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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1535)

[English]

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Thank you, and good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 6, Monday, October 17. The orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), are a study of the national public transit strategy.

Witnesses joining us today are, from the Canadian Automobile Association, Mr. Tim Shearman, president, and Jeff Walker, vice-president of public affairs. We apologize for being a few minutes late getting started, but I know that you've presented before. We'll listen to your presentation and go right to questions.

Please begin.

Mr. Tim Shearman (President, Canadian Automobile Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to meet with your committee to discuss public transit issues. The Canadian Automobile Association is very pleased to meet with your committee early in its mandate. My colleague Jeff Walker, our vice-president of public affairs, and I would be pleased to take your questions after these remarks.

I am reasonably sure that many, if not most, of the honourable members who serve on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities are among the 5.6 million members of the Canadian Automobile Association. However, let me take a few minutes to explain our organization and the unique perspective we are able to bring to bear on transportation issues.

Across the country, and in every region, the CAA brand is one of Canada's most recognized and trusted. Our roots go back a century to the early days of the automobile, when motoring enthusiasts would gather together to urge governments to build better roads, install proper signs, and establish reasonable speed limits. Our clubs and our national association were in fact founded by groups of concerned motorists to lobby for safer, better roads. The emergency roadside service and other services CAA is known for today came later. Public policy advocacy on behalf of our members is in our DNA.

[Translation]

Today, we are an affiliation of nine automobile clubs whose members rely upon those individual clubs to deliver exemplary roadside assistance, travel, insurance and member rewards. They also rely on us to deliver honest, reliable information on topics that matter to them, and to make sure decision-makers hear their voices.

The nine member clubs operate some 130 community offices across Canada and these offices are the delivery points for the visionary, community-focused work that has become CAA's hallmark in every region. By working together with a national organization, the strength of the whole becomes greater than the sum of the nine individual parts.

Here in Ottawa, CAA National works with member clubs to support and protect the CAA brand, including standards that apply to all member clubs, and the accreditation of these member clubs. Where needed, we lend our help to programs and services provided by the clubs. We maintain relations with national and international organizations outside of Canada, such as the American Automobile Association. The national office also provides public education, unbiased information, and a voice in Ottawa to our members on the issues they tell us they care about, from texting while driving to ways to economize on fuel that benefit the pocketbook and the environment to explaining new vehicle technologies such as hybrids and electrics.

The issue of texting while driving illustrates how we work. Our member surveys have identified this as the number one road safety concern of members and the general public alike, surpassing even impaired driving as of last year. As a result of what our members tell us, we have made it a priority to work on this issue. We have launched a youth video contest called Practise Safe Text; we will be convening major experts to discuss the issue next March; and we have done dozens of media interviews to publicize the issue. In doing so we are working with our partners, including Transport Canada, to reach as many people as possible.

We don't just consult our members on road safety issues. In partnership with Harris Decima, we conduct extensive member research surveys twice a year to measure issue awareness, identify topics, gather insight, and as a reality check for where we are directing our programs and activities. We survey 4,000 Canadians each time, both CAA members and the general population. The sample size is designed to be large enough so that we feel we can speak with some confidence on the Canadian public opinion in general.

Equipped with the results of our research, the national office also plays a strong advocacy role at the federal level. Past efforts have included highlighting the importance of road infrastructure, for example, and we were very encouraged when the stimulus package introduced as part of the economic action plan put such a priority on roads.

In all we do, we are informed by the opinions of our members. We are committed to building safe communities that provide mobility to all, not just to better roads, but to a better transportation system for all users. We are committed to mobility.

Our starting point here—and this will be no surprise—is our membership. The average CAA member isn't just a driver, but also takes transit, and even rides a bicycle from time to time. This should not be surprising. Many Canadians, especially those in large urban areas, use transit at least part of the time to get to work. They hop in their vehicle to run errands and ferry the kids to activities at night. And on the weekend when the weather is nice, they haul the bicycles out of the back shed and go for a ride.

[Translation]

That is why we like to talk about mobility. It is a recognition of where modern CAA members—and Canadians—are in their lives today.

[English]

This brings us to the issue of public transit. Mobility is about much more than cars and trucks, roads and bridges. It requires an integrated approach to transportation that includes public transit, passenger rail, and even bike paths.

Our goal at CAA is neither to put more drivers on the highways and roadways nor to tell them that they are misguided if they do not take transit or bikes to work. Our goal is choice and overall mobility for the Canadian population. Efficient, available public transit and bike paths, where they make sense, take vehicles off the road. It is a win-win situation for motorists, shippers, and transit users alike.

According to our most recent research data, 15% of Canadians use public transit as their primary mode of transportation, compared to 76% for the car or truck. The numbers for our members are lower: 90% are primarily drivers, and only 5% rely on transit as their primary means of getting around. But 31% of the general population takes transit at least some of the time, and 23% of our members do the same. Among those who cite transit as their primary mode of transportation, our members take it, on average, 2.8 days per week. The comparable figure for the general public is 3.5 days per week.

Leaving aside these statistics, the plain fact is that the majority of transit in this country runs on roads. How well it functions has a

direct bearing on all road users, whether they're on the bus, so to speak, or not.

An improved system of public transit, especially in our major cities, would be welcomed by CAA members. Public transit is an important part of reaching our goal of improving the mobility of our members. They want to spend less time stuck in commuter gridlock. They want driving to be a safer, more efficient, more enjoyable mode of transportation. Public transit helps take cars and trucks off the highways and roadways to the greater advantage of both those who use their personal vehicles and those who use public modes.

We noted with pleasure Minister Lebel's recent statements that he is committed to working with stakeholders on a future plan to deliver transportation infrastructure funding to Canada's provinces and municipalities.

Based on our experience as a federation, we believe that determining the exact mix of funding, between transit, roads, and other municipal infrastructure for each community, is best left to the provincial and municipal levels.

● (1540)

[Translation]

What is clear however is that stable, long-term funding will allow for proper planning. At CAA, we always try to focus on pragmatic solutions.

[English]

In that spirit, we are agnostic on how the federal government should deliver its share of transit funding. What is important is to achieve the goal of stable, multi-year funding so that funds can be best spent.

We would also ask the government to ensure that its criteria for funding give the provinces and municipalities leeway to invest in longer-term projects. For instance, at CAA we are working with researchers at the University of Calgary and the University of Toronto on so-called intelligent transportation systems that marry roadway video, transit information, GPS, and sophisticated modeling to plan the best possible traffic flow for all users. This allows government to squeeze more volume per kilometre of road, an efficiency that is good for the economy and for individual users.

In closing, I have one more reference to our members' data. Fewer than half our members rate the state of public transit infrastructure in Canada as adequate or better. The actual number is 46%, compared to a barely better 52% among the general population. Surely as a country we can do better.

As a federation of nine clubs, we understand very well that one size does not always fit all.

We know that transportation infrastructure is an area of shared responsibility. We note again Minister Lebel's commitment to hold up the federal government's end of the bargain, and we stand ready to assist this committee in any way we can in its deliberations.

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to speak, and we welcome the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Nicholls

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. My thanks as well to Mr. Shearman. I also wish to thank your organization, of which I have been a member in the past. I used the association's services on several occasions.

You talked about awareness-raising campaigns regarding texting while driving, and road congestion. Rather than investing in awareness campaigns or new roads, should we not be promoting public transit? This would be to the advantage of drivers as it would offer them an alternative. They could use digital technology on the bus rather than trying to do so while driving. The same goes for the congestion issue. Public transit is a more effective way to move people, and it clears up congested roads.

You talked about an integrated approach to public transit. Do you believe that the federal government has a role to play in planning that integration through a national strategy?

• (1545)

[English]

Mr. Tim Shearman: Thank you for the question.

Certainly the federal government has a role. As we know, funding for some of the infrastructure comes through the federal government through gas taxes and what not, but we found in our federation, much like in Canada, that a lot of the expertise on the transit and roadway use comes from the local level, the provincial and municipal level. We have experts in our clubs who work with their local governments, and we support them with data to help them with their local governments.

So yes, there is a role, we believe, for the federal government, but I think the decision-making for the most part rests with the local municipalities, because one system that works in Winnipeg, for example, will not be the same that will work in Vancouver. We've seen different infrastructure investments in the different provinces. As we see in Montreal, obviously there's a high priority on bridges and viaducts and what not, which would be quite different from Edmonton or Calgary. So we really need the local governments to be involved in that debate.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Do you not believe that by having a national forum there could be a sharing of best practices, perhaps, that for viaducts and roadways maybe one agency could share with another agency, one agency in Montreal could share with an agency in Vancouver, not necessarily to use it as a template, but to use it as a way of informing a better strategy?

Mr. Tim Shearman: Yes, we'd certainly support that. We act in much the same way with our issues. We meet with stakeholders across the country; we engage people in best practices. For example, we mentioned this conference we're having in March next year on distracted driving. We'll invite experts from all over Canada and the world to meet together to talk about what they're doing in their territories to help educate drivers on distracted driving.

So yes, we'd certainly support that.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I have a very easy question for you. Is it safer to text while driving a car, or in a bus or train?

Mr. Tim Shearman: As long as you're not driving the bus or train, it would certainly be safer in there, yes, without question.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I'll give my time to Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Thank you.

I tabled a member's bill on a national transit strategy. The bill tries to ask the federal government to take a leadership role to bring different levels of government and transit authorities together, different stakeholders, and say what a long-term plan would be. It's not that the federal government would predict—it shouldn't, really. So the stakeholders would say what the long-term plan should be, and from there they would have a discussion as to who pays for what, so that there is a very clear delineation. That kind of strategy seems to have been lacking in the past.

The federal government in the last two years, of course, has been putting in money—both to the gas tax and the capital budget—but not bringing in as many people as possible. I don't see any downside to it, as long as it's not one size fits all. That's not what it's supposed to be.

I just want your comment on what you think of that initiative. Is that something you would suggest? Someone needs to bring people together. That's what I think the federal government's role should be.

Mr. Tim Shearman: I'm going to ask my colleague Mr. Walker to speak to that, because he was involved in instances like this in his former life. Maybe he can shed some light on that.

Mr. Jeff Walker (Vice-President, Public Affairs, Canadian Automobile Association): It's always a fine line in these kinds of things when you pull together groups of people or stakeholders. If you're setting the agenda and telling everybody what that agenda is going to be, that has a certain impact on the outcomes. I can tell you that we run a federation at CAA, and it's a lot like the Canadian federation, in that as soon as we try to set that agenda or push agenda items on everybody, we end up in trouble. So we end up somewhere between facilitator and enabler in our day-to-day practice.

I think what we would say is that in this space, if there were a way to structure somewhere in that facilitation or enabling role, or maybe even it's a third party that organizes it with everybody at the table so there's no sense of the power relationship there on the ground.... Because obviously the federal government has the most money to put on the table, there's a natural likelihood that people may feel like they should defer to the federal government, and that may or may not be the right approach.

One way or the other, there is absolutely a value in sharing best practices. Really, I think the question is about—and I think we at CAA think this—who should organize it, who should set that agenda, and even how it should be funded. As long as those things are done in a collaborative way in some fashion, then to us there's value in that kind of thing.

• (1550)

Ms. Olivia Chow: I have some time, but I'll come back to this, because three minutes are probably not enough to explore it in. But I want to push that—

The Chair: Ms. Chow, I'll ask you to come back to it in the next round.

Ms. Olivia Chow: In the next round? Okay.

The Chair: Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you very much. Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today.

Unlike Mr. Nicholls, I have not used my CAA membership card very often, as I never forgot my keys in my car. However, I certainly recognize the importance of your services. You publish splendid, very interesting atlases and they make very nice Christmas gifts.

But seriously, with all of our witnesses—and I am pleased that you are here—we talk a lot about public transit and having a national strategy. But I always get the impression that people are saying that

the car and the bus are mutually exclusive. That is one perspective we hear about.

I am happy to hear your comments today, because basically you are saying that one can benefit from public transit while owning a car. Practical reality is important in a national strategy. That is the relationship between the individuals and the services they access. This is the approach I'd like to explore with you today.

Everyone needs money. Currently, there are issues of governance, mobility and the sustainability of infrastructure. For instance, bridges in Montreal are attracting interest because they are falling down. We don't have a choice. Since we don't want them to deteriorate any further, we have to deal with them.

Since you also have to deal with the federation—we put up with it as well, and someone from Quebec could write books on the constitutional aspect of things—what do you think should be the first rung of a strategy? Should we come up with a governance structure involving the various jurisdictions, or should we begin first of all rather by trying to understand each other? I am talking about drivers and public transit users.

[*English*]

Can we chew gum and walk at the same time?

Mr. Tim Shearman: There are two different parts to that. The first part is what we should do at CAA. What we like to do is—I'll coin a phrase that Mr. Walker uses—to be an honest broker. We work at bringing people together to share ideas.

There was a recent example of this last May, when we held what we believe is the first bike-car conference. In Vancouver, we brought national cycling groups together to discuss their issues specifically, because Vancouver, as you probably know, has had a recent investment in infrastructure to add more bicycles to the road, and along with that has reduced a number of lanes in certain areas. There's quite a municipal debate on that.

We stepped into that debate to bring people together, not to give our opinion, but to get together in a room the best people who know about the impact of the bike and the car. Similarly, we would see our role as the same thing in terms of public transit. We have been involved at the local level in public transit. Metrolinx in the GTA is an example.

From the federal government's perspective, again, I think communicating with the provinces and municipalities, providing them the research that organizations like ours can provide, and providing them the best tools to make those decisions is probably the best role for us, rather than saying specifically where the money should be spent.

•(1555)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Shearman, we have to put a strategy in place and do things differently. We have to take the environment into account as well as quality of life. Do we not need to reinvent the way government works, whatever the operative strategy? The government that is the closest to the people is always the municipal government. Funding has to be taken into account as well as the Constitution, because the municipalities are creatures of the provinces, under the Constitution.

How does the CAA see that situation? Your organization has a vast experience of the country and has a strong relation with its affiliated organizations. We are all in agreement on public transit. The first thing we should do to set up a national strategy should be to reinvent the way in which the Canadian government works, in particular with cities, don't you think?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Walker: To be honest, I'm not sure that we agree with that. I'm not sure that we're at a point where we believe, certainly, at CAA that we have to fundamentally rethink how government works with cities.

The Building Canada fund has worked pretty well, from our perspective. We think the stimulus spending, broadly speaking, was hugely beneficial as well, with a few things we wish had been done a little differently.

Hon. Denis Coderre: So how can you manage to have a dedicated fund if it's not federal business, regarding the role with municipalities, for example? We've done it. We proposed it at the beginning, and it became permanent with the gas tax. But how can we manage...?

The name of the game here is efficiency, right?

Mr. Jeff Walker: Right.

Hon. Denis Coderre: And it's the same taxpayer money. How can we manage to make sure we can talk about infrastructure and at the same time focus on the necessity of having better public transit for everybody?

Mr. Jeff Walker: I guess what we at CAA would say to that is that it really comes down to what the definition is of the word "strategy". How prescriptive do we mean when we say we have a strategy?

Hon. Denis Coderre: What's your definition?

Mr. Jeff Walker: Our definition of strategy is pretty prescriptive, and we're not sure you need to be all that prescriptive in this. In other words, hosting people to talk about best practices and setting broad criteria and parameters around what kinds of things should be eligible for funding sounds good.

We enumerated a few things we think should be prescriptive. One, for example, is that they take a long view on some of these things. Some of the money that was spent under the infrastructure stimulus spending had sort of a nearer-term orientation. We'd like to see some parameters to say let's make sure that when we do evaluations, we're weighing longer-term and shorter-term criteria.

We'd like to see intelligent transportation systems—you know, have a criterion in the formula that people might submit for funding. But beyond that, we at CAA would say we still think the provinces and municipalities have the best insight about the right prescription for their jurisdictions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I like that.

The Chair: Mr. Adler.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, witnesses, for being here today.

I remember when I was a kid my father was a member of the DAA, and we used to get those.... Remember those metal...? I don't know if you remember those.

•(1600)

Hon. Denis Coderre: I'm much younger than you.

Mr. Mark Adler: They had adhesive tape on the back. You would stick them on the car. We kids used to always play with those. We'd put them on our bicycles.

As a proud CAA member now, I'm glad you're here. We really value your input and what you had to say today.

But I have a couple of questions. With respect to the national transit strategy, when we're talking about.... I was interested to hear you talk about a strategy and the definition of a strategy. When we're talking about a national...isn't that kind of a misnomer? We're really talking about major cities across Canada. Where does that leave the jurisdictions outside of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and Toronto in terms of public transit? Public transit in a lot of communities across Canada, the majority of Canada, would be the church bus. Could you comment on that?

Mr. Tim Shearman: Yes, certainly.

We live in a vast country. I think we have something like 900,000 kilometres of roads. And everyone has a different environment.

We have done work over the past few years on senior drivers, for example. Public transit obviously is good for senior drivers in a city when they lose the ability to drive. However, if they're in rural Saskatchewan or northern Ontario, that's not an option. So we've been looking at all forms of transportation, as we said earlier, trying to create the best mobility for all Canadians. And that, again, is a mix. It has to be a mix of transit, the automobile, and in some cases the bicycle. Again, one size does not fit all. Every region, every part of Canada, is different.

Mr. Mark Adler: Exactly. So is there a city, in your estimation, in Canada that either has it right or is close to having it right, as you would like, in terms of a nice mix between public transit and the auto?

Mr. Jeff Walker: I tell you, there is probably room for improvement everywhere. Again, one thing we would stress is not to leave the cyclist part of this out of the equation. That's one of the things, when we hear about a national transit strategy.... We really talk a lot about mobility at CAA, so we like to think about the whole mix of mobility options. So if I can add that layer to it, we feel Vancouver has actually done quite a good job at managing these issues and at balancing these options, probably the best within Canada anyway. But some other jurisdictions are really interesting. Portland, Oregon is a smaller second-tier city, for sure. They do some very interesting things there, and not just with cycling but with transit as well.

So there are actually lots of interesting models around North America to look at and learn from.

Mr. Mark Adler: Certainly weather would have an impact on, for example, a strategy for the bicycle in this country.

Mr. Jeff Walker: For sure. That's for sure, but remember, in lots of parts of Canada, you can easily ride your bike six months a year.

One of the interesting things in the future of the automobile is a system where you will be able to pay usage-based car insurance. Why will that matter in the future? Because all of a sudden you will not have the same level of fixed costs associated with running your car over time and you'll be more willing and interested in switching over from different modes of transportation. That's coming within the next decade, and that's going to change the economic equation for a lot of people day to day. We think, for example, that in the summertime some people who normally drive their cars will actually take their bikes because there will be an economic incentive for them to do so.

Mr. Mark Adler: Do I have more time?

The Chair: You do. You have three minutes.

Mr. Mark Adler: I represent a riding in Toronto, the riding of York Centre in the north end, and before I got into politics my office was downtown at Bay and Richmond. If I left at my normal time of 6 a.m. or 6:30, it would take me under 30 minutes to get downtown. If I left during rush hour or came home during rush hour, it would take well over an hour and sometimes an hour and a half.

Is it a lack of attention to public transit or is it a lack of infrastructure? There's a huge economic cost to people spending an hour and a half in a car or on a bus. Could you comment on that?

Mr. Tim Shearman: Certainly. We mentioned this in our opening remarks when we talked about intelligent transportation systems, information systems.

There are ways to utilize our existing infrastructure more efficiently. They have started it in the U.K. and parts of the U.S. as pilot projects. We can use those existing roads as you suggest, so that not everyone is travelling at eight o'clock in the morning. We would encourage flexible hours at workplaces, as an example, to spread out the load on the infrastructure. We feel there's a huge advantage to using the existing infrastructure more efficiently, and that's what we're working on with the University of Calgary and the University of Toronto: tools and technology that combine weather information, roadwork or construction information, along with volumes. We believe there's a way to get people to where they

want to be, whether they're on buses or cars or bikes, more efficiently. That's certainly a big focus at CAA.

Jeff?

Mr. Jeff Walker: The most interesting technologies these guys are working on.... They're using algorithm technology to figure out how to switch lights. So instead of a fixed 30 seconds or one minute at a light, they have algorithms built in to cameras that essentially are watching what's happening as people are going on the roads and they're switching lights based on those algorithms. It's making systems, the modelling anyway, in those systems run 50% faster.

That's just one example. There are dozens of examples of where technology is going to be part of the solution. I think the reality we face, though, is that Toronto's getting big. What is the growth plan, was it 11.5 million people by 2030? I think that's the number. You've got this enormous pressure on the system, which we're just trying to keep up with. I think everyone is. It's a huge issue. It's a combination of probably doing better at multi-modal infrastructure and a reality that things are going to be more challenging until we get more urbanized and probably a little bit less suburbanized in the way we're organized in our cities.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I just want to continue that line of thought about partnerships.

Right now in Whitehorse and St. John's—not big urban centres—they have some buses. Municipalities are saying they can't afford to run all of these buses. There are areas in Whitehorse, for example, that need more bus services, but the municipality does not have enough money to circle the neighbourhoods.

The neighbourhood of Mount Pearl said they too need buses but they can't afford them, so they would love to partner with both the provincial and federal governments—especially the federal government, because the federal government right now is not at the table—to work with them. They are doing the planning. They want the federal government to provide some seed money to help them plan, because they don't have the funds to plan. They would like the federal government to be involved so that after the planning they can say, “Hey, this is what we need. Which part should you folks pay for? Is it buying the buses, fixing the buses, or whatever? What part should the province pay for, and what part should the municipalities pay for?” They want to have that kind of dialogue. Right now there is no table, desk, or forum for that dialogue to take place.

You can call this strategy a plan or policy, it doesn't matter, but there has to be some way for this dialogue to occur. Right now there's a huge vacuum, which is probably why 52% of the public said in your survey that the state of public transit should be better. Fewer than half of your members rate the state of public transit infrastructure as adequate or better because of this vacuum.

Is there anything wrong? Do you not think it's time for the federal government to be involved in that way?

I also have a follow-up question on funding.

Mr. Tim Shearman: Certainly all levels of government can be involved. We also have to look at the experts and best practices. You gave the examples of Whitehorse and St John's. I'm sure other cities have used smaller vehicles, for example, so instead of having one 18-foot bus you could have—I'm just making this up—three smaller buses that are more efficient and can get to more locations.

You also have to throw in the best practices from municipalities that have had to deal with similar issues. I don't know how much the federal government has been involved in deciding on transit—probably not too much—but I don't have the expertise in that area. It makes sense to give funding to the people who know. As Jeff said earlier, long-term stable funding is needed so that municipalities can develop 10-, 15-, and 20-year plans—as in Ottawa. Then the municipalities can be assured that there will be funding available for an extended period so they can make intelligent decisions.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Right now the federal government makes decisions though the infrastructure funds as to whether they will pay to support the York University subway line in Toronto, for example, or buy street cars. In some ways the federal government is already dictating what happens in the municipality. It doesn't quite say so, but by the capital funding and what gets funded, it is already making decisions.

So should the federal government assist in the planning—not do the plan, but take the leadership to have the plan take place? What is a better funding formula? Is it better to do all the transfer through the gas tax, which is an automatic transfer, but play no role, or have some kind of capital funding project with very clear criteria? If you do that, then the federal government is making decisions on what projects get funded.

What is your opinion on that? I know you said you're a bit agnostic, but what side do you come in on?

• (1610)

Mr. Jeff Walker: The way it has been working under the Building Canada fund, under the stimulus spending, we would probably want to debate the criteria that have been included and those that would be included in the next version of the Building Canada fund. But at the end of the day, to us it's all about the degree to which the federal government is prescriptive with the money. Our concern is not setting aside the money. We think the federal government needs to set aside money. Our concern is whether the federal government will get too prescriptive about how it gets spent.

For example, if we say it has to be certain kinds of buses in Whitehorse, or it has to be certain kinds of this or that in another place, that's something we're not comfortable with. Frankly, we're not totally comfortable with there being a discussion only within the

boundaries of transit. We think it has to be a truly tripartite discussion between transit, roads, and cycling infrastructure. To that extent, in our view it can sometimes be too narrow to confine it within the boundaries of transit.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you.

I'd like to continue with that discussion. I think what I was hearing was that it's important to allow decisions to be made for by the different municipalities. With Canada being the kind of country it is, we have a lot of diversity, a lot of different regions, some large cities but also a lot of small communities, rural communities, and remote communities. They all have different challenges and different needs. There are possibilities that are different for each of them. We have to be careful not to impose limits so strict that different communities can't focus on the needs that they have.

Was that the sentiment I was hearing from you?

Mr. Jeff Walker: It was. We would add that there is probably value in doing a set-aside for different levels of community. There's probably value in having a set-aside of new funding. For example, cities under 20,000 people would need such and such a set-aside, with others for cities of 20,000 to 100,000, 100,000 to 500,000, and so on. Probably that's necessary because otherwise the big cities would gobble up all the money. Within the boundaries of setting limits and criteria for submissions for funding, there is probably value in doing some set-asides for those reasons, but we believe that the local communities know. If there's a need for a forum of discussion about what's working, then maybe there should be one. I'm not sure the government should be organizing it, but there sure ought to be one.

Mr. Blake Richards: We set up our Building Canada fund so that there was a communities component established for smaller communities. That's the kind of thing you would like to see in future?

Mr. Jeff Walker: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: The model that we have set up through the gas tax transfers is based on the idea that there is some stable, predictable, long-term funding that municipalities can take a look at and plan for their needs. These needs could be transit or other types of infrastructure such as roads. I think this fits in with what you were saying earlier. That allows them to make plans for their needs, as opposed to looking at various programs created by provincial or federal governments and trying to figure out how to put this square peg into that round hole. A community might find a project that may have been fourth or fifth down their list is what qualifies according to criteria set by other levels of government. Then their top priorities aren't being accomplished. I like the idea of the gas tax funding being a stable, predictable, long-term funding that allows communities to make plans and know that their projects will be funded.

Does that fit in with what you're saying? We want to see different communities able to make plans based on their needs, because we understand that it's a very diverse country.

• (1615)

Mr. Tim Shearman: I think we'd agree with that. We have to remember that despite the stimulus spending on the economic action plan we still have a huge infrastructure deficit. That includes what we see in Montreal as a good example. We have roads and bridges, but we also have other infrastructure problems with sewers, etc. We have to balance the needs of the individual municipalities in light of the deficits, the upkeep that needs to be done, and the new projects. It's going to be different for each city.

Cities in western Canada don't have the same infrastructure problems, because they're not as old. But they're going to have transit issues because their populations have grown more rapidly. The municipalities have to spend money where they feel it's necessary.

Mr. Blake Richards: I appreciate that. That's exactly the sentiment I think we have with that gas tax transfer funding. It is to allow municipalities that opportunity to make those plans based on their infrastructure needs and what they feel is pressing for their communities.

How much time have I got?

The Chair: Fifteen seconds.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, so I'll skip over to the one question I wanted to ask.

I had some comments on your opening remarks, though it's slightly off topic, about texting while driving. Has your organization done any study or heard of statistics compiled by others? I know here in Ontario and in my home province of Alberta a law was passed to deal with the problem. I'm just wondering if you've seen any stats, whether from those examples or from other examples in the States or other places in the world, where laws have been passed, on what effect they've had on instances of texting. I'm just curious about whether there's any proof that those laws work.

The Chair: Very briefly.

Mr. Jeff Walker: The issue's brand-new and the data collection is brand-new. They're just starting to collect this data. We see a few jurisdictions in the U.S. doing it. We don't see any in Canada yet starting to collect that data.

One of the big challenges with texting while driving.... I think we all observe it. We're all watching, and as we drive around we see people do it. The reality is that a whole lot of fender benders are caused by texting while driving, but the BlackBerry goes back in the pocket or somewhere else before the police show up. So there's a huge problem around the data collection of that issue.

We've collected a whole bunch of behavioural data in our research that says that upwards of 30% of people under 24 have texted while driving in the last 30 days. We're talking about some pretty big numbers. It's a big problem.

The Chair: Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming to meet with us today.

In your introduction you talked about being an affiliation of nine member clubs. You touched a little bit on some of the challenges of working towards consensus and how that works within your clubs. Could you elaborate a little on that for us? I think a large part of that touches the conversation we're having here as to what has worked effectively for you in that regard. That will have an impact on what works effectively for a transit strategy that is also going forward.

Mr. Tim Shearman: Yes, and we really feel that the reason CAA has existed for over 100 years in some jurisdictions is because the local knowledge has allowed the clubs to be at the grassroots with their members.

We have nine member clubs, as you pointed out, pretty much provincially designated. There may be a little bit of an exception in Atlantic Canada. We really rely on those local clubs to know how they best serve their members. As a federation, we have certain standards that clubs have to adhere to so that members, as they travel across the country or throughout North America, receive the same basic level of services. The local flavour and the local knowledge make us successful. We're convinced that our growth over the past few years—we've had 2% growth even throughout tougher economic times—is based on that community involvement. We feel that extends, in this debate at least, to their knowledge of their local communities in transit and in infrastructure spending.

• (1620)

Mr. Jeff Walker: In terms of how we function in relation to our clubs, the word I use is facilitator. We work as a facilitating agent. Ideas bubble up from them, and we try to help create a forum where information is shared, and people understand what's working and not working in different jurisdictions. We stay pretty far from prescription, and that's the key thing. We try to create, if you will, that forum or platform where people learn from each other and where we can bring in smart people from outside of our organization to tell us about interesting things. We do that, but we stay very close to the line in terms of telling people what to do.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: So you'd say there's a big difference, then, between a top-down dictatorship that's essentially telling the local community what to do and how to do it and listening to that community and seeing what they see. As an overall organization, you need to have a set criteria for them to work within, but as long as they're working within those criteria, that works very effectively.

Mr. Jeff Walker: We feel strongly that it's helpful when those players have input to the criteria. It's a good thing. Usually they have more buy-in to the process in the end, but at the end of the day the general criterion is probably the limit by which we would want to be directly involved in telling our clubs what to do.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I'm asking these questions as a bit of a lead-up to talking about whether it's best to have a transit strategy that is driven from the bottom up, from the grassroots so to speak, of the local communities. We've had a lot of conversation here about the different requirements or different needs of different communities, not only on the basis of the community populations, but also on the existing infrastructure of the communities, the environment they're living within. Canada has vast differences in environment also. Would you see from the work you've done with your membership that this would garner a lot more support across the country by having things coming from the bottom up, rather than from the top down?

Mr. Jeff Walker: I think it's a combination, because I think what is important is the ideas probably need to come from the bottom up, but at the end of the day the reality is that the federal government is going to have to come to the table with a significant share of the dollars.

There are two parts to this equation. There probably is some bottom up in terms of ideas, but there is a very real ask and a very real need at the dollar level, which is only going to be able to be provided by the federal government.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: From what I understand, you see the federal government much more in a financial role and as a facilitator and the CAA in a broad role rather than to be the one drawing up all the plans and saying this is what you must work within. You'd much rather see very broad criteria and an allowance to work within that, with the federal government having a large part of the financial burden.

Mr. Jeff Walker: I mean with some set-asides, like we talk about for size of community, for intelligent infrastructure kinds of transportation, and frankly within the boundaries of not just transit. Transit is critical, but it's not the only thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

As you can probably tell from the discussion, we probably have the same goals but a different idea of how we should get there. As you correctly surmised, a lot of it revolves around how the federal government contributes to the building of public transit in the country, and from our perspective we're not always happy with choices not necessarily based on a common framework, common ground rules, in terms of funding. I think that's what we're trying to say.

We're not trying to suggest that the government be prescriptive about thou shalt only have this particular type of bus or thou shalt only have.... But we're concerned that different communities get different responses from federal funding or different parts of communities get different responses from federal funding, depending on political decisions, perhaps, or political interference with the decision-making process. That's part of the reason we're proposing that there be a national strategy, that it becomes "agnostic", is your word—I like it—that it becomes apolitical, that the decision-making in terms of investments in public transit have none of the colour

we've seen over the years, particularly in Toronto, where we dig a hole, fill it in, dig it again for the Eglinton subway. Here we go with a lot of money being spent on infrastructure that finally gets built, but 20 years late.

I've heard you agree that there currently isn't enough money in the system. I won't ask you to describe how much money there should be, but ought there to be more and ought it to be as part of a strategy rather than just ad hoc?

• (1625)

Mr. Tim Shearman: There can always be more money. The question is where is it going to come from? In Canada we have to balance what comes in with what's important to Canadians. We poll Canadians all the time, and we know health care is always important, education is important, and transportation is important.

We think the money perhaps can be spent more intelligently through looking at some of the research that's being done out there in terms of making better use of the existing infrastructure and ensuring, as you point out, there's transparency. I think if Canadians see transparency in the process, they're going to be more likely to buy into it.

I think that's certainly what we would advocate. Transparency can come in the form of the various levels of government getting together with other stakeholders to discuss the best ways to spend those precious dollars.

Mr. Jeff Walker: I'm going to echo what Tim said on this notion of transparency. We think in a lot of cases decisions are getting made. I think the stimulus spending money was spent in very specific ways because there was a very specific set of needs that needed to happen relatively immediately. You could call those political or you could say there was an economic need at a moment in time. To our mind, we'd love to see a few different criteria introduced to hopefully the next version of Building Canada, but at the end of the day I really agree with Tim on this one, that this notion of transparency around the rationale for decision-making can probably go a heck of a long way to assuaging some of those concerns or considerations. That's something that could be usefully done without being too prescriptive.

The Chair: I have to end it there.

I thank our guests for being here for the first part of our meeting. As always, it was good information and I'm sure the committee will have future questions of you too. I thank you.

We'll recess for two minutes while we bring our next guests forward. I would like to start on time, so we should limit it to a two-minute recess.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: Welcome back to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, part two. Joining us today from the Canadian Union of Public Employees is Mr. Paul Moist, national president and fellow Manitoban. I know he has another guest at the table.

I'll ask you to introduce your guest and then proceed.

Mr. Paul Moist (National President, Canadian Union of Public Employees): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Members of the committee, with me is Kelti Cameron. Kelti is a senior research officer for the municipal sector. Also with us is Toby Sanger, our senior economist. If there are any questions arising out of what we say, Toby will assist as well.

We're very privileged to be here, and we'll stick to your timeframes.

CUPE represents over 600,000 Canadians who work mainly in public services. They include about 6,000 urban transit workers who work all across the country.

We're pleased to talk today about public transportation as a pretty fundamental element of an equitable society. It's only through a national strategy, in our view, that we could realize the full benefit of that equity. There are necessary investments required for a truly pan-Canadian public transit system.

Interestingly, it's the number one priority for the Toronto Board of Trade. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has also called for a national strategy. And I read, Mr. Chairman, your encounter last week with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Urban Transit Association. We also want to place Canada in the context of the developed world, the G-8. Significantly more investment in national transit initiatives is happening in other countries than currently exists in Canada.

We recently polled Canadians through the Canadian Labour Congress. Seventy-three percent would support more federal government support for local transit, 92% feel that public transit makes their community a better place to live, and 66% feel that all three levels of government are not working together to implement long-term transit priorities.

Why do we need more investment? I think it's self-evident. Other delegations have spoken to it, but I'll quickly run through a couple of examples.

First, it would reduce the cost of congestion. Estimates for Toronto alone, from an OECD study, suggest that \$3.3 billion in savings could be realized by simply reducing congestion.

There are health costs. In Ontario alone, air pollution carries a price tag of \$1 billion.

Traffic collision costs and annual vehicle operating expenditures for households could come down with expanded or improved public transit.

We think there are savings for government in the long haul. We think it could be less expensive than our current system, when the social costs of parking are taken into account. Transit is actually one-third to one-half as expensive as automobile use for moving people around from home to work.

I know that all parliamentarians share the collective goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Private automobiles account for 27% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

With regard to quality of life and equity issues, I put on the record that lower-income people and recent immigrants rely much more on

public transit as part of their regular routine of working, moving their children to child care, and so on.

Under the heading of job creation and stimulus, public transit currently employs over 50,000 Canadians, and indirectly another 24,000 Canadians. The job creation potential of major public transit, such as inner-city rail projects, could be between 9,000 and 14,000 jobs for every billion dollars invested. A recent study concluded that investment in public transportation could potentially create 18% more jobs per dollar invested than road construction or road maintenance. There are long-term economic benefits from investment in something the public needs.

Why do we need a national strategy, as opposed to a local strategy? The economic, social, and environmental impacts, costs, and benefits aren't just local; they are national in scope. National funding is needed, not exclusively but as part of the mix to improve public transit. And there are huge equity and access issues for all Canadians. It truly is a pan-Canadian issue.

What would the goals of a national public transit strategy be, beyond those in the draft legislation, Bill C-305?

Number one would be adequate long-term funding. We agree with the Canadian Urban Transit Association's submission.

Number two would be increased access and affordability. Individual Canadians currently pay higher public transit costs than most other G-8 nations. It is 62%, compared to 39% in the United States.

• (1635)

Collaboration among all levels of government is desirable and needed on this pan-Canadian issue, and the added benefits of integrated transportation and land use planning we think should be a principle of a national public strategy. We also propose, at the federal level, research in information sharing. What one community learns from a project can and should be shared as part of a national strategy, and there should be accountability to ensure funding meets these objectives.

Wrapping up very quickly, we think an additional public priority that was not stated or not clearly stated in the proposed legislation is that public transit must be public in financing and public in operation. There is a significant role for the private sector in the capitalization of needed public transit expansion, but there are plenty of examples from around the globe of private financing not being an option, especially now when we're living in historically low-interest-rate borrowing times for the public sector. We've seen some big mistakes where the public sector gets left with the bill—the London Underground and Metronet so-called public-private partnership, for example. The City of Ottawa here just settled a lawsuit—almost \$37 million—after a previous light rail P3 project was cancelled. I notice that the current mayor of Toronto has ditched the city transit proposal from the former administration. He says his new subway line is going to be funded with private financing, and he's having a hard time finding that private financing.

So we live in precarious economic times. There has never been a more efficient period of time for the public sector collectively—not just the federal government but all levels of government—to invest in our society through public transit at very economical rates.

Public transit that exists in Canada is a good deal for many Canadians. There's a huge demand for increased public transit, especially in the growing part of Canada, the 20 urban centres that now house over 80% of the population. And that percentage is rising. Ninety percent of the immigrants coming to our country are in those 20 major urban centres. I agree with Brock Carlton, who was here just recently. All of those communities have huge infrastructure needs. Today we're focused on public transit, but we need a shared experience in Canada to make effective progress on the funding of infrastructure—in this case public transit. The entire infrastructure challenge can't be funded through property taxes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Morin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you for your presentation. I was happy to hear you point out the potential health costs that automobiles represent currently for our citizens. Today the Alliance pour le financement des transports collectifs au Québec, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Quebec, and the Association pour la santé publique du Québec met to ask the Government of Quebec to increase funds allocated to public transit, rather than allocate more funds to large infrastructures.

I would like to know how you feel the federal government could work with the public transit networks in Canada to define the roles, the responsibilities and the priorities of each level of government with an eye to a national strategy. What is your opinion on this matter with regard to employers and workers in Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Moist: Thank you very much for the question.

First of all, as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has said, about a quarter of CUPE's membership, about 150,000 to 160,000 members, are municipal employees. For the eight years I have been in this job, I have attended all of the conventions and events held by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Mayors and councillors from across Canada cannot meet their infrastructure and public transit needs off the property tax base. Many communities have had responsibilities put onto the property tax base for which it was never intended. They respectfully speak—and the meetings are always respectful—to all political parties. The four major parties, including the Green Party of Canada, are invited every year to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities meeting, and public transit has been a big part of their overall infrastructure submissions. They said here a week ago, in your presence, that the gas tax has been welcomed and it has been embedded by the current government as an ongoing fix of revenue, but there is no escalator clause built into it, and that's needed.

With regard to the space created by the cuts in the GST, it has been said notionally by some federal spokesmen that that's available for junior levels of government. Well, municipalities do not have the authority.... As the chairperson notes—he and I come from the same province—65% of the population in Manitoba lives in one community, Winnipeg. Well, the mayor of Winnipeg wants a 1% increase in the sales tax but he has no authority to make that happen.

Nothing really happens in Canada without the federal, provincial, and, I would argue strongly, the municipal governments having a seat at the table to talk about stabilizing funding. I could live with the Canadian Urban Transit Association's submission that one cent of the two cents the current government has cut off the GST be dedicated to public transit. That is one of the options.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: Thank you.

What role do you see the unions playing in the determination of this national public transit strategy?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Moist: Thank you very much. I didn't answer that the first time you asked it.

We have an incredible responsibility on behalf of the people who work in public transit to make the most efficient system possible, to embrace change if communities are going to move from traditional busing to light rail or other systems. We have pretty sound relationships. We have 3,900 relationships across Canada in the form of collective agreements with towns, municipalities, everything from the cities of Montreal and Toronto to small communities. All of them want to work with us to varying degrees when it comes to making changes to the system. We are quite open to doing that. Some relationships are better than others.

When we lobby federally, we talk about infrastructure funding not from the point of view of CUPE. CUPE members don't do capital works. That's not our point. Our point is that we work with maintaining systems that are falling apart. Canada is a big producer of conventional buses. My own hometown produces some of the best products in the world. We need to align all levels of government, but not to trample on the jurisdiction of provinces or get into a constitutional debate. That's a waste of everybody's time.

The municipalities are preachers of their provinces, legislatively. As somebody who represents workers at the municipal level, fixing rail lines and buses, we are fixing things in some cities that should have been replaced a long time ago. We see changes in government like we've seen in Toronto and we are not sure what the future holds.

Beyond negotiating for wages and benefits for folks, CUPE has a responsibility to be part of the solution and to broaden sources of revenue beyond property taxes. We won't have a national public transit system if the solution lies with property taxes, and there will be a revolt in the country. That is not the solution. There are more progressive ways for us to collaborate. I think the country is screaming for all three levels of government to collaborate on many issues, from health care to the environment, including public transit.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin: You are talking about the potential for job creation. Do you see a difference between a national strategy and a more local one in that respect?

[English]

Mr. Paul Moist: Probably not, but a national strategy could have a more positive impact. We should not use government money to create jobs for the sake of it. But if we're talking about renewing infrastructure, the statistics that I gave you are that over the last ten years, investment in capital works in the municipal sector has created 140,000 person-years of work. That's important—road work, all kinds of waste water treatment plant work.

I gave you statistics that show that if we invested in public transit and inter-city rail projects, we could do much better than investing in simply road and road maintenance. We need to maintain roads and we need road maintenance, but we can't be a society that's imprisoned by our infatuation with the automobile.

When I speak about other G-8 countries, they have not.... Major cities in Europe, where most of you have travelled, and certainly in Hong Kong.... The statistics I heard in Hong Kong were that less than 10% of the population transport themselves in privately owned automobiles. Ninety percent of the population transport themselves through public transit systems.

We're not like them or like European cities; we're much more American. We have become imprisoned with building beltways and roadways. We need those things, but we also need investment in public transit systems that can more efficiently move people to and from work and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and actually create meaningful employment for thousands of unemployed construction workers. Many of the stimulus measures from the Building Canada fund.... The last delegation was asked a number of questions. Many of those projects are done; they've been committed to. We need a new federal-provincial-municipal boost toward fixing infrastructure, including public transit.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all I would like to welcome our witnesses.

I always find it a bit hard to listen to the comparison between the reality in Hong-Kong and the situation in Canada when it comes to automobiles. Drivers are not the bad guys in all of this. We have to improve quality of life and reorganize things. There is a governance and a management issue. At the municipal level, the infrastructure is

indeed becoming obsolete, and without infrastructure it will be difficult to have public transit. And on the topic of public transit, I liked the fact that in his presentation the CAA representative talked about integrated positioning, that is to say what is being done regarding cyclists. There is also the matter of the train. We should be talking more about the high-speed train in the Windsor-Quebec corridor.

All that said, I want us to talk about motivation for a moment. You, of course, are familiar with the situation of workers, of unionized workers. Before we begin to philosophize on the concept of dedicated funding and everything that relates to that topic, could you tell us about how your members see things right now? What do they say about current public transit networks? Do they feel that the system is obsolete? We may well develop a national strategy, but what will we do if our current equipment is failing? Moreover, people have been talking about jurisdictions. Is it the Canadian government's responsibility to invest in this or should we be looking rather for a new funding approach?

I would like to hear you discuss the situation. People talk to you a great deal. What are you hearing right now from unionized workers with regard to public transit as it exists currently, in urban areas in particular?

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Paul Moist: Thank you very much.

I expect it depends on where you go, but we've heard a number of messages.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Let's talk about Montreal.

[Translation]

Others are going to talk about the situation in Toronto.

• (1655)

[English]

Mr. Paul Moist: We hear about aging fleets, huge pressure on property taxes, and cutting services to so-called non-productive suburban routes.

No transit driver or maintenance worker wants to see the public waiting an hour and a half for a bus that used to come every 30 minutes. That's just the fiscal pressure on municipalities. That is point number one.

Sometimes we're asked as a national union to take positions on big political decisions. Building the Canada Line from the airport in Richmond to downtown Vancouver was driven by a single event, the 2010 Olympics. It hopped ahead of other projects in the lower mainland, and we have two points of view on traffic in the Vancouver and lower mainland areas.

Number one, as workers we are stuck in that traffic every day. Number two, from a transportation point of view the GVRD, the greater Vancouver regional district, the collection of mayors from the lower mainland, had a 30-year plan. It was interrupted by the beautiful success of the Olympics. It was great for the Olympics, and it's great for me when I land in Vancouver and want to go downtown efficiently. It's much cheaper than a taxi. But it wasn't part of the overall plan for the lower mainland.

It may be a pipe dream and impossible in Canada to think of tri-government planning that we stick to, because different priorities pop up from different folks. But our folks who maintain public transit systems tell us we have an aging system and the investments are needed to keep the system going. A maintenance worker in Calgary told me we're throwing good money after bad sometimes, bandaging up something that should be replaced, like a bridge in your community that needs to be replaced.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Basically we need flexibility through a national strategy. It's not a one-size-fits-all situation, and some events happen, like the Olympics, which is great, so we can adapt ourselves.

How would you proceed with what I would call a new deal with different levels of government? Because at the end of the day, the Constitution remains. You cannot get involved in a provincial matter. From a federal perspective you cannot go directly to municipalities, because they are provincial creatures. But at the same time, there is a new reality that in those big cities you have to do something about it. The future of Canada clearly goes on at the rural level, of course. But for the future of cities like Montreal, Vancouver, Toronto, and so on—I can say Winnipeg for the purpose of the reality too—how can you manage that new deal? How do you perceive it? Do we need a new federal-provincial-territorial conference with all the other stakeholders?

We already invest some money through infrastructure. We put some money into public transit, but frankly it's not just putting some money into some events or infrastructure; we need to look ahead. If we want to have a vision for the next 20 years, how concretely could we manage that kind of new deal with the workers, the employers, and the governments?

Mr. Paul Moist: If I had the answer to that I'd be a rich person. I don't care whether it's health care, social housing, municipal infrastructure, or post-secondary education, on all fronts the best decisions Canadians enjoy are those where there's broad consensus from the federal—notwithstanding jurisdictions—the provincial, and municipal levels.

Think of the success stories in Canada, and think of the non-success stories in Canada. There isn't a politician of any political stripe at any level who doesn't recognize that the number-one policy issue for Canadians is health care. Notwithstanding frustration at times with the health care system, there's an expectation that health care will be available and perhaps improved in the long term.

We have created services that are the envy of some countries in the world, but we're rapidly running up against problems in the area of social housing. The budget of 1995 saw—

Hon. Denis Coderre: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but now we've spoken about health care and housing and we have a study on public

transit. How do you manage your priorities? Should we have a dedicated fund? It will have an impact on the other priorities. Health care is the number-one issue, of course.

The Chair: I have to intervene here. We're way past the time. Maybe you can fit the answer into another question, if it comes your way.

Monsieur Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): You mentioned the idea of increasing the GST in order to fund municipal priorities. Do you acknowledge that Canadian taxpayers are tapped out, that they can't pay any more? Whether it's property taxes or consumption taxes or income tax or other business taxes, there's really only one taxpayer. It doesn't matter which tax you raise, you're still taking money out of the pocket of the person who earned it and putting it into the coffers of government.

Do you not acknowledge that taxpayers are paying enough already?

Mr. Paul Moist: I was a big supporter of the move to dedicate a portion of the gas tax to municipalities and to working with municipalities to use that to bring down the infrastructure deficit. And I was a big supporter of Mr. Flaherty's two budgets in the midst of the recession. I think that stimulus was required. But on your broader question, we're actually at historically low levels of spending on public services in Canada, as a percentage of gross domestic product. We are at levels that are lower than in 1960.

There's a lot of wealth out there in society; it's not all in governments' pockets. But as a percentage of the overall wealth of Canada, we're at 50-year lows.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: What is the percentage?

Mr. Paul Moist: The percentage of GDP being spent on public services right now is under 30%. Toby Sanger will probably have the exact number.

We're at the lowest levels we've been in 50 years. The economy has grown. Public spending doesn't have to keep pace exactly with all growth in the economy, but the opposite has happened.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Can you give me a breakdown of that 30%?

Mr. Paul Moist: I'm talking total governmental spending, all forms of taxation, as a percentage. It's in the index to Mr. Flaherty's budgets each year.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I didn't bring the index today.

Mr. Paul Moist: I didn't either.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: You referenced it, so I'm curious if you happen to have any—

Mr. Paul Moist: But your broad question is a good one. Canada is spending less, as a percentage of the overall wealth in the economy, than at any time in the last 50 years.

By the way, I don't ascribe that simply to the current government. There's been a crunching down of spending.

•(1700)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: It's hard to believe that's the case when all levels of government have been growing their spending faster than nominal GDP over the last decade. It's hard to believe we're at an all-time low, with that having been the case.

Mr. Toby Sanger (Senior Economist, Canadian Union of Public Employees): In the past few years there has been an increase in total public spending as a share of GDP. That's largely because the economy has gone down in the past few years. But prior to the economic crisis, public spending as a share of the total economy had indeed dropped to the lowest rate it had been in many decades.

Now, I think there's some confusion there, because the federal government has increased its transfers. So what you may see is a lot of double-counting. The federal government may be increasing some of its spending, but a lot of that goes to the provincial governments. Then you see the provincial government also increasing spending by that amount.

There's only one taxpayer, but a lot of that, as you said, is the same amount of money. If you look at total levels of spending, it has dropped to a very low portion. That's partly because a lot of the services have been downloaded to municipal governments, and I think Paul has made this point.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: They haven't been downloaded by the federal government. There's been nothing downloaded by the federal government in over a decade.

Mr. Toby Sanger: Well, I wouldn't necessarily agree. There have been reductions in spending in a lot of different areas, which municipalities have had to pick up.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: There hasn't been downloading from the federal government to the provinces in at least a decade.

Mr. Toby Sanger: There have been reductions in spending by the federal government in various areas.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Like what?

Mr. Toby Sanger: It might be immigrant settlement, and larger cities certainly pick that up.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: No, that's not true. There have been no reductions.

Mr. Toby Sanger: Reductions as a share of—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: No, there have been no reductions of that kind.

Mr. Paul Moist: Listen, it wasn't your government, but in 1995, in another period of time to deal with...

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That was 15 years ago.

Mr. Paul Moist: Well, the Canada Assistance Plan.... This is the first recession. We're dealing with the first recession since 1995.

The Chair: Point of order, Monsieur Coderre.

Mr. Paul Moist: And getting rid of the Canada Assistance Plan has had a devastating impact on municipalities.

The Chair: Order, please.

Monsieur Coderre on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I would like to feel that this is the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and not a court of justice where questions are being asked every three seconds without giving the witness a chance to answer. It might be preferable to do that at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance to try to see whether the witness knows his budget. With all due respect, I think we should calm down a bit here.

[*English*]

The Chair: On the same point of order, Monsieur Poilievre.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Of course, the honourable member does not want the witness to talk about the enormous cuts the Liberals made in the 1990s.

In any case, I have the right to ask my questions.

Hon. Denis Coderre: In 15 years as a member, I have never raised the issue of relevancy.

In 1993, we inherited a deficit of \$42 billion that was handed down to us by the Conservatives. My intervention had to do with courtesy. It did not concern the substance, but the way in which questions were being put.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Watson on the original point of order, and then I'm going to rule.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Actually, on the substance of the point of order.

If I understand correctly, the allotted time belongs to the member, so I defend his use of his time as he appreciates it. If he feels the question is not being answered and he needs to intervene, it is the member's time. I would defend that same right for my honourable colleague across the way.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will rule it not a point of order. I do think it's important that our committee members have the right to challenge something being given to the committee as document or as presentation. I believe that's what Mr. Poilievre was doing.

You have one minute and forty seconds.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

I guess my concern is that we always have groups before committees whose vested interest is in greater government spending, spending which can only be paid for by taxpayers because there is no other source of money for public administration. It doesn't really seem to matter to these groups how much we increase spending, because there is always some pretext to increase it even more. I guess that's why I've asked you to be specific, because you've been very specific in your request for more taxpayer dollars. I represent 100,000 plus citizens, most of whom are taxpayers, and they're getting tired of paying, so I'm just asking for you to be very specific about why it is that we still need more tax increases.

Today you proposed a GST increase. If you're going to come before a parliamentary committee and demand that taxpayers shell out yet more, I think it's only fair that you be specific as to why we need more spending on top of the already extremely generous increases that have occurred at all levels of government in the last decade.

• (1705)

Mr. Toby Sanger: Just to correct the record, the CUTA proposal is for one cent of the federal gas tax, not for an increase on the GST at this stage.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Where does that come from?

Mr. Toby Sanger: The federal government collects gas tax money, so that comes from the federal government.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Are you proposing to increase the gas tax then?

Mr. Toby Sanger: No, no, no.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: So where does that come from?

Mr. Toby Sanger: Where does that come from? It comes from federal government revenues.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: And where does that come from?

Mr. Toby Sanger: It is already being collected right now. If you're interested in proposals in terms of increasing revenue or restoring revenue—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: No, we're not, actually.

Mr. Toby Sanger: —the first place to start would be to cancel the corporate income tax cut.

The Chair: Order, please.

What I'm going to suggest before I go to Mr. Adler for new questions is that you're suggesting that the one percent come out of the current existing gas tax revenue that is allocated to municipalities. Am I correct?

Mr. Toby Sanger: That's correct.

The Chair: Mr. Watson, on a point of order.

Mr. Jeff Watson: We may have to wait until the blues come out, but I do believe that Mr. Moist had actually suggested a one cent...or a one percent increase in the GST. We should verify that for the committee, or I think Mr. Moist could clarify his position.

Mr. Paul Moist: Mr. Chairman, I gave you an example of the mayor of Winnipeg. He's only one elected official. He's accountable to 600,000 Canadians. He has argued that the space created by the GST cuts should be occupied by a dedicated infrastructure fund that the Government of Manitoba would remit to the City of Winnipeg. He's only one spokesman.

The Chair: I will rule that not a point of order but a good response to a point.

Mr. Adler.

Mr. Mark Adler: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for appearing here today.

I have a couple of questions just following up on Mr. Poilievre's line of questioning. With regard to the increase in public spending

that you indicated, are you talking about just the one cent, or about increasing taxes in other areas also to fund the public...?

Mr. Paul Moist: We're talking about a renewal of things like the Building Canada fund.

Mr. Mark Adler: But how would you pay for that? Please be specific.

Mr. Paul Moist: We would pay for that out of general government revenues dedicated towards putting people to work and meeting the \$125 billion deficit, which the delegation from the FCM spoke to you about last week.

Mr. Mark Adler: Okay. Maybe it's me, but I don't quite understand. What general revenues are you talking about? Do you mean of the Government of Canada? Where do these general revenues come from?

Mr. Toby Sanger: We're doing our pre-budget submission tomorrow at the House of Commons finance committee, and our proposal has a number of fair tax reform initiatives. One of those is closing the stock option loophole whereby people such as Warren Buffett or others pay half the rate of tax on their capital income and their stock option income that normal workers pay on their employment income. That would raise approximately \$1 billion for the federal government. That's one source of income.

There's been a lot of discussion about corporate income tax cuts, which haven't been particularly effective in terms of increasing the rate of investment. In fact, corporations are holding half a trillion dollars in excess cash that they're not investing in the economy.

We've also proposed higher taxes on the financial industry, because it's currently undertaxed in comparison with the rest of the economy. So we're proposing fair tax reform measures, and billions could be raised through those. We probably wouldn't propose doing that immediately, but certainly some of those could be introduced after a number of years.

• (1710)

Mr. Mark Adler: I wasn't aware that Warren Buffett paid taxes in Canada, but in any event...

Mr. Toby Sanger: No, I'm just using that as an example.

Mr. Mark Adler: Yes, I hear what you're saying.

Do corporations pay income tax?

Mr. Toby Sanger: Sure. Corporations file income tax returns.

Mr. Mark Adler: And where does that money come from?

Mr. Toby Sanger: It generally comes from their profits, I believe.

Mr. Mark Adler: Really? Okay.

Do trade unions pay taxes?

Mr. Toby Sanger: Unions are non-profit organizations.

Mr. Mark Adler: You're aware that a non-profit organization is just a legal entity. A non-profit is allowed to make a profit, and most of them do. Should those profits be taxed?

Mr. Paul Moist: What does this have to do with public transit?

Mr. Mark Adler: You're talking about taxing to pay for public expenditure, and I'd like to know where this money is going to come from.

Mr. Paul Moist: We're joining with Canada's mayors and councillors and the Canadian Urban Transit Association.

A public transit system for Canada, with national leadership, is a viable public issue. Building public transit will actually mean savings in the long term. If we're going to get into a debate about how one pays for that.... How governments spend money here and elsewhere is open for debate. There are Canadians clamouring for more investment in public transit. What that has to do with this line of questioning, I don't know.

Mr. Toby Sanger: I would just add that a lot of the testimony you've heard is about the cost to the economy of having inadequate public transit. The federal government itself did a study showing that a conservative estimate of the cost of congestion was close to \$4 billion a year. If people have more time to work, then that's going to grow the economy and make it more productive.

Mr. Mark Adler: We could pick this up tomorrow at the finance committee.

I have a couple of other questions.

Mr. Moist, have you been to Hong Kong?

Mr. Paul Moist: I have.

Mr. Mark Adler: And you stand by the statement that 90% of the people in Hong Kong use public transit? Only 10% of the people drive cars?

Mr. Paul Moist: The ownership of registered private vehicles is by less than 10% of the population of Hong Kong. The private ownership—

Mr. Mark Adler: Where did you get that information?

Mr. Paul Moist: I'm pretty comfortable with that information.

Mr. Mark Adler: Could you present that evidence to the committee?

Mr. Paul Moist: Sure, we'll send it through the chair—

Mr. Mark Adler: You can send it to the chair and he can distribute it to us.

Mr. Paul Moist: Absolutely.

Mr. Mark Adler: How did you arrive here today?

Mr. Paul Moist: I walked.

Mr. Mark Adler: Do you have a—

Mr. Paul Moist: I live near Parliament Hill and I....

Mr. Mark Adler: How do you normally transport yourself around on union business? Do you have a driver, or do you use public transit?

Mr. Paul Moist: I fly while the airlines are flying.

Mr. Mark Adler: Through the city streets...do you drive?

The Chair: I'm going to go to Mr. Nicholls now.

Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Paul Moist: I do drive. Absolutely.

Mr. Mark Adler: You're a driver.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Moist: I am a driver. I'm a good driver.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nicholls, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Thank you, Mr. Moist, Mr. Sanger, and Ms. Cameron.

I'd like to return to maybe a bit of the substance of what we're debating: public transit. The Conference Board of Canada 2010 report, *Dispelling the Myths*, talked about P3s, saying that they had certain "efficiency drivers". However, governments continue to treat them in an ideological way by claiming that they save taxpayers money, sometimes even claiming that they cost the taxpayer nothing through such discredited practices as off-book accounting.

Can you outline how P3 projects—maybe specific to transit—sometimes are more costly to the taxpayer and can actually decrease economic activity?

Mr. Paul Moist: Thank you.

It was your colleagues in the United Kingdom, in the 2008 parliamentary report of the transport committee, who said, about the London Underground: "Whether or not the Metronet failure was primarily the fault of the particular companies involved, we are inclined to the view that the model itself was flawed and probably inferior to traditional public-sector management".

There are auditors general across Canada, including the federal Auditor General, who at times have commented upon the so-called public-private partnerships. There is a legitimate role for the private sector to help us build Canada's public sector. That's where the work belongs: it belongs in the hands of the private sector. But when we start mortgaging debt at terrible prices compared to what we could manage that debt at ourselves.... Mr. McGuinty was elected for the first time in 2003. He said he was going to take to court the whole deal around Highway 407 in Toronto. He found out that it's locked down for 90 years. He's not able to undo that deal. He says he'll never make that mistake again.

History and countries around the world, including this country, are replete with examples. Mortgaging debt at inflated costs is a bad move. The private sector assisting the public realm in building infrastructure is an appropriate move.

● (1715)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Thank you.

That leads me to my second question.

You mentioned that under tough economic times one of the weaknesses of P3 procurement is the difficulty of finding private partners willing to make negotiations that are favourable to the public's interest. It's sort of the idea that the private partner looks at it as how beggars can't be choosers, and the public partner might make an unfavourable negotiation. You can look at examples such as twinning the Port Mann Bridge, where the private bidder walked away and the public ended up saving \$200 million through public financing of that project.

In comparing P3 and public procurement, what's the method of determining the savings that can come to taxpayers? Secondly, can you outline examples of savings to taxpayers through public sector procurement and service provision?

Mr. Toby Sanger: One of the major sources of savings is simply the lower costs of financing through public procurement and financing—i.e., not P3s. Over the 30 or 40 years that these might be amortized those 100 or 200 basis points can be a really substantial amount. Unfortunately, a lot of the value-for-money studies that are done by provincial governments really obfuscate the information. They present just a few pages of information. It's really not transparent. Unfortunately, that lack of transparency about the costing is endemic to P3 projects as well, because the public just does not have access to that information, which is often protected by commercial confidentiality and thousands of pages of legal contracts.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I just have one more question. When the Vancouver system transferred from B.C. Transit to Coast Mountain, I believe the rights of the CAW were transferred. I think one of the members across, Mr. Watson, might have been a member of CAW at one point. We see that through P3 sometimes the union rights are transferred. In late 2007, I think, Montreal transit drivers of CUPE 1983 were upset about privatization pressures. During the same period, TransLink and Coast Mountain in October 2008 got B.C.'s top employer award. The Vancouver example shows that when governments advance in good faith, union rights can be transferred in these negotiations, even when the agency running it might be contracted to private partners. However, in bad faith, bad things can happen.

Could you outline what the locals' concerns were vis-à-vis privatization pressures in Montreal's transit provision?

The Chair: Very briefly, if you could.

Mr. Paul Moist: I couldn't speak with any authority on that.

All over Canada we have had debates, and our goal here today is not to represent union members' interests, it's to talk about what kind of system we need for Canada. I'm old-fashioned. I'm from the prairies. I don't think we should spend any more money than we need to, to build Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: If you are going to come before a parliamentary committee and ask for billions of dollars in spending, it's perfectly reasonable for us to ask you how you're going to pay for it. So your suggestion earlier that our line of questioning had nothing to do with the subject at hand is in fact wrong. We do have the right to ask these questions.

If you're going to take one cent of the GST, there are only two ways to do that. You can raise the GST, which we oppose, or you can use the equivalent amount from general revenues, which also come from taxation. At the end of the day, there's no free money. I'm still waiting for you to explain how we're going to pay for this increase in spending that you're proposing today.

• (1720)

Mr. Paul Moist: We've tried to answer that. We would make different spending priorities within existing allocations. We would make revisions to the tax code to apply a fairer tax system. We would end the capital gains windfall that some Canadians enjoy. We would make tax moves that would free up capital for public

investments that mayors and councillors are clamouring for from across Canada. These are all choices.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Do your members have a pension plan?

Mr. Paul Moist: Most CUPE members—not all, but most—participate in pension plans across Canada.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I suspect that those pension plans are almost universally invested in the capital markets.

Mr. Paul Moist: Yes, they'd be a combination of, increasingly, real estate; fixed income instruments, including ones issued by your government; and equity markets.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I appreciate your acknowledging equity markets as one of the aspects of a pension portfolio for unionized workers, because your members pay corporate taxes. The return from those equity holdings comes only after the corporate taxes are paid.

You mentioned air travel. I know you're not the union responsible; well, in fact you are in some cases. The members there have a pension plan about which there are concerns. Canada Post came before our Parliament in the spring. The number one holding of the Canada Post pension plan is TD Bank, \$200 million in holdings. When you propose to raise taxes on businesses, you're actually raising taxes on your unionized members and their pension plan. So I would encourage you to rethink that proposal as a funding method for the increased spending that you're proposing on this and other issues.

Mr. Paul Moist: All I'd say in response to that is that I appreciate your intervention.

When I watched the Minister of Transport speak in Halifax in June to 2,000 mayors and councillors, he gave every indication that in this new era of a majority government, the Building Canada fund was almost committed and that there would be governmental response to the legitimate concerns being expressed by mayors and councillors, one of which is public transit. Those mayors and councillors were, as they always are, very respectful to all the political leaders who attended in front of them. This year the Prime Minister couldn't attend, but the Minister of Transport received a very polite response.

Those mayors and councillors are saying the same thing that we're saying here today: there's a huge municipal infrastructure deficit that affects the quality of life in communities everywhere, and it needs attention, not exclusively from the feds, but the feds have to be part of the solution. I agree with their comments and the polite but firm position they took in Halifax, and that they actually took here a week ago with you.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I agree that we have a role to play, and we are playing it. We have the gas tax fund, the GST rebate, record investment through the Building Canada program, and of course, on top of all that, the infrastructure stimulus fund and the overall economic action plan, which funded 28,000 incremental projects across the country. So we have definitely played a role. At the same time, I think it's fair for parliamentarians to ask any stakeholder group that comes before this committee asking for more funding to suggest sources of revenue to pay for it.

Mr. Paul Moist: It's very fair. We'll give you tomorrow's submission tomorrow.

The Chair: With that, I thank you for being here. I appreciate your comments, and we look forward to more conversation as we go.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Chair, it's ten minutes before adjournment here. Why are we adjourning early?

The Chair: It's six minutes, and I have a couple of issues to bring forward to the committee.

Thank you. I appreciate your time.

I'll ask the committee members just to sit tight for one second. I want to advise the committee that I've received a letter from a gentleman who has sat on the transportation committee in Europe in the European Parliament for several years. He's coming to Canada and will be here on November 3. I'm going to ask the clerk to send out a note. He would like to meet with us. It's not necessarily a committee day, so it's going to be a non-mandatory committee meeting. It will have translation; we'll carry on that way. I just wanted to make you aware of the date and watch for the calendar to come out.

Mr. Coderre, on a point of order.

• (1725)

Hon. Denis Coderre: When we had our meetings we spoke about the way we should have some flexibility as a committee. There are two things I would like to talk about.

[Translation]

I am in agreement that we have a meeting on November 3 and so on, but I think that we have to adjust to certain realities.

First, I am still waiting to know when Minister Lebel is supposed to meet with us, on which date. I think it's important that we begin to see his face. He made a few announcements and I would like to see him. I have some good questions for him.

Moreover, there are certain things happening out there. Last October 7, there was an illegal strike at the Toronto Airport. I am concerned about the working conditions of workers, but I also wonder what went on there. Why an illegal strike? What happened? The relationship between the Garda company and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority is important. I don't know if my colleagues want to talk about this, but I am proposing that we do so.

And so I need to know the date of Minister Lebel's visit. We can ask him some questions about that. I am hearing certain things about Garda and about the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority. It is our role to ask questions in a timely way on what happened. I would like to take the opportunity to ask the Garda representatives—this

could be people from their union or simply members of Garda—about the current working conditions.

I don't know what my colleagues think about this. I accept that I can put my little question in every hour, but there are some current realities we are facing. Perhaps the time has come to consider this type of file also with close attention.

[English]

The Chair: Is there discussion around that?

I can advise the committee that I have sent a written request to the minister and I'll follow up again through the clerk to confirm a day.

On the second part, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you're suggesting we might want to host a meeting where Garda and CATSA would be invited, to find out what happened particularly on that particular point.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Yes, that's correct.

Firstly, I would like to know what the working conditions are.

Secondly, there was an illegal strike. This is an essential service and this has an impact on consumers. Nevertheless, I think it would be relevant for us to be able to ask questions about this. I don't know if we need to submit a motion. What do my colleagues think about this? As a federal member of Parliament, I want to know what is going on.

[English]

The Chair: Are there any comments?

I guess that would be the question. Do we want Mr. Coderre to present a motion?

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Do you need a 48-hour notice? I propose that we invite people from the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, CATSA, and from Garda so that they can explain what happened last October 7. We should also take the opportunity to find out about the working conditions.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We would need notice for that.

The Chair: We would need a written...unless the committee would agree completely today. If not, we can ask for a 48-hour notice.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Do the members of the committee agree?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We would be in agreement with the 48-hour period.

The Chair: Okay. If you submit it, I'll make sure we set something aside at the end for that.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I will submit a motion which you will have before you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Not that I would debate it, but I wouldn't mind seeing the wording. I think there's a bigger issue. Maybe it's not just a company, it's also the authority that signed the agreement, etc. It's fairly complex.

I'll leave it in your hands. Once we see the motions, we may have to think about that. It's not necessarily just one thing; it's more complex than that.

• (1730)

The Chair: I'll ask Mr. Coderre. If he wants to proceed with this, we'll look at a motion on Wednesday.

Is there any other business?

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Eventually we should have a discussion, in terms of this study, on how long and when, and what area we want to get into. There are areas we should focus on, but it's probably best if it's the committee as a whole for that kind of discussion, dwelling on one or two specific areas, such as whether it's amortization, what kind of system, gas tax versus capital funding.

There are different ways we could discuss different areas of this strategy. Right now it's all lumped into one, which is fine, but for me, what would be really helpful is if in two or three areas it could be the

committee of the whole, with people we invite, and we could actually have an in-depth discussion and not just the normal bouncing back and forth to different.... That's fine, but you touch on something and then you go on to something else, and you never really have enough opportunity to get into it. Sometimes we might agree with each other, but then the third questioner would move the discussion to another angle, which is sometimes really frustrating.

So I think there might be consensus on some areas we want to really look at, whether it's big cities, smaller cities, or smaller towns, that kind of thing. What's top down? What's from the grassroots up? There are different areas.

We could even have an informal discussion on that, Mr. Chair, so that we make the time that we spend here even more productive.

The Chair: We have invited guests for Wednesday. After that what I'll do is send out a notice to the committee as to the particular day. We are filling it in for the next couple of weeks, but I'll make sure we set aside a discussion time for the entire committee within the next two weeks.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Maybe a committee of the whole doesn't necessarily have to be the same format. You would have a better discussion that way.

The Chair: You bet.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thanks.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Seeing none, I adjourn the meeting.

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