

Memorandum

FROM Rae-Ann Lajeunesse
Deputy Minister

OUR FILE REFERENCE

YOUR FILE REFERENCE

TO Shannon Phillips
Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts
5th Floor, Federal Building

DATE July 8, 2020


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SUBJECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS – WRITTEN
RESPONSES

In follow-up to the June 9, 2020 meeting with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I have attached written responses to the outstanding questions raised during the meeting.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.


Rae-Ann Lajeunesse

Attachment

Alberta Transportation
Public Accounts Follow-Up Questions
June 9, 2020

Capital Maintenance and Renewal

1. Mr. Rod Loyola

Question: Can the ministry outline how much was spent on CMR in 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019? Can the ministry provide the four-year average, please? (Page PA-234)

Answer:

- This program supports projects that maintain or improve the condition of our existing network and includes bridge construction and major road rehabilitation. It also includes major maintenance activities, such as deep mill and fill, full-depth concrete replacement, and bridge deck joint replacement.

- Over the four year period from 2015 to 2019 the Ministry spent an average of \$396.2 million on Capital Maintenance and Renewal. The breakdown by year is as follows:
 - 2015-16 - \$305.5 million
 - 2016-17 - \$432.0 million
 - 2017-18 - \$402.9 million
 - 2018-19 - \$444.3 million

Exports

2. Mr. Roger Reid

Question: I want to talk a little bit about exports...I want to refer to page 18, performance indicator 1(a), which states the volume of exports by mode of transportation. From 2014 to 2016 there was a significant decline in export volume followed by an upswing in export volume in 2017 and '18...can the department explain which exports declined to reduce overall volume of trade and if transportation capacity was a factor in that? (Page PA-235)

Answer:

- Between 2014 and 2016, the reported value of Alberta's non-pipeline exports declined, this was mainly influenced by value of mineral products transported by rail. Mineral products include oil and gas. The decline in 2016 can also be attributed in part to the wildfires which impacted the energy sector in the Athabasca oil sands area along with the time it took the transportation system and other systems to come back online fully.
- The decline in non-pipeline export value between 2014 and 2016 and subsequent upswing are correlated with the overall Alberta economy in terms of gross domestic product. Alberta Transportation does not have evidence that transportation capacity affected the decline between 2014 and 2016.
- The reported export value is influenced by demand and supply of Alberta products and the price of commodities transported for export, which may vary from year to year based on many factors.

Transit Ridership

3. Mr. Drew Barnes

Question:

Can somebody from the ministry please speak on the department breakdown in terms of the number of ridership, particularly as it pertains to the difference between Calgary and Edmonton? (Page PA-235)

Answer:

- In 2014, conventional transit ridership in Calgary and Edmonton were 110,274,530 and 89,238,008 respectively.
- In 2018, ridership in the two municipalities had decreased to 105,336,547 (5%) and 87,121,534 (2%).
- Although Alberta Transportation does not operate municipal transit systems, a number of factors can be associated with changes in transit ridership including economic activity, changing demographics, vehicle ownership, parking availability, and the quality of bus service.

Calgary Green Line LRT

4. Mr. Rod Loyola

Question:

Since the inception of expenditures on the Green Line, how much has been spent year per year? (Page PA-237)

Answer:

- Since the inception of expenditures on the Green Line, the province provided \$138 million up to 2018-19 for early works involving utility relocation and land acquisition. The breakdown per year was as follows:

Project Name	(\$000s)			Total Spent to 2018-19
	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	
Calgary Green Line	\$26,437	\$53,700	\$57,859	\$137,996

Highway 3 Bridge / Highway 40 Twinning / Deerfoot Expansion

5. Mr. Rod Loyola

Question:

Then we will get an update on the highway 3 bridge in Lethbridge, the highway 40 project, and the Deerfoot expansion strategy, correct?(Page PA-237)

Answer:

A. Highway 3 Bridge in Lethbridge

- The Highway 3 Bridge in Lethbridge was never included on a published Unfunded Capital Project List.

Background

Current

- Rehabilitation work was completed on the bridge in 2018 to extend its service life for another 10 to 15 years.
- We will continue to evaluate this project and take it into consideration in future capital planning.

B. Highway 40 Twinning

- The Highway 40 Twinning project, between south of Wapiti River to the City of Grande Prairie corporate limits, was added to the Unfunded Capital Project List in 2017-18.

Background

- The project was originally approved in 2018 with a Total Project Cost of \$106 million, with the majority of the funding provided in 2023-24 to 2025-26.

Current

- In Budget 2020, the Total Project Cost remained at \$106 million, however the project was accelerated with the majority of the funding being provided in 2021-22 to 2023-24.
- In February 20, 2020, the project was announced as a cost-sharing agreement.
- The Alberta government, the Municipal District of Greenview and County of Grande Prairie reached a cost-sharing agreement to twin Highway 40, south of Grande Prairie.
- This cost-sharing agreement means construction related activities, such as relocation of utilities and land clearing, can now begin as early as summer 2020.

C. Deerfoot Trail Expansion

- The Deerfoot Trail expansion project was never included on a published Unfunded Capital Project List.

Background

- In November 2018, Treasury Board approved total funding of \$36.8 million for Hwy 2 Deerfoot Trail (Smaller Scope Projects).
- Subsequently, the previous Government announced \$478 million for additional work on Deerfoot Trail on March 14, 2019, but no budget was allocated.

Current

- Budget 2019 officially allocated \$209.8 million for Deerfoot Trail Improvements.

Terwillegar Drive

6. Mr. Rod Loyola

Question:

In the future we can talk about the decision to cancel this funding, but I'd like to go back to 2018-2019. I understand that this project got more due diligence by the previous minister than virtually any other relative to its dollar value, so can the ministry tell this committee: back in 2018-2019 why was this project deemed so essential? Can the ministry catalogue the extensive back and forth between officials and the city on this critical project? (Page PA-237, PA-238)

Answer:

- The Terwillegar Drive project was originally approved under the Alberta Community Transit Fund (the ACT Fund). No funding was provided under this program.
- The ACT Fund was intended to provide funding for municipalities to support the purchase of low- and zero-emission vehicles and other transit-related infrastructure.
- Program funding was to be available for municipalities (city, town, village, summer village, specialized municipality, municipal district, improvement district, and special area), Métis Settlements, and transit commissions or regional transit authorities established by the provincial government.
- Transportation received 37 applications, and 33 were approved for funding, including the Terwillegar Expressway Project.

Dangerous Intersections Funding

7. Mr. Rod Loyola

Question:

I know that the ministry has a list of dangerous intersections. In 2018-2019 how much money was allotted to addressing the issues surrounding these dangerous intersections? (Page PA-241)

Answer:

- In 2018-19, the department allocated \$18.1 million for intersections where safety improvements were identified. With this funding, the department improved seven of the top 10 intersections identified for improvements. The remaining three were undergoing planning in 2018-19 for completion in future years.
- The department conducts annual safety reviews on intersections using collision incident information.

Alberta Community Transit Fund (ACT Fund)

8. Mr. Rod Loyola

Question:

a) Can the ministry talk about the development of the Alberta Community Transit Fund, or GreenTRIP 2.0, back in 2018-2019? What was the application procedure, how many jobs were expected to be created, and how were the projects scored? (Page PA-243)

Answer:

- The Alberta Community Transit Fund (ACT), funded through the Climate Leadership Plan, was developed to support municipal transit initiatives to ensure safe, accessible and environmentally sustainable public transportation options.
- The department built a set of program guidelines based off these outcomes and municipalities were encouraged to submit an application form. All applications required information on regional collaboration as well as the environmental, social and economic benefits of the project.
 - Applicants also required a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) assessment and a Council resolution that endorsed the project.
- A cross-ministry team from Municipal Affairs, Transportation, Community and Social Services evaluated and ranked the applications based off the highest scores for each section (regional collaboration, environment, social and economic benefits):
 - Regional Collaboration: 30 per cent;
 - Environmental benefits: 25 per cent;
 - Economic benefits: 15 per cent; and
 - Social benefits: 30 per cent.
- Municipalities estimated that 560 jobs were expected to be created.
- In Budget 2019 the ACT Fund was cancelled. No funding had been provided under this program. Many of the projects that applied under this program continue to be eligible for federal transit funding.

b) Can the ministry tell this committee how they communicate to the public when these critical projects are cancelled? (Page PA-243)

Answer:

In the case of the ACT Fund, this was communicated through Budget 2019 and through direct contact with municipal contacts by the department.

c) So in the case of Calgary, what's the ministry's message to the city? How are they meant to cope when the government of Alberta made commitments, fully funded at that time, and then cancelled those commitments? (Page PA-243)

Answer:

- No funding had been provided under this program when it was cancelled in Budget 2019.
- The province continues our commitment to fund Calgary's projects under Green Transit Incentive Program (GreenTRIP) and \$1.53 billion towards Stage 1 of the Calgary Green Line LRT.

Green Line LRT

9. Mr. Rod Loyola

Question:

Then as a follow-up to that, for Calgary and, in particular, the funding agreement for the green line, I'd like to stay with the formal plan in 2018-2019. Now, this was about a \$1.53 billion commitment on behalf of the province going back to 2018-2019. Can you please inform this committee on the flow of funding each year of that legislated commitment? (Page PA-243)

Answer:

- Our commitment to funding \$1.53 billion towards Stage 1 of the Calgary Green Line LRT is set under the *Public Transit and Green Infrastructure Project Act*, which alleviates any uncertainties that Calgary may have concerning provincial funding for each fiscal year as follows:

	Alberta
2018-19	-
2019-20	-
2020-21	-
2021-22	\$25,000,000
2022-23	\$50,000,000
2023-24	\$291,000,000
2024-25	\$291,000,000
2025-26	\$291,000,000
2026-27	\$291,000,000
2027-28	\$291,000,000
Total	\$1,530,000,000

Noise Abatement

10. Mr. Lorne Dach

Question:

I'm just wondering if the ministry has now adopted as a regular part of its planning procedure the ability to implement noise abatement measures where they receive public complaints or where they believe that it will become a problem after the roadway is built.(Page PA-244)

Answer:

- Yes, noise abatement measures are considered based on Alberta Transportation's noise guidelines, which were first implemented in January 2001 and revised in 2002.
- For construction or improvements of highways through cities and other urban areas, Alberta Transportation has adopted a noise level of 65 dBA within certain parameters.
- When these parameters are exceeded, mitigation could include construction of noise walls and/or berms. The decision to implement noise mitigation must consider whether mitigation is cost-effective, technically practical and broadly supported by the affected residents.

Graeburn Bridge

11. Mr. Drew Barnes

Question:

We had a huge 1-in-350-year flood event in Cypress county in 2010. About eight miles south of the Trans-Canada highway at Walsh, you know, five or so miles inside the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, is the Graeburn bridge, that now for 10 years hasn't been up to full capacity and able to carry necessary hay and cattle and normal transportation requirements across it sometimes. Of course, in that vicinity are many, many families and many, many huge, multimillion-dollar farming industries. Is this bridge at all on the department's radar?(Page PA-244)

Answer:

- Graeburn Road is a local road under the jurisdiction of Cypress County.
- Cypress County applied for the replacement of the existing single-span bridge through the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP).
- The Graeburn Road Bridge project is on the department's radar and will be considered when grant funding is available.

Traffic Counts (Hwy 3 – Medicine Hat to Taber)

12. Mr. Drew Barnes

Question:

I'm wondering if the department has recently done any new traffic counts on highway 3 from Medicine Hat to Taber, in particular heavy-vehicle traffic.(Page PA-244)

Answer:

- The department updates traffic volumes on an annual basis using automated traffic recording (ATR) devices that are installed along highways to record hourly traffic volumes. They operate 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.
- Statistics from the ATR's are published in March of the following year (i.e.; March 2020) to account for weekly and seasonal fluctuations in traffic throughout the year. The statistics show Hwy 3, between Taber and Medicine Hat, has averaged 3,824 vehicles per day. This includes about 508 (13.3%) Tandem Trailer Trucks (heavy vehicles) per day during 2019.

Trans Canada – Eagle Butte Intersection at Dunmore

13. Mr. Drew Barnes

Question:

I'm wondering if the Department of Transportation has any study in the last year's budget that was done and any plans going ahead for the Trans-Canada-Eagle Butte intersection at Dunmore.(Page PA-245)

Answer:

- Cypress County and Alberta Transportation have entered into a cost-share agreement to install traffic signals at the intersection of TransCanada Highway/Highway 1 and Eagle Butte Road in the Hamlet of Dunmore.
- This project is currently out for tender and should be closing in the near future.

Fresh Water to First Nations

14. Mr. Lorne Dach

Question:

I have a quick question regarding bringing fresh water to First Nations reserves. As this committee is no doubt aware, getting water to reserves was a pretty big commitment of the ministry in 2018-19. As I can see, roughly \$100 million was budgeted. Now, as I understand it, that commitment was honoured by the current government, but it only scratches the surface. Can the ministry explain what changed in it's thinking? Much more work needs to be done, but why is getting clean drinking water no longer a key priority? Why was the next tranche funding cancelled?(Page PA-245)

Answer:

- The First Nations Water Tie-in Program (FNWTP) budget maintains the original commitment for \$100 million over six years.
- Alberta Transportation continue to work with Indigenous Relations (IR) & Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to determine the feasibility of additional projects under the program.
- Current program funding is allocated/identified. As of 2018-19, \$45 million of program funding was spent, \$14.6 million in 2017-18 and \$30.4 million in 2018-19. The balance of \$55 million is allocated over the remaining four years of the program and will be spent as progress is made.

Accessible Transit

15. Ms. Marie Renaud

Question:

My question is around performance measure 3(a) on page 41 of the annual report. The methodology notes that “transit ridership is reported by the Canadian Urban Transit Association,” but the data doesn’t include specialized services such as handibus or paratransit. I’m wondering if the department can provide some information about what metrics are used to monitor what is accessible and what the metrics are to determine success or not. Also, further down it notes “that nearly all conventional transit routes are designated [as] low-floor accessible.” I’m wondering if the department can provide more information, some numbers around what “nearly all” means. (Page PA-245)

Answer:

- Performance measure 3(a) refers to the percent of Albertans that have access to public transportation services.
- The percent of Albertans that have access to public transportation services is calculated by dividing the number of Albertans that live within a transit system service area by the population of the province.
- Alberta’s transit system operators report their service area population to the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) based on local standards.
- Some transit system operators use 400 metres from a bus route to be their standard for determining their service area.

Accessible Buses in Alberta

- In 2016, the CUTA’s Alberta members reported that 99.67 per cent of Alberta’s transit fleet was accessible. This includes 2,382 accessible low-floor buses and 8 non-accessible buses.
- A vehicle is determined to be accessible if it can accommodate the safe transition of a mobility device and includes proper designated mobility aid emplacement.

Yellowhead Trail

16. Ms. Sarah Hoffman

Question:

My question is about the Yellowhead. I'm hoping that we can get a response in writing about progress made on the Yellowhead initiatives over the 2018-19 fiscal year and how those relate to the annual report as we move forward.

(Page PA-245)

Answer:

- We are continuing our commitment to invest \$241.6 million towards upgrades on the Yellowhead Trail in Edmonton. The City of Edmonton is leading the freeway conversion project on Yellowhead Trail with a total estimated cost of just over \$1 billion.
 - Land acquisition is \$277.9 million (funded by the City of Edmonton), with the remaining \$724.8 million funded equally by the three levels of government:
 - Federal Government (\$241.6 million)
 - Provincial Government (\$241.6 million)
 - City of Edmonton (\$241.6 million)
- The City of Edmonton and the Federal Government are contributing their funds in the earlier phases of the project.
- The provincial funds will start in 2023-24 during the latter four years of construction.
- Once these payments are made to the City of Edmonton, they will be reflected in the Department's future Annual Reports.
 - The Yellowhead Trail is owned and managed by the City of Edmonton. As a result, the provincial funds will be provided once claims are received from the City and construction progress has been confirmed.
- Based on the City of Edmonton's website, the progress made on this initiative in the 2018-19 fiscal year was for planning and design work.

Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP)

17. Mr. Lorne Dach

Question:

I have another question about STIP funding, strategic transportation infrastructure program. In 2018-2019 many projects were under way. I'm just wondering if those projects ended up being completed, or are some still under way? What's the value of that STIP funding in 2018-19, rural versus urban, the breakdown of that, and the jobs created in '18-19 under those STIP program projects? (Page PA-245)

Answer:

- STIP provided \$22.5 million in grant funds to municipalities in 2018-19. In that year, 76 projects were active and 39 were completed. Urban municipalities (small cities, towns, villages, hamlets, summer villages) accounted for seven projects for \$2.7 million grants and the rural municipalities (counties, municipal districts and improvement districts) received \$19.8 million for 69 projects in 2018-19.
- The grants contributed to approximately \$36.7 million in total project spending. The number of jobs created in 2018-19 under STIP projects is not known.

Rural Bus Pilot Project

18. Mr. Roger Reid

Question:

Related to the rural bus pilot project: at the conclusion, how will the department judge its success, and what performance measures were selected at the beginning of the pilot to guide the process? (Page PA-246)

Answer:

- The department will evaluate each pilot project at the end of the program.
- The department selected ridership and user satisfaction as the metrics to judge the success of the pilot projects.
- As part of the program guidelines, municipalities operating the pilot projects are required to provide the province with a quarterly update on ridership and a bi-annual update on user satisfaction, in the form of aggregated responses that are part of user surveys.

First Nations Drinking Water Follow Up

19. Mr. Garth Rowswell

Question:

a) There were 10 projects, as I understand it, that were under way in 2018-19 to bring clean water to the boundaries of 14 First Nations. I'm just wondering if they've been completed, and of course, then the federal government takes it from there. You know, I'd like to know: do they actually have drinking water, or has the water only gotten to their boundary? (Page PA-245, PA-246)

Answer:

- The program is intended to provide First Nations an opportunity to access safe drinking water from existing regional/municipal supplies, where practical and feasible; and where Indigenous Services Canada commits to on-reserve infrastructure.
- In 2018-19 there were 9 projects being pursued to provide access to safe drinking water to First Nations.
- Of the 9 projects:
 - One is currently providing regional water (from the West Inter-lake District Regional Water Commission) to two First Nations, the Paul Band and Alexis Band,
 - Three of the nine projects are under construction or near construction to provide water for the Whitefish First Nation, Dene Tha First Nation, and Cold Lake First Nation,
 - The remaining five projects are being planned or considered, e.g. in the planning, feasibility, or design phase.

b) Then, also, how many other First Nations don't have clean drinking water in Alberta? I'd like to find that number out as well. (Page PA-245, PA-246)

Answer:

- The First Nations Water Tie-In program is intended to tie in First Nations to regional water systems where practical and feasible.
- The Federal Government monitors the quality of water in First Nations throughout the country. This information is found online at:

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660> .