



**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A**

Hon. Kerry Vincent MLC

**Thursday 20 November 2025**

**MEMBERS**

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC (Chair)

Hon Dean Harris MLC

Hon Sarah Lovell MLC

Hon Cassy O'Connor MLC

Hon Bec Thomas MLC

**OTHER PARTICIPATING MEMBERS**

## **IN ATTENDANCE**

### **HON. KERRY VINCENT MLC**

Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Housing and Planning.

### **Infrastructure and Transport portfolio**

#### **Tim Lovibond**

Chief of Staff

#### **Craig Limkin**

Secretary, Department of State Growth

#### **Cynthia Heydon**

Deputy Secretary, Transport, Department of State Growth

#### **Anthony Reid**

Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning

#### **Ben Goodsir**

Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure Tasmania, Department of State Growth

#### **Ben Moloney**

Executive Director, Major Transport Projects, Department of State Growth

#### **Lia Morris**

Chief Executive Officer, Marine and Safety Tasmania

#### **Travis Boucher**

Director Finance, Department of State Growth

### **Ministerial Staff**

#### **Trent Dann**

Senior Adviser

#### **Richard Wilson**

Senior Adviser

#### **Todd Newett**

Senior Adviser

### **Housing and Planning portfolio**

#### **Tim Lovibond**

Chief of Staff

#### **Craig Limkin**

Secretary, Department of State Growth

**Anthony Reid**

Acting Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning, Department of state Growth

**Eleri Morgan-Thomas**

Chief Executive Officer, Homes Tasmania

**Kym Warner**

Chief Financial Officer, Homes Tasmania

**Richard Gilmour**

Director Community Infrastructure, Homes Tasmania

**Jessemy Stone**

Director Housing Policy and Programs, Homes Tasmania

**Travis Boutcher**

Director Finance, Department of State Growth

**Ministerial Staff**

**Victoria Matterson**

Senior Adviser

**Adele Fenwick**

Senior Adviser



# PUBLIC

## The Government Budget Estimates Committee A met in the Legislative Council Chamber at 9 a.m.

**CHAIR** (Ms Forrest) - Welcome, minister, to the final day of Estimates hearings for this year. You're appearing here in the first part of the day for the Infrastructure and Transport portfolio. I will invite you to introduce the people at the table for the benefit of *Hansard* and then invite you to make an opening statement over both Infrastructure and Transport and look over questions.

**Mr VINCENT** - On my right I have Craig Limkin, Secretary for State Growth. On my left, I have my Chief of Staff, Tim Lovibond. Beside him is Cynthia Heydon, Deputy Secretary for Transport. My statement this morning will cover, as you said, Infrastructure and Transport. Since taking on the Infrastructure portfolio, I have been focused on working with stakeholders and departments to eliminate issues and get projects moving for Tasmania.

In the Infrastructure space, over the Budget and forward Estimates, we are demonstrating our ongoing focus to look to the future with optimism and a dedicated sense of purpose when it comes to planning and delivering intergenerational projects in Tasmania. Over the next four years, there is \$3.4 billion in infrastructure investment, with a further \$1.7 billion planned across government businesses. There isn't a corner of Tasmania which isn't going to benefit from our infrastructure over the coming years, ensuring Tasmanians can get home sooner and safer.

Expenditure in 2024-25 was lower than expected due to the range of challenges impacting the delivery of road and bridge projects. These included lengthy Australian Government environmental approvals, budget caretaker period impacts on procurement and other project activities such as stakeholder engagement processes, and difficulties in obtaining expert design consultants. Importantly, we continue to provide stable work for the Tasmanian construction industries while recognising the increasing complexity in project delivery, a truly national challenge.

The significant forward infrastructure program continues to provide confidence to industry and create new jobs and investment in training. It should be noted in recent years we have included the expenditure for the brand-new Bridgewater Bridge which resulted in previous-year capital expenditure peaking up to \$550 million in 2023-24 and \$570 million in 2022-23. Now, despite being open to the public, the new Bridgewater Bridge project is nearing completion and 2025-26 Budget profile for CIP represents a more normalised and sustainable baseline deliverable annual expenditure profile range of between \$400 million to 425 million across the forward Estimates.

I could sit here all day talking about many projects our government is embarking on, but it would take me hours. Instead, I will simply say we remain committed to upgrading and improving our roads and bridges and will continue to back the thousands of workers who are keeping Tasmania moving.

Rolling into Transport, and that pun was perfectly needed, the 2025-26 Budget continues to invest in transport services, helping Tasmanians to commute and access essential services across the state. The Budget includes significant investment for general-access bus services and school bus services. We have extended half-price fares. This initiative delivers cost of

# PUBLIC

living relief to families, commuters, students and regional communities. It also encourages people who might usually drive themselves to work to try public transport.

We want our passengers and bus drivers to be safe, and this is why we're expanding our transit officer program with additional funding. We will run a tender for a longer-term transit officer program, and this program includes a training standard which will require transit officers to become authorised officers approved by the transport commission, which will give transit officers additional powers. The tender will also expand transit officers to some services in the north.

We've recently completed the third round of the all-access, all-weather bus stop upgrade program which has helped local governments upgrade bus stops and shelters, making them both more accessible and more comfortable for passengers. Earlier this year, the new Regional Transit Centre opened in Launceston, providing a significant upgrade for public transport in the city. This is a state-of-the-art facility. It provides convenience and comfort for travellers. The transport program includes key investments for new park-and-ride facilities across Greater Hobart, including sites at Glebe Hill, Claremont, and Midway Point, as well as in the state's north. Park and rides help people living in outer-urban areas to access public transport and reduce congestion in peak commuter times. As my understanding grows with my ministries, I am confident I will continue to make a positive difference in this beautiful state. I'm very proud to be on this journey with all my colleagues, stakeholders, and constituents that I have in my portfolios, as well as the good people of Prosser. Thank you. I'm more than happy to take questions, Chair.

## **Output Group 2 - Infrastructure and Transport Services**

### **2.1 Infrastructure Strategy and Delivery**

**CHAIR** - Thank you, minister. I want to ask my overarching questions first. It would be good if you have your budget papers in front of you. I know that most people fail to bring them. In terms of line item 2.1, infrastructure strategy and delivery, there is some description in the notes about some of the programs that have finished. If we look at that, there's the Launceston City Deal, Tamar Estuary projects, and some other things related to the road safety area.

I'm just interested if you can provide some breakdown of the Budget, the appropriation of \$17.5 million, acknowledging that there was more appropriated in 2024-25 than what you have budgeted for this year, which we're finding to be a pretty common trend in not just this portfolio, but just about every other one. It is the same if you look at the expenses side of that line item. The budget was \$58-59 million; the actual expenditure was 56, 57, it was less, but this year's budget is only \$36 million. If you could provide a breakdown and an explanation as to -

**Mr VINCENT** - The secretary is just going through that. It was certainly different for us with the interim Budget coming through. We're looking at 253 there.

**CHAIR** - 253 is the expenses page and 249 is the appropriation, but they both show a similar picture.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you, minister. What's in the breakdown is the 2025-26 election commitments or decisions. There's money for Cape Barren Island, and this is supporting the

## PUBLIC

infrastructure needs of the island, areas such as roads, water, and electricity. The other thing in there is -

**CHAIR** - What I'm after is not just every project, because projects are one thing, but obviously this delivers the operational side of Infrastructure and Transport, the people who are sitting in this room, their salaries, et cetera, I would expect, minister.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Yes, it does, Chair.

**CHAIR** - What I'm asking for is a breakdown of how much of that appropriation relates to the overheads, staffing, and those sorts of costs, and how much is spent on projects, so we can see what the breakup is, because when we see how far it drops away in the forward Estimates, that's what I'm trying to understand.

**Mr LIMKIN** - How I will answer that, Chair, is there's base funding in the line item that includes staffing costs, overhead costs, et cetera, to support the staff. That sits at \$4.8 million in 2025-26, \$4.9 million in 2026-27, \$4.9 million in 2027-28, and \$5 million in 2028-29. The remainder of that line item, or the breakup, relates to projects, with the largest of those projects being the work for Cape Barren Island and the -

**CHAIR** - Which is how much?

**Mr LIMKIN** - It's about \$6.5 million across the forward Estimates. The remainder is -

**CHAIR** - \$6.5 million spread over the out years?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Forward Estimates - it's \$3.4 million in 2025-26 and then \$1 million in 2026-27, \$1 million in 2027-28, and \$1 million in 2028-29. The other major one is the Tamar Estuary funding by both the state and Australian governments, so I will do it as a combined. It's \$15 million in 2025-26 and then \$3.9 million in 2026-27.

**CHAIR** - The numbers don't seem to add up. I might rely on my right-hand wing man down the end of the table to fix that for me, who is no doubt doing it as we speak.

**Mr LIMKIN** - They're the major projects. One of the -

**CHAIR** - There's obviously other things, but my point here is, minister, that the base funding in 2026-27 is 4.9, there's less than \$2 million there for everything else. I heard that there was at least \$1 million for Cape Barren Island. The \$15 million sits somewhere. I don't know where that sits because it's clear - that must be in the 2025-26. Now, if we go out to 2027-28, we've got a million there for Cape Barren Island, we've got 4.9 for overheads and that's it. That's all. That's the whole total amount and then next year the same. How - that is all you can deliver in the money that's in the forward Estimates, or are you cutting people, or what are you doing?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will ask the secretary for -

**Mr LIMKIN** - Reconciliation to 12.3 is: in 2027-28 is \$7.8 million, of that is 4.9 for staff, or base funding, and then there is \$3.2 million for West Coast Wilderness Railway in the

## PUBLIC

2027-28 million, and so there are no projects funded in this line item in that year. However, a lot of the projects continue across the forward Estimates through our capital program.

**CHAIR** - You've just said - correct me if I'm wrong, minister - what the secretary has just said there's projects like our wonderful West Coast Wilderness Railway that are going to be funded, but the money is not there; is that correct?

**Mr VINCENT** - The money is there. Just -

**CHAIR** - Where?

**Mr LIMKIN** - I will use the West Coast Wilderness Railway as an example: in this line item, the West Coast Wilderness Railway will be funded at \$3.2 million, \$3.2 million, \$3.2 million across the forward Estimates. That is an estimate of their activities. The West Coast Wilderness Railway earns revenue. In fact, they're actually having the most bumper season they're ever having, because people are able to do both ends, and we're seeing visitors actually using both ends. We've based the forward Estimates based on the information that the West Coast Wilderness has provided us.

**CHAIR** - Could I clarify, minister: is the West Coast Wilderness Railway funding in line item 2.1 or in the capital investment program line?

**Mr LIMKIN** - My understanding is it's in both. This is the operational funding for the West Coast Wilderness Railway. There is some capital works that we continue to provide the West Coast Wilderness Railway as well.

**CHAIR** - What I need, then, is an actual breakdown of the operational funds for people or whatever else there is, in line item 2.1 in 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29. You've talked about the Cape Barren - you said that was in this line item, you said the West Coast Wilderness Railway operating is in that, and there was something else you mentioned, because those numbers don't add up.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm happy to provide the member the information. What I would say is these - what is funded through here are not our capital program. These are the ones where we are - I will use an example: we don't own the assets of Cape Barren Island. The Aboriginal people own the assets of Cape Barren Island, and we are providing grant funding to enable them to support their roads, their energy, their water and their housing. If it was a capital program, so like a road program, it is included in our capital program.

**CHAIR** - I understand that. I understand that. I'm just concerned these numbers aren't adding up. You're telling me there's funding available for supporting the operating costs of the West Coast Wilderness Railway; but when you give me the numbers and add in the allocation for overheads and staffing, the number it appears, unless I'm wrong - the number appears to add up at least if not exactly that, but it seems to be more than that. I'm just trying to understand. You say the money's there; but I'm not convinced it is.

**Mr LIMKIN** - If you're happy to, I will provide a detailed reconciliation before the session is over on staff and projects and we will highlight the material project staff, not all of it.

# PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - For everything under 2.1, yeah? Everything that sits under that which is operating, not capital. The capital we will deal with later.

I want to go to another point, and this has been referred to in the Treasurer's budget speech and other contributions, probably from yourself in the budget reply in this place. In fact, the minister for Energy wanted to start asking questions himself till he realised where he was: on that side of the table.

The Budget states:

Infrastructure has been re-profiled to mitigate short-term debt pressures.

That's budget paper 1, page 7. Table 5.4 in budget paper 2, pages 73 to 75, shows the capital investment program reduced by \$1,103,500 in the 2024-25 budget. The \$772 million in the preliminary outcome - sorry, actual, that was, I think, when I looked at the numbers, which is a significant reduction.

When we look through the infrastructure, not just in your portfolio but particularly in Education, just about every school that hadn't started their capital works has been pushed out by one or two years. I went through and looked at all of them. We call that re-profiling; some might call it pushing out expenditure to make the budget look better.

Can you tell me which specific projects were deferred or funding reduced, and the reason for it? How were the decisions made about what would be pushed out, and why?

**Mr VINCENT** - When I first came into the portfolio was when we were coming out of the high expenditure of the Bridgewater Bridge and recognition under the former treasurer that some re-profiling needed to happen.

We worked through the projects and how they were going to be delivered, and our capability within Tasmania of how they were going to be delivered by the civil contractors. I had a lot of discussions there, and the secretary certainly did, on how we profiled that, and found that the amount that stated, the \$1.7 million, the \$425 million each year going forward in the Estimates, was an amount which could substantiate the civil contractors' workload and be deliverable by the state, by both the department and the contractors.

At the same time, we were also running into the issues of projects being held up with the EPBC (*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*) on road projects that we had not anticipated, which was Australia-wide. So, we understood that some of the projects would move from one year to another, and others would come forward. We've been working pretty hard to make sure that there is a rolling list of projects that we can move to make sure the flow of work going out the door stays consistent for the industry to keep employment running. We've had to do that for pretty well the last 12 months, and we'll probably continue to do that over the next few years while some of those issues are dealt with.

We have dealt with some of the internal issues allowing for the flow of work, to do with, say, power corridors, for a good example, on highways where there was a difference between TasNetworks and State Growth. There was hold-ups on jobs there, so we had to move things around for that.

## PUBLIC

But that amount of \$400 or \$425, by all accounts, and talking with the industry, seemed to be a sensible amount. The projects itself can move up and down.

The other thing that's been an advantage to us on the capital program has been the corridor work done over a number of years on many transport corridors around the state, in identifying safety improvements, widening or other projects. The department has worked through quite a few of those, so they can cherrypick - that's the term I'd like to use, projects when something else is held up to keep that flow of work going.

The actual mechanism behind the \$400 and \$425, would you like to explain further on that, secretary?

**Mr LIMKIN** - As the minister said, I will talk about the major drivers [inaudible]. The department reviews our capital investment program forecasts monthly, and we work with the Department of Treasury to provide monthly updates to inform our forward Estimates. And so, we do a full review of our capital program to make sure it's actually deliverable.

There have been a number of challenges this year that has impacted that. The first one is that Australian government assessments approvals under the *EPBC* are becoming more onerous and we have to provide more information and clarification. It's really important to do it, but it does take quite a long time to do it.

**CHAIR** - If I can just interrupt on that point, most of the school redevelopments would not require an *EPBC* assessment. When I look in infrastructure investment budget paper 1, every school that hasn't been started has been pushed out by at least one and many by two years. That's not a reason for that. I'm happy to hear you continue -

**Mr VINCENT** - We're talking roads here under the infrastructure.

**CHAIR** - Yeah, but I'm talking about - obviously, you've got the portfolio over Infrastructure. When we look at general infrastructure investment, I'm just trying to understand how decisions are made about what's pushed out and what's not.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Apologies, I was answering it as the department. Why don't I start at the the top level and go down to specific departments?

**CHAIR** - Yeah.

**Mr LIMKIN** - At the moment, across the nation, we are seeing capacity constraints for infrastructure. We're seeing national demand increase. Infrastructure Australia has put out at their latest infrastructure marketing that basically shows that, as a nation, their five-year pipeline is \$213 billion. That puts significant pressure on workforce shortages, cost escalation.

The Productivity Commission at a national level has said that there are productivity challenges in the construction sector and that we, as a nation, need to focus on this, both for more efficient delivery but also the safety of our workers. We know construction workers are working long hours to deliver. And so it has to be about productivity to support both. We also know because of the large inflation of costs, materials are challenging, and materials are scarce. We've seen a 30 per cent increase in prices of materials over time.

## PUBLIC

And so, what is happening at a national level is a re-looking at major projects. In New South Wales and Victoria, they are retiming projects to deliver. In Tasmania, we are doing a similar process. We are looking across government to, how do we deliver this as a state so that we can ensure the best process of that?

Infrastructure Tasmania (ITas), for example, does a 10-year infrastructure project pipeline plan. It contains planned public infrastructure investment and also known private sector investment estimated over \$5 million. That enables us to look at what we believe the market will be able to deliver.

There is then a piece of work across government agencies who are asset owners. We don't control profiling of schools. We just work with Education and Health to make sure they understand the market constraints and challenges. We support them to understand challenges around capacity and capability in the market to enable us to really look at that.

Ultimately, it's a decision for individual agencies on their profile, but our role as the Infrastructure Department, and the minister's role, is to make sure that his colleagues and my colleagues clearly understand the infrastructure market constraints and capacity to actually ensure delivery.

**CHAIR** - Minister, the secretary mentioned that - I'm not sure whether it just relates to road bridges, but major construction in your area. Schools are major constructions, too, but they're generally less complex, except, perhaps, Montello Primary.

But anyway, the secretary mentioned that one of the challenges here is the 30 per cent price increase. Is that across the board?

**Mr VINCENT** - The price increase is fairly largely across across the board, from housing to roads. Sometimes, because with roads, a lesser amount of ingredients go into it, a more concentrated area. The impact on that has been fairly severe over the last few years. But construction right across the board, some of the methods and construction techniques now have a lot more focus on safety and have seemed to have added to those costs of other infrastructure.

As Infrastructure minister, I am only responsible for roads and bridges. All schools and everything come under the individual departments still at this stage, so I don't have any input into the schools.

**CHAIR** - But what you're seeing is, as the secretary said, is a 30 per cent price increase on some of these major projects?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. A couple of good things have come out of some of that large increase in pricing. Because the flow of work has been fairly solid and steady in roads and bridges, we've had most of the major contractors invest in decent machinery and being able to take a bit of understanding that there is a long-term list of projects there that we're working on, so they can afford to lease machinery over it. But it is normally a seven-year period, I believe, now. Five is a little bit short.

**CHAIR** - I just want to ask one more, and I'll go to Cassy.

## PUBLIC

**Mr LIMKIN** - Sorry, Chair. Can I just clarify - the 30 per cent is a national level. What I will try and do is get you what the Infrastructure Australia report says is the Tasmanian one. But it's a 30 per cent increase on a national level.

**CHAIR** - It's interesting that this was the figure that was used by the developer - and I'm not sure who it was - who was going to build that hotel-type complex in the city. They said they had a 30 per cent increase. So, it seems to be pretty consistent.

**Mr VINCENT** - It is consistent for a lot of people. There are a lot of different parts of the different industries with construction that use that anywhere between 22 and 33, I've heard, but 30 seems to be the round figure.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I just want to confirm for you, Chair, because as I said the number I'm quoting is 30 per cent nationally, but we will get you the Tassie one.

**Mr VINCENT** - Chair, could I just add one thing that's also affecting our thought pattern on ongoing forward Estimates of infrastructure? That's the federal government have touched on the long-term infrastructure pipelines for all the states back into Canberra.

I think that's a fantastic way they're going about it now, because there's actually - and I have spoken in the House about it, you might remember, about our ability now to be working on closer to a P90 when we put forward projects instead of being a wishlist of P50, to be a more accurate, so, a lot more work is going into it, but that does cause a few other delays in the expertise needed on those projects. But, overall, both for the state and federal, it's good. It'll be a lot better.

**CHAIR** - Once that's embedded in the system - that's right, yes.

One of the other things the secretary mentioned, minister, was workforce pressures and things like that. You're responsible for roads, bridges, those big infrastructure projects. We know the Brisbane Olympics is going to create a whole drain on every other state in terms of the capacity for construction workers across a whole range of areas. Have you factored in what that will do to the workforce and also the forward program you've got?

**Mr VINCENT** - My answer would be that it's not fully factored in because there's so much unknown other than there's going to be a drain. But, if you look at what we are doing in the training - and even working in partnership with the MBA with their new training headquarters out at Cambridge and with the CCF with their new training facility for civil works at -

**CHAIR** - What's CCF?

**Mr VINCENT** - the Civil Contractors Federation - with all the road crews, to put it simply, and sealing crews - everything to do with road and civil works. What they're doing at Quercus Park is about training more people and upskilling some of the good people they've already got in the organisation, to move from - we've already seen some of the people start at traffic management and they're now driving the pavers and similar sorts of machinery. So, we're working very hard to keep -

**CHAIR** - Train up your own people.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - to train up our own people and to upskill many of the people within the civil construction industry, and that's quite successful. There is a growing number of women coming into that trade and, from what I can tell, they are very, very good machine operators who look after their equipment very well.

**CHAIR** - That's what the miners will tell you. They're the best truck drivers they've got, the women.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. We're seeing that more and more, which is a very big positive.

I did meet, during my visits to the Bridgewater Bridge and to Selfs Point - Macquarie Point works down there - quite a few young people in that 28 to 40 bracket that have moved out of being on the tools to being more project manager style, because of the size of some of these projects. The half a dozen of those that just want to stay in Tassie - they're at a stage where their families are starting - have upskilled and want to stay in Tassie. So, I took that as a positive -

**CHAIR** - You still need tradies; you can't build things without tradies.

**Mr VINCENT** - And I have spoken fairly heavily with a lot of even developers and NBA, HIA about the fact that a lot of tradesmen are employed now on a contract basis. I believe it's a real negative for the industry, because, when you're on contract, it's very hard to even go and get a home loan, because you haven't got proven income or reliability of income. So, a lot of them move in and out of the trade to suit their personal lives.

Also, the number of apprentices had dropped hugely from HIA and MBA, where they used to have a lot of their internal apprentices, and a lot of people now are just hiring extra tradesmen in for two days a week or three-week projects. So, that's having a detrimental effect. I have been talking with mainly my old jobs hub in the south-east about how we can rectify that and get more people skilled up and into the trades or do taster courses to get them into the appropriate trades. It's a big body of work that needs to happen there. I know the new -

**CHAIR** - That's not all your responsibility - it's the minister for Skills.

**Mr VINCENT** - No. The new CEOs of HIA and MBA are both very, very switched on to it. Both have been involved in these sorts of things before. It is going to be a whole-of-industry to try and get the numbers right to keep us going.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Chair. Minister, the Chair, through her line of questioning, has demonstrated the precariousness of the infrastructure budget and the fact that in the Budget, expenditure is being pushed out and, at some level, it makes the Budget look a bit better, I guess.

**Mr VINCENT** - Smooths the Budget.

**CHAIR** - Not much better.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Although it is a disaster for the people of Tasmania. As a first question, I want to take you to the Tasmanian climate risk assessment. Given that we're talking about infrastructure strategy, and there's not a lot of evidence before us that the government

## PUBLIC

actually has a strategy for infrastructure, and, if you wanted to address that in your answer, that would be helpful. The climate risk assessment says:

Damage to the transportation network is projected to have major consequences by 2030...

So that's five years away, minister.

...which may result in service disruptions due to loss of critical transportation infrastructure. Further state-level action is required to respond to specific climate change impacts on Tasmania's transport network, including a coordinated approach across different levels of government.

Given the squeeze on infrastructure funding, a prioritisation of roads infrastructure, for example, what are you, as minister, doing to help to ensure that we're ready for what's coming?

**Mr VINCENT** - There are a couple of different things there. The state of the climate report that the TPC did, which was a long time overdue - we now have that being worked on by Mr Ramsey so that is reviewed on the five-year window on a regular basis now. We're putting that in place to start with. I know it's only one step in -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - The State of the Environment Report.

**Mr VINCENT** - State of the environment. Thank you. We're putting the system in place for that. Mr Ramsey is working on that at the moment. On what needs to be detailed and how that will be done.

I haven't had a huge amount of discussions on the climate change effect other than - and I could bring Mr Moloney forward to talk more about this - discussions on several of the road projects. If I could use the example of the south-east traffic solution, if you travel along to the end of the airport and then go down the old road near Barilla Bay, the new road is approximately, in my terms, about a metre higher. I can remember quite a few years ago the discussions on how the causeways could be done to minimise impact in the corridor that's already there for them basically, although we had to extend it out. One of my questions then was what we are doing about the effect of climate change and it was very positive that it had been considered. The numbers had been considered and the department had actually talked with Pitt & Sherry, the contractor at the time doing the initial work, that the causeways would need to be about a metre higher all the way through to allow for that sort of effect. I've had discussions with several mayors and GMs about some of the impact that climate change may have on their road systems, but I can honestly say that I haven't moved fully into a full understanding of the effects of climate change yet. I guess my answer is the department does take that into account when designing roads at the moment.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, minister. That's just roads and as you know, the infrastructure for which you're responsible comes in many forms. I've sat across Estimates tables from various infrastructure ministers over the years and asked whether the department has done any kind of audit or risk assessment to existing infrastructure around the island. These questions have been going back since your colleagues came to government. Apart from considering the height of roads, what else is happening in the agency for which you're responsible to make sure that our infrastructure is ruggedised -

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Is that a real word?

**Mr VINCENT** - I was going to ask the same question.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Made more rugged and more resilient, which of course also has then a community safety and an economic benefit in buffering us from some of the shots when these climate impacts hit our infrastructure, as they already have.

**Mr VINCENT** - My portfolio is roads; it says Infrastructure which is roads and bridges. I'm not involved with some of the other assets that are around. TasRail have discussions there about the work they are doing on maintaining their lines, they take a lot of those things in too, but I would like to bring Ben Moloney forward.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - There's also the question of ports and coastal assets for which you have responsibility, and the assessment says:

As an island state, the operation of Tasmanian ports and coastal infrastructure is of critical importance. While there is a lower level of confidence for this risk compared to other tier 1 risks -

Which are detailed in the assessment,

the accelerating impact of rising sea levels emphasises the need for additional adaptation action as improvements to port infrastructure and coastal infrastructure can have long lead times for implementation.

Big questions here.

**Mr VINCENT** - Before I hand over to Ben, I will mention that on the ports for you, when I took the role on, it was just after I'd been through this process for the first time, and ports are obviously a big point of discussion. We discovered fairly quickly the projection of some of the infrastructure needs for ports, and this will be something that you could certainly talk to in the GBES next week, was somewhat limited. We now are working on a project, instead of a four or five-year forward Estimates on works in ports, we are now working on a 20-to-30-year infrastructure plan, of which a lot of work is being done on costing those projects all the way through.

Now, obviously you can get five years pretty accurate, 10 and so on, got to keep as a rolling stock, but there is a lot of work doing there. The other thing I've been quite fascinated with the ports is their measuring techniques of modern technology on assets, on vibration, movement, separation and hydrology is a lot more advanced than an old carpenter like me ever appreciates. I've learnt a lot on that and certainly not an expert on it, but I'm sure next week, exactly on ports, they will be able to answer a lot more on what they're doing.

**CHAIR** - They couldn't do it in 2023, that's for sure.

**Mr VINCENT** - There's been a lot of work done in the last 12 months and with that, I'd really like to welcome Ben Moloney to the table. He might be able to talk more specifically about what the department is doing when they're thinking of individual projects.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We're trying to just get a picture - and thank you, Mr Moloney, just so that you can save the time of the committee - of the department's strategy for dealing with climate risk in specific terms: succinct and specific terms, Mr Moloney.

**CHAIR** - Can you introduce Mr Moloney by his title as well, please, minister, or can he do it himself?

**Mr MOLONEY** - I'm Ben Moloney, I am the Executive Director of Major Transport Projects on behalf of the Department of State Growth. In terms of future proofing and taking into consideration climate change and everything else, there are probably two main aspects: there's the maintenance side, making sure that you continue to maintain and protect your existing infrastructure assets, and then there's new developments. For the last 10 years or so, I've been more in the new development side.

It's a little bit more difficult for me to discuss how the department is currently approaching the maintenance side, but from my previous days working maintenance, it was a key consideration in how we programmed either periodic maintenance or regular maintenance to make sure that we were maintaining our assets, and where there was periodic maintenance, so where we were doing something more substantial, you were seeking to provide extra protection so that the roads were more resilient. If you think of some of our challenging roads in mountainous countries, making sure the drainage is sufficient for extra flows and the likes, and then -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Or a road like the South Arm Highway at Lauderdale, which is right on sea level.

**CHAIR** - So is the Bass Highway nearly all the way along.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Exactly: we've got a lot of these kinds of roads, that will be a real challenge, especially if we don't have enough money to deal with it, which, if we go ahead with this ridiculous stadium idea is a strong possibility, on top of our debt situation.

**Mr MOLONEY** - Essentially projects have that opportunity to uplift and provide improved conservatism and protection against those future changes. For instance, if I use the new Bridgewater Bridge project as an example, we acknowledge and recognise that the Lyell Highway from Bridgewater to New Norfolk has a lot of sections there which are quite low. A project could, theoretically, take the approach, well, if there's going to be a flood, they're going to flood, so therefore we don't need to do anything better than what is existing; but what that would do is set the benchmark going forward. Rather than doing that, the new Bridgewater Bridge project adopted the process of considering and making sure we accommodated for future sea level rises and the likes, so that the section that we were upgrading was at a higher level and could accommodate those adjustments in flood levels and the like.

That set the new benchmark, so that if there are further projects along that highway, the Lyell Highway between Bridgewater and New Norfolk, it could then ensure that each of those projects ideally, subject to budget and the likes, could be upgraded and lift the road and the level of protection in those locations. That's, I guess, an example of where a major project has been able to set the new benchmark to take into consideration those longer-term changes.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thanks, Mr Moloney. Chair -

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Could I just ask the secretary to add on a departmental level, please, which is where it all stems from?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Ms O'Connor, I have the benefit having the Climate Change Office in the department, and so since the 2024 report has been assessed as part of the work, the Climate Change Office has presented to our executive about that report and the importance. In addition, we're presenting to the secretaries board regularly so all my colleagues understand the impact of the work there. In relation to a department basis, climate change is on our risk register -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I should hope so.

**Mr LIMKIN** - It is on our risk register. I think it's very important that it's on our risk register. I wanted to say it, because it should be, and then it is embedded in all the assessments that we do across the department. We ask each one of the business units to do it and we will continue to have our Climate Change Office present at our executive so that people are informed, and that they can build this into their appropriate processes as Mr Moloney has spoken about.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you. I will say in closing before passing on, it's really important that heads of agency and other skilled people within government departments are clearly focused on this, because as you know, minister, ministers come and go, and agencies often have people in there who've been working in the field for a long time. I thank you, Mr Limkin. I encourage you to even further elevate the understanding of climate risk and make sure that your department is helping whatever minister you serve access the funds that you need, even if it means difficult choices, in order to keep Tasmanians safe and buffer us from the economic shocks of what's coming.

**CHAIR** - I think that's a statement.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - If I can just pick up on one of the things Cassy raised around particularly coastal erosion and impacts on ports. We know the huge scouring that's gone on under berth 4 - and this can be followed up more by committee B who's got TasPorts, not us - but I just want to take you to the Budget. We know that climate change is having a massive impact. There is a lot of work that needs to be done, like berth 4 at Burnie needs massive work. When we look at the future profitability as described in the budget paper 1 of TasPorts, in the out years they just fall right away in terms of their income tax equivalents, which is an indication of their profit level, and the returns to government also are low.

They don't seem to have a lot of headroom to be able to fund their own. Is it expected then when these things - because we need to have reliable ports - that there will need to be a government top-up of some form to assist them to make sure that they can provide the infrastructure this state needs as an island state?

**Mr VINCENT** - Obviously, next week the GBE is the perfect time to ask that.

**CHAIR** - No, I'm talking from a government perspective here, because this is the government's Budget and there's no funding that I can see to assist TasPorts.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - In summary, we been talking heavily with TasPorts about working on the actual costings of what their projection is going forward. We're starting to see those figures with a greater understanding now and will do over the next three or four months at least, for the forward Estimates, the next four to five years, by the next budget. We will be working through that to try to have a very good understanding, and transparent understanding, of what is required both in our operational ports, firstly, because they provide services and goods to Tassie, and then, secondly, the community assets that TasPorts are required for and what is required for those. I don't have a proper figure on that other than we know it's a substantial number over the next 20 years. But more of that will become available.

**CHAIR** - What is your expectation of the number - I mean, 20 years is a long way out. That's well beyond the forward Estimates.

**Mr VINCENT** - Well beyond.

**CHAIR** - Bearing in mind that next year's budget will go out one more year to 2029-30, what would your expectation be of TasPorts' additional funding over that forward Estimates period?

**Mr VINCENT** - I haven't got those figures available to me, but if you look at it simply that \$188 million has been put aside for the Antarctic wharf there and you still have 4 and 5 to do on top of that -

**CHAIR** - That's just in Hobart?

**Mr VINCENT** - That's just in Hobart. Then the work they're doing with Strait Link on the wharf there in Burnie is giving an indication on new techniques of what they need to strengthen some of the walls. They're not fully costed. They're still working through that.

But it's a continual program in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

**CHAIR** - For TasPorts to generate enough revenue to fund those things, it's likely they will have to put their freight costs and their lease costs up that much. It probably becomes prohibitive, one would think. Is it your expectation that the government will find money to help them maintain and upgrade these critical assets?

**Mr VINCENT** - No. We'll come across that with the federal government when we have to, as we need to.

Obviously, the assets are very old in many cases and there's a lot of work needs to be done. We will have those numbers over coming months to give a better indication going into the May budget on what will need to be expected.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I have a few questions about the Tasman Highway upgrade, which we have learnt this morning is part of that process of pushing out expenditure.

This is a project that's been on the government's agenda for the last six-and-a-half years. As we understand it, part of the reason we are where we are is because State Growth, through previous ministers, obviously, put a lot of time into trying to avoid EPBC assessment of the values along the highway there. Could we please have an update on how the money that's been

## PUBLIC

allocated to that project so far has been spent? We suspect that quite a lot has been spent on consultants commissioned to try to get around the EPBC act.

**Mr VINCENT** - I wouldn't have the breakdown of those costs, but we could work through that, if you like, and produce that. I have the cost of each of the projects there, on the South East Traffic Solution (SETS) project, but I wouldn't have a breakdown at hand.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Is it possible to get a breakdown, minister?

**Mr VINCENT** - I should imagine there would be. I fully understand.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - There will be something somewhere in the department that answers the question.

**Mr VINCENT** - There would be. I just haven't got it here at the moment. The team will get that for us and the breakdown on that that's the consultants.

The biodiversity and all parts of the EPBC, it's an interesting and frustrating point. Most of the things we're dealing with, with the South-East Traffic Solution are still items that we knew about from day 1. Some of the points are the increasing [inaudible] effect of the EPBC, which has changed somewhat from initially, and the fact that - and Ben might be able to follow with a bit more information. But they don't really want to start their assessment until the project design is at a certain stage, so you just can't say, 'We're going to put causeways across here; can we have an open discussion about this?' They need a lot more detail on that. It takes a while sometimes to get that concept going, which has added to the delay. Then a lot of questions come back. I'm not involved with all those intricate parts of it but, Ben, do you want the honours there, or Cynthia?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Just to be clear, when you said earlier that some of these issues were known about since day 1, it would be fair to say, wouldn't it, that there were EPBC act considerations for that project the government knew about from day 1 but, for whatever reason, chose not to deal with efficiently and appropriately, and tried to get around an EPBC act referral? So, the government did know from day 1 that there might be issues there under Commonwealth law and six-and-a-half years later, the project hasn't gone into the Commonwealth for assessment. Consultants have been engaged that the government presumably thought would bolster its argument, and money's being squandered.

**Mr VINCENT** - I wouldn't put it in those terms, but I will ask the deputy secretary to - Common sense says that if you can avoid a sensitive area with a design and a move of the road, you would do those things. I have been on the side involved, as the local mayor, on that project we're talking about there, with discussions with other landowners at the golf club and other infrastructure delicacies like the water line that goes through there and the MBM and carbon fibre, so there's a lot of things that determine the placement and design of that road, and changes were made along those lines. For more detail, could I ask the deputy secretary of Transport to take that on, please?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes. Again, just for clarity, we are abiding with the EPBC act and we've actually had referrals in for two years with them. We've had a bit of backwards and forwards as part of the consultation process that's required under that act. And we've got an additional

## PUBLIC

request for information that we're preparing to send through to them as well. So, we are being consistent with the act.

As the minister said, there is a lengthy design process. Our intent is to try and avoid any environmentally sensitive. That's the first approach. And then, if you can't, it's what does that look like? and then we have made referrals as part of that act. We are working very closely with the AGs on this. It has been a slow process. They've got a lot on at the moment. But we've been advocating to try and speed up that process and get feedback from them on our referrals.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - After a very slow start, minister, for whatever reason, a referral wasn't made to the Commonwealth until four years into the project. I'm sure, as the former mayor of Sorell, you'd be disappointed in your predecessors who oversaw what has clearly been a badly managed project. We're here in part because the state government tried to get around the EPBC considerations on that site.

Can we just be clear that we're getting details on the breakdown?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Yes, we are getting the consultant breakdown for the work.

**Ms LOVELL** - Minister, yesterday I understand your department secretary, Mr Limkin, advised the Estimates committee that he became aware of the question of TT-Line's insolvency on July 21. Can you confirm who informed the department of that on that date?

**Mr VINCENT** - I can certainly ask the secretary on the timeline there.

**Mr LIMKIN** - It was the Chair of TT-Line, Mr Ken Kanofski, who called me.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. It's clear that's pretty important critical information. I think the secretary yesterday said that he spoke to minister Abetz quite quickly after that. You became the minister on 7 August, but you told the committee yesterday that you didn't find out about this until, I think, 8 October, which is two months.

**Mr VINCENT** - 21 August is when I had the financial matter first raised. The 8 October was the further conversations which was regarding the Auditor-General (AG) report.

**Ms LOVELL** - So, you first found out about it on 21 August?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, because that was after caretaker when the briefings started for me.

**Mr LIMKIN** - If I may, Ms Lovell, just for clarity: I attempted to ring minister Abetz. I was not able to get minister Abetz. I then was able to contact his chief-of-staff, who I spoke to on the 21st.

**Ms LOVELL** - On the 21st? Thank you. So, you found out about the insolvency issue on 21 August?

**Mr VINCENT** - It was mentioned in the briefings that we had as I came in on an overall view of the TT-Line, as the new minister briefing.

**Ms LOVELL** - What steps did you take after that to inform yourself about that issue?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - More information was coming forward on it at that stage. And then over the next few weeks, the understanding was to me that the Auditor-General's report referred to the next 12 months as being okay because of the credit limit, and -

**CHAIR** - On a going concern matter? On that, make sure we don't verbal the AG.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, and the ongoing was being looked at and the board were putting independent people to review that in place. I was comfortable with that until more information come forward in regards from Ken Kanofski, the chair, in relation to how the board who are the person responsible for the solvency of the company whilst handling the matter. We had just general discussion of that and I was more than comfortable from the information that Ken kept me up to date with that they're going through a proper process with that.

**Ms LOVELL** - In terms of that you're comfortable with that process that they were seeking independent advice and further information, which seems very reasonable. Since then what information have you been provided with that means you were able to maintain that level of comfort. Have you seen the advice?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, just recently and the date is on the 12 November was briefed -

**Ms LOVELL** - By who?

**Mr VINCENT** - By Ken Kanfoski as chair and the CEO - sorry - it was Chris as the CEO -

**Ms LOVELL** - Not the chair?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, not the chair.

**Ms LOVELL** - Sorry, just to be clear.

**Mr VINCENT** - No, just to clear that. The CEO Chris and the independent body that's doing that review gave us a verbal online discussion of what that looked at, the reasons for it. The legal team.

**Ms LOVELL** - TT-Line's legal team? Sorry, can I be clear? Is it an independent body or was it TT-Line's own legal team?

**Mr VINCENT** - External team not internal, external.

**Ms LOVELL** - Okay, an external legal team.

**Mr VINCENT** - With expertise in that area.

**Ms LOVELL** - An external legal team, and the CEO briefed you on the 12 November verbally?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes.

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - And are you able to share with the committee what - I mean, obviously there's some sensitivity around the information, but what was it that made you comfortable with -

**Mr VINCENT** - The information and the report they're doing is in-confidence with the board of TT-Lines. The information was general about what they looked at, the points of law they'd looked at, and where they felt that TT-Line work okay with their position and the directors seem, from all accounts of that conversation that day, to be still working through that issue. As soon as they have worked through that issue, there will be more available to the minister on that, but I had no reason to doubt that the board was in a good position for working through the legalities of that insolvency question.

**Ms LOVELL** - If I can just clarify - I feel like you're very careful with your words there. You said that you have no doubt that they're working through the legalities of it. Do you have any doubt about the question of insolvency? It is a matter of opinion. The Auditor-General has made an opinion which is on a very serious matter. He wouldn't have made that opinion if he didn't feel like it was warranted. We have another opinion. Tasmanians, and we at the committee have very little information about what's informing that other opinion that we're expected to take over the Auditor-General. Is there anything more you can share with the committee on that about what's made you feel more comfortable with that opinion?

**Mr VINCENT** - The fact that we have a new board in place and chair that are doing, by all accounts, a fantastic job from everything I see in the way they are scrutinising things. The fact that the issue of solvency is a matter under corporations act for them to be dealing with, and the information that has come forward to the shareholder ministers, I have felt comfortable with that they are doing everything correctly to make sure they are in position of solvency.

**CHAIR** - Can I just follow up on that? Minister, it's a very similar question to Ms Lovell's. From an insolvency perspective, can you clarify for the committee the distinction between the company's ability to pay its debts from its own resources versus relying on a third-party guarantee, which is effectively the government and the people of Tasmania? Can you explain the difference about that? Specifically, does the existence of a government guarantee, for example, from the government, the money that's been the extension of the borrowings, which the guarantee is to shore up TASCORP, not TT-Line, to be clear. Does that mean that TT-Line will always satisfy the solvency test?

**Mr VINCENT** - The board has a financial review underway at the moment.

**CHAIR** - I'm not asking that, I will ask Mr Konofsky next week about his position. I'm asking about you. Can you explain to the committee how - when you, I would hope that you've got some legal advice yourself on this, because ultimately, you're responsible and behalf of all of us here to ensure that you've got a company that's not trading insolvently.

I'm just asking how have you satisfied yourself, from an insolvency perspective, that they are not insolvent and on what basis do you make that assessment?

**Mr VINCENT** - My personal satisfaction with the position at the moment, and that is changing as these things happen, but I talk regularly to the Treasurer and to Treasury to make sure that they are comfortable with information that we are receiving.

**CHAIR** - In terms of solvency?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - In terms of solvency and we're a position that there is ongoing work being done on this and we're stepping through this not on a daily basis, but on a as-required basis at the moment.

**CHAIR** - Clearly, it's a criminal offence to trade when insolvent under the corporations law. It's an offence, so have you had any communication with ASIC yourself as the shareholder minister?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, once again the solvency is through the board. We've been talking regularly, and my office has been talking even more regularly than I have been back through to the chair to make sure at this point in time. Like I said, it is fluid, it is moving, but we're keeping up to date with it on an almost daily basis.

**CHAIR** - Do you believe then the extension of the borrowing repayment out by 12 months to 2027 rather than 2026, and the \$74.5 million equity addresses the challenge of solvency or is that not enough on its own?

**Mr VINCENT** - Treasury are working through that with the Treasurer and as those reports become available and more information that will be reassessed if there needs to be changes in that level of support for TT-Line.

**CHAIR** - You're a shareholder minister, you have responsibilities here too. Do you believe that the extension for another year before that debt is called in by TASCORP and the \$74.5 million is adequate to ensure their solvency under the proper definition of solvency.

**Mr VINCENT** - For this point in time, yes, I do.

**CHAIR** - Do you do you believe there will be a need for further equity injections beyond the \$74.5 million to maintain their solvency?

**Mr VINCENT** - That's been discussed a fair bit inside and out. We will deal with that when the information says so. It is expected that as a government you would not allow any part of the government operations, of which TT-Line is, to fall into a place where they were insolvent. It is something that we take very seriously, of course, and we will continue to monitor, and I will make those changes as we need to as we work through with the Treasurer and Treasury

**CHAIR** - Have you got legal advice yourself as to the definition of insolvency and what your responsibilities are as a shareholder minister in this?

**Mr VINCENT** - Not myself personally. I've been discussing and was comfortable with what the expert advice that TT-Line had there on their interpretation of it. I have no reason to question that at this point.

**CHAIR** - Did you see the legal advice that TT-Line was provided?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, it was [inaudible].

**CHAIR** - How can you be assured, without getting your own legal advice on this critical matter, that the company is in fact trading solvently?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - I was comfortable to accept what we were provided with at that briefing.

**Ms THOMAS** - Can I ask a follow up on that?

**CHAIR** - Yes, sure.

**Mr VINCENT** - Sorry. If I could just add to that also that the advice that they are supplying to the TT-Line board is in draft at the moment, so as soon as some of that is finalised, then I would be requesting the department to seek further advice on when that actually comes forward.

**CHAIR** - You'll seek legal advice after you have the advice from TT-Line advisers?

**Mr VINCENT** - At the moment it's hypothetical, but at this stage we understand and accept the advice that's there in a draft form.

**CHAIR** - Your responsibilities are different from the directors.

**Mr VINCENT** - Totally different. The question of solvency is very much in the hands of the directors. We are comfortable with where it's at the moment.

**CHAIR** - You're confident they're trading solvently?

**Mr VINCENT** - yes, at the present.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you, Chair. You mentioned before - it's just linked to the conversation we're having there with the Chair - you mentioned before that the work that's underway with the external legal team, that there's the report -

**Mr VINCENT** - and financial advisers too.

**Ms LOVELL** - and financial advisers - that the report is in confidence with the board. Do you expect that you as shareholder minister will be able to see that report?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, the expectation is that, once the board reviews that, it will be coming to us to review also and seek advice on as well.

**CHAIR** - Just one final, unless anyone else has anything on this, but when the Auditor-General reported - and yes, it is his opinion, but he's a qualified expert in this field - I think it was unfortunate that the way he was portrayed in this parliament by the Premier, to not respect a senior integrity officer in this state is quite appalling. That's a statement which I said I shouldn't do.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - He did the same thing with the TPC panel.

**CHAIR** - Yes, a bit of a habit. Minister, the Auditor-General says he stated in his report that he wasn't aware of any developments that would have restored TT-Line's solvency. In your view, are there developments that have assured their solvency? He's the expert making this, forming this opinion on all the evidence right in front of him. What developments have

## PUBLIC

occurred giving you the assurance that they're trading solvently where the Auditor-General still held concerns?

**Mr VINCENT** - At this point in time, the work that they're doing with their independent or expert legal and financial team gives me the confidence that the board is doing the right things at the moment to assure themselves first up that they are solvent, because they are the first line that they're responsible for. We're comfortable with that at the moment. Should that change, we'll reassess. But at the moment, the draft report indicates that they are still solvent. It is fluid. It is being worked through on a daily basis. I am happy to be transparent and open about it. At this point in time, I'm more than comfortable that they are doing things right.

**CHAIR** - Under the obligation to the Auditor-General under the Corporations Law - I assume he did because he would have operated under the act - would have given TT-Line time to provide evidence that they were solvent. It appears they were unable to do that. But you're still confident they are. Despite their inability to convince the Auditor-General, you're still confident?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, I am. They had at the time withdrawn the corporate plan because of their overarching financial situation. The new board wanted to reassess their corporate plan and are working through that. This advice will play into a new corporate plan that we're waiting on also. They have quite a few things happening in order on this, but I am comfortable, as with the Treasurer, that, as the other shareholder minister, we're working through it appropriately.

**Ms LOVELL** - Minister, I'm just struggling with the timelines a little bit. I just feel, I don't know, I feel like this is not, like this, to me seems like a should have been ringing alarm bells all over the place and it feels like that response has not been there. A company the size of TT-Line, I would expect, would not be surprised by the Auditor-General's opinion. This can't have happened overnight. In fact, the Auditor-General - I'm speaking from memory here, so, I might not be 100 per cent accurate. It's been a big week - but I'm pretty sure he said there were some conversations earlier in the year about the finances of TT-Line. But I stand to be corrected if I'm wrong on that.

I just think the board and particularly the chief financial officer would have been aware that the financial position of TT-Line was leading towards insolvency. It must be, at a minimum, for the Auditor-General to come up with this himself.

**CHAIR** - Mr Kanofski himself said they were running out of money.

**Ms LOVELL** - Okay, thank you. At what point was the department informed that TT-Line was heading towards insolvency or the need for a bailout?

**Mr VINCENT** - Certainly. I will have to ask the secretary to go through that timeline, because it was before my time.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you. The first time I had been aware of the financial challenges and the need for further government support was when Mr Kanofski called me on 21 July 2025. I cannot talk about whether they've had in-depth conversations with Treasury beforehand. I do know that TT-Line has been engaging regularly with Treasury in relation to their financing matters for a very long time. Treasury is our financing arm. I suspect Treasury will have more information. All I can say is, the first time I was made aware was the date that I've stated.

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - It seems extraordinary that a government business gets to the point where we're finding out that the Auditor-General has determined that he believes they're insolvent and nobody seems to have known, which raises real concerns about the level of oversight for GBEs which we know has been an issue in the past with other projects.

**CHAIR** - The PAC report just tabled would clearly indicate that disaster.

**Ms LOVELL** - As minister, a shareholder minister, what are you doing to ensure that that level of oversight is improving and that the government has any idea what's going on in these GBEs?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. I'm happy to answer that. If we go back to around 12 months ago when I stepped into infrastructure and took on TasPorts, we were having very broad - not quite to the same level of financial - but issues with TasPorts. We worked very hard to make sure we put in place a board that had the skills. We kept going back to the skills matrix as we were selecting board people. We worked on a huge list and believe we have a board there now that is equal to anything nationally. The chair often describes it as a board of international quality, the people on there. I wasn't the minister but I know the previous minister and the secretary went through a very exhausting and similar process to put the new board in place.

In recognising the fact that GBEs did need to be reformed and freshly looked at, the classic example of TT-Line was the previous failure to probably bring expertise onto a board when changing direction from being a ferry operator to -

**CHAIR** - They are still a ferry operator, minister. They haven't stopped being ferry operators.

**Mr VINCENT** - You have concentrations that the board has to do as they've had to do with the new ferries and the port infrastructure without the level of expertise on that board. We have changed the way we think - certainly I have as minister - and I am trained as a board person and I have been on quite a few - not to the size of that board - but I do understand the process and the importance of a skills matrix. I work as closely as possible with all the boards that I have in place to make sure that it is different to what it was 12 months ago.

**Ms LOVELL** - On that, with all respect to you and the boards, I think, if we'd asked the shareholder ministers two years ago about the boards of the GBEs, they would have said they had every confidence in the boards.

**Mr VINCENT** - Standard.

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes. You said then - you touched on it - you said you're meeting with them. There just seems to have been over the last few years a very hands-off approach for shareholder ministers of these boards. In an ideal world, sure, you'd be able to trust the board to do everything right and we would have no problem. But we're not in an ideal world, are we?

What else are you doing to ensure that this board, which I'm sure you have every confidence in and there's been a rigorous process - continues to operate these GBEs in a robust and a responsible way for Tasmania?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - I can put hand on heart to say that I am directly involved with the boards. I don't talk to board members, but I certainly do with the chair. I do with board members if I run into them and we have a gathering or something like that.

**Ms LOVELL** - Do you have regular meetings with them? Do you have regular reporting mechanisms in place?

**Mr VINCENT** - We certainly do. Both myself and my chief of staff. The chief of staff almost on a daily basis as it needs to. For myself through our RFMs and our RMMs - our regular fortnightly meetings - took me a month figure these things out - and regular monthly meetings. The level of discussion - and I know I've used TasPorts as an example of the infrastructure about my involvement in what the board is actually doing - I do inject myself into that discussion as much as I'm allowed to without becoming a director myself. They understand that I am involved in that sort of thing. I do the same with TasRail, MAIB is a totally different thing on the finance side of things, but those practical boards of TT-Line, TasPorts and TasRail, I'm certainly involved with as much as a minister can possibly be, and we're very comfortable with that. We're very comfortable in also looking at the way we are rotating directors now and looking at the skills matrix.

We recently just added a position, say, to TasRail to save on the fact that we had some very good applicants and we had another rotation coming forward in 12 months, so to save the money of running two programs, we put a couple of people in place with one to drop off later on in the year, and things like that. We're looking very much at the rotation, and the skills level, and that doesn't mean that somebody dropping off wasn't skilled in their own area, but as things develop you might need to have different level of expertise on that board for the next three or five years. We're doing a lot of work on that.

**Ms LOVELL** - One last question, and if I can make a personal observation, if you will indulge me, I feel on a personal level that this is something that you would be invested in and interested in. I'm reassured by what you've told me. Is this something that is being led, more broadly by government, by the Premier, by the Treasurer, by anyone in government, or is it just up to individual shareholder ministers to do this work? If it is, do you feel like the other shareholder ministers are as invested and putting as much time and effort into this as you are?

**Mr VINCENT** - I certainly can't talk on behalf of other ministers, but I think the developments that have happened over the last 18 months have given everybody a shot of adrenaline that they need to be involved and where their responsibilities are. I might just go back a step further: one of the points I just discussed with the Premier when I decided to stand was about GBE reform, which the Premier was fully in a mode of doing that, and the previous treasurer took the first tranche of that through in an overall review, because if you look at - a lot of the different boards were formed for certain points of time, in different points of time where the letter of expectations, the constitution probably hadn't been kept up to date or just need to be reviewed.

A lot of that work has been done by outside sources and we still have two more tranches of that to go through which will work on some of the finer operations. The Treasurer now has systems in place where there is a lot more updates financially through to the Treasurer and certainly with the - if I moved out of my ministry, I feel sure that these systems that are in place now, compared with when I first came into this place, with the work done by the government, that that level of reporting will stay much higher than what it was in the past.

## PUBLIC

**Mr LIMKIN** - Minister, can I just add on to our previous answer that Miss Lovell asked me about? I am advised that Treasury regularly engage with the Auditor-General and TT-Line around the financial matters, and any questions regarding their earlier engagement should be directed towards them.

**CHAIR** - PAC will have that opportunity directly. I'm sure he's looking forward to that, the Treasurer. Are there any other questions on this line or we might move?

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, I do. Thank you. Minister, I want to talk about the Northern Access Road plans and there's been some discussion recently about the Northern Access Road being part of the City Deal, which came as somewhat of a surprise to me. Can you tell us the cost of the Northern Access Road, what the plans are for funding that, and where the reference is in the City Deal to that project?

**Mr VINCENT** - It was news to me, being a newcomer, that it has been talked about since I think just over 10 years now, but we're lucky that Mr Moloney is the project manager for that. On the finances, I will ask the secretary - or go straight go to Ben to explain more about the Northern Access Road, because that will be first-hand information.

**Mr MOLONEY** - In terms of the Northern Access Road, my understanding is that it is part of the City Deal back in 2018. I'm not as familiar with its history. I have only, I guess, come on board in terms of delivery of that project in the last six months or so. Essentially, there is an allocation within that budget of - I guess an allocated budget - of funding of \$75.9 million new funding for the construction of the Northern Access Road as shown in the budget.

At this stage, our cost estimates indicate that the project can be delivered for that sum. We're currently working through the concept designs so we can actually prepare more accurate cost estimates and the like. In terms of planning, it's still in its development of the business case, and final concepts are suitable to then put forward the business case to government and also present a report to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works to seek endorsement of the project and take it forward.

In terms of the project itself, its key objective really is to provide a secondary access to Macquarie Point. It has been talked about for a number of years because any redevelopment on Macquarie Point would require an improvement of access to Macquarie Point. So, in addition to Evans Street -

**CHAIR** - And the port.

**Mr MOLONEY** - and the port: that's correct. To enable the entire precinct to operate efficiently, it has been a project that's been talked about for some time, clearly with the intention to proceed subject to the approval of government with the stadium project. In terms of time priorities, it becomes more critical so we're working very closely with Mac Point, also TasPorts, TasWater, and also TasNetworks who all have substantial projects planned for the broad precinct, so we're looking to coordinate our project with them.

In terms of the scope of the project, in addition to the provision of the road access from the northern end of Macquarie Point through to the Tasman Highway using the existing half cloverleaf, our project also includes a scope to include a bus plaza to support the movement of

## PUBLIC

people on those major event days, so again, we're working with the key stakeholders to develop up the concepts for that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Can I just check, sorry, just for clarification, is that bus infrastructure funded anywhere in the Budget?

**Mr MOLONEY** - It's funded as part of that same allocation.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It's part of that parcel of \$75 million.

**Mr MOLONEY** - And when we say bus plaza, essentially what we're seeking to do is provide, in particular, a hardstand adjacent to the road necessary to support the number of buses that we're looking to utilise and other support facilities such as shelters and the like in terms of the scope there.

**Ms THOMAS** - You said that's at concept design phase: so \$75.9 million your estimates are, it should be able to be done within that envelope. Is that a P90 cost estimate, or are we not at that stage yet?

**Mr MOLONEY** - At this stage, our P90 estimate is within that funding envelope. There is a small amount of money that's in addition to that - I just can't recall the exact number - but something in the order of \$4 million that was existing funding. The \$75.9 million is new funding so, let's say, within the \$80 million total. At this stage our estimates include quite significant contingencies because we're at that early concept design stage, but our estimates are within that envelope.

**Ms THOMAS** - So can you have a P90 cost estimate even when you're at that early concept design phase?

**Mr MOLONEY** - That's actually, I guess, the whole approach to developing P90 and P50 estimates. So effectively, for the committee, P50 having a 50 per cent probability of being able to achieve within that budget, P90 being a 90 per cent ability to achieve within that budget. At a very early stage, what you do is work out your base estimate and typically your quantity of contingencies that you add on top are quite large. For instance, at a very early stage you might have - to have a P90 budget you might include 50 per cent contingencies on your base-cost estimate. So, our base-cost estimate may be \$50 million to undertake the total works and then we allow a 50 per cent contingency, which would bring it up to the \$75 million to have a P90.

Then, as the design evolves, it may either stick to that same trajectory and you might stay to, say, a base-cost estimate of \$50 million, in which case, as you have greater certainty, your quantity of contingency comes down, or as quite often happens on complex projects, you identify new challenges and issues, and you then factor that into your base-cost estimate. So, at this stage, we feel that the quantity that's been allocated is sufficient to meet the intended scope and does allow for a number of those unforeseen eventualities that every complex project [10.24.27 indistinct]

**Mr LIMKIN** - Do you just want to touch on how that calculation is done for members? It's either a Monte Carlo analysis or risk. I just think that would be useful for members to understand how it is developed.

## PUBLIC

**Mr MOLONEY** - I guess as in the case where we have more detailed designs and have worked through - basically when we're at a developed design stage, that's where we typically have sufficient information to apply more complex approaches to look at a probabilistic assessment of risks and that's where, as Mr Limkin mentioned, you can use Monte Carlo processes and the likes. In the earlier stages, when you are still working through very early concepts, typically what you'd look to is general benchmarks for similar projects interstate when they're at that very preliminary stage. Based on the experience of delivering those types of projects, you'd then allow perhaps more often than just a basic percentage.

I'd admit that at this stage, we're still at the concept stage - so we are, at this stage, applying more of a percentage approach to calculation of contingencies. However, as we proceed through the development of the design and we have more detailed analysis, what we're able to then do is identify specific risks to the project. We break down each of those risks and we identify what cost impacts they may have, what time impacts they may have, and then we apply what is the probability of those risks materialising. Then, that's where you get a basically a calculation of the contingency from that. We're not at that stage yet, but as the project matures and goes through those steps, that's what we would be undertaking.

Typically what you see as you have more and more information about the project, you have greater certainty, and typically your contingencies start reducing.

**CHAIR** - The costs might have gone up in the meantime.

**Mr MOLONEY** - Quite often -

**Ms THOMAS** - Minister, on -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Does it factor in the 30 per cent that we heard before, in increasing costs? Sorry, Bec.

**Mr MOLONEY** - It is a current estimate, so it has been undertaken in the last two months. So, it does take into consideration the movement of the civil and construction cost escalation over recent years, over the past four years or so, which has had that high spike in cost escalation.

**Mr LIMKIN** - And just for clarity as well: this project will go through the Project Assurance Framework, as members of PAC will know, we are a big advocate for the project's assurance across government. We're making sure our own projects meet them. So, we are complying with the government's policies [inaudible] of our projects valued over \$50 million undergo a mandated one.

In addition, we look at whether we have high-risk projects or projects that we want to go through the Project Assurance Framework anyway, even if it's below \$50 million, to just try and give it a good test as well to make sure we deliver them as well. So, this project will also be going through the relevant gates moving forward as well.

**Ms THOMAS** - Minister, will this project also go through the Public Works Committee, or, given its relationship through the order that's before the parliament if that's approved, will it not?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - The northern access road? As far as I know, it's going to Public Works as soon as you get to a certain stage. Could I just clarify that, please?

**Mr MOLONEY** - We've actually scheduled consideration by the parliamentary standing committee. I believe we have a sitting to consider scheduling the hearing in early December. So, in early December, there would be consideration of a scheduled presentation of the report in the new year.

**Ms THOMAS** - That's after the order.

**CHAIR** - Can I just explore that? As I understand the order, anything that's on that site is excluded from the other processes. But, you're telling me now - or [inaudible] be telling me, Ben - minister, that this will go through the Public Works Committee?

**Ms THOMAS** - Minister, what's your understanding?

**Mr VINCENT** - The road will; the road is separate to the stadium.

**Ms THOMAS** - Isn't it a condition of the POSS order?

**Mr LIMKIN** - The stadium cannot start to operate without the northern access road being done -

**CHAIR** - That's the point we're making here - that because that's a condition in the order, the approval powers sit with the secretary of the department or other entities. This is a very mixed message from what we've heard in the past, so we really do need some absolute clarity on this.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Minister, can I just check, just so I can answer the question carefully, what is the clarity that the members are after? What's going through the order process, and what's going through the standard planning process?

**CHAIR** - The POSS process removed the Public Works Committee, it removed the Sullivans Cove planning requirements; it removed all of those things. It was an integrated assessment.

We've been told in briefings - and I'm sure others will correct me if I'm wrong - the way I read the order was that anything on that site which is reliant for the operation of the stadium fits under that order and doesn't have to go through those other processes. And now, we're hearing something different.

**Mr MOLONEY** - I should probably elaborate that in terms of the northern access road, in addition to the bus plaza and the connection to the Tasman Highway, we're also looking at improving the connectivity of the existing half cloverleaf into the Tasman highways. There are aspects which potentially could be argued as sitting outside the remit of what is being presented to parliament on Macquarie Point. In terms of ensuring that we have dotted each 'I' and crossed each 'T', at this stage we are proposing to present the entire package of the project which includes the works on the Tasman Highway, which is part of the Department of State Growth improving and maintaining its existing highways, as well as a combination...

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - It has to happen for the northern access road to work because otherwise you can't get the trucks in there. Let's be honest about this.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Minister, can I suggest we take this one on notice and come back to the committee very deliberately of what is in the stadium order and what is outside the stadium order so we can answer it properly.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Today?

**Mr LIMKIN** - We will need to consult with DPAC and Macquarie Point. Subject to the minister, I'm happy to take it on notice and provide it to the committee.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I'm a bit surprised that that's not already well understood.

**Ms THOMAS** - Me too.

**CHAIR** - Particularly if Mr Maloney's indicated they were scheduling hearing early December. That's actually not very far away, like it's two weeks.

**Mr MOLONEY** - To clarify, we're seeking a hearing in early December.

**CHAIR** - With the Public Works Committee?

**Mr MOLONEY** - We are requesting consideration of the project and that request for consideration, I understand, has been scheduled for a meeting in December. At that meeting it would then be determined when the hearing would be scheduled in the new year.

**CHAIR** - That's the first step in the process.

**Mr MOLONEY** - Correct.

**CHAIR** - Not a member of Public Works Committee. I don't fully understand how it works. But you are.

**Mr MOLONEY** - News to you, Dean.

**CHAIR** - As opposed to you. The member for Huon is. But surely that initial engagement is an indication that it is subject to the scrutiny of the Public Works Committee. Is that how it works, member for Huon?

**Mr HARRISS** - It does, but there's nothing on our Public Works Committee, I'm only looking at the agenda.

**CHAIR** - This is very murky, minister. I hope you can come back with some very clear advice.

**Mr LIMKIN** - As I said, I think it's best that we take this on notice and we come back with some very clear advice.

## PUBLIC

**Ms THOMAS** - It's concerning when we're two weeks out from making a significant decision that this level of clarity isn't clear to the people who have significant power within the order to actually approve these conditions, which concerns me greatly.

My follow up question is: what else within the order then, minister, are you aware will come before the Public Works Committee? This is news to us. Is there any other condition or any other infrastructure related to any condition in the order that will in fact come before the Public Works Committee? I mean, including the stadium itself? Because what we've heard in briefings, minister, is that the stadium itself won't be subject to scrutiny by the Public Works Committee. There's not that layer of oversight. In fact, almost every condition for a plan that's required vests power in the secretary to approve to sign off on.

Minister, will you provide clarity on what within the order will be, in fact, coming before the Public Works Committee? If there's anything further than the northern access road? Be really clear about what will and what won't.

**Mr VINCENT** - There's nothing else that I'm aware of, but I will just check with the secretary who's running through things there to make sure. Is the northern access road a separate thing?

**Mr LIMKIN** - That's my understanding.

**Mr VINCENT** - I don't know of anything else. We will just check on that as well just to make sure we're right.

**Ms THOMAS** - Perhaps you might take that on notice as well. Thank you.

Coming back to the references to the city deal, minister, as I said, I wasn't aware the northern access road was included as part of that. Part of my question was where is it included? I will answer that myself by a quick scan I found on page 11 of the city deal, a very small reference to - a northern entry point will be established to provide access to Macquarie Wharf and Macquarie Point. That's under the heading of - 'We will facilitate an Antarctic and science precinct at Macquarie Point'. That is where the reference to the northern access road, as far as I can read it is contained within the city deal.

What progress or plans has been made towards the Antarctic and Science Precinct given that that was the intention under the city deal? And what's your understanding of the future of that part of the city deal?

**Mr VINCENT** - The simple version of that is I don't have any involvement in Antarctica, and it's doesn't come under my ministry. I haven't been involved with any other discussions other than what is required for TasPorts with the northern access road.

**Ms THOMAS** - What's your understanding, minister, as Minister for Infrastructure of the status of the city deal then? It just seems really curious that all of a sudden this northern access road has been linked back to a City Deal which seems to have been long forgotten about which has other significant transport and urban renewal projects that have been promised to Hobart through a partnership with federal, state and local government that are not being delivered, including the northern suburbs transit corridor.

## PUBLIC

What's your understanding of the city deal as a live deal? And what funding is being committed from all levels of government?

**Mr VINCENT** - My first knowledge of this being involved in the city deal was the comment made yesterday in Estimates. I've just been dealing with the northern access road as a project as such, not in reference. And then in conversation yesterday, it was mentioned that it had been talked about for a while.

I was aware of conversations in the last 12 months with TasPorts as to the need for having an increased capacity of access to the wharf for the development of the whole area, and that fitted in with the stadium concept.

I haven't done a lot of work with the city deal per se, but there are other projects being worked on in Transport through, I should imagine, the deputy secretary there with the prospect of the rapid buses and other corridors that link into that. But I don't have any direct involvement there.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The member's question earlier about what is in and out of the order, the order defines what the project is, which is what the order seeks to approve. The project is defined as the stadium; the relocation of the goods shed within the project plan; a concourse and plaza surrounding the stadium; and the associated works, including but not limited to access, parking, landscape and signing. That's on page 6 of the order.

**CHAIR** - Access?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Access, in this definition, is, in my understanding from the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC), general access, so wayfinding, pedestrian movement. It's not the northern access road.

The advice I have is that the northern access road and the other relevant parcels of land on the site that has been identified in the precinct plan for other development will go through a normal planning process.

In relation to the northern access road, the northern access road is being delivered by the department. That is why it is going through Public Works, because the department is accountable to go through Public Works. Macquarie Point Development Corporation is a statutory authority and, therefore, it does not - the advice I have, it does not go through Public Works.

**Ms THOMAS** - So, it goes through a normal planning process until such a point as, perhaps, it may not be looking like it's going to get approval. And then, is there a chance it does get factored into that definition of 'including but not limited to' all of a sudden?

**Mr LIMKIN** - My understanding is the order is unable to be changed and so, therefore, the order will not be - that definition is set by general law and would not be [inaudible word 10.38.26] to do it.

**CHAIR** - 'But not limited to' - that's pretty broad.

**Ms THOMAS** - That is a pretty broad definition, minister, wouldn't you agree?

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Notionally, you could talk about Davey Street because that is in the vicinity.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Was there Crown Law advice on the break-up of the components of the project? You talked about receiving some advice.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The Office of Parliamentary Counsel drafted the order. The advice I talked about was a conversation that was had on the clarity of a number of these matters. OPC would be best to answer the member's question about the definition.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Sorry, but did OPC advise you that 'access' meant pedestrian access, wayfinding?

**Mr LIMKIN** - That is the advice I have.

**Ms THOMAS** - With respect, minister, you will be likely to be on the floor and asked questions about what that definition includes, as the Legislative Council now considers the order. Is it your intention to seek further advice, if you are unable to answer it now, about what that definition actually means and includes?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, on the questions raised today and the lack of clarity around some of those points, we'll be seeking a little bit more information on that. Most definitely.

**CHAIR** - It's always a bit of a challenge to drop OPC into it, as they said, because as I understand it, drafting instructions are provided by you, minister?

**Mr VINCENT** - For the order, yes.

**CHAIR** - And so, what was your intention drafting that piece with 'but not limited to'?

**Ms THOMAS** - 'including but not limited to'.

**Mr VINCENT** - Certainly, I understood the 'not limited' to be into those items that the secretary has mentioned involved in that immediate footprint of the stadium. I never took it to mean any changes with the northern access road. I was always under the opinion that was a totally separate project [inaudible] -

**CHAIR** - How can it be totally separate when the stadium can't operate without it, which was made very clear?

**Mr VINCENT** - Look, I don't know the legalities of the wording of that -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's a point the TPC made as well.

**Mr VINCENT** - Both projects are running in conjunction with one another, and I was comfortable with that at the time [inaudible] -

**CHAIR** - When this was first put forward, though, I'm pretty clear in my mind, and other members can speak for themselves, that the northern access road was part of this project because one was reliant on the other. The provisions of the Public Works Committee and other

## PUBLIC

planning provisions were switched off by the Project of State Significance (POSS), as is the process. It's a planning process that's different.

**Mr VINCENT** - Look, I haven't got an immediate answer. I'll seek some more advice and come back to the committee.

**Ms THOMAS** - Thank you. And just to be clear, the \$75.9 plus \$4.5, did you say million for the -

**Mr VINCENT** - I think it might have been three - clarification, I've got \$3 million.

**Ms THOMAS** - So \$75.9, plus \$3 million for the northern access road? Given the seemingly out-of-the-blue references to the City deal, this is being fully funded by the state government? There's no federal funding allocated for the northern access road?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, that's correct.

**Ms THOMAS** - Okay. The references to the other projects in the City deal I mentioned before do link in with this proposed northern access road. Is there any impact that the northern access road will have on the existing rail corridor?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. Mr Moloney was asked this question yesterday and gave a detailed answer on how it all links in and the thought pattern with that. I'll ask him to expand on that again.

**Mr MOLONEY** - In relation to the project, in order to provide that northern access link, we are utilising the rail corridor through that section. Essentially, we will be utilising the alignment of the old rail network and we will extend the northern access road through. It will continue past the car park there that belongs to Hobart City Council, then linking into the existing half-cloverleaf. That's the extent at which the existing rail corridor will be utilised.

Beyond that point, so from that point northwards through to the Tasman Bridge and beyond, our project won't impact on the rail corridor. However, as part of our project, we recognise that at some point in the future the rail corridor may well be utilised for public transport and other purposes. So, our project will consider how a road connection, or other form of connection, would be made to the rail corridor at that northern extremity of the project site. So, whilst we won't build a road connection, we will show how it could be provided at a later date should it be necessary for something such as a rapid bus transport system or the likes.

We will be utilising the part of the rail corridor between Mac Point and where the northern access road will connect to the existing cloverleaf and we will ensure that there is connectivity northwards from that point.

**Ms THOMAS** - On the northern suburbs transit corridor, the City deal did say that the identified solution will be activated in five to 10 years. That City deal was signed in 2019, so there's four years to go. Are you confident that a transport solution will be activated on that transit corridor by 2029?

**Mr VINCENT** - I can't predict the future. I've only been in this role for a short time. But the report that's before us at the moment for consideration, and the strategic plan being done,

## PUBLIC

will make that clearer on the costs and benefits on how that proceeds. We'll know that in the first part of next year.

**Ms THOMAS** - Are you able to tell us whether the report that you mentioned, the strategic business case, I think you're referring to, for the northern suburbs transit corridor includes a benefit-cost ratio?

**Mr VINCENT** - I have the understanding it does have all that in it.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I may just ask Ms Heydon too. It does include a cost-benefit ratio. It is a preliminary business case at the moment; the cost-benefit ratio becomes more accurate as the costings become on, when you go from a strategic business case or a preliminary business case, for a final business case. The final business case benefit-cost ratios are really what Infrastructure Australia use and governments use as investment decisions, but there is an estimate based on the costs we have at the moment. Cynthia, is there anything you want to add at all?

**Ms HEYDON** - No, that's correct. Yes, for your question around the delivery profile based on the work that we've done and the times that were targeting to finish a final business case, should it be approved to go through, that we'd be targeting to go to the feds to get funding in early 2027.

**Ms THOMAS** - Does the strategic business case that's been prepared, minister, outline different mode options or only bus rapid transit?

**Mr VINCENT** - Certainly there have been different modes of transport looked at with the consultants and the different use of the corridors that link out through that way as well, use of the Brooker, the main road and the rail corridor, and that also relates to options for further expansion to the south and east as well.

**Ms THOMAS** - Are you able to tell the committee whether the strategic business case includes a cost benefit ratio for different modes, including bus rapid transit versus rail?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will just seek some clarification on that because that detail I'm not across at this point.

**Ms HEYDON** - We have done costings at high level of a full, let's say rail network, the approach that we've done is that we are looking for a network outcome. We are aware, because we also funded some of the work, around the rail assessment for the northern corridor itself, but we've also done further assessment of can you actually do rail down to the south and to the east. Those costings pretty much have ruled out that as a network solution and we're trying to provide a network solution. There's been more detailed work done on the rapid bus, but we have done an assessment of rail at a high level.

**Ms THOMAS** - Is that information publicly available?

**Mr LIMKIN** - It's not publicly available yet, but once we go through the Infrastructure Australia and that infrastructure priority list process with the feds will be looking to make as much publicly available as possible for the community to firstly understand all the options we've assessed, the potential pathways forward and then other type of Maccas (?).

## PUBLIC

10.47.34) as well. We will be putting in the public domain as much as we can possibly can while maintaining the state's commercial in-confidence matters as we move forward here as well.

**Mr VINCENT** - Some of those points around this relate to some of the questions the member of Hobart's asked in the chamber regarding density out through there and even projects like the show grounds where there is an opportunity there for some social and affordable housing into the density and also discussions with the council in regard to the rezoning. There's some quite potential flow-ons through the ministries that I have and further discussions to make it even more workable into the future.

**Ms THOMAS** - Can I just keep going? I know we're running out of time.

**CHAIR** - Yes, we have a few more lines, but this is a big deal, most of it is covered here.

**Ms THOMAS** - What are the timelines then for the next steps in the strategic business case and the Infrastructure Australia approval?

**Mr VINCENT** - Certainly, I'm not fully familiar with how Infrastructure Australia work, but federal funding is needed for a project of this size. I will ask the secretary for his experience on how that system might work.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I've taken it a couple of stages, and so the next stage in this is the final business case. So we've been actively engaging with the commonwealth government to unlock some of the funding that is in our transport numbers to access that so we can use that money for to complete the final business cases. Those conversations have been very positive with the feds. One of the requirements they need is to have the strategic business case approved by government and submitted through the infrastructure priority list, which is the process we're going through, and then they will give us approval to move forward to that process and so that will unlock a further \$5 million to 6 million worth of federal government money to finish that.

Once we go through the full business case, there will then be an investment decision for both the federal government and the Tasmanian government. We have already started having conversations with the federal government on a funding profile for that. My view is it should be 80-20, given that the federal government funds other states' passenger network train services at that basis for major city movements, and so they're the conversations we're currently having with the commonwealth government at this stage.

**Ms THOMAS** - Minister, the secretary just mentioned that the federal government funds other states' train networks. Is there a risk that, if this is a rapid bus service, the federal government won't agree to that 80:20 funding split, or to funding it at all, because typically they fund passenger train services?

**Mr VINCENT** - My level of communication is limited on this this, but I haven't seen anything or heard anything that would be detrimental to that, unless the secretary has?

**Mr LIMKIN** - In all the conversations I have had, they understand that Tasmania does not have a passenger train network -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Anymore.

## PUBLIC

**Mr LIMKIN** - anymore; and that if we had to spend -

**CHAIR** - Back in the day, yes, we used to.

**Ms THOMAS** - Still got the rail line.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We've got the rail line, but it has been undervalued, underappreciated, under-maintained -

**CHAIR** - I used to go on the Tasman Limited, a long time back.

**Mr LIMKIN** - All the conversations I've had to date is that we are focused on rapid buses. They have not raised any concerns, they aren't not [inaudible], they understand that this is our equivalent to train-passenger transport, so those conversations continue and are positive.

**Ms THOMAS** - Minister, I just want to go back to something we discussed earlier, talking about the northern access road. Firstly, actually, can you confirm that the \$76 million roughly being allocated to the northern access road is not coming from the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor bucket?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Such that it is.

**Mr LIMKIN** - My understanding is that it's not.

**Ms THOMAS** - So that \$53.5 million that has been set aside for the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor remains in the budget and will be allocated to that purpose, not re-profiled to the northern access road?

**Mr VINCENT** - That is my belief, but I will just clarify that.

**Mr LIMKIN** - It is standalone; there is no re-classification. My understanding - and I've been advised - it appears on a separate line as urban congestion and that's all new money.

**Ms THOMAS** - What appears as a separate line under urban congestion?

**Mr LIMKIN** - The \$75.9 million.

**Ms THOMAS** - Forgive me for not being across this, but is the funding for the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor set out in this Budget, then, as it has been in past years?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will just check on that.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm advised it's got a different name, but Ms Heydon will be able to answer that for you, Ms Thomas.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, just for clarity, it's under the Urban Congestion Fund, and that is the fund that you've referred to, which has the Australian Government commitment of \$40.5 million and \$14 million from the Australian Government. That is separate to the northern access road.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - It's listed on page 96 of budget paper 1, so it sits there.

**Ms THOMAS** -

The Urban Congestion Fund includes the Tasmanian government's new commitment of \$75.9 million for the northern access road.

Is it possible then to get a breakdown of what that line on page 169 includes for the Urban Congestion Fund?

**CHAIR** - Over the forward Estimates.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, we can get that.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, I'm comfortable with that.

**Ms THOMAS** - I have another question, going back to the P90 cost estimates we talked about before; minister, I'm interested in your understanding of industry standards, benchmarks or thresholds when it comes to P90 cost estimates and the confidence levels they provide governments and other developers in cost-capping infrastructure investment.

Do you have any understanding of the industry standard when it comes to cost-capping investment in significant infrastructure projects?

**Mr VINCENT** - I wouldn't like to say that I've got a huge amount of experience, my pricing and estimating was quite a few decades ago, but I have seen the development and the assurance and gateway programs do touch on this, which will make it much easier for committees going forward, because as these gateways are hit, that information will be available to tick off, to give some reassurance to everybody in parliament that major projects are making those points and being double checked for everything.

I am confident, as I have mentioned in this House in previous discussions, that the programs put in place now for Infrastructure Tasmania and Infrastructure Australia are solid, and that the way we are looking at major infrastructure now, to get the difference between that P50 and P90 with the contingency in, and then as you work through the risk values, and gradually it becomes more and more accurate or adjusted as you work through, is a much more transparent and independently-checked system than what we've had in previous years. To everything before me at the moment and my knowledge of the industry, and talking to a lot of people in the industry, there is a lot more comfort in the way we're doing it now.

**Ms THOMAS** - That's really encouraging to hear, minister. I guess my question is, would you as minister be confident in capping the government's investment in any particular infrastructure project based on a P90 cost estimate?

**Mr VINCENT** - You always have to be careful in capping, because you just don't know in big projects when something could go terribly wrong or whatever. But, I am confident that on top of the P90 that projects have a contingency and a risk factor built into them, and that contingency is higher than what it used to be on projects. It used to be quite a small percentage; now it has increased a fair bit to allow for those things.

## PUBLIC

As the state develops more knowledge and has a different level of project management on those major infrastructure jobs now that our accuracy is far greater than it used to be. So, we are refining and defining that all the time, and each time a gate is passed or the assurance programs are there, there is certainly all the risks taken into account which increases our learning for any other project that may be happening or coming forward as well. It is a gradual learning, but our systems are quite superior to what they used to be and need to be.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Um -

**CHAIR** - We're going to have a break at 11.00. I'll let you go with your question in a minute, Cassy. We'll finish this line and come back to Road User Services after that. You had a response, minister?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Through you, minister - here is the breakdown on the output as requested.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, minister. Connected to the member for Elwick's questioning: is the future of the Bridgewater Bridge - the old Bridgewater Bridge, which has the rail line on it - what is the government's current plan for the Bridgewater Bridge? Because, if it is removed, as has been stated as the plan of course, that creates a very significant connectivity issue for rail. Very significant.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes it is, and there's been a lot of conversation in the 12 months that I've been involved with the Bridgewater Bridge. The idea of keeping the causeway is there, having them open to the public. That allows for them to stay there should there be some form of need for the connectivity again.

The bridge itself has been deteriorating for some time. That lifting mechanism is really, really struggling; it's hardly working. The removal of that part of the bridge - it would have to be a whole new structure that goes in there.

There are some other - and I will give Mr Moloney to explain in a bit more detail, because it comes under the Bridgewater Bridge project. The removal of the existing gantry there has started, and there are some impacts on what is classed as standard navigation channel to get through there. With that, I'll ask Mr Moloney to explain with a bit more detail.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Mr Moloney. Just briefly - I just make the obvious observation that to take down the bridge - rather than seeing what you can do to maintain it so that the rail connection is maintained - is extraordinarily shortsighted. Well, it seems extraordinarily shortsighted, because it instantly cuts off Hobart from the rest of the state's rail network. It's sort of mind-numbing that that would be the first thing that government decided to do is take out the bridge, take out the rail connection, and cut us off.

**Mr VINCENT** - I'll get Mr Moloney to talk about the structure and the deteriorating state of the structure and the cost of maintaining that structure if we had have chosen to leave it there, please.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It's all about choices in how you've spent your money, though, isn't it, minister?

**Mr VINCENT** - It is, that's correct. And we've made the choice to remove it.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - If your government choose to invest in a stadium.

**Mr MOLONEY** - In terms of the existing Bridgewater Bridge - the existing Bridgewater Bridge is actually the fourth permanent structure there in terms of the crossing, the new Bridgewater Bridge being the fifth. Had previous governments not removed previous bridges, we would have had a scattering of various structures throughout that area. In order to re-establish navigation up to New Norfolk and upriver, it is important that we do demolish the existing structure to provide that navigation access. We're seeking to provide a 45-metre-wide navigation channel. The existing gap where the lifting span is approximately 30 metres. That would be insufficient, and it's also not in alignment with our proposed navigation channel. In terms of -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Sorry Mr Moloney, what sort of vessel needs a 45-metre navigation channel? What kind of different vessels would be going up river?

**Mr MOLONEY** - For safety perspective, the 45-metre-wide navigation channel is consistent with the existing defined navigation channel under the Bowen Bridge. Effectively back in the 1980s it was determined that for vessels passing each other and the types of vessels navigating the River Derwent through that area, that a 45-metre-wide navigation channel was appropriate. We're seeking to deliver a clearance both horizontally and vertically that is consistent with the existing Bowen Bridge. In terms of the cost of demolishing the existing bridge, an awarded contract has been let for that and the works have commenced. We did provide the exact number yesterday, I believe it was \$13 million.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I mean \$13 million to demolish it, I'm not sure how much more it would have taken to get it back in a safer standard. Again, it's depressing, but this was the first option for government.

**Mr MOLONEY** - The cost of demolition is \$13.162 million. The estimated cost of maintaining the existing bridge was estimated by our engineers to be between \$50 and \$100 million over the next 50 years. It's safe to say that the existing bridge is in quite poor condition. It was quite challenging to maintain it as part of our National Highway network until a point at which we were able to transfer traffic onto the new bridge. It's difficult to speculate. We haven't done engineering assessments of the existing bridge as to whether it would be capable of carrying a modern rail network, but I would hypothesise that, if we did seek to identify whether the existing structure could be certified to carry that kind of load, I believe there would be quite significant challenges.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It's all academic now, though, isn't it?

**CHAIR** - Water under the bridge, under the Bridgewater Bridge, that's right.

**Mr MOLONEY** - It's important to note that the demolition of the existing bridge does form part of the new Bridgewater Bridge project, so, it is fully funded by the project, which has a 80-20 funding split with the Australian Government. As I mentioned before, it is important for asset owners to be accountable and responsible for their decommissioned assets, such as old bridges which are sitting in a marine environment and would be impeding vessel traffic going into the future. It is important from a legacy point of view to make sure that we do remove infrastructure which is no longer able to serve a purpose and that's I guess what was determined.

## PUBLIC

We recognise that there is a lot of history attached to our various structures. So, as part of our project we are also implementing a heritage interpretation plan which will utilise elements of the existing bridge and incorporate those into artwork which will be installed on the Bridgewater side. We also have quite a high level of information available on our website in terms of the history of the crossing and the area generally. We will be implementing a, I guess, a historic trail of information for the public so that, when they are walking out on the causeway or other areas, they can be aware of the long and extensive history of the area. For instance, the causeway itself was built by convicts from 1810 through to 1830. It's certainly a long history in that area.

**CHAIR** - Just before we close this session, in response and in some further questions with the breakup of 2.1 infrastructure, from this it seems that there will be no ongoing base funding for the Don River Railway beyond 2025-26, there'll be no further funding for the Tamar dredging program from 2025-26-27, well from 2025-26, and there'll be no further funding for the Tamar estuary governance beyond 2026-27. Is that correct?

**Mr MOLONEY** - That is correct, and through you, minister, my understanding is the Tamar dredging program will be completed at this stage. We will continue to assess it, and should it be further required in the future the government will make choices at that time. We continue to work with TasPorts and the Harbour Master regarding the requirements of that.

**CHAIR** - What does Don River Railway think about not getting any more base funding?

**Ms HEYDON** - We don't provide base funding to Don River Railway. That's reflective of the commitment from the Australian Government and we've provided additional funding to that commitment.

**CHAIR** - The \$170,000 is our commitment just as a one-off?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes. They received a grant funding through AGs. We're working with Don River Railway in relation to the delivery of that grant. There has also been funding provided by the Australian Government, but they don't have an ongoing subsidy from the state government.

**CHAIR** - There's \$2.2 million in airport infrastructure for 2025-26, and there's no more requirement for any airport infrastructure in the forward Estimates?

**Ms HEYDON** - That's in relation to aviation grants provided to Hobart, Launceston, and - I'm going to forget the other airports, but they were one-off grants, but I can get you detail.

**Mr LIMKIN** - They were one-off commitments by government. The department has funded those, consistent with the government's commitments.

**CHAIR** - There are other accruals and depreciation that's taken off the amount, obviously. What are we depreciating here and what do the accruals relating to here? I thought this was mostly operational funding, not capital.

**Mr VINCENT** - While the secretary is just gathering that, I will also add that TasRail has an agreement of assistance with Don River Railway, quite a bit to do with their rolling stock and rail and everything like that. That's quite substantial.

## PUBLIC

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm advised, minister, that it's accrual-based accounting by our finance team.

**CHAIR** - The depreciation?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - On what?

**Mr LIMKIN** - I will bring forward Travis, our finance manager.

**Mr BOUTCHER** - All of our outputs across the department from 1 to 6 will have accrual estimates, which are items that will be spread across all of them. It might not just be specifically for this output, it could be a department-wide one for which we have an expense. Salaries would have depreciation. Anything that's required on an accounting basis for an accrual statement has to be spread across all the outputs. They're non-cash add-ons. They're for displaying profit and loss.

**CHAIR** - Make the numbers add up.

**Mr BOUTCHER** - Well, they don't change our budgets. That doesn't affect the ability for the department to spend.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. We've gone a little bit over 11 o'clock. We will have a 15-minute break and come back at 11.25 a.m.

**The committee suspended from 11.08 a.m. to 11.25 a.m.**

**CHAIR** - Thank you, minister. I think we've got just a couple of matters to follow up before we move on to 2.2 Road User Services.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Madam Chair, the question that Ms O'Connor asked us in relation to the breakdown for the consultants, we will actually have to take on notice. While we can provide it at a top level now, we can't provide the breakdown that the member is after and we'd like to take it on notice so that we can provide the breakdown that she is after.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Mr Limkin.

**Mr LIMKIN** - And Mr Moloney.

**Mr MOLONEY** - Thank you. Just to make a couple of clarifying points around the northern access road project. Before, I referred to the project being referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I just wanted to get the terminology right. The documentation for the project is to be on the agenda for the Executive Council meeting on 1 December, is what we're working towards and have scheduled. It would be at that Executive Council meeting that a potential hearing would then be put into the calendars and dates.

In terms of why it is being considered and assessed separate to the Macquarie Point project itself, I do understand, and I'm informed that on the DPAC website there is the minister's

## PUBLIC

statement of reasons and within that a section, part C, 'matters not included in or covered by the order', and there is a statement there that lists some aspects of the broader stadium project for which planning approval will be sought through appropriate approval processes to this order. These are, and one of the dot points was, the development of the northern access road and/or improvements to Mcvilly Drive.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Do you just want to read in the other ones as well?

**Mr MOLONEY** - In addition to that is also the bus plaza for events, offsite footpath improvements, urban renewal housing project, which is near the Regatta Grounds foreshore, and the relocation of sewage treatment plant currently located at the northern end of Macquarie Point near the Regatta Grounds. So that is part C of the minister's statement of reasons, which I understand is published on the DPAC website.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**Mr MOLONEY** - Generally, in explanation as to why the northern access road sits separately: geographically it is outside the area of land which is under the control and management of Macquarie Point, and the northern access road will ultimately be a state road managed by the Department of State Growth.

**CHAIR** - Can I just question that, because in the TPC's report there are a number of descriptions of the site that include the area that does enable the northern access.

**Mr MOLONEY** - That goes part way for the northern access road but is not fully inclusive of the entire footprint of the northern access road, which needs to continue through to the cloverleaf on the Tasman Highway.

**CHAIR** - So would it be an expectation that the section that is outside of this area would be assessed by the Public Works Committee but inside will be dealt with under a separate process?

**Mr LIMKIN** - My understanding is the TPC formed a different view to the proponent on what they were seeking approval for. My understanding is Macquarie Point Development Corporation sought the approval for the project, and how the project is defined within the order will come before the Legislative Council, not next week, the week after. But the TPC took a broader definition of the project.

**CHAIR** - Sorry to bang on about this, but as the operations of the stadium are absolutely reliant on that northern access road, wouldn't the parliament need to be assured that that would get approval: otherwise it becomes completely stranded?

**Mr LIMKIN** - The northern access road is not approved to the order. The road is being designed -

**CHAIR** - No, no, that's not my point.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I will come to that, Madam Chair. The road is being designed and progressed through normal planning and approval processes including the consideration of public works. The order, at D1 section 35 requires that: before any events are held at the

stadium an access road and bus plaza is available, or an alternative solution has been approved in the operational transport management plan.

**CHAIR** - Okay. I will move to Road User Services, please, Sarah.

## **Output Group 2 - Infrastructure and Transport Services**

### **2.2 Road User Services**

**Ms LOVELL** - Minister, we had a pothole blitz last year. We had the Premier pretending to fix a pothole. I don't know how much help he was really, but there was a photo of the Premier fixing a pothole. There was a bit of a push to get people to report potholes as well. How many potholes have been reported through the phone line reporting mechanism, the pothole hotline?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. I've even reported a few to test it. I haven't got the actual breakdown of the - I will just ask the dep sec, through the portal we do have monthly reporting by north, north-west and south, of the potholes through the inspection, which should also include the phone ones. I will ask Cynthia for a bit more clarification on that.

**Ms HEYDON** - We have two mechanisms for the public to report: obviously, as you've mentioned, a phone. We also rolled out mid this year a new form that's been taken up by people. I will get the team to look at what we can provide in this session around the breakdown between those two.

**Ms LOVELL** - When you say form, is it an online form?

**Ms HEYDON** - It's online form, yes.

**Ms LOVELL** - That would be great. If you don't have a breakdown between the two, that's fine. Even just a global number.

**Ms HEYDON** - I believe we do have a breakdown. That was part of the joy of the form.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you. You had some other information there did you, minister?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, to give you some examples of how this is reported through to us all the time: the total potholes identified for the north was 3327 potholes completed, 3283 which is 98.7 per cent. I've actually been out there and heard of reports of potholes on a section of road but when we get there they're not there. Sometimes they're not always spotted or reported differently, but that's why there's always a little bit of discretion.

**CHAIR** - They might not know where they actually are.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. North-west: 4574 of which 4222 at 92.3 per cent. It can also be if there is other work required, of course. In the south: 16,111 of which 15,128 were completed in that time period. We get that on a regular basis now. The pothole blitz has moved into more of identifying and scoping some major patching. We have been actually trialling some different methods that are used on the mainland by Fulton Hogan which are proving quite successful in some areas, and that is where we cut further ones out.

## PUBLIC

For the period of 1 July to 18 November, the number of potholes detected in the state road network: 9512, of which 9,032 have now been completed, a reduction of 22.6 per cent from the number of potholes detected in the same period of last year, just for some additional information. With the major resheeting, it allows us then to program and scope our reseal programs, and it is my belief that this is where some of the deficiencies have been caused with the resheeting and the quality probably of the resheeting and the specifications of that. That's been identified by the department as well as contractors and alterations being made to that. It's not something you can go on fix in one year; it is something we have to program over several years to do.

**CHAIR** - Sometimes you have to keep going back.

**Mr VINCENT** - That's why we've moved from fixing potholes. So as quickly as then we can rescope the heavy patching to fix, and the way we do that is more substantial. Then you put the resheeting over the top, you've got your road sealed to stop the water getting in.

**Ms LOVELL** - That's my question. The statistics look good. You know, 98.7 per cent of potholes fixed, but they don't stay fixed forever and often they come back. I know there are a couple of spots around, particularly in the north-west that are notorious. What's is the schedule of work or the program of work to do some proper road repairs on some of those areas? I know outside Ashgrove Cheese is one that gets a lot of attention. There are pretty damaging potholes there.

**CHAIR** - The Bass Highway - new sections?

**Ms LOVELL** - That's how it generally is.

**CHAIR** - New sections.

**Ms LOVELL** - What sort of work is being done to identify those where there might be

-

**Mr VINCENT** - Can I just point out, the area outside Ashgrove Cheese was in relation to a contractor that we had arguments over the quality of the work, and that took a while to work through the legalities of that, to have the heavy patching that has just been completed in the last four weeks from my last trip up there - or five weeks - to be rectified. Let's say, that's separate to some of the other work.

The other areas are potholes, that when we identify, we have officers go out and re-scope the work for the heavy patching; so the crews can come out because it's a different sort of mechanism to make it a lot more secure. With the re-patching that triggers, in most cases, part of what the reseal program will be totally d a reseal over the top of those.

Now, we've increased our areas of reseal coming forward and we will need to do that for several years to make sure we have that coverage. Some of the roads though that are back coming up for major recon work where you take the top 185 to 200 ml of FCR off and do a recon on it. We balance that workload between those to say, 'Rightio we're going to have a few potholes there,' but that is down to recon. I couldn't talk at my level of knowledge on each individual section of road. I'm a bit of a pain in the butt to the deputy secretary, on every road trip, I have I come back with a fair list of anything I've noticed.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - The GPS locator.

**Mr VINCENT** - I haven't quite got to that level. I like to describe it more.

**CHAIR** - That's why sometimes you'd go and they're not there because someone's put the wrong GPS coordinate.

**Ms LOVELL** - Potholes are obviously a safety issue, as we all know, but it's also actually very expensive issue for people with damage that is incurred. I know there's an avenue for people to claim compensation, but there's strict kind of conditions around that.

**CHAIR** - You have to be able to prove it was the cause.

**Ms LOVELL** - What I'd like to know is how many claims for compensation have been lodged and how many have been paid, but also what are the criteria for people to be eligible for a claim of compensation through State Growth?

**Mr VINCENT** - A fair question and I will ask the deputy secretary to talk on that because it is a safety feature. The regime we have of inspecting, though, and identifying and then getting the correct repair is much shorter and quicker now. To the extent that even if we get a weather forecast of substantial rains like we've had a few times. The secretary's even being involved in this, in making sure that the crews are ready to go in case there is an issue with a certain area. I will ask the deputy secretary to expand with a bit more detail.

**Ms HEYDON** - Of course. Claims are actually made through the maintenance contractors, not through State Growth. We manage the contracts, but we have experts who maintain the roads for us. We will get some statistics with what we have available and see if we can get back to you within the session on that. The criteria is available on our site though, as well, but we have been working with the contractors to try and simplify the process and make it clearer for people who are seeking a claim.

**Mr VINCENT** - I might just say, as part of my work in coming into the ministry, was to go back to basics, and I talked about going to visit quarries and people that blast and then the types of gravel around the state and doing the work with several of the major contractors and quarriers like Hazels and others on how that works. The department even did some assessment of the sections of roads that was having issues with, and where the gravel come from and who the contractor was.

**CHAIR** - Do you see a pattern in that?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, we didn't see a lot of pattern in it. There hasn't been an enormous pattern in relation to anything other than probably, in my opinion, at the moment, that hasn't been fully tested yet, some of the quality or the specs of the seal going down. It's a lot of little things that add up to it all, and one of the things we're looking at is, everybody talks about fixed standards, but that was a decision of the department made to have a consistent standard that was updated all the time, but it does lead to a change.

I'm trying to think of the right words here, for quarries in certain areas. I will use the one with Southern Midlands Council, they have some quarries near Interlaken, near Oatlands there. When they did their major works on Interlaken Road, they weren't able to quarry, didn't have

## PUBLIC

enough material in their quarries and they didn't have a mining licence to be able to do enough because they had, it was a limited quarry, but it would have saved on the transport and we would have known that gravel was appropriate for that area. There's a body of work that we're talking about and doing off the side of how we can recognise some of those areas either with council or in areas of the state that we can draw suitable quarry material from that does make specifications to minimise the road freight and the cost both to council and state in various jobs.

It's another point of understanding the differences of gravels in different areas of the state and how they react to the wear and the dusting and the compaction. We've gone into lots of different aspects and there hasn't been something you can just say, there's the problem, we've got to fix that and that will fix everything. It's been lots of little one and five percenters along the way.

**Ms LOVELL** - Minister, you talked about that largely the work is being managed by contractors, and as I understand it, when a contract is awarded to an external contractor, the department formally hands over responsibility for that section of road to the contractor and then, is it correct, that the department's not liable for any damage or loss through the actions of the contractor?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will just clarify that through Cynthia.

**Ms HEYDON** - It may depend on what in particular, but essentially, yes, the maintenance of and control of that part of the road or section of the network would sit with our contractor. That doesn't mean we are completely not involved. We do have responsibility for the management of the network, but it may depend on what sort of claim or issue there might be as to where we might be sitting.

**Mr VINCENT** - There are certain things there that build risk into some of those contracts of the scope of the work and what risk might be involved so that may well be rebuilding the contract instead of something coming back as a blowout that is fixable by the contractors as they're doing the contract instead of it coming back to government all the time.

**Ms LOVELL** - What's the process that the contractors will undertake with transport or with State Growth after identifying a fault and work being required to repair the area, do they have to seek approval from government department at all to undertake that work?

**Mr VINCENT** - There's a couple of different aspects to this and once again I will get the deputy secretary to clarify, but we have our own people looking and scoping, the [inaudible] potholes sit largely with the inspection and reporting process.

When you get into doing the heavy patching and any of the reseals or anything above pot-holing there is a different process of inspection and scoping the square metre each of each patch as you go through and marking out, that's what the white lines you see around some of where it might have been a pothole, but it's gradually working out because of the moisture in the gravel, and that is done by I believe department people or contractors.

**Ms HEYDON** - What happens is, if anyone finds something on the network, it gets reported. It can be reported through a member of the public or it can be reported through contractors. It actually goes into our reporting management system, depending on the nature of the, let's say, damage fault, that then triggers a timeline for when it needs to be repaired.

## PUBLIC

If it was something that was not, say, routine activity and one of the contractors identified and was suggesting that there was a different kind of improvement, that would come through for an approval process.

**Ms LOVELL** - That process of those reports being considered, whether it's from a member of the public or from the contractor, they all go through the same process.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, they all get entered into the reporting system. So, it's captured where a pothole is, how many potholes are in it, various sections you can break it down.

**Ms LOVELL** - How many requests from contractors to undertake repair work of those reports have been rejected in the last 12 months?

**Ms HEYDON** - I will see what we can get back to you within today. I wouldn't refer to it as repairs; it might be essentially a step above routine maintenance requirement.

**Ms LOVELL** - What is the average wait-time for those requests to be processed?

**Ms HEYDON** - Again, we will see what we can come back with today. and it varies depending on the complexity of what's being proposed.

**Mr VINCENT** - They have crews that have set up, say, for major patching, which is different to pot-holing. If you scope that sort of work and they go into an area, they may do a week working through a highway concentrating on that, so for efficiency, you get a lot more done that way. But the inspections are pretty good and it's an understanding of how many square metres, what depth, and that can vary on how it's breaking up and going further, whether they need to dig down 100 mm or whether they can do it with taking off the 40 mm and just doing a heavy patch. That's that experience thing that comes into play.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Are we able to move on from potholes soon?

**CHAIR** - Yes, I was just going to say. If you're done, I'll come to Cassy.

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes, I'm done.

**Mr VINCENT** - I'm happy to supply any other information you might need.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you, minister.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Minister, I want to take you to the situation on the Huon Highway. I'm sure my colleague, the honourable member for Huon, will have some question for you on this as well. As you know, in February of this year, a 17-year-old schoolboy was struck by a vehicle at this notorious location on Huon Highway and sent to hospital in a critical condition.

I know that since then the government has moved to lower speed limits from 100km/h to 80 km/h; but this is an area of road that locals, as we understand it, had been frightened about - for everyone who crosses it, but particularly for the kids - for a very long time. School children are reported to have said they feel unsafe crossing the road. Who would be surprised by that? It's the Huon Highway.

## PUBLIC

Are you able to provide an update to the committee on the safety remediation works on the Huon Highway?

**Mr VINCENT** - Thank you. Yes, obviously, it was a concern before that unfortunate accident had been raised by locals as an area of concern, and we actually travelled down there to stand there for over an hour watching it and seeing where parents pick up from. As we know, any school pickup area - whether it's at a school or out on sides of roads - are awkward places sometimes for that. The department then worked through a process with council all the way through of identifying some of it. I'll just read this page out to give you clarification and then I'll add to it and get the deputy secretary to add to it as well on where we're at the moment.

The Australian Government has committed \$40 million to upgrade priority sections of the Huon Highway between Kingston and Southport, as identified in the Huon Highway Corridor Strategy. The Tasmanian Government has currently committed \$3 million to commence improvements to the following high-priority projects: the Mountain River Rd intersection at Grove -

That we were talking about now -

And the Leslie Rd intersection at Leslie Vale. Design is progressing on improving the bus stops and pedestrian safety at the Huon Highway - Mountain River Rd intersection. On completion of the design in November 2025, the department has engaged with the Huon Council on the proposed design and consulted with the community on the preferred option.

I think there were five or six options done there of various mechanisms.

Design and community consultation on improvements to the Huon Highway and Leslie Rd intersection is scheduled to commence in mid-2026. In addition, the Tasmanian-Australian governments funded \$16 million and \$13.2 million respectively for the new Huon Link Rd.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Just to clarify, minister, did you say design on these remediation works, safety works, at this location are not due to start until the middle of next year?

**Mr VINCENT** - I'll seek clarification on that because I think that might be where it says here 'Leslie Rd' and not 'the Grove intersection', because we saw the original concepts and there were a couple of them that made it awkward for parents in other ways because of the growth in that area, and that's where council come into play with the local communities. I'll ask the deputy secretary to expand on those consultations and the final designs, please.

**Ms HEYDON** - Through you, minister; the bus stop and pedestrian safety designs have been completed and we'll be engaging with the council, if not at the end of this month, in early December, and looking to commence construction after community consultation in early 2026.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Construction of the new works in early 2026?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, that's what we're targeting. The reference that the minister made to mid-2026 is the consultation we will be undertaking around the Leslie Rd intersection.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - The other interesting point in discussions is also with the bus companies about where it's feasible. Some of the options were to turn the corner and go into what is paddock there now, but it's an area where they pick up, but in consultation with the bus companies it was also raised that makes it awkward because it changed the time when they've still got to get back out across the traffic. Traffic lights are awkward because you're coming down a steep hill. So, there was lots of varying things looked at and a lot of consultation done, and that ended up coming up with the final design that's in a couple of different stages of getting done.

**Mr HARRISS** - Just on the final design, are you maybe able to describe what it looks like? Where does it go to? Because you just mentioned then about there was discussion about possibly pulling off Huon Highway into Mountain River Rd and then turning there - there is another option to go down Dip Rd as well, but I just - what's that design looking like, and where will the buses pull into?

**Mr VINCENT** - I'll certainly ask the deputy secretary to expand on that please.

**Ms HEYDON** - I don't have the detail right in front of me, but essentially the section is concentrating just above the shops and the post office area and where the bus stop currently is located on that side, and then down to where the southern bus stop is, next to the orchard area.

There's a couple of configurations that we looked at, but the preferred option that we'll be discussing is essentially an improvement within those locations, based on the feedback we've got - actually not going too far away from where those bus stops are located but improving how and what they're set up. So, essentially rebuilding them.

**Mr HARRISS** - Right, so, students and passengers will still have to cross - in the new designs - they will still have to cross Huon Highway?

**Ms HEYDON** - We're doing pedestrian improvements as well, but I don't have the design to show because we're still locking it down -

**Mr VINCENT** - Be happy to get those designs for you, so you can have a look.

**Mr HARRISS** - Because there was a design - well, correct me when I'm wrong - that -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - 'If you're wrong, not 'when' you are.

**Mr HARRISS** - that took it off the main highway, essentially. Put it over near the Grove shop for parking and buses to pull in there, which would essentially - my understanding would be 95 per cent of the people that get on at that location, off at that location, go up the righthand side as you're coming down, so, go up the Grove shop side. That's where they live; they don't live on the other side. Essentially, the 95 per cent of them will still have to cross the highway.

I'm just trying to understand what consideration was there, I suppose, with the safety aspect, particularly of students? Because I know my kids don't pay attention around roads, quite often.

**Mr VINCENT** - That would not be right.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Surely not. They're much better trained than that.

**Mr HARRISS** - I'm just trying to understand where that design comes from, I suppose.

**Ms HEYDON** - That was one of the designs that was looked at, as you spoke around. That had a lot of significant movements of buses with people in a confined area as well, which then sort of started to force a larger and larger area, which then brought in other sorts of concerns - costs, time, location. We're happy- if you need to, we can arrange a briefing of that.

But, yes, we went through as many as we could - we talked with the operators, we looked at it from a safety perspective and a people movement perspective, and as best we could, we've landed on this preferred option to go out to the public and after consultation with the council.

**Mr VINCENT** - I think that's been through council as well, or to council -

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes. All of the options we've discussed have been through with council, and then we're working through with them on the preferred option.

**Mr HARRISS** - And they went out for public consultation already, didn't they?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, that was earlier this year.

**Mr HARRISS** - What was the preferred option from the public consultation? Was it this option?

**Ms HEYDON** - I'll say it was fairly varied. Even the option that we're going forward with has been revised based on some of that feedback. It's, let's say, a revised of one of the options that was put there, with consideration from the feedback from the community, from council, and from the bus operators.

**Mr VINCENT** - I might just add, if you wouldn't mind, that this is something we're experiencing around the corridor, and it's interesting looking at things on a statewide basis instead of a south-east, where I used to be mayor. Christmas Hills is another one with traffic - not the children situation, but with the traffic - where years ago, when you approved a couple of businesses to operate from there, you never expected the growth and the vehicle movements that are now putting pressure on a very awkward part of the road.

**CHAIR** - There has been a very tragic accident on that intersection.

**Mr VINCENT** - I wonder there's not a lot more, actually.

**CHAIR** - There is. It frightens me every time I have to go through there.

**Mr VINCENT** - It is. We're experiencing this in quite a few areas. Part of those corridor strategies are about identifying, the same as what it is for the Arthur Highway, identifying a few of those pinch points now and prioritising them as the funding rolls through the strategy work over the next 10 years. A lot more focus on the safety aspect of some of those intersections.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I think you spoke earlier about \$3 million allocation towards a small number of jobs, including this safety upgrade. That's not a lot of money.

**Mr VINCENT** - No. I spoke about the overall funds I've just handed back for the project at all. When you have a corridor strategy, and I'll certainly ask for a bit more clarification, you put forward certain projects, but that can be moved and taken from one -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Within that budget, if you need more.

**Mr VINCENT** - For that strategy, yes.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Because I guess -

**Mr VINCENT** - Yeah, that \$3 million was to commence improvements and work our way through it. Then the two amounts were the \$16 million, and \$13.2 million, which gave a total of \$29.2 million. Then that is addressed as part of our ongoing discussions on what money is needed for that area.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Following up on the member for Huon's question and the answer to that question about the feedback from the consultation, is what the government's planning for that section of the highway what you, minister, or State Growth, would advise is best practice in response to the risks there?

**Mr VINCENT** - Understanding that the department always looks at what's best practice for any of the design work, there are a lot of design standards they have to meet. That's part of what they look at. But I would ask for more clarification from Cynthia, please.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I'm just trying to make sure we're not inventing shortcuts because of funding considerations or some nearby landowners that are annoyed by the prospect of a new piece of safety infrastructure there.

**Mr VINCENT** - Landowners nearby were largely extremely supportive, just as a point on that intersection.

**Ms HEYDON** - Part of the design work actually does require us to do a safety assessment, including that sort of motion, people movement, because it is around pedestrian safety as well. While there is \$3 million committed, and as the minister mentioned, the Australian Government has committed \$40 million overall to the corridor, what we'd be looking to seek is some access to that money to get the preferred upgrade that we've designed.

**Mr HARRISS** - Just one last one on that: the decrease in speed limit from 100 to 80, is that anticipated to stay in place?

**Mr VINCENT** - That will be a decision for the Commissioner of Transport, which is the other-side hat that somebody just down here might wear, which is totally independent. We certainly make recommendations. Anybody who writes in or discusses that, we pass on. But it is looked at very separately.

**Ms HEYDON** - As part of the design, the recommendation is that it stays at 80.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - I might just say on that 80, a lot of work, it was interesting the amount of work. I think when we were standing there that day, the appropriate level of a hill being there and the braking time for trucks, and where the signs need to be, was quite a fascinating discussion - that you just can't put it there and it'll be right. You need to put it in a place where -

**CHAIR** - Trucks can't pull up very quickly.

**Mr VINCENT** - No. So, a lot of common sense. I was quite fascinated by the common sense shown in the placement of signs to allow for appropriate braking distances, and so forth.

**Mr HARRISS** - I think the corridor study noted earlier on that there's quite some turn-offs along that Grove straight.

**Mr VINCENT** - That's that growth that area is expecting, so I think there will be more of those sorts of projects.

**Ms THOMAS** - I wouldn't miss an opportunity to talk about the gigantic road signs. What do we call them? Information boards. You know what I mean. I raised this last year and on the floor as well. In previous question times and Estimates, I've asked whether the government would consider using those signboards as a revenue-raising measure. The feedback has been no, they are for the purposes of advising motorists of how far they are from their destination, even though most people have the capacity to do that through Google Maps on their phones - most people, not all, I acknowledge - to tell them how far they are from their destination. This was a \$22 million expenditure. I acknowledge that, I think, \$12 million was from the state government and the rest from the federal government. Given the dire situation of the state's budget, will the government consider using these signboards for advertising as a revenue-raising measure?

**Mr VINCENT** - They're not designed for that sort of thing. I'll have some clarification from the deputy secretary in a second. But they have been used in a positive way when there's been hold-ups at various points on the highway that I travel in diverting.

I wouldn't like to totally dismiss that they won't be used for other traffic enforcement in the future at some stage, to be honest. We're finding that speed cameras are having an enormous effect on slowing down traffic in certain areas. They mightn't be in the right areas for that to happen, but we need to look at all aspects of road safety, and the speeds on country roads and the speed of travelling in and out of the cities as well to minimise major accidents.

I can't remember the exact answer on the advertising, so I will ask the deputy secretary for clarification.

**Ms HEYDON** - There is no policy in place to use them for commercial purposes. Fundamentally, they are about advising the time for a destination but, again, for any other sort of emergency advice, safety information or changing conditions on the network to get that information out as quickly as possible to our customers and to the public.

**Ms THOMAS** - Thank you. I appreciate there's no policy position of the government, which is why I'm asking the question. We had the Treasurer before us on Monday, I think it was. He certainly wasn't offering up to us any proposed new revenue measures. I think at one point he even said it's a joint responsibility of members of parliament to come up with ideas,

## PUBLIC

or something along those lines. Anyway, we won't go further into that. But there's an idea for you, minister. I'm giving you an idea and I would appreciate you considering that.

**Mr VINCENT** - It has been talked about briefly in the past, so we'll keep it on the agenda for things like that to be used for that sort of advantage. I guess we will be looking at all aspects of revenues.

**CHAIR** - Whether you actually needed the things in the first place, too.

Minister, I believe you've got some answers to the question for the member for Elwick on the Urban Congestion Fund.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes.

**Ms HEYDON** - The Urban Congestion Fund is made-up of OTIS, which is the overhead traveller information systems. I know. Sorry.

**Ms THOMAS** - A big gigantic sign?

**CHAIR** - How much was that?

**Ms HEYDON** - Sorry, I'll finish. The Lane Use Management System, so what you see on the Tasman Highway, transport decarbonisation, Hobart public transport infrastructure planning -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That would be nice for something like that to happen.

**Ms HEYDON** - I will speak a little bit about that - Greater Hobart rapid bus network planning, Derwent ferry infrastructure, active transport and Macquarie Point northern access road. I do have the breakdown across the forward Estimates.

**CHAIR** - Is it easier if you table that, perhaps?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yeah. Otherwise, I would be talking for quite some time.

**CHAIR** - That's right. If you could table that. It would be a table of information, anyway.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yeah. So, we've got that broken down.

**Ms THOMAS** - That would be very helpful. Thank you.

**CHAIR** - That's broken down by state and Australian Government funding?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, we've got both. It is a mixed funding.

**Ms THOMAS** - Thank you. OTIS - Milo and OTIS.

**CHAIR** - Yes, Milo was on the agenda yesterday and we've got OTIS today.

**Output Group 2 - Infrastructure and Transport Services**

**2.3 Passenger Transport**

**Ms O'CONNOR** - As the member for Hobart and a representative of this highly congested city, I want to express to you the frustrations of the community that I represent about the lack of investment and focus on passenger and pedestrian transport in and around Hobart.

I'm sure you've noticed, minister, congestion is actually getting worse on Davey and Macquarie streets each day. It's very difficult to get anywhere in a timely way. What is your government doing to help the people of Hobart to have a livable system?

**CHAIR** - And those who have to come here.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - And those who have to come here. It's now becoming clear that Hobart's traffic and transport needs are utterly deprioritised by this government. That's the only conclusion you can draw.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, we certainly know the funnel effect of Hobart, of the Huon, Kingston, Derwent Valley, Brighton, and the south-east funnelling in, especially of a morning, and then funnelling out of a night. It does cause problems. My office receives a daily traffic report, morning and night, and the first thing is that it is colour-coded to make it easier for me. When you flick through it, you're really pleased when you see it all green for each of the major intersections and roads. What it does highlight is the regular congestion on Davey St or at Mornington. It might only be for half an hour, but it sticks in your mind very quickly about some of those congestion points. Being a person who has lived most of their life outside of Hobart and now working in Hobart, it is paramount in my mind, the complications now. Some of the reports I've seen on the greater Hobart solution - which I will talk a little bit about in a moment - are quite fascinating because although the Brooker Highway is a certain width - and the Tasman Bridge is there, which we know is under pressure with the amount of traffic moving on it - it is very difficult to keep understanding the growth of Hobart that's expected over the next 10 to 15 years and working within the corridors that we have. We have limited potential. It is becoming more difficult for us to cope with the present situation. We need to clear our minds and think of a different way of going with it.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Possibly because of previous decisions not to invest in some traffic-calming or alternatives to getting in the car to get from one side to the city to the next.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. Especially in Tasmania, we like the convenience of our cars.

**CHAIR** - This line item is about passenger transport, so, try and bring us back to that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes, but it is connected.

**Mr VINCENT** - We talked before about the work being done on the northern corridor and what that may mean and the different modes that have been looked at and will come out in that strategic plan about the thought pattern around moving people in and out of that area. Those corridors are being talked about to go down towards Kingborough, as well as to the eastern shore. Certainly, the deputy secretary has some thoughts on the difficulty of that which she will talk about in a moment. We have to look at how effective it will be. The new CEO coming in, just after Christmas, I think -

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - The CEO of?

**Mr VINCENT** - Metro. She certainly has a lot of experience in moving people, and her fresh thinking, I'm hoping, will be an added value to how we move people around on buses and make Metro more effective in what they do. Certainly, the work on the Southern Outlet on moving people through and the eventual ability to have a T3 lane there - that is for vehicles with three or more people, plus buses and taxis using a dedicated lane. We've already seen positive comments from people through the top of Davey Street - through the section that has been done already - when it becomes a full T3, the flow of traffic will assist in what is a congested area now.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Sorry to interrupt, minister. Maybe it will. What's actually happening here is that the road is intended to be widened at the outlet, but it still pinches into the bottleneck going down Macquarie Street. It's still a pinch point there that has not been dealt with.

**Mr VINCENT** - We are dealing with the pinch point there. We've seen the flow, but traffic continues to increase. The way we look at our density, which we have talked about a fair bit before, will work. I think everybody has a full understanding that we have to use our bus network a lot differently to now. The river ferries are certainly being looked at. The river ferries are an interesting discussion for moving people because we've never really planned to do that properly. There are issues with the Bellerive businesses complaining that car parking has been taken up. The one at Sandy Bay, the councils haven't decided on a site there. Lindisfarne has a site and there are ongoing discussions about Wilkinsons Point. There is a growing amount of people using the ferry system, but it does highlight our mentality as Tasmanian public to be willing to walk to a place to catch a bus or a ferry to get to where we have to go.

It's quite interesting when you talk about putting the ferries into a location at the wharf or the port structure here on where you bring them in so that it is a very easy walk for people to move and out of the city. It is also interesting about how you have that connectivity between the waterfront and the main shopping area, let's say the mall, as a destination of how those people will move, and the footpath and the traffic light flow through there to get people to and from work as well. So, there is a lot of work being done on that thought pattern -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It's being done in a sort of ad hoc and casual way -

**CHAIR** - Unplanned, as he said.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Unplanned, I think. Yes. And for a really long time.

**Mr VINCENT** - A lot of those pinch points have come around from probably lack of enough planning in the past, but there is a fair bit of work being done. I will ask the deputy secretary to explain some of that in more detail and some of the little things that we're finding in that discussion, please.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I'm happy to have sort of an overview, because we've only got another 50 minutes in this committee and there's a few outputs to get through.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes. I don't think it's a surprise that we perhaps don't have the PT share that you would expect for a city and an area that we have. What we have been looking at - and appreciate that perhaps there hasn't been sort of some clear plans out there - we have been

## PUBLIC

challenged with bringing that together. Part of what we've been doing with the rapid bus is not just looking at rapid bus but it as a network, as part of what the overall greater Hobart public transport network needs to be and how that integrates with ferries, with sort of the traditional bus routes, and with active transport. So, that is actually underway.

That's one of the foundational pieces; having that rapid bus network with higher frequency and higher reliability, and then allowing for the design of other bus services that also need to have that broader connection - maybe not as fast, but they've got to have that range to be able to capture more people - and then having better integration with all of those with both the ferries and active transport.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you. It still sounds like a fair bit is still in the planning stage.

I just close off this line of questioning, minister. You've acknowledged that Hobart's transport system is compressed. Do you agree that plonking a stadium at Macquarie Point - at a pinch point, I might say, where the highway comes into the city - is only going to exacerbate the problems that the city is already facing, which are still being dealt with in a largely planning phase? You can acknowledge, can you not, that the impact of the stadium on existing congestion and profound traffic issues will be significant.

**Mr VINCENT** - It's significant most of the use of the stadium would be planned to be at a time outside of a lot of the times when our peaks are already there. It's been acknowledged that there is a lot of work to do on planning the flow of people, and that a lot of work has already been done on that - whether it's on footpath, or whether it's by bus or by transit.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Can I just let you know there that the Treasurer the other day, when we were asking him about this associated infrastructure, basically sort of casually waved off the need for investment in better pedestrian infrastructure, when we were trying to get to the bottom of costs?

**CHAIR** - Everything's tickety-boo, he said.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - All tickety-boo, don't need to do any more work on pedestrian -

**Mr VINCENT** - 'Tickety-boo'? Is that one of the new terms I have to learn in political language? 'Tickety-boo'?

**CHAIR** - That's what he was suggesting, though. That's true.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes, that is absolutely what he was suggesting - that there may not be the two-storey car park, and he doesn't really see the need for extra pedestrian infrastructures -

**CHAIR** - Significant investment.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - And Ms Beach from MPDC indicated that their modelling shows that they don't need the extra significant infrastructure because they've worked it all out, and people will pour across the wharf, apparently, out of the stadium, and not end up -

**CHAIR** - Not fall in the drink.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - End up in the drink, or on Davey St, which is a busy road.

**Mr VINCENT** - I won't get drawn too far into that, but part of the orders there and some of the finer points raised by the TPC that I found interesting, and I just touched on that, with the way the ferries interact - say, with people getting to work - is how we do move pedestrians around. Because if you're moving, you have to think of the flow of traffic lights and the safety factor of moving them around, and that's going to become increasingly the same as we are having to look at the increased capacity of people using electric scooters and other bikes and similar sorts of transport, as well as the push bikes. We have to take all of that into account in being an active-transport city. I don't have the perfect answers.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We're not an active-transport city yet.

**Mr VINCENT** - No, but we are we are taking it into account as we go.

### Output Group 6 - Subsidies and Concessions

#### 6.1 Shipping and Ferry Subsidies

**CHAIR** - Well, unless there are other questions, we'll move to the next line item, which is 6.1 shipping and ferry subsidies. I only have - unless Dean has anything, because it does relate to Bruny Island as well, but this is basically a contingency fund if you like. I do note, though, that the forward Estimates for this line item are very limited in their increase. I do note that the expenses for this year, for 2024-25, were \$2.4 million. That much was paid out of this fund as I understand it.

**Mr VINCENT** - On Bruny Island?

**CHAIR** - No, this is the King, Furneaux Group and Bruny. This is the shipping subsidy, it's when things don't go so well. But for 2025-26 it's down to \$1.8 million then down to \$1.3 million. Why are we suggesting a lesser amount than what was paid this year? Were there were problems this last year that required additional - if you can highlight that and why you think it's not going to be a problem in the future?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, thank you. I will ask the secretary explain a little bit more on that.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Thank you. Last year the Government allocated money in the 2024-25 Budget year and also 2025-26 to deal with the drought challenges that were had on the island, to put on additional services to move those matters off island. Based on the advice from NRE, they're not believing that that will continue. However, we will continue to monitor this and work with NRE to make sure that there is sufficient capacity should those drought matters occur in the future.

**CHAIR** - So essentially this uptick was to manage the drought and the extra shipping that was required to provide funding to Warren Dick, and particularly not for the Bass Island Line, but for the Warren Dick service, Eastern Line Shipping?

**Mr LIMKIN** - We will just have to check who it is, but that concept was we provided additional funding to enable additional services on those routes to support the community during drought.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Okay, if we can just clarify who was the recipient of those funds, whether it was Bass Island Line and/or Eastern Line Shipping. I don't believe there's anybody else that came in, unless there might have been someone else to Flinders perhaps, but the bigger problem was on King Island with the de-stocking required. Okay, we'll move to 6.2 General Access Services. We've covered off some of this, their ticketing might be something.

### **Output Group 6 - Subsidies and Concessions** 6.2 General Access Services

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes, I think most of my questions have been covered already, actually. I don't know if anyone else has anything on this line.

**CHAIR** - On this one, there was a significant underspend in this. I'm just trying to understand, if you look at the expenses, there was \$91.5 million budgeted, but the expend was only 36.9, then it goes back up. I'm just wondering what was the lack of drawdown on that? Obviously it's going to need funding spent in the future here, but I'm just trying to understand what would be considered a big underspend.

**Mr LIMKIN** - My advice is that the payments are actually based on the contract payments. If there are payments required for the school services, so depending on the service numbers, because we purchase services, so if there aren't that many services done we don't pay for it. It's an allocation, then we manage the network to be able to provide those services. It's timing based on a payment of contracts.

**CHAIR** - Does this include the ticketing system? Is that to do with that?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Sorry, when you're talking about ticketing, you mean common ticketing?

**CHAIR** - That's what I believe it is under general access.

**Ms HEYDON** - The common ticketing funding is under the digital transformation fund at this.

**CHAIR** - So what does ticketing refer to here, then? Here the description of it talks about, 'supports measures including safety, customer information, ticketing and infrastructure'; what aspect of ticketing is provided through this rather than the digital transformation piece? It's on page 262, budget paper 1.

**Ms HEYDON** - Sorry, just for clarification, because the common ticketing is going to move out from digital next financial year.

**CHAIR** - It will come to where?

**Ms HEYDON** - It will be - based on the budget papers, it will be allocated to respective portfolios. That ticketing actually refers to - we pay, as part of payments to all bus operators, funds to support their existing ticketing systems and provision of ticketing. Every operator has their own ticketing system at the moment, and ticketing arrangements, and part of what we reimburse under those operating contracts are other costs associated with that.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - When the common ticketing system comes in through the digital transformation, can you just clarify again what you said about where it was going to be evident in the budget papers?

**Ms HEYDON** - It's referred to in the budget paper. Just give me a moment -

**CHAIR** - Under the digital transformation piece?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, under digital transformation it's referred, the common ticketing, that project is allocated under there, but it is noted in the budget paper that that will transition into portfolio allocations.

**CHAIR** - Once the system's up.

**Ms LOVELL** - It will come to this portfolio? Is that -

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, we have the money, it's identified under that fund at this stage.

**CHAIR** - It sits in finance general at the moment, all of that?

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes. I can pull the reference.

**Mr LIMKIN** - That's my understanding, yes.

**CHAIR** - Next year are we saying that this little period -

**Ms HEYDON** - It's identified in the budget papers that funds will be allocated to the respective portfolios.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Sorry, it will come out of finance general and go into Transport and the advice I have, it will be into output 2.3 next year.

**CHAIR** - 2.3 in Infrastructure, and passenger transport: that makes sense.

**Mr VINCENT** - Passenger transport next year.

**Mr LIMKIN** - From next year.

**CHAIR** - The forward Estimates don't reflect that.

**Ms LOVELL** - No. I was about to say that that's not in this space.

**Mr LIMKIN** - That's not yet in there because until we complete the capital build, it will need to go in there, but -

**CHAIR** - When do you expect to complete the capital build?

**Ms HEYDON** - For common ticketing?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

## PUBLIC

**Ms HEYDON** - Next year.

**CHAIR** - You expect to finish it next year, but the forward Estimates don't show -

**Ms HEYDON** - It'd be financial year 26-27.

**CHAIR** - Which is still in the forward Estimates, so we don't see that appearing. Is it just a move from finance general to this output, where we could expect to see whatever the cost is or the appropriation is, we will see a reduction in finance general of that amount and that amount appearing under passenger transport?

**Mr BOUTCHER** - The funding sits with Treasury under digital transformation fund; we spend to get reimbursed. The funding, if you look in the expense table, it's not appropriation, it's appropriated Treasury and so you will see the uptick in the expense table where it sits.

**Ms LOVELL** - In these budget papers?

**Mr BOUTCHER** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - But it doesn't appear yet?

**Mr BOUTCHER** - No, so it is in those out years.

**Ms LOVELL** - In total expenses?

**CHAIR** - But it falls away, the funding in 2025-26 - the expenses, sorry -

**Mr BOUTCHER** - This is on the current profile for common ticketing, yes, that's where it sits.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, we're back into 3.3 here, minister, but it's not obvious we should be somewhere else. If we can have a breakdown of what's actually funded out of the passenger transport line item including what component of the 26-27 \$11 million is for the common ticketing.

**Mr VINCENT** - We could organise that, dep sec?

**Ms THOMAS** - Nothing left for anything else; a feature of the Budget, though, isn't it?

**CHAIR** - That's what I'm saying.

**Mr VINCENT** - We can get a break down of that?

**Mr BOUTCHER** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Now or later? Later. We can move on, and you can table that with us later, minister. Nothing else on that for the members? We will go to school bus services, Dean.

**Output Group 6 - Subsidies and Concessions**

**6.3 School Bus Services**

**Mr HARRISS** - Thanks, Chair. Minister, can you just provide a quick breakdown of what the line item includes: is it purely school bus contractor payments or are there other?

**CHAIR** - [inaudible]

**Ms HEYDON** - The delivery budget allocated for common ticketing, 2025-26, is \$11.1 million and in 2026-27 it is \$2.5 million.

**CHAIR** - To go back to passenger transport 2.3. In 2026-27, you said is \$11.1 million?

**Ms HEYDON** - In 2025-26, it's \$11.1 million and in 2026-27 it's \$2.5 million.

**CHAIR** - Over the forward Estimates, further beyond that, is it still, that's it?

**Ms HEYDON** - No, it turns into business as usual.

**CHAIR** - Right, sorry, Dean, back to you.

**Mr VINCENT** - On 6.3, you were asking for the breakdown of the \$43-odd million. I've been informed by the secretary that they don't break it down into individuals. They manage that money through the year depending on what the incoming tickets are.

**Mr HARRISS** - I suppose my question was, is it all contractor payments? Is that line item all contractor payments? Or is there a small thing that's not?

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm advised that it is contracts with the 90 bus operators to deliver 345 school buses and 17 specialist school buses transporting students with additional needs.

**Mr HARRISS** - The \$42.9 million and the forward Estimates, year-on-year increases at 1.8 per cent. Taking into account inflation on fuel, wages and whatnot, is that current allocation and forward Estimates sustainable?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Demand for school buses fluctuates throughout the year and each year. At the start of each year, bus networks generally experience an increased demand and there's ebb and flow through the year. Once again, we manage this as a system. We work within the budget and with DECYP to do some work to make sure we are providing the services. The advice I have is that we've never had any challenges. We are also looking at new systems. For example, we've done a new trial of school bus services between Spring Farm, Wyatt Road and Whitewater ark Estates at Kingston Primary School and Kingston High School, which trial new services through other areas in the Huon and Hobart College.

One of the things we are very much also working with DECYP on is how do we provide specialist school buses to some of our most special kids in our state and so we are working in partnership with them and both ministers are very passionate about this to make sure that those children are able to go to school in a safe and respectful manner. I went out to one of these schools and I had saw firsthand the impact our buses have on these students. For me personally,

## PUBLIC

I want to acknowledge we do need to do better, and we are committed to doing better and we will continue to do that, particularly over the next 12 months.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It can be a really significant barrier to education and inclusion.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Spending some time with those parents was so unique because you actually got to see the impact our services have on them and it was really important for me.

**Mr VINCENT** - Things like the time on bus, there's so many different aspects to it that just don't know unless you're in those circumstances.

**Mr HARRISS** - What measures are in place to ensure continued safety on buses? Including seat belt compliance, because I'm aware of some that go from Kingston to Huonville and vice versa where students have to stand up or they are three to a seat.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, it's certainly open to a bit of discussion at the moment with some of the contracts coming up for renewal. There is currently no Tasmanian legislative requirement for buses, including student-only or general access buses, to have seatbelts located. Research shows that travelling on large buses without seatbelts is very safe due to the size and construction of the larger buses and their effectiveness in protecting passengers. However, all small buses used on school bus service are required to be fitted with seat belts and under the terms of the government school bus contracts, small buses are buses with 25 seats or fewer. New Australian design rules commenced in January 2025 and will require the new buses fitted with seat belts also to have seat belt reminder systems to improve wearing rates. These Australian design rule changes do not mandate seat belts on all new and existing buses, which some reports have incorrectly suggested.

The other part of discussions that we have there is the contract going forward around the time that that contract would be renewed for, which gives a lot of the private operators doing the school bus runs the financial capability to purchase new buses on a lease, or buy, over that time. We are having open discussions on that over the next few months as that contract comes up for renewal to ensure everybody is fully on board with what the requirements will be. Obviously, there's a huge cost outlay, and those terms and contracts will be part of that discussion.

**Mr HARRISS** - As to the BusSAFE initiative, which I only discovered when the budget came out, I think it's a country-wide program, but I'm interested to understand how schools get involved in that?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will ask the deputy secretary for a bit more information on that, please?

**Mr HEYDON** - I will have to come back to you on the details and the reference in the budget paper if you give me a moment.

**Mr VINCENT** - We will take that on board and get that information for you.

**Mr HEYDON** - Also, it was touched on by the secretary a minute ago as well, in our chamber last week, the member for Nelson asked a question about school bus services in Spring Farm and Whitewater down in Kingston. There are over 700 homes in that estate, and

## PUBLIC

they don't currently service a couple of schools; St Aloysius and Tarremah Steiner School. Have you got any update on that?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, I haven't got an update on that. I spent a lot of time sitting in these Chambers this week and next week. I have got the note to follow through on that.

I've just been given an update. How efficient is this system!

I might just say, before reading this out, is that it is an important part of what we need to look at as we develop new subdivisions, and one out in Brighton, up past the Brighton Council Chambers, is another example putting a subdivision in without thought given to normal bus services and school bus services as part of the planning process on that. We are conscious that there's a lot of things like that which we need to look at.

The Department of State Growth was not provided the opportunity to engage early on in the Spring Farm and Whitewater estates' development and were not able to provide advice on public transport provisions and requirements. The design of the estates makes it difficult to be serviced by public transport, but State Growth is planning on installing new bus stops on the Channel Highway near Spring Farm Road to align with the planned shopping centre development which will increase public transport access to the estate residents to existing channel highway bus routes. However, service adjustments to divert existing channel bus routes through the estate are not possible because of the significant disruption this would have the on existing passenger and highly integrated public transport network. The estates are currently serviced by two school bus routes to Kingston Primary, Kingston High and Hobart College, as well as several nearby non-government schools. The department is currently progressing the Greater Hobart Bus Network Review, which includes consideration on how to best to provide the Spring Farm and Whitewater Park community with access to public buses.

Extending the existing Spring Farm school bus to non-government schools such as Aloysius Catholic College did not comply with the school bus service eligibility guidelines. The guidelines do not allow for State Growth to fund new or extended services to support travel beyond local government schools. In this case, the change would compromise both the travel time and arrival and departure of students to the core government schools being served by between 10 to 15 minutes. Some thought is being done on that but it doesn't tick all the boxes at this stage.

Chair, the secretary has a couple of answers, and if I could just offer for tabling the information into the Urban Congestion Fund?

**Mr LIMKIN** - To return your question on who we support on the shipping, the Tasmanian government has a grant with Bass Island Line to support additional non-commercial services where they are required for drought. There are no other shipping grants, so it's only Bass Island Line.

In relation to the pothole claim -

**CHAIR** - Just before you go onto that, do you have a figure there for how much they gave Bass Island Line?

**Mr LIMKIN** - I do not have a figure. We can arrange for that to be provided.

## PUBLIC

In relation to the pothole compensation claim, the total number of claims received, excluding the ones that are not on the State roads because we don't track those: claims received for the financial year 2024-25 is 274. Claims for this year, financial year 2025-26 - note that we're only six months into it, is 109.

I am advised that most claims arise from the roadworks and they are forwarded to contractors to resolve. The department is not provided with the information on whether these claims are paid by the contractors or not. This is a matter between the relevant contractor and the claimant. The claims are sent to a variety of contractors, including routine maintenance contractors, resurfacing contractors and construction contractors, depending on where and when the issue occurs.

**CHAIR** - Dean, do you have any more?

**Mr HARRISS** - Just one. Is there -

**Mr VINCENT** - Sorry, I have one more point to add to what the secretary said. The additional sailings undertaken by Bass Island Line in 2024-25 were mostly commercial, requiring little government support. Approximately \$250,000 was expended over the financial year, including support for Need for Feed.

**CHAIR** - Minister, I did believe there was funding provided, or a subsidy provided to Warren Dick's shipping service, the Eastern Shipping Line. Where did that come from?

**Mr VINCENT** - Not sure, but I was under the same impression before I was even in this Chamber.

**CHAIR** - Because he put on extra sailings.

**Mr VINCENT** - We would have to check on that around the drought.

**CHAIR** - Maybe if you could just follow that one up.

**Mr VINCENT** - I will do.

**CHAIR** - Sorry, Dean, back to you.

**Mr HARRISS** - Are there are plans to implement real-time tracking systems on school buses, or not?

**Mr VINCENT** - Not that I'm aware of. The real-time tracking with Metro has been a huge success. It's been very well accepted. Very positive feedback by talking to a lot of different people on that. But I'm not aware of anything on the school bus network.

**Ms HEYDON** - No, nothing is planned, although for a lot of our school services, they are provided through a general-access bus. Once we actually have common ticketing in place - that has additional real-time functionality, we can look at whether it's possible to do it through there.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - In terms of the planning around school bus requirements, what interaction do you have with the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) in that?

**Mr VINCENT** - On a day-to-day basis, not a real lot there, other than -

**CHAIR** - I'm talking more about the planning side of it, not on a day-to-day basis. You'd think things wouldn't change that much day to day.

**Mr VINCENT** - No. On the planning side of it, there'll be more - part of the Tasmanian Planning Policies now is for bus services, or connection to services, to be taken into account as part of the overarching things for a development going ahead, which does allow for a greater scope of planning and making sure the department is involved with discussions on a new estate.

**CHAIR** - Your department or DECYP?

**Mr VINCENT** - With DECYP, because they have to still tick off on that if they're given the opportunity. And that will trigger for councils to ensure

**Mr VINCENT** - (cont) will trigger for councils to ensure, no different to checking with TasWater or other service providers, what happens with the service of that, which will allow for forward planning of potential to service areas like we've had with those couple at Kingston.

**Ms HEYDON** - We work quite closely with DECYP every year in getting an understanding of what the number of children are expected to be enrolled in each public school, and also getting an understanding of where there's been some potential or significant movement when a new school has come in. We use that to, basically, inform what we put out for the next calendar year.

We also then, as I think it was also mentioned, we do kind of adjust, often in that first term. While we might all plan and think that the movement's going to go a certain way, there may be reasons that we actually put in an additional service or change a service, based on how the pattern of use has been. But yes, we work very closely with DECYP in relation to designing, essentially, the service level of requirements each year.

**Mr VINCENT** - That could also include new schools at Brighton and Legana and things like that.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yeah. Where it is a public school, and it's a new public school coming on, we have a good engagement of how we can bring that into the services.

**Mr LIMKIN** - And they're like specialist school buses because we run the buses. DECYP have their staff on there to support our children. The working relationship has to be really closely together as well.

**CHAIR** - Dean raised earlier that one of the Huon school buses has three to a seat or standing in the aisles. That's not unique just to there. How many school bus services are you aware of with that overcrowding on the buses?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - I'd have to seek more information on that. I certainly don't have any on that.

**Ms HEYDON** - From a planning perspective, children standing, et cetera, wouldn't be seen as overcrowding. But we can get you the figures of what we have in relation to seated and standing.

**CHAIR** - Yeah, I know it's not considered overcrowding. This is the thing. On some of our rural bus routes, and down the Huon would be the same, they're very windy. You're interacting with log trucks, milk trucks, other heavy vehicles on quite narrow, windy roads. To think of a small child standing on a bus is hardly a safe trip.

**Ms LOVELL** - With some long trips, too.

**CHAIR** - I would be interested to get the figures on how many services, and which services, have - I won't call it overcrowding, children standing, or three to a seat because, sure as hell, when you go around some of those corners that one of them will slide off.

**Ms LOVELL** - Chair, can I ask, if that's not considered overcrowding, what is considered overcrowding?

**Mr VINCENT** - We'll gather some more information on that valid point for you.

**Mr HARRISS** - It's not just - when I say three to a seat, it's also the bags and everything. I can nearly tell, when my kids get off the bus, if they've been sitting on a three-to-a-seat bus because they're hotter, they're grumpy, they're throwing stuff about, because it's a 45-minute bus ride -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Like sardines.

**CHAIR** - Or falling off the seat if you're on the aisle.

**Mr HARRISS** - Yes. But definitely [inaudible].

**Mr VINCENT** - Valid point.

**CHAIR** - So, what is classified as overcrowding?

**Mr VINCENT** - I haven't got that figure and I'm not aware of that, but -

**Ms HEYDON** - There is a classification, and I can't give it to you right now, but -

**CHAIR** - We'll put on it on notice.

**Ms HEYDON** - from a public transport perspective, there's essentially what gets referred to as crush capacity, and then you've got seated and standing variations within there.

**Ms LOVELL** - What capacity?

## PUBLIC

**Ms HEYDON** - It's referred to as crush capacity.

**Ms LOVELL** - 'Crush capacity'? Wow.

**CHAIR** - Great, as opposed to 'crash' capacity.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, that is a PT, yes. It varies depending on the mode itself, as to what is - and that's determined by - yes.

**Ms LOVELL** - Is crush capacity the maximum - what does that mean? People are crushed on the bus when it's at that capacity?

**CHAIR** - You can squeeze one more person in. I suppose it's like a tram in Melbourne after a footy game.

**Ms HEYDON** - Yes, your experience on a tram is probably, essentially, where you've got people -

**CHAIR** - Touching each other.

**Ms HEYDON** - Touching each other, yes.

**Ms HEYDON** - Not crushed to the point where you can't sort of generally move at all, but yes.

**Ms LOVELL** - I'd be interested in some more information around what the definitions are and what's -

**Ms HEYDON** - How we determine - it would be our definition.

**Ms LOVELL** - Exactly, and what's deemed to be - like, what's the threshold? Is it at that absolute crush capacity? That that's the threshold. Or is there a lower threshold for children on school buses?

**Ms HEYDON** - We'll come back.

**CHAIR** - And some school buses have children of a variety of ages coming home after a day of PE. When you're adolescent, I mean, we can smell that, can't we? We will ask for that information.

What is the average age of the fleet, because this goes to this also.

**Ms HEYDON** - I will confirm, but I believe we are at 14 years at the moment.

**CHAIR** - That's an average age.

**Ms HEYDON** - As reported in the State Growth Annual Report, the average age on our contracted services is 14 which was the actual for 2024-25 and that's the target we have at the moment.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - How many buses are older than 14 years?

**Ms HEYDON** - I would have to come back with that information, see if we can get back in session with that.

**CHAIR** - Because one would presume that older buses have, perhaps, not the same ventilation and the same airflow and if these buses are also the ones that are getting to the 'crush' rate, that would be even more unpleasant for the students.

**Mr VINCENT** - School buses go through a very heavy inspection regime, but certainly the heating and ventilation system is so much different now. I had a look at Tassielink buses now that advertise on the side of their buses about taking SARS and a lot of the viruses out through filtration, which is a great reassurance to people. I think that will become a standard in the future, which is good to see.

**CHAIR** - That's not a lot of our school buses though.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Ventilation is very important.

**Mr VINCENT** - Some of this modernising of the fleet is what I touched on before about the length of the contracts, so that these family businesses can have the confidence to invest. It is very hard and a huge competitive market for newer second-hand buses. They need to have a lot of confidence to be able to step forward to buy new or even some of the more modern buses which we're very conscious of.

**CHAIR** - Okay. Anyone else on school buses?

### Grants and Subsidies

**CHAIR** - I think we've touched on some of this already.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Does airport infrastructure not -

**CHAIR** - No, there was no funding this year. Oh, was there? No.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - In broad terms there is a question on airports I would like to ask, just one, which I ask every year.

**CHAIR** - Do you? There's no money for it though.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's actually a foundation for asking this question. Minister, obviously the government's walked away from the privatisation of GBEs under significant community and political pressure, but to your knowledge, are there any discussions or plans for the government to privatise or sell any of the existing airport infrastructure?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, there is not that I am aware of.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - And you'd be informed of course if there was a plan like that picked up somewhere?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - Somewhere along the line I am sure I'd be brought in on it. TasPorts, of course. own Devonport Airport which they've spent a considerable amount of money on and are very proud of the increase in business there. It is quite common for port operations to also own airports around Australia. But no, I haven't heard of any conversation along those lines at all.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - In the grants and subsidies, I have a couple of questions. I will start with the West Coast Wilderness Railway because we spoke about that earlier. I assume the funding in this 2025-26 is \$15.25 million, then dropping down to \$6.025 million, down to \$2.4 million. This is not the operating, this is capital, is that right? I am just trying to understand what this line's for.

**Mr VINCENT** - I will pass to the secretary.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The Tasmanian Government has invested \$47.5 million between 2019-2024. What is in the Budget is a further \$23.675 million over the budget and forward Estimates. This relates to asset maintenance and refurbishment and particular significant upgrades going ahead including re-railing works between Regatta Point and Lettes Bay, strengthening work and welding of bridge 35 and 36, two level-crossing renewal, minor bridge defect removal and spot coating.

**CHAIR** - So it's all been for infrastructure upgrades?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Those are all infrastructure upgrades; they're the work that they're going to do over the forward Estimates.

**CHAIR** - With the Transport Access Scheme, this is what subsidises taxi fares, disability parking permits, discounted driver licence, et cetera, providing some relief to people with disability, et cetera. As we've got an ageing population, and more people probably likely to fall into that category and not necessarily older people, but anyone, I know that it is an administered expense, I'm sure that there may be times when it's more than this but there's it's absolutely flat. There is no intention to increase it despite our demographic. Is that a bit of an oversight, do you think?

**Mr VINCENT** - Probably not at this stage. We have had a meeting only a couple of weeks ago with representatives from the taxi industry regarding some of those extra assistance payments, and even discussions which I didn't have any idea at the time about how the concentration of that usage is just on Christmas Day which is obvious when you think about it and what that might need to change too.

At this stage that fits okay, but we are having discussions about where we need to be to once again give confidence to taxi operators to be able to afford to have the special vehicles to be able to do that, so that discussion is ongoing.

**CHAIR** - Minister, do you have an actual expenditure for 2024-25 on that?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will just seek some advice on that.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Your DECYP might have it.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I've got it as well. The 24-25 actual expenditure is in two parts: the disability parking permit component, which is \$83,000, and the taxi subsidy program, which is \$4.7 million.

**CHAIR** - So \$4.7 million for the taxis and what was the other one?

**Mr LIMKIN** - The disability parking permit where we issued parking permits, it's \$83,000.

**CHAIR** - That is certainly more than \$4.5 million, which is in the budget here and as I said, it's flat. Already in the year we've just gone out of, we're spending over \$2 million more than what's budgeted this year this year?

**Mr LIMKIN** - For clarity, it's \$300,000.

**CHAIR** - But 4.7 is the taxi subsidy, it's 4.5 which is two \$200,000 less in the budget.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Sorry, you're going across the forward Estimates.

**CHAIR** - No, it's this year. The budget for 2024-25 was \$4.5 million you actually spent close to \$5 million all up.

**Mr LIMKIN** - We spent \$4.8 million in this financial year.

**CHAIR** - Okay, 4.8, it's still 300,000 more, and then for every year for the forward Estimates exactly the same appropriation or expectation of that. Is it likely that this is going have to be increased because of the demographics, but also the reality that we've spent more than was budgeted?

**Mr LIMKIN** - I am advised that there is funding in administered funding that is offset throughout the other transport outputs that we have moved to the Department to meet that \$300,000 in this financial year.

**CHAIR** - Where's it been moved from?

**Mr LIMNKIN** - I'm advised it's conveyance allowance.

**CHAIR** - The same applies how much was spent on the conveyance allowance last year? This is to support my kids coming to school from King Island.

**Mr VINCENT** - We will get that information.

**CHAIR** - While you look at that information, I might also look at pensioner air travel subsidies only \$10,000, a small amount in many respects. I'm just interested in how much it was paid out of that.

**Ms HEYDON** - Expenditure in 2024-25 for the conveyance allowance program was \$0.78 million.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - That's interesting. So are a lot of the kids not coming off the island anymore for education?

**Ms HEYDON** - I could get into the details. It's actually higher though. The spend in 2023-24 was \$0.74 million.

**CHAIR** - In terms of budgeting, rather than having money there that can be shunted off to somewhere else. Acknowledging this does also help my people on King Island, like it stays in their region, but why wouldn't you have a more accurate distribution, so it's clearer what the actual needs are, rather than not adjusted to -

**Mr LIMKIN** - We make our budget estimates based off historical information and the actual spend. Each year we go through a process to update that with Treasury. We've probably missed one and I'm happy to commit to look how we do that in these line items, but we do that each year.

**CHAIR** - I mean, population comes and goes on the island. There's been the drought; we did see some families move off the island, I will say, sadly. Then, with the \$10,000 pensioner air subsidy, that's again for the support of pensioners on the islands, how much of that was actually paid out last year?

**Ms HEYDON** - Give me a moment.

**Mr VINCENT** - While the deputy secretary is looking that up. In relation to the member for Huon's question on BusSAFE, if I could just drop in for a couple of seconds. BusSAFE is a national industry initiative. TasBus is a member together with the bus associations in other jurisdictions. Tas government is not a member, but we will approach TasBus to determine how we could become involved. Our 'Love 40' is a separate campaign to improve safety around school buses. We will be contact with TasBus.

**Ms HEYDON** - I've been advised the expenditure for 2024-25 was \$11,512 on the pensioner air travel.

**CHAIR** - We're talking small amounts, we're talking about a small amount of people, but it's still more than what's appropriated or budgeted for. The ageing demographic happens on King Island and Flinders as well. More on King than Flinders perhaps, but the reality is you need to look at these and actually budget properly, not rely on shifting the deck chairs. Anyway, that's a common opinion.

Anything else on grants and subsidies? We will move to capital investment. We have talked about some of these other, but if there's anything - this is in budget paper 1.

**Ms THOMAS** - I think I had something.

**CHAIR** - Did you have something in there?

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, on the contribution to the National Transport Commission, the local government contribution. I was going to ask this in local government, but it really fits here. In the table, I note that the amount for that is to support local government for loss of

## PUBLIC

revenue from heavy vehicles, following the abolition of local heavy vehicle road tolls in favour of national heavy vehicle charges. I can see the amount for 2025-26 has increased to \$5000 -

**Mr VINCENT** - \$5 million, I was going to say.

**Ms THOMAS** - There'd be some very angry councillors, yes. \$5 million from \$1.5 million, but that's a one-off increase. I'm just wondering - I know that will be really welcomed by the local government sector - but why is it only for one year?

**Mr VINCENT** - Look, it was worked out at the time for one year while some other work is being done, which we are about to do. We've had discussions with the Local Government Association on the best way to do that. The reason for that is the levy collected hasn't adjusted from the \$1.5 million for many, many years and local government felt that they deserve a greater amount and they were very comfortable with that \$5 million amount as being the correct amount, that would have been if the \$1.5 million had been brought through with an index attached to it. We set it on the \$1.5 million. We are now in discussions and just working through and will be working through over the coming months.

The next budget, in my hope and the local government's hope, will reflect an on-going commitment to a portion of the levy collected so that it doesn't flatline and then have to go on peaks and troughs, but we're just working through that at the moment.

**Ms THOMAS** - And you expect that to be ready for the 2026-27 Budget?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, that's the idea.

**CHAIR** - Anything else on CRP. We covered a lot of that during the other discussion. We're going to move to Marine and Safety Tasmania, so I think rest of your team can probably go, minister, because when you're back you have Housing and Planning after lunch, but we will invite Lia Morris to the table to assist in this.

### Marine and Safety Tasmania

**CHAIR** - Minister if you'd like to introduce Lia, or she can introduce herself if she likes.

**Ms MORRIS** - I am Lia Morris, the CEO of Marine and Safety Tasmania.

**CHAIR** - The member for Hobart has been desperate to ask a question, so I will go to her.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Welcome to the table, Lia. I wanted to talk about the Cygnet jetty. I am asking this question on behalf of the people of Cygnet and surrounds, and also my colleague, Dr Rosalie Woodruff, who's the member for Franklin, and Greens Leader. Ms Morris, I'm sure you know some of the details of this story, but just for a bit of background for the benefit of anyone who's curious who is here. MAST assessed Cygnet's original jetty and decided it was not fit for purpose and needed replacing. They explored options, including consulting locals, which is an excellent response, and built a new fit for purpose jetty in a new location which MAST worked with the community on, but MAST is also facing \$20,000 in cost to dismantle and remove the original jetty. Minister, I don't know if you've seen it, but it's

## PUBLIC

a perfectly workable old classic Tasmanian timber jetty that's much valued by this active working waterfront.

MAST worked with the community; the understanding was that the original jetty is a good bit of infrastructure, it just needs a bit of work. It provides value for the active working waterfront and a second deep-water spot on the river. MAST, in response to listening to the community, held an EOI for a lease of the original jetty to undertake the repair work, and offered to help retain the existing infrastructure by supplying the \$20,000 allocated for demolition.

Local boat builders and sailing experts were successful and paid Crown Law about \$1000 to submit an application. In the last month or so, Statewide Moorings have expressed an interest and have offered to rebuild the jetty. There's been meetings with MAST and Parks, but the stumbling block has been Parks. The original group would be prepared to work with Statewide Moorings, who are a local Huon Valley business, and MAST obviously has offered to help with some of the materials and the money.

The report back from locals is that MAST has been outstanding and receptive to the community's desire to retain the old timber jetty, but the sticking point has been Parks, which has come up with three different excuses for why the locals shouldn't be able to work with MAST or work to themselves to fix that jetty. Minister, are you across this situation? Have you got any insights you'd like to share with us? At the moment, there's a MAST sign on the jetty that says the jetty will be closed on 1 December and demolished, which has devastated the local community.

**Mr VINCENT** - My knowledge of this situation had just come before me with what you read out, and a little bit of information I have here before me. Can I say I'm glad I'm not sitting here as the minister responsible for Parks at the moment?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Well, he will be back in here next week, and we will have a little follow-up with him.

**Mr VINCENT** - My knowledge of this is extremely limited. Do you want to expand more on it?

**Ms MORRIS** - I could just explain our position, and that is that the 'old Cygnet jetty', as we call it now, was built in 1965, so it's fairly old. We carry out three-yearly structural audits to ascertain the status of our facilities, and these audits ensure the facilities are maintained to a good standard. They also provide residual lifespan so we can lobby government for money for replacement, which we did successfully with this one. The audit revealed that it needed replacing, the old Cygnet Jetty, basically because it wasn't fit for MAST's purposes. I need to emphasise that. MAST purposes are public purposes, so obviously it's a much higher standard than if an individual owned a jetty. Based on that we replaced it, in consultation with the community, and it ended up relocating, but certainly from our perspective, we're very willing to divest the structure, but the sticking point has been it needs a lease or licence over it for a potential new ownership.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, thank you. Minister, to refresh in case you haven't in the brief yet seen what Parks has said, the first excuse for not entering into a lease and licence arrangement with the local community organisation was that the wharf is not up to standard.

## PUBLIC

We can all agree on that. That's right. That's why MAST wanted to replace it. Then Parks said, 'Oh no, we can't do this because there are not enough car parks.' It's a four-berth jetty, so MAST found it needs four car parks. There is room there to formalise four car parks, which for a small community should be enough.

Then Parks came back and said, 'Oh no, we can't go into a lease and licence arrangement with you, or even really talk about it, because of the potential damage to the coastal foreshore.' Obviously that area's been used as a jetty for some time. Normal boat repairs won't damage the foreshore. Swing moorings in Cygnet and demolition will do so far more. Minister, I guess I'm imploring you on behalf of the Cygnet community to have a conversation with your colleague, the Minister for Parks, because this is one of those local situations that should be resolvable by the two people who need to talk to each other talking to each other.

**Mr VINCENT** - I'm happy to have that discussion, and include Lia in that, MAST in that to have that discussion.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, so can I just impress upon you that there's an urgency here? I don't know what the date is today.

**CHAIR** - It's about two weeks.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Less than two weeks, the notice that's been put up says that that jetty will be permanently closed to use and then it will be demolished. Is it possible to have an extension provided to the community while there's an opportunity to negotiate and hopefully sort Parks out?

**Ms MORRIS** - Certainly we have to shut it, close it for public use on 1 December based on engineering advice that we have, but we are very happy to delay or postpone any demolition subject to the ongoing negotiations between the third party that's interested in taking ownership and Parks.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay. Well, Minister, that provides you with some breathing space to have that conversation. I guess it is reasonable to ask you, as minister, whether you understand where the local community is coming from and the reasonableness of the ask, and the fact that they've been so proactive in working with MAST trying to find a path through for a broader community benefit.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, I can see that from what you've read out, and am happy to continue those discussions and in that amount of time it would have to be shut, but the ability to have an ongoing discussion is still there. So we will take that opportunity.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, thank you. I might follow it up with you in Council next week to see if you have had an opportunity to talk.

**CHAIR** - There will be two ministers here you can take to task.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I know. It's wonderful.

**Mr VINCENT** - No. Not take to task: have discussions with, thank you.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - She might take the other one to task, not so much you.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Have a friendly discussion. Can we just confirm for the Cygnet and surrounds community that while the wharf will be closed, on engineering advice, on 1 December, the demolition program will be delayed while the two ministers involved have that conversation and hopefully resolve the issue, so that the Cygnet community can keep their little wooden working wharf, with some extra engineering support to bring it up to scratch a bit? Okay. All right. I will talk to you next week.

**Mr VINCENT** - You know where to find me.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I totally do.

**CHAIR** - Minister, I was interested, the Public Accounts Committee and I think government admin committee heard about the regulatory challenges with MAST and TasPorts and the need to separate out the regulatory role; I'm just wondering if there's been any progress on that, because it's sort of stalled a number of times and there have been a number of extensions.

**Mr VINCENT** - I wouldn't say it stalled. I think it is still moving ahead as part of our ongoing regular fortnightly meetings with TasPorts too. Of course, one of the difficulties is to isolate out some of the costs involved, and for MAST's board to do some due diligence work, which I'll get Lia to expand on in a moment. A lot of that's been done. TasPorts have been constructive in offering to assist in the financing of some of the work that needs to be done to separate that up and the best way to do it to make it less prohibitive on MAST taking on those responsibilities, but still being able to work practically with the people that are doing those jobs at the moment. With that, can you just summarise on more of the detail on where the due diligence may be? Thank you.

**Ms MORRIS** - Certainly. We're currently undertaking some due-diligence work. The potential transfer of Harbour Master and VTS is quite complex as you could imagine. Vessel traffic services, VTS, is akin to air traffic control. It has to be done without compromising shipping movements or safety. We have to make sure that that process is very considered. It also involves a lot of IT and a lot of meteorological equipment out in the field, a lot of CCTV equipment, et cetera.

The due-diligence work is underway on the VTS audit at the moment, but we also have to undertake some financial audits, et cetera, in terms of understanding the cost of running the Harbour Master Office and the VTS. That work is underway as well, and that involves obviously some complex HR issues as well in that the VTSOs that are currently employed by TasPorts are under an enterprise agreement. We have to unpack a lot of complexities. The work is underway.

**CHAIR** - If you were to take it over, you would need additional funding from somewhere?

**Ms MORRIS** - Our role in it is to actually ascertain what the costs - come up with a transitional plan, cost that transitional plan and actually advise government of the ongoing operational costs of operating the VTS and Harbour Master Office.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Do we have any idea about what the expected timeline is for this? It has been going on for some time now.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, it has been.

**CHAIR** - I appreciate it's complex work; I'm just interested in when you think it might be resolved.

**Mr VINCENT** - I don't think I could give an indication on that. We thought it was going to be in this period, but it certainly is going to extend well and truly into next year. Everybody's cooperating, it's just there is complexities there.

**Ms MORRIS** - We're just one piece of the puzzle. DSG are working on some regulatory reform that would have to go hand in hand with this package as well.

**CHAIR** - Lia, I also noticed that you have a number of responsibilities, including maintenance and operative facilities and other navigation aids, et cetera. Your budget actually drops away quite significantly in terms of the grants that are coming in.

**Ms MORRIS** - From last year?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Ms MORRIS** - That last year's grant, the difference between last year and this year is we received some money for Gordon, the replacement of Gordon Jetty.

**CHAIR** - Right. It's pretty flat. Are you confident you're going to have adequate funding to deliver all the services and the work that you need to do?

**Ms MORRIS** - At this stage, yes. For our existing facilities and structures and ATONs, but certainly, in terms of if we, through this transition process or reform process, we inherit additional ATONs for example, then that would be all factored into any transitional planning and ongoing operational costs.

**CHAIR** - So funding would come with it, effectively.

**Ms MORRIS** - It would have to.

**CHAIR** - It would have to, wouldn't it, really?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Is there any update on incidents of marine debris impeding navigation access or posing a risk to navigation access? You will remember, Miss Morris, I think we've had similar conversations before and there's a genuine safety concern about marine debris. Some of it will come from fish farms, of course; some of it will come from other places. Is there any update for the committee on what MAST is finding over the past year or so? Have there been any significant marine debris incidents that have posed a safety risk potentially?

**Ms MORRIS** - Yes, it's very much improved. Over the last few years, the improvements have been remarkable in terms of the debris, particularly from the aquaculture industry. We actually audit the marine farm markers, because obviously they provide some navigational

## PUBLIC

safety measures, and through that process, we have authorised officers from NRE, and we have the ability to report back in relation to leads and lines outside of the actual zones and leases. It's markedly improved.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - What do you put that down to?

**Ms MORRIS** - I think the aquaculture companies have been working very hard to improve that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - To prevent their plastics entering the ocean, along with the rest of the plastic.

**Ms MORRIS** - Individually, the companies have programs, and I know NRE have been working hard too in terms of the zero-tolerance policy. It's a marked improvement.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Good to hear.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, minister. We will be back at 2:00 p.m. for Housing and Planning.

**The committee suspended from 1.16 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.**

**CHAIR** - Thank you, minister, for appearing as the Minister for Housing and Planning. We will start with Homes Tasmania and then work through Housing and Planning and the State Planning Office after that. I invite you to introduce members of the team at the table and then if you wish to make some opening comments, I'm happy for you to do that and then we will go to questions.

**Mr VINCENT** - To my right as before, we have Secretary of State Growth, Craig Limkin, and then the CEO of Homes Tas, Eleri Morgan-Thomas, and then on the left, my Chief of Staff and the Acting Deputy Secretary, which is Anthony Reid there also.

As this morning, this opening remark covers off on both housing and planning. I'm pleased to be at my first Budget Estimates, or second or third one now, hearing as Minister for Housing and Planning, this is a portfolio very close to my heart and one which I want to be able to make a positive difference.

The funding provided in the Budget recognises that the government's acknowledgement of the need to support the most vulnerable in our community with the provision of social and affordable housing and crisis supports.

We provide to Homes Tasmania funding to cover both operational expenses and borrowing costs associated with meeting capital expenditure requirements, a vital part of Homes Tasmania work. This capital expenditure is predominantly funded through borrowings from TASCORP, with debt servicing costs guaranteed by the Treasurer through appropriation.

Using borrowings and Homes Tasmania's existing funding, we're investing around \$230 million this year alone in building new social and affordable rental housing, MyHome investments, ModHomes and land subdivision work. Homes Tasmania's forward delivery plans see a target of 839 new homes in the 2026 financial year. This will include 223 social housing properties, 167 affordable rentals, 372 home purchases and the sale of 77 lots of land.

## PUBLIC

Rate of delivery is expected to accelerate from 2027 as Homes Tasmania's future fund projects and major land developments progress. We have an increased push for more than for more one- and two-bedroom properties to meet the housing requirements of the housing register. We have seen a real shift over time in the housing needs of Tasmanians and are working hard to target our new housing builds to address these requirements. I do want to note we are implementing all the recommendations of the Crawford review into Homes Tasmania and we are looking closely at what further measures we can make to increase the housing stock of social and affordable homes, plus assist more Tasmanians into their own homes.

The MyHome shared-equity program has helped enabling first home buyers into their own homes, with 900 mortgages being entered into since the program commenced in July 2022. MyHome doesn't just support Tasmanians into homes, it also supports the construction industry by assisting Tasmanians and the builders to sell or contract the construction of nearly 270 new homes since 1 July 2022.

I'm under no illusion to the seriousness of the state and national social and affordable housing crisis issues. I believe I have the growing knowledge, passion, and commitment to bring some fresh thinking and direction to these issues. That's what I'm here for.

The 2025-26 budget provides \$2.2 million for the State Planning Office in supporting the planning scheme and working with key stakeholders, especially local government. Included in the core funding is \$385,000 for planning scheme reforms, which were originally announced in the 2021-22 state budget. The Budget also provides for additional \$300,000 for support of crucial major projects and strategic regional development.

I'm pleased to announce that yesterday I released the Tasmanian Planning Policies. These policies will come into effect on 1 July to provide suitable time for users of the planning system to adjust their processes. Publishing of the TPPs also allowed for the release of the draft Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy for public consultation. The strategy guides strategic land use and development across the southern Tasmanian region, influencing things like where growth for houses, businesses, and industries should occur. It helps support the delivery of much-needed housing, managed-land use change, and foster sustainable economic development. It also supports the efficient planning and delivery of the physical and social infrastructure and recognises the natural environmental hazards. I'm pleased to be releasing these documents and look forward to the work progressing on the north and north-west regional land use strategies. Chair, I'm happy to take questions. Thank you.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your introduction, minister, although it was a bit lengthy. I want to take you to the Pre-Election Financial Outlook Report, noting that some of these questions may have come up in the other place in Estimates, but we haven't had the opportunity to hear detail on your responses.

As you know, the PFO talks about the cumulative borrowings of Homes Tasmania and this model that loads them up with debt. It will increase to \$720 million by the 30 June 2028, requiring cumulative debt servicing of over \$100 million across the three-year period up to 2027-28, and that works out at about \$40 million per annum just to cover borrowing costs. Homes Tasmania, according to your government's Treasury Department, and according to Homes Tasmania, estimates it will require additional funding of around \$10 million a year in debts to cover increasingly unavoidable property holding costs.

## PUBLIC

My first question to you is an obvious one, and people ask this question out and about. How sustainable is that model where you have turned a public housing agency into a public non-profit financial corporation and its primary means of obtaining capital money to build homes is through debt?

**Mr VINCENT** - Thank you. Homes Tasmania was established as an instrument of the Crown by the *Homes Tasmania Act 2022*. Homes Tasmania is tasked with delivering on the state government's housing commitment and we are aiming at delivering an additional 10,000 homes - and that's well publicised - by 2032, but we will talk about that more. The borrowings. The 2025 Budget does present those budget estimates, and it is debt regardless of whether it's in government or out by itself. But it is a complex thing and that's why we are doing a review into how the finances of Homes Tasmania operates. I haven't received that report as yet. But I will ask the secretary to give a bit more detail on the debt. It is due, I believe, not long after Christmas or just on Christmas.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The financing review of Homes Tasmania is a recommendation out of the Margaret Crawford report. It was something the government already committed to. We have engaged KPMG to do the work. The report is expected to be received later this year. So next month. It could slip into early 2026 depending on where they're going. However, our goal is to be able to complete the the review in time so that the minister and the Treasurer can be provided with actions on how they consider this in the 2026 budget. I will talk a little bit about it more in a second.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Before you go into detail there, can I just ask the minister, given that there's a Crawford report and a review underway, are you, as minister, open to changes to the model so we're not loading up our housing provider with this burgeoning debt?

**Mr VINCENT** - I fully understand the intricate nature of those comments and yes, we are looking at options. It has only been 11 weeks since taking the ministry on. There's been a fair bit to take in that time. But we know that 10,000 homes is just the target number. It is ongoing what we need to do.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It is not just a target number. Sorry to interrupt minister, it's a policy commitment of government in response to a housing crisis.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. Well, what I'm saying though is it is a number that represents a point in time. We know that's already changed and increased dramatically. Right around Australia those numbers are increasing at what I consider to be alarming rates. We have to have a relook at this and that's what we are presently going through in a lot of different areas. Trying to ascertain what can be done. Some of my conversations with some of the peaks that are dealing with this is more around how we can prevent some of the situation happening.

We know the cost of living is going to force more and more people into this situation. We understand that there is a changing environment of the traditional three- or four-bedroom home, now becoming more aimed at one and two bedrooms where there's no maintenance, smaller family units. There is a lot of changing parts to this we have to readdress and recalibrate as me as the new minister coming in. But I will ask the secretary to elaborate on your original question about the debt.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - The repayment of the debt, well, what more can Mr Limkin add?

## PUBLIC

**Mr LIMKIN** - Briefly what I would add is that the review is also taking in account consideration on the delivery models, industry benchmarks and CHPS, consideration of Homes Tas' cash and borrowing requirements and the associated impact on the state budget now and beyond 2030. One of the things we specifically asked KPMG about is the long-term sustainability of Homes Tas in that and the payment of the debt and also options to consider how it delivers on the objectives within resources, including opportunities for generating additional revenue and/or reducing costs. One of those could be how do we continue to maximise the success under the Australian Government. The review is looking at all potential options to provide options to government for consideration.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you. The budget paper number 1, page 154 is pretty telling. It says -

There are no specific equity contributions to Homes Tasmania included in the 2025-26 Budget and Forward Estimates.

Unlike Macquarie Point Development Corporation, for example, which had a significant equity investment. Minister, I know there's some recurrent funding that goes to Homes Tasmania, but that comes out of their rental income, doesn't it?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Thanks, minister. Some of it comes out of rental income, but there is a grant from government that comes in that includes the debt service payments, but also for homelessness services and some operating.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - So what was the quantum of the grant in the past financial year? The total grant.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Sorry, I don't have that to hand.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - And while we're dealing with that, can we have some understanding of the thousands of homes Homes Tasmania is the owner and tenancy manager of the rental income from that. Does it go into the public account and then gets dispersed out to Homes Tas? And when it's dispersed, is it dispersed all or in part?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - It comes in as a grant. It comes in through State Growth. We don't get an appropriation; we get a grant. It comes to Homes Tasmania. We allocate that where it's hypothecated. If it's got a specific purpose, like the Bethlehem House funding that was in there is in a separate line, comes in there, and we allocate it that way. All the homelessness services are about around \$50 million. They go straight through, then we are looking across the whole and we determine our own budget based on what comes from government and our other revenue sources.

To pre-empt what you might be asking, there isn't a mechanism for any surpluses to go back to government, because it comes as a grant. We retain them and we are moving increasingly away from thinking year to year in the way government particularly would and thinking more about how you would budget when you're in more of a capital budget, how that works. We're thinking across multiple years.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you. So, the rental payments come in from tenancies. Does that money go into State Growth?

## PUBLIC

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - No, they're Homes Tasmania's properties.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That money goes directly to Homes Tasmania?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Yes.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay. All of it?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - There's no revenue source from the Housing portfolio that goes into State Growth; it's all the other way.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Or the consolidated fund, is my advice, so it all goes to Homes Tas.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I know this question has been raised downstairs and come up publicly, but it'd be really great to have some clarity about actual numbers on delivery, because there's allegations of fudging figures, and double counting. For example, counting a house again after a lease. Exactly how many new social or affordable properties has Homes Tasmania delivered since it came into being on the 1 December 2022? Not leases, not private rentals - new builds.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Minister, I can answer Ms O'Connor's question on the grant while you find that. The grant payment from State Growth to Homes Tas in 2025-26 is \$189.5 million, and that is passed through.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay. That's so that Homes Tasmania can service its borrowings and run its operations, yes?

**Mr LIMKIN** - That also includes payment for the National Agreement on Social Housing -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Specialist homelessness services?

**Mr LIMKIN** - The Commonwealth pays it to us, and we are just a through part on that, but that's included in that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thanks, Mr Limkin. Yes, hard numbers on new builds, whether it's in a partnership or not, since the 1 December 2022.

**Mr VINCENT** - The CEO has those figures.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Not from December 2022, because the count started before Homes Tasmania was created. It started in October 2022.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I am more interested in understanding and the performance of this newly created public non-financial corporation. I preface this by saying this is no criticism of Homes Tasmania, who are amazing people trying to do great things. It's the structure that is causing concern.

**Mr VINCENT** - I have some of these numbers here. I will read across the page. Social housing: Homes Tas, 235. Community partner: 815 for a total of 1050.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Sorry, those numbers - what?

**Mr VINCENT** - It is 235 for Homes Tas social, under community partner 815, to give a total of 1050. Supported accommodation: 140 under Homes Tasmania, three under community partner for a total of 143. Affordable housing -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Now what's that? Is that the private rental scheme? What's the affordable housing one? Are they builds or existing homes?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - There's a mix of both.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We can't get clarity on that?

**Mr VINCENT** - Not at this point on the figures here, but we can chase that. Zero and community partner 62 for a total of 62. Homeless accommodation 105 under Homes Tas, six under the community partner for a total of 111 which gives a total of 1366.

**Ms LOVELL** - Was that one homeless accommodation?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. Now, just to break that up, the same numbers. In one-bedroom units Homes Tasmania 341 and community partners 75 -

**Ms LOVELL** - Is that a breakdown of the type of accommodation in all these numbers? All of these numbers added together -

**Mr VINCENT** - Sorry, yes. It's the same numbers, but this is the bedroom breakdown. I will start again. One bedroom, Homes Tas, 341, community partner, 75 for a total of 416. Two bedrooms, 97 for Homes Tas, 747 for community partner at a total of 844. Three-bedroom units, 38 under Homes Tas, community partner 58 for a total of 96. Four bedrooms plus units 4 for Homes Tasmania, 6 for community partner for a total 10. In accounting terms, 1366 adds up on both lists.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - To be clear, they're not all new builds, are they?

**Mr VINCENT** - I think that's what the CEO indicated there.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Some of those tenancies which are part of the private rental scheme? Existing homes?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - No, they're all new builds.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - All of them are new builds.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - That's not including the rental properties sit in a different - they're on top of that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Is that from the date that we heard before 2020 or from 1 December 2022?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - That's 2022, but it doesn't give us a month. I would think it is October, but we're not sure on the month.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - You will probably be asked to table that downstairs and perhaps you could do for us again.

**Mr VINCENT** - It's just that's new information to me, on a break today.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We would quite like that, I think.

**Mr VINCENT** - If you'd like that tabled, I don't think there's any problem with that. We can organise for that to be tabled.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I will wind up on this line of questioning. Minister, I gather given there's a review underway following the corporate report, you do see some problems with the model. Which is a loading of debt, a reliance on commonwealth (inaudible) funding, a reliance on partnerships with community providers, but this ever-growing trajectory of debt and borrowing costs. You must see a problem with that.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, every everybody can see the issue around the debt to service this area of our community. In the short time I've been in this role it is obvious the Crawford report was a very sensible report. You really need a two-year window to do that sort of report and look at it and that's why it's pretty important. We would and we are working presently as I have stated in the House during normal working of our sense of urgency to get the dashboard into a position that reports more openly and transparently for everybody to have a look.

It is not quite as easy as I thought it might be from my ignorance on that sort of thing. We are working through some of those things. Early in the new year I believe we will have much more transparency. It might take us a couple of goes, but we will get it right and break that up into a lot more of the divisions or numbers, so it is very easy to identify what's going on and the reasons for it. A lot of the other parts of it are being worked on by board, management. It's obviously very clear to us all going into 2026 that we need to adjust and readjust. Some of my conversations back to the secretary of State Growth have been on understanding the 10 thousand. I have read the strategies, but there's not a lot in the strategies per se in what I consider targets that I like to be able to chase and look at.

With the increase, as I was touching on a few minutes ago, we really want to drill down and understand. Those one- and two-bedroom units are 53 to 60 per cent depending on the area of what people are requiring now.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's why we need more medium density.

**Mr VINCENT** - That changes the whole way of this community's thinking of what we've grown up with, with three- and four-bedroom homes for a lot of years.

The way they are constructed also is of importance. Having visited some of the Youth2Independence facilities and talking to the young people, they mentioned yesterday the noise from the mod homes that can transfer through, bouncing along the floors between units close together. And some of the other little idiosyncrasies that the young people living in these

## PUBLIC

have passed on have been valuable in understanding the distance, the landscaping even, and the accessibility to these units. There's a lot of things we've got to adjust.

We can talk about some things in planning as well that need to happen; not just density but also how we can understand how mod homes, or quicker versions of developing builds and getting them on site faster, but still have the quality and the aesthetics to make it part of a subdivision is very important to us during the next year.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We know how consultancies work. What was the direction given to KPMG for the review?

**Mr VINCENT** - That was before my time so I might just ask for clarification.

**Mr LIMKIN** - What do you mean by direction, I'm sorry?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I've worked with KPMG and other consultancies before. I know that when you sit there as minister, for example, or the secretary, the consultant - and I'm not going to just point to KPMG - goes, 'Well, what do you want?' I'm interested to know what the brief was.

**CHAIR** - 'What's the answer you're looking for and what information do you want?'

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yeah, 'What outcome do you want?' is implicit in the conversation, where the consultant says, 'What outcome do you want?' Given that you're paying how many of thousands of dollars for the report, what did you ask KPMG? What's the outcome that you want?

**Mr VINCENT** - The outcome I'd want is -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Not you, the secretary.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The outcome we want is a very clear understanding of what options government has to ensure that Homes Tas is able to deliver. How do we ensure the targets are appropriate, given there is time that's moved on, and there is an ever-changing market, and how do we ensure it is sustainable for our state? Then we have referred them to the terms of reference.

Apart from that, Ms O'Connor, I have had no other conversation about a directive or anything. I'm very keen to see what the report comes back with. But we have asked for options because this is going to be policy choices that the government is going to have to take, and financial choices. So, for me, it's about making sure we have all those options, and the risk and benefits of each option, for government to be able to weigh up and make those choices. So, we have asked the consultant not to come back with an answer, but options that the government can choose from.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - At what cost was the consultancy?

**Mr LIMKIN** - I would have to check that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Are you going to take that on notice?

## PUBLIC

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm happy to take that on notice, through you, minister.

**CHAIR** - We're still on Homes Tasmania. Minister, when this was set up, I was here in the parliament. I know you weren't. The point that was sold to us was that this was going to deliver all these new homes. Yes, they had capacity to borrow, but it seems like that capacity has been well and truly exercised where all the debt, a bit over \$1 billion of debt, will sit with Homes Tasmania, which is just a convenient way of getting it off our balance sheet.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's right.

**CHAIR** - But the general government is still having to pay the interest. Why wouldn't you put all the debt on our balance sheet, the state balance sheet?

**Mr VINCENT** - That would be a topic for the Treasurer and Treasury. In my time there, I was given a very clear commitment and understanding of what I'm looking at of fixing the model that we're working with at the moment, with reviews going on as to what needs to be done in the future. I haven't given any consideration for the movement to Homes Tas away from the model that's there at the moment.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I thought you said you were thinking about it.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yeah, but the model that's there at the moment, we've got to review recommendations in place, is what I mean by that.

The delivery time and the speed of delivery is something that we're very conscious of and there's no running away from the conversations that have been had all around regarding Huntingfield. I don't think some of the issues Homes Tas has faced on that have been properly put into record, but there's been a lot learnt from that, from what I can gather. There is a lot of things we can do differently. Some of those are planning things, some are communications with the community.

We're seeing that with the old Penguin sportsground that the communication can certainly be done different. Homes Tas showed a lot of flexibility on what they thought was a viable commercial model for that land. I think it might have been in the high 50s originally. With community consultation and then discussion about open space and similar sorts of things, it's come back to 45 now, or thereabouts. You get that community conversation right, but you still need to have some sustainability and some some finances around it.

The other thing that I think will come into play in some of these numbers is the parcels of land that Homes Tas will work pretty hard to secure from government, and also a couple of places that were military at Warrane. There are substantial parcels of land now that need to be-

**CHAIR** - Built on?

**Mr VINCENT** - Built on. But the process there, though, is there's still some things on the side that have to be removed or understood. There is the possibility of contamination, so working with the councils to get that right.

In my opening we said about accelerating in '27. There is a lot of things there, if we can tidy up some of the planning, tidy up the work with council and the local communication, and

## PUBLIC

get our systems better, that the delivery should and can increase quite dramatically with those parcels on land we have. My concentration in my short time has been to understand some of those points, fully understanding the high level of debt that's coming up. We have to change that model.

The thing about the land, whether it's Huntingfield or Penguin, or any of the other parcels of land, that I've been quite fascinated by is a split of 85:15 between affordable housing and social housing, which allows for a lot of the blocks to be sold. That then, in return, pays for a lot of the other units for rental. Please correct me if I get this wrong, but that split has some sustainable numbers around it, which does help in some of the finances going forward. The CEO might like to add to that.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - It does very much depend on where the land is. Huntingfield's obviously got higher value than some land we have in the north-west just because of the nature of land values. Our goal is to bring those on progressively so that there's an income stream from that and use the proceeds from that to reduce our call on debt.

That's the same, same approach we're using for the equity shares that we have in the shared home ownership product. What we are seeing although MyHome, the current shared equity product has only been around for not quite three years, a number of co-purchasers have refinanced, in which case our funds have come back to us, so we're able to use those proceeds to reduce our call on debt. There's quite a long tail on the MyHome purchases. We're looking at how we blend our capital to reduce the [inaudible].

**Mr LIMKIN** - For the member of Hobart, the KPMG contract is a fixed price contract. It is \$215,175 plus GST, so \$215,000 plus GST.

**CHAIR** - It was the outcome you were asking about, wasn't it, or did you get that?

**Mr VINCENT** - No, the price.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It was the outcome to the consultancy, to the instruction. But thank you, Mr Limkin, for the consultancy.

**CHAIR** - You've sort of alluded to the fact that the model needs to change. Is it your view then that, under the current model, there is no way that Homes Tasmania can actually start paying down their own debt.

**Mr VINCENT** - My experience on that side of it at this stage, until that financial review, and I must admit I've been waiting for that to come in, because otherwise I'm only prejudging things at present, that may change. Until that comes in later on this year, early next year, I haven't formed an opinion on that, other than it's a vital part of what we need to plan the sustainability of Homes Tasmania, what it needs to deliver for those people needing that level of support. I will form opinions around that then.

**CHAIR** - Minister, you talked about Huntingfield; I was here then, too. From my recollection, and the member for Rumney may recall, she was here too, there was a great degree of haste to get it done. Such was the urgency of developing this parcel of land and the apparent need to not perhaps consult more fully with people other than those that have actually shared a neighbouring fence, effectively, you've just said, lessons learned up in Penguin, there's been

## PUBLIC

much better community engagement, so I struggle to see that with Huntingfield, this great haste and great need to get it through the parliament and just trust us, just trust us, like we hear all the time, and here we are. So what's been the actual problem and how do we move forward from here?

**Mr VINCENT** - Certainly I will get the CEO to run through some of the holdups, but there are certainly issues in approval of DA, changes to DAs, heritage, Aboriginal and environmental, and conservation.

**CHAIR** - Which all were raised when we were dealing with this.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, and the timeline of approvals before you can go to the next stage, even recently with a minor amendment to - that has taken way longer than should have been, we can't move on titles until those things are fixed. Even the fact that Homes Tasmania put in for the next couple of stages but then were told, well, that will take precedence over what you've already got in, so they had to withdraw that, so the concentration was getting out -

**CHAIR** - Told by who?

**Mr VINCENT** - By Kingborough council in this case. I will let the CEO expand on that a little bit more, please.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Thank you, Minister. With Huntingfield, it's a very complex site to deliver. It needs water and sewerage infrastructure. It also, even though it was farmland, it was deemed through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*, EPBC, to be a flyover zone for forty-spotted pardalote and swift parrots.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Isn't it a nesting zone for the pardalotes too, in the Murrell reserve?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - In the Peter Murrell reserve, so it's a flyover zone.

**CHAIR** - Which was all identified when we dealt with that order.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - But then working through the EPBC, unlike a lot of wind farm proponents and stuff, we haven't been out in the media talking about it; we've been good corporate citizens and working through the process. We only had final certification of that in March this year. We also had to go through a bit around the Aboriginal artefacts scatters that are on the site and work through a process for that. The Commonwealth tied that into their process and then we had to undo that, because we couldn't actually do what they wanted us to do. It's been really hard getting that through. That meant that we couldn't do some of the site works we needed to do because we have to be a good developer. We can't just go bulldoze and then seek permission afterwards, can't do that. We would have been in way more trouble if we did that.

So we've done all that. There was also a requirement to build a slip lane that we hadn't anticipated several years ago. There's a slip lane on the Channel Highway now that had to be constructed before we could do some of the other work. There's a critical path in the development of all those things that mean you have to reach certain stage gates before you can go on with the next one. It's been a very complicated planning process, as the minister alluded

## PUBLIC

to. We are very hopeful that we will have title in December and are currently planning the launch of that at this stage.

**CHAIR** - Minister, when land is being selected, Homes Tasmania, I assume, do a lot of that themselves, do we need a far better due diligence at the outset to be sure that what's being earmarked for housing - and this is the same for the government looking at spots or areas of land that may be useful. I mean, you could go to building in the density, which doesn't create the same challenges as a new greenfield site, but it just seems this has been doomed from the start - Huntingfield. What's going to change, from your perspective, to ensure we don't end up sending a whole heap of money and taking so much time until a cost blowout, all of that? What are you going to do differently in the future?

**Mr VINCENT** - I think the selection of most of the parcels of land, where I understand where they are, and I have driven past quite a few of them, are very sensible because there is a selection process around being close to services and close to communities of a similar nature. I might say the Huntingfield estate is a magnificent estate to look at. It's been constructed extremely well with magnificent views; anybody would want to live there. In relation to the other parcels of land, a conversation that I have been having with Mr Reid here, with the State Planning Office, is about how we can speed up that process and have a better understanding of some of the issues at council.

When you look at the, sometimes, 18-month periods or over 12-month periods for some of these things to be ticked off, I'm struggling even with my limited knowledge as a mayor of the planning scheme, to understand why some of these things couldn't have been happening together, instead of having to finish one before you start the next to speed up the process; also, the understanding that we now have about site contamination, or what has to be cleared from the site. The HSO has certainly made it easy for acquiring the sites now, but we need to look at various other planning matters so that we can take things through and that includes -

**CHAIR** - You created a bit of a problem by sorting that bit out without sorting out the planning stuff.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. There are quite a few things that Mr Reid and I have touched on which we just haven't had time to finalise the conversation on some of the things that may be able to be changed. Certainly, the State Planning Office has, in my opinion, a very good thought about having a consultancy part where council officers, if they are not sure about the best or the quickest way through a setup, are able to ring for a bit of advice so that we can alleviate some of that confusion between different planners. I keep using the adage of 29 councils and 29 different planning departments having 29 different views on the same pathway sometimes. If we can alleviate that, we can speed up the process a lot more.

Certainly, Homes Tasmania is in a different state now of being able to increase their capacity, and that's why during 2026 I certainly want to increase that to make sure that towards the end of 2026 and 2027 we are delivering a lot more than what we possibly have been.

That's our plan. Looking at all parts to pull it apart, it has only been 11 weeks that I've been in the role, but we are doing a lot of work through all areas involved to make sure that we tick as many boxes as we can to support Homes Tasmania in delivering for these people, including, I must say, going out and visiting most of the areas to understand the need for crisis, to understand for youth through independence, mature age people, Bethlehem House, which

## PUBLIC

was an extremely emotional visit the other week for me, and to understand those needs of people on an immediate, short-term, and long-term basis. A lot of those people that are in various forms of accommodation have been absolutely amazing at downloading real-life experience to me.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - You really clearly are invested in the portfolio, I will give you that.

**Mr VINCENT** - Giving it a full shot.

**Ms THOMAS** - Are we just asking questions on Homes Tasmania?

**CHAIR** - At this point, yes.

**Ms THOMAS** - Regarding the Homes Tasmania Housing Dashboard, I know that there's been some concerns from within the sector about the user-friendliness of that actual dashboard. I'm wondering, minister, if you have any updates on any improvements to that?

**Mr VINCENT** - No. We've taken three steps forward, two sideways, one backwards, and two forward again, that's as we learn more things about it, and everybody has a different version on that. I must admit that some months ago - quite a few weeks ago - at the Shelter Tasmania 50th birthday bash, I did have discussions with a couple of people that Meg Webb MLC introduced me to that look at that from a UTAS point of view and some of their thoughts on it. Certainly, Ms Webb has her own thoughts on it. We've had input from a lot of different people and we haven't had time, because of a few other processes in place, to sit down with the management to fully go through it. But, they are aware of some of the changes that are happening.

We thought it would just be 'here's the numbers,' but it's never that simple, and we want to make it right so it's transparent. We've got some new fresh ideas that we're developing, how that might be transparent for everybody to be able to see on a more regular basis.

I should say in the first part of next year, it might take us a few months of fine-tuning to get it right. Happy to take input from anybody or everybody on that to get it right, so that it's a very good system for us all to look at.

**Ms THOMAS** - Tell me if you covered this - sorry, I wasn't fully paying attention, but - the implementation of the transition of the responsibility for strategy and stewardship of housing and homelessness policy from Homes Tasmania to the Department of State Growth, with Homes Tasmania maintaining its role as the delivery arm. Can you give, I guess, a clear indication of the split of responsibilities between the two organisations, and how the government will ensure appropriate efficiencies are delivered in light of the challenging fiscal environment?

**Mr VINCENT** - Certainly. There's a couple of parts of that. I'd certainly ask the secretary to give a lot more detail than I can, as an overview on that, please.

**Mr LIMKIN** - I'm just trying to find the table.

One of the things we're currently doing as a steering committee is working through the delineation of the two roles. The final report into the government - we attempted to try and put

## PUBLIC

it in the - the government's response to the Margaret Crawford report, it's on page 10 - to try and be really clear on what is the responsibility of Homes Tas, and what will be become a responsibility of government departments. So, there is a diagram there.

And so, we're using that as our basis and then building it out as part of change. We've got to remember any change has impact on people - either in Eleri's team or my team. And so, we're working very methodically through that. The goal is to be able to implement that in time for the 2026-27 budget. It would just be reallocation of funds or reallocation of people depending on we're going, so it's not going to increase that.

We are of both cognizant of the need to continue to make it efficiency and make it simple for people to do. What we don't want to do is create more red tape for Shelter Tas or anything else - CHP, or even our own teams - and so that's why we're taking in a methodical pace to do this. We would have personally loved to have it done by now so the community has clarity, but we think it's worth just taking a little bit more time. Given this was an interim Budget, we didn't want to rush it. We also want to have that ability to consult with staff and the community as well.

**Ms THOMAS** - So, my understanding is there will be amended minister's statement of expectations as part of that. Is that right?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes.

**Mr LIMKIN** - The minister has sent a draft statement of expectation to the board. There has been - we've updated the statement of expectation already and provided advice to the minister. We have consulted with the sector as part of the requirements under the Homes Tas act.

We thought it was important to actually do that now, so there was a reset in the Homes Tas statement of expectation as quick as we can, so that the board has clear direction on what they need to do and the government's expectation. And so, that has been consulted with the sector, sent to the board as required under the act, we're waiting feedback for the board, and then the minister will consider that feedback and finalise the statement.

We will actually have to do another update of the statement following the changes and the work that we're doing for the 2026-27 budget, but as I said, we thought it was important for government to give clear expectations now and then revise it again next year following all the work happening.

**Mr VINCENT** - If I could just go backwards to the question which was talking about increasing supply, and I was talking about the HLCs, getting used to this one- and two-bedroom units and how they are working for various parts of the need.

Mr Reid was in Western Australia recently and examined a much maturer market over there in quick production and the different styles of production of mod homes, and he's got the thinking cap on in relation to that.

But when you take that back to some of the land that - or a lot of the land that Homes Tas have, and how the subdivision layout and the size of the blocks, or how that is integrated with the community, about whether you have six or eight on a large parcel of land of 800 to 1000

## PUBLIC

square metres, or whether you - how the tenure of that subdivision works. The way Homes Tas have worked, a lot of that is that it's not the old cookie-cutter approach that the Housing Commission had back in the '50s and '60s. It's much more individual places that are designed and coloured, and fits in with the rest of the subdivision, so it's all part of the -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It creates a community.

**Mr VINCENT** - It creates a community, thank you, yes it does. The size of the blocks is something that I have down to talk more about with the State Planning Office; where they're located, or how they're shaped and positioned, even to take care of sun and things like that, which are so important when you start to bring buildings closer together, and how they absorb into the community, because we can rapidly increase the density, but we've got to understand some of the flow-on effects to the more conventional housing around it and the size of the block.

In going forward, the layout of the subdivisions are going to become more and more important because that also has an effect on position of driveways and the size of the connection from TasWater; whether it's at 20 mm standard, and now it's a waste of time putting a 20 mm standard fitting onto a block of land, and then you do a unit development, and you've got to part with another \$7500 to get them back to put a 32 mm or a 40 mm connection.

With a lot of the subdivision work we are obligated to put a driveway, there but when you go to do a multi-unit or even a house, about six out of ten times the driveway isn't in the right place. It's \$6000 or \$7000 to pull it out and put another one in. All these costs add up when you're talking about hundreds of places. There's lots of little one and five percenters like that that we are also trying to examine to take some of the cost out.

**Ms THOMAS** - Thank you. Back on that, the minister's statement of expectations, it sounds like the sector has been consulted on that. Is that right?

**Mr LIMKIN** - That is my understanding.

**Ms THOMAS** - So they have seen it?

**Mr LIMKIN** - My understanding is that they have been consulted on it, which is a requirement under the Homes Tas act.

**Ms THOMAS** - And there are elements in there related to ongoing consultation with peak bodies in informing policy positions; is that right?

**Mr VINCENT** - I can't remember all the details in it. We might be able to pull it up. The expectation is broad, but that leads to a lot of the other things, policies around consultation and other items.

**Ms THOMAS** - Once that's finalised, would that be something that's publicly released?

**Mr LIMKIN** - Yes, the act requires it to be published on the site, so yes, that would be the intention.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Minister, have you issued any directions at all to Homes Tasmania with regard to any of the matters that we've been discussing or anything else?

**Mr VINCENT** - Not directions at this point in time, because of the review and the Margaret Crawford report accepting all recommendations, and the interim new board, although it's been a few months for Ben Wilson. The discussions have been much more general until we get that financial review, and then we will understand a lot better what's got to happen. No ministerial orders, but plenty of discussion on the possibilities.

**CHAIR** - Do you think there may need to be an amendment to the act?

**Mr VINCENT** - I haven't got that far in my thinking in my limited time, sorry. I'm not sure whether anybody else has considered that, but we will certainly be looking at whatever we have to make this work quicker and more efficiently.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Can I ask a quick question? Have you got something -

**Mr LIMKIN** - I was just going to answer the member's question. Yes, it does require Homes Tasmania to actively engage with the housing and homelessness sector as part of it. It has a whole section on working with the sector.

**Ms THOMAS** - That has happened or is happening?

**Mr LIMKIN** - This is in the statement of expectations. It was in the previous statement of expectations that Homes Tasmania would do it, but this is what's in the draft one that the minister is consulting on at the moment with the board.

**Mr VINCENT** - The board is reviewing that at the moment.

**CHAIR** - Cassy, you had a question?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I just wanted to explore why housing policy was taken away from Homes Tasmania? In my experience, the deep knowledge of housing policy - what works, what doesn't, the development of livability strategies, for example - that knowledge was always in Housing Tasmania, and now it's sitting over under the all-powerful Mr Limkin, if we look at the stadium order.

It feels to me a little bit like empire-building if you take away from Homes Tasmania the capacity to help advise government on policy. What we've turned Homes Tasmania into is just a delivery arm for housing. It's almost insulting, in a way, to the people who, for many years, have been able to help government set good housing policy so long as there was the resources there to build homes.

**Mr VINCENT** - It was a very strong recommendation from the Margaret Crawford report for that to happen and the secretary might have some thoughts on how it's going to work.

**Mr LIMKIN** - Margaret Crawford's recommendation 6 was clear that strategy for housing and homeless policy is the responsibility of government through the Department of State Growth, and so we are implementing that recommendation, and the government's accepted that recommendation.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Can I ask: when a decision was made to do that, did you populate that division within State Growth with people from Homes Tasmania who had that policy experience?

**LIMKIN** - That is the conversation we're currently having, Ms O'Connor. We have not actually moved anyone across yet, that is a change-management process that we need to go through. It's an ongoing conversation we have not finalised, and I acknowledge your comments about Homes Tasmania, they do have an amazing team with deep knowledge and that's why we're continuing to work together and have those conversations.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Who's doing the policy work in DSG now; is that another one of your jobs?

**Mr LIMKIN** - No.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Just checking.

**Mr LIMKIN** - We've always had some housing responsibility, more about urban planning, not actually about housing and homelessness policy, I acknowledge that, and so, that policy function has not yet transferred across as I indicated earlier.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Who is writing the policy now?

**Mr LIMKIN** - It is a collaborative piece of work that is an ongoing with Homes Tasmania. Any policy or any intergovernmental arrangements at the moment is a collaborative piece of work between the departments. My personal view is housing and homelessness is a whole-of-government response, and we should be collaborating at all times.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We hear about whole-of-government responses across all portfolios and often it's a way, through you, minister, to sort of diffuse and deflect responsibility; but just take that as a comment. No-one becomes responsible because it's a whole-of-government responsibility. We've heard it from the Minister for the Environment the other day on climate, and it just strikes me as a loss of focus.

**Mr VINCENT** - I should say my focus is very squarely here and while I'm the minister, I can guarantee the focus won't change except for improvement and positivity, and whole of government means that I would be calling on whole of government, but my responsibility, my effort to make it happen.

**Ms THOMAS** - Thank you. Minister, I'm just interested in, you mentioned - you talked a bit about smaller dwellings, one or two-bedroom homes, but there's clearly a need for three and four-bedroom homes to provide safe housing and support, particularly to families and particularly supporting victims of domestic violence. How many three and four-bedroom houses have been built since 2023, and how many are planned to be built by 2032?

**Mr VINCENT** - Certainly we had those figures there before from 2022 that were in that tabled document. I will ask the CEO about what they've got planned. We do work on the percentages of where the market demand is, and that's where Housing Connect, which is run by Anglicare, is giving good information and the experience of a lot of the people we deal with. It is also of benefit that when the portal is upgraded during next year, Anglicare is of the belief

## PUBLIC

that that will be able to give them more knowledge on where to divert or to complement services that will help the people using that portal, but you might have the planning for three and four bedroom on top of the one-twos, there, thank you, CEO.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - We've got 65 three and four-bedroom homes in the pipeline. They're in various stages of being built or about to be built. There's 47 three bedrooms and 18 four bedrooms. That's not the only thing we're doing in - across social housing there's a fair number of people who are what we call under-occupying, so there might be one person in a three-bedroom house. A lot of those people have been in those houses for 30 or 40 years, and they are now going, this house is too big for me, the garden is too big, can you find somewhere to move that's more suitable as I age?

We are working with community housing providers to redirect to those people into some of the new builds, so that will free up some of the three- and four-bedroom ones. It's not only a build one, it's about adjusting the portfolio. We are trying to encourage people to move rather than forcing. We have limited powers to force people to move anyway, but we're trying to do it in a way that kind of works for them as they go through. Some people are never going to move out of the house they've been in for a long time.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes, it's their home.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, it is their home, and as that changes with time, we're reconfiguring some of that. The other interesting thing that I've found quite fascinating that you don't think about is that when a lot of people move out of their home or it becomes vacant for a while, the energy upgrades and the maintenance upgrades that you need to do are quite significant. Now, there is a body of work that Homes Tasmania are doing where they look at, is the cost of renovating that home more than it's really worth? Are you better to remove that home and because of the size of the shape of the block, put two or three units on it to increase the liveability, or the number of people that are able to live on that block?

It's not huge, but it's a change in mindset once again, that you can blow a lot of money in trying to keep that building compliant whereas sometimes you're able to change that. Certainly, with the regular amount of stock for providers as well as Homes Tasmania that have insurance claims around them, normally by fire or whatever, it brings around a new thought pattern about, do we clear the site and do it differently again? That's been a quite a fascinating bit of work and discussion around that because it just breaks again this mentality we have towards what's sitting there now being compliant.

**Ms THOMAS** - Minister, are you aware of any barriers for developers who develop housing for social or affordable housing purposes and then want to, I guess, offload the stock to Homes Tasmania or even for NDIS housing, which I understand falls outside of this remit? I've had reports just recently of housing stock in different areas that developers build and then it sits there vacant for quite some time. It frustrates people to see those homes sitting there, and why isn't the government or Homes Tasmania taking them on? These are questions that people ask me. Are you aware of any issues?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, we are and my advisor and I attended an SDA - Specialist Disability Accommodation - in Launceston last week and were gobsmacked to find there are homes everywhere under a federal scheme of supporting people to invest in NDIS homes. I found out that I think I've got 11 at Sorell that have been sitting vacant for well over 12 months.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It's shocking.

**Ms THOMAS** - It's exactly the area I was talking about.

**Mr VINCENT** - It is of a distant thing and they've been built in - a lot them, not all of them - some have been built in areas where there are not the clients that want to move into them because it's not near services that they need, but I will get the CEO to expand on where Homes Tasmania is with - they do have a supply of NDIS homes and are presently doing a body of work to look at further expansion. I've had meetings with Anglicare even about using their knowledge and influence to see if we can activate some of those homes. They are built differently. They are about twice the cost, and that's a loose figure, but they're much more expensive than a conventional home because of the supports, just the way they have to be built for NDIS.

**CHAIR** - The ceilings and that have to [inaudible].

**Mr VINCENT** - The way the cupboards are done, the door openings, the way the bathrooms are done -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Universal design.

**Mr VINCENT** - But it doesn't mean it can't be utilised. We are in the throes of having discussions about how we could do that better. I will ask the CEO to expand on Homes Tasmania's involvement in some of that, please.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - We have looked at some of those properties. They're hardened designed, they're actually more than liveable - universal design - they're actually hardened for people with disabilities, but, as the minister said, they're in locations people don't want to live and the financial model that appears to be behind them, individual investors appear to be seeking around \$2,000 per week.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - What?

**Ms MORGAN - THOMAS** - \$2,000 per week.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - In rent?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Yes.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - From the Commonwealth?

**Mr VINCENT** - As part of the model.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - That's the return they need, we understand. We just know this anecdotally.

**CHAIR** - No wonder they can't put people in them.

**Mr VINCENT** - They work on a formula of more than one person in it, so it is part of the NDIS funding model per se.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - For supported accommodation.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - It would be supported specialist disability accommodation, but it's delivered through the market, and the market is not aligned. It's very hard for us to pick those properties up for a variety of reasons, cost being one of them. They were never designed to be sold through any long-term financial arrangements in my understanding. They're also in places where people with disabilities don't want to live but are not well located for services and other things we think are important for social housing.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Isolation. Developers would be carrying the cost as well.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Individual owners seems to be the financial arrangement. It's a financial arrangement. This is happening around the country, not just in Tasmania. What we're doing with our own disability portfolio is looking at that. We're now looking at ways that we can enrol it in with the National Disability Insurance Agency so that we are able to pick up some of the specialist disability accommodation funding that some of the people who live there. That's now been opened up to us because of the transition from states to the Commonwealth. We've looked at various ways of whether we could register them ourselves and get accredited to manage those properties. But having reviewed that, we think a better option will be to go to the market and see if somebody can manage it on our behalf. We issued a request for information on the weekend just as an initial stage to go who's interested in talking to us about that.

At the moment we are running a lot of those properties without the Commonwealth funding that's attached to them. We want to make sure that we bring as much of the Commonwealth funding in as we can. Because we are also the provider of last resort and some of our clients with psycho-social things going on are quite hard on properties, you do get a lot of damage in some of those properties. The specialist disability accommodation from the NDIA is designed to defray some of those costs.

**Ms THOMAS** - It's really interesting.

**CHAIR** - Every time you turn over a rock, there's something else, isn't there?

**Mr VINCENT** - Well, even now with some of the homes, as people move out. I will ask the CEO to touch on this because this is quite fascinating on the different markets, we're in now about the meth testing and the process and the time it takes to cleanse a house now is quite extraordinary.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - This is not the disability properties to be clear. Some of our properties turn over faster than others. When we have a vacancy now, we automatically do testing for methamphetamines, because it can mean for the next person who moves in it can be toxic, so we routinely test it.

**CHAIR** - It would be illegal as well, which may be problematic.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - But people do get unexplained interests, and we have gone. But also for our staff who are working in there, there's workplace health and safety issues. Not all of our properties - but of the ones that become vacant, 14 per cent are testing positive for some sort of methamphetamine. Now what that means and some of it will be just at the level

## PUBLIC

and some of it will be the whole house and that means, but that has to go into an insurance claim. Typically, for something like that, you can't kind of vacuum it out of the walls or anything, you have to replace the plasterboard and all of those things. It is a big insurance job.

**CHAIR** - It has been hidden in the walls, is that what you're saying?

**Ms MORGAN** - Because it permeates into the fabric. You have got to rip out the interior and replace it.

**CHAIR** - Soft furnishings, etcetera.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Yes, well, and the walls actually. It's a very big job to remediate, but it's an increasing problem. I heard the police yesterday talking about the number of meth cases they're picking up in road. It's affecting us as well.

**Ms THOMAS** - If only we had better trauma services through our health services to try and prevent some of these problems happening. Anyway, that's a whole another topic.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - But we are doing all the right things around making sure our staff have the appropriate protection and identifying it and dealing with it. But it's a growing problem.

**CHAIR** - Minister, the issue of double counting some properties has been raised in terms of properties that are leased under other schemes, then once the lease ends and they're released they're counted again new. Tell us if that's happening. It seems pretty clear it is and what the real numbers are.

**Mr VINCENT** - I haven't all that data in front of me as part of the new look at the dashboard, but I will get the CEO to explain a lot more of that. But where blocks of land that had come up to be sold were counted in the dashboard, it is now that - they're counted, but if there is not a DA for the house to start within two years, it goes back out of the dashboard so, that that takes care of some of that transparency.

**CHAIR** - That's all right with the land. It was an audit, or something happened and there was a whole heap dropped off immediately. Rightly so, but -

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. I will just ask the CEO to talk about the housing side of things, because I haven't delved into exact numbers there because of what we are doing and the work we are processing on the dashboard.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - With the land count, just quickly the change there was because we were counting them when they were released to the market, not when they were sold. That was because of an internal system problem we have had to sort out. It was a one-off adjustment. We are now much clearer on how we count that.

With the head leased properties, head leasing is a great way to bring stuff on quickly and deal with. It's a lot faster to do that than it is to build something. It is an interim arrangement that most state housing authorities use, to a greater or lesser extent. We count the leases in there. That is correct; that is the current counting rule. The number of houses that's in there at any one time is a shifting thing, because houses come in and come off when the leases end.

## PUBLIC

We launched a new program in June of this year, and there's been a whole lot of advertising on that, and we're expecting 10 new properties to come on every month through that. We are continually advertising.

**CHAIR** - New lease properties from the private market?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Through our community housing partner, Loreto Community Housing. It's an effective way of being able - we subsidise them.

**CHAIR** - But you're still double-counting them, aren't you? If you're counting them when it's coming in the first time and then when the lease is renewed - and it may be renewed for the same person, as I understand it - then it's counted again as another house or another property.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - You're correct. That is the way it's counted.

**CHAIR** - Which, minister, is really pretty stupid because it's not a new house. It's the same house, a different lease. It gives a distorted view of the number of available properties for people to live in. Who determines the counting rule on this?

**Mr VINCENT** - I would have to refer that to the CEO. It's not clear to me at this point.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - I am advised that we've counted it that way since the beginning of the program in 2018.

**CHAIR** - It doesn't make it right, though. Who determines how it's counted?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Well, it was the counting rules from 2018.

**CHAIR** - Okay, and rules from who?

**Mr VINCENT** - It would have been the department.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - The minister of the day.

**CHAIR** - Right. Who do we blame?

**Mr VINCENT** - This is why we're looking at all that. This is why we're trying to tidy it up, so we have a very clear understanding of what is actually in the dashboard.

**CHAIR** - Can we just stop it?

**Mr VINCENT** - It is understood that is one of the anomalies we have to fix.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - But we don't want to have this conversation again next year.

**CHAIR** - We can't just stop it. We have to have this.

**Mr VINCENT** - No - I'm not sure how the process brings around the dashboard. Obviously, it's part of internally what they do, and if we have to change the way the computer

## PUBLIC

feeds the information or what we feed into the computer, we will do that as part of the fix of what we just broadly say the dashboard, the numbers.

**Ms THOMAS** - You are talking about the Private Rental Incentives Scheme. How many unique properties are in that scheme?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - At the end of September, there were 217 homes under the Private Rental Incentives program, and 43 homes under family violence rapid rehousing. We are advertising and recruiting more properties in there, and we are expecting to go to 550 as they become available.

**CHAIR** - How many of those would have been double-counted over the time?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - I am advised none. Those are all individual houses. They're houses. Yeah.

**CHAIR** - Yeah, but when they were re-leased, a number of them would have been in the system long enough to be re-leased and, thus, counted twice. Do you have any idea of that?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - What we were counting were the leases with the clients who were assisted, so we are counting clients who are assisted there.

**Ms THOMAS** - Not homes? That's confusing.

**CHAIR** - Bit of work to be done, I think.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, thank you. Yes, I know it.

**Ms THOMAS** - So, you're aiming for 550. How long has the Private Rental Incentive Scheme been in effect for now?

**Mr VINCENT** - I know it's been extended. 2018 maybe?

**Ms THOMAS** - It seems like, from memory, the number has been stagnant for quite some time, or maybe even gone down. Do you have any numbers over the years as how participation in that scheme has changed over time?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - I could get that for you on notice. I can't tell you off the top of my head. But the way that scheme works is that there's an amount, a funding bucket, that's attached to it and an incentive for each of those ones. This would be the same in every state. You have an allocation for 500 properties and that's what your target is, and you aim to have 500 properties in there at any one time. So, it will be relatively static. It's not meant to continue to grow so that you have all of those. It's not that type of program. It's to have some flexibility in the system.

**Ms THOMAS** - Yeah, but the aim, obviously, is to get more housing stock on the market for people in need.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - It's one of the strategies, yes.

## PUBLIC

**Ms THOMAS** - One of the strategies. So, if the current number is 217, the hope is to reach that 550 mark. What strategies are being used to try to achieve that and encourage more landlords to participate in the scheme?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Because we have a very tight private rental market, people can't put their properties into this scheme if it's already got tenancies in it. You're restricted to whatever is in the market at that point of time. Because landlords aren't sitting there going, 'What can I do?', we are promoting it through a whole lot of social media advertising, because in our test, that was a really successful way of doing it. We know that we can only bring on so many a month anyway through our work with Loreto. If you had 500 properties, or people came and looked at it, you've still got to go out and inspect each of those properties, and make sure that they meet standards and all of those sorts of things. So, they're budgeting for about 10 a month to come in.

**Mr VINCENT** - I understand there's quite a long list of inquiries to be part of that scheme at the moment, which we haven't had in the past because of the shortage of people requiring to rent. But there are more people inquiring about putting their homes into that system.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Yes. We have about 200 active inquiries at the moment. Loreto is working through all of those.

**Ms THOMAS** - For full disclosure, I have a property in the scheme. There was a recent review, I understand, of the Private Rental Incentive Scheme program. Did that review include talking to participants who are landlords in the scheme, and seeking their feedback on what works and what doesn't work?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Yes, there was extensive discussion about that. But we also reflected on what we needed and where we needed it, and also worked with the minister around what the appropriate settings were for that. So, we substantially changed the program. I think that we took a lot of the red tape out of it. It felt to me like we had, particularly at our end. And we adjusted the incentives that were in there to reflect the types of properties. As the minister said, a lot of the demand through that is for one- and two-bedrooms, and we knew that we had a problem in the north-west, so we were adjusting it to try and get the sorts of properties we wanted. But that only launched in June, so there was a hiatus for a while before we were able to launch it.

**CHAIR** - We need to move on to Housing and Planning soon. Is there anything else for Homes Tasmania?

**Ms THOMAS** - I want to talk about the housing dashboard and the applicants, and how the applicants are reflected on there as the number of households, rather than the number of people awaiting housing. Is there any plan to update that to be more reflective of the actual number of people seeking a home?

**Mr VINCENT** - My simple answer to that would be, we're looking at all parts of the dashboard, but I will ask for exact details.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - We do know how many people are in there, but households fluctuate, and a surprising amount. People have babies, kids age out, move out, partners get attached. There's a lot of movement of the ins and outs, detach, there's all sorts of things happen.

## PUBLIC

We count the applicant because that's who we know. We can always tell who's on at the time but the movements on and off tell a different story, and not one that's easy to get a time series on.

**Ms THOMAS** - Do any other jurisdictions that you know of have different dashboard sort of reporting?

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** - Most of them that I'm aware of count the applicant for that exact reason that you don't know who's on and off.

**Ms THOMAS** - It's complex.

**Ms MORGAN-THOMAS** -Yes.

### **Output Group 8 - Housing and Planning**

#### 8.1 Housing and Planning

**Ms LOVELL** - I want to have a look at the funding line item, 8.1, on page 247. I understand, as described on page 255, that there's a decrease that's attributable to re-profiling of some funding, prior budget initiatives, including the Burnie master plan, affordable residential land rebate, Housing Density Incentive Grant Scheme and the Hobart showground redevelopment. Can you give us a breakdown of the funding attributed to those programs when they're ending or being re-profiled and then what's left to be funded from that line item in the forward Estimates?

**Mr VINCENT** - Thank you. I certainly need to seek Mr Reid's advice on that.

**Mr REID** - Would you like me just to walk through the years 2020 - I can do that.

**Ms LOVELL** - Great. Thank you.

**Mr REID** - For '25-26, there's base funding of \$1,005,000 in '25-26. There's a Cape Barren Island initiative of \$520,000. There's a Burnie master plan issue of \$8,000,650, which is the final payment for that setting. Homes Faster Partnership, which is the no-interest loan headworks charges for the no-interest loan scheme, \$364,000. The Residential Land Rebate Scheme, which is one of the schemes that's been re-profiled, has \$750,000 left in it. The Secondary Dwellings \$10,000 Rental Incentive has \$320,000. The RAST showground redevelopment has \$18 million, and King Island package has \$800,000. And that's what makes up the the \$30,409,000 in '25-26.

**Ms LOVELL** - Thank you.

**Mr REID** - In '26-27, base funding at \$1,010,000. All other programs, other than RAST, cease to exist, which causes \$2 million for RAST and \$320,000 for the Secondary Dwellings 10,000 Rental Incentive. Then from '27-28 to '28-29 is base funding.

**Ms LOVELL** - Okay. And base funding, presumably, is the policy advice and operations of the office?

## PUBLIC

**Mr REID** - That is correct. It's the operations staff in the Strategy, Housing, Infrastructure and Planning section, which are providing the housing policy function in liaison with Homes Tas.

**Ms LOVELL** - Okay. Minister, there's not much there in terms of actual programs or deliverables. It's just base funding. Why is that?

**Mr VINCENT** - This being an interim budget, with the work you've heard us talking about that we're doing, we will be reviewing a lot of things running into May next year. In the short time I've been involved, I've accepted where Mr Reid is at, at the moment, and we're re-looking at things freshly.

**Ms LOVELL** - Is there going to be any more money in May next year? The Treasurer keeps telling us there's not.

**Mr VINCENT** - If there is something important enough to have happen, we've got to find the money from somewhere. In a lot of these areas, what we have to do is planning, so -

**Ms LOVELL** - All right. We will tell the Treasurer you said that.

**CHAIR** - [Inaudible] hollow log.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - [Inaudible] every department.

**Mr VINCENT** - As you can see the base funding is light. We do -

**Ms LOVELL** - It's very light. It's concerning that there are no planned projects to deliver any additional housing or planning policy.

**Mr VINCENT** - I will ask Mr Reid for a bit more.

**Mr REID** - That will also fall out of part of that arrangement at the moment in building the policy function. Obviously there's still a body of work that's underway between Homes Tas and the Department of State Growth to transfer fully that policy function across. Like the conversation we were having before around that relationship between the Department of State Growth and Homes Tas is going to be basically fundamental. That relationship needs to obviously continue to work because the skills and experience in Homes Tas in policy-development is a must-have.

**Ms LOVELL** - With that function coming across, will there be an expectation that there will be funding attached to that?

**Mr REID** - There will be some funding that will be needed for positions within State Growth to facilitate that role. It's also needing to be obviously not a set of standard operating procedures, but certainly that relationship between Homes Tas and the policy function that sits within State Growth is going to be fundamental.

**Ms LOVELL** - We will have a look in May, then, and see what happens.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Can I just check in that framework, will State Growth does the Secretary of State Growth have any kind of authority over Homes Tasmania?

**Mr VINCENT** - Sorry, I wouldn't be aware of that.

**Mr REID** - No, Homes Tasmania works independently. There's an oversight steering committee that's been stood up between the Homes Tas board, Treasury officials, DPAC and the Secretary of State Growth, which is a committee that will basically work through, not only the Crawford review and the implementation of the projects that fall out of that, but work around ensuring that both the housing policy function and the operations Homes Tas remains effective.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, thank you. Sorry, Sarah, but so we're going to have policy people undertaking housing policy in the Department of State Growth, presumably at the direction of the secretary.

**Mr REID** - Within State Growth?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes.

**Mr REID** - Yes.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Exactly. I mean, so the Secretary of State Growth, where once Homes Tasmania had, you know, to the minister, some autonomy, now we have the all powerful Secretary of State Growth able to - but it's true, all through the order.

**Ms THOMAS** - You don't have to tell me.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - All through the order. The Secretary of State Growth apparently knows everything you need to know about planning, but apparently also about housing policy now. So I'm just trying to get to the bottom of what authority comes from State Growth to housing policy when Homes Tasmania is over here with the skills.

**Mr REID** - The State Growth function in terms of housing policy probably needs to be looked at its whole of system housing. So Homes Tas is obviously focused on a variety of housing roll-out and they're obviously expanding across the larger spectrum from social and affordable. They will still obviously maintain that role and the policy function within Homes Tas, particularly around social and affordable housing specialist disability accommodation. Those under their act for eligible persons will continue to maintain that function. The role within State Growth, as I understand it in terms of it's designed to be full spectrum housing. It's designed around to look at how can we get private investment? How can there be better improvements in the private rental market? How can we unlock potential or activate areas to promote housing across the full spectrum?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you Mr Reid, that is in the Homes Tasmania Act as part of Homes Tasmania's task as well, just to be clear. Those other aspects of housing from recollection are in the act.

**Mr REID** - That's the general understanding as to what my understanding as to why the policy function's been stood up in in State Growth to assist with that.

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - Just go back to their funding. Sorry, I've lost my train of thought a bit now. One of the programs that is mentioned in the budget papers, but you didn't mention then in that breakdown is the housing Density Incentive Grant Scheme. That has been ended, is that right? That funding's been reprofiled?

**Mr REID** - Yes, reprofiled. The Treasurer made the announcement that both the medium-high density development grant scheme and the residential land rebate scheme will cease and be reprofiled back to Treasury.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Shockingly short-sighted.

**Ms LOVELL** - How many grants have been approved and how many dwellings proceeded under that scheme before it was closed?

**Mr REID** - The Density Incentive Grant scheme?

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes.

**Mr REID** - As of 3 October, which is when the program closed, 16 applications had been approved supporting the construction of 214 medium- or high-density dwellings to an allocation in 2024-25 of \$660,000.

**Ms LOVELL** - \$660,000, that's the amount that's been paid out through that scheme?

**Mr REID** - That's the information that I have here, in 2024-25.

**Ms LOVELL** - For 16 applications? What was the target? What was the funding allocated to that program initially and what were the targets set around the number of applications that should have supported?

**Mr REID** - I'm sorry, I might just take that on - not that question, sorry - the first question on notice. I'm not entirely sure the \$660,000 is right. I might try and get an answer for that because it doesn't add up in my head. I'm sorry.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Good on you for picking yourself up.

**Mr REID** - It just looked like that doesn't quite sound like given the volume. It was initially a \$10 million incentive scheme that was due to run across two financial years, \$5 million allocated for each of 2024-25 and 2025-26.

As far as I'm aware, it wasn't necessarily about the targets, it was just that was the allocation from the funding.

**Ms LOVELL** - Minister, are you aware of any - so there was no sort of planning around what number that might support, what number of dwellings that might support?

**Mr VINCENT** - Not that I was aware of in my short time in the ministry. We could certainly chase up any of that information, please.

## PUBLIC

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes, given that you haven't been minister for long, I'm happy for you to take that on notice. It would seem, maybe, short-sighted to set to release funding like that or allocate funding like that without any sort of plan around what it's intended to deliver, but I'm happy for you to take that on notice.

Where has that money gone? Has it gone to another housing program or planning anything? Anything to support increased builds? Or has it gone back to Treasury?

**Mr VINCENT** - Gone to support the first homeowners lift from up to \$30,000.

**CHAIR** - Oh my goodness.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's right, so a move away from modern medium-density policy.

**CHAIR** - On that, do you mind if I jump in, Ms Lovell?

**Mr VINCENT** - I've just been reminded also that the density scheme is being reviewed about the effectiveness and how it worked and how it could be done better. There is talk around the possibility of being reintroduced with some fine tuning to it.

**CHAIR** - Minister, you just said that the money from that program was back in Treasury's coffers to support their first home owner grant extension? Now your party in the 2024 elections and the 2025 elections - we have one every year at the moment, just to keep in practice - made a clear commitment that you would introduce a short-stay levy to fund that. When we had a briefing on the bill recently, that was confirmed by Treasury. That the levy was to be brought in to fund that. Now we're hearing that money from housing has been taken to fund this proposed -

**Ms THOMAS** - Scheme?

**CHAIR** - Scheme, that's right. I'm just a bit floored by this. Because that seems to be two really inappropriate decisions. To bring in a piece of legislation without the mechanism to pay for it, as was promised in two elections, and then to hear that money for housing has been pulled over to do this.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Not this minister's decision, possibly.

**CHAIR** - No, no - well as I'm saying - were you aware of it? Are you going to go and have a chat with the Treasurer?

**Mr VINCENT** - Like I said, we're re-looking at how that Density Incentive Grant can be done better at the moment. I've only been in there for a short time, so no, I wasn't fully aware of all this to start with.

**CHAIR** - It's blatantly dishonest.

**Mr VINCENT** - There's also work - I will just check on -

**Ms LOVELL** - The first homeowner legislation isn't hasn't gone through the parliament and it won't, if that's the case, I wouldn't have thought.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Minister, are you going to talk to the Treasurer?

**Mr VINCENT** - Ah yes, happy to talk to the Treasurer, as I will be a fair bit about how this can be revalued, or recalibrated, whatever words I'd like to use there.

**CHAIR** - I'm sorry, I've just lost my train of thought. With the housing, you were - they are affordable houses, we're talking about?

**Ms LOVELL** - It was in the medium-to-high density -

**CHAIR** - In the density - and that was to deliver affordable homes? Is that correct, or am I -

**Ms LOVELL** - I don't think it was necessarily, it was just to increase density. Yes. It's just to increase supply for medium-to-high density.

**Ms THOMAS** - It was to incentivise developers, because there's nothing to incentivise -

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, it was for development of blocks of land, not necessarily affordable housing, blocks of land - to bring more blocks of land on board.

**CHAIR** - Not specifically for affordable housing?

**Ms LOVELL** - You would expect if this money is going to first homeowners, first homeowners are not building medium-to-high-density housing; they're building their first home, which is -

**Mr VINCENT** - They're normally building a three-bedroom home.

**Ms LOVELL** - Yes, exactly. So, it's going to deliver a very different outcome than it would have, which is concerning. Minister, ABS building activity data is showing that there's a drop in annual dwelling completions in Tasmania - a fall, I understand, from around 3,500 in 2021-22 to around 2,450 in 2024-25. We've got no funding in the forward Estimates towards any kind of policies that are going to help with increasing completions.

We've got a medium-to-high-density incentive scheme that's been reprofiled to deliver something very different and a lot less effective, I would argue. What are you doing to address those declining completion rates; and we're not just - we've spoken to Homes Tasmania and we know there's pressure on the system across all levels of housing, all types of housing. What are you doing more broadly to address those falling completion rates?

**Mr VINCENT** - There has been an increase - I think it's two months running, now - in the amount of approvals going through councils. We have seen it flatten out, and we will need to see several months of that before we have confidence that the market is actually increasing. That, of course, in most circumstances is based around interest rates, and the news over the last couple of weeks has been that decreases are going to be a way off still at the moment, so that will need to be something that I will have to factor in.

My concentration on my workload in my ministry at the moment has been on the social and crisis, so that's certainly an area I've got to do more work in, there's no two ways about

## PUBLIC

that. I am meeting regularly with quite a few significant builders that have been very open in their conversation after decades of experience of what makes the housing market work, and that's why we're looking at some of these planning issues, to make it easier.

I've just been through the experience of trying over the last two years of getting my daughter's house and been involved with the whole process on that, and found it frustrating. So, that's why the mix of ministries I have now is working towards being able to look at these a little bit differently, but that's something I haven't dug into at this point in time, to be honest.

**CHAIR** - Okay. Look in the mirror and talk to a different minister while you're there. I'm just conscious if we want to get to Planning before 4, is there anything else on Housing?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Quick question, yes. Thank you. Minister, we've just heard that the housing medium-to-high-density grants have been - well, we might just say 'taken' by the Treasurer and put over in the first homeowners grant. Is this a policy decision, given that the government's stated policy is to expand the urban growth boundary, which will lead to more subdivisions, more congestion, more sprawl, and if you read the climate risk assessments, more risk to people who are living on wild bush-urban interfaces - is it policy for government to walk away from density?

**Mr VINCENT** - It certainly is not. I might have Mr Reid talk a little bit more about the TPPs as we swing into Planning, if that's all right, Chair, because that answers -

**CHAIR** - We might get into Planning if it sits there.

**Mr VINCENT** - This answers some of that question for you on our commitment to controlling that urban sprawl, and our concentration on looking at the density within urban development now. That's why I thought it matched up.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Happy to hear briefly from Mr Reid - is fine, but I also want to talk to you about the fact that University of Tasmania sold the K&D site to a car yard dealership, despite all of the imperatives to improve density, livability, public open spaces, commercial opportunities on that site; somehow a public institution, having had conversations at some level with governments, has sold this prime site to a car yard dealer, which we have plenty of.

**CHAIR** - That's because with the congestion, you have to have somewhere to park the car, surely.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Probably, yes, thinking ahead, we've got them all over Campbell and Argyle Streets. The government's done nothing about that. The planning scheme is not adapting or elastic enough to deal with that. I'm just expressing the frustration on behalf of a lot of people in Hobart who want to see us have a highly livable city, where medium density and high density to an acceptable standard is the norm rather than something that seems to be falling over at the first hurdle. Some of those beautiful apartments they were going to build up there on Macquarie Street: gone. The K&D site: apparently gone. Minister, what are you doing to modernise our city and make sure we are delivering -

**CHAIR** - Is this a planning issue?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - No, it's a housing question.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - I was trying to roll it into planning.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - But until you get the density question right, you can't encourage investment in it if there's regulatory - and that is a planning question - but if there are these obstacles to it, it is so frustrating. The opportunity was there, and it seems to have been lost.

**Mr VINCENT** - The elastic nature that you referred to, of the planning scheme, is what I've spoken about a couple of times today, that we are starting to look at now - except for one council, being Kingborough, coming on board with it over the next few months, but the TPPs as I referred to, does show a different commitment to the higher density being reviewed with a lot of things. I will just ask Mr Reid to expand on that, which does relate to exactly what you were talking about.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you.

**Mr VINCENT** - Discussions on K&D I haven't been directly involved with because of the private nature of -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - You should have been.

**Mr VINCENT** - the discussions.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - We've talked to you about this.

**Mr VINCENT** - But, yes, and there are still discussions taking place in regard to that site.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - With Homes Tasmania?

**Mr VINCENT** - Homes Tasmania are having discussions.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you.

**Mr REID** - The release of the TPPs and the southern strategy has an increasing focus on delivery of housing across the full spectrum, greenfield like you talk about as well with regards to the urban growth boundary, but also density targets that under the previous strategies we haven't quite got there in terms of the density targets that we're looking for.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - There hasn't been the will or the resourcing.

**Mr REID** - Probably one of the things that would be really good to point to, is the next set of reforms which I think would be really important, is the outcomes of the Improving Residential Standards review that was conducted last year and released earlier this year, which points to a whole raft of changes in the residential zones to promote density, to increase height availability, increase the diversity and the lot sizes and things like that within the primary residential zones. We're embarking on a piece of work at the moment and working up, potentially, amendments to the state planning provisions that will allow a greater array of choice and density, in particular in the residential zones, from the rural living zone all the way through to the inner-residential densities.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Mr Reid. Can I just ask you, and I'm happy to move on after this: what is the timing on the review that will lead to potential planning scheme amendments, and will those amendments be consulted, because governments seem to have a problem with consulting people around some of these big changes?

**Mr REID** - The review's actually been done already. There's been work done by ERA and associates that has provided a raft of projects that have fallen out of that review and we're already working as we speak on potential amendments around, particularly, residential standards that are going to make the transition through the planning scheme for higher density and residential use in the right areas a lot easier. As part of the statutory process to amend the SPPs, there'll be a consultation process and of course, assessment by the TPC.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Timing?

**Mr REID** - Probably early next year will be the first side of the first tranche of changes that we're looking to do, but there's certainly work underway. It's certainly work that we've had on our radar for quite a period of time. It's just being able to get it right up the priority list to where it needs to be to be implemented.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you.

**Ms THOMAS** - Can I clarify the short-stay thing? I think the Chair touched on this, minister, that the government as part of its 2030 Strong Plan for Tasmania's Future -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - So-called.

**Ms THOMAS** - said it would introduce a 5 per cent fee on short-stay rental accommodation. Is the government monitoring the impact of short-stay rental accommodation on the residential rental market? And is it still committed to introducing this fee, or doesn't that fit in now it has a no-new-taxes policy?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Which is a stupid policy.

**Ms THOMAS** - I think we're starting to get a bit stupid.

**CHAIR** - I mean, it just gets stupid and stupider.

**Mr VINCENT** - Just for clarification, the figures are still supplied for the short-stay accommodation. That information is still accumulated by CBOS, which comes under the Treasurer's department. Yeah, the levy is the Treasurer; CBOS collects the information.

**Ms THOMAS** - So, that would be a question for the Treasurer about the short stay?

**Mr VINCENT** - I suggest we ask that to the Justice minister at the end. It is quite complex. Some of it comes under me, some of it doesn't.

**Ms THOMAS** - Maybe you need to do Estimates with your colleagues. Shelter Tasmania's independent research shows short-stay properties are increasing across all regions. In the last 12 months there has been a 20 per cent increase in Greater Hobart, 29 per cent increase in Devonport and a 31 per cent increase in Greater Launceston. As

## PUBLIC

Housing minister, do you consider that to be a concern? And how will you liaise with your colleagues to address the impact of that?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, it is still a big part of discussion. It's interesting that in most areas of Tasmania, off the top of my head, I think it's about 56 to 58 per cent of those houses where it's short-term accommodation with rooms in an existing house where the people live. In Hobart, that is much higher into the 60 per cent. I don't have the figures in front of me, but there is also a large portion of that which are houses that would not be available for any other rental if they weren't because they were holiday homes. People choose to pay for the cost of the holiday home by a bit of short-term accommodation.

But there is still a window that needs to be looked at there. It is a body of work that I haven't got too far into at this point in time, but is part of the radar.

**Ms THOMAS** - But even if people do rent one room out on a short-stay basis, they could choose to do that on a longer-term basis. So it still could potentially be taking up accommodation that could otherwise be offered to someone ongoing. But anyway.

**Mr VINCENT** - That's not the indication. But I understand what you're saying there. Fully understand that, yes.

**CHAIR** - Okay, we might move then, before I run out of time, to 8.2, State Planning Office.

**Mr VINCENT** - Sorry, we've just got a housing update.

**Mr REID** - I have updated statistics for the density incentive grants scheme. As of 14 November 2024, nine applications have been paid their grant, with the remaining 10 applications of the 19 to be paid once they've substantially commenced their dwelling. We've allocated a total of \$2.42 million for the entire program. To date, \$1.15 million has been paid to support 115 new dwellings under the scheme - \$10,000 per dwelling, and 19 grants have been awarded in total, which will support 242 new medium- to high-density dwellings.

**CHAIR** - How much money is left in it?

**Mr REID** - That's probably the bit of information I don't have, sorry, Chair.

**CHAIR** - It would be interesting to see how much Treasury is getting to fund the -

**Mr REID** - The original program was \$10 million, and that's what's been spent to date.

**Ms LOVELL** - \$1.15.

**Mr REID** - \$1.15 has been spent to date, but there's still \$2.42 million in total that will be kept aside to fund the the applications that are in.

**Ms LOVELL** - But it's \$2.42 total.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - So, more than half.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - (cont) Tasmanians value their coastline. It's now some time since the Robbins Island wharf issue went through and the first discussions of changes to the state coastal policy were put forward. It's gone a bit quiet. Could you give us a succinct encapsulation of the objectives. I would like to hear from Mr Reid, but also from Mr Ramsay on the consultation state coastal policy review.

**Mr VINCENT** - Thank you. In my short time in the role, it hasn't been a big part of what I've had to discuss or work my way through at the moment, and that is the reason I would love for Mr Reid to give a bit more summary. Thank you.

**Mr REID** - I certainly can, minister. I won't speak for the TPC on where they're at with their process, but the then-minister at the time and the Premier issued a ministerial direction to the Tasmanian Planning Commission under the *State Policies and Projects Act*, directing it to provide advice on whether a proposed amendment constitutes a significant change to the policy. Upon receipt of that advice, the minister agreed with the commission and determined that the amendment was a significant change to the policy, and made a subsequent direction to the commission to prepare a report and undertake an assessment of that policy, which I understand is the process that's under way at the moment.

The draft amendment to the policy was placed on public exhibition from 30 June to 25 August 2025, and I understand 203 submissions - I'm not sure that's correct, John - were received, and advised that 90 per cent of those submissions were in a pro forma template.

The advice I have before me is the public hearings are scheduled for either November this year, or -

**Mr RAMSAY** - They start next week.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Public hearings on the state coastal policy amendment.

**Mr RAMSAY** - Yes. We've appointed a panel of delegates to undertake the assessment, and it starts next week, having hearings in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart over about an eight-day period.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Mr Ramsay. I'm sure that timeframes have been set out on the very efficient TPC website, which is -

**CHAIR** - I'm surprised you haven't been on there.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I have been on there, but not in the last few - probably days, to be honest with you. Perhaps, for the purposes of the committee's understanding, just to give us an indication of timelines on when the TPC will report back on the review, and then I would like to go back to the minister about what the objective is here.

**Mr VINCENT** - I am of the understanding that the recommendations will be before me in early 2026. I will ask Mr Ramsay if he's got -

**Mr RAMSAY** - Yes, that's our expectation. Until we do the hearings and find out what the issues are, it's a bit hard to make time commitment to it. Interestingly, there are no timelines for this process, but we are hoping to get all the hearings done before Christmas and have the

## PUBLIC

report written either before Christmas or at least in the new year, and then we'd report back to the minister.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - So minister, what's the objective?

**Mr VINCENT** - And I have not developed any expectations or objectives at this point in time but will do over coming months.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, well thank you for that clarification, because the objective that was stated by government prior, was to facilitate potentially more development within the one-kilometre coastal defined zone, if you like - loosely-defined zone in the state coastal policy. It was to allow more development in the coastal zone. That's not something you'd confirm as a stated objective, at this point.

**Mr VINCENT** - Not at this point in time. I haven't familiarised myself with all the points of this policy at this stage but will be over coming months.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Can I ask you whether you agree with the notion the state coastal policy, while outdated and imperfect, has done a pretty good job of protecting coastal access and made sure that, unlike many other parts of the country, we haven't gone headlong into coastal development in a way that damages values here and our brand?

**Mr VINCENT** - There are points that have been raised in court that question some of the legalities around some of those points, and that's where this body of work is working through at the moment. As that is worked through, I will develop more of a thought pattern around it. I can't give an answer more than that, because I just haven't had enough time in the ministry yet to cover all these points, but I know the work that's being done State Planning Office and will be by Mr Ramsay, as will be part of

**Ms LOVELL** - So, it would be 7.0-something will go back to Treasury. Okay, thank you.

### **Output Group 8 - Housing and Planning**

#### **8.2 State Planning Office.**

#### **DPAC 6.2 State Planning Office (no budget provided for 25-26)**

**CHAIR** - It's all under 8.2. Sorry, it's over 6.2 as well. We're nearly out of time, so we will need to go across both, if we can.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I think it would be good to do it to understand.

**Mr VINCENT** - We have just been joined at the table by John Ramsay from the Tasmanian Planning Commission.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - As we know, the Tasmanian Planning Commission (TPC) is an independent statutory body. Are you able to condense the working relationship between the State Planning Office and the Tasmanian Planning Commission? It might sound like a really basic question, but it's an important one to wrap our heads around.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - It certainly is. I meet with both on a semi-regular basis. I certainly have a lot more to do with the State Planning Office [inaudible] other things. But I meet with Mr Ramsay, as needed on a regular basis to run over things. But the relationship between the two internally, I'd ask for Mr Ramsay to clarify how you work with the State Planning Office, please.

**Mr RAMSAY** - Okay. I suppose the difference is that the State Planning Office is policy and we're the regulator. But we meet every fortnight just to understand what work the State Planning Office is developing, like changes to the State Planning Provisions (SPPs) or changes to the State Coastal Policy, development assessment panels (DAPs), whatever. We basically have an informal exchange that helps us within our forward work program. There is internal consultation on some more technical issues, but that's the extent of our interaction.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thanks, Mr Ramsay. Was the TPC consulted by government on the development of the Development Assessment Panels legislation? I ask this, in part, because the objective of that legislation was to slightly skirt around some of the existing planning provisions and, certainly, provide an easier path to development.

**Mr RAMSAY** - Yes, we were consulted informally and we were consulted formally. Formally, we put our views on the record in relation to the first emanation of DAPs. We consulted on the second and third emanations, but only in terms of, 'Can we make the process work? Are there provisions in the DAPs bill that would be difficult for us to administer, either from a legal perspective or from a time perspective?' We provided our views to the State Planning Office and formally to the minister when we were part of the consultation process.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you. The first DAPs bill was put up by government and the Legislative Council dispatched it very efficiently. I don't know if this is stepping outside your brief a bit, Mr Ramsay. But to your mind, is the current iteration of the DAPs bill which has been released substantively different in any way from the original, because we don't think so?

**Mr RAMSAY** - I think the policy changes are probably not my call to respond to. We understand that it is slightly different. But from our perspective, if we're asking, 'Can we make it work in terms of our processes and resources?', the answer that we've given is, yes, we could.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, thank you. Can we go to the review of the State Coastal Policy? This is also a body of work I would imagine there's conversations happening between the two parts of the planning system. Minister, is it possible to provide an update of where the State Coastal Policy review is at? It would be great to get an expression of commitment from you to an ongoing robust State Coastal Policy that's in line with our resource management and planning system objectives around sustainable development.

**Mr VINCENT** - Thank you. I will ask Mr Reid for a summary of where the State Coastal Policy is at the moment.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I'm very happy to get that information from you, as the minister now, knowing how much Tasmanians value their coastline. It's now some time since the Robbins Island wharf issue went through and the first discussions of changes to the state coastal policy were put forward. It's gone a bit quiet. Could you give us a succinct encapsulation of the objectives. I would like to hear from Mr Reid, but also from Mr Ramsay on the consultation state coastal policy review.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - Thank you. In my short time in the role, it hasn't been a big part of what I've had to discuss or work my way through at the moment, and that is the reason I would love for Mr Reid to give a bit more summary. Thank you.

**Mr REID** - I certainly can, minister. I won't speak for the TPC on where they're at with their process, but the then-minister at the time and the Premier issued a ministerial direction to the Tasmanian Planning Commission under the *State Policies and Projects Act*, directing it to provide advice on whether a proposed amendment constitutes a significant change to the policy. Upon receipt of that advice, the minister agreed with the commission and determined that the amendment was a significant change to the policy, and made a subsequent direction to the commission to prepare a report and undertake an assessment of that policy, which I understand is the process that's under way at the moment.

The draft amendment to the policy was placed on public exhibition from 30 June to 25 August 2025, and I understand 203 submissions - I'm not sure that's correct, John - were received, and advised that 90 per cent of those submissions were in a pro forma template.

The advice I have before me is the public hearings are scheduled for either November this year, or -

**Mr RAMSAY** - They start next week.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Public hearings on the state coastal policy amendment.

**Mr RAMSAY** - Yes. We've appointed a panel of delegates to undertake the assessment, and it starts next week, having hearings in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart over about an eight-day period.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, Mr Ramsay. I'm sure that timeframes have been set out on the very efficient TPC website, which is -

**CHAIR** - I'm surprised you haven't been on there.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I have been on there, but not in the last few - probably days, to be honest with you. Perhaps, for the purposes of the committee's understanding, just to give us an indication of timelines on when the TPC will report back on the review, and then I would like to go back to the minister about what the objective is here.

**Mr VINCENT** - I am of the understanding that the recommendations will be before me in early 2026. I will ask Mr Ramsay if he's got -

**Mr RAMSAY** - Yes, that's our expectation. Until we do the hearings and find out what the issues are, it's a bit hard to make time commitment to it. Interestingly, there are no timelines for this process, but we are hoping to get all the hearings done before Christmas and have the report written either before Christmas or at least in the new year, and then we'd report back to the minister.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - So minister, what's the objective?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - And I have not developed any expectations or objectives at this point in time but will do over coming months.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay, well thank you for that clarification, because the objective that was stated by government prior, was to facilitate potentially more development within the one-kilometre coastal defined zone, if you like - loosely-defined zone in the state coastal policy. It was to allow more development in the coastal zone. That's not something you'd confirm as a stated objective, at this point.

**Mr VINCENT** - Not at this point in time. I haven't familiarised myself with all the points of this policy at this stage but will be over coming months.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Can I ask you whether you agree with the notion the state coastal policy, while outdated and imperfect, has done a pretty good job of protecting coastal access and made sure that, unlike many other parts of the country, we haven't gone headlong into coastal development in a way that damages values here and our brand?

**Mr VINCENT** - There are points that have been raised in court that question some of the legalities around some of those points, and that's where this body of work is working through at the moment. As that is worked through, I will develop more of a thought pattern around it. I can't give an answer more than that, because I just haven't had enough time in the ministry yet to cover all these points, but I know the work that's being done State Planning Office and will be by Mr Ramsay, as will be part of my education process on that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Does someone who grew up in Joh Bjelke-Petersen's Queensland where canal estates just erupted all over the coast, I'm hoping you would see the state coastal policy as a policy wouldn't be something you'd chuck the whole thing out of and write again given the pretty fair job it's done of protecting coastal values and providing for access.

**Mr VINCENT** - I understand your passion towards this and take fully on board.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's not an answer to the question, but thanks for the flattery.

**Mr VINCENT** - I hope you've been able to see today that I am injecting myself into as many parts of my ministry to learn as much as I can before I make decisions and this is one of those situations. Yes, I am being polite with my answer, but you still have my commitment that I'm working my way through it.

**CHAIR** - Any other questions?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I could sit here all day and ask questions but no I am fine for now.

**Mr VINCENT** - Always happy to take questions on board normally, anyway, so always approach on any of that.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, minister, for your time on Housing and Planning. We will have a 15-minute break and come back to Local Government.

**The Committee suspended from 4.01 p.m. to 4.15 p.m.**

# PUBLIC

## Output Group 1 - Policy Reform and Government Priorities 1.9 Local Government

**CHAIR** - Minister, thank you for coming back again. I will now deal with your portfolio responsibilities under local government. I will ask you to introduce the people at the table with you. Then, if you want to make an opening statement, you'd be welcome to do that and then we'll go to questions.

**Mr VINCENT** - No worries. On my right-hand side, I have Deputy Secretary, Matthew Healey, and then Acting Director of Local Government, Luke Murphy-Gregory.

**Mr VINCENT** - I'm happy to go straight to questions, to be honest instead of reading that out, if you want.

**Ms THOMAS** - Minister. I'm keen to hear from you about the budget appropriation for the line-item Local Government 1.9 on page 215 of the budget papers, there's \$2.853 million allocated in 2025-26 and then over the forward estimates that amount drops down to \$2.25 million in the final out year. Given the significant reform agenda that has been committed to in the local government space and the recommendations of the Future of Local Government review, how do you see the government achieving that when the funding is going down?

**Mr VINCENT** - No worries. I will ask the deputy secretary to expand on those line items.

**Mr HEALEY** - If I can, probably just in the first instance, acknowledge the numbers that I'm going to read out are slightly different to yours, because I'm reading off the expenditure table, which includes - to explain the difference - for 2025-26, there is \$100,000 of commonwealth funding in the expenditure table for the Recreational Fishing and Camping program that the Office of Local Government administers on the Commonwealth's behalf. There's also around \$50,000 in accruals which comes in trust funds for the administration of the code of conduct system. My numbers say 3005, which is reconciles with your 28 when you take those two numbers out.

The base funding for the Office of Local Government is indexed and continues to rise through the forward Estimates. This financial year, the number includes \$200,000 which was provided a number of years ago to support community education for compulsory voting. Funding was provided for two elections. That will be available next financial year to once again, educate the community about compulsory voting in local government. It also includes a \$500,000 allocation for the Central Coast Council waterfront renewal, which will be grant to the council.

Then, in 2026-27 and 2027-28 there is the Future of Local Government Review funding, so \$250,000 per year for two years. That was previously allocated in this financial year, but because of the lengthy caretaker period, and because of the significant policy-reform program that the office is already trying to move forward, being electoral bills and local government amendments, we felt that it would be best to provide the additional funding in the next two years so that we can support some of the other delivery of the recommendations from the Future of Local Government Review.

That's how the funding sits within the Office of Local Government.

## PUBLIC

**Ms THOMAS** - What is the base funding, then? You said it increases over time?

**Mr HEALEY** - Base funding for 2025-26 it's \$2.247 million and then it rises to \$2.353 million, \$2.326 million and then up to \$2.394 million in 2028-29 -

**CHAIR** - \$2.394?

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes, \$2.394 million.

**Ms THOMAS** - It goes from \$2.247 million to \$2.353 million to \$2.326 -

**Mr HEALEY** - Now, a caution there. In 2026-27, there is a 27th pay so that lifts it up a bit. It's not dropping, it's just going from a 27 pay to a 26 pay financial year. Then it continues to increase to \$2.394 million, an additional \$70,000 uplift from 2027-28 to 2028-29.

Now, what will complicate all of these things, is obviously there is a broad agency-based budget - they call it a performance efficiency measure - that will need to be applied across the agency generally and DPAC's working on that on an agency wide basis at the moment.

I'm sure the Office of Local Government will need to provide some support for that.

**CHAIR** - Could I clarify this, because you've said twice now, so I'm pretty sure I've heard it twice. I'll just use '28-29, for example, but the others are equally relevant. But you said there's \$2,394,000 and the base funding - that is the base funding?

**Mr HEALEY** - That is the base funding, yes.

**CHAIR** - But the appropriation for that year is only \$2251?

**Mr HEALEY** - I've got 2304, that is assuming some of the allocation of the Department savings measures over the forward Estimates. Probably there is an efficiency measure in there that represents that remaining \$70,000.

**Ms THOMAS** - I see what you're saying.

**Mr HEALEY** - That's obviously been applied in the Budget. Even though the agency is managing its budget efficiency dividend on a whole-of-agency basis, they've obviously applied that measure into that number.

**CHAIR** - The reality is that the appropriation in there is \$143,000 less than just the base funding. so you -

**Mr HEALEY** - Yeah, there's no additional funding measures in that year. That's the only year where there's no additional measures. So, yes, you're right.

**Ms THOMAS** - Given there's only the \$250,000 per annum allocated over the next two financial years, is it your expectation that all of the recommendations the government has agreed to will be completed by then, or?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - We're certainly working through them. One of the big pushes I've had since coming into the role has been to bring forward or actuate a lot of the work that had been done over the last four to six years in consultancy, to bring that forward in discussions with the office. We feel we will have a lot of that in place by the October '26 elections. Some will float past that, but all the important things we need to have in place, fingers crossed, we will have in place on a timeline for the '26 elections. And then we will work through the other points that we still need to bring forward.

Some of those we will work through during next year as well, but we're getting the main ones up that require legislation or changes. And then there'll be a few others that we're going to look at.

There's ongoing conversations with councils as those discussions mature as well, but we haven't got accurate figures to build in anywhere of what what may be needed for some of that consultation with councils and community.

**Ms THOMAS** - On that, you mentioned things being ready for the 2026 elections in October next year. Where is the electoral bill at? Is it likely that the changes in that will be implemented by the 2026 elections?

**Mr VINCENT** - Probably a bit too early to tell. We're certainly trying to do it. I will ask Luke for a bit of coverage on that, please.

**CHAIR** - Probably delayed if you had another election.

**Mr VINCENT** - If another election, yes, we'd be delayed on a lot of things. It has certainly slowed a few things up. We've got a backlog of legislation.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - Yes, unfortunately we have had some delays in getting our bill in a state where it's ready to release for an extended consultation period, it is a technical bill, it's fair to say, in terms of what we're working on. It's a brand-new electoral bill, in addition to a number of adjustments that we'll need to make to the principal act.

At this stage we're targeting a release in the first or second week of December of that bill for an extended period of consultation. Obviously, that means then it takes us through to next year's parliamentary sitting, in the autumn session.

We are obviously pragmatic about what that looks like in terms of implementation. We're having active conversations with the Electoral Commission at the moment about what is practicably possible, depending on the different timing scenarios of when we get the bill through the parliament. Obviously, we can't control entirely when the bill gets through the parliament, so the timing will need to be a little bit flexible in terms of implementation. But we are really keen to understand the key reforms that the sector wants and needs, and that the TEC can actually deliver in whatever time frame we do have.

As I said, we'll be going out in early December as part of that consultation. We'll be seeking that feedback. But it's fair to say that there'll be no -

**CHAIR** - Until when? You said 'extended period'.

## PUBLIC

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - Sorry. Through to the end of February is the plan at this stage. As I said, it's obviously a busy time of the year for everyone and it's been a busy and intense year of consultation for the sector. We've had two other significant reform bills out and consulted on this year. Not bills, I should say but in terms of programs and papers. And we've had one bill out, which has just closed for consultation. So, yeah, it's been an intense period for the sector. We want to give everyone the opportunity to make sure that piece of legislation is right and does the job. As I said, it is a technical one.

But it won't have any impact on how the election is run in terms of when it's run. It will absolutely be held in October and November next year. It will just be a matter of what's possible in terms of getting the reform through prior to the election. And then the balance of the reform that comes through will be implemented post-election.

**CHAIR** - What is the FTE and the headcount in the office?

**Mr HEALEY** - The current FTE is 14.5, as of March 2025.

**CHAIR** - And headcount?

**Mr HEALEY** - Headcount is 15.

**Mr VINCENT** - I'll just add to the consultation part. Part of what we did to make sure about all this, when Michael Mogridge was acting director, was to sit down and work through some of the timelines with the Local Government Association, so they were fully aware. We tried to work it so that even with some that we were on a very tight timeline for, that it still allowed for a workshop and the council meeting. We had regular conversations with some of the general managers about making sure that it fitted.

As I've been going around talking to councils, especially early in the piece, I apologised and explained that some of the legislation we did need to happen, and had an amazing amount of support for making sure that the consultation happened and came back in at an appropriate time so that we'd keep things moving. It was done and will continue to be done with open consultation.

**Ms THOMAS** - Back on the election bill, one of the key things of concern to the sector, in my understanding, is the general manager's role. I expect that will be part of the reform. If the bill isn't introduced or passed through the parliament, can that in itself somehow be put as an amendment, given that's a priority?

**Mr VINCENT** - It is a priority. I don't know about there being concern. I haven't met anybody in local government that wants to keep it there, so it's a very quick handball on their department. I will just ask for some clarification because there have been discussions between the office and the Electoral Commissioner regarding how this might work.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - Yes, it is something we hear from the sector, something that they're really keen to see happen as soon as possible. We expect to get that feedback as we go out for consultation. We've already heard it, obviously. We are actually meeting with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission tomorrow to talk about implementation and timing around aspects of the reform program. The GM's role is a relatively complex undertaking in terms of the transfer. I know that the commission has flagged, at officer level at least, some potential

## PUBLIC

concerns with having that happen, depending on the timeframe of when the bill gets through the parliament.

In answer to your question about whether or not it would be possible, through amendment, to have it happen even if the substantive aspects of the bill weren't able to make it through in time in terms of implementation: it could form part of that suite but I would have to say it would have to be contingent on ongoing conversations with the commission.

**Mr HEALEY** - Minister, correct me if I'm wrong, but the management of the electoral roll is not one of those amendments where it either happens in 2026 or you have to wait another four years for it to happen. You could start the transition of the oversight of the general manager's role from the day after the election if you wanted to. It's not something that would have to wait for four years if we didn't get it done for next year's election.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - That's absolutely right, Mat, and yes, I think the commission's concerns on the face of it, depending on how much time they have, probably go to ensuring, I guess, the integrity of the role as it's transferred over, if they've only got a very short period after the passage of the bill and the election, but yes, as Mat says, we'd be undertaking our best endeavours to have it in place as soon as possible. It would just be a question of whether or not it happened on this side of the election or on the other.

**Ms THOMAS** - Okay. Thank you. Another one of the recommendations of the Future of Local Government review, recommendation 18, was in relation to infrastructure contributions. The recommendation was that the Tasmanian government should work with the sector and the development industry to further investigate and consider introducing a marginal cost-based integrated developer charging regime; minister, has there been any progress on that? The government's response to the review recommendation was that work would be commenced by the end of 2024; where is that at?

**Mr VINCENT** - It hasn't progressed too much further, to be honest there, other than there is certainly a maturing of views within the industry that it needs to be looked at, and it is on the agenda to do very quickly. There are quite a few developers that have approached me both personally and through the office of having discussion on it. There are some peak bodies that support it, some that don't from their members.

It's a different conversation now about some of the subdivision work that needs to do and the contribution needed to protect the instigator of the first greenfield site, council, ratepayers, developers and builders. Some of that work is a greater appreciation of the infrastructure costs that are associated with some of the urban growth, expansion of new subdivisions. It's something I'm fully aware of at Sorell.

As I said, some developers want it. Others who come in on the second and third attachments don't, of course, but we have to be fair about it, because agencies can't wear the full cost, councils can't wear the full cost, and then for the developer, it's far better off to work it out across - it's not hard to work out a cost of upgrading systems in an area for stormwater, for power necessarily, if it takes in all these things, for the cost of sewerage - and there may be a few other things there, as well, that can be looked at and then divided into what council might be able to do with some higher-density rezoning - which gives you an idea, then, so if somebody splits a decent-sized block up into three or four, it can still be attributed to those as individual, and it's much easier to be taken care of into the price of the block there and then, than it is with

## PUBLIC

some of the systems that are building up now in the anomalies. So, having very central conversations with a lot of people. Not everybody is fully agreeing to it at this stage, but it's something I'll be progressing in 2027 guaranteed.

**Ms THOMAS** - Progressing in what, sorry?

**Mr VINCENT** - Sorry. 2026, not 2027.

**Ms THOMAS** - You said before you were going to do it very quickly. I thought, 'hang on, that doesn't sound very quickly.'

**Mr VINCENT** - No, sorry. I've skipped a year all of a sudden.

**CHAIR** - Wish your life away.

**Mr VINCENT** - No, I don't want to wish my life away. I'm getting to then where I have to slow down, not speed up.

**Mr HEALEY** - That is quick for us.

**Ms THOMAS** - I'm meant to say that, Mat, not you. Are you admitting that? Did you hear what he said? '2027, that is quick for us.'

**Mr HEALEY** - I didn't say that.

**Ms THOMAS** - I think the Hansard caught it.

**CHAIR** - You will be tossed out soon.

**Ms THOMAS** - Oh dear. Well, I think that would be pleasing for the sector to hear that, and my understanding is the LGAT's done a fair bit of work on it already. So, will that work that they've done on the policy framework be incorporated?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, you're quite correct, and it certainly will be. There are some other bodies that have done substantial work on it also. Some of those I haven't seen yet, but I've only heard about them verbally. We meet with Local Government Association very regularly. Everything that we're putting on the table I've discussed openly with the CEO, and in most cases, the president as well, and if the CEO needs to have further - he quite often goes out and meets with mayors or GMs to make sure that we're on track with what we're doing now.

We have a fantastic working relationship. It doesn't mean we agree on everything, but quite often Dion has stepped forward to say, 'We've got some body of work done on that a few years ago,' or 'We have some information on that, we'll pull it out for you so you can start your thinking around these lines.' So good working relationship, solid communication. I don't want that to change.

**CHAIR** - There has been criticism in the past that adequate time hasn't been given to LGAT and the local government sector generally for consultation on things that affect them; it's your clear intent, is it, minister, to make sure that's not a repeated performance of the past?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - From day one in this role, because of my previous role, I've always had a fantastic working relationship with Dion Lester as CEO, and I need for the things that we need to bring in for that role, as in communication between the two of us and the sector, to be as good as it possibly can be all the time. That's why I raised the point before with consultation, if we need to have it done quickly to meet time frames, we go and talk to him about that as well and Dion's has always supported that. When we have extra time, like we have with this one over Christmas, we make sure it works with them as well. No hidden secrets there: open communication with LGAT all the way through this.

**Ms THOMAS** - Thank you. We talked about heavy vehicle motor tax earlier, didn't we?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, we did.

**Ms THOMAS** - I've covered off on that one. Another area where there was suggestion that there'd be work commenced by the end of 2024 was in relation to rating for major commercial operations like wind farms. That was recommendation 17 of the review, that the Tasmanian government should further investigate and consider introducing an alternative framework for councils to raise revenue from major commercial operations in their local government areas, where rates based on the improved values of land are not an efficient, effective or equitable form of taxation.

**Mr VINCENT** - My knowledge in that area is limited at this point, other than some conversations we had when I went around with the energy committee before I became a minister, with people there.

**CHAIR** - How Hydro doesn't contribute to the west coast in that way.

**Mr VINCENT** - I might just ask the dep sec to expand on that from his knowledge, please, where that may be at.

**Mr HEALEY** - I suppose two things: the imperative for delivering on this reform was probably relieved a little bit with the Auditor-General changing the valuation classes. There is now a valuation category for wind farms and so councils are able to rate wind farms if they want to. They now have a mechanism to do so. It doesn't quite deliver on the intent of the recommendation, which is to have a really deliberate and considered framework for the rating of major industrials that may not lend themselves well to rating on the basis of land value or capital value.

We have been working with ReCFIT on trying to work through how we might look at this issue alongside of their work that they've been doing on the community benefit framework for wind farms as well. It probably hasn't progressed that far, other than really understanding the complexities of it. It probably now is another one for 2026 to really start to progress. Now that we have that progress on the electoral bill, we have progress on the local government reform bill, some of these other broader recommendations can be brought onto the priority list.

**Ms THOMAS** - One of the other recommendations, 36, was in relation to workforce, that the government should support LGAT to develop and implement a workforce-development toolkit tailored to the sector and aligned with the Tasmanian government's workforce-development system. Has there been any progress on that or is there any intention to further progress that?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - Obviously, it's an issue across the sector and across the Tasmanian economy more broadly, in terms of skills gaps and shortages. We found that through a FoLGR process. I would just note that that recommendation, I believe, was listed as a lower priority in the governments response to FoLGR. When we brought out our reform program for 2024-26 in response to the FoLGR recommendations, we had a series of high-priority recommendations that we committed to rolling out in the first instance.

It's a broad suite of reforms, obviously, under FoLGR, and we thought the best way to approach it would be to chunk it out, and we consulted with the sector around those things that should absolutely be brought to the fore. That's what we're doing currently with all the work that we're doing right now. At the end of the 2026 program, I think we will have delivered action against 17 of the recommendations in total, but obviously the workforce one is in there and it remains an important issue, but I would say probably at this stage it isn't the focus of a dedicated, program of work given all our other priorities. If that's fair to say, minister.

**Mr VINCENT** - I will add a little although, directly on workforce, there is another program we are working closely to develop in early 2026 in relation to the 26 elections and that's lifting the profile on top of the campaign that the LGAT have had over the last 12 months of lifting the tone.

We really want to promote to the communities, the serious work that GM's and council staff do and then council is also on behalf of the community. I believe the majority of the community don't understand how dedicated our councillors and staff are and don't think many of them appreciate the role the general manager plays in trying to keep the peace between ratepayers, staff, councillors and the regulatory authorities they also have to work under.

I would like to start a program of education that which would roll in then to an added campaign of councillors in the community and how important it is to understand some of the things that are around. The seriousness of it now and some of the important decisions they have to make which would then roll into well before the 26 elections.

The third part of the campaign being along the lines of if you would like to stand for council, can we suggest these are some of the people you can talk to, or this is where to go and look at things and these are the numbers to ring if you'd like more information.

We educate the community about the seriousness of council staff and councillors, start to appreciate the role and some of the things involved with it and then bringing an awareness campaign leading into the 26 elections of people knowing what they're getting themselves in for and working through that process. That all comes into a bit appreciation that will help with the workforce development and retention in my opinion.

**Ms THOMAS** - Something else just popped into my mind as you were talking then about the elections and the electoral bill and what will be included in that, given the government has re tabled its legislation to amend the *Electoral Act* to remove section 196.

**CHAIR** - Yes.

## PUBLIC

**Ms THOMAS** - They re tabled that with the intention to remove section 196 of the *Electoral Act* about the use of name and image without a candidate's permission. I know from personal experience that has been used that section by candidates in local government elections. Either as a complaint mechanism or a level of protection for candidates when there have been people who have used name and image without permission in local government elections.

Certainly, there's limited if any other protections for candidates in relation to people making things up about candidates and inappropriately using your name and image. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on whether there'll be any additional protections in the electoral bill to support people.

Because of course, we know the flack you cop and the criticism in the sometimes mistruths that are portrayed about you can be a real barrier to people wanting to put their hand up to run for office in local government. Is there anything in the electoral bill that addresses that?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will just ask for a bit more clarification from Luke, but certainly it is and it's becoming a larger issue in all walks of life. For people to put themselves up in local government, we want to encourage general public putting their name up for local government that don't have a great ambition for most of the time to take a career on other than to do the right thing by the community. Putting your hand up to do that in a volatile market of social media for all different ages and walks of life is a very scary thing, as most of us know that have been through the process.

We're very conscious of that and it is talked about quite regularly and reform is needed on a lot of those different areas, but Luke your thoughts there.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - I just want to be a bit cautious because our bill is still subject to consideration by the Cabinet, but it is probably okay to walk through it at a high level given it is consistent with what was released earlier this year in relation to our discussion paper. In terms of the broad changes with respect to electoral advertising and publication of electoral matter, for instance, we will be introducing new prohibitions on the dissemination of misleading and deceptive statements, the intention of which is to line up with the changes to 197 of the *Electoral Act*.

A key part of what we're doing with this bill is to introduce and bring through a lot of the changes and reforms that came through in the most recent suite of reforms to the *Electoral Act* to make sure that we can have alignment where it's appropriate. Obviously, we still need to retain the special place of local government and how it operates within our electoral framework. As for other other changes, we are looking to, at this stage, repeal the existing provision that does prohibit the publication of a candidate's name or image without consent. This would align our local government elections with state and federal practises when no such restriction applies.

**Ms THOMAS** - It does still in the state law as it exists currently, because that amendment hasn't gone through the parliament.

**CHAIR** - It was removed in our House, that provision, wasn't it?

**Ms THOMAS** - Section 196.

## PUBLIC

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - I'm relatively sure it has been removed. We can take that on -

**Ms THOMAS** - We haven't dealt with that yet. It went to a committee -

**CHAIR** - That's right, it did too. Sorry.

**Ms THOMAS** - It went to a committee and the government, just last week, re-tabled it in the other place.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - I suppose in that circumstance the intention is to align it with the outcome of it if it is being sought at the state level also. There will be updates and clarification to what constitutes electoral advertising to ensure consistency and legal clarity. We will be looking to align our definitions with the *Electoral Act* and reduce ambiguity for candidates and regulators. We will require electoral advertising to include information identifying who authorised the material. The aim there is to promote transparency and accountability in campaign communications. There will be limits on electoral expenditure to the candidate, intending candidate, or their formally nominated agent. We're trying to prevent unregulated third-party campaigning and increase transparency there. There will be adjustments to the caps on electoral expenditure and changes to reporting, but that's probably about the extent to which I can share at this point without going into too much detail.

**Ms THOMAS** - That's fine. Thank you. I appreciate that. Minister, my concern would be, and this is my thinking, that without proper truth in political advertising frameworks, we're going to continue to prevent good people from putting their self forward, particularly at the local government level, where you are super accessible to the community and really at the grassroots level. People simply won't stand and whilst I understand the intent to align with state provisions, do you see any other way, or is it your intention as minister to look for other ways to protect candidates?

**Mr VINCENT** - I fully understand the nature, having been there. I haven't got a perfect answer for you at this stage, other than we're working through those situations and understand. I am talking to people at present that are looking to stand for council and asking those questions. It is at the forefront of my mind, and I will continue to work with the department on any improvements that can be made. I haven't got the perfect answer for it at this stage. It is very volatile because most people coming in have a genuine ignorance of what they can and can't do. Others have a vindictive nature they want to use and then it's such a volatile area. The more we can put processes in there that encourage people to put their hand up, the better it be for local government overall.

**Ms THOMAS** - Of course, there are differences, between state and local government elections and candidates. We don't yet have, and hopefully won't have, in Tasmania, a party system associated with local government elections. It is a bit different. I know there's different views in this place and the other place about the removal of section 196. I think local government does deserve different consideration in relation to those protections for candidates and use of name and image, given that it is a different landscape in terms of not being driven by party politics or party campaigning.

**Mr VINCENT** - Your thoughts are taken on board.

## PUBLIC

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Noting, also, there's a view that section 196 is unconstitutional because it restricts the implied right of freedom of political communication, which is why it's been referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

**Ms THOMAS** - Is that a question?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It's a statement. I just wanted to add some colour to your statement, Bec.

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, there's clearly different views around the place and different framework for local government being established.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Electoral framework?

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, and constitutional -

**CHAIR** - Anyway, questions across the table this way.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That aligns us at a state and local level, in terms of electoral laws.

**CHAIR** - We will just focus on asking the minister questions.

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, okay. See? It's a very fraught area.

My next question, then, is about the development assessment panels.

Just for the benefit of *Hansard*, because we kept talking about before FOLGR is Future of Local Government Reform.

**Mr HEALEY** - It's not a very good acronym, is it? Doesn't have a very bright ring to it.

**Ms THOMAS** - Doesn't roll off the tongue very well, does it?

**Ms LOVELL** - There are some worse ones around.

**Ms THOMAS** - Development assessment panels - talking about things being brought back to the parliament - are back, version 3.0. The consultation draft has been released. My understanding is local government sector still opposes the model due to lack of evidence for the need and the poor use of resources. Or are considering it a poor use of resources to develop and implement this reform, when the State Planning Office - or whatever it's going to be called now, is it still called that? - could be working on more strategic projects.

What conversations have you had with the local government sector about development assessment panels, and how has their feedback been incorporated into version 3.0?

**Mr VINCENT** - A lot of it come from the last vote in this place in regards to the minister having input into part of that, and that's been taken totally out now.

The three components of it, the main part being for Homes Tas to work through. We did touch on some of the issues earlier on with the Huntingfield Estate, that could have been done

## PUBLIC

a lot differently by all parties involved - it was council and that's a big part of being able to move some of those things through.

The other one that's been open to contention and has caused problems at councils around the state - although councils as a whole might have been negative towards it, the fact of the matter is, there has been a lot of awkwardness about some of the developments that councils have voted for themselves. There is a part of the DAPs that indicate that council projects over \$1 million would be put back through the TPC.

And then the other one, where developers might choose to take that line instead of putting it through council. I don't believe there will be a lot in that area. The targets before of the \$10 million and \$5 million was put in place from the suggestion of local government. Then it was changed when the bill went through, and that was one of the big arguments they had against it. They've been increased now to that \$10 million in urban and \$5 million in regional councils.

**CHAIR** - We don't do big things in regional areas, do we? No, we do.

**Mr VINCENT** - In some areas we do, but most of it we don't. It varies municipality to municipality. Sorry, I lost my train of thought there.

They are the three points there and open to discussion. There is a growing number of local government people that do not want even a planning scheme to be able to put them through. There is a growing number of people that understand the complications of some of the bigger projects. We see that constantly - the argument about if a council planner makes a recommendation to the council and the council wishes to vote against it, this will allow a system where they can actually still have their say on a matter through this system as a councillor, instead of having to have the pressure on to agree with what the council planner has put through. There's a maturing discussion around it. I know the overall view of local government is that they're worried about it, but I still feel, even more so now with the amendments of taking the minister's responsibility out of it, that there is an opportunity for planning reform there that would work for most.

**Ms THOMAS** - Okay. A big part of the community concern, which was also reflected to some extent through local government, was the community voice and the capacity of community to have their say. My understanding is that hasn't changed in the draft bill that's out; was there any consideration given to that?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, there is, and a good answer, I think was it Luke, you gave on the community side of things yesterday about consultation on DAPs?

**Mr HEALEY** - That probably would have been in your planning minister's Estimates.

**Mr VINCENT** - It might have been too. Sorry. I just have to get a bit more information on that for you. I'm not right across that. For the avoidance of doubt, yes that's very nice, and for the benefit of these watching and reading *Hansard*, the DAPs bill is mine as the Minister of Housing and Planning, not Local Government. One of my faults, I must admit, is that my ministries are all ones I see merging, and quite often in my own mind I'm running them alongside one another. I forget which hat I've got on, so I do apologise for that.

## PUBLIC

**Ms THOMAS** - I will ask you these questions on the floor next week then instead about the actual model and the community voice, if that's more appropriate.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, thank you.

**Ms THOMAS** - What further opportunity - I guess there will be further opportunity for local government to have a say on DAPs; what is the time frame for progressing this through the parliament?

**Mr VINCENT** - We will just find that and come back to you in a couple of seconds.

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, and there will be opportunity for local government to have more of a say before it's progressed. It won't be rushed through parliament?

**Mr VINCENT** - I can't imagine it being rushed through, that is not my intention at all.

**Ms THOMAS** - If the POSS order fails, it won't be rushed through in another way to try and approve a stadium?

**Mr VINCENT** - I don't see the two associated at this point in time.

**CHAIR** - At this point in time.

**Mr VINCENT** - Don't play with my words, but no.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - You couldn't approve the stadium through a DAP process, could you?

**Ms THOMAS** - Anything's possible. It's the first thing that popped into my mind when I saw it come back on the table, but anyway, call me cynical.

**Mr VINCENT** - The consultation is open from 7 November as it was, through to 5 p.m. on 12 December and we already started discussion with local government -

**CHAIR** - What was that, 7 November until 12 December?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, until 12 December so there'll be more conversations on it.

**CHAIR** - That's not the consultation on a draft?

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, it is.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, it is.

**Ms THOMAS** - It sounds fairly rushed to me, but anyway, hopefully the local government sector -

**CHAIR** - They won't get it through this year anyway; not enough days in the week or hours in the day.

**Mr VINCENT** - No, no.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Cassy, did you want to have a question?

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I'd love to, thanks, Chair. Thanks, Bec. Minister, I think we've had this discussion a number of times, whether it's in Question Time or across the table. As you are aware, national and state governments have prepared climate risk assessment reports. The Tasmanian climate risk assessment report commissioned by government tells us that we are in for extreme weather events with increased frequency and severity, and that includes obviously floods, storm surge, sea level rise, but also catastrophic bushfires.

Given that local government in many ways is closest to community and dealing with the consequences of these extreme events, which will occur with increased frequency and intensity, can you point to any resources in the Budget for local government that assist with adaptation measures, particularly?

**Mr VINCENT** - I don't believe there's anything there at the moment, but let me just check.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I ask this because the Local Government Association of Tasmania had a grant for - I think it was a couple of years where they were able to employ a part-time FTE under a state grant, so a climate readiness grant. That was a coordinating grant between all councils.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Would LGAT's funding be administered by the Minister for the Environment?

**Mr VINCENT** - Which would be the Minister of Environment. I think we touched on that yesterday.

**Mr HEALEY** - There probably are a few areas across government that do work on climate change, on severe weather events, and work with local government to make sure that they're prepared and are thinking about how to boost their community resilience. Resilience and Recovery Tasmania in the Department of Premier and Cabinet is -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - They don't allocate funding to LGAT to work on climate.

**Mr HEALEY** - They do access funding pools. For example, they have been doing a lot of work with local governments around drought and drought resilience. They've also been doing a lot of work with local governments around flood mapping and bushfire risk mapping, education around flood and bushfire risk. I haven't been in that space for a little while, but for many years we were quite ahead of the pack in terms of our mapping of bushfire risk, mapping of flooding risk, and the engagement with local government on those too.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I know that very well, Mr Healey, as you know I know well, because I was the minister when a lot of that good work started.

**Mr HEALEY** - It was, and we are benefitting from that work now embedded within our planning environment. Bushfire attack levels - it wasn't that long ago, but we didn't have a

## PUBLIC

structured approach to planning and reducing and building resilience in our built infrastructure from bushfires. We do now, and it's quite a sophisticated system.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Well, it's developing. I'm not sure you would want to rely on it completely under the circumstances, because there's still resourcing and capacity issues, for example, in the TFS and the SES and Parks and Forestry; but I guess the question is - and through you, minister: in this portfolio, are there any resources allocated specific to climate change adaptation? Mitigation is one thing, but adaptation at a local government level in places for example like Lauderdale, Sorell, Orford - even Hobart, which is on high risk for bushfire; what's in local government to drive that adaptation work?

**Mr VINCENT** - There is work done by the other departments that can be contribute financially or work with the local government association separate without going through the local government ministry, in some cases. And straight on the LGAT's role, on their website:

We have also engaged with the state government on the review of the *Tasmanian Climate Change (State Action) Act (2008)* and the development of Tasmania's Climate Change Action Plan for 2023-25.

So, they're already working with some of the departments on that, but not through this parliament.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you, minister. I think LGAT would have been disappointed to hear your colleague minister Ogilvie's response to questions about the climate act review the other night, where she seemed very casual about whether or not any strengthening of the act was needed. How are you making sure as minister that adaptation planning is embedded at a local government level, noting what Mr Healey said before about all these excellent tools we now have - sea level rise, inundation risk, landslip risk - all these tools that we have available to local government, but there doesn't seem to be much coordination of climate adaptation activities or resourcing going into it.

**Mr VINCENT** - It is not something that I've had to deal too much with at this point in time, but I'm happy to add it to the next agenda with the CEO of LGAT to see where his comfort level sits with this and see if I can facilitate anything different or improved.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - That's really good to hear, minister. You might just, before you have that meeting, refresh yourself on the Tasmanian Climate Risk Assessment, given how pertinent it is to all your portfolios - in fact, you particularly as a minister, all your portfolios.

**Mr VINCENT** - Thank you, I will take that on board. I think it might be in amongst my pile of reading, but yes, point taken. Thank you, and as you know, I have been trying to look into some of the climate situations, and certainly to talking with Mr Ramsay that was here before about making sure that the reviews are done at a proper time from the TPC, and my knowledge of that area is growing.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Good. Can I ask you - so, if Clarence Council, for example, had a project or some work that it wanted to do along the South Arm Highway at Lauderdale, which, when there's a big weather event, the waves crash over the road and it's dangerous, where would Clarence Council go for infrastructure funding support, advice and that sort of thing, or some funding for a project?

## PUBLIC

**Mr HEALEY** - Resilience and Recovery Tasmania are actively engaging with councils to talk about facilitating access to national funds like the disaster resilience fund.

I think, and I won't say it definitively, but certainly last time I spoke with that team, Tasmania was punching way above its weight in terms of getting access to the disaster resilience fund from the Commonwealth, and we were facilitating projects in local government that enabled them to address some of those risks. So, we do really actively - and they are very connected with local government on these sorts of issues.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I can't find the page quickly, but my recollection is that the funding for the recovery and resilience fund sort of drops off quite sharply in the out-years.

**Mr HEALEY** - I think there's been a - there was some funding that they had access to, and so for 2024-25 to 2025-26, it returns back to a base - to be honest, I can't comment about their ongoing budget.

**CHAIR** - We've got some information coming on notice about that, I think, Cassy - from memory, I think you asked for that.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Oh good. So, the inputs to the recovery and resilience fund - what are they, Commonwealth and state monies?

**Mr HEALEY** - The Commonwealth runs a fairly sizeable disaster resilience fund - or Disaster Ready Fund, they call it - and they work with states and territories to help to facilitate applications into that fund. RRT works with councils, they put out notices to say that the rounds of that fund are open, and then they work with councils to put submissions together. Sometimes, the state has in the past been able to provide matching funding to some of those, to make it more likely that they -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Last question, just so I can clarify on the funding here. It's not a funding pool that is always reactive, is it? So, if Clarence Council, for example, or Hobart City Council, wanted to do some more work up in the Wellington Park on fire-risk mitigation, is that source of funding available for them to bid into? Is it that kind of funding pool, that a local government can access for preventative works, adaptation works?

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes, it's for Disaster Ready - yes, it's actually for building resilience and reducing risks associated with disasters. Now, I want to be a bit cautious because it's not my area, so I don't want to mislead you in terms of the exact eligibility criteria, but it's absolutely - we work as the agent - 'agent' is the wrong word - we help to facilitate local government applications to that fund, and then if need be -

**Ms O'CONNOR** - To the Commonwealth?

**Mr HEALEY** - To the Commonwealth, yes. We can group up applications or we can sometimes - in the past, we've been able to support the applications with some matched funding. But no, we've been quite successful in that program in attracting funding into the state for improving disaster resilience.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Okay. Is it worth, minister - I guess the question is - you've had a long day... You're going really well, not long now -

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - Don't drag it out.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - I just wanted to - is the funding that's available even close to sufficient to the task?

**CHAIR** - In your view, maybe.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Yes. Given we've got all these local government areas, we've got soft coast, we've got sub-councils that have more inundation risk - there's a whole lot of different risk elements here, each council will have their own. I'm just trying to establish where is the pool of funding to help?

**Mr VINCENT** - I can answer that by saying: in my time here, I haven't heard any overwhelming evidence to say that it is not. We do appreciate the pressures of course, and when projects are coming up specifically, they've always been looked at the past, but it's not something that has been a flood towards my office at all in any way.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Last one before I go to Bec, in the National Climate Risk Assessment, it's pretty clear the advice is we probably need to be spending in the order of \$1-2 billion every five to six years as a state, \$1-2 billion every five to six years, in order to have real adaptation capacity in the system.

It doesn't seem, obviously, like the states kind of do that and it wants to fritter away nearly \$2 billion on the stadium, but just to convey to you the scale of the task, minister, according to Australian and Tasmanian governments' own commissioned experts.

**Mr VINCENT** - Some of those items, and I'm not trying to push back on the importance of it here, but some of those items as we heard from the road crews here are taken into account now when they're doing some of the work; it's not perfect, I know a lot of the coastal councils have won quite a bit of funding from federal funds.

We improved at Sorell in the last three years in the high 20s of stormwater outlets that were assessed and filtration and proper piping in systems put in place to stop erosion, but also to filter where it was coming from, and we also looked further up. I know quite a few councils had that money available to them and won some of those grants.

Although it mightn't be just a bucket of money there at the moment, there are a lot of things that do happen in the normal course where these things are taken into account. It's not like it's being pushed to the side. It is a growing area of concern where there are a lot of good people, especially in local government, that deal with this and do filter that through and there are quite a few grants that have popped up that I'm aware of in my time.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - The issue is coordination, which is why LGAT wanted that bit of extra resourcing and to put on a person who could help coordinate local government's response to climate. Thanks for your answers.

**Mr VINCENT** - From memory STCA a few years ago, when your colleague Helen was in the chair, there, had some resources towards that as well that we work closely on.

## PUBLIC

**Ms THOMAS** - The recent discussion papers have been out for consultation on councillor numbers and allowances. That consultation is closed now. Is that right, minister?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes.

**Ms THOMAS** - Has there been a summary of the feedback received to date prepared as yet?

**Mr VINCENT** - Consultation on the council allowance numbers review discussion paper closed on 7 November. This reform has drawn notable public attention and commentary. DPAC has received 47 submissions across the eight-week consultation period. Twenty-three submissions were provided by councils, while the remaining 24 come from a mix of councillors, organisation, and members of the public.

There has been general support for reforms to councillor numbers and allowances, with the Local Government Association of Tasmania submission observing that a majority of councils has indicated support or support-in-principle to the proposed reforms.

However - always a 'however' - consultation has also identified notable points of contention and reservation with elements of the proposal including the risk associated with maintaining a quorum in accounts with only five elected representatives and the 14.25 per cent allowance increase has been seen as insufficient to encourage a more diverse range of candidates to stand for the office.

I have heard the exact opposite to that from a lot of people in the community that would like to stand for council. Varying comments have also been received on the use of particular metrics, with some councillors suggesting alternatives, which is fair and what consultations all about. Overall feedback indicates the reforms sit as a moderate middle ground between those who believe the reform does not go far enough and those supporting what we know and is broadly recognised within the sector and community as being an unsustainable status quo.

Varied commentary on this reform again reflects the difficulties of achieving structural reform in local government and reaching consensus across 29 vastly different councils.

On balance, however, feedback has shown there is an identified need for reform and general acceptance that it would deliver benefits subject to the appropriate management of potential implementation challenges. We are now in the process of considering all feedback as we determine a final position on those reforms which we will look to deliver via legislation to parliament next year.

Following on from that, as I moved into this role, my intentions and discussions with former acting director Mike Mogridge, from virtually day one, was about recognising the role of councillors in a better way. Through understanding there are issues of councillors not having superannuation put straight into super. It is built into the allowance, which I did not know at the time.

**Ms THOMAS** - Which means you get \$0.20 an hour.

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes. And the fact of taxation which is not a problem for those retired because it is a top up to their super, but it certainly is for most other people that they have to manage their own taxation to deal with that.

At my first min con for local government, which was only a few weeks from memory into my role, I did learn that New South Wales Local Government Association is doing some work on this on a national basis, but there hasn't been a lot of meetings of that at this stage to have an update to that.

There are two councils, I was told, in the Northern Territory that passed their own bylaws. I stand to be corrected there, but let's say bylaws at this point, for their own council so they could do that. Most other local government associations did not think it was a good idea for individual councils to be doing that because you end up with a weird anomaly all round Australia. That seemed to be the feeling here, but there was an overwhelming feeling that these things need to be addressed.

This doesn't take care of all that, but it did recognise the increase of the superannuation in amongst the allowance and it did recognise a substantial increase in the allowance for councils without costing ratepayers anymore money in most circumstances, except where a council had changed their categories and stepped up in that.

**Ms THOMAS** - Like Clarence.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, Clarence is one of them. It was for very genuine intent that happens as a step up towards strengthening council. I had a lot of comments on my journey to get to this place where many of the, especially regional, councillors did not have a lot of people standing for council. There were some that were elected on countbacks that only had a couple less than 7, less than 15 votes in some circumstances. The number of councillors being reduced also worked, some say to reduce numbers, but I didn't see it that way. I saw it as a way of strengthening the community's input who was being elected and being more focused on that.

The intentions of how this started out for me was very much a carry over from my days as mayor of starting to rectify some of the lack of recognition of councillors in the community.

**Ms THOMAS** - Okay. Thank you. Will you rule out in whatever the reform looks like including a disallowance motion for allowance increases?

**Mr VINCENT** - How do you mean, sorry?

**Ms THOMAS** - It's not able to be disallowed by councillors when they are offered allowance increase, because look what the headache that causes.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes it does. I hadn't thought about that to be honest, but point taken.

**Ms THOMAS** - I really hope you will, because it should not be up to those who are receiving the allowance.

Thank you. I look forward to seeing those reforms come to parliament next year once that feedback has been considered.

## PUBLIC

Does anyone else have any questions because I know I've absolutely dominated here.

**Ms LOVELL** - Doing an excellent job.

**CHAIR** - Maybe, the minister would like to ask himself a question, being as one of the other ministers tried that. He did stop himself when he realised what he was doing. A member of our Chamber, I might say. It gives you a clue.

**Ms THOMAS** - I probably have three more questions and then I'm done. One is in relation to the recommendations in the Future of Local Government Review that found a formal council amalgamation proposal should be developed for particular councils. That was recommendation 4. And also recommendation 9 around the Minister for Local Government having the provision in the *Local Government Act* to require councils to participate in identified shared service or shared staffing arrangement agreements. Has there been any progress towards either voluntary amalgamations and/or shared service agreements?

**Mr VINCENT** - I will read this so I get it right and then I will talk a little bit more to it. The government continues to support the structural reform in local government where councils demonstrate genuine intent and capacity to engage in a serious outcomes-focused process. This approach aligns with the direction set by the Future of Local Government Review and reflects a refined and practical application of its structural reform recommendations. The review made it clear that Tasmania's current structure cannot meet the challenge of the future without reform.

Following the release of the review's final report, we were encouraged to see a number of councillors proactively approach the government to explore amalgamation. While not all these proposals are progressing, early interest, highlighting the sector's willingness to engage, will inform and reinforce the need for a consistent strategic approach.

We had approximately nine councils that had discussions. Some are still - the easiest way to describe it would be chatting about it. Certainly, some on the east coast, the general managers had very productive meetings. I've always had my own thoughts on this: that 29 councils is too many. But I prefer to talk about communities of like, and that's based around some of the very sensible things that are happening by themselves in local government, which I was involved with.

I've talked mainly about regional because most metros have a rate base that they can survive okay. But for regional areas, the South East Region Development Association (SERDA) was very effective; South Central which formed off that for the Brighton, Central Highlands, Southern Midlands and Derwent Valley hub. We've also seen the success of Cradle Coast. There is another group up there now which is focused on a community of like, which is the Mersey Leven alliance.

Certainly, I wish to do more work in that area and I don't like to use the 'amalgamation' or 'merger' word. It's more about communities of like; of where you have an interest on what needs to happen for funding and development of communities in regions, where you can have an agreement of federal, state and local government input into set projects that are planned in advance for developing those regions, instead of duplication, or each council in regional areas fighting over the same pool of money, and all getting dribs and drabs, but it not really doing anything for the betterment of the community.

## PUBLIC

We've proved in a lot of the regional areas that when there is a united approach to sport or some community facilities, you get a much better result and you build a much better facility that benefits a lot of other people.

Yesterday, I used the example, and the other example that was added to it was the Dial Sports Range, and how effective that is now as a multi-sports complex. I used the example close to my heart of Pembroke Park, where it used to have 200 to 300 people a week using it for football and cricket. With continued investment, federal and state, and council money, over about a 10-year period, my best estimate is that there are now somewhere between 5000 and 6000 people a week using that facility for a multitude of sports. We saw improved netball conditions, where the club went from four or five teams - they had to stop growing at about 28, and I think they still might be squeezing a few in, of all levels of sport and even with a state league side now. What that did was bring people from Nubeena up, Swansea, Seven Mile Beach. Even a lot of people from the eastern shore and Hobart are coming out because it's a pleasant drive out to Sorell.

**Ms THOMAS** - Because there's not enough facilities in Clark.

**Mr VINCENT** - It shows what you can do when you build fair facilities. They're not over the top. They're only basic, but have that combined regional effort to focus on a good facility.

I would like, in my portfolios, and the Premier has given me some latitude, to put forward some of my thoughts in '26 regarding how we can develop a concept around communities of like, and support those groups, which is changing and maturing the conversation towards what I would like to think will be boundary changes in the future to give areas a decent rate base that can actually be sustainable for their ratepayers. That's where my heart and mind and passion is. Whether that leads to amalgamation or mergers is beside the point, but I have my own clear direction on that and would like to continue that.

**Ms THOMAS** - That's good to hear. Excellent, thank you. I said I had three questions. My other one was about exactly that - the financial sustainability of local government, and you've just touched on that.

**Mr VINCENT** - Could I just add to that a little bit, please? Most of the public don't realise - they see things thrown out by everybody about mergers and amalgamations. But what most people don't realise is even two councils with the same population in regional areas have a different rate base. What we really have to do is understand the asset management of each council and then look at their rate base to see, is that a rate base that is able to have enough commercial and industrial land to be able to sustain the assets of that community? Then you can have a professional discussion about the rates, which leads then to a whole sustainability discussion.

Once you've discovered that, that's when you can really go out and talk to your community about what you need to do or what you can't do, or what you need to look at in the future to change the mentality. That's the level of discussion we haven't had a maturity on for the last decade: to be able to educate the ratepayers that a whole different view and concept, and thinking about future sustainability, what is wastage and what is sensible to be spending on needs to happen.

## PUBLIC

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, I totally agree. I would like to see that happening at the state government level too, in terms of assets and development of new revenue bases [inaudible 5.32.26]. But that's a whole other topic that's very topical.

**Mr VINCENT** - All of that comes into whole-of-life cost too when you talk about a project; that you do have to examine it. We can build it for that and do that, but whether it's a road or a bus or a stadium, you still need to look at what it's going to cost on an ongoing basis. Most people don't understand about a 5-10 per cent depreciation. So, we need to work through that.

**Ms THOMAS** - I know. This is what I've been asking.

**CHAIR** - I can't believe it. Let's just frame that bit. We'll get the *Hansard* and frame it.

**Ms THOMAS** - Anyway, that's talking about local government. But yes, absolutely, the same principles apply at all levels of government, don't they?

In terms of the recommendations of the Future of Local Government Review, it talked about the Tasmanian government seeking advice from the State Grants Commission on how it will ensure the financial assistance grants methodology is transparent, well-understood, assistance is being targeted efficiently and effectively, and is not acting as a disincentive for councils to pursue structural reform opportunities. Has there been any of that recommendation progressed?

**Mr VINCENT** - I think you would remember as mayor that anybody started to talk about financial assistance grants or the formula involved around that, you run the opposite direction.

**Ms THOMAS** - Yes, it's pretty scary.

**Mr VINCENT** - It is pretty scary. There has been some thought pattern on that because as soon as you start to bring councils together for a discussion on that, of course, they are penalised because of the larger mass and income. And that changes within a two- or three-year period the amount of assistance they get. So, that's got to be taken into the financial viability when you're looking at bringing them together. I haven't done any more work on that at all at this stage, and I'm not sure whether the office has or not.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - It might just be worth noting, I guess, the advocacy that is happening at the national level as well in terms of potential adjustments to how the Commonwealth funds local government.

**Ms THOMAS** - Yeah, I'm aware of that advocacy that the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) do, but I guess my concern has always been, yes, ALGA can be the champion for that, but unless the states, through the state ministers for local government, are pushing that agenda as well, you're unlikely to achieve the change that's required. So, is that something that's discussed at the ministers', whatever you call it, MINCO?

**Mr VINCENT** - MINCON (Ministerial Council for Local Government). I only had the one. We've got another one coming up, I believe. I don't think it was discussed at the one I was at. It's certainly been raised by a number of individual councils that try to work the formula out and feel that they are not being represented properly by the amount of money they were

## PUBLIC

receiving, so we've had discussions there, which is driving a different conversation. There is some work being done to review it. It's not an area I've got too far involved with but it's something that we have to deal with as part of the review.

**Ms THOMAS** - But it's something you recognise? That to be able to be sustainable, changing boundaries lines on maps is not going to increase the financial sustainability of councils; the actual revenue base needs to change, and there is an element of needing a fairer share of taxation revenue to be able to deliver for communities. Do you agree with that?

**Mr VINCENT** - Fully recognised for that. We'll go back to what we talked about before with the heavy motor vehicle tax, or levy. Keeping that attuned to the growth of the funds or into the amounts collected is important so that it's spread evenly throughout the community and having advantage of that.

All those formulas about sustainability and what can be spent on projects needs to be reviewed. Otherwise, ratepayers, if they really looked at what it cost to run their municipality - and it's pretty easy to do, actually. If you look at the how much rates and user fees are collected but how much the council actually spends in a year, it's usually somewhere between a 15 per cent and 30 per cent difference. If you put that all back into a rate base, most rates would be almost unaffordable.

The importance of the flow of grants, both to state and direct to local government, is vital in that. Everybody needs to understand those formulas and how and what applies to it, and to make sure the money is used to the full extent of the intention of the money, not just swallowed up in other pet projects.

**Ms THOMAS** - Just to round out where we started off, to be clear about this, the funding for the Office of Local Government, I didn't ask you what the actual expenditure was in 2024-25 and how the budget -

**CHAIR** - We did do that, but that's all right. It's been a long day.

**Ms THOMAS** - The actual expenditure from '24-25?

**CHAIR** - We talked about the base funding, sorry. You're right.

**Ms THOMAS** - The actual expenditure for '24-25?

**CHAIR** - It did say \$3 million in what you sent me.

**Mr HEALEY** - Output group expense: \$2,000,553.

**Ms THOMAS** - That was the amount expended?

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes.

**Ms THOMAS** - What was the amount budgeted?

**Mr HEALEY** - Amount budgeted was \$2,000,574.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - I got a different number when I asked this question on notice.

**Mr HARRISS** - Your question on notice has '25-26 on it.

**CHAIR** - You're probably right because there was a couple of them did that, and I thought, 'Don't they understand the question?'

**Mr HARRISS** - That \$3 million was '25-26.

**CHAIR** - You're right, because I looked at that earlier and I thought that's not right. I just got an inaccurate answer. They misunderstood the question, whoever responded on your behalf, minister. Or you did actually.

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, okay.

**Mr HEALEY** - The actual expenditure, \$2,000,553, the revenue from appropriation was \$2,000,386, but there was additional revenue from other sources that goes into the overall budget, the expenditure budget for '24-25, which is \$2,000,574. Does that make sense?

**Ms THOMAS** - Okay. Has the Office of Local Government funding decreased for this year, then?

**Mr HEALEY** - No. Well, part of the budget efficiency has been applied to the office, but that's more than offset by funding coming in for the administration of the Recreational Fishing and Camping Fund, plus the \$200,000 for compulsory voting and the \$500,000 for Central Coast, which had just administered grants. It means that the overall funding is probably about the same, a little bit more, for this financial year. So, no really significant decrease.

**CHAIR** - But it does decrease over the forward Estimates and you're going to have to find some savings.

**Mr HEALEY** - As you pointed out before, the \$143,000 there does start to mean that we need to find internal efficiencies to make sure that we can continue to maintain now.

**CHAIR** - Which takes me to the point: one of the parts, 'Deliver education and training', is that education and training to councillors?

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - I was doing some work on another committee a little while ago, while Bec was absolutely in control. Did you talk about that, the education and training piece?

**Mr HEALEY** - No.

**CHAIR** - Obviously, that has to be met within the budget. What training has been delivered and what's planned, particularly over the forward years? You will almost certainly have new members coming in next year and that will require additional training. How's that going to be delivered if you're having budget cuts to the office?

## PUBLIC

**Mr HEALEY** - Firstly, we have done a lot of work in this space. We developed and implemented an online learning system, which has been rolled out across all councils for the first time. It had a fairly comprehensive learning -

**CHAIR** - But you would know that laws change.

**Mr HEALEY** - They do, so -

**CHAIR** - You will have to update it, won't you?

**Mr HEALEY** - What we've done is - the Local Government Association of Tasmania has always seen this as a core part of their role, so we have transitioned the ongoing maintenance of all of that work to LGAT. They're now hosting the learning modules and they'll be updating them as they're required.

**CHAIR** - So that has to come out of their funding?

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes. They've always had a pretty strong role in the learning and development space. They see they now have a system which can deliver systematically what they've previously been doing by running face-to-face workshops and the like. I think they're very comfortable that that supports them to deliver that role more effectively than it has in the past.

We still have a role to provide tailored learning and development, so our internal resources will still find opportunities to run face-to-face workshops or other packages for local government, as we always have.

**CHAIR** - Minister, in terms of delivery of education and training, part of that seems to have been done by providing resources for LGAT to roll out to councillors. What is now the expectation for delivering education and training because if it's there, one would think that there's something that happens under that.

**Mr VINCENT** - I thought it had fully been handed over, but there might be other parts that you're still working on there?

**Mr HEALEY** - I suppose just for context, LGAT has always led the learning and development. We stepped in a couple of years ago by diverting some of our regulatory resources into building this platform for online learning for councillors. For a short period of time, we significantly upped our priority into this space. We developed the system, we rolled it out to councils and then we've given it to LGAT to support their traditional role in supporting learning and development. We will step back a little bit, if you like, to take on our traditional role, which has been about making sure that we're educating councillors and others about good governance and finding targeted pieces of work to go out and roll out across the system. We'll still do that and we'll use our internal resources.

**CHAIR** - Within the budget constraints baked into the forward Estimates?

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes, they are. Exactly. So, we need to prioritise our internal resources, as we have in the past. As I said, for a while we reprioritised them to deliver the education and learning framework. Now we're prioritising the delivery of a number of the policy elements.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - You said that the efficiency dividend was imposed and now other savings are going to be found. Where reasonably can you find? It's a small office. You don't have a lot of people, and people are money because that's where most of your costs would be. Without getting rid of people - unless you plan to?

**Mr HEALEY** - As I mentioned before, even though these numbers are applied in individual budgets, the Department of Premier and Cabinet is looking at its entire agency to say, 'How can we find efficiencies and find new ways of doing things to meet this budget target?' - and that will impact on actually -

**CHAIR** - Maybe we would get rid of an associate secretary and that would save you worrying about chopping into your staff.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - It will impact on staff numbers, won't it? Because across the agencies, we're going to see this.

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes, it has to over time. Whether or not that is just [inaudible] as my secretary has said, over time with retention, you can restructure positions and not feel vacancies over time. I think she did mention across the state service last year there were about 3,000 vacancies that arose. Her preference would be to be looking for opportunities like that to adjust over time. In my group there is the Office of Local Government. There are also other areas that focus on the delivery of some priorities for the Premier and some literacy work and some work on well-being. We will look to adjust our resourcing across all of those priorities so that we can deliver on the efficiencies but still deliver on the core business. The Office of Local Government has a regulatory function that we have to deliver on. That's one of the areas where we can't choose not to support the regulation of the *Local Government Act*. We're very clear on -

**Mr VINCENT** - Just to explain, there is a define between LGAT and the Office of Local Government. The Office of Local Government supports and provides advice to LGAT, monitors compliance with new legislation provisions, which the Chair just raised, provides education and written material to the sector, provides advice on, and actions further legislative amendments, and participates in LGAT's evaluation of the framework. LGAT has seven or eight that they are responsible for as well. There is a clear partnership there of the duties of the Office of Local Government with the local government association.

**CHAIR** - Minister, you would be aware that things are not all that happy in a couple of my councils, particularly one. No one is in some sort of administration at the moment and I don't believe there are any boards of inquiry underway at the moment, but when we see some pretty challenging behaviours - I know the code of conduct is supposed to sort this out - but seriously, I know the general managers work really hard to try and deal with these things, but then it doesn't seem to have the desired effect. What's your role in this?

**Mr VINCENT** - My role is limited to some of those matters. We discuss a lot of those issues almost on a daily basis. They pop up and we have a lot of councillors that phone through with updates of frustrations either way -

**CHAIR** - About cultural problems and workplace behaviour?

## PUBLIC

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, all of the above. It is quite diverse, some of the issues we're dealing with. I was shocked when I found out coming into the role just how much time the Office of Local Government - and some days it is over 50 per cent - is dealing with rogue situations. Part of these amendments will allow for PIDs to be issued by the Director of Local Government. We have already -

**CHAIR** - Do you want to say what -

**Ms THOMAS** - Performance improvement directions.

**Mr VINCENT** - It is getting late, isn't it? Performance Indicator Directives. We have issued some of them recently where councils have volunteered to have mediators come in and be an independent body to oversee some of the operations. That hasn't worked every time, but a couple that we've done recently, it's worked very, very well.

**CHAIR** - They have to be funded by the council?

**Mr VINCENT** - Yes, they do.

**CHAIR** - How many of those PIDs have been issued in the last 12 months?

**Mr VINCENT** - We had some PIDs with -

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - It was in relation to Derwent Valley.

**Mr VINCENT** - Then we had one at Dorset.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - There were some ministerial directions that come off the back of the Dorset Council Board of Inquiry, which are still active.

**Mr VINCENT** - The Office of Local Government monitors them on the timelines and keeps in communication.

**CHAIR** - None up in Burnie City Council?

**Mr VINCENT** - Not that I'm aware of at the moment. Part of that is for the Director of Local Government to be able to act. Some of the problems we've had in the past, over recent years, have indicated we do not have the powers in the Office of Local Government to step in quick enough to prevent them becoming major issues -

**CHAIR** - Escalation.

**Mr VINCENT** - Under some of the new forms, it will allow for the director to be able to step in with the mediator, with advice, also the PIDs, to keep everybody focused quicker so it doesn't escalate. I think that will be quite strong. Mat, you've been involved with this for a fair while.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - I certainly have. It's something that we've put a lot of energy into overtime and not only in some of the reforms that we're seeing now but certainly trying to support elected officials and non-elected officials in councils too.

## PUBLIC

**CHAIR** - It certainly takes time away from that other core business.

**Mr HEALEY** - There's a really small number of people that's engaged in this sort of behaviour.

**CHAIR** - They take up an extraordinary amount of resources though.

**Mr HEALEY** - And its behaviour that harms people.

**Mr VINCENT** - It's stops people from entering in standing or staying in. We've got to prevent some of that leakage.

**Mr HEALEY** - Some of the reforms that we're looking at include broadening out the ability to issue PIDs so that we can use them more effectively. There's also some ability to insert individuals into councils to help them to manage some of these and other performance issues.

**CHAIR** - From your office?

**Ms THOMAS** - No, independent conciliators.

**CHAIR** - Then that's funded by the council, not by-

**Mr HEALEY** - Yes, but probably quite significantly we are looking to allow the director to refer a code of conduct complaint to TASCAT in circumstances in which you would enliven dismissal penalties for really serious offences.

**CHAIR** - It's an expectation that mediation is attempted first, though?

**Mr HEALEY** - Absolutely, there would be very few that would be referred to TASCAT that would be reserved for those examples of behaviour that's incredibly harming, is deliberate, is in flagrant disregard to the code of conduct. There's a there's a list of things that they would have to consider.

**Ms THOMAS** - TASCAT is already doing code of conduct for other complaints.

**Mr HEALEY** - Exactly, so they were quite comfortable to have it, well, they didn't want to take the whole code of conduct system that's too resource-intensive for them and probably would end up crossing the system a lot more money. But for those serious ones, having a quasi-judicial environment or a more quasi-judicial environment than the code of conduct system is, is appropriate given the nature of the sanctions that would be available to them.

**Mr VINCENT** - History has strongly indicated that if we step in with mediation that works in most cases.

**CHAIR** - If you do it early.

**Ms THOMAS** - If they're willing to engage, most of the time they're not.

## PUBLIC

**Mr HEALEY** - The ones that are almost intending harm that people that campaign for office on the basis they are going to bring people down, it's really troubling.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - I just wanted to make a clarification through you Minister, just in respect to your question about TASCAT's existing handling of code of conduct. I just want to clarify that they don't handle local government code of conduct matters except in relation to appeals currently.

**Mr HEALEY** - I thought you meant because they do-

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - They handle other tribunals, yes.

**Mr HEALEY** - I think there are other professional bodies where there is a review function like a disciplinary review function already in TASCAT.

**Mr MURPHY-GREGORY** - There was some consideration of the whole framework moving to TASCAT at one at one point, but we decided with the reforms that we were making to introduce the new dispute-resolution mechanisms in the act. We brought in some reforms in 2024 which have made it a requirement that the council has to adopt a dispute resolution policy and now during an initial assessment and initial assessing a code of conduct matter needs to look at the efforts which have been made or not to engage with that process.

The idea here is to try and push down and make councils a bit more accountable for I guess resolving those more sort of behavioural and interpersonal matters so that they don't end up in the code of conduct process. We will see how that plays out, but those policies have only gone live in terms of being mandated as of September. It's still early days and LGAT has issued and developed a model policy which I understand almost all councils have adopted in their totality and every council now has a policy on foot as of today.

**Ms THOMAS** - Great, thank you. I don't have any other questions, Chair.

**CHAIR** - Anyone else? Well, thanks, minister.

**Mr VINCENT** - Pleasure.

**CHAIR** - It's been nice to have you at the end of our week, I must say.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - You're refreshingly frank.

**CHAIR** - You're one of us too, if that makes a difference. Thank you for your time today and to your team and for the preparation that goes in. We acknowledge a lot of work goes into these sessions, but we do appreciate the information provided.

**The committee adjourned at 5.55 p.m.**