to create options in terms of moving forward with operational testing at the border in the air mode. Our cohorts at CBSA are working closely to consider options in the land mode.

• (1725)

Mr. Doug Shipley: I can see the chair talking, but he's on mute. I don't know if he's telling me that my time is over.

The Chair: I haven't done that in a while, so thank you.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I should have just kept going.

The Chair: Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Chair.

I have some fairly technical questions for our officials.

In looking through the supplementary (B)s, I was quite intrigued by a number of the items, and one in particular for “Funding to deliver better service to air travellers”, at \$12 million. Quite honestly I have to say that I hate air travel, and anything that could possibly improve service is certainly music to my ears.

Could you explain—and I don't know who the best person is to do that—just what exactly this money is supposed to achieve?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

This relates to an initiative that we launched in the 2019 budget. We passed a bill.... I'm trying to remember the name of the act, but I think this was for the P3...? You know, I actually have the wrong line item. I'm going to turn to the assistant deputy minister, Ryan Pilgrim, our chief financial officer, to speak to this. I think I was speaking to the wrong item.

Mr. Ryan Pilgrim (Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, Department of Transport): This \$12 million is for an expense reimbursement agreement. With the potential sale of CATSA to an independent party, the purchasers' approved diligence and negotiation expenses would be reimbursed up to an agreed-upon cap if the negotiations fail. The thought was that the sale would go through this year, so this money was pulled in for that in case we had to reimburse the group that purchased the entity. That's what it's for. It's a contingent liability.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Is that somehow going to relate to better service for air travellers, with the sale or the transition of CATSA? Could you elaborate?

I'm new to this and I don't understand.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Happily, and I apologize for the confusion on this.

In the 2019 budget, the government announced a plan to transition CATSA, the air travel security agency, from a Crown corporation to a not-for-profit corporation that would run essentially like a co-op. It is essentially replicating the model that we did for air navigation services quite some time ago. It was a service function

of air navigation that was essentially a part of Transport Canada, and we transitioned it to a not-for-profit corporation that was fully focused on service and has been able to generate essentially higher levels of service, better safety performance and lower costs.

The plan is to drive a similar transition in the governance of CATSA to enable the organization to, we believe, work more closely with the airports and airlines to provide a better and faster service to travellers in terms of their security screening and that of their luggage.

Now, this was launched back when one of the main challenges was ensuring you had an efficient service that could handle the ever-increasing volume of passengers. It's a reform that is sort of mid-stream, and we're taking stock of how to proceed with this reform given the unprecedented and devastating impact we've seen on air travel.

• (1730)

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you. That does help quite a bit.

My other question relates to CATSA and some \$41.5 million for explosives detection systems. I would have assumed that we already have some sort of explosives detection system.

Again, could you just elaborate on what this expenditure is going to be used for?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Sure. There's an element of the operations of CATSA that.... At its heart, it is a security operation that uses the best intelligence on security threats and the latest technology to protect passengers from mischief. In the personal screening and the hold-baggage screening, there's always an evolution of the technology to more sophisticated x-ray machines and remote sensing. We're working on the adoption of some newer technology that allows better remote sensing of explosives without as much intrusion as you would normally see. You know, you go through and then there's the swab of the bag. There's a way to start doing that in a more remote manner using the latest technology.

In CATSA, we're always going through, every few years, an investment in the next technology to better screen for things like explosives and weapons and better protect passengers in a manner that's less intrusive as they go through the screening points.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan, and thank you, Ms. Jaczek.

We're now going to move on to Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Keenan, you have certainly received letters from airlines, regional ones especially, complaining about a situation that arose on July 1.

A new regulation affecting the Twin Otter aircraft came into force. The Twin Otter is the main aircraft used to serve northern communities. The brush plane regularly uses runways in less than ideal conditions.

Under the July 1 regulation, airlines can no longer use the aircraft, even though it was seldom involved in accidents. It has been in operation since the 1960s and is manufactured here.

Before you introduced the regulation, did you consult with regional airline operators, especially given COVID-19 and the crisis in the airline sector? The timing of the regulation makes me question the process and thinking behind it.

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: You raise a great point: We have a fundamental mission. Our number one objective at Transport Canada is the safety of the travelling public. There are always a number of issues that we're working through, a number of standards we're improving and regulations that we're modernizing. We're looking very carefully at how we carry out that number one priority in the context of the deep disruption of COVID.

On some basic level, we have extended deadlines for the renewal of pilots' licences, etc. When it comes to addressing pressing safety concerns with equipment, we have to continue to pursue the changes to airworthiness directives and the corrective actions. We have tried our best to make adjustments to reflect the disruption, and we've changed some timelines on a number of safety initiatives to, without sacrificing safety, allow for the disruption that operators are facing.

When we make changes to a requirement, for example, for the training of pilots or for equipment on planes, we do consult with both the manufacturers and the operators, because the operators have to put the changes in place.

• (1735)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I am happy to hear you carried out consultations, but I imagine the companies didn't agree with your decision, given that I am hearing from them. I understand why they are upset: the main aircraft small airlines use to keep regions connected can no longer be used. I see a big problem with that.

How many accidents was the aircraft involved in? What data was the regulation based on?

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Again, I think it's a great question, because we're very conscious that in remote communities, particularly those that have no other access to transportation legs, the small regional operators and planes like the Twin Otter are absolutely the backbone of all the essential supply. We work through and seek to find a way to address the safety concerns in a manner that does not disrupt operations. We can often find solutions. Sometimes the op-

erators are not happy with the results of our safety officials, but we do try to be conscious of operational implications and give enough time and enough notice for the operators to come into compliance so that we do not disrupt essential transportation routes.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I encourage you to keep working with those companies to find solutions, because it would be helpful if they could continue using the aircraft. Sometimes, runway investments are necessary, but you could also provide financial assistance. In any case, I think it's very ill-advised to impose the regulation on them like this, especially because it comes at such a huge cost to remote regions.

My other question has to do with the new regulations on pilot fatigue. I've heard that planes may need to have more pilots. Northern communities do not have enough housing, and the fact that more people are on an aircraft increases the risk of exposure to COVID-19. When you have two pilots on a nine-passenger plane, it gets to be a lot.

Did you take into account the issues air carriers brought to your attention, especially the smaller ones that serve the regions?

[English]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Mr. Chair, the member raises another very good question. This is a great example of the significant number of operational problems we've seen air operators run into as a result of the COVID disruptions. They're particularly acute, as the member has indicated, for the small airlines going into remote communities.

What I can say is that the safety officials and Transport Canada civil aviation are maintaining an ongoing dialogue with air operators, including northern air operators, the small regional operators, to identify the challenges they're facing as a result of COVID. We are doing our best and we are offering flexibility on a number of the civil aviation safety requirements. Wherever we can provide flexibility that we believe does not sacrifice public safety, our officials are trying to do that.

I can commit to taking these two issues back and seeing where we're at with our safety officials. However, I never direct safety officials. They have to come to a conclusion themselves. I think I will see what other room there is to offer flexibility on these operational issues, as long as it does not sacrifice public safety.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I have one last question for you.

For months now, a Transport Canada report on the sale of Air Transat has been sitting on your desk. Where are you in your review? Are you worried about the impact on competition? Did you receive the committee's request for the production of papers? Can we count on you to provide them on time?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Barsalou-Duval, I'll hold off that question.

Mr. Keenan, if you can get that answer into another question, that would be wonderful.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

My questions are perhaps for Mr. Keenan, but I suppose whoever is best equipped to answer them can jump in.

I want to start where I left off with the minister, talking a little bit about the CTA, the Canadian Transportation Agency, and the complaints that it's received. We all know there's a huge backlog of complaints, and we heard from the minister that at least 10,000 additional complaints have been received since the beginning of the pandemic.

I'm wondering if Mr. Keenan can speak to how many of those 10,000 complaints have been investigated, or whether, given the backlog, the CTA simply hasn't been able to get to the pandemic-related complaints.

• (1740)

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you.

That question would have to be put to the CTA. It's a quasi-judicial entity that operates arm's length from Transport Canada.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

Maybe I'll try this tack. In the main estimates, the funding for the CTA is included. By our read, it looks like there's a reduction of about \$2 million for dispute resolution based on what was spent last year. It seems like, given the backlog of complaints and the massive number of complaints related to the pandemic, this would be an agency that should be receiving more money, not less.

Can you speak to why that seems to be the case in the estimates and why the CTA isn't getting an increase in funding in order to deal with the backlog that they're seeing?

Mr. Michael Keenan: That's an absolutely fair question.

To get a complete picture of the CTA's resources to deal with all of its operations, including the uptick in complaints from passengers, you have to look not just at the main estimates but also at the supplementary (B)s. You will find in the supplementary (B)s that there is an item to add just over \$11 million to the funding of the CTA specifically to give it a significant boost in resources to address the significant uptick in air passenger complaints.

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

Moving on, many of my colleagues have mentioned the situation facing smaller regional airports. That's certainly an issue of great concern in northwest B.C.

I've been speaking with different airport operators and with local governments. One of the concerns is around the ACAP program, the airports capital assistance program. I noted in the main estimates that the funding seems to have remained fixed at about \$38 million and it's been at that level since 2000. This is a program that local governments that run airports and other airport authorities really depend on to purchase expensive capital equipment and make other capital upgrades that wouldn't otherwise be affordable.

I'm wondering if you can comment on the need for an increase to the ACAP program. This is something I wrote to the minister about recently, specifically with regard to the Bella Bella and Bella Coola airports, which need upgrades to their lighting so that medevac flights can land there. During the pandemic, of course, this is an issue of utmost concern.

Is your department considering increasing the ACAP program?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I would agree with the minister's characterization. We see ACAP as a really important program that helps those smaller airports meet the safety requirements. It's a heavily subscribed program. It's been at \$38 million for a number of years, and we spend just about every penny. We may re-profile on that, but it's fully subscribed.

I would say that the ability of airports to finance safety issues—the safety investments and spending—given the downturn in the revenues is one of the many issues we're looking at and analyzing very carefully in the context of the economic crisis in the air sector.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Continuing on the situation facing regional airports, Mr. Keenan, I know that the minister alluded to the fact that there's going to be a plan that becomes evident over the next rise, and that we should hang on and wait for these details. I'm just wondering if you can speak to some of the strategies your department is considering in order to provide those smaller regional airports with the support needed to keep them viable, keep them financially sustainable and keep air transportation into the smaller communities through the pandemic.

Could you speak just in broad terms to the types of strategies that the department is considering?

• (1745)

Mr. Michael Keenan: What I can say on this is that we're working very hard and very diligently, analyzing all of the many stress points in the system, and we're consulting very closely with the operators in the system. We're doing it in such a way as to make sure we differentiate between the large airlines and the large airports, the small airlines and the small airports, and the remote regional communities that rely heavily, some of them exclusively, on the air mode as their link to the rest of the country.

We're making sure that the diversity in the system and the fact that there are extreme stresses playing out in different ways across the different parts of the system are fully understood.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: My last question is with regard to emissions and greenhouse gases from the transportation sector.

The minister was talking earlier about the different strategies to reduce those emissions. I note that in the departmental plan there are measurements provided for 2016 through 2018 that show that emissions from the transport sector have been stagnant. They've been roughly 7.5% over 2005 levels although your department has a goal to cut them by 30% of 2005 levels by 2030.

Are the strategies the department is employing to reduce emissions up to that task? Do we have effective enough strategies, and is there a plan to meet and exceed that 2030 target yet?

The Chair: Mr. Keenan, please give a quick answer.

Mr. Michael Keenan: That's a great question. Minister Garneau has said many times that transport accounts for one-quarter of all emissions, that it is the second-largest source of emissions in Canada, and he is working diligently with his colleagues at developing options and plans for additional actions to actually reduce emissions in the transport sector.

Mr. Chair, if you'll permit me, I feel I gave long answers and I left two questions from the previous member unanswered, which I could answer quickly if you could direct me to squeeze that in at some point.

The Chair: Go ahead. Squeeze it in.

Mr. Michael Keenan: The first answer is that Transport Canada is working diligently on the application for the merger between Air Transat and Air Canada. The parties filed their latest undertakings with us a little over two weeks ago, and we're working through those. The department has received the motion from the committee for the production of papers related to the merger, and we're working diligently preparing to respond to that request, and we will ensure that we do so within the time allocated by the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan. Did that include Mr. Barsalou-Duval's question?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Yes.

The Chair: Great. Thank you, Mr. Keenan. I appreciate that.

We're now going to go on to the second round, which is going to start off with Mr. Soroka for five minutes.

Mr. Soroka, the floor is yours.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Keenan, for appearing today.

As I reviewed the estimates, a few things struck me, particularly regarding some sums of money here in table 197. There was the sum going to the Asia-Pacific gateway and corridor transportation infrastructure fund. The stated purpose of this fund is to provide:

...funding for strategic infrastructure projects in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba that enhance the competitiveness, efficiency and capacity of Canada's multimodal transport network focused on international commerce with the Asian-Pacific region.

I know you're aware of the Alberta-to-Alaska corridor. I'm just wondering if there has been any discussion within the department, and what kind of potential there is for this being put through.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

That item on the Asia-Pacific gateway and corridor fund is a re-profiling of some final monies under an infrastructure fund that started quite some time ago in budget 2006, under a previous government. The nature of infrastructure projects is that you allocate all the money, and the final payments tend to come sometimes years later on some of the larger projects. That project is really just finishing paying off on projects that were decided many years ago. There is no new intake under that project.

The national trade corridors fund, which was launched by Minister Garneau a little over two years ago, has moved quickly and has approved over 85 projects. I think we've put out about \$1.8 billion, leveraging almost \$4 billion in strategic infrastructure projects. That program is now fully subscribed.

There is a northern component that we've just opened up, and we're open to submissions on that. Essentially, if we get submissions for northern transportation projects, we assess them on a merit basis and go from there.

• (1750)

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Okay. Once the project is submitted, then there's potential for this, or do you see any benefits of that Alberta-to-Alaska corridor being put through?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I'd actually have to check to see. I know what project you're speaking about, and because it's Alaska to Alberta, I'm not sure if it would qualify under the northern program or not. It would certainly qualify under the general program, but again, it would be subject to a proposal and a merit-based assessment. The challenge with the general program is that the government has fully allocated the initial funding on that program. There's a tiny amount left, and I know that the amount left would not be enough to build a railway.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: I know it's not enough to build a railway. I'm just wondering about your viewpoint. If there were political will from the Americans and Canadians, is there a good potential for it to go forward, and would it save money in the long run?

Mr. Michael Keenan: It's difficult for us to opine on a project until we actually get a detailed submission and then assess it against the merit criteria.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: For any of the northern projects, then, that's only anything within Canada, and that's only going to coastal waters, or how is that allocated, then? Is that air, ship and rail?

Mr. Michael Keenan: There's a \$400-million dedicated northern program for those that are north of 60 projects, with a carve-out for Churchill, Manitoba. It kind of dips down north of 60 for Churchill. There's a geographic restriction to it. In principle, it's open to any project that improves transportation and trade gateways and reduces bottlenecks.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Now, again on table 197 under the estimates, a grant of half a million dollars is allocated to the "National Trade Corridors Fund" and, under the contributions, \$450 million. You're saying that most of that money is already spent and is just being paid back now, or is there some new money for some other projects that I'm not aware of?

Mr. Michael Keenan: I think the monies you're referring to—and I'll invite my ADM of corporate services to correct me if I'm wrong—is what we call a re-profiling. It's in the supplementary estimates (B) because we shifted the allocation of money from one fiscal year to the next. There is a significant amount of money under the national trade corridors fund that's not yet spent, but we received a tremendous number of high-quality proposals.

We put them through a merit-based assessment criteria, and the government decided on and announced over 85 of them. Those 85 projects, we've committed the money to, and if the proponents do build them—and sometimes a project will go astray for any number of reasons—then we will have spent virtually the entire \$1.8 billion. It continues to show up in our reference levels until we get the construction bills in and we pay them, but we don't actually have enough unencumbered funds to take on any major new projects at this time, unless the government were to decide to add financial resources to the program.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

Thank you, Mr. Soroka.

We'll now move on to Mr. Rogers for five minutes.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to Mr. Keenan and the other officials. Before I get to the questions, I want to go back in regard to Marine Atlantic.

I've also met with numerous people in the airline industry, CEOs of airports, people who own airlines and people who have a keen interest and a vested interest. One thing they keep telling me and saying about getting people back on the aircrafts is that we should have rapid testing. Rapid testing, they believe, will put people back on the aircraft and have them flying, particularly in the domestic market.

Mr. Keenan and other officials, thanks for being here today. I have a couple of questions around the impact of the current pandemic on service provided by Marine Atlantic, both the mandate of the constitutional one between Port aux Basques and North Sydney, and the non-mandated one between North Sydney and Argentia. Has the pandemic had any influence on the funding requested in the main and supplementary estimates that we see in front of us?

• (1755)

Mr. Michael Keenan: Yes, it has.

There's an item in the supplementary estimates for Marine Atlantic that has to do with costs and revenues. Is that not the case,

Melanie? It's under supplementary estimates (B), and I'm trying to find the amount here. Do you have the amount there, Ryan, for Marine Atlantic?

Mr. Ryan Pilgrim: Yes, there's \$2 million in the supplementary estimates (B). It's a re-profile of capital. Also, in supplementary estimates (A), \$84.9 million was provided to Marine Atlantic for capital and additional operating dollars. Between the two, \$86.9 million extra is provided to Marine Atlantic this year in the supplementary estimates, in addition to the \$55.7 million provided in the main estimates.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Just to follow up on that, what are the anticipated financial impacts of the pandemic and reduced services on the viability of Marine Atlantic?

Mr. Michael Keenan: The pandemic has hit almost every transportation provider. Airlines were hit severely, as were transit, intercity busing, intercity rail and ferry services. We see all the ferry operators in Canada have taken an operational and financial hit. We first worked with them to ensure we had the provisions for safe operation. As Marine Atlantic is a Crown corporation in the transport portfolio, we're working closely with it to assess the financial impact going forward.

Our view is that the continued operation of Marine Atlantic in general, and the constitutional service in particular, is non-negotiable. We're simply working through the financial implications and finding a way, with Marine Atlantic, to manage them.

As the minister indicated, it's our assessment that Marine Atlantic's done a really great job, both in managing and dealing with COVID safety for their passengers and clients, and also in adjusting their operations to the disruption to manage their way through. We'll keep working with them on that and make sure the service continues.

Mr. Churence Rogers: I experienced first-hand the tremendous service provided by the employees of Marine Atlantic. They were very comforting and reassuring, and treated us very well. It was a very positive experience, with the restrictions they're dealing with.

I asked the minister about the building for Port aux Basques, and he referenced the Marine Atlantic corporate plan. I was wondering when we might be able to see some kind of response to that corporate plan. Will it be sometime soon, or what do you think?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Melanie, when do we think the Marine Atlantic corporate plan would likely go through? Do we have a sense?

Ms. Melanie Tod (Director General, Crown Corporations and Portfolio Governance, Department of Transport): Our objective would be in the coming months, as soon as possible. We've received excellent information from Marine Atlantic. We're working it through the system.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tod.

Thank you, Mr. Keenan, and thank you, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We're now going to move on to Mr. Barsalou-Duval for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I recently learned through the media that, further to widespread calls from people in Natashquan, Fisheries and Oceans Canada was considering acquiring a port that is currently owned by Transport Canada. Is the department open to the possibility, since Natashquan fishers worry whether they will even be able to fish?

Will the department support it? Where do the negotiations stand?

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

I'm going to turn it over to a colleague, the assistant deputy minister of programs, to answer that.

Go ahead, Anu.

Ms. Anuradha Marisetti (Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs, Department of Transport): We are aware that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is interested in acquiring the Natashquan wharf, and we are working with them. There are a number of steps we have to take in terms of ensuring that the wharf can be transferred, including environmental remediations if necessary, and just a whole bunch of internal steps.

As we go through them, and as there's interest to move this forward, we will proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Do you know how long it might take?

[*English*]

Ms. Anuradha Marisetti: No, we don't have an idea of a timeline. It's in the very initial discussions with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: As I'm sure you can appreciate, this is a matter of life and death for those fishers. Without a port, they can't fish. That means no work and no more village.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: I think that's a fair point.

When we look at these kinds of issues, we consult very carefully and closely with affected parties. We'll work closely with the community and DFO in looking at this issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Keenan, are you satisfied with the fact that people have filed more than 10,000 complaints about

unrefunded airline tickets, none of which has been dealt with by the Canadian Transportation Agency?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Keenan: I would simply come back to the points that the minister raised.

This is a very sensitive issue. It's a very difficult issue. It's one that we're really aware of and considering closely as we do analysis and provide advice on possible measures with respect to the economic crisis in the air sector.

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

I'll now move on to Mr. Bachrach.

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

Thank you, Mr. Keenan, for your answers so far.

My next topic of questioning concerns the high-frequency rail project. As we know, other countries around the world enjoy high-speed rail. I believe Canada is the only country in the G7 that lacks high-speed rail. The proposed project would see trains travelling at speeds of around 170 kilometres an hour; whereas countries like France and Japan have trains that travel at 320 kilometres an hour.

Should Canadians be happy with an option that is still significantly behind what other countries are building and what other countries' citizens are utilizing?

Mr. Michael Keenan: Thank you for the question.

The member speaks to an area of significant work right now in the Government of Canada in terms of developing a potential project to dramatically improve passenger rail service in the Quebec City to Toronto corridor. Transport Canada worked with Infrastructure Canada, with Via Rail and the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and we set up a joint project office. We brought in some absolutely top-notch people in the world of developing passenger rail projects. They are doing due diligence and creating analysis on options that the government could consider in moving forward to improve passenger rail service.

Until that process gets to a next stage, it's hard to describe exactly what the service would look like. However, I would say that a whole range of options, in terms of improving frequency and improving speed to get better reliability and better travel time, are under consideration.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Is your department considering options that would make us competitive with those other countries that I mentioned?

Mr. Michael Keenan: The focus is not so much an international point of competitiveness, as opposed to providing better, more convenient and faster rail service to the large number of people who travel in the Quebec City to Toronto corridor.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan and Mr. Bachrach.

We'll now move on for five minutes to Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much to all the officials for being here today. You were so very kind to brief me. It was two months ago now already, but time goes on. I always like to point out as well that I'm a very proud former public servant, having spent close to a decade and a half at GAC, so it's always lovely to be amongst former colleagues of the public service.

Building on my main point to the minister earlier, what I hope will be true is the release of some type of sector supports in the very near future. As I said, the media reports are that this will be sooner rather than later, which is excellent.

I wanted to know from you what the implementation of sector support might look like, what that possibly could look like. Would it be done through regional initiatives, as we have seen with this first great piece with the north? Would it be done on an application process, airline by airline, or is it dependent upon whatever type of structure is used, be it debt equity or some type of aid?

I was hoping, just for the sake of that, when this is announced—which I hope is soon—implementation will be very fast and these funds will be allowed to flow as quickly as possible to the affected parts of the sector. In my opinion, throughout the pandemic, we've seen distributions of funds from the government, some of which were more timely than others.

If this is in fact happening, if this does occur, I would be interested to know what the implementation would look like and to get an idea as to timing.

● (1805)

Mr. Michael Keenan: That's a great question. I won't repeat what the minister said and the discussion in the first hour, obviously. However, there are acute pressures and acute challenges in the sector, and there's an active discussion of options in terms of the government's response. What I would say on implementation is that it is a key question, because once the government decides it wishes to do something as a matter of policy and what and when, then that's great but for it to matter, it has to be implemented.

In terms of implementation, I would say that it could be any of the options the member listed, depending upon what kinds of decisions the government takes with respect to addressing the issues, which gets back to the comments the minister made. I would say that implementation is something that officials are supposed to worry about and support the government on. Whatever the government makes decisions on, and whenever, with respect to these issues, we will certainly be working with our colleagues in other departments, and we'll certainly be working with the stakeholders in the sector to seek to implement those decisions absolutely as quickly as possible given the nature of the challenge.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Deputy Minister, for that excellent response. I really like the comment that for it to matter it has to be implemented. That's fantastic.

I'm going to go back to my colleague Mr. Shipley's comments about rapid testing. Likewise, we've talked a lot on this call today

about the implementation in Alberta at the YYC and Coutts crossing. What would have to happen for this to occur nationally?

I know that we touched on it in Mr. Shipley's comments, but what would a national rollout of such a rapid testing process look like at our main ports and main airports, etc.? Could you provide some insight to me as to that?

Mr. Michael Keenan: That's a great question.

It's hard to predict. It's virtually impossible to say that a national rollout would be x simply because it depends on a whole number of factors. The first is what we learn from the pilots. The second is the decisions by both the federal and provincial governments on where to go with these kinds of issues. The third would be where our international partners go, because it looks like we're heading to a system where there will be some kind of recognition. If the work that's under way at ICAO that Canada is involved with pans out, there would be some sort of rules of the road or rules of the air, if you will, with respect to testing for international flights.

When we look at how to do all that, you come back to first principles and how you enable Canadians to travel by air whether domestically or internationally so that they are safe, given the COVID threat. Testing is part of that, but a lot of things go into that. Among them are the cleaning protocols, the mask wearing. In Canada, in mid-April we required passengers to wear masks on planes. It turns out that if the cleaning protocols of the airlines, the physics of how air moves within a plane and strict protocols like masking all come together, it almost counterintuitively results in air travel being a reasonably low-risk activity for passengers.

We've worked really closely with the industry. There's real leadership in the industry on the part of the airlines. The airports are under extreme financial and economic stress, but they're committed to doing whatever it takes to keep their clients safe. Working with them we've been able to put together the flight plan. Canada has something called the flight plan, which is a national plan for COVID-safe air travel. We see testing fitting into that, but I think the question is making it work from a system perspective. There is progress to make. I think the pathway will depend on some government decisions, some international partner decisions, but also really close collaboration with the industry operators.

● (1810)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

I'll now move on to Mr. Sidhu. You have five minutes.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, I'll be sharing my time with Mr. El-Khoury.

Thank you to the officials for being here today and taking the time to be with us.

Mr. Keenan, is it true that most European and U.S. airlines that mandated reimbursements also provided very significant sector-specific bailout packages to their airlines. For example, Lufthansa in Europe. Can you please comment on that?

Mr. Michael Keenan: The situation varies dramatically country by country, but a number of European countries have provided significant support, and the German government did make a significant investment in Lufthansa, for example. Air France has done the same with Air France-KLM. The Netherlands is supposed to, but there's a question as to how they'll proceed. The general trend is that there have been some significant investments, different types of financial assistance or taking ownership stakes by a number of European countries and by the U.S. under the CARES Act, which one of the members mentioned earlier.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that.

Mr. El-Khoury, I'll share my time with you.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you.

Thank you, sir, for being here.

As the minister said before, health and service are going in parallel and are a priority for your department. As you know, the spread of COVID is very important, and we have to take all the steps we can to control it. The best way is to increase the amount of rapid testing. I know my colleague spoke about it, but I insist on hearing from you if it's possible to comment on the pilot project for rapid testing for COVID-19 in all Canadian airports.

What do you expect as a result and how do you see it in other countries? Another thing you spoke about was the incentive for zero-emission vehicles. Can you explain more about it?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. Keenan.

Mr. Michael Keenan: Sure.

Quickly, on two different topics.... To elaborate on the previous answer, I will say that we do see testing at the point of travel as part of the solution to safe travel and learning how to safely co-exist with COVID for however long that takes. We're hopeful of learning from the pilots—both the Alberta pilot and the Air Canada-McMas-

ter-Toronto airport pilot—a really good baseline of data in terms of how many people are travelling, potentially, with the virus and the effectiveness of testing at different intervals in terms of screening them. Essentially, we're looking for evidence that it is a robust alternative to a quarantine.

This is not something that Transport Canada assesses on its own. In fact, we would defer to the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada on that. I think we're hopeful of learning a fair bit that will inform a number of operational questions in terms of how to conduct testing and make it work in the passenger flow system and how to get recognition between different countries and airlines on test results and airports, and then, finally, inform the decisions that governments can take in terms of how to make adjustments to border policies and quarantine policies.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury and Mr. Sidhu.

We have come to 6:15, members. I want to state two things. One, I want to thank the clerk, the analysts, all House personnel, and the interpretation, as well as all those who have made this happen. I know that you all have been under a lot of stress over the last couple of months, but thank you for all you do for all of us.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Tod, Mr. Brosseau, Mr. Pilgrim, Ms. Marisetti and the deputy minister, Mr. Keenan, for their time here, as well as members of the committee.

Lastly, I want to wish someone a very special happy birthday. It is Ms. Jaczek's birthday today. She's turned the wonderful age of 29.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: She turned 19.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Happy birthday, Helena.

The Chair: Helena, you go and have a nice glass of wine now and enjoy the rest of your evening.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you so much, Vance.

Some hon. members: Happy birthday.

The Chair: Have a wonderful evening, everyone.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>