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Chair: Mr. Vance Badawey



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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.)):
Good afternoon, everyone.

It's my pleasure to call this meeting to order and to welcome each and every one of you to meeting number 29 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, and proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are all aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few points to follow. First, members and witnesses 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 the floor, English, or French.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in the committee room. Keep in mind the directives from the Board of Internal Economy regarding masking and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. I remind everyone that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute. With regard to a speaking list, as always, the committee clerk and I will do our very best to maintain the order of speaking for all members whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Members, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 29, 2020, the committee will now continue its study of targeted infrastructure investments.

I would now like to welcome and introduce our witnesses for today's meeting. First, we have from the Alaska-Alberta Railway Development Corporation, Mr. Jean Paul Gladu, president, Canada; and Mr. Sean McCoshen, founder and chairman. Appearing as an individual is Shoshana Saxe, assistant professor, department of civil and mineral engineering at the University of Toronto. From the

Canadian Urban Transit Association we have Marco D'Angelo, president and chief executive office. Finally, from the City of Sept-Îles, is Réjean Porlier, mayor.

With that, we're going to start off with Jean Paul Gladu and Sean McCoshen.

I'm not sure which one of you is going to be speaking, but you have five minutes. The floor is now yours. Welcome.

Mr. Sean McCoshen (Founder and Chairman, Alaska - Alberta Railway Development Corporation): Thank you.

Good afternoon, everybody. It's such an honour to be invited to speak. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the members of this committee for having us this morning.

My name is Sean McCoshen and I am the chair and founder of the Alaska to Alberta Railway, known as A2A Rail. J.P. Gladu, as you've already introduced, is joining me today. We are here to talk about A2A Rail and to offer our thoughts on the process of developing infrastructure in Canada. Our perspective comes from five and a half years of working to build A2A Rail, a low-carbon, multi-commodity railroad that aspires to be the largest indigenous co-owned project in the world, which will bring immediate and long-term economic opportunity to Canada's north.

From its inception, three objectives have been central to A2A's DNA: one, meaningful indigenous engagement and ownership of the project; two, setting a new gold standard for sustainability and environmental impact; and three, opening a reliable and long-term pathway through the Yukon and Northwest Territories into Alaska.

I founded A2A Rail because I saw the potential and the need for a project of this kind. In fact, when I first learned there was no rail connection into Canada's northwest, I was astounded. Through this work and throughout my career, I have engaged with international investors, many of whom are looking for opportunities in Canada. While many of them tell me that there's a bit of a chill on building large-scale infrastructure in Canada, I believe the one way to prove them wrong is to show the world that we can build large-scale infrastructure in this country.

At A2A Rail we feel strongly that successfully building the kinds of projects this committee is studying means designing a project in the exact way we have designed our railway; placing environmental considerations at the forefront of planning; engaging indigenous communities, not simply in the planning process but as owners and partners in all phases of the project; lowering the cost of living for communities in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories; and, opening Canada's north while deepening Canada-U.S. connectivity. That is the kind of project Canada should be building right now, and we can absolutely do this.

A2A Rail can be a model for how big infrastructure projects in Canada are built going forward. Success through Canada's regulatory process for projects like ours, which is designed with these elements at its core, will go very far to encourage significant new investment.

I'll pass it off to J.P. Gladu at this point.

• (1540)

Mr. Jean Paul Gladu (President, Canada, Alaska - Alberta Railway Development Corporation): Thank you very much, Sean.

It's a real pleasure to be here. I'm calling in from the traditional territory of the Algonquin people. I'm actually first nation from northern Ontario, the Sand Point First Nation.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be working on this project with Sean. I've known Sean for many years. His passion for this work is palpable.

Our entire team is proud of the way A2A Rail will be built. We have conducted extensive engagement with communities along the route, but beyond that, we're also in the process of reaching a number of equity agreements with our indigenous communities. In fact, I was on two calls today, one with a community in the Northwest Territories and one in northern Alberta. We have communities all along the route that are incredibly excited about this opportunity and we're engaging with them. As Sean mentioned, we're seeking their input very early on. We flipped the process on its head. We strongly believe that when the indigenous communities are on board, projects see a larger opportunity for success.

We will serve as a vital transportation network in the north. The economic opportunities that come along with it have the potential to unlock \$60 billion in cumulative GDP through 2040. The ancillary benefits also include fibre optic connections. I can tell you that one thing Sean has been quoted as saying in the press is that up north he has to pay \$8 for a bag of Doritos. I'm being a little bit facetious there, but the opportunity to reduce the cost of northern living for communities along the route will be transformative.

A2A will also set a new standard for sustainable development, as Sean has mentioned, with a 100% offset of all operational emissions and an explicit focus of designing a sustainable railway where safety, environmental protection and indigenous land preservation remain at the forefront. We believe in our approach to A2A Rail, and not only because it's the right thing to do; it also reflects the priorities and needs of our country right now.

We really do sincerely appreciate the opportunity to present to you today. We look forward to your questions and to further discussion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

We will now move on to Ms. Saxe for five minutes.

Ms. Shoshanna Saxe (Assistant Professor, Department of Civil and Mineral Engineering, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Chair and members of the committee, for having me today. My name is Shoshanna Saxe. I am a professor of civil and mineral engineering at the University of Toronto and Canada's research chair in sustainable infrastructure.

What we build is the foundation of our society. It's the best expression of what we value and what we envision for the future. Transportation infrastructure in particular is the skeletal structure of all of our other infrastructure systems. Transportation influences where we live, where we work, how we travel, who we meet, what opportunities we have, and our consumption. It also drives how much pollution we make.

In Canada, transportation is the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, second only to oil and gas, which is also largely about transportation. Every year 13,000 Canadians die from air pollution, which is also largely driven by transportation choices. For scale, in two years this is more people than have died so far from COVID. Our transportation pollution disproportionately impacts the young and those who live near busy roads, meaning it's an important question of both current and future equity.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Chair, the interpretation isn't working. The problem might be the position of the microphone. If the witness repositioned the microphone, that might allow the interpreters to do their job.

[English]

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

Mr. Clerk, what's the problem over there?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): I think the interpreters are having a problem with the signal that's coming through. The sound degradation is a little bit too much. They're not able to provide interpretation.

The Chair: Ms. Saxe, could you please place your microphone just above your top lip? I was hearing a popping sound. That could be the problem. Try placing it above your top lip and right against your skin. Just hang it like a moustache. That's what we're always told by the interpreters.

Mike, perhaps you can keep an eye on things and we'll see what happens. We have only a few minutes to get through here.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, hopefully we can get the interpretation for you.

Ms. Saxe, please continue.

• (1545)

Ms. Shoshanna Saxe: Thank you. Hopefully this will be better.

The consequences of our transportation are not unavoidable things about modern society or economy. They are an echo of our infrastructure choices, particularly 70 years of a single-minded focus on building around the car.

Going forward there are three things we need to do to improve the equity and sustainability of our transportation infrastructure. First, we need to stop making things worse and move away from investing in fossil fuels and automobile-oriented development. We need to invest in no new highways, no road widening, no extensions of our current automobile infrastructure.

Highway construction incentivizes low-density, high-cost land use. It pushes more people to drive farther and it permanently damages our natural lands that are necessary to resilient systems. For a long time we thought of roads as being key drivers of economic benefits, but for a long time now they have been a very low return while maintaining very high costs.

Second, we need to invest in low-tech, low-carbon, low-cost infrastructure now. We have all the tools we need to build sustainable development; we don't need any new inventions. Two of the best tools we have are largely underused in Canada: building infrastructure around the bicycle and around the bus. We can do this rapidly and affordably. It's accessible to all, and once it is done, it tends to be very popular, as has been shown in cities across Canada and around the world.

Finally, we need to be big and ambitious about our long-term projects, but these will take up to 10 years or longer to build, like subways or fast intercity rail. For this we need to establish forums for stable long-term planning and long-term funding. A lot of infrastructure in Canada takes decades to deliver and we've talked a lot in the public discourse about cutting the red tape and making things go faster, but a huge driver of what's making our projects slow is the time it takes to get to the starting line, to prioritize and to get dedicated funding.

In summary, going forward, I hope that we will see more infrastructure in Canada that doesn't prioritize the car, and more focus over what we can do now with technology that works really well, like investing in bicycles and buses, and more long-term planning for infrastructure systems with dedicated funding.

Thank you for your time and for your patience with the tech trouble.

I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saxe.

Don't take it personally. This is a normal thing that's been happening over the past year with our new normal when it comes to committee work and, of course, all the tech that we rely on. I give a lot of credit to the interpreters because they do their best with what they have. It's ongoing. It's become the norm, so don't take too much offence.

You did great work.

We're now going to move on to the Canadian Urban Transit Association.

Mr. D'Angelo, you have your headset all ready to go I see, and you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Marco D'Angelo (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Urban Transit Association): Thank you, Chair, and thank you for inviting me.

Today I'd like to talk about three things: the state of public transit, the benefits of investing in it, and some features of existing programs that prevent funds from reaching communities in need.

[*Translation*]

I'll begin by talking about public transit.

With more people working remotely or studying at home, ridership has dropped. At this time last year, ridership was down almost 85%, and it is now down about 60%. This means that more than two million people rely on public transit every day. They are most likely to be low-income workers living too far from work to walk or bike to work, but have incomes too low to buy a car. Many are seniors or disabled people carrying out essential daily tasks.

[*English*]

For visiting a doctor or shopping for groceries, public transit is a social enabler. We give people access to employment and education.

Before the pandemic, about half the cost of running transit came from the fare box, and so if we're going to keep service levels so that people who rely on transit can get where they need to go, ongoing financial support from government is going to be needed, as funding through the safe restart agreements is beginning to expire.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

We can't let urban mobility become the privilege of only some people. Rather, it must be accessible to all, and that can only happen through public transit. This is the operational aspect.

[*English*]

Of all the infrastructure classes, building public transit creates the most jobs. For every dollar that's invested, \$1.50 of economic activity results. It's also a key way to meet our climate goals. I think about before COVID, when public transit reduced emissions by more than 14 million tonnes a year. That's like taking three million cars off the road.

[*Translation*]

The more we develop public transit, the more we connect communities and the more we can fight climate change.

[*English*]

This is why we are so supportive of the permanent transit fund that will take effect in 2026. Predictable, stable funding will let transit systems plan. This will be of most benefit to larger, rail-based projects in our biggest cities.

If we get the details of the fund right, this will be transformational. We'll soon be releasing a paper with some recommendations on how to do that, and we'll make sure that every member of the committee gets a copy.

Before wrapping up, I want to address one other issue that we're studying today: ensuring that infrastructure investments reach communities. We have large regional discrepancies. In the four largest provinces, where provincial governments take advantage of available federal funds, transit gets built. However, in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Atlantic provinces, provincial governments for the most part do not. Over the first six years of the investing in Canada infrastructure program, the six smallest provinces have used only 15% of the available federal funds. In some provinces, it's even lower—like 5%. As a result, over the last five years, a lot of Infrastructure Canada's budget has been unspent. I hope that the permanent transit fund will address this issue. We think there are ways that it can. One way is by adopting proven features like the community-building fund, formerly known as the gas tax fund.

[*Translation*]

It effectively links the dollars to the program, particularly because municipalities are invited to the table.

[*English*]

It respects Quebec's jurisdiction by flowing funds through a provincial agency. Another way is by recognizing that one size of a program doesn't fit all. What works in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver is not going to necessarily work in Moncton and Brandon. To help smaller projects in smaller communities get built, we think the permanent transit fund should have a baseline stream, an amount that every system across Canada will receive whether or not the province is able to match that. That would help communities in provinces that traditionally don't invest in transit to get their projects built, and would continue what's already working well:

where larger provinces are keen partners with the federal government and municipalities.

[*Translation*]

Thank you again for inviting me to appear before the committee today.

[*English*]

I'd be happy to answer any questions you have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Angelo. Great job.

We don't have Mr. Porlier, the mayor of Sept-Îles, online. He's having problems connecting, so I'm going to go right to questions.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have a question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Actually, I wanted some clarification.

From what I understand, the mayor was unable to connect to the network, but he was able to contact the technicians or the clerk, and he will be able to testify by telephone, without any video image.

Can anyone tell me if this is the case?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: No, they have to actually connect through the Zoom meeting. We don't have a phone-in option at this time. IT is on the phone with him right now, and they're working on the problem. Hopefully, they'll get him in soon; otherwise, we'll have to have him back next week.

The Chair: We're going to start off our first round of questions—six minutes each, starting with Mr. Kram.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

My questions are for Mr. Gladu and Mr. McCoshen of the Alasca-Alberta Railway Development Corporation.

A couple of years ago, the federal government brought in Bill C-69, which adds a considerable amount of overhead to major pipeline and resource projects, and that law would also apply to the building of the Alaska to Alberta railway. Can the witnesses speak to the effects of Bill C-69 on major projects in Canada and on this railway proposal in particular?

• (1555)

Mr. Sean McCoshen: J.P., do you want me to take a crack at this one?

Mr. Jean Paul Gladu: Absolutely, Sean. Go ahead.

Mr. Sean McCoshen: We're going to be the first major project to go through this new process. The new process emphasizes indigenous consultation. New scares everybody, but the changes were made to address the current realities of climate change that are affecting all of us in this day and age. There are some streamlined effects as opposed to the old bill. There are some additional steps that you must take, but it's something that you have to go through. You know, it's always difficult when you're new to something. You're sort of being the precedent setter, but it is what it is, and it's something that we're looking forward to getting involved with. We currently have a draft in front of the EIA of our process that we're going to be going through. They're working with us. They're tremendously supportive. That's what I have to say on that.

J.P., do you want to add anything?

Mr. Jean Paul Gladu: For the most part, regarding the challenges in the country with garnishing certainty around any kind of infrastructure project, the projects that are successful are the ones that have strong engagement with indigenous communities.

We've taken that a step further. If you take a look around at any infrastructure projects on Crown lands, I think there is a strong equity portion afforded to communities for their support, and we're seeing a lot of great success. Communities are stepping into that space, and that should help alleviate some of the challenges we will face as an organization going through the IA process.

Thank you.

Mr. Michael Kram: A major component of Bill C-69 is indigenous consultation.

Can the witnesses expand on the indigenous consultation they have done or plan to do with respect to the proposed Alaska—Alberta railway?

Mr. Sean McCoshen: It's massive. JP is our president in Canada and he runs something we like to call the "NET", which is the northern engagement team. It arguably has the biggest budget. A2A spends several million dollars a month on this in terms of engineering and consultation. Those are the two major components at this point in time.

That will move into environmental once we officially submit...which we're anticipating to be around June or July, depending on how the consultation goes.

It is constant engagement. It's transparent engagement. You have to discuss all sorts of aspects of the project, such as where the line is going to run, where the communities would like to see it run. They tend to have a better knowledge of their land than anybody

else, so it's a wonderful resource, and we're very, very grateful for that resource.

JP, you head up that team, so take it away.

Mr. Jean Paul Gladu: Absolutely. My past experience as the president and CEO for the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business has set me up pretty well with the communities, as far as having pre-existing relationships is concerned. However, you can't rely solely on that. It's being transparent and open with the communities.

There are 22 primary communities that we are engaging with on a regular basis. Unfortunately, due to COVID, there are a couple of communities that have just signalled to us that they are taking their time because they can't get their community together.

There is not one community that has pushed back to us. They have regular concerns that normally come up, around wildlife and water issues, which are all very mitigable with regard to the best environmental and safety standards that we have.

It's constant, open and transparent conversations with the communities, and we're making significant progress, considering the short amount of time that we've been at it.

Mr. Michael Kram: Environmental impacts are another component of Bill C-69. I understand that the Yukon and Northwest Territories have large caribou herds that migrate across the north.

What can be done to protect the caribou herds that migrate along the proposed railway route?

• (1600)

Mr. Sean McCoshen: There are several things that are being done.

We have a master agreement with Alaska Railroad and we're partners, so in effect we're already operating up north, and some of the mitigation practices we're getting from them. We're also looking at mitigation practices that were in the Middle East in order to preserve camel herds.

You have certain numbers of bridges that you could build specifically for wildlife. You can have a kind of angular approach as opposed to just straight lines, which tend to confuse the caribou.

All of this is under development with engineering, but it's going to be substantial in terms of how little impact we're going to have once this is built.

JP, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Jean Paul Gladu: The only other thing I would add is that this is a multi-cargo rail line. Bitumen will be part of it.

In partly meeting the highest standards and offsets in GHGs, we look at surcharges, to support, for instance, the indigenous leadership, the guardians program and green energy projects.

To go back to having indigenous people on the ground all the time, helping us direct the way we build this project, they understand where the caribou movements are, where to put gates and overpasses.

There is technology on a long line that can signal to animals the presence of oncoming trains, by creating noises, as an example, to scare caribou. We're looking at all of the technologies. There is a lot out there, and we will implement everything we possibly can, because it's important to our indigenous partners and it's important to us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gladu and Mr. McCoshen, and Mr. Kram.

We're now going to move on to the Liberals, with Mr. El-Khoury for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon to our guests.

Ms. Saxe, you are a civil engineer, so I would like to talk about social infrastructure. The government has adopted existing programs to meet the needs of communities in these difficult times, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have made municipal and provincial buildings eligible for the new COVID-19 resilience component. Minister McKenna has already approved hundreds of projects under this component, such as hospital and school renovations.

Can you speak to the importance of social infrastructure so that all levels of government work together to serve Canadians from coast to coast to coast?

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Saxe, you're on mute.

It happens to all of us.

Ms. Shoshanna Saxe: Thank you. I was just listening to the end of the interpretation and then I was on mute.

As we've seen over the last year and a half, social infrastructure is particularly important to how we function as a country. We need good hospitals and good schools, and we also need the ability to reach them.

It has been exciting to see the announcements of new funding for new infrastructure over the last several months, but there's still a lot more we need to do.

I'm hoping to see over the coming years more investment in infrastructure projects that combine multiple functions. Traditionally, we have looked at our social infrastructure, things such as schools, community centres, sports fields and police stations, as single-use projects.

As we move forward to the challenges of the 21st century and the increasingly competitive nature of our use of land, more people needing more things and less space, I'm hoping to see us develop putting more things together.

It could be a school that's also a community centre, and on top of it, places where people can live; or a police station that's not just one floor but has many uses in the same location. This is one of the biggest improvements I'm hoping to see in social infrastructure in the coming future.

Also, a question that applies to social infrastructure spaces as well as all infrastructure is how can we repurpose what we already have to deliver more effectively on what we need? The things that we needed 50 years ago when we built much of our infrastructure are quite different from what we need now.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saxe.

Mr. El-Khoury.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Mr. D'Angelo, the social inequalities that exist in our communities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. How can infrastructure investments help to address these systematic inequalities?

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: Thank you for the question.

For people who live too far from work or school and can't walk or bike to work or school, but whose income is too low to own a car, public transit is the only mobility option. Public transit is essential for many seniors, people with disabilities, and everyone doing essential work during the pandemic. Public transit provides many people with access to employment and education.

[*English*]

I'm also very happy to say that many transit systems across the country have assisted in supporting vaccination programs, retrofitting their buses, and bringing the vehicles to where people need them, while connecting folks to essential jobs.

What we don't want to have and what we have avoided in the transit industry is a nurse after a 12-hour shift wondering if the bus will be there on time, or a grocery store worker finishing their shift worrying about being late and what will happen. Transit has had their back throughout the pandemic.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Mr. D'Angelo, you spoke in your presentation about addressing climate change. My question is for you and the other witnesses.

How do you see Canada's future in light of the recommendations for our government's commitment to invest in green infrastructure?

Do you find that clients, particularly those in the private sector, are having difficulty understanding these recommendations? Can the price change their opinion?

Can you illustrate this point?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. D'Angelo, could we have a short answer, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: Before the COVID-19 pandemic, public transit reduced pollutant emissions by more than 14 million tonnes a year. This was equivalent to emissions from three million cars. Public transit also helps reduce urban congestion and sprawl.

I'll now give the floor to the other witnesses so they can also weigh in.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Angelo.

Mr. El-Khoury, your time is up, so I'm going to go on to the next witness. Hopefully, if other witnesses have some other comments to make on that, they can make them within their answers to other questions.

Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury.

With that, I'm going to move on to Mr. Barsalou-Duval of the Bloc Québécois for six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Mr. D'Angelo, I was interested to hear you compare how different provinces use infrastructure funds in your opening remarks earlier. You mentioned that often in the less urban provinces where the population density is lower, there is money that is not being used. If we were to analyze this, we would probably find that the same thing can happen within the same province or territory. In Quebec, for example, population density isn't the same everywhere: there are large cities, but also rural areas where public transit services are virtually non-existent.

On the one hand, what can be done to make public transit available to people in these communities?

On the other, what can be done to ensure that unused funds aren't lost, which is important?

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. D'Angelo.

[Translation]

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: It's very important that all communities have access to federal funding to improve public transit service.

I'm very pleased that the federal government has been negotiating with Quebec for a long time on how best to deliver programs. The small communities fund is distributed by a provincial agency. So there may be options for—

• (1610)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. D'Angelo, could I step in for just a second?

With the interpretation, we're getting both English and French at the same volume.

[Translation]

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: I'm sorry, that's my fault. I'll start again.

The federal government has been negotiating with Quebec for a long time to find the best way to deliver programs. So it's very important that small communities have access to the same funds as big cities.

We would have no problem with a similar agreement in Quebec with a provincial agency that would distribute monies from the small communities fund to improve the mobility of people living in small towns.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much for your answer.

I would like to throw out an idea. Communities that live in areas that are remote from major centres often face the following problem. As soon as a road is built to these areas, there is a sort of *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of the federal government with respect to other infrastructure, such as wharves, airports, and so on. Yet these infrastructures are essential to the economic development of these communities. It is not because a road passes through their town that fishermen will start fishing on the road. They will continue to use the wharf. The same thing happens when a community is thousands of miles away from major centres. Sometimes you have to fly in and out. Wouldn't that be a problem?

Wouldn't other modes of transportation, for example, transportation by boat, and even by air, be considered public transportation? I don't know if you have any expertise in this area, but I would still like to hear your views on this.

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: We focused on travel by bus or train, for example, but not air travel. However, this is a very interesting question.

We are in discussions with Infrastructure Canada to determine the rules that will govern the \$250-million fund announced for small communities.

I don't know if air is the best solution, but we are prepared to offer small communities solutions, such as bus transportation or other means. I don't think air travel is going to be one of the options, but maybe the other stakeholders will have something else to say about that.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

We realize that air travel is more polluting than other forms of transportation. That being said, when you are 1,000 kilometres or even more than 500 kilometres from a major centre, the idea of having to use bus transportation can be daunting for many, especially if there is an emergency.

I would like to ask Ms. Saxe a question.

Ms. Saxe, we in the Bloc Québécois are often concerned that the federal government will use its powers, for example through the Canada Infrastructure Bank, to circumvent the environmental rules of the provinces and municipalities. The government could decide not to respect these rules under the pretext that it is implementing a federal project. It could impose its project on smaller communities, or even larger communities.

Do you think such a problem could arise in infrastructure development?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Saxe, if you can hold that microphone just above your top lip, that would be great.

Go ahead.

Ms. Shoshanna Saxe: Thank you for the question. It has a tough one to answer because it depends on the project we're considering and there is often a tension between local needs and goals and wider community or national needs and goals, which need to be balanced. The federal government has a responsibility to speak for all Canadians, and sometimes that can put it in tension with a local desire around infrastructure.

For instance, we see this sometimes in rail projects where there could be a lot of benefit for the rail infrastructure but it has large impacts on the local community.

Yes, that is an important impact and one that needs to be taken into account, but especially for national-scale projects or things that are important at a scale larger than community, we need to be careful to balance the ability of a local community to veto something that is very important.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saxe, and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Xavier, I have to say, I'm doing my best to learn French and today is the first time I've heard the French word for "bailiwick", so thank you for that.

For the NDP, we have Taylor Bachrach for six minutes.

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

I'll begin my questions with Mr. D'Angelo.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for their opening remarks and their responses to questions we've heard so far.

Mr. D'Angelo, could you spell out for the committee how serious the impacts of COVID-19 and the pandemic have been in terms of transit ridership across Canada?

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: Thanks for the question. It's good to see you.

In terms of ridership, at the lowest point we were down about 80%, I would say, with a mix of bus holding steady but commuter rail really seeing the biggest drop. There was a rebuilding of ridership during the summer and fall of 2020, but again, as restrictions increased during the winter and now into the spring, that's having

an impact on ridership. It's going to have an impact on municipal budgets going forward.

I'll stop there in case you have another question. I don't want to take all your time.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

As a follow-up to that, the last time we spoke you were describing some of the long-term risks this presents for transit authorities, that it's not as simple as cancelling routes and laying off staff and then hiring them back and rebuilding the routes. There can be a downward spiral that can have long-term or permanent impacts on transit systems.

Could you help the committee understand what those risks look like?

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: One thing we've been able to avoid is a downward spiral, and that has been important. It has been by having essential workers continue to use our service.

As well, even before there was a safe restart agreement, our transit agencies across the country went out on a limb to ensure that we provided 80% to 90% of service across Canada so that our essential workers could get to appointments or work, and to avoid crowding and to exceed health protocols.

We're very proud of our record and what we did before provinces and the federal government were able to deliver the safe restart, which we're very grateful for. We knew they would come to a conclusion, but it's our mandate to make sure that we never let our citizens down, and we did not.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Obviously those safe restart funds have been critical to maintaining transit services in the face of declining ridership or lower ridership than usual. I understand that some transit authorities will see those safe restart funds running out in the not-too-distant future. How urgent is that situation, and how important is it that the federal government seriously consider allocating additional funds for transit operations?

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: It is very important. Last year all transit systems were in the same boat, if you will, meaning that they needed operating funding, and through safe restart there was a series of bilateral agreements between each province and the federal government. Each has a different expiration date so I think it's really incumbent on the provinces and on the federal government to work together to make sure that operational funding continues until ridership is close to, if not at, pre-pandemic levels. We're willing to reach out and work with any government, provincial or in Ottawa.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I think a lot of us were pleased to see the announcement around the permanent transit fund. That's something we have been calling for in the NDP for a long time.

We were a bit surprised that the permanent transit fund won't actually kick in until 2026. From your organization's perspective, would it be beneficial to move that date up and begin the permanent transit fund so that municipalities and transit authorities have that certainty as soon as possible?

• (1620)

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: On behalf of my members, I will say that achieving a permanent transit fund has been a goal for a long time. We're very happy we did that. I am glad there is a date in the calendar, 2026. Certainly, that is also when ICIP expires.

Where I would like to continue the work of our association is in bridging those two programs so that we can maximize building back better out of the pandemic, creating jobs for Canadians as we come out, and also increasing mobility options, respecting that the people's pocketbook coming into the pandemic will be different from what it will be as they come out. Having the right to get around your community is something we think is very important.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: My last question is for Mr. D'Angelo.

Talking about the operating funding model for transit, historically transit has been funded through a combination of fare-box revenue and municipal contributions. In the pandemic, obviously federal funds have been really critical to keeping transit running.

From your perspective, is there a long-term role for the federal government in funding the operations of transit networks across Canada?

Mr. Marco D'Angelo: Certainly the role of the federal government in supporting capital, I think, is agreed upon. In terms of operational funding, so far our members and the federal government are, I think, aligned quite well in seeing us through COVID-19 to the end of the pandemic.

After that, I think it will be very interesting to see how transportation trends go. As for the federal government, I certainly can't commit on their part, but I know that our members, who provide transit across Canada, will be very interested in maintaining high service levels, and if that means getting help from the national government, we will look at that.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Do I have a couple more seconds, there, Mr. Chair? How am I doing?

The Chair: You have 10 more seconds.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay.

The Chair: You can wish us all a merry Christmas. How is that?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's a bit premature, Mr. Chair, but I like how you think.

I do have a question about what it's going to take to restore ridership, but perhaps I'll wait until the next round.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Members, we do have, online now, Réjean Porlier. Réjean is the mayor of Sept-Îles, and I would like to give him an opportunity to give his five-minute introductory remarks, and then he can jump in to answer our questions along everyone else.

Mr. Mayor, it's great to have you aboard. If you want to unmute yourself, I'll give you the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réjean Porlier (Mayor, City of Sept-Îles): Good afternoon, everyone.

I apologize, we have been trying to log in for an hour.

My name is Réjean Porlier and I am the Mayor of Sept-Îles. I am also responsible for the transportation committee for the assembly of North Shore RCMs.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by thanking you for allowing me this brief statement, in which I will advocate for sustained funding to improve road and air transportation service and infrastructure in rural regions.

We must admit that we have failed in our responsibility to make dynamic use of Canada's vast territory. The concentration of populations in the major cities and the staggering investments required to constantly expand their transportation networks, at the expense of so-called remote regions such as Quebec's North Shore, have in my view only accelerated the exodus from these regions to the major cities.

In recent years, we have witnessed a number of brazen contradictions. The first is undoubtedly the increase in the number of ever-widening highways, which spur the continued growth in the number of cars and are responsible for much of the climate change that we claim to want to combat.

Another paradox is that, while we spent tens of billions of dollars overbuilding these urban road networks, the sole road connection between Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador was never completed. Yet we wonder why people are leaving the area! I hope that, one day, I will see the completion of this critical economic corridor that will open up many communities. Imagine for a moment all the children who, for many years, have been isolated and missed many long-planned trips or who have witnessed the impacts of this isolation on their loved ones' health. How many of them, after leaving home to complete their studies, will want to return to that isolation?

While we wait for the day when our governments will finally decide to finish Highway 138, putting an overdue end to this isolation and transforming these communities from a resilient existence to a dynamic one, our only hope is airline service worthy of the name, at an affordable cost, above all.

What exactly is the situation?

In general, air transport in Quebec is everything but efficient and accessible. It is more of a brake on development than a useful tool for outlying regions. The service does not seek to serve as many people as possible but instead to deliver the most profit for the airlines. In fact, it embodies another paradox: generous subsidies generate profits for private businesses, with little concern shown for genuine accessibility.

The situation is even worse on the Lower North Shore, where service is very poorly structured in my view. Needs should be met together to create economies of scale through the use of larger aircraft, which would lower ticket prices. Service today is so poor that tourism development in this otherwise outstanding region is impossible to envision.

The report for a study on air transportation commissioned by the assembly of North Shore RCMs entitled “Repenser la desserte aérienne de Sept-Îles et sa région,” clearly showed a need to abandon the old paradigms and find innovative solutions, such as a cooperative model in which customers become owners with an interest in the quality, reliability and accessibility of the service. This report is appended as part of a brief on the future of air transportation in the region, submitted by the City of Sept-Îles to the aviation committee struck by Quebec’s Transport Minister, François Bonnardel, in the wake of the pandemic.

In fact, an initiative employing the co-operative model—the Coopérative de transport régional du Québec, or Coop Treq—is underway in Quebec and should come into being this summer.

In short, there is no doubt in my mind that fulfilling our governments’ stated desire to make dynamic use of our region first requires completing Highway 138 to finally link Quebec with Newfoundland and Labrador. The idea of further delaying this work, which is stymying our development, is counterproductive and reveals a lack of vision. If they can't rely on the road, one village after another will disappear.

At the same time, the Canadian government should take a serious interest in the study on air transportation commissioned by the assembly of North Shore RCMs and the report produced by the Institut de recherche en économie contemporaine, which proposes innovative and promising avenues.

I have been tasked with advocating on this issue by the assembly of North Shore RCMs. I am also a member of the air transport committee of the Union of Quebec Municipalities.

I would be pleased to discuss this matter with you further.

• (1625)

I hope I didn't speak too quickly, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Good job, Mr. Mayor. You were just fine.

We're now going to move to our second round of speakers, starting with the Conservatives and Ms. Kusie for five minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all of our witnesses for being here today.

I'm going to go back to Mr. Gladu and Mr. McCoshen to pick up where my colleague left off.

I am curious as to what the timeline is for submitting the Alaska to Alberta Railway project description to the federal government and, hopefully, getting the project approved.

The Chair: Gentlemen.

Mr. Sean McCoshen: As mentioned earlier, we're looking at a late-June-to-July application going in, depending on our consultation with indigenous communities on the route. That's going to dictate, essentially, how long the process will take. I mentioned earlier that Bill C-69 was sort of designed with some advancements on the old bill, but it was also sort of designed to have meaningful consultation. That's where we're at right now, and that's driving the process. Once that's done, we're going to submit. Like I said, we're shooting for about June.

J.P., do you want to add to that? I mean, the NET team is kind of handling that more than I am.

Mr. Jean Paul Gladu: The indigenous engagement and consultation will play a big role. The last thing we want to do is submit and then have communities opposed to it without our taking the time and effort required to make sure that we got the buy-in that we need from our future partners.

Thank you.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Excellent.

I would think that if you're going to lay down 2,000 kilometres of railway tracks, it must be very cost-effective to lay down fibre optic cables beside it. Can you please speak about the cost savings that could be had by bringing high-speed Internet access to the Yukon and Northwest Territories alongside the railway, Mr. Gladu and Mr. McCoshen?

Mr. Sean McCoshen: As you construct, it's very inexpensive to lay fibre optic cable. That's already in the engineering plan, so along the route we will have fibre optic capabilities, and those lines can branch out to the communities and the municipalities that are along the route.

• (1630)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. McCoshen, as my colleague mentioned, you've been quoted in the media as once having paid \$8 for a small bag of Doritos in the north. That leads me to a couple of conclusions. First, you must really like Doritos—if you're like me, you like cool ranch. Second, the cost of groceries and food security must be a constant struggle for the people of Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Can you speak about how the Alaska to Alberta railway will improve food security in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, please?

Mr. Sean McCoshen: They're simply going to transport it more efficiently and in larger quantities that are needed. It's a general cargo railroad with a passenger component to it.

It's a simple method of flying stuff in or driving it in on an ice road. Heating is done through burning Bunsen burners and whatnot. Then food has to be flown in or driven in on an ice road. That results in the cost. With regard to that \$8 bag of Doritos, probably \$7 of that is the fuel and transportation to get it up there. I mean, I'm good friends with an architect by the name of Douglas Cardinal, and he said that Canada's north is not just third world; it's fourth world. The only way we're going to alleviate these disparities is through economic parity. If you don't have proper infrastructure going up north, you're never going to achieve economic parity. It's that simple. It's shocking.

J.P., do you want to talk about that?

Mr. Jean Paul Gladu: I think you've hit it, Sean. At the end of the day, trains are great at reducing GHGs. With regard to loads going up, you can put a lot more on train than you can on a truck. Housing.... From an indigenous person's perspective, the ability to get snow machines, ATVs and those things that northerners rely on for their way of life is going to have a major impact on the north as well.

I'm more of a salt and vinegar fan.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Oh, oh!

Indeed, Mr. Gladu. Thank you.

I'm going to use my remaining 20 seconds to move the motion I put on notice on Tuesday, April 27:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), an order of this committee do issue for a copy of all relevant documents relating to the agreement signed with ITC holdings regarding the Lake Erie Connector, including, but not limited to, the agreement itself, all correspondence between ITC Holdings and the CIB, any appendices, terms of a repayment schedule, the Bank's evaluation of the project and any other relevant documents in an unredacted form within 20 days of the adoption of this order.

Thank you, witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

The time has stopped, and we're now going to questions.

Mr. Fillmore, I see your hand is up. Go ahead; you have the floor.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, Ms. Kusie, for that intervention.

I've been thinking a lot about this motion, and it creates a few difficulties. I'd like to go through them and make sure that all members from all parties on the committee understand the challenges in the motion.

First and foremost, the motion is asking the Canada Infrastructure Bank to violate its own enabling legislation. The CIB Act has a section entitled "Privileged information", and that section lays out that all information obtained by the bank in relation to project proponents or project investors is privileged. It states that the CIB "must not knowingly communicate, disclose or make available the information, or permit it to be communicated, disclosed or made available."

The CIB Act is not a long act, and I encourage members to have a look at it if they haven't. This particular section is laid out in detail, because it's important for an entity like the CIB to maintain the trust of investment partners and project owners that it will keep that commercially sensitive information confidential. This is potentially market-moving information, and this act exists for a reason. The motion is kind of a non-starter based on that, but there's a little bit more.

The next point is that the investment agreement for the Erie connector is not yet finalized. The CIB has not financially closed with the proponent, and it's not a done deal. Bringing this kind of uncertainty, exposure and political risk into a deal is simply not a responsible thing for our committee to undertake.

In fact, many members of the committee from all parties have said that they wished to see the CIB getting more deals going and more projects completed. This motion would throw cold water on that, slow things down, and erode trust in the process.

Third, members have also sometimes questioned the independence of the Canada Infrastructure Bank and have argued that the CIB needs to be fully independent so that it can get deals done free of political interference. Again, this motion is about political interference, isn't it? It goes against that argument.

To wrap it up, I'll go back to my first point. I don't think it would reflect well on our committee to pass a motion telling the CIB to violate its own legislation and, in fact, break the law when we don't really need to do that.

There's a wonderful alternative that would respect the intention of Ms. Kusie's motion, and I'll lay it out. It's very short, but in essence it would be a simple amendment to the motion presented by Ms. Kusie in which we would strike all the words after the first word "that", and replace them with, "The committee invite Ehren Cory, the CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, to appear before the committee to discuss the Lake Erie corridor and full transparency and open communication with this committee."

I'll hold my comments there. I'd love to hear what other members have to say.

• (1635)

The Chair: Mr. Fillmore has a clarification. Are you putting that forward as an amendment?

Mr. Andy Fillmore: I am. I can repeat it if you'd like.

The Chair: That's fine.

Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

We are now going to take questions on the amendment. I have a speaking order.

Mr. Scheer, you're up next.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Do I understand that we're now going to be debating the amendment?

The Chair: Correct.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you.

While I appreciate Mr. Fillmore's comments, I would say that only the Liberal Party seems to view accountability and transparency as some kind of political interference.

We have a situation such that we are trying to get more information out of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. It's been a bit of a challenge to do so.

I would view your proposed amendment as a wonderful suggestion for a separate motion. I would love to have Mr. Ehren Cory come back, and he could speak to this as well as to some unresolved questions regarding the bank's operations and mandates. I don't see the two as being mutually exclusive at all.

If the company involved, ITC Holdings, wants to keep its operations confidential, if it wants to keep its project proposals secret, if it doesn't want to divulge information, there are tons of lending institutions in Canada that provide that kind of service. It can go to the CIBC or RBC.

It's owned by a company called Fortis Inc., which had over \$8.9 billion worth of revenue last year. It paid out over \$800 million to shareholders last year alone. I'm sure it has a wonderful relationship with financial institutions in Canada. If it were looking for assistance to get this project built, there are a number of lending institutions that provide that kind of confidentiality.

When you go to government, when you look for government to provide that type of assistance, I believe it is essential that taxpayers know exactly what they're on the hook for. We have a situation here in which the Canada Infrastructure Bank, using taxpayers' dollars, has made an announcement. Not even all of the details are provided on their web page, and on this point I'd just like to make a comparison.

I'm sorry, but I think someone is not on mute, there.

The Chair: Would everybody make sure they're on mute, please?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I'd just like to make a comparison. Even for the Réseau project in Montreal, at the very least on the website for that project the bank has included the repayment schedule and the interest rate. For this project, we don't have that at all.

I don't believe and I don't accept at all for a second that in providing this committee with the opportunity to go over how this decision was made, we're being told that the bank is supposed to use public money to leverage private dollars. Here we have a situation in which it's the exact opposite, and private money seems to be leveraging public money. I believe it's eminently responsible for the bank to show this committee on what it based its decision to spend \$655 million worth of taxpayers' money.

I'd be happy to hear what other members have to say on that.

I reserve the right to come back if there is more discussion on this, Mr. Chair, so I'll lower my hand and raise it back up again, and hopefully I can respond to other points that are made.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Rogers, go ahead.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

For the last couple of meetings we have spoken about the line of work this committee has in front of us. Personally, I think we should be focusing on that work.

We have witnesses here today on an important subject, and I think we shouldn't be wasting their time and ours on another motion. This committee already questioned the minister for infrastructure about this very same project just last week.

I'm not sure where the analogy is or where the comparison is with the CIBC and RBC. That's like comparing apples to oranges, so I'm not sure exactly where the opposition is coming from on that. It just makes no sense to me.

Anyway, I just want to make those comments, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

We'll now go to Mr. Bachrach.

You have the floor.

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

Speaking directly to the amendment, I tend to agree with Mr. Scheer that it's a lovely amendment. It would make an even better stand-alone motion, perhaps with the timing coinciding with the arrival of the documents.

This motion is really about transparency and accountability for the public dollars that are going into these projects. The concerns around the structure of the infrastructure bank are now well known. They've been affirmed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We need more light on this issue, not less light. We need to understand exactly how these deals are structured and what the private investors are expecting to get out of it, and we need to do that on behalf of all Canadians.

I'll be voting against the amendment, and I certainly support the direction of the original motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

We will move on to Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

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

I have a great deal of interest in the motion on the floor.

I was quite surprised by this project. I thought that the Canada Infrastructure Bank funds were to be used to build public infrastructure. I am now trying to figure out how this serves the public. It could also be explained to us more in the documents that will be presented to us.

As I understand from the last few comments, there is a concern that our committee's schedule is quite full. However, I don't think that the request for documents is detrimental to the continuity of our work. We're not the ones who are going to get the documents, they're going to be provided to us by government officials. So I don't necessarily see a connection between the two.

Of course, if we want to add meetings to this, we may have an opportunity to do that later, unless Mr. Fillmore wants to make it an actual amendment. I would actually be very open to such an initiative.

That being said, while I am very interested in this topic, since we are having a meeting today and we have witnesses with us, I would like us to have the opportunity to address them as well. To that end, my colleagues could limit their time.

There is one particular witness I would like to ask questions of, but my six minutes are already up. Since we are still wasting time, I am afraid I will not have a chance to ask my questions, which would be very disappointing.

[English]

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

We're now going to move on to Ms. Jaczek.

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

Certainly, I'm supportive of what Mr. Fillmore has suggested because I'm particularly concerned about the unredacted form of what is being requested. As Mr. Fillmore has said, the way this is written, the motion is asking the CIB to violate its own enabling legislation. The CIB Act has a section entitled "Privileged information", so how can we possibly expect them to violate that particular section of the act?

In essence, as I understand it, the deal has not yet closed, which makes it even more difficult to request this kind of information at this particular time.

I feel exactly the same way as Monsieur Barsalou-Duval: We have witnesses here and we were engaging in an extremely interesting conversation. I think that since this motion has been brought forward, we need to be extremely cautious about in any way suggesting that the documents should be unredacted.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jaczek.

Can members of the committee still hear me?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes, we can.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm locking out here. I have no video, so I'm kind of blind here, guys.

I am now going back to Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks, Chair.

I thank my colleagues for the thoughtful commentary.

The fact remains that the motion is asking the committee to break the law, and I think we should all think long and hard about that. We've seen a string of motions and lines of attack over the past number of months from Mr. Scheer and his Conservative colleagues that are blatantly political and are looking to try to embarrass the CIB or to degrade the ability of the CIB—and, in fact, the entire infrastructure department—to achieve its mandate. That's what this is.

I mean, for a party that has been trying to embarrass the government, what better way to do it than to pass a motion that would throw cold water on investment to the Infrastructure Bank and prevent more projects from happening? It's brilliant in its simplicity, but it's also terribly wrong. It's not just wrong—it's illegal.

I'm sorry that Mr. Bachrach perhaps is joining in the political theatre with the Conservative Party, or perhaps he earnestly believes that this level of transparency would somehow be helpful in getting more infrastructure built. I can't assume the motive, but I'm very sorry that the motion is even on the table.

However, it's clear from the comments, including Monsieur Barsalou-Duval's comments, that there is an appetite among the opposition parties to break the law here and move forward in some way. I'm going to try to mitigate that damage and follow along with what Ms. Jaczek said. It's very important in any document production order a committee like this undertakes that the order be consistent with the relevant legislation concerning confidentiality.

I'm going to be withdrawing my previous amendment and proposing an amendment to the original motion. I can take some direction from the clerk or the chair on the orderly way to do that. I would like to ultimately get to a place where we amend the original motion to include this very specific language: "and that the production of documents be consistent with relevant legislation concerning confidentiality".

I would also like to make an amendment that extends the patently unreasonable 20 days—in an era where we have committees working literally around the clock—and replace that with 60 days.

I would again like to hear from multiple parties on their appetite for those two amendments.

Thank you.

The Clerk: If I could just jump in here for one second, it seems that we've lost the connection with the chair.

I'm going to ask you, Ms. Kusie, as vice-chair, if you can assume the chair and direct the debate at present.

Just for the edification of all members, we would need unanimous consent to withdraw an amendment. Then we'll begin over with the new amendment.

Ms. Kusie, I'm going to turn it over to you.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: On a point of order, if I may just jump in, since Mr. Fillmore has proposed withdrawing his amendment and since the first round of speakers to that amendment seemed to indicate that there wasn't much support for it, could we quickly dispose of that and see if there's unanimous consent just to allow him to do that?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): First of all, we're looking for unanimous consent for the withdrawal of the previous amendment of Mr. Fillmore. Are we in unanimous consent of that?

• (1650)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): Okay. Excellent.

Pardon me. I'm in speaker view. I'm going to go to gallery view so that I can see all of the party representatives.

Mr. Bachrach, are you in consent of this?

I see a nodding head.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes.

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): Thank you.

We will go to the second amendment of Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Clerk, could you please read the amendment of Mr. Fillmore once again so we can move to discussion?

The Clerk: Actually, if I could, I was going to request that Mr. Fillmore repeat his wording, because I didn't quite get the whole amendment for that.

Ms. Vice-Chair, you'll see the hands are up.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): I am looking at the hands. Thank you, Clerk.

The Clerk: If Mr. Fillmore could reread his amendment, then you can just direct debate. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): Thank you so much.

Go ahead, Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Clerk, for the help.

I'm going to make sure that I do this in two amendments.

The first amendment is to delete the words "in an unredacted form" from the original motion and replace them with "and that the production of documents be consistent with relevant legislation concerning confidentiality".

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): That's your first amendment, Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: That's right.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): Okay.

We will take these amendments one at a time, I understand.

Could I please get a speakers list for the first amendment of Mr. Fillmore?

Mr. Rogers, I see that you have your hand up. Please proceed.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Actually, I like the second amendment better, and I was going to propose, if it's in order, that we would have these documents provided to the committee in both official languages, just to make sure that we have both official languages covered off.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): Thank you, Mr. Rogers. The clerk will verify, I believe, that all documents must always be provided in both official languages.

Could the clerk verify that, please?

The Clerk: We would have them translated if they weren't received in both official languages.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): Certainly. Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

I will move, then, to Mr. Scheer.

Go ahead, please.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Obviously I disagree entirely with the way that Mr. Fillmore has characterized this motion. I will give him the benefit of the doubt on the concerns that he may have about a third party group, a private company, being told that certain aspects of the legislation would apply. In that light, I'm trying to consider whether or not I could support that.

The concern I have is that we have seen in so many other committees and so many other instances that the government has used cover in that type of thing to prevent disclosure where disclosure is warranted, and it has kind of stretched the application and the meaning of that.

I really do believe that it's very important that we have a clean motion here because, as it relates to the project, the types of information that would have been provided to the CIB would have been linked to the project. This is a private sector company. This is a company that is owned by Fortis Inc., which is massive.

I don't want to repeat myself, but I want members to appreciate the fact that this is a company that clearly has a great credit rating and has strong revenues, yet they have been offered this kind of deal from the government. They've been given \$655 million. We don't yet know exactly if that is a loan. Is that a loan at market rates? If so, why did the government have to be the one to offer that loan? We don't know if this is some kind of debt/equity swap here. There are a lot of different tools that the investment community uses to structure these types of deals. We don't know what the taxpayer exposure is on this. We don't know what the ownership structure is going forward.

I'm inclined to be supportive of a motion that would be less restrictive. I look at what other committees have done when they are looking to get things.... The law would allow for redaction. It is very important to home in on that. Any time a committee asks for unredacted information, it's because there are laws that allow the government to withhold that information from the public, and the whole purpose of having a motion calling for unredacted documents is precisely to say, look, the committee needs to get to the bottom of this.

Also, let me remind you that it was the government that wrote the Canada Infrastructure Bank enabling legislation. I don't believe it is appropriate to give that kind of cover to a structure, a \$35-billion bank, where this government wrote into the enabling legislation elements to prevent full disclosure and transparency.

I think my NDP colleague and my Bloc colleague put it very well. When these deals are structured between other levels of government where it's public infrastructure, where the public owns the asset or operates it, there's a great deal of disclosure, because you have provincial, municipal and federal access to information and legislation. Here, we have a situation where it's exactly the opposite. We would not protect the Government of Quebec, the Government of Ontario or the Government of Saskatchewan from not having to fully divulge the information about their involvement in these projects, so why would we protect a private company?

• (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Stephanie Kusie): Thank you.

Mr. Clerk, I see that Mr. Badawey has returned.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kusie, for jumping in there. My computer went off in its own little world, so I froze up. I apologize for that.

With that, I see many hands up. I'm going to go to Mr. Fillmore next. That's who's on my list.

I have Mr. Fillmore, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, Mr. El-Khoury.

Is that proper?

Ms. Jaczek, are you okay with that?

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Chair, I would suggest you skip me and then come back to me after the others who have their hands up have spoken. I would like to have an opportunity once the other four have spoken.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Mr. Chair, I was after Mr. Bachrach.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bachrach and Ms. Jaczek, we'll go with you two first.

Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I share some of the concerns about redaction. In this Parliament we've seen some concerning instances where documents were over-redacted. Perhaps a compromise would be to involve the law clerk in the process of reviewing the documents. That's something I could support. Otherwise I tend to agree with Mr. Scheer that having a cleaner motion makes more sense.

I would remind folks that there was a 2009 report by the public accounts committee that said very clearly that "A committee's power to call for persons, papers and records is [said to be] absolute", and that was a committee chaired by a Liberal. I think getting these documents makes a lot of sense. It's going to get answers for Canadians, and it's something I support.

The Chair: Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to go back to the issue of unredacted documents because Mr. Scheer was implying that somehow the government does the redaction. Clearly, redactions are done by our public servants. They, of course, are non-partisan and neutral people who understand the provision of the legislation they're working with. For sure, they do what they are supposed to do. They are not influenced in any way by the government, by the minister. It is clear that they are simply putting their best efforts into following what they are allowed to do.

I just cannot let that impugning of our wonderful public servants go. I'm fully supportive of Mr. Fillmore's amendment. I think we should take this extremely seriously. I would just like to repeat that this particular deal is not yet closed. To interfere with these sorts of demands at this point in time is just not reasonable. As far as I'm concerned it's completely unreasonable.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jaczek.

Mr. El-Khoury.

[*Translation*]

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

In my opinion, our witnesses, particularly Mr. Réjean Porlier, who is from a remote area, deserve to be heard and to have the opportunity to answer questions that are of particular interest to members of Parliament who are from the province of Quebec.

Out of respect for the witnesses, I move that we give them a chance to continue. We can then return to the business of the committee.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, go ahead.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

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

I, in turn, support the comments of my Conservative colleague Mr. Scheer, who has concerns with the amendment that is being proposed.

I have had occasion to table motions for the production of documents before, and I have sometimes been very unpleasantly surprised at the outcome. I recently made an access to information request. The committee made the same request, but did not get the same documents. This is surprising, since these requests are supposed to be answered in a comprehensive manner.

We have made other requests, and we have been told that the document requested is confidential. That in itself is not a problem. However, 80% of the content of that document was redacted. So this procedure is a bit difficult to understand. We need more explanation as to why things sometimes happen this way.

I, for one, rely on the members of the committee to protect confidential or sensitive information that should not be made public, if at all. I am quite comfortable with that.

That being said, for the benefit of the public, as much information as possible should be made public. There is a framework that can be followed and trusted. I trust my colleagues around the table. I think that transparency is essential, but unfortunately, we have seen too little transparency from the federal government. In this case, large amounts of money are at stake. I don't see what would prevent us from getting the real information about the money that is being spent and that belongs to the taxpayers, after all.

Mr. Chair, I mentioned this earlier, but I see that time is running out and I wonder if we will have to reinvite some witnesses. One witness in particular was almost unable to speak. Perhaps we will need to invite him to an additional meeting, unless you intend to extend the time for today's meeting.

[English]

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

Because of when we started, extending today's meeting past the 5:35 mark is not possible.

Mr. Fillmore, you wanted to speak at the end of the queue, so I'm going to go to Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I just want to reply to Ms. Jaczek's comments.

With the greatest of respect, I have a completely different perspective on this. Waiting until after a deal is signed, until it's all signed, sealed and delivered and money is flowing, would be too late.

If indeed there's nothing to worry about here and everything makes sense and is defensible for the government, well then the project will proceed. If there's something egregious, some kind of questionable arrangement or some kind of drastically below-market rate or something...as we've seen with other examples.

We saw \$12 million go to Loblaws. This government gave a multi-billion dollar grocery company \$12 million to replace their fridges. It was too late to do anything about it. The money was already spent. Then, \$15 million went to Mastercard to help a credit card company that makes billions of dollars off the backs of working Canadians who can't pay their full balances.

I would respectfully, not just suggest, but insist, that this is the type of thing that needs to be disclosed before it's too late. This committee provides oversight. This committee holds this minister to account. This committee has a right to know what the government is intending to do. Too often, it's too late once these things are already all signed, sealed and set in stone.

The Chair: Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks, Chair.

To be absolutely clear, we have nothing to hide and, of course, that was the point of the original amendment to the motion, to have the CEO join us and answer any questions that you have.

Again, the fact remains that we are asking the committee to break the law. It's politically motivated to encourage the CIB to experience trouble and to make it appear that it's failing, and I want to ask my fellow committee members this. You're proposing to do this now to the Lake Erie Connector group? Is REM in Montreal next? Is the Oneida battery project in Ontario next? Is the southern Manitoba fibre project next? Who next will have to pull their pants down for this committee before we get a project built in Canada under the Canada Infrastructure Bank?

There is a witness on this call who I'm sure would not want to have their competitive financial information or trade secrets revealed to satisfy a political appetite that is not in the least helpful to help Canadians recover from this pandemic economically or to build the infrastructure in Canadian communities that needs to get built. This is a terrible waste of time.

This is a wonderful panel of witnesses and I would love to have a chance to talk to them about a progressive vision of Canada where we shift to active transportation and electrification of bus fleets and the rebuilding of a rail program in the country and shift away from 20th century fuel sources to renewables. I hope that we get a chance to come back and talk to them.

This very project that we're talking about, the Lake Erie Connector, at its heart is about shifting to those greener energy sources and giving a chance for good, clean Canadian power to reach a wider market, help the country reach its emissions reduction targets and put Canadians to work. It's exactly what the CIB was intended to do. There is a law that governs the way the CIB interacts with its proponents, and I think the relevant section needs to go into the record so I'm going to read that now.

This is subsection 28(1) on privileged information:

Subject to subsection (2), all information obtained by the Bank, by any of the Bank's subsidiaries or by any of the subsidiaries of the Bank's wholly-owned subsidiaries in relation to the proponents of, or private sector investors or institutional investors in, infrastructure projects is privileged and a director, officer, employee, or agent or mandatary of, or adviser or consultant to, the Bank, any of its subsidiaries, or any of the subsidiaries of its wholly-owned subsidiaries must not knowingly communicate, disclose or make available the information, or permit it to be communicated, disclosed or made available.

This is the law, friends.

Subsection 28(2), on authorized disclosure, reads:

Privileged information may be communicated, disclosed or made available in the following circumstances: (a) it is communicated, disclosed or made available for the purpose of the administration or enforcement of this Act and legal proceedings related to it; (b) it is communicated, disclosed or made available for the purpose of prosecuting an offence under this Act or any other Act of Parliament; (c) it is communicated, disclosed or made available to the Minister of National Revenue solely for the purpose of administering or enforcing the Income Tax Act or the Excise Tax Act; or (d) it is communicated, disclosed or made available with the written consent of the person to whom the information relates.

Nowhere in this unamended motion are we respecting that, and if I'm reading what's happening here.... It's hard to tell from the confusing signals whether there is an appetite for the amendment that the redactions, the production of documents, be consistent with relevant legislation concerning confidentiality or not. I certainly hope we wouldn't pass a motion that would disregard that at the least.

Now I ask for some common sense here and for us to step back and remind ourselves of what the CIB is trying to do, what we're all trying to do, which is to invest in Canadian communities, rebuild community infrastructure for future generations, recover from a pandemic, put people to work, reduce GHGs and increase the ability of equity-seeking groups that Ms. Saxe talked about in her testimony so they can participate in an economic recovery as well.

• (1705)

Please, let's have some common sense.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

Next is Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to build on something that Mr. Fillmore has alluded to. Obviously, this project, in its agreement in principle, looks extremely promising in what it might be able to achieve.

The Ontario Minister of Energy, the Honourable Greg Rickford, a former colleague of many of our Conservative colleagues here on this committee, said when he heard the announcement of the agreement in principle:

The Lake Erie connector demonstrates the advantages of public-private partnerships to develop critical infrastructure that delivers greater value to Ontarians. Connecting Ontario's electricity grid to the PJM electricity market will bring significant, tangible benefits to our province. This new connection will create high-quality jobs, improve system flexibility, and allow Ontario to export more excess electricity to promote cost-savings for Ontario's electricity consumers.

Minister Rickford was obviously extremely enthusiastic and I think any possibility of producing unredacted documents relating to this deal could put the whole deal in great jeopardy, and I would think that this would be most unfortunate for all concerned.

I just want to bring that to the attention of our Conservative colleagues.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jaczek.

We'll now go to Mr. Rogers.

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

I agree with some of my colleagues with regard to what this motion is suggesting. It is asking the CIB to violate its own act. When

we talk about the commercial confidentiality of this agreement and how we could possibly jeopardize this project—this negotiation apparently is not finished, it's ongoing—and how we as a committee could inject ourselves into that kind of process, I think, quite frankly, it would be irresponsible.

I think Mr. Fillmore has put forward an option that is worth considering by way of the amendment he has proposed. I certainly would speak in favour of the amendment, and certainly not in favour of the original motion as it was presented.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, I just have to keep going back to the point that there are dozens and dozens of lending institutions that provide financing without the need to disclose to the public the arrangements. Mr. Rogers, a few rounds ago you said you didn't understand the comparison between the CIBC and the CIB.

The point I was trying to make was that if a company is worried about the public having access to its confidential and privileged information, then it can go to a traditional lender. It can go to any one of the chartered banks. There are all kinds of financing options out there for people.

But, if it goes to government, if it's asking the government to forcefully reach into Canadians' pockets to give them money at either a preferential rate of interest or an extremely long repayment term, or who knows what, we don't know.... We're speculating here because we don't actually have the details. But, the fact that they went to the government, that the government tells us there's some type of advantage to the company....

That's the point I was endeavouring to make with that comparison. For companies that are worried about the secrecy and confidentiality and privileged nature of what their operations are, or what their forecasts are, as I said, there are lots of options for them to go to. But, if they choose to go to government, then I believe it's essential that we apply that level of accountability and transparency that we demand of other departments. We can file access to information requests. We can get this type of information when it's the Government of Quebec or the Government of Alberta through their various access to information laws. That type of disclosure is important.

I want to thank my NDP colleague, Mr. Bachrach, for bringing up the multiple examples of where committees have sent for papers, and specifically mentioned looking for unredacted information. Even in this Parliament there have been some examples of that.

I know the minister used this point, and I heard it again in the last round, talking about the Government of Ontario praising this project. Well, I've asked around, and it turns out that the Government of Ontario has not committed a dollar to this project; so, it's no surprise, if this federal government is coming along and saying they'll pay for this, for what would normally be considered a provincial project.

It's odd to me that if this is such a good project, then why does it need government money? If it's such a good project for Ontario, why hasn't Ontario committed any dollars to it? Minister Rickford has praised the project. Perhaps I might too if I were in his shoes. If the federal government was going to do something that the provincial government has so far refused to do, then it's no surprise there that he appreciates the Government of Canada stepping in and doing something that even it had evaluated was not in the interests of its taxpayers. Those are some of the questions that I struggle with.

I'll just go back to the question about the redaction and providing a loophole. I really do believe it's important for us. Someone suggested—I think Ms. Jaczek or maybe Mr. Fillmore—whether we would be doing this for every project that came through. Well, ideally, the government would not have written the legislation to keep these types of details secret. Ideally, the government would have written the legislation for the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I remind members that it passed this legislation at a time when it had a majority government, so it had the sole pen, the sole right of authorship of the legislation. Ideally, it would have written into the legislation more robust transparency and disclosure regimes, but it chose not to.

This is really the first situation where we have a private sector company involved in a project with the Canada Infrastructure Bank. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has dispelled the notion that the Réseau project in Montreal and the Alberta irrigation project have private sector funds. He has dispelled that. He has concluded that the government's own definition of “private sector” and “public sector” means those two projects aren't eligible.

• (1715)

I think this is very timely to set the stage for accountability and disclosure if private sector companies that are going to profit from these projects.... This ITC Holdings, no doubt, has some way of recouping its investment and returning dividends to its shareholders. If they are going to benefit from that, if they are going to be able to win approval of their board members and shareholders by showing them how much money they're making on these types of projects, I believe it's eminently reasonable for them to explain to the Canadian taxpayer what's in it for them, what's in it for the taxpayer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

I'm now going to move to Mr. El-Khoury.

[*Translation*]

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

I am concerned. If we are going to interfere with the structure of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, I am concerned that the project will be delayed or not completed.

Let me take the example of the Réseau express métropolitain, or REM, project, a project that is close to our hearts in Quebec. The government has worked hard to convince other interested parties to participate in its funding. If the project is delayed or not completed, what would be the losses for Quebecers and Canadians?

Let's also take the example of the Lake Erie connector project. I have the same concern about that. I hope the committee takes this seriously, and it is in Canada's best interest during this COVID-19 pandemic. We must look out for the interests of our economy and our citizens.

I'll return to my proposal.

Do committee members agree to give the mayor of Sept-Îles the opportunity to participate in our meeting for a few minutes? It would be worthwhile.

[*English*]

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

I believe the mayor of Sept-Îles has departed, so I don't think we're going to have that opportunity, unfortunately.

I'm now going to move on to Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

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

I see hand after hand going up. People have had the opportunity to speak on this before. Is there really anything new? I think we've had an opportunity to grasp what is being proposed by our colleague.

So I would suggest that we move to a vote as quickly as possible.

• (1720)

[*English*]

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

I'm now going to move on to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair, I was going to propose an amendment to the amendment, but I agree with Mr. Barsalou-Duval that we should move along with the vote.

I'm in a bit of a quandary here. Perhaps, if I can ask for your forbearance, I will propose an amendment to the amendment.

The Chair: Taylor, why don't we hold off on that until we vote on this amendment?

I see one more hand up: Mr. Iacono.

My intent is to go to the vote on the amendment, and then if you want to propose another amendment we can do that.

Does that sound good?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair, I'm just looking to seek a bit of a compromise here that might move us along more quickly.

The Chair: You can always move a subamendment, but we have only 14 minutes left in the meeting.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay, a subamendment....

The Chair: You can do that, but I would prefer to keep it cleaner.

I see Mr. Iacono with his hand up. Let's go to Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Bachrach, let's vote on that amendment, and then I'll come back to you.

Go ahead, Mr. Iacono.

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

Yes, indeed, I move that we go to a vote.

First, I'd like to say that what's eminently unreasonable here today is that my Conservative colleague was comparing in his tweet the Canada Infrastructure Bank and the commercial banks. The notions of the basic economy seem to be confused in his mind.

He's smiling.

I'm glad that the common Canadian is more resistant to misinformation. This is what he continues to do. I'm able to re-establish the fact for my colleague's benefit that the CIB is actually there to invest in infrastructure in joint partnerships with private partners, and in no way is commercial profit part of its mandate.

I have to also add that, in the last five years, we've seen so much infrastructure being built or being renovated, more than we've ever seen during 10 years under the Conservative government. It's time to stop misinforming and misleading the public and stick to the facts.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think it's time to move on to having these votes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

We go back to Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I was all set to move on to the question until Mr. Iacono decided to use his platform, so I'll respond to that.

This government was the one that claimed that the Canada Infrastructure Bank would unleash a minimum of four-to-one, maybe even seven-to-one, private sector investment. We understand that there are lots of funding models where the government invests in infrastructure and does not expect to get a profit back. It was this government that structured it as a bank and told Canadians that they were going to get all of this money back from the private sector to leverage these projects.

When you look at the PBO report, and you look at the department's own disclosure, they are losing money, and they haven't completed a single project.

I don't know why these Liberal members keep trying to make comparisons with the previous Conservative government, which

got the Asia-Pacific corridor projects built. They got the building Canada projects built in communities all across this country. Their P3 model completed projects within a four-year timeline.

All of that is to say that this is great material for debate on other things, Mr. Iacono. I think there's a willingness of the committee here to dispose of this amendment, and I suggest that we do that now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

With no other questions or comments—

Mr. Bachrach, you have your hand up, I'm assuming, for another amendment.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's correct, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

I see no further hands up, no further questions or comments. I'm going to ask for a vote on the amendment.

Mr. Clerk, it's going to be a vote that I believe you should take, because it's going to be all over the place, so it would probably be easier for you to take it versus my trying to count hands on two screens. Go ahead.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We are now going to go on to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead to the main motion.

● (1725)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I would like to propose a separate amendment. I am going to amend it by adding the words, “and that the documents be reviewed for legality by the Parliamentary Law Clerk”, and I would also like to propose an extension to the timeline extending it from 20 days to 30 days.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Are there comments or questions to the amendment?

I have Mr. Fillmore and following him, I believe, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bachrach, on your amendment to have the documents reviewed, could you just repeat it? You said by the law clerk for legality. Is that it?

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Okay, thank you.

I would love to hear from anybody on the committee as to whether or not this is tantamount to the previous amendment we just voted down. I feel like it achieves the same purpose. If there is a different purpose at work here, I'd like to understand that.

Second, thank you for the extension of days. It's a move in the right direction, given the fact that this inordinate and extraordinary volume of documentation is going to have to be translated and then redacted and reviewed for legality. Thirty days is an impossible ask of our excellent House of Commons staff and public servants, and I wonder if we could get unanimous consent to amend that to 60 days.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

I'll go along with the amendment first, hear everybody's comments, and then, Mr. Fillmore, I'll go back to you to see about unanimous consent.

Right now I have Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thanks very much.

I appreciate Mr. Fillmore's comments there. As I see it, the difference between the original amendment that Mr. Fillmore moved and the one Mr. Bachrach just proposed has to do with who is the decider of what is redacted. I would definitely support the move in that direction to take ownership of that on the parliamentary side and away from the bank itself. I think all of us, despite Ms. Jaczek's assertions, understand how the redactions process works, but I think we would all have a little bit more comfort knowing it was the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel doing it. I think 30 days is a reasonable compromise. I think 60 is awfully far off into the future. They say a week can be a lifetime in politics. I can certainly attest to that. The sooner the better. I wouldn't want to have it delayed so long that there would be a risk that we might not ever get them back.

The other point I would make on that is that surely the documents must be readily available. The bank just made this decision. We're not asking it to go back 10 or 15 years into the archives and to send someone down with a flashlight. These should all be readily to it. All we're asking it is to give them to the parliamentary law clerk so the parliamentary law clerk can go through what should and shouldn't be redacted as the translators go through their process. I think 30 days is eminently doable.

With regard to the scope, I might suggest to Mr. Bachrach that maybe we'll have some time to chat, as I know we're coming to the end of our meeting here. Is there a way we could maybe narrow the scope a little bit on the lens that the law clerk would look at this through? I'm looking at examples of how other committees have passed motions whereby documents go to the law clerk and then they kind of give a few filters or a few instructions to the law clerk to protect private information or things like that.

If we give Mr. Fillmore the benefit of the doubt when he says he really doesn't want to put these companies in positions of having opened up their kimono on things they might not ever have expected to go public with, is there a way we can maybe give some guidance to the law clerk? What I don't want to have happen is to say

that the law says something is privileged or confidential and so on, and so the law clerk will have to look at that, and there may be information on the bank's side that there's no need to protect, that this committee has no interest in protecting because the bank is a public institution and should be open and public....

Anyway, I'm throwing it over to you, Mr. Bachrach, about the possibility of maybe adding some filters or lenses around what we would be asking the law clerk to base his redactions on.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

We're now going to move to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thanks, Chair.

Chair, when we talk about time frame—30 days or 60 days—I'm wondering, if we're going to have documents provided in both official languages, I'd like to hear from the clerk as to what kind of a time frame we might be looking at in order to be able to provide documents that would have to be translated into either official language.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: It entirely depends on how many documents. It's like the question, "how long is a piece of string?" It depends on how many pages of documents we receive. It depends on whether the documents are provided in both official languages, which they often are by departments. This is not a government department, but it operates under the Official Languages Act.

Once again, it just depends on how many documents are received.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Sorry, Chair.

In the case of documents, then, we don't know really if 30 days or 60 days would be adequate, Mr. Clerk. So I support Mr. Fillmore in suggesting that we would go to a minimum of 60 days.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

I'm now going to move on to Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm just concerned a little bit about the workload of the law clerk. Obviously, this is not in their usual scope of activities and they have normal responsibilities to fulfill.

Clearly, we normally have redactions done by subject experts who are totally immersed in the subject matter that they're looking at, so they can truly appreciate where confidentiality is extremely important, whether it's privileged information and so on.

I have a concern on that front. Therefore, to echo Mr. Rogers to a certain extent, in terms of the time frame, is it reasonable for a law clerk to fulfill this responsibility within a relatively short period of time?

I would certainly think it might be more reasonable to give more time and consider something like the 60-day time frame because I'm sure this would be an additional and onerous responsibility.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jaczek.

I now go to Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Sheer, you have the floor.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you very much.

This is an eminently reasonable committee. I'm sure that if we're getting close to the end of the 30-day period, if the law clerk or the translation services came to the committee and just said that there are so many documents here they can't manage the workload, I would certainly support hearing that. I would be inclined to support a reasonable request for an extension, so that the law clerk or the translation services don't find themselves past the deadline.

If we say 60 days, I'll take 60 days. If we say 30 days, more likely it will take 30 days. I'd far prefer giving a shorter time frame with the understanding that we could face requests for an extension based on real circumstances. That would obviously be entertained by reasonable people, especially if they came from someone of such stature as the law clerk.

Just to talk about the redactions, there are confidentiality agreements with lots of arrangements with government. Lots of legislation now enables governments to use that as an excuse to not provide details. It's essential that committees, when they feel that it's important enough, send for these types of papers and assert their parliamentary supremacy on that.

We're not talking about contracts between two private individuals or two private entities. We're talking about a contract with the government. We've seen with this government with other scandals where we've had to ignore some of those confidentiality agreements. We've had to use the committee power to compel that to shine a light on some of the scandals this government is embroiled in.

That's not to suggest that anybody at ITC or anybody at the Canada Infrastructure Bank has done anything like that so far, but if these types of crown corporations and government agencies know that Parliament and committees will not hold them accountable, that could be very detrimental to the sound management of these things down the line.

That is why the Conservatives proposed this motion to begin with, which is to send for them in an unredacted form. I believe that Mr. Bachrach has introduced a good faith effort to try to take into account some of the more reasonable concerns of Mr. Fillmore. I'm hopeful that we can find some wording around that that everyone can support.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

We have come to the end of the meeting.

Because there are no more hands up, I'm going to allow the vote to happen on the amendment. With that, my intent is to adjourn the

meeting. Of course, from there Mrs. Kusie would have to bring a motion up to resume debate at the next meeting.

With that—

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Sorry, I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

We're kind of chatting through the committee about providing some language around Mr. Bachrach's proposal to involve the law clerk. I'm not formally a member of this committee at this point, so I'm not able to move a subamendment to do that.

I wondering, just because I don't know what the rules allow, given the time, if this amendment is defeated because we don't yet have a full agreement on how the law clerk's involvement would be structured, if that would that prevent a further amendment to be brought in that might have that kind of clarity.

My suggestion would be to either adjourn the meeting now and allow those conversations to happen or give some clarity that if this amendment is defeated, it doesn't preclude another crack at it.

The Chair: I have two things to say. One, the motion belongs to the committee. It's on the floor. Two, regardless of whether this motion passes, another amendment can be presented at a different time. That different time would be at the next meeting, when the motion is brought back to resume the debate.

Does that clarify your thoughts?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Good.

Mr. Bachrach, you have your hand up. Again, we're running out of time. I would like to go to the vote on the amendment.

Did you have any further comments?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I hear you, Mr. Chair.

Procedurally, I'm a little bit confused as to why we're going to vote on the amendment and not on the main motion, but if that's the way it's going to go, that's at your discretion.

• (1740)

The Chair: I have to vote on the amendment so that if it does pass, the main motion would be amended. What we would be voting on when we get to the main motion is an amended main motion.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Right. Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Clerk, we can call the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 9; yeas 2 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk, and thank you, members of the committee.

To that end, members, I do now adjourn this meeting. Have a great evening.

We had a very robust discussion today. I do apologize to the witnesses or for those that are left for the time over the last half hour. Hopefully, we can get the witnesses back at a different time.

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