

Transportation and Economic Corridors (TEC) 2023-24 Public Accounts  
Questions for follow-up

**Question 1.** Ms. Marie Renaud, MLA (NDP) for St. Albert

Topic: Regional airports

*I actually looked around to see if I could find the grant recipients, like, sort of what was the scope of the projects that they were undertaking. I couldn't find it. Doesn't mean it's not there. I'm just wondering: **is this publicly available information?** (Pages PA – 365, PA-366)*

**Supplemental Response**

The information regarding grant recipients, including scope of projects, is publicly available at the Government of Alberta News website.

The title is “Building Alberta’s regional airport network” and can be found using this link:

[www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=900989FCA7676-EC12-ED09-BABDB805E14AE135](http://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=900989FCA7676-EC12-ED09-BABDB805E14AE135)  
(Accessed May 20, 2025).

**Question 2.** Ms. Marie Renaud, MLA (NDP) for St. Albert

Topic: Strategic Aviation Advisory Council

*Of the 15 members of the Strategic Aviation Advisory Council I note a lot of expertise in a lot of areas, but I didn't see - and perhaps it just wasn't mentioned - any members with expertise in emergency management, fire, medical or air ambulance. **Would the department outline the emergency medical expertise on the council? Also, what is the total operating cost of this council?** (Page PA-369)*

**Supplemental response:**

The Strategic Aviation Advisory Council includes members with a broad range of expertise relevant to Alberta's aviation sector, including emergency management and related disciplines.

Mr. William Stewart, Director of Terminal Services at the Grande Prairie Regional Airport, brings significant experience in emergency response. He is the former Chair of the Alberta Airports Management Association, which represents 43 community airports across rural and remote areas of the province. The Alberta Airports Management Association's members play a key role in supporting emergency management, wildfire response, and medical services, including air ambulance operations. In addition, Mr. Stewart operates a consulting firm which provides emergency response exercise planning services to airports globally.

The operating costs for the Strategic Aviation Advisor Council in 2023 to 2024 was \$2,300 and was limited to member honorariums and travel expenses which members may incur while performing their duties. Most Council members opted not to claim honorariums, resulting in minimal costs to the ministry. Honorariums are as specified in the Committee Remuneration Order and any associated expenses while performing duties are in accordance with the directive issued by the Treasury Board respecting travel, meal, and hospitality expenses.

**Question 3.** Ms. Marie Renaud, MLA (NDP) for St. Albert

Topic: Passenger Rail Master Plan

*And, finally, I note the passenger rail master plan outlined a number of targets: improving commuter rail, regular rail lines, creation of a Crown corporation, examination, multimodal hubs. **Can the department outline any targets related to climate change mitigation and the creation of this master plan? Are there any projections of emissions reductions, et cetera?** (Page PA-369)*

**Supplemental response:**

Alberta's government is developing a Passenger Rail Master Plan which will look forward decades. This plan identifies concrete actions which can be taken now and future actions to build the optimal passenger rail system for the province.

The Master Plan will include a 15-year Delivery Plan which will provide options and recommendations to the government on how to sequence passenger rail investments, infrastructure, and services.

In 2023 to 2024 no funding was provided. Significant work (e.g. consultant efforts) on the Passenger Rail Master Plan did not begin until 2024 to 2025.

Once the Master Plan is completed and the government decides to progress passenger rail development, further studies (e.g. environmental assessments, engineering), and public and Indigenous engagement will be required on specific alignments, routes, and stations' locations.

**Question 4.** Mr. Garth Rowsell, MLA (UC) for Vermillion-Lloydminster-Wainwright  
Topic: Highway 3 Twinning

*I would like to turn to page 22 of the report and the discussion on Highway 3 twinning. This is a key economic corridor through southern Alberta's vibrant agricultural region, and it joins Saskatchewan to British Columbia.*

***I would like to get a detail to the committee about what was accomplished in '23-24 and what is under way to further enhance this corridor, and, also, to provide any further information regarding the economic importance of this corridor. (Page PA-369)***

**Supplemental response:**

This work is the start of a larger undertaking of twinning Highway 3 from the Alberta-British Columbia (BC) border to Medicine Hat, which will be completed in eight phases. Functional planning studies for the twinning of Highway 3 were completed. One exception is an area between Pincher Creek and Fort Macleod, including the Piikani Nation, which is currently underway.

The first phase is twinning 46 kilometres (km) of Highway 3 between Taber and Burdett. It is being completed through a Design-Build contract awarded to Ledcor Highways Ltd in the fall 2023. Construction began in earnest in spring 2024, with completion anticipated in 2026. The project cost of \$260.5 million includes twinning and a bypass of the hamlets of Grassy Lake and Burdett. Work consists of twinning the 46 km, 11 bridge structures, intersection improvements, two rest area pullouts (westbound and eastbound), and 10 service roads. To date, 26 km of grading and eight km of base and paving is completed, while utility relocations and major water crossings are ongoing.

The second phase is 36 km from east of Highway 885 (Whitla) to Medicine Hat. Planning studies were completed, and preliminary engineering began in spring 2024.

The third phase is 11 km along Highway 3X/Coleman Bypass. Planning studies were completed, and preliminary engineering began in summer 2024.

The fourth phase is 21 km from Blairmore to east of Highway 22. Planning studies were completed, and engineering will begin in 2025.

The fifth phase is 20 km from east of Highway 22 to Highway 6 at Pincher Creek. Planning studies were completed, and engineering will begin in summer 2025.

The sixth phase is 30 km from east of Burdett to east of Highway 885 (Whitla), including the Town of Bow Island. The functional planning study was completed, and the province will continue to consult with the Town of Bow Island and other stakeholders to finalize the alignment.

The seventh phase is 38 km from Pincher Creek to west of Fort Macleod. A functional planning study through the Piikani Nation Reserve is underway and will continue for approximately the next two years.

The eighth phase is six km from the Alberta/BC border to Highway 3X. Continued engagement with BC is necessary to consider alignment with improvements being planned through the BC portion.

Highway 3 is a vital east-west link and economic driver for the agriculture industry in southern Alberta. The highway supports the movement of agricultural products to markets outside Alberta, including international markets accessed via the Port of Vancouver.

The expanded Highway 3 will better serve Albertans getting to market and the value-added production in the agricultural sector.

**Question 5.** *Mr. Garth Rowsell, MLA (UC) for Vermillion-Lloydminster-Wainwright*  
Topic: Highway 686 Planning

*We've been discussing the status of projects and updates already today, and I would like to continue that line of questioning. On page 28 of the report it discusses the proposed Highway 686 extension. I'd like the deputy minister to highlight to this committee why this extension is needed and what will be achieved through this project. (Page PA-369)*

**Supplemental response:**

TEC is moving ahead with plans to create a new east-west corridor in Northern Alberta. Work is underway on planning and preliminary engineering for the Highway 686 extension from Fort McMurray to Peerless Lake to connect northern communities and support economic development across the region. This will form part of a broader east-west corridor we anticipate will connect to Hudson Bay in the east and into BC on the west. The 218 km highway project will open new travel options for this resource rich part of Alberta.

The extension of Highway 686 from Peerless Lake to Fort McMurray is an example of a road infrastructure project with local Indigenous communities leading as project partners. This project will provide a vital link between the Peace Country and Fort McMurray, supporting economic and social activity in the region, and providing additional egress routes in cases of emergency like wildfires. It will also help with establishing a new cross-jurisdictional east-west corridor which better connects Alberta to Hudson Bay.

We continue to advocate for project funding from the National Trade Corridor Fund and have yet to receive a decision from the federal government. Alberta sought funding from the federal government for the Highway 686 extension.

We signed an agreement in April 2023 with three First Nations to begin work on the extension, enabling them to play a leadership role and actively participate in the project. The agreement's overall value of \$2 million supports First Nation coordination and advice, with the potential for an additional \$5 million on pre-engineering work in the future.

**Question 6.** *Mr. Garth Rowsell, MLA (UC) for Vermillion-Lloydminster-Wainwright*  
Topic: Memoranda of Understanding and Market Access

*Another one on MOUs. Market access is a key component of enhancing and expanding our economy. In order to increase access, it is important for Alberta to work with other jurisdictions. On page 27 of the report, it addresses the issue. Key objective 1.2 highlights collaborating with industry stakeholders, other governments, and Indigenous communities to identify and advance nation-building infrastructure projects, that increase access to other markets for our amazing Alberta businesses. **Could you explain how memorandums of understanding of economic corridors and federal-provincial advocacy in general help to achieve this goal?** (Page PA-369)*

**Supplemental response:**

Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) help by establishing new nation-building corridor projects which will require long-term government cooperation and shared political will at all levels of government.

Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba signed the MOU in April 2023, under which the three provinces are collaborating on regional planning, regulatory harmonization, and joint advocacy.

Prairie MOU achievements include:

- carrier profile harmonization and alignment of tandem axle permits;
- joint support for a Port of Vancouver application for federal funding;
- collaborative regional planning to support development of a northern corridor;
- further efforts to advance planning of the La Loche Road connection to Saskatchewan; and
- mapping the flow of key commodities, which will help prioritize trade infrastructure investments.

Alberta signed a similar MOU with the Northwest Territories in July 2024. Advancing priority economic corridors provides Alberta with greater flexibility and capacity to move resources to market, supporting job creation, and generating revenues. Nation-building infrastructure projects, including ports, roads, railways, pipelines, and telecommunications networks, are essential for economic growth and community connectivity.

TEC recently participated on a Western Provinces and Territories Committee on Economic Corridors. A report was provided to western Premiers in spring 2024, exploring solutions to improve existing and establish new economic corridors across Western Canada. This includes a recommendation the seven western provinces and territories formalize cross-jurisdictional coordination of economic corridors, such as through an MOU.

An MOU among western provinces and territories was subsequently completed at the Western Premiers' Conference in May 2025, setting the stage for further collaboration on Economic Corridors.

TEC is moving ahead with plans to create a new east-west corridor in Northern Alberta which is envisioned to form part of a future east-west corridor across western provinces, including connection to Hudson Bay. Work is underway on planning and preliminary engineering for the Highway 686 extension from Fort McMurray to Peerless Lake to connect northern communities and support economic development across the region. The 218 km highway project will open new travel options for this resource rich part of Alberta.

With respect to engagements with the federal government, Alberta advocated for enhanced federal funding for trade-enabling infrastructure such as roads, rail, ports, inland ports, airports, and more. Alberta also advocated for timely federal decisions on applications for federal funding, such as those under the National Trade Corridors Fund. We are awaiting decisions on nine applications put forward in 2022.

Additional advocacy included the streamlining of federal regulatory approval processes so major projects are advanced in a timely manner, and for the creation of a national Economic Corridor Agency to identify and maintain economic corridors across provincial boundaries with meaningful consultation with Indigenous groups and industry.

**Question 7.** *Mr. Garth Rowsell, MLA (UC) for Vermillion-Lloydminster-Wainwright*  
Topic: Truck Driver Vacancies

*In recent years, I think it's fair to say, we have all become aware of how important supply chains are, including getting product from one area of the country to the other. The trucking industry is a key part of supply chains in Alberta. Performance measure 1(b) on page 40 of the report tracks the percentage of commercial truck driver vacancies in relation to the total number of licensed commercial truck drivers. **How does the department track and analyze trends in commercial truck drivers, driver job vacancies, and further to that, what actions are being taken in response to the data?** (Page PA-369)*

**Supplemental response:**

This measure defines the percentage of commercial truck driver job vacancies in relation to the total number of Class 1 and Class 3 licensed commercial drivers in Alberta. This shows the effectiveness of TEC's efforts to support the carrier industry by addressing the worker shortage and creating employment opportunities for Albertans, through actions which include targeted grant programs and changes to the driver licensing system.

In 2024, the average commercial truck driver job vacancy rate in Alberta was 0.9 per cent, which indicates a significant reduction compared to the target 1.67 per cent vacancy rate. Job vacancies decreased, while the number of licensed Class 1 or Class 3 commercial drivers in Alberta increased. Additional factors contributing to these outcomes reflect continued economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, a reduction in supply chain bottlenecks, population growth, and other industry specific factors.

TEC is continuing to take steps to eliminate barriers to industry training while upholding safety standards. Over the past four years, the Driving Back to Work grant program supported over 2,000 Albertans to take driver training, covering up to 90 per cent of the cost of driver training and testing for new Class 1 drivers.