



**PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR  
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

Second Session  
Fiftieth General Assembly

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**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on  
Government Services**

April 26, 2024 - Issue 14

Department of Transportation and Infrastructure  
Public Procurement Agency

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Assembly  
Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA

## **GOVERNMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and Public Procurement Agency

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Chair: Lucy Stoyles, MHA

Vice-Chair: Loyola O'Driscoll, MHA

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Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA  
Scott Reid, MHA  
Lela Evans, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Bobbi Russell (A)

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Appearing:

### **Department of Transportation and Infrastructure**

Hon. John Abbott, MHA, Minister

Cory Grandy, Deputy Minister

John Baker, Assistant Deputy Minister, Air and Marine Services

Greg Clarke, Assistant Deputy Minister, Infrastructure

Justin Garrett, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Corporate Services

Keith Maynard, Departmental Controller

Mark Vardy, Manager of Budgeting

Bradley George, Executive Assistant

### **Public Procurement Agency**

Hon. John Abbott, MHA, Minister

Heather Tizzard, Chief Procurement Officer

### **Also Present**

Hon. Elvis Loveless, MHA, Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture

Jim Dinn, MHA

Eileen Anderson, Government Members' Caucus

Daniel Blackmore, Official Opposition Caucus

Steven Kent, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Elvis Loveless, MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Lela Evans, MHA for Torngat Mountains.

The Committee met at 1 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

**CHAIR (Stoyles):** Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to our Estimates Committee for this afternoon.

We have a couple of substitutes. Replacing Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's, is Minister Loveless. In place of MHA Evans, we have MHA Dinn.

So we will start the meeting, and it will be the same as every other one: 15 minutes in the beginning and then 10 following. We ask everybody to wave your hand and wait for the tally light to come on and say your name.

The water coolers are behind and bathrooms are outside the door. If there is an independent coming, we've agreed to give them 10 minutes at the end. Right now, I don't see any independent Members.

We're going to ask everybody to introduce themselves. Then we will give the minister a couple minutes for opening remarks and we'll move into the subheadings. So let's start off by having everybody introduce themselves.

Loyola.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Loyola O'Driscoll, MHA, Ferryland.

**D. BLACKMORE:** Daniel Blackmore, Sessional Support, Opposition.

**J. DINN:** Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

**S. KENT:** Steven Kent, Research Assistant, NDP Caucus.

**E. LOVELESS:** Elvis Loveless, MHA, Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

**P. TRIMPER:** Perry Trimper, MHA for Lake Melville.

**E. ANDERSON:** Eileen Anderson, GMO.

**S. REID:** Scott Reid, MHA, St. George's - Humber.

**H. TIZZARD:** Heather Tizzard, Chief Procurement Officer, Public Procurement Agency.

**J. ABBOTT:** John Abbott, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**C. GRANDY:** Cory Grandy, Deputy Minister, Transportation and Infrastructure.

**J. GARRETT:** Justin Garrett, Assistant Deputy Minister, Transportation and Infrastructure.

**K. MAYNARD:** Keith Maynard, Departmental Controller, Transportation and Infrastructure.

**G. CLARKE:** Greg Clarke, Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure.

**J. BAKER:** John Baker, Assistant Deputy Minister for Air Services and Marine.

**B. GEORGE:** Bradley George, Executive Assistant to Minister John Abbott.

**M. VARDY:** Mark Vardy, Manager of Budgeting, Transportation and Infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** Again, thank you all for coming this afternoon.

Before we go to the minister, I ask for a motion to move the last minutes.

**S. REID:** So moved.

**CHAIR:** Moved by MHA Reid; seconded by MHA O'Driscoll.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Against?

Carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

**CHAIR:** All right, Minister Abbott.

**J. ABBOTT:** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks, everyone, for coming out on this sunny Friday afternoon. So we'll see how we make out and if we get home by supper hour, and that the Member for Ferryland and I can drive home, nice and safely, together on the Southern Shore Highway.

As minister responsible for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and the Public Procurement Agency, I want to provide a few remarks prior to the review of the Estimates. I'm going to start this afternoon with the Public Procurement Agency.

I'm pleased to highlight, as announced in February, the release of two new, innovative procurement strategies: one, the Newfoundland and Labrador First Procurement Strategy, which will help maximize the success of provincial suppliers in obtaining government contracts and support supplier development; and the second, the Sustainable Procurement Strategy, which is focused on embedding sustainability considerations in procuring goods and services across government entities.

I look forward to continuing to work with the agency this year, as it continues to modernize and provide oversight of public

procurement towards achieving best value in government purchasing.

Now, in terms of Transportation and Infrastructure, building on the work of my colleague and former minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Minister Loveless who is here this afternoon, this year we'll see the continuation of record-level investments in provincial highways, roads, education, justice and health care facilities.

I'm pleased to report that while we may have had to transfer funds between program areas to respond to emergency priorities throughout the past year, the department was able to live within its means. Last year, the department spent \$1.3 billion of its \$1.4-billion budget.

This year's budget, *Budget 2024*, includes \$1.1 billion for infrastructure, generating close to \$600 million in economic activity and creating hundreds of new jobs for the province's skilled tradespeople. In addition, infrastructure investments include \$288 million for upgrades to our provincial highways and road network, as part of our commitment of \$1.4 billion over a five-year period, starting last year.

We're allocating \$77 million for the operation of the ferries across the province, with \$29 million for marine service infrastructure. We're allocating \$41 million this year and \$146 million, over the next three years, for new schools in Cartwright, Kenmount Terrace, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's and Pilley's Island, as well as \$50,000 to begin planning for a new school in Paradise.

We have \$11 million allocated to advance work on the Cardiovascular and Stroke Institute at the Health Sciences Complex, replacing the St. Clare's Mercy Hospital and a new long-term care centre in Bay St. George.

We've allocated \$8 million to advance the new mid-size theatre in downtown St. John's. We've allocated \$6 million for the ongoing redevelopment of the Martin Gallant Building in Stephenville Crossing, which will house the Provincial Court and some government offices.

We've allocated \$15 million, over two years, to enhance such things as open-air courts, video conferencing, new cameras and program trailers at Her Majesty's Penitentiary, and \$8 million to continue work to replace Her Majesty's Penitentiary.

This year, you will also see a new line of business for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, as we welcome staff in student transportation and school facilities from the former Newfoundland and Labrador English School District. We're delighted to have them join the department as we work together under the NLSchools brand to better serve our K-to-12 school system.

With that amalgamation, *Budget 2024* also includes \$18 million to phase out the 1.6-kilometre rule to access school busing in the K-to-12 school system and \$30 million, over the next five years, to renew the fleet of school buses.

Throughout the Estimates, you will notice a trend across all lines of business within the department. This is, of course, the rising cost of goods and services. This past year, we continue to see general labour rate increases and high fuel prices, driven by inflation and supply chain issues.

I'm pleased to report that the department absorbed these pressures without impacting service delivery or our commitment to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through our Provincial Roads Plan, through our public building projects, through our marine services and our waterbomber and air ambulance services.

Our staff, across all areas of the province are to be commended for their professionalism and caring. As minister, I cannot achieve my objectives, on behalf of government, without them.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister Abbott.

We have to call the first set of subheadings, first. I ask the Clerk to do that, please.

**CLERK (Russell):** 1.1.01, Public Procurement Agency.

**CHAIR:** 1.1.01.

MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you.

What is that cause of the salary increase this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Just bear with me for a second and I'll get my book on the way here.

So the increase reflects the departmental salary plan, including basically our negotiated salary increases.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

What services were purchased last year under the Professional Services expenditure?

**J. ABBOTT:** Under Professional Services, we would have provided in terms of – I'm just getting my notes here – some consulting services related to procurement opportunities and legislative issues.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you.

What services were purchased under the Purchased Services expenditure?

**J. ABBOTT:** Under Purchased Services, also then in terms of looking at some

advertising, copier rentals, facility rentals and those kinds of things – printing and consulting services.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

And what caused last year's shortfall in the provincial revenue? Can we expect a similar shortfall this year? And if yes –

**J. ABBOTT:** Basically less than in terms of public auctions. So it would be depending on when we sell off government assets and then the revenue would come in, and it is less. So depending on what we're doing any one year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

I just have some general questions now: Can we obtain a copy of the minister's briefing binder?

**J. ABBOTT:** Absolutely.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Are there any errors or omissions included in that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Not that I am aware of.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Not that you know of, okay.

That will be it for this section.

**J. ABBOTT:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

How many people are currently employed in the Public Procurement Agency and how many vacancies are there currently?

**J. ABBOTT:** Heather, I'm going to ask you to answer that.

**H. TIZZARD:** So we have 42 positions; 32 are filled, with 10 vacancies right now.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Has the agency undertaken any audits of the NLHS in the past year and would you be responsible for looking into their use of travel nurses?

**J. ABBOTT:** The answer is no and no.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I guess you have announced the innovative public procurement strategies, but I am just wondering how much are you reducing the use of bid bonds for local bidders, and how much will this change affect the ability of local companies to compete?

**J. ABBOTT:** I'll get Heather to sort of build on this, but we're really not changing that process to any great extent. But what we were trying to do is where there are multiple tenders in by one supplier, we would then amalgamate or minimize the requirement for them to have multiple bid bonds.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

How many audits of municipalities have you completed in the last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** None.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

That's it.

**CHAIR:** That's it.

Seeing no other questions, I'll ask the Clerk to call the subheading.

**CLERK:** 1.1.01, Public Procurement Agency.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subhead 1.1.01 carried.

**CLERK:** The total.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Public Procurement Agency, total heads, carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Public Procurement Agency Estimates carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Public Procurement Agency carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** Moving forward – that was a fast one – I'll ask the Clerk to call the next set of headings, please, for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**CLERK:** 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

**CHAIR:** 1.1.01 to 1.2.04.

MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Just going back to some general questions, I'll ask them in this section.

Is there an attrition plan being followed and, if so, what are the changes for last year and this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of attrition, there is no new plan. We have committed on the plan that was in place, so we've reached our target of 27 positions over two years, ending in '21-'22.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

How many people were employed in total in your department?

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of employees, as of March 31, we had 2,394.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Has there been any retirements since last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of retirements, last year we had 62 retirements and, if I will go ahead, we had 61 additional that would be eligible this year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Any vacancies in the department?

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of vacancies, we have 257.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Is that difficult to fill or just what causes that?

**J. ABBOTT:** I think the correct or simple answer is yes, in some areas, but we're actively making sure we pull out all the stops to do that. We're looking certainly in the engineering side. We're competing obviously with other sectors and the private sector in particular, but we continue to attract, others move on, so that's one area.

In terms of our highway equipment and maintenance area, that's a particular challenge as well, and we continue to advertise and recruit. We'll just continue to focus on that, because we need those folks in place.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, for sure. Some of those mechanics, I would say, in some of those depots, obviously the wage issue, it's hard to keep them. Of course, that's a contract or a union issue, but is there a way to classify them differently to be able to keep those?

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of the collective agreement, we'll sort of dictate, but for what we call hard-to-fill positions and we're not competitive with the market, then we can go to Treasury Board to get what we would seek with the market adjustment to allow us to attract and recruit individuals.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Have we done that along the way? Like, I'm using technicians only because you know, in the depots, it's hard to keep. So have you done that to try to retain or get – because some of the people in the depots where I'm am are fairly old. The people will soon be retiring. They've retired and come back, retired and come back. I know one guy – so I know it's hard to fill. So have you gone to –?

**J. ABBOTT:** So that's something we're looking at, but I can speak to a case in point. Last year, in our water bomber service with pilots and folks on the ground, we did just that and we were able to retain those employees.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** It's important for every depot to be able to service your own equipment, if you can, but sometimes you can't because of people. Have any positions been eliminated?

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

How many layoffs have occurred in the department in the last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** No layoffs.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No layoffs. Okay.

How many new hires took place in the last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of recruitment, we filled 119 positions.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

How many contractual and short-term employees are in your department, like 13-weekers?

**J. ABBOTT:** Now, I'm going to see if I've got that. I'll just go through it pretty quickly here. We have 261 seasonal, 674 temporary, 29 contractual and 110 13-week employees.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, 110.

Did your department receive any funds for the contingency fund and, if so, what was that for?

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** On to section 1.2.01, Salaries. This year there was \$84,200 more. Is this for a new position and, if so, what is the position for?

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of on our salaries, the increase was due just to the collective agreement and general step increases.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Last year there was \$55,200 less than was budgeted.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, we had a vacant assistant deputy minister position.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 1.2.02, Salaries.

**J. ABBOTT:** It would be the same thing, either collective agreement or step increases.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Operating Accounts, Transportation and Communications, you anticipate \$69,500 in additional spending. What would be the reason for that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Can you just repeat the account number?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** 1.2.02, under Operating Accounts, Transportation and Communications.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay.

So in terms of the overrun from one year to next, we had increased WorkplaceNL costs. Though we are covered by the workers' comp legislation, we direct pay and we had an increase in that expenditure. Then we're not obviously anticipating that to continue into next year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Under 1.2.04, Land Acquisition, \$3.5 million was spent last year.

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of land acquisition costs, we had obviously reached some additional land settlement claims that got finalized in the past year, and that was the reason for the increase.

Normally what we do is put, I'll call, a nominal allocation of \$500,000, because we're never sure from one year to the next when we're actually going to reach a settlement and then, when we do, we transfer funds in from other accounts in the department. If we didn't have those, then we'd go to the contingency.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Do you anticipate any land acquisition this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, because we're in negotiations on a number of land transactions. One, obviously, that comes to mind is certainly for land to allow us to proceed with the Team Gushue Highway in the Goulds and that area, Brookfield Road and Kilbride.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All right.

I have some more general questions. What steps are the government taking to increase the efficiency of road and damage repairs so that the road damage is not left unrepaired for months on end following the end of a snowfall? Have you got any plans?

**J. ABBOTT:** Under my former minister, he started an asset management program. So we've allocated now \$15 million to do just exactly what you're saying. We have our supervisors and superintendents in the regions identify work that can be done and to maintain so that we retain and support that asset – the highways, the guardrails, the signage, what have you.

That started under his tenure, and it's really ramped up last year. For those who noticed – and I think there was a comment made just even the other day – we've got some guardrails and signage already in place this year, because weather was good and we were able to get the crews started to get that work done.

So that's one area that I want to focus on, while I'm in this portfolio, is to do more of that. So we get on top of it earlier and it will sustain that bit of highway for a longer period of time.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Well, I can tell you I witnessed that this morning. They were doing a sign on the end of Witless Bay Line when I dropped off my daughter and they were putting up new signage there. That was one of the ones that was gone. There was one put up in Long Pond – I noticed it this morning on the way out.

They were doing it yesterday and I noticed this morning on the way out that there's a new tourism sign that's up for a new business and I seen the guardrail has been done. So I do see that action certainly happening in my district.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, and what I'm trying to instill is, look, this is an asset like any other asset, that needs to be maintained. If we own it, we've got to make sure it's presented well to the public, and the motoring public in particular, so we're going to build on that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, it's always good to see them out at that stuff.

Were any provincial buildings acquired or divested by this department in the last fiscal year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Nothing acquired, and I don't think we disposed of any that comes to mind. We only have actually a very small number, surprisingly, and we're looking at that right now to see, for the few that we do have, can they be used for affordable housing. If not, we'll put them on the market for disposal.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

How many leases is the department currently paying for?

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay, now that I don't know offhand. Greg, do – no, I shouldn't say Greg.

**OFFICIAL:** No, that's missing (inaudible).

**J. ABBOTT:** Missing ADM.

No, I don't see it. We don't have that right here, but we'll get that for you.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, no issue with that.

**OFFICIAL:** It's online. We can proactively disclose.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** What's the total value of the assets held by your department?

**J. ABBOTT:** That's a good question.

That would be in our Public Accounts, but I don't have that number here in front of me.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, you'll surely get that, though? I'm sure you'll get it.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Does the government have a full complement of water bombers along with aircrew and support staff available for the upcoming fire season?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, we do.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, that's good to hear.

Does the department have a formula for determining when a building or other large asset is beyond reasonable repair? Do you have a formula that you use to be able divest that? Is there something that determines that?

**J. ABBOTT:** We certainly know in terms of our asset and the condition it's in and their replacement, it's not a rigid formula in that sense but we certainly look at the use of life of that.

In terms of our building and maintenance, we, again, are very active and proactive on the maintenance side so we can, obviously, keep the buildings and extend their use of life as possible. I mean, the Confederation Building is now one of our oldest buildings that we maintain, and we know what the challenges are there. So we continue to do that, and you'll see on the Estimates the expenditure we're making for all of our buildings.

The other thing, just as I mentioned in my opening comments, we've also now brought in the school buildings under our jurisdictional responsibility, so we're going through that particular exercise now to determine the condition those buildings are in, what work we need to do to keep them up and running, and safe and secure buildings as well.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You're going around doing inspections, is that what you're saying?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so we want to know and do a baseline and know, then, what work we need to do. We had some money added into our budget this year because of that, so we'll have some funds to start that exercise.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So the money, you're saying, is for inspections? It's for people to go out and do those inspections, and do repairs too?

**J. ABBOTT:** And to get the work done.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All right, perfect.

Are we using more private contractors/garages right now, compared to other years?

**J. ABBOTT:** No more than usual, no.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Is that something that you think you'd be trying to get away from and hire more people so you'd have less?

**J. ABBOTT:** It goes back to the earlier comment on retention, certainly, of our mechanics, as a case in point, the condition of our fleet. One of the things we're also doing is expanding investment in our fleet of trucks and plows and what have you.

We have a five-year plan to reinvest which, again, the predecessor was successful in starting. The more we do there, the less, obviously, we need to rely on the mechanical work, so we're keeping that in mind.

If you look at what we had done in the past year, in this past winter, we've had to use both a combination of our own crews and private garages to make sure our plows were up and running.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** When do you determine when a piece of equipment is no longer, I'm going to say, suitable or able to do the job?

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, it's depending on our mechanics' judgment. I don't hesitate in saying that we have equipment on the road that we are just keeping together, taking parts from other pieces of equipment just to keep the truck going, keeping the plow going. That's why we've invested and we are accelerating a replacement because we are at that tipping point that we can just no longer sustain it. Of course, we've had to take a few plows off the winter, at the most inappropriate time, i.e., a snowstorm.

So we recognize that, and that's where we're focused on making sure we minimize that downtime.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Another, I guess, general question: When do you start to take the plows off? We've had a couple of snow falls lately. When does the plow actually have to come off?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so April is sort of that month of changeover. So we get ready – our plows are ready, but that's the change month. Usually about the middle of April, we're starting to – I'm not going to say park them but do that changeover.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I know there's a piece of equipment in Tors Cove, a 1993 grader. Are there any plans to replace something like that, that could probably be transported to all depots, I guess, along the way?

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, as you mentioned the other day, we were down to the depot and I know the state of some of the equipment there and elsewhere. The challenge we've had, we had a budget last year we weren't able to fully expend because of supply chain issues. We've got things on back order. I thought we were going to have a bunch of new equipment this winter; it just didn't arrive. It is planned to arrive now over the next couple of months. So we're going to be

in a much better position next winter and the winter after and the winter after that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

**CHAIR:** All right, thank you.

We're going to move on to MHA Dinn now, please.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

With regard to infrastructure related to schools, I'm just trying to get an idea of what the department will be responsible for now. At one time, I know, depending on what the infrastructure was about, whether it was building a new school, doing major renovations, it could be something that belonged to Transportation and Infrastructure or it could be something that would be funded by the department. I can think of some schools where they did wholesale renovations, removing windows and the like. And some infrastructure improvements would be taken on by the district. So there are sort of three pots of money.

Are all infrastructure upgrades now part of Transportation and Infrastructure or are there pots of money for the department and NLSchools?

**J. ABBOTT:** It's all now concentrated in our department. So from nuts to bolts we're responsible.

**J. DINN:** Would that also apply to the Francophone school board?

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

So they would have money that they would be responsible for?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**J. DINN:** And by extension then, would there be infrastructure money that's, say, in the Department of Education that would be for certain projects as well?

**J. ABBOTT:** For maintenance and those kinds of things. Obviously, if there was anything larger than that, then that would involve our department.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

You mentioned the St. Clare's Hospital. Is there a report that detailed the condition of the hospital that warranted it? I know people talk about it's 100 years old. Well, the one part of it that is 100 years old is the white house on the corner of St. Clare and Lemarchant.

**J. ABBOTT:** That's right, it'll be 90 years old.

**J. DINN:** Actually, it was built in 1922. But the newer wing, the last time a wing was opened up was in 1972. Which, if I remember correctly, is about six years before the Health Sciences was opened. So there's not much of an age difference between that and – so I'm trying to get an idea, if that's the case, I guess in another eight years we can expect to replace the Health Sciences complex.

I'm just wondering if there's a consultant's report, something detailing the deficits and what –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, there is the health authority, or Eastern Health at the time would've had their report done on, I'll call it, the deficiencies in that under their standard reporting. So that would be the basis of which, all right, it's time now to replace that building.

Those reports are done in Health for each of their facilities. Of course, in St. Clare's there are different wings, so one wing would be a little bit better off than the other, than the

other. So it was recognized that it was time now to reinvest there.

When it comes to the Health Sciences, there have been, over the years and continue to be as we speak, reinvestments in that facility and expansions. We're redoing the emergency room right now. Every time we're adding a piece on, whether it was the Bliss Murphy centre, the Janeway, their systems were kept current for that day and that continues. So when we talk about the Cardiovascular and Stroke Institute, one of the things that we will also be doing is upgrading systems in the Health Sciences so those buildings can merge quite successfully.

**J. DINN:** I look at Holy Heart High School, which was built in 1958, so it is older again. It has been added to, but it has had improvements. I'm just wondering even in terms of whether a new hospital or start with tearing down the white house and adding on that section – would that have been a cheaper option? Especially if it's a downtown hospital, which services many people in that area.

**J. ABBOTT:** No, I understand your question. I think the assessment was in terms of the planning and certainly in the detail – and the deputy minister is very intimately involved in that – is looking at the standards of services, the standard of technical and medical equipment in that replacement would be very costly. That was the issue we had out in Corner Brook with the Western Memorial. Do we – quote, unquote – repair or replace?

That analysis and debate went on for several years and then the final analysis is that we will build new and then we'll have a longer term life for that facility.

**J. DINN:** So the analysis would be or should be with the NL Health Services?

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, the work they've done in terms of whatever the deficiencies were and

then I don't know who did the final math on repair versus replacement and any other factors there – I wouldn't accept that we would be able to do anything further on the St. Clare's site. But that's me speaking as the non-engineer, because that is a very cramped space. We have parking issues as an example, and we've got issues around where the population actually is. Because St. Clare's is, in my vernacular, more of a regional hospital.

**J. DINN:** It is.

**J. ABBOTT:** Same as the Western Memorial and it is intended to serve the general population, whereas the Health Sciences is a tertiary centre to serve the whole province for the higher end services. So that's a factor as well, as to who we're serving and what services we're looking at.

The other part – and I don't know how well known this is in the public – we're looking at as part of the replacement of St. Clare's, that we're replacing the Miller Centre. So that would be combined in that new building.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Just back to school infrastructure, who would decide the priority for building, let's say, school infrastructure projects? Would it be NLSchools or the department? They would send it to you and you would decide which ones are actual priorities. I'm just wondering how that process works.

**J. ABBOTT:** So as we would with any, I'll call it, tenant – because that's how I am sort of seeing the Department of Education now as a tenant of a school building that we own and operate as it were. So they will make their request to us, as they determine a new school requirement. They have determined, based on the demographics and whatever, they needed the new school, they do the analysis and then they will make the request to the department. We will then do the technical and architectural and design and

those things, come up with a costing, bring that to Treasury Board and/or Cabinet, depending on the step in the process. Then we take it from there.

**J. DINN:** So it wouldn't come down to, whether it's the department or NLSchools, here's the priority of the infrastructure we need. You do the analysis and we find out, look, even though, number one, it is a priority, we don't have the money for it, but we can do priority two or three. Would that be the process?

**J. ABBOTT:** There's an interactive process at the end, yes, just based on financial considerations if nothing else.

**J. DINN:** Okay, fair enough.

Are we getting any closer to seeing a feasibility study for the Nain airstrip?

**J. ABBOTT:** That is, I'm going to say, in progress. Really, the Nunatsiavut Government is the driver of that particular project.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

What has been the impact of inflation on our financial obligations deriving from P3s? Are we now paying more under those agreements?

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, the agreements did contemplate that there was going to be cost increases as a result of inflation. There's a formula that was agreed to and then we meet our commitments under those, no different than the cost of our own buildings, to maintain them, are going up by 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 per cent depending on where we are in inflation.

So the positive thing of that for me, anyway, is certainty. Those agreements give us certainty of payments and then that works for all parties, I believe.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Is work on the War Memorial still on track and are the costs also projected to remain within budget?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, there's no choice in us being on time and on target for that but yes, that is coming together quite nicely.

Thank you.

**J. DINN:** And projected costs are still within budget?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Would you be able to provide us with the next steps in the procurement process for His Majesty's penitentiary and how would you ensure the best value for the money, given that there was only one proponent?

**J. ABBOTT:** Obviously, we had sought a request for qualifications. We got one proponent. We did our due diligence on their qualifications and they have met our requirements. We have engaged them, now, in the next step as to then how we look at finalizing a design and a costing for the facility, and that will be an iterative process, but we will be fully engaged in that.

Once we are satisfied we got the right design and the right costing, we will bring that to Cabinet for approval. Assuming approval, we will enter into a contract with the proponent and then we'll seek construction start from there.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You did say that the Miller Centre is going to be in the new St. Clare's as a combined unit?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Well needed for sure.

Is there any update on the talks regarding the fixed link?

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, same answer as last year.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Can we get a breakdown of the fleet purchases this year, and heavy equipment and light-duty vehicles, I guess?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, we can provide that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

The 24-hour snow clearing: Why won't the government reinstate that prior to what it was in 2016?

**J. ABBOTT:** There are two factors: One is based on need, and the other is based on cost. We determined that is not needed. But when we do need 24 hour, and we do on some routes – and when I say need, that's for the province as a whole. We do recognize there are certain routes that do need and should be provided, and we do that. There are, basically, 12 routes we do there.

We are always assessing if we need to expand that. Then if there are exceptional circumstances, we're able to call out the crews to continue to other routes and incur, if need be, overtime. That's the operating premise right now.

If we were to do 24-hour snow clearing across the province, as I think you've suggested in some of your public comments, we've costed that to be roughly an additional \$51 million on top of our current expenditure.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So you cut it to save \$1.7 million and now you're saying it's going to cost \$51 million?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, but the \$1.7 million was just on the pilot for the 12 routes back in 2015-16 period. But to –

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So the 12 routes are no longer –?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, they are. So we continue to do those 12 routes, but if there is no snow, then we will not have that crew on overnight. If there is snow, i.e., on the ground, that we need to have a plow, then we would provide 24-7. So we look at the forecast, determine if we need 24, and we'll do those on those 12 routes.

But if we were to do, as I said, all routes for the province as a whole, it would be an additional \$51 million.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So we look at some of these storms, and we know that they start 3 in the morning, 4 in the morning, do we have this set up – or your managers or your department superintendents, do they call them in at 2 a.m. or 2:30 a.m.? I mean if you call them in at 4:30 a.m. or 5 a.m., or they come in at 4:30 a.m. or 5 a.m., and they've got to clear – and I'm just using my district because I know where it starts and I know where it ends.

If you come in, they've got to cover all these roads from 4:30 a.m., by the time they're all done, it's not very quick for people that are going to work. If you're just covering the main road, then you've got side roads in some of these communities, and then of course you've got some communities doing their own, but there are some of these that are not cleared for a long time. So I'm just wondering what the plan is there.

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, I certainly understand your question. We balance that in terms of how often, when, what crews we need, when we need them. Based on forecast, then the crews will be ready. If we need to bring them in, based on whatever reason, we would bring them in. But we leave that then to each of the superintendents in the

area to make that call, because obviously it varies right across the province.

So we're comfortable with our current approach but, at the same time, when I say that, we keep monitoring and make sure where there can be improvements. I think with the new equipment and whatever, that will definitely help us.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** We met with a community and I know that you're trying to get those communities to take over those roads. I mean, some of these roads that we're trying to clear in some of these small communities, these big trucks can't get there –

**J. ABBOTT:** No. Agree.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** – and we've got to have the proper equipment to get there –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. And we're working on that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah. Because some of these roads, these trucks can't turn around. They've got to back a long distance; there are no turnarounds for them. So, I mean, it's something that we have definitely been looking at. I think you could save yourself some money by having these big vehicles – and I'll use private contractors in my community that are doing it, that the council or whatever they hire, and they're not going around with these big trucks, but they're clearing the roads really well.

I'm not saying the other guys are not, but they're big, big equipment and you've got to have certain equipment, I'm sure, but it's something that –

**J. ABBOTT:** The 550 trucks that we've talked about, they're a good example which would be more efficient, more cost effective to do those.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I would think so.

**J. ABBOTT:** So we've got a lot of those on order and, eventually, one will find a way up the shore.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Perfect.

How many roads did you carry over last year, Minister, from last year's roadwork?

**J. ABBOTT:** How many projects?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, how many projects?

**J. ABBOTT:** I don't know the answer to that offhand. But we do have costs, but I will get that for you.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, no issue there.

How much construction capacity exists to get the Roads Plan done this year? I mean, you've got a big announcement and obviously you're trying to get it done.

**J. ABBOTT:** Fair enough.

So we just had a meeting with the road builders' association there and they're gearing up. They're a month ahead of schedule, in some cases. So the weather has been conducive, that they can start getting work done. We're optimistic – and that's the only word I can use right now – that we will be successful in getting most of that work done.

We're dependent on the private contractors and suppliers. So that's one of the things that we're focused on. We're going to make sure, in terms of our contracts with each of the contractors, that they meet their requirements. And if we, dare I say, have to pull a contract because of lack of performance or delayed performance, that is something I'm prepared to do and retender to those who can do it.

It's important that we get this work done and I think the association certainly sees it the same way.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I've emailed your office and you gave me an answer on the Witness Bay Line: four kilometres this year and the rest next year to finish it off. I think I clocked it off this morning and it was 9.7, say, as an example.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, 10.1.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, 10.1. You are right on the button when you said it started at 5.7 because they clocked that off the last time I came across.

So why do it in two years? It's a question for me because I don't understand that. Like, you're doing, say four, kilometres this year, four next year. Is that somebody who bids on that for the first four kilometres this year, separate from a tender next year, and why bring back the same equipment – it may be a different group, but you're paying costs twice. I'm just wondering is there something that –

**J. ABBOTT:** It really boiled down to how we allocated the budget right across the province. Some of these projects, we can break them down over two years, and really it was a mathematical challenge. We only had \$288 million, but obviously the requests and analysis supported it for more work. So we brought it down and then we sat down and said all right, how do we do this and then allocate that.

Now, that being said, depending on how certain contracts and work gets done, we can change that during the season. So we'll measure that. Because if we find that a certain piece of work is going to get delayed over here, then we'll say can you come over here and, to your point, can we now finish off that part.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Right. I'm looking at it going up as far as Trepassey, as an example, or wherever the construction is. They're two hours taking it there and all the equipment has to go on floats and then it all has to go on another tender next year, so

you're doubling it – really paying for it twice, if it is different contractors. That's the only reason I ask. I could see you spreading it out, trying to give everybody so much, but that was certainly a question.

**J. ABBOTT:** You have other colleagues that are clambering for your pavement.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah.

Can I get an update on the Team Gushue Highway and where we stand? When you mentioned land acquisition, are we still looking to purchase land for that now even though –?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. We have the tools to expedite that, if need be. But we finished in time, we're putting out the tender and we'll see construction start this year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Do you still need to purchase more land for it?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, there is still some that we have to finalize, but that won't stop us from the work we have to do this year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** How long do you think the process – as the two curlers had said, they'd love to see it finished. They were down there at an Uber announcement and they asked them about the Gushue Highway. When do you think that we're going to get this finished?

**J. ABBOTT:** Basically two construction seasons, maybe into the third.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Does the minister have any update on the asphalt studies that were done and what is the work on them and what's not, I guess?

**J. ABBOTT:** It's a timely question because we're right in the midst now of conducting, with the road builders' association and others – because there's been some comment and perspective on how the

asphalt and the contents, shall we say, of the asphalt and how good or bad it may be in the province, at different points in time, different seasons and what have you. So we've agreed to do an independent study of that, look at what other jurisdictions are doing as well, and then determine if we need to make some change in, basically, the configuration of the asphalt itself so that we get the best result.

We have seen some of the changes we made in the past couple of years, that the durability of the pavement has improved and we want to be able to build on that.

**CHAIR:** Your time has expired.

We're going to move back to MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

Just with regard to following up on asphalt studies, has there been anything – I don't know if this is part of the study – to look at the composition in terms of – I know in some jurisdiction there is like breaking up old tires and using that in the aggregate and increasing durability. Was there any studies or projects done or –?

**J. ABBOTT:** That would be part of that. I think we'll say Newfoundland is unique in terms of the geography but certainly the environment in which we're trying to operate, and particularly on the East Coast. Central and West Coast do not have the same issues as we do, say, on the Avalon in terms of how best to lay pavement, as it were, in terms of what pavement we put down.

So part of the study now is to bring all these factors together and making sure that the industry and ourselves see this the same way.

**J. DINN:** Now, mind you, I guess most of the roads, if not all the roads in my district, are taken care of by the city, more or less, so I don't come to look to you for asphalt;

but with regard to ruts and the wear and tear, I notice on the highway most of you will see the wear and tear going up hills. There are still ruts there but is there a part of the study where you'll also be looking at the use of studded tires, or has that been seen as a problem?

**J. ABBOTT:** I don't know.

Cory?

**C. GRANDY:** It's not in the scope.

**J. ABBOTT:** It's not in the scope but it may be a factor. We don't think it's to that degree. It is the roadbed itself. Do we construct that properly?

Secondly, the pavement we put down is the right formula, as it were, and then who's using it. That's why we have the highway inspection site, because there are certain loads that cannot be or should not be on our highways and, as well, at certain times of the year.

So we're beefing up that enforcement and we're working with Digital Government and Service NL. They are putting in new updated systems so that we can build up that side of the operation because that's the biggest concern: the use and overuse. We'll put that in our analysis as to then what roads we do, when we do them and how we do them.

I know the Member for Ferryland talks about rutting on the Southern Shore. If you look at when that was done to where we are today and the amount of traffic, yeah, you're going to start to see rutting because of just the use of the highway itself.

**J. DINN:** At one time, people would blame it on the transport trucks, but really the ruts are just the right wheel width for cars more or less, right?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**J. DINN:** I don't know if it's the roadbed, but I've seen the top section taken off where you're down to the next level as such, but it seems to stop there in some cases. So I'm just wondering if it has to do with the tires.

Also when it comes to fixing washouts and that on this side of the road, and even the ruts – I think of my sister who came home a few years ago, struck a pothole on the West Coast coming out of the ferry, which could have turned the car over, but did some severe damage.

But I often look at the washouts. They're not just small ruts; they are major ditches almost. For people at night, if you're not familiar with the road and you pull over, it's going to – I'm just wondering, when they get washed out, what is the timeline to fix them? How do you fix them? Because, in many ways, maybe rather than just put more gravel there, maybe put a sort of run-off. I'm just –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So our supervisors in any of the regions then are responsible for identifying those deficiencies, for the sake of a better word, and then they will do remedial action right away as to what they can do, and we will then look at what else we would need to do if there would be major repairs. So if it's a culvert kind of thing, we'd make sure we bring that into play.

That's why our summer maintenance program – and we were able to start earlier this year because of the weather, starting to roll things out – is to identify those potholes, those ruts, whatever we can fix. If not, we call in a larger contractor to do that work.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

Is there any plan, like in terms of the reflectiveness of the centre lines – they wear out and after a while, especially in a wet night, it gets harder to see. Sometimes if you're a novice driver, determining where you should be. But even into, sort of, the cats' eyes, it's sunken into the road.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. We haven't been doing that. I just had a conversation earlier today on the painting of the lines and making sure they're done as early in the season as possible. We are, again, changing the formula of the paint. One of the things is we went from oil-based to water-based, so you can imagine that's – so how do you sustain that in our environment?

So there are different approaches here, and we're building on that so we can improve – I think Cory was telling me earlier, making sure we add fibre to the paint so that adheres and it will stay longer. And if you notice going outside the city and inside the city, there is a difference in that regard.

So we're constantly improving our processes and we're looking at what other jurisdictions are doing and then bringing those into our jurisdiction.

**J. DINN:** No, I guess painting the lines is futile if it barely lasts half the year. In the city you see that; you're driving on roads without markings.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Is it possible to provide us an overview of how the department chooses which projects will be selected as part of the Roads Plan for a given year? As you said, there are people clamouring for the pavement. And how does the priority get determined and by whom? How does public consultations fit into the process?

**J. ABBOTT:** I'll say, in its simplest form, we will have our department's roads engineering folks look at – and they are doing this on a constant basis anyway – identifying all of the roads in the province, what work needs to be done. So they're going to look at any safety issues. They're going to look at average daily counts in terms of traffic. They're going to look at amenities, looking at economic

development implications, access to schools for school busing. They're going to look at access to hospitals.

So they'll score all of that and then that will help us start to then prioritize in the department. We will then have discussions or input from MHAs on all sides of this, because we get lots of representations from them. Community mayors and town councils, we get lots of representations from them. Also, through our public consultations this year, we actually got the best response in terms of numbers this year because we went out directly through a press release and put that out there that we're looking for input. So we got that from the motoring public, as it were.

We put all that together and then a set of recommendations are presented to me. I will debate with myself and others on how we finalize that, and then we make that available to the public.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**J. ABBOTT:** The guiding element, obviously, is how much money's been allocated. And then our priority is the Trans-Canada Highway, then our secondary highways, other provincial roads and then community roads. Then we've carved off money for our asset management program to make sure we do repairs ongoing. We've allocated money for brush cutting and we've now, this year, allocated some money for, we call it, moose fencing, to protect the public as well.

**J. DINN:** I know there's talk about twinning the Trans-Canada Highway, but in many cases, too, here we've had several examples where a washout has just basically severed the Island portion in two, and maybe even Labrador when you look at it. But is there any plan to address that? Even to have diversion routes that would address that problem so we don't find ourselves cut in half?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, we don't have any particular plan with respect, as you're suggesting, but we do know where our vulnerabilities are. We obviously keeping conscious on our major bridges and culverts. We had a case there last fall out in Central Newfoundland which came close to what you're describing. But then with our own resources and any contractor resources, we'll be on site right away, put in an alternate side route to get vehicles moving, fix whatever needs to be fixed and then we're back in business.

Based on a lot of the rainfalls we've had on the West Coast, unfortunately and fortunately we're actually having a lot of experience with this and we're able to mobilize very, very quickly. When we know there's going to be a heavy rainfall, we make sure we know what assets we have in place. We'll make sure, in the private contracting community, what assets they have. So we'll put them on notice that we may need to and then they'll come to the fore.

The other thing what's important is that we do have culverts and those kinds of things in stock to make sure they're available as well. That's what we're seeing is that our culverts are going to have to be larger and we're seeing that. And when we replace we're replacing, because of climate change, to have a much higher standard than what we currently have.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you.

Just a couple of questions. He had touched on one there, the paint for the highways. You said it's now water-based, it was oil-based?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** And you're changing it to?

**J. ABBOTT:** We're at water-based, but we're adding now fibre to the paint to make it more resilient and more visible, and it lasts longer.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Lasts longer, okay. I had spoke about that the other day.

Also, on some of the highways –

**J. ABBOTT:** That's what prompted me to ask the question, internally.

Thank you.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Oh, is it? Okay. Well, that's good. All good.

They did some roadwork up in Trepassey area last year. Before that was there, and even if you drive up now in the nighttime, they got just a small stick with a deflector on it and that helps people in the fog, especially with the lines fading and the yellow line not so evident.

But I'm wondering if you look at that on barren grounds or barren roads or, like, Witness Bay Line, as an example – I did have somebody call me, asked me, it's so foggy trying to stick handle around all the pot holes that if you had deflectors – it's hard to paint that with the way the sides of the roads are in there on the Witless Bay Line. If you would consider maybe, with the construction that's there – it's not a big expense, I wouldn't think – to put deflectors every so often that gives them an advantage in the nighttime with fog.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay. We'll take that under consideration for sure.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Is there an issue with pavement going on the concrete bridge? I'm not an engineer, so I'll use the Harbour Arterial as an example. Every time you drive over that, it seems like every three or four years, the pavement is coming off the

concrete and we can't seem to get that – I'm not an engineer, so I ask the question because it's something that comes up fairly often. They are tearing it up now, so I'm just wondering something –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, fair enough. No, good question.

I've had the same one of our engineers, but I'm going to ask the engineer to respond.

**C. GRANDY:** So with your specific question around – I think you made reference to the Viaduct downtown?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yes.

**C. GRANDY:** So, I think, on that particular asset, we've been focused on the rehabilitation of the bridge structure itself, and that's a multi-year project. Because of that underlying work, we haven't been putting a whole lot of emphasis yet on the deck. That will be the last step in that process.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Even bridges in general, like, a lot of times we see the pavement coming off the bridges for some reason. We've got a different climate, no question, than Florida or anywhere else. They sort of seem to use concrete. I always thought about it, but then with salt and sand and studs, would concrete last.

So it's just something that came to my mind and I just thought I'd ask that. I'm not an engineer, again, so just something that maybe I can get an answer.

**J. ABBOTT:** No, and I actually have had the same question and had discussion around that. It needs, in my view, anyway, certainly further examination. In the United States, for instance, so their Interstate Highway System, when they built it – I might be overgeneralizing here, but I think I got it pretty correct – it was all concrete. But, in recent years, they have gone to pavement.

But when it intersects with the bridge and pavement – because when we talk about can we just resurface, put pavement on top of pavement, it doesn't last. It doesn't adhere. My non-engineering view would be I think we probably have a similar dynamic, pavement on the concrete. But that's something we're going to definitely have to explore further – good point.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Well, they are general questions that everybody sees when they're driving. Grooves on the road – and I heard the MHA here say – that's something that we look at. You might have just answered my question because we do it in the city. We scrub up so much and then we put back so much, replacement. Like, some of these grooves that are in the road – you know, we drive it in the morning – it's not something that you can not take all the pavement but scrape so much and repave, because it's not going to stay.

**J. ABBOTT:** You've got to rebuild the whole road.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You got to build a whole road.

Listen, I asked the question to why we wouldn't do that on Witless Bay Line to a fellow that has a big construction company. He said: Loyola, you stick to sports and stay away from stuff you don't know anything about. So that was his answer to me. I thought we could go in and recap it, but that doesn't work.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. Well, good advice.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** That was good advice, it was.

**J. ABBOTT:** Good advice, Member.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I took it very clearly. But grooving, obviously, if you drive through Terra Nova Park, they seem to have more thickness on their pavement than we do provincially. Is that false or is that correct?

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No? It's the same thickness?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, but they contract us to continue, I'll call it, a high standard, in terms of maintenance and repair.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** From the federal to the provincial?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so they'll pay for that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Oh, okay.

It's not something that we adopt; it's something that they ask for in their provincial parks.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Can we get an update on the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway. Was any work actually done this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** No. What we've spent some funds on, which was mentioned, is we've hired some consultants to help us determine how best to proceed.

One of the things that we're considering is that it would be a P3 project, so we need to get our analysis and homework done on that. We haven't made a final decision on that at this point, but we're also looking at the routing and high-level design aspects of that because we've got a lot, as anybody that's travelled there knows, of roads that go off that into different communities.

So we've got to figure out what would be the most appropriate routing for that and then try to cost that before we go to the next step.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Is there a detailed time frame that you're looking at here?

**J. ABBOTT:** We're looking to get that work completed in very, very short order, you know, this spring. Then based on that, as minister, I would have to go to Treasury Board and Cabinet to determine what route we will go, whether it will be the standard tender build – we design, then we tender and build and pay or do we do a P3. And that's something that we're definitely actively considering.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You're considering P3 for maintenance and operation?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, but as I said, publicly we have not made any final decisions on that, but I did want to be transparent that we were considering that so that those who are interested and concerned know that. If they had any views or perspectives, I'd certainly wanted to hear those.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I would think in throwing in consideration if some company – if you do happen to do that, and some company gets it, what if they no longer exist in two years and now you're stuck with it. So that's something I'm sure you're considering in your thoughts. Hopefully that doesn't happen. We're not looking for that to happen.

During your budget in 2024, you reannounced money for schools. Has government identified any land, let alone purchased it for, you know, the one in Kenmount Terrace? Have you got land?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You have land applied for that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Done already?

And how much are you going to spend this year, realistically? Are you starting ground work. Are you –?

**J. ABBOTT:** We're calling tenders this year. No, we do have an amount budgeted there –

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah.

Can we get an update on the timeline, and how much for that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay, we'll get that for you. We don't have it in our details in our note, but we do have that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

So we'll follow up. We'll send you an email on some of the notes we need, for sure.

I had a question here, as something that I put there – summer maintenance. I know that you have the time of year that there are layoffs that come from the summer, with their hours –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, we're in that period now.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Any consideration to be able to get some more, whether it be brush cutting, guardrails – I see that you're doing. Some of the guardrails, I'm sure, are contracted out. Are you doing any yourselves as a depot, as a department?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. We want to make sure when we allocate the work for our depots, what they can handle based on the crews that they have, and the focus being on the roadwork, the roadbed, the pavement, the shoulders and all of that. Then, it's do they have time to do the other things. So that's why, through our asset management piece, we're looking at this a little bit more systematically now, because we want to make sure that each element is addressed holistically and that we're not just piecemealing this forever.

So that's why we said let's make sure we've got contracts out for guardrails, so make sure we've got that done, make sure we've got the signs done, let's make sure now we

get the shoulders done and let's make sure we get the pavement done.

We're looking at that, and our crew out in Clarenville have that responsibility. It's paying dividends already.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Responsible for the whole Island in Clarenville?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, for that piece.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** For that piece. Okay, that makes sense.

In regard to, like you said, roadbeds that time, when they're doing something, whether it be ditching – and in my district, in certain areas, they've been doing a great job. I've said that to you before.

But, obviously, when they go to do it, they're going to need a backhoe. They're going to need a superintendent. They're going to need flag people on each end. Do you hire out flag people or do you use your own workers? Is that something (inaudible)?

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, depending on if it's contracted work, they provide.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** They provide, yes.

**J. ABBOTT:** If it's us, we will do that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So you need five people, basically, to do a job whether it be ditching or –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So we have doubled, like our brush cutting, for instance, budget this year. I've heard loud and clear that's a big issue. I know it is. We've allocated another \$2 million on top of the \$2 million we normally spend and then we're doing the moose fencing on top of that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

Your time is up and we're going to move on to MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, would it be possible to provide an update on the Municipal Capital Asset Management framework, what types of projects it will cover and will it be binding on all municipalities?

**J. ABBOTT:** Greg, do you want to answer that one?

**G. CLARKE:** The asset management framework is a framework that our department supports, but it's not a framework that we lead ourselves. We have provided funding and collaborated with Municipalities NL and the AIM Network – I can't think of the full name of that acronym – to develop tools to help communities identify their own infrastructure priority needs.

Communities use that tool to identify the projects that they prioritize in the applications when we issue an open call for applications, but we don't do our own independent asset management work ourselves for communities. We support them doing it themselves.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Are there any plans for money to be spent by the department to enhance existing municipal transit services or for towns to create their own, or even to look at feasibility, whether regional transit? I think PEI has been talking, at least, about bringing about rail. I'm not suggesting that we're a go, but at the same time, like rail, anything along a regional –

**J. ABBOTT:** Certainly, one of my particular interests, as Minister of Transportation for the province, is to facilitate enhanced urban transit and community transit. The question – and I've had some discussion with the councils here on the Northeast Avalon on that. That is sort of high level or conceptually, and I was anticipating that, in the federal budget, based on some discussions we had a year ago with the

federal minister, that there would be funds made available to jurisdictions to do just that and then we could mount something that's significant, whether it's here on the Northeast Avalon or elsewhere in the province.

In the absence of the federal funds today, then, as I know it anyway, we're going to have to be careful what we do here, because my concern is raising expectations that we're not going to be able to deliver on. So I'm going to, in the very short order, sit down with the City of St. John's, as an example, who run Metrobus, and have a further discussion with them as what is possible from their perspective on the Northeast Avalon and what kind of investment would be required.

My sense from the communities that I've talked to is they're interested but, likewise, who's going to – quote, unquote – pay for it. So we've got to figure that out and then when you get off the Northeast Avalon, we've got just challenges, I think cost per resident, cost per community. In the Department of CSSD, they were making funds available for local community seniors' transportation, providing some start-up funds for buses or supports and what have you.

So we've got pockets of that around the province. At least we have it. It's not perfect by any stretch. So that's where I am. I've got to sort of now re-engage, knowing that there's no federal money likely, what can we do as a province and with the municipalities concerned.

So, as you can appreciate the cost, because it's going to require buses and systems to put in place there.

**J. DINN:** No, I appreciate that. I'm just thinking in terms of looking at an overall plan. I would assume you probably know where certain roads are going to go as well at some point, but an overall plan with that.

You mentioned the city in terms of busing – and I asked this in the Department of Education as well about the school busing in terms of using Metrobus, partnering with Metrobus within the city or within their jurisdiction. So when it comes to high school students, it could be just a simple case of here, get on the bus.

For primary and elementary, maybe it means putting someone to be on the bus with the students or it could mean – I know in some jurisdictions where they have it, where the bus will change its route according to the people who want to get on. I guess, one of the few options, you could easily work with Metrobus to say we need a contract, here are the bus routes, what can you do to help us with that. Is there any –?

**J. ABBOTT:** There hasn't been any, I'll say, formal conversations with the city that I'm aware of, but that's something, again if we talk about an urban transit – quote, unquote – plan, say for the Northeast, that's where obviously my focus and bias might be, that would be something you'd want to factor in there. Of course, school busing standards and approach versus city bus standards and approach are quite different, but that's not to say you can't align in certain areas. So I hear you on that, for sure.

**J. DINN:** Any plans to electrify the vehicle fleet?

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, we are having conversations with Environment and Climate Change officials, what are the possibilities there. The deputy minister and myself and a few others, with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, did visit the electric bus plant just outside Montreal.

So we just wanted to see what was, in fact, doable. We've talked to PEI who introduced a lot of electric buses and trying to learn from their experience. Because, I'll say, new technology, it's probably less than technical than it is a new way of doing busing as a

driver or as a rider, what people's acceptance of that technology will be.

We're going to start introducing electric buses. We haven't really figured out the when and where, but we have that on our radar and there is some federal money that is available to us if we go down that road.

**J. DINN:** I'm not just thinking buses, but I'm thinking your own vehicle fleet, whether it's snow clearing whatever and vehicles within

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, we'll be considering that, I'll call it, in future. I don't think we're going to be the innovators on that. We will wait and see what happens in other jurisdictions and then build on there.

**J. DINN:** Okay. Thank you.

With regard to 1.2.02, are there any particular contaminated sites that are prioritized for a cleanup over the coming year?

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**J. DINN:** No. Thank you.

In the same section, Transportation and Communications, the last year's Revised value was \$22,000. Under this year's Estimate, it was increased by \$47,500.

**J. ABBOTT:** Mr. Dinn, can you just tell us that account number?

**J. DINN:** Sure. That's 1.2.02, Transportation and Communications. Last year's Revised value was \$22,000 under Budget and this year's Estimate has increased by \$47,500.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, I think we're back to the normal budget on that. I'll just pull it out there, 1.2.02. Sorry, bear with me there.

Based on our historical trend there, we have moved money in from other accounts into that budget. We spent less in the previous

year because of reduced postage. That, again, was largely to reflect inflation in that area.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under that section as well, the revenue – actually, I'm going to jump to 1.2.04, Land Acquisition. Forgive me if we've already asked. Property, Furnishings and Equipment: Last year's Revised value was \$3 million over Budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** I'm going to apologize again, Jim, if you could just repeat that.

**J. DINN:** Yeah, sure thing. 1.2.04.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. Property, Furnishings and Equipment?

**J. DINN:** Yeah, it was \$3 million over Budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** Again, as I mentioned earlier, we put in a placeholder for that budget of \$500,000 because we're never sure, in any one year, what settlements we will reach. In this case, there were some claims from previous years, including last year, that we were able to settle to the tune of \$3.5 million. Then we're back to the annual allotment until we figure out what else we're doing.

So, for instance, we are purchasing land down adjacent to the War Memorial, that site there. So that would've been reflected – or will be reflected, I should say.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Back to the brush cutting. Of the budget that you had last year, how many kilometres did you get done out of it? Is that generally the same figure every year, roughly?

**J. ABBOTT:** I don't have that, but we can provide that to you. I don't have it here in front of me.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, perfect.

**J. ABBOTT:** Because we do measure it and cost it.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah. Because it would be nice to know what your costing was, and how much you get done each year.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, and we did actually over two million; we found some savings and put it into the program.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Sometimes previous years, if somebody was doing some pavement and there's another kilometre they do, they'd add on. So I wonder if you do the same thing for brush cutting, that you could allow while they're there.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, we do.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Too bad, you were in the area last year.

Just to go back to the fixed link. Is that a dead issue now? I mean, there's no update. Where does that sit?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, it's not a dead issue. Again, we have the prefeasibility studies and what have you, and costed. I've had some conversations on it with interested parties since I've been in the portfolio, but we won't be moving on that until we get a signal from the federal government that they're ready to move. We haven't heard anything from them since their statement of over a year ago when they put it in their budget.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

For the penitentiary – and I am jumping around a bit – is there any land that you've got allocated for that now? Is there a spot – ?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes. So it's down in the White Hills.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** In the White Hills, okay.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, in the Pleasantville area.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You had a contract a few years ago, so is that something that you go back on, for the land itself, or –?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, because the land was provincially owned.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Provincially owned land. Okay.

Was there any preparation done on the initial construction part?

**OFFICIAL:** Minor site clearing.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, just some site clearing.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

How many outside workers are employed right now for our capital projects? Do you know that number?

**J. ABBOTT:** Just in terms of the employees, let me just – bear with me for a second.

We have 362 in, what I'll call it, our infrastructure building areas, so that would be inside, outside.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Do you have any updates on department's work to address issues identified in the AG's report for the *MV Veteran* and the *MV Legionnaire*?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. Right now, the *Veteran* is on dry dock, and we're doing an extensive bit of work there, required by Transport Canada. We'll be replacing the engines as well. They're not being done

right now but they will be. Then, once the *Veteran* is finished later this fiscal year, the *Legionnaire* will come on and will be undergoing the same type of repairs and new engine.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So there's a new engine going in the *Veteran* now –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. Will be.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** – and that's in the process. Okay.

Any current operational breakdown related to the history of that kind of stuff, like lack of operation manuals, poor training, familiarization training for crews and stuff?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, there's no issue there. We are well serviced there.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

In regard to – we ask this question all the time in the House of Assembly – when you're doing these roads and who gets what, you've got your five-year plan; does that change year to year? There are some going to go off this year and more move up. The ones that you add on, do they jump up in the list or do they come to the end of it?

**J. ABBOTT:** It's sort of a variation of that. Some, we move up, some will stay in place and some might drop down. Again, as things change, priorities do change – and that's the strength and weakness of a five-year plan. I know my predecessor talked about that, is the criteria you use, and when you use it and then things change, opportunities present themselves, communities change, the politicians involved change, so it all comes to bear.

It was commented by one of our Members across the House here that the Premier is no more involved in this other than an MHA. The Cabinet approved the funding. My job was to come up with the plan. We took all these variables and tried to come up with

the best plan for this year, with some projects ready to go for next year and then, over the winter, we'll finalize next year's full complement of projects.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** And some MHAs going out promising some pavement when it's not in your project doesn't make it easy for you either when they're on the election campaign, I guess.

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I got a question on the Robert E. Howlett extension. That was a plan years ago and there was a petition that I have done maybe once or twice. I'm just wondering if that's still going.

**J. ABBOTT:** It's not on my list of things to do.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No, okay.

What about our breakwater in Trepassey?

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay, so we've stepped up. We're going to work, obviously, with the town to see if we can make sure we get this done right for the long term. So we'll work on that. The engineers are involved in that as we speak.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Is there a timeline on that? Not really (inaudible)?

**J. ABBOTT:** We're trying to get that done as soon as possible, but again, it's getting this right and we'll make sure we'll fund that then.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

For the school in Paradise, you allowed \$50,000; what is that exactly going to do, for \$50,000?

**J. ABBOTT:** Again, a bit of a placeholder in that we've committed to doing the school. A

lot of the preliminary work would be done in the department, as it normally would be. So that is some additional cost for the department.

Once we've got our preliminary work done, then we'll put it out for design or design build as a tender. So that's really that work to get that in the position to tender.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Any land acquisitions for that yet?

**J. ABBOTT:** We're still working on that piece. So that has to, obviously, happen.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I mean, it is easy the problems that they have –

**J. ABBOTT:** We have some options and –

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Have you?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

On to water bombers. For years, we're going to sell number five. Where does that sit now?

**J. ABBOTT:** We're going to repair number five. and we're working on getting that work done.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

So obviously you still only have four operational now?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. And that's sufficient for the moment. But because of climate change and we've seen the forest fires, based on experience and, again, my predecessor learned and contributed to that discussion, that we are going to retain the fifth one.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So when you do send planes to help someone else, which is great that they help, if something breaks out here,

is there one left here or is there just a couple gone?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So our folks responsible for that, with the interprovincial committee – or that's not necessarily the right word here. But we will determine, based on our forecast and whatever, what we need, what we're prepared to offer up and then, of course, if things change on the ground here, they come back immediately.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah. You wouldn't leave it short without having one here.

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No, I wouldn't think so.

Is there any plan to get a swing vessel for the ferry fleet or rent the *Kamutik W*? I don't know if I'm pronouncing that right.

**J. ABBOTT:** So, no, but we are looking at our complement of ferries because of the age. That is some of the work we're doing now, and that would be built into that analysis. As we had to do this year, if there is a private supplier around, we'll use them to fill in as needed.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Was there an RFP for that contract or was it sole sourced?

**J. ABBOTT:** That one, I'll say it was sole sourced. They were on contract with us to do that Labrador service. We've asked them, because of our need for the Fogo service, if they would just extend that contract into the winter.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So the \$3.27 million in Purchased Services, we'll get to that one when I get into that section.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** That will be all the questions I have right now.

**CHAIR:** I see no more questions.

I ask the Clerk to call the subheads.

**CLERK:** 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

**CHAIR:** Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.04 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** Against?

Carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.04 carried.

**CHAIR:** I see we're over halfway through, so I'm just wondering about taking a break. I'm wondering if you wanted to take a 10-minute break before we move to the next section.

**J. ABBOTT:** I'm good.

**CHAIR:** You good?

Do you want to carry on?

**J. DINN:** I'm good, either way.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, I'm good, either way.

**CHAIR:** We will carry on.

I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheads.

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.5.03 inclusive, Operations.

**CHAIR:** 2.1.01 to 2.5.03.

MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** In 2.1.01 – and these questions are probably spread right across

the board and you can answer that when you get to it. I'm just wondering, it's a contract that you said – but last year you spent an additional \$231,000 in Salaries.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes. We had some additional leave to pay out for certain employees and then the increase for this year, over last, was related to just negotiated and/or approved salary increases.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Operating Accounts, Transportation and Communications, last year you spent \$475,000 more than was budgeted.

**J. ABBOTT:** The overrun was due to increased travel for our road maintenance crews and we had to transfer funds in from other accounts. It does vary from year to year, depending on the activity. So the more we do, obviously the more travel involved there.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You mean flooding and stuff that you had to go –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, exactly.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All that stuff, yeah.

Under Operating Accounts, \$42,300 in additional spending last year. I was just wondering why that was – under Purchased Services, sorry.

**J. ABBOTT:** Purchased Services.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Still under 2.1.01.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

We had some additional equipment rentals toward our road maintenance work.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Property, Furnishings and Equipment, can you explain the unbudgeted expenditure of \$38,600?

**J. ABBOTT:** We bought some additional office furnishing for the department.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 2.1.02, again Salaries, when you get there. There was a difference of \$833,400.

**J. ABBOTT:** We have a new collective agreements and general salary increases across the board. We had some vacancies in previous years that we intend to fill this year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Supplies, can you explain the additional spending of \$1.8 million in 2.2.02.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes. Mainly through the increased costs of our paint, dust controls, signage and what have you.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All right.

Under Purchased Services, can you explain the \$2.1 million in additional spending last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** We have a highway maintenance contract in Labrador, which is private, so we've had increased costs there because of inflation and other contract increases right across our operations.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 2.1.03, Salaries, there is an estimate of an additional \$1.47 million in spending this year. Are there new hires there? It might be combined with the previous part but –

**J. ABBOTT:** So one of the main factors was less overtime for our winter maintenance crews, and that varies from year to year, obviously. Then any subsequent increases from budget to Budget or Revised were largely due to the collective agreement and the salary increases in those areas.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I would say in all Salaries, in all sections, they're all for collective agreements?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Will this additional spending allow for the reinstatement of the 24-hour snow clearing?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, I'm \$50 million short, remember.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Do you want to think about that?

Under Supplies, what was the nature of the increase from \$31 million to \$38 million?

**J. ABBOTT:** So it's mainly, which is no surprise, salt and sand. As an example, our inflationary costs on sand went up 30 per cent in '22 and another 28 per cent in '23. Salt went up 23 per cent this past year.

That's from a budgeting point of view. So working with Treasury Board, that's when you'll see the numbers sort of move around a bit, because we don't have a base. We'll just go from base and then we'll move money in. We'll negotiate what the new base might be, because they want to hold on to the cash in the centre, but we have money in our overall budget then we have to move in as needed.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Budgeted to go up this year as well?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** What's the budget amount we're presenting –?

**J. ABBOTT:** We got a slight increase. We know we might need more. But, like I said, this year, we're in April, and we haven't had the same snow conditions as we've had obviously probably last April – I couldn't say for sure – but we won't know until the winter.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Purchased Services, there's an additional \$2.3 million spent this year.

**J. ABBOTT:** The Purchased Services there was again, as I said earlier, the maintenance contracts and general increases in other contracts to supply support across the province.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I don't think I asked this one, but how much has been spent on private companies, do you know, contracting? Do you have that number?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, I don't have that, but we'll get that for you.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** And what contracts may be in place; like, you must have somebody lined up for –

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, we have a list and all that. Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** – for each depot, I would think, or people in the community.

In comparison – and I'm going to say we probably had this – to the major municipalities – St. John's, Mount Pearl – highway equipment operators employed by department are paid significantly less. Is there some way that – that's a union contract, I know.

**J. ABBOTT:** So it's part of the challenge. One aspect obviously is through the collective agreement and negotiations there. So NAPE, in this case, would be negotiating with our Treasury Board folks in terms of appropriate salaries and anything else.

Where we run into individual challenges, whether it's a mechanic area or other, if we can make the case using your example that the market is 10 or 20 per cent higher and we've got a vacancy of 10 per cent or more for an extended period, then we can go to Treasury Board to ask for an adjustment.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I worked previously in the car industry, but I was in heavy equipment in construction. They competed against out West as well from technicians – not only from the Department of Highways, the private industry competed against those people. If they can't keep them, it's going to be a hard job for you to get them. Somehow, you've got to figure out a way.

The average age of a mechanic in TI got to be up there; you don't get young people in and try to keep them, I guess.

**J. ABBOTT:** We've had, not an extensive conversation with the president of NAPE and others on how we can make the work attractive, how do we get young folks in, how do you get high school kids interested in skilled trades such as mechanics. So that, and working with other colleagues in Cabinet, that's a concern for anybody providing a service, whether it's health care or education: How do we get young folks attracted to those professions? One is the training itself in excess; and then, of course, it's the pay and benefits that go along with that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah.

Under 2.2.02, Operating Accounts, Property, Furnishings and Equipment, why is that number increasing to \$35,335,400 this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Just bear with me.

So that's the additional loaders and other equipment that we were able to get a hold of this year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** How many pieces of equipment is involved in that? Do you know that number?

**J. ABBOTT:** I'm going to say 40-some-odd pieces.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, I remember a time when they came into where I worked before and there was a lot of heavy equipment.

They are loaders; is that what you're saying?

**J. ABBOTT:** And others, but the loaders are the primary ones, yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** And other equipment, okay.

Under 2.3.01, Provincial Buildings, can the minister explain the \$88,000 in additional spending in that category?

**J. ABBOTT:** What number, again?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** 2.3.01, Provincial Buildings, Building Maintenance, Operations and Accommodations. Buildings.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay.

That was just, again, inflationary increases on our supplies.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under that same one, under Professional Services, why was there \$7.1 million in additional spending last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Professional Services and you said the amount ...

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** It was \$7.1 million.

**J. ABBOTT:** Under Purchased Services?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Under Professional Services.

**J. ABBOTT:** It's not lining up with mine there.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Under Operating Accounts, sorry – well, it says Operating Accounts, Professional Services is \$7.1 million. It was \$56 million to \$64 million.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay, I'm sorry on that –

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Oh, it is Purchased Services, sorry.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, I got a difference of \$7.8 million?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. Sorry, I went ahead.

That's increases in utilities, electricity consumption, inflation on our contracts and we've had a significant increase in some of our private snow-clearing contracts, HVAC contracts and cleaning contracts, so right across the board.

**CHAIR:** All right.

Your time is up.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** So we're going to move on to MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.1.01, Supplies, last year's Revised value is \$77,400 over Budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** Can you mention that number again?

**J. DINN:** Sure thing. 2.1.01, under Supplies, last year's Revised value was \$77,400.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay.

We did some work and replaced a depot, and we needed some additional supplies for that depot.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.1.02, Summer Maintenance and Repairs – you've already referenced this several times with inflation and I am just wondering, has inflation started to eat into

your ability to conduct road maintenance and repair and, I guess, the plans then to address this going forward?

**J. ABBOTT:** So the answer to the first question is no, because we've transferred funds in to meet any of our commitments or needs. We're in regular discussion with Treasury Board on the pressures that we have. They recognize those, and it's what dollars they can free up to add to our budget.

So, this year, we got some additional millions of dollars to go towards inflationary costs and then we spread that funding out across the department. So that will help us. And then we just had to be conscious of our overall operations so that we meet our budget targets during the year.

**J. DINN:** From our conversations here, road maintenance in this climate is probably more challenging than most. Do we talk to other jurisdictions with similar conditions, whether it is here in North America or in other countries, about the challenges and maybe some of the innovations or approaches they've taken?

**J. ABBOTT:** Maybe I'm going to ask the deputy minister to comment on that, because there are different associations, committees and tables that do just that.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**C. GRANDY:** Right.

As the minister said, we're tied into various industry associations across Canada as well as FPT groups. I guess in the area of transportation, in particular, the Transportation Association of Canada is our biggest affiliation and lots of information sharing, certainly, through that association in terms of the various standards for everything associated with the transportation sector.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**J. ABBOTT:** If I may just add for a moment, recently, I guess it was February month, the federal-provincial-territorial transportation ministers met. We talked a lot at that level on the challenges we each face and they're very common.

Climate change, if you want to boil it down, was probably the one that is common to all, we focused on that and supply chain in terms of meeting the challenges of just getting equipment in place and making sure goods and services are in place, but on the climate change – and again we focused my discussion around Labrador – we are seeing that in real time. The Members for Labrador are here, we're facing that on the North Coast of Labrador, ice is either too early or too late and that impacts transportation.

It's going to impact our ferry service, it's going to impact our air services and it's impacting, obviously, moving people and goods and services. What are we, as jurisdictions with the federal government, doing to mitigate, the climate change issue, but in terms of on the ground, what dollars can the federal government free up to help us address that.

So when we're talking about the Nain airstrip, that's going to become a critical piece of infrastructure needed there. Our other airstrips, in my view, need to be extended so we can land larger aircraft because we're going to become more reliant on air transportation, literally, as the years move on.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.1.02: Have there been any changes in the past year to the road maintenance systems management in terms of how the roads get ranked in priority for repairs?

**J. ABBOTT:** Two things: One, as I mentioned, about the asset management approach so that we are doing a better job

of maintaining the road assets we have, and that is paying dividends, and then in terms of looking at the assessment of our road network, what we're doing is bringing a climate change lens to our infrastructure, getting out and looking at our culverts and our bridges, in particular, to make sure that they can sustain additional pressure from water in particular. We're making sure that, for instance, as I said earlier, we got a good supply of culverts in place, larger, better so we can respond on doing that. So we are trying to be proactive. Again, the more we do that, the better it's going to be for all concerned.

**J. DINN:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Under 2.1.02, Transportation and Communications, last year's Revised value was \$48,000 over Budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, again, as I mentioned earlier, that was for our road maintenance crews to go out to deal with different projects across the province. That does tend to fluctuate.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.2.01, general question: Would you department be responsible for the vehicles used by the Resource Enforcement Division?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Okay. Would it be possible to have an update on the vehicles used by that division?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Such as how many are in the fleet, how many are operational, their average age, and have a record of maintenance and inspection for each vehicle, along with the mileage and age, if that's possible?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, we can get that.

**J. DINN:** Okay, perfect, thank you.

Under 2.2.01, Salaries: Last year's Revised value was \$1.1 million over Budget. I don't think that one had been asked. This year's Estimates it's increased by a further \$347,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, in terms of from our Revised number for last year, the savings of just over a million dollars were due to the vacancies that we had, particularly in our heavy equipment technicians area. That's a challenge. That's where our vacancies are and that's a challenge for recruitment. Then any increases that you'll see were as a result of the collective agreement and just general salary increases across the board.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under Supplies: Last year, the Revised value was \$3.5 million, roughly, almost \$3.6 million over Budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. Mainly for increased fuel costs for both our light- and heavy-duty fleet.

**J. DINN:** Okay, wow, thank you.

Have you done any – to replace some of those light-duty vehicles with electric?

**J. ABBOTT:** So as I mentioned earlier, we're in conversations with our colleagues in Environment and Climate Change, because they're certainly wanting us to consider that. So what we're asking of them in that discussion is tell us what the technical standards, what the best practices are. We'll then take that and then when and where we can adjust, and we want to move to electrical, we will. We have a few vehicles. Nowhere near what they would like us to have for sure.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Under Purchased Services: Last year's Revised value was \$5.8 million over Budget,

this year's Estimate it was increased by another \$750,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so we focused on repairing and upgrading some of our equipment right across the province. We wanted to make sure that the repairs get done. So that's where we had to spend that additional money. Also, we got some long-term rental cost of some of our equipment and what have you and those were increased because of inflation as well.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**CHAIR:** All right, we'll move to MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** How much surplus government space has the department identified to be repurposed for low-income housing?

**J. ABBOTT:** Greg, you can help in here – I guess it was Dan who was working with it – we have identified maybe a half dozen buildings in the province that might be, at best. So we're getting ready to put out an expression of interest for those and to see if there's any interest. An example would be out in Carbonear, the old Interfaith nursing home. So that kind of the thing.

We have, surprisingly, very little excess government buildings because we did an exercise over the past number of years of reducing our footprint, reducing our leases and consolidate. So we're pretty tight on the ground right now.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under section 2.3.02, under Professional Services, what accounts for your \$3.1 million you budgeted this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Professional Services: Basically, we had a one-time savings that we did not spend as much money on consultants as we had anticipated and we put that money back in the budget for this

year, anticipating, because we have a number of projects that we're going to be doing both on buildings and new buildings, as well.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Purchased Services: Can the minister explain the \$5.3-million expected expenditure increase this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** That, again, we were able to get from Treasury Board, roughly an additional – depending on how you do the math, but I'm going to use the number \$10 million for our buildings, including schools. We've allocated that across these different accounts to allow us to work on repairs on our various buildings.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All right.

Can you provide a list of the existing facilities that would undergo maintenance this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Sure. That's sort of a work in progress, but we can identify some of the major activities, for sure.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** What you plan on doing for sure, yes.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** 2.3.03, Salaries: Why was there an unbudgeted expenditure of \$210,000?

**J. ABBOTT:** That program now is terminated, with the final payout by the federal government.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, eliminated. All right, that was a question there.

Was there an unexpended expenditure under Professional Services of \$80,000?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, we did some reallocating there because we had some unallocated expense to pay out.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 2.3.04, there was \$180,000 in spending Salaries last year and I'd like to know why.

**J. ABBOTT:** That's the same.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Same thing?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, same thing, one was the Operating Accounts, this is the Capital accounts, so the same issue.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Purchased Services: \$2.8 million in additional spending last year, I was wondering why that was.

**J. ABBOTT:** We have some projects that are carrying over and this is then the cash flow for those.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

I'm going to 2.4.01, under Supplies, \$213,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** That's for increased diesel fuel costs for our air operations.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Do you know how much they spend on fuel each year, for all your equipment? You must have that number.

**J. ABBOTT:** No, but we can get that for you.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I'm sure that's a number that's—

**J. ABBOTT:** Good contract.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** What?

**J. ABBOTT:** Good contract if you can get it.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Well, if you go across the Island, how much you burn in all your vehicles.

**J. ABBOTT:** I can't sole-source it to you, you know that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No, don't do that.

Airstrips: Can the minister outline if there are any repairs being conducted on airstrips this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** We will be doing some work up on one of the strips in Labrador, that's it. We'll be doing some low-level maintenance on some of the others that are around the Island.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Is the current arrangement still in place with the federal government on that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** It is.

**J. ABBOTT:** And there is an agreement in place, they will provide funding to upgrades. We're always after them for more money to do more work and working with the Nunatsiavut Government, as well.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Not to repeat, I'm pretty sure that the MHA had asked about the Nain airstrip. I thought I caught the last of it.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, I won't ask that again. If you answered it, we'll be able to get that.

Under 2.5.01, Student Transportation.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** How many more buses will be needed when the 1.6 is eliminated?

**J. ABBOTT:** We have that number here, just bear with me for a second.

The new buses, we will purchase 45 new buses that we operate directly and we have another \$6 million provided for the purchase of new buses, it's just normal turnover of our existing fleet.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So 45 plus another –

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, another 33.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Are they ordered now? Are they supposed to come in? Like that's going to come in next year, are they going to be here in time?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No issues to get them here, the same as vehicles, I guess.

How many school buses in the province's fleet are due to retire? Is that the 33?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, that's the 33.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So 33 coming out and 33 new going in, is that how that works, generally?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 2.5.01, and I'll go back to Salaries, \$1.6 million in additional spending. Same thing again, contracts? Seems to be the general consensus.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So in this one it's because of the hiring of new bus drivers to accommodate the change in the 1.6 policy.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All right.

Under Supplies, \$270,900 in additional spending this year, why is that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Again, that's related to additional fuel for the elimination of the 1.6: more buses, more fuel.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay. Yeah. All right, good answer.

Under 2.5.03, Property, Furnishings and Equipment.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** What will the \$14.8 million be spent on? I'm assuming ....

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. That's for the new buses and the replacement buses.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay. That's what I thought.

Okay, that's it for that section for me.

**CHAIR:** Okay, thank you.

MHA Dinn, do you have anything further for this section?

**J. DINN:** Yes, I do.

I'm just going to figure out where we started from.

I think under 2.2.02, Capital: How often do vehicles have to be replaced in the fleet and how much equipment will this budget amount buy?

**J. ABBOTT:** Jim, can you repeat that, I didn't hear it.

**J. DINN:** Sure thing.

2.2.02, Equipment: Just wondering how often do vehicles have to be replaced in the fleet and how much equipment will the budgeted amount buy?

**J. ABBOTT:** So we have a multi-year budget now for fleet replacement and, as I said earlier, we're in a back order sort of

situation. So we've brought on just over 40 pieces of equipment this past year; we have more to come for each of the next four years.

Obviously, we know that a lot of our equipment is past its best due date for sure and the folks in the field have been clamouring for new equipment for quite a while. So we'll then take the worst of that equipment off and replace it with new. By the end of this five years, we will pretty well have all our fleet replaced.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

I've asked this in other departments: Is there any use of drone technology or use of drones to help aid with the work, maybe even save some of the wear and tear on vehicles? I know in speaking to RPM Aerial, the work, not only just in the survey but the plotted plot points when it comes to road construction and everything else.

**C. GRANDY:** We still are doing a lot of traditional surveying, but we have begun to move in that direction. Just as one example, we're planning for the additional passing lane that's been announced on the West Coast coming out of Port aux Basques. That's one example where we have used drone technology to help map and survey that particular project.

So we're at the beginning of the curve but ...

**J. DINN:** Okay because I think they use LiDAR or whatever, individual plot points.

Okay, good. I'm just thinking in terms of the wear and tear, even driving around you can probably aid the people who are doing that work.

Revenue - Provincial: Why was no revenue received last year under 2.2.02?

**J. ABBOTT:** This was for money we would normally get from occupational health and

safety through WorkplaceNL. There were no claims against to get revenue from.

**J. DINN:** Oh, excellent. That sounds like a good track record then.

2.3.01, Provincial Buildings: Is it possible to have a list of the deferred maintenance for buildings and the estimated dollar value? Has the list been increasing or decreasing over a period of time?

**J. ABBOTT:** I'm not going to be able to supply that because we don't record that in the way you asked it. So what we will look at is identify any deficiencies in any of our buildings, address that and then, at the appropriate time, do a cost-benefit analysis and say: Are we at that tipping point where we should replace with new versus continuing to repair.

**J. DINN:** Okay, so there's no list of deferred maintenance.

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Under 2.3.01, Supplies, last year's Revised value was \$88,000 over Budget. Why is that?

**J. ABBOTT:** You said Supplies. One second.

**J. DINN:** Yes, \$88,000 over Budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes. That was just inflationary on our supplies.

**J. DINN:** 2.3.02, Alterations and Improvements to Existing Facilities.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** I'm just wondering how much money has been allocated this year for upgrades to the mechanical ventilation systems or HVAC systems in schools?

**J. ABBOTT:** We haven't done our final – our projects within our budget yet. We'll be sitting down doing that in the next couple of weeks and then we'll be able to answer that. That would be within the school system and would be definitely a priority.

**J. DINN:** Okay. You would also have a list of schools that probably don't have those updated.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**J. DINN:** Okay, perfect.

Under 2.3.02, Revenue - Federal, last year's Revised value was a little over \$78,000 less than expected. This year's Estimate was increased by \$5.8 million.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so we had the investment Canada infrastructure fund for different projects. So, right now, we are finalizing different projects and making claims against those.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Under 2.3.03, the Low Carbon Economy, is it possible to get an update on the current transition from fuel boilers to electric ones in provincial buildings? How many have been done and how many are planned to be done this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, we can provide that too.

**J. DINN:** Thank you very much.

In that same section, 2.3.03, Transportation and Communications, what was the reason for the unbudgeted \$23,500 spent?

**J. ABBOTT:** That was an unbudgeted expenditure, and then we just had to move money into that account after the year started.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Purchased Services: Last year's Revised value was almost half a million under Budget. Why is there no money allocated this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** The program is finished, so that answers the second question. The first one was that some of the projects were budgeted as Current and then had to be moved into the Capital account. That was why the drop there. You will see on the Capital side a corresponding increase.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

On 2.4.01, Airstrip Operations, Professional and Purchased Services, one was over budget. Professional Services was over budget and Purchased Services last year was under budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** So the increase for last year was we had a consultant hired to do some test stations for the registered airstrip to make sure it's still safe, based on Transport Canada requirements. The Purchased Services we used less rental equipment than we had initially budgeted for.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 2.5.01, Student Transportation, I'm just trying to get an idea of the total. I think in Salaries you indicated \$1.6 million was for hiring new bus drivers for government-owned or department-owned buses, correct?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Overall, the total cost of eliminating the 1.6-kilometre rule will be what? I've heard \$20 million, but last year when we were talking about it in the past, it was upwards of \$30 million. So I'm just trying to get an idea.

**J. ABBOTT:** So for our department, the additional cost now is \$18 million.

**J. DINN:** Okay and that includes those drivers and the buses, correct?

**J. ABBOTT:** I can just break that down for you, Jim.

\$8.4 million was to purchase 45 new buses to meet the need, \$1.6 million for the bus drivers and related other staff and costs – mechanics and admin – and then \$8.1 million for the contracted bus services.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**J. ABBOTT:** Cory just mentioned to me it was \$1.5 million in education because they had hired student assistants to go on the buses with some of the students.

**J. DINN:** Okay. So the total amount then includes –

**J. ABBOTT:** It's \$20 million.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

2.5.01, School Facilities is increased by \$353,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** That was just under the collective agreement salary increases that were awarded.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** All right, your time is up, MHA Dinn.

MHA O'Driscoll, do you have any other questions?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** I had no more questions in that section.

**CHAIR:** No more questions?

All right, we can put another 10 minutes on the clock for you.

**J. DINN:** I won't need that. Just one question, please.

Under 2.5.03, Loans, Advances and Investments: What was the purpose of last year's \$1.9 million spending and why is there no money budgeted for this year? I'm assuming the program has ended. That's under Loans, Advances and Investments.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so that was a payout. Under the school district, they had different lines of credits and loans for busses and the like, so with the integration into the government, we paid that out.

**J. DINN:** Thank you very much.

That's it.

**CHAIR:** All right.

Seeing no further questions, I ask the Clerk to call the subheadings.

**CLERK:** 2.1.01 to 2.5.03 inclusive, Operations.

**CHAIR:** Shall 2.1.01 to 2.5.03 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.5.03 carried.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings, please.

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 to 3.4.01 inclusive, Infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** 3.1.01 to 3.4.01.

MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Thank you.

Under Supplies, 3.1.01: There's an increase of \$705,000. I'm just wondering why?

**J. ABBOTT:** 3.1.01?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yup, under Supplies.

**J. ABBOTT:** \$705,000?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah.

**J. ABBOTT:** Increase due to providing new laptops and some new AutoCAD software for our highway design staff.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Professional Services, it increased \$3.71 million last year. Can you explain that?

**J. ABBOTT:** So that would be hiring outside consultants to help us for our bridge and overpass assessments, inspections and rehabilitation services.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So we now have a full up-to-date of bridges and all that stuffs done?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, and we keep that current.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Keep it current.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay. What do you mean by keep it current? You keep going back to do more every year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. Every two years we're – yeah.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Purchased Services, \$69 million when you started, then it went to \$42 million and now it's back to \$55 million. I'm just wondering what is happening there.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay. So in terms of the allocation last year – and this is Current account so part of that is – at times we budget in the Current account and, depending on the nature of the project, we may end up switching it over to Capital. So that would be one part of the reason. The other is we may not have gotten all the work done as we planned, and that was the case. Then the increase in 2024 is based on our Budget this year of \$288 million. That's each year of new work in the Current account.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Grants and Subsidies, it's up \$5 million. I'm just wondering why that is.

**J. ABBOTT:** So one of the reasons we've done that is that we want to – I've been talking to different communities about their ability and willingness to take on more work on our roads in their communities. We will provide them a grant to do that. So we budgeted more money this year to do just that.

So I've had a conversation – no surprise – for instance, with the Town of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, a conversation with the Town of Conception Bay South, the Town of Holyrood and others, if there's interest in taking over some of our roads in their communities, then we would make sure that worked for them financially, and part of that was if we need to provide them a grant.

We were also talking to some smaller communities because we're short on some of our summer maintenance or because we had to get everything done by June 1 or July 1, some of the communities came forward and said: Look, we have a crew, can we pay them to do the work? We said: Yes, if you're ready to take it on, then we'll provide you a grant to do that.

My interest is getting the work done and if somebody can step forward to help us get it

done, then we'll make sure that's financially feasible for them to do that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So some of these small communities – and, again, I'll speak to my district – obviously, you ask them if they can take over some of the roads or try to do some of their own maintenance or whatever. If they were to go do that, they'd be crazy to go in and take over their own roads unless they're up to a standard. No different than if I built a house down there and they needed the road to be upgraded, you wouldn't take over that and a town wouldn't take over that road until you brought it up to standard. That's how it works in communities.

**J. ABBOTT:** So that's definitely part of the discussion. We said everything's on the table. For those that are interested, then we're in a position to have those conversations. We've got a small unit in the department now to do just that. So we're just taking this slow and easy. This will be a multi-year approach.

What I say to communities: I know that the main road in your town is priority one for you. Unfortunately, it's not priority one for me because I've got 10,000 kilometres. So if you want to make that priority number one, then you're going to have to step forward to do that and we'll help you with that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** When you say the main road – I'll use Cape Broyle as an example – going through it.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, and it wouldn't be that kind of thing.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** You're not – not that one, what they consider their main road.

**J. ABBOTT:** I'll call it – yeah, the harbour road.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, I get what you're saying.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Under 3.1.03, under Professional Services, \$1 million was spent last year. I'm just wondering why.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, so the increase was, again, we've done external consulting services for the Team Gushue Highway and the Galway interchange.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Each year there are carry-overs, what capacity exists to get this work done? Is that realistic that you'll get all the work that you plan to get out this year? Normally there's so much carry-over every year you would consider.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, again, as I've said, they're already started in some areas to gear up for the construction season. So they're a month ahead. We've provided certainty now because there is five years of work at \$250 million to \$300 million-plus. So the industry now knows that they can invest in their equipment and plants and what have you because there's going to be some longevity.

So we're anticipating that they can now get more of the work done as we've budgeted because they're ready with their plans to do just that, rather than year by year. That's happened because we never knew exactly how much was going to be in any one year – \$250 million is a lot of money. That doesn't include some of the Team Gushue work, nor does it include the twinning project, when that comes on schedule.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** So when you contract out a section of road, I'll use, again, Witless Bay Line because we know that's hopefully going to be done this summer, do you have one of your employees that stays with a contractor to see that through for everyday work?

**J. ABBOTT:** No, not on an hourly or daily basis. But we contract out, the performance standards have to be met. Obviously, we will inspect that as it progresses and then if we're satisfied, we write the cheque. If we're not, they deal with the deficiencies, then we write the check.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, driving through some of the places last year, you would see a government vehicle there with a contractor.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, there might be an issue.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** They're just there checking something out.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, there may be an issue that's come up, a culvert or something, and they'll be onsite.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Yeah, okay.

Still under section 3.1.03, can you explain the federal revenue under this section?

**J. ABBOTT:** So they are related to, again, the Canada Infrastructure project fund. We budgeted \$3 million and got more because more claims were finalized. Then, the final amount is what's left over in terms of claims.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Under Purchased Services, the increase to \$185 million, I'm just wondering why that's ...?

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay, so this reflects the increase of our roads budget for this year. We've gone up to \$288 million from last year, around \$250 million, I believe. That reflects that increase.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, under section 3.1.05, under Federal-Provincial Cost-Shared Agreements, what is planned for this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** 3.1.05. So we've got – bear with me for one second.

I'm just trying to find my notes here now. That would include largely the Team Gushue Highway. It's the major project there.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 3.2.01, Purchased Services, you expect to spend \$723,000 more. Just wondering why that is?

**J. ABBOTT:** The Purchased Services there are largely for insurance premiums for the government buildings.

**CHAIR:** All right, thank you. Your time is up.

We will move on to MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I'm going to start with 3.2.01, Purchased Services. I just want to make sure – in last year's budget book the amount that was budgeted for 2023-2024 should line up with the 2023 Budget there.

You've got here a Budget for 2023-2024, \$6,345,900 and then the Revised was \$4.6 million. This year, though, I'm just looking at here, there seems to have been some discrepancy between them. I'm just wondering what the reason is for that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, the reason for that is we brought in the education school district allocation into our department and then it gets restated.

**J. DINN:** So it doesn't line up with last year's actual.

**J. ABBOTT:** No.

**J. DINN:** Okay, good enough.

**J. ABBOTT:** So you merge into this new number for both the Budget, the Revised and the new Estimate.

**J. DINN:** Okay, good enough. In other words, sort of like rewriting last years ...?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**J. DINN:** Okay, good enough. I just wanted to make sure. We had seen that in another one earlier.

Okay, on 3.1.01, when can we expect any further news on the highway to the North Coast of Labrador?

**J. ABBOTT:** There was a feasibility study done. That's in, I'll call it, near final draft. We will be sharing that with the Nunatsiavut Government.

There's been a fair bit of consultation with the communities. We just want the Nunatsiavut Government to review the report, provide us with any comment and then we'll release it.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

3.1.02, Federal-Provincial Cost-Shared Agreements, Professional Services: Last year's Revised value was \$590,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay, 3.1.02.

Which account, Jim?

**J. DINN:** Sorry, that's in 3.1.02, Federal-Provincial Cost-Shared Agreements, Professional Services.

**J. ABBOTT:** Oh, Professional Services? Okay.

Basically, what we've done is split out the amounts there. Basically, this funding here is for consulting services on different road projects. Again, some of that gets split between different accounts.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**J. ABBOTT:** So we'd start off with a number in the air and then once projects progress,

we reallocate the funding to the appropriate account.

**J. DINN:** I know you've referred to consultants in several (inaudible). Are they the same consultants or do we have a list of consultants?

**J. ABBOTT:** Depending on the action that is needed, whether it is bridge design, road design, marine, air.

**J. DINN:** Is it possible to have a list of the consultants?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

3.1.02, Purchased Services: Last year's Revised value was almost \$469,000 under Budget; this year's Estimate is decreased by \$1.1 million. What's the purpose of this line item?

**J. ABBOTT:** We achieved some cash flow savings on some of the projects this past year. And then the funding for the new Building Canada projects is completed, so this is the residual now for the last year.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

In that same section, 3.1.02, Revenue - Federal, why was no revenue received last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Again, this was a manner of claiming. Then, when the feds actually pay us – and, obviously, didn't cough up any money for last year, but it will now make a final payment in '24-'25. So part of that was an overestimation on our part at that time.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

3.1.03, Improvement and Construction - Provincial Roads, Capital, Salaries: Last year's Revised value was \$600,000 over Budget and this year's Estimate has increased by another \$1.1 million.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so the increase was due mainly because of just increased activity in that area and, again, what we broke down between Current and Capital. We ended up moving some money from the Current account to the Capital account, so it gets picked up there. Then, because of the overall increase in the budget for roadwork this year, we obviously had to bump it up considerably.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under that same section, 3.1.03, Transportation and Communications, last year's Revised value was \$4.1 million over Budget and this year's Estimate was increased by only \$168,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** This past year we had an unbudgeted contract payment and so we had to adjust our budget as a result of that. Moving in, then, to this year, this would be, again, because we're doing more work, we're going to be doing more travel by staff and others in the department.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Under 3.1.04, Trans Labrador Highway: Now that Starlink service is available between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Port Hope Simpson are there any further upgrades required to the communication infrastructure along the highway?

**J. ABBOTT:** We're going to monitor that based on the need. We're getting various times, you know, representation, but finding that solution with the Starlink has really made a difference and it was really a small investment.

But we're looking at the options of rest stops, those kinds of things as well to just make it safer for motorists.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

On the topic of rest stops just in general, you go to the certain provinces, and it's

Quebec I'm thinking of, they do have rest areas along the way just for pull overs. Any consideration in doing that?

**J. ABBOTT:** I thought it was called Irving Big Stop.

**J. DINN:** Not all. I know, but they are few and far between now.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, we don't have any particular plans, but I know what you speak. So, again, depending on what's happening as we develop the further work and the twinning and all those kinds of things, we'll bring some of those issues we have to bear on, but we don't have any plans to put rest stops, certainly on the Island portion, anyway.

**J. DINN:** Yeah, and just saying, when pulling over, rather than on the edge of the road.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, I know. I understand.

**J. DINN:** 3.1.05, Federal-Provincial Cost-Shared Agreements, Salaries: Last year's Revised value was \$150,000 under; this year's Estimate was decreased by a further \$250,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, again, these are all, sort of, cash flow considerations as we move monies between Current and Capital there. The decrease was due just to our cash flow saving and then we re-estimated what we need for next year based on the current agreements.

**J. DINN:** Rather than ask each one individually, but for Transportation and Communications and Supplies and Professional Services, would that be the same?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

**J. ABBOTT:** And some of this depending on as the level of activity went down, obviously, the staffing associated with that goes down.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**J. ABBOTT:** And they're all charged to those projects as a Capital expenditure.

**J. DINN:** Yeah. Okay, thank you.

3.2.01, Administration and Support Services: Any significant projects that we might expect to hear about in the coming year?

**J. ABBOTT:** The major ones would be the penitentiary, as we do that, and the schools that we've identified.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**J. ABBOTT:** And some of the work on the St. Clare's replacement as well.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Salaries: Last year's value is \$122,000 under Budget and this year's Estimates are decreased by a further \$195,000.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So it is just some vacancies that we had in the department and we'll see that continuing into this year.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA Dinn, your time is up.

We're going to go back to MHA O'Driscoll.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** 3.2.02: Can the minister update that status of the construction on the Corner Brook hospital, the adult mental health and addictions and all other major facilities.

**J. ABBOTT:** In terms of the Corner Brook hospital, for all intents and purposes, that is completed. The Western Memorial staff are moving in, they're getting ready for patients coming on board. That will happen in the next month or two. So that's pretty well complete; a few minor things that they're finishing up there.

The mental health facility here in St. John's, that construction project finishes this fall and then that work will be done with staff transitioning in and bringing in patients by next spring. So they're the two big ones.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** That was it, yeah.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, and some other school projects we're working on as well.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Under 3.2.03, under Professional Services: Can the minister explain the Revised increase of \$12.8 million?

**J. ABBOTT:** So it depends on, obviously, the number and type of projects that we're anticipating and that's largely used for design activity and the like. Also, then how we split between Purchased Services and Professional Services is a factor in how we had to adjust the budget.

I'm just trying to see if there is anything here that I can add to that. That's mainly it. It's really just how we allocated the budget between those various accounts.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under Purchased Services, you started out with \$513 million, then the Revised to \$402 million and this year it's \$340 million. Can you explain that?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So, again, cash flows, but in terms that one is we had to purchase equipment as part of the contract for the Western Memorial hospital, and we won't be doing that obviously for next year. Then we also had – I don't know if this is the area

where we do our Capital payment – no, sorry. So the biggest number was because of the equipment, which was \$70 million for the Western Memorial hospital. So we won't need that in this coming year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Under 3.3.01, Ferry Terminals: Can the minister explain under Purchased Services the \$1.2-million increase?

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay. You said Purchased Services, 3.3.01?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** 3.3.01, yeah, under Purchased Services.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, okay, just wanted to make sure.

In terms of the increase, we had to replace some fendering at various wharves around the province and we continue to upgrade that. Then, the increase this year is that we've put in more money for our wharves and terminals around the province to upgrade them.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 3.2.02, Ferry Terminals, Capital: Has a shore-based manager been hired the Bell Island-Portugal Cove service?

**J. ABBOTT:** Not yet. Still can apply. No, we've closed the competition. We had a lot of interest and we're just getting down to finalizing that.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Has the department considered hiring a shore-based manager for the Fogo and Change Islands service?

**J. ABBOTT:** Not at present.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** No, okay.

Are you considering putting back on the run that we cut this year from Change Islands?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So once we bring back the *Veteran*, that will happen.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

3.4.01, Salaries: \$163,000 in additional spending this year, I'm just wondering why that is.

**J. ABBOTT:** Salaries, 3.4.01: The increase is, again, based on the collective agreement and general salary increases across the board – step increases, I should say.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

On Grants and Subsidies, can the minister explain why we left \$56 million on the table last year and how we can't get that money out the door?

**J. ABBOTT:** Now, you're into the municipal finance world. Basically, what we had done – and this is basically cash flow requirements – we've improved, over the past number of years, multiple projects, hundreds of millions of dollars. This reflects the actual cash flow requirement for any particular year.

Last year, we budgeted \$157 million. Not as much work got done as planned so we had to pay out \$101 million, based on the cash flow requirements from that and previous years. We're going to see a bump up, we think, in work getting done this year and previous work getting done and completed and invoices sent in to us, and then we'll pay out the \$172 million. But it's dependant on a municipality getting their invoices in to us.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under federal revenue, can the municipalities expect an increase in infrastructure funding this year?

**J. ABBOTT:** We've allocated an additional \$50 million in work that will get matched by the municipality. Unlike previous years,

there's no federal matching at this point. So we now will work with those communities that got proposals in to get those approvals in place so they can get – if the design needs to be finished and get tenders out.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay and I'll stretch away from that and just ask a question generally from my district. That will be the last one I have in this section.

I'm just wondering for the Trepassey area, I know you did tell me how much you're doing. Can we get where they're doing and what they're doing? Can I get a description of that? An email next week would be fine.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, we can.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All right, thank you.

That's it for that section for me.

**CHAIR:** All right.

MHA Dinn, do you have any further questions?

**J. DINN:** Yes, I do.

3.2.02, Health Care Infrastructure: Are all of the expenditures under Purchased Services related to P3 agreements for services rendered as part of the contract? If not, then what proportion would be of the total cost there?

**J. ABBOTT:** It's all P3 and so that's what that is for. Yeah, that's the operating payments.

**J. DINN:** Okay.

So everything there is P3s, correct?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

Is the construction of the adult mental health and addictions centre still on track?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, it is.

**J. DINN:** Purchased Services: Under that line, last year's Revised value was \$221,500 under Budget. This year's Estimate has increased by almost \$6 million.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so last year it was just some cash flow savings. For the coming year, now that the hospital is ready for occupancy, we now have to meet our payments. It reflects the payments under the contract, the Current account payments.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

3.2.03, Building Infrastructure: Can we also have an update on the work to extend and renovate the Labrador Correctional Centre.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, we can get that for you.

**J. DINN:** Perfect.

I assume you'll give it to my colleague from the Southern Shore as well.

**J. ABBOTT:** Oh yeah, sure.

**J. DINN:** Also in 3.2.03, could we have an update on how the work of the Northeast Avalon Health Care Infrastructure Advisory Committee is going. When can we expect to hear a report?

**J. ABBOTT:** That committee continues but they're getting near to finalize. So they have to make their final recommendations on the services that are going to be consolidated in the new, I'll call it, St. Clare's replacement, as well as the Cardiovascular and Stroke Institute.

We also have consultants working on the functional plans for those new facilities, at which time then we will get ready to determine the approach around normal tendering or a P3 model as well.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I've asked a question similar to this before where the NLSchools is now part of core government. I just want to make sure. Has your department taken on added responsibilities as a result of that when it comes to infrastructure?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes.

**J. DINN:** Okay, perfect.

Onward and forward. That's it, Chair.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** All right.

Hearing no further questions, I ask the Clerk to recall the subheadings, please.

**CLERK:** 3.1.01 to 3.4.01 inclusive, Infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** Shall 3.1.01 to 3.4.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.4.01 carried.

**CHAIR:** I ask the Clerk to call the next set of subheadings.

**CLERK:** 4.1.01 to 4.2.02 inclusive, Air and Marine Services.

**CHAIR:** 4.1.01 to 4.2.02.

MHA O'Driscoll?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Can the minister update us on the ferry Market Sounding report and its recommendations? Have they been fully implemented?

**J. ABBOTT:** That was done some while ago, certainly before my time. That's sort of completed. We're not doing anything further on that at this point in time.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

4.1.01, under Purchased Services, an additional \$9 million was spent last year. Can you explain that?

**J. ABBOTT:** The variance relates to a couple of things. We had a new contract for the South Coast ferry services with Puddister Trading. That was \$2.5 million of that. We added additional runs last fall on the North Coast ferry service for Labrador. That was \$1.3 million.

Another \$1.7 million is the replacement of the vessel to operate on the Fogo Island service over the winter. Then the remaining increase of \$3.6 million is increased repairs and maintenance and critical parts for all our other ferries.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Minister, are you satisfied with the progress of the refit that's going on now?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yes, I'm planning to go down for a look in the next week or so, once the House gets out of here. Go down and check it out myself.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay, perfect.

4.1.03, under Capital, with the extra \$8.56 million budgeted this year, which vessels are getting work and what does this work entail? I think you mentioned that already.

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so we're continuing work on the *Veteran*, we'll be doing the *Legionnaire* and the *Beaumont Hamel* will also continue to get that work done.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** All right.

Under 4.2.01, Purchased Services, can the minister explain the additional \$3.27 million in spending last year?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah. So we had to do significant upgrades on our aircraft to meet Transport Canada's regulatory requirements for the electronic systems and we've had to do some money on the air ambulance engine replacement.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay.

Under 4.2.01, never spent any money last year but we see the federal revenue expected this year and the same request for funding. Just wondering why that is.

**J. ABBOTT:** Can you just tell me what account number again?

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** 4.2.01, under Capital.

**J. ABBOTT:** Okay. So the work that we have budgeted in '23-'24 was not undertaken. We will be doing that work this year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** Okay. Under Purchased Services, there's \$15 million in increases, just wondering where that ...

**J. ABBOTT:** So, again, work wasn't done; it will be done this year.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** How will privatizing our air ambulance/road ambulance affect – back in the previous one, under the Purchased Services, how is that going to affect the \$3.27 million?

**J. ABBOTT:** Well, that's a good question in terms of what happens, you know what the results of that proposal call will achieve. So one scenario being a private-sector supplier comes in and provides their aircraft, then we will dispose of our aircraft. Another option would be they would come in and take over our aircraft. Either we lease it to them, sell it to them, what have you.

But too early to say, it's still in the proposal process. That being said, we've got to keep both the water bombers and the air ambulance ready to go at any time, no matter what those future service-delivery options turn out to be.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** That's it for me on that section.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

MHA Dinn.

**J. DINN:** Thank you, Chair.

4.1.01, Ferry Operations: Is it possible to get the totals of how much was the North Coast run budgeted for and cost and the Strait of Belle Isle one costing?

**J. ABBOTT:** We have all that. I don't have it here, but we can provide that to you.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Any update on the annual meeting with the current North Coast ferry service provider, stakeholders and provincial government?

**J. ABBOTT:** I'm going to ask John Baker on that.

**J. BAKER:** The meeting – we normally get together some time in April. This was a little later so I would expect that we'll have the meeting now in early May.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

**J. ABBOTT:** Just if I may add. In the fall, the Minister of Labrador Affairs and myself, took the ferry from Goose Bay to Nain to get – for me certainly – first-hand knowledge and insight on the service with the crew and with the community leaders, because we stopped into every community and had a good conversation. So we know where our challenges are. We came back with a list of issues that the communities wanted us to address and we have done most of that.

There were one or two outstanding issues. One of the big issues for me was safety on the docks themselves and we wanted to make sure that was impressed upon everybody because I think how people are used to doing business on the dock and how business should be done on the dock from my perspective needed to be – that was my big takeaway for sure. But the quality of the service, the quality of the boat, the quality of the crew was exceptional in my view.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Moving on to Supplies in that same one, 4.1.01: Last year's Revised value was \$4.2 million over Budget.

**J. ABBOTT:** So the increase was mainly attributed to the cost of fuel. That is both the cost itself and the more runs we make, the more fuel we use, obviously, but it the price was the largest factor this past year.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

I know in certain jurisdictions they're actually looking at electrifying ferries, I'm not suggesting for the coast of Labrador at this point, but even the Bell Island run.

**J. ABBOTT:** No, fair enough. I think as we look at any replacement, whether we own them ourselves or contract out, I think they're the things that we now will have to put on the table and say, to increase the fuel consumption, at least the carbon-related fuel consumption, that we look at how we can electrify some of this. Absolutely, I'm all for that.

**J. DINN:** Thank you. Perfect, thank you.

4.1.02, Ferry Vessel Refits: How many vessels were in dry dock last year for repairs and maintenance, and I guess the length of time they were out of commission?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so we can provide that information.

**J. DINN:** Thank you.

Only one I guess I have there and that's under 4.2.01, Supplies. Last year's Revised value was \$1.1 million under Budget, this year's Estimate was decreased by a further \$1.2 million.

**J. ABBOTT:** So the savings was fuel savings actually on our water bombers because we didn't have to have them in the air as much as in previous years. We are seeing some other savings that will carry over into this year. Of course, it's going to depend on the forest fire activity itself.

**J. DINN:** Just as a question. So last year was under Budget and this year's Estimate was decreased by \$1.24 million, correct?

**J. ABBOTT:** Yeah, so we –

**J. DINN:** No, but the question I'm asking is, like you just said, last year, fortunately, we didn't have to use it, so you didn't have to have that money, but would it be advisable maybe to keep that money – like, I just –

**J. ABBOTT:** I understand.

So, again, in terms of monitoring of that, we've made some adjustments for inflation in that, looking at the crews and – I'm just trying to think now, the supply side of this, we're not going to necessarily see the same amount of inflation, but that being said, whatever we need to do, we'll transfer the funds in.

**J. DINN:** Okay, thank you.

That's it, Chair.

**CHAIR:** All right.

Seeing no further questions, I'm going to ask the Clerk to call the subheads, please.

**CLERK:** 4.1.01 to 4.2.02 inclusive, Air and Marine Services.

**CHAIR:** Shall 4.1.01 to 4.2.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.2.02 carried.

**CLERK:** Total for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, total heads, carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report the Estimates of Transportation and Infrastructure carried?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure carried without amendment.

**CHAIR:** All right.

I want to say thank you to all the staff and the Members who attended today. I will ask the minister now if he has any closing remarks before we conclude.

**J. ABBOTT:** All right.

Thank you, Chair, for your diligence in keeping us all on time, I appreciate that. I want to thank my critic, the Member for Ferryland and the Member for St. John's Centre, for participating and holding us to account. I appreciate the nature and the substance of the questions. I think that helps us to stay focused on our work. I think in terms of the questions that get raised in the House or through the media or elsewhere, it certainly helped me get ready for this Estimates meeting today. So I thank everybody for that.

I thank my colleagues on the back row there for withstanding my answers, and the former minister, who could've answered these without my briefing book. I want to thank staff, the deputy minister and the ADMs and others here today, they are the backbone of the department. We have a very strong leadership team and a very strong department and everybody's there to focus on getting the work done and making sure our roads and highways and our airways and marine services are bar none, given the challenges we all face in the environment in which we live and which we work.

But on that note, we've got a busy year ahead. We've got \$1.4 billion to spend and we're going to make our best efforts to spend it all.

Thank you, folks, and have a great weekend.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister.

The next meeting will be at the call of the Chair.

Now I'm going to ask for a mover to adjourn.

MHA O'Driscoll.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** (Inaudible.)

Thank you, again, and enjoy your weekend.

**CHAIR:** You wanted to say a few words?  
Okay, sorry about that.

On motion, the Committee adjourned sine die.

**L. O'DRISCOLL:** (Inaudible) he might yet.

No, I'd like to thank the staff here, obviously, for doing this and the staff that showed up with you. It's certainly appreciated, and the people that are not here as well. They keep it safe on the roads.

Obviously, our job is to keep you accountable and we'll certainly be doing that. But thank you again so much. We appreciate everything you do for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**J. DINN:** (Inaudible) thanks, I don't have any ferries or roadwork to be done in the district. But I do appreciate the work because I do travel on the road. I did travel up the Southern Shore for I don't know how many years and I can do it blindfolded, I know the issues my colleague talk about.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

I, too, travel to the Southern Shore quite often. I say I've spent more time up there – anyway, I'm going to call for adjournment.

**E. LOVELESS:** So moved.

**CHAIR:** MHA Loveless.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

**CHAIR:** Carried.