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HE-58

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HE-58

**Standing Committee
on Heritage, Infrastructure
and Cultural Policy**

Estimates

Ministry of Infrastructure

**Comité permanent du
patrimoine, de l'infrastructure
et de la culture**

Budget des dépenses

Ministère de l'Infrastructure

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 25 September 2024

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 25 septembre 2024

Chair: Laurie Scott
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Laurie Scott
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE

Wednesday 25 September 2024

Mercredi 25 septembre 2024

The committee met at 1300 in committee room 1.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning):

Good afternoon, honourable members. In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, it is my duty to call upon you to elect an Acting Chair. Are there any nominations? MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Chair—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It is not me, MPP French, unfortunately. I nominate MPP Bresee.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning):

Thank you.

MPP Bresee, do you accept the nomination?

Mr. Ric Bresee: I do. Thank you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Isaiah Thorning):

Are there any further nominations? Seeing none, there being no further nominations, I declare nominations closed and MPP Bresee elected Acting Chair of the committee.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. We have already been called to order. We are joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcasting and recording. Please wait through this meeting until I recognize you before starting to speak, and as always, comments should come through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

Seeing no questions, we will now commence consideration of the 2024-25 expenditure estimates referred to this committee. As a reminder, members may ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee. However, the onus is on the members asking the questions to ensure the question is relevant to the current estimates under consideration. The ministries are required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that they undertake to address. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked with the legislative research officer.

Today, we will consider the Ministry of Infrastructure. I'm required to call vote 4001, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the minister.

With that, Minister, welcome. You may begin.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, Chair and committee members. I just want to say hi to Victoria, who is watching estimates from home today. I'm pleased to be here today to talk about estimates for the Ministry of Infrastructure and to highlight our ministry's accomplishments and progress as we deliver our priorities.

Infrastructure serves as the foundation for strong and healthy communities. It's what makes our roads safer, commutes more convenient, and communities more vibrant and prosperous. It connects us to the services that we rely on every single day. When we build hospitals and long-term-care homes, we're ensuring our loved ones are taken care of. When we help deploy high-speed Internet infrastructure, we're ensuring all communities across the province can participate and thrive in the 21st-century digital world. And when we help build a new school in your community, we're helping the next generation of leaders get the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential. Investing in infrastructure is how we're building Ontario, driving economic growth, and creating good jobs and more opportunities for all.

I think we can all agree we cannot afford to wait. According to Statistics Canada, Ontario could see an increase of more than four million residents in the next two decades, and that's a medium-growth scenario. At the higher end, Ontario could grow by more than six million over that same time frame. That's more than the entire population of New Zealand. This is exactly why we need to continue to invest in infrastructure: to ensure it continues to support the delivery of modern services for the people of Ontario, now and into the future.

This is why we are moving forward on delivering the most ambitious plan in Ontario's history. Our government is investing more than \$190 billion over the next decade to build and expand highways, transit, homes, high-speed Internet and other critical infrastructure that will reduce congestion, bring housing closer to transit hubs and support our province's growth.

We recognize that for our province to grow and succeed, we must build more housing, and building homes requires housing-enabling infrastructure such as roads and water infrastructure. In fact, we've heard from municipalities that one of the biggest barriers to growth is not having the community infrastructure necessary to support new housing developments. That's why we're promoting growth and unlocking housing opportunities by investing over \$1.9

billion through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, to support core projects such as roads and water infrastructure.

The first intake, totalling approximately \$970 million for the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, closed in April 2024 and will support 54 projects, enabling 511,000 homes across 60 municipalities. This investment will bring us one step closer to meeting our goal of building at least 1.5 million homes by 2031. Due to high demand for funding, we also opened a second intake with an additional \$250 million to allow more municipalities to apply by November 1, bringing provincial total for the program to \$1.2 billion. I look forward to announcing the selected projects as part of the second intake in early 2025.

The government is also moving forward with its Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program intake, totalling \$400 million. This funding will help build, maintain and repair core assets such as municipal roads, bridges and culverts to enable more housing. The intake opened on August 21 and will close on October 18. The remaining funding under the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, including eligibility and application intake details, will be announced later in 2024.

We're also continuing to support municipalities by providing direct and stable funding for hundreds of small, rural and northern communities through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, also known as OCIF. We know that current supply chain challenges and inflation have placed tremendous pressure on all governments, including municipalities. That's why, starting in 2022, our government increased its investment for OCIF by \$1 billion over five years, bringing the total amount of funding to nearly \$2 billion. In 2022 and 2023, our government provided \$400 million annually under OCIF, an increase of \$200 million a year from previous years. This year, we continue to provide \$400 million under OCIF.

Ontario's small, rural and northern communities and their residents are essential to the growth and prosperity of this province. We're continuing to put people and communities first.

Another way we're supporting communities is by helping municipalities with their infrastructure planning. In some parts of Ontario, existing infrastructure is degrading faster than it is being repaired or replaced, putting essential services at risk. That is why we implemented the asset management planning for municipal infrastructure regulation. The regulation builds on the progress municipalities have made, while bringing consistency and standardization to their asset management plans. Currently, all 444 municipalities have an asset management plan in place and will continue to make updates to their core infrastructure assets.

In partnership with the Municipal Finance Officers' Association, Ontario is continuing to provide asset management tools and support to municipalities to help them develop and maintain their plans. To ensure more municipalities are set up for success, the government has invested an additional \$1.2 million, so that even more municipalities have access to support. This brings the total funding through the asset management program to more than \$3 million over four years, starting in 2022.

Our investments are also helping communities get shovels in the ground on hundreds of priority projects across the province through jointly funded programs, many of which are already making a real difference in people's lives. One of these initiatives is the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, also known as ICIP. This program represents up to \$30 billion in combined federal, provincial and partner funding over 10 years for local infrastructure projects, which includes \$10.2 billion in provincial investments. That's more than \$10 billion in provincial dollars invested right back into communities for transit, rural, northern, green, community, culture and rec, and other infrastructure.

From a roundabout in the Six Nations of the Grand River that will improve road safety and reliability, to 1,500 metres of water main in Welland that will ensure continued reliable access to clean drinking water and renovations at the YMCA of Northeastern Ontario, to new dedicated median bus rapid transit lanes in Pickering, our investments are improving the quality of lives in communities in every corner of our province.

The intakes under all streams are closed, and funding has been fully allocated. These investments are laying the foundation for Ontario's economic growth while supporting critical services for everyone. But it's not just about brick and mortar; it's about people, the residents who live and work in these communities. It's about improving economic opportunities. It's about being able to connect with others.

We're building these connections by investing nearly \$4 billion in high-speed Internet access. In today's digital economy, those who lack access to reliable Internet only continue to fall further behind. We made a historic commitment to ensure that no matter where you live, every community in Ontario will have access to reliable, high-speed Internet by the end of 2025. Ontario has finalized agreements worth over \$2.5 billion for more than 270 high-speed Internet and cellular projects across the province that will bring access to more than 550,000 homes and businesses. Over 98,000 premises have been connected to date and construction is complete or under way for 75% of our projects. This includes our Accelerated High-Speed Internet Program, through which Ontario has committed over \$1.7 billion of provincial funding with eight Internet service providers.

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Our ICON program has committed over \$590 million of provincial funding to over 70 projects, some of them in partnership with the federal government through its Universal Broadband Fund. And to close cellular connectivity gaps across eastern Ontario, we have invested over \$71 million to the Eastern Ontario Regional Network's cell gap project. As of today, 35 new cell towers have been completed, 51 new co-locations have been built and 308 towers have been upgraded through this project.

Ontario recently announced an investment of more than \$34 million to extend our partnership with South Western Integrated Fibre Technology, SWIFT, to enable access to more than 3,000 additional homes and businesses across southwestern Ontario. In total, our government has in-

vested nearly \$97 million in this project. We have also announced that we are seeking a satellite Internet service provider to bring high-speed Internet access to about 43,000 unserved and underserved homes and businesses across Ontario.

Finally, we're also speeding up construction of provincially funded high-speed Internet projects in communities through the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021, and the Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022.

We've also released guidelines and regulations to help provide more certainty for our partners, to help deliver projects faster. From the small business owner outside of Ottawa who would like to see her products online, to high school students near Sault Ste. Marie who no longer want to sit outside on a cold bench just to get a WiFi signal, we are helping to ensure that every community can participate in the modern digital economy. This is vital to our future prosperity. We're making sure that no community is left behind.

Another way we're continuing to build Ontario is by supporting the design, execution and delivery of major infrastructure projects through a spectrum of models and approaches. These range from a traditional direct approach that is used by several ministries, to more dynamic approaches such as employing progressive procurement or working with the private sector through a range of public-private partnership models, also known as P3s.

Infrastructure Ontario's market updates demonstrate our ongoing commitment to deliver these major projects across the province. Our last market update was released in June and included 25 projects, with 19 projects in pre-procurement and six projects in active procurement, valued at over \$30 billion. Our market update demonstrates our drive and ability to bring critical infrastructure projects to life by getting more shovels in the ground on the projects that people need the most, projects like the Mount Sinai Hospital phase 3A redevelopment project, which reached substantial completion last November. The project led to a large-scale renovation of several key areas of Mount Sinai Hospital, including the redevelopment of the critical care unit; expansion and redesign of the emergency department, operation rooms and surgical services; increased medical and surgery in-patient capacity; and more.

We have also recently reached substantial completion on projects such as the Brampton courthouse addition, the Toronto Region Jail Centre and GO expansion on the Davenport Diamond rail grade separation. Across every corner of the province, we're making incredible progress in our government's plan to build critical infrastructure for our rapidly growing communities.

With rapid population growth, we're finding new ways to get shovel-ready projects moving faster in many communities. For example, we are standardizing the design of new schools, which will cut down planning time and get shovels in the ground faster. This could lead to building schools faster by changing certain processes that will allow shovel-ready projects to move forward. And through the accelerated build pilot program, for example, Infrastructure Ontario has helped accelerate some of Ontario's most

urgently needed projects. This includes the Lakeridge Gardens long-term-care home in Ajax, which was completed after only 13 months of construction, and Humber Meadows in Toronto and Wellbrook Place in Mississauga. Both of these long-term-care homes opened last year.

We're also testing the application and benefits of digital modelling technology, known as digital twins, to help deliver key infrastructure projects such as hospitals, highways and transit faster. From start to finish, digital twins can help project partners involved in the building process have access to timely, accurate and state-of-the-art data to advance the delivery of Ontario's infrastructure for our growing communities. Whether it's prioritizing shovel-ready projects, testing new technologies or standardizing building designs that cut down on project time, we are making sure that families in Ontario are not left waiting for community infrastructure.

As part of our plan to continue building, our province is using a once-in-a-generation opportunity to spur vibrant mixed-use communities around transit stations across the greater Golden Horseshoe. Our Transit-Oriented Communities Program allows us to leverage third-party investment to explore new funding avenues and opportunities to deliver cost-efficient transit solutions. These communities, also known as TOCs, will bring more housing, jobs, retail and public amenities close to transit.

Work is under way to deliver TOCs on 12 future stations along the new Ontario Line, Yonge North subway extension and Scarborough subway extension. Combined, these TOCs will create spaces for approximately 79,000 new jobs and about 54,000 new residential units, including affordable housing. We're also creating new housing and mixed-use communities around new and existing GO and light rail transit stations across the greater Golden Horseshoe, such as at the proposed Woodbine GO station.

To spur more TOCs and transit stations, last year we successfully introduced the Transportation for the Future Act, 2023. This legislation created a new voluntary funding tool, called the station contribution fee, which will allow municipalities to fund the design and construction costs of new GO stations upfront and recover the costs over time through a charge on new developments built around the stations. We recently wrapped up consultations on the proposed regulations to implement the station contribution fee and look forward to sharing more details soon.

Once implemented, this tool will help speed up the construction of new GO Transit stations while also creating opportunities for mixed-use communities around those stations. By building transit where people live and work, we are increasing ridership, reducing gridlock, stimulating economic growth, increasing much-needed housing supply and lowering the cost of building infrastructure for taxpayers. We are taking a bold and innovative approach to city building.

We're also taking an innovative approach to our government's general real estate portfolio, known as GREP, one of the largest public sector realty portfolios in North America. We are consolidating and improving realty management functions across government while supporting a

consistent and holistic approach to provincial real estate decisions. We successfully introduced the Improving Real Estate Management Act in 2024 and the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, 2023, to create a more efficient and centralized approach to how government manages real estate, while improving economic growth and saving taxpayer money.

We continue to leverage our realty portfolio, working with other ministries and Infrastructure Ontario to support provincial priorities such as housing and long-term care. This includes selling off surplus and underused government properties. In Oakville, for example, our government sold surplus property to help deliver 640 new long-term-care beds. In Hamilton, a property was sold to create more than 500 long-term-care beds and over 800 housing units. In Kingston, a portion of surplus lands was sold to Homes for Heroes to build homes in a park-like setting for military veterans.

We're using surplus government properties in communities across the province to help improve Ontarians' lives and create opportunities for economic development, job creation and improved community safety. In Waterloo region, for example, we sold a property, the former Kitchener courthouse, to Waterloo region at its market value. This property has since been returned to productive use as the central division facility for the Waterloo Regional Police Service. This state-of-the-art facility is designed to serve as a prisoner management facility for the entire region, provide space for community-led events and house multiple policing units to help ensure the safety of the community.

Our ministry is also investing \$250 million over three years for capital repairs to address the deferred maintenance in GREP, along with \$103 million for accessibility improvements, which began last fiscal year. We are also optimizing government-owned office space and minimizing third-party leased space across the province to unlock and increase the value of government real estate. Our efforts have led to a reduction of over 430,000 rentable square feet, resulting in a \$16-million annual reduction in costs for the government's office real estate portfolio. Meanwhile, our Community Jobs Initiative will help distribute a greater portion of the provincial agency workforce across the province.

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The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Two-minute warning, Minister.

Hon. Kinga Surma: We're also continuing to work closely with our tri-government partners to ensure Toronto's waterfront is a source of pride for all residents and visitors now and for generations to come. We're also making investments at Toronto's waterfront. Our government is rebuilding Ontario Place to make it a year-round, world-class destination for generations to come. As we rebuild Ontario Place for the future, we will once again make it a place for Ontarians to enjoy, learn and create lasting memories.

In conclusion, I would like to take a moment to thank the hard-working staff in my ministry and at Infrastructure Ontario and at Metrolinx. I am immensely proud of my ministry's work and accomplishments. I look forward to continuing to make progress on our government historic plan and investments to build Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now begin the question-and-answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time.

As always, please wait to be recognized by myself before speaking. All questions and comments do need to go through the Chair.

For deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and staff: When you are called on to speak, please provide your name and your title, so that we have an accurate record in Hansard of who we have here in the committee.

I will start with the official opposition. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Minister. As the critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways, I very much appreciate the chance to ask questions during estimates. I regret that this is such a short opportunity, but I will try to be concise. I will ask that the minister also appreciate the importance of accountability, and we'll endeavour to do that together.

I recognize it's been a busy day so far, Minister. Ontarians saw you on TV today with the Premier at an announcement about the feasibility of a 60-kilometre subterranean highway tunnelling under the 401. I'm sure we'll have lots of time to debate this, and we'll get dragged into the Premier's newest rabbit hole when we return to Queen's Park, but as one of the ministers making the announcement, I would ask: Where in the estimates do we see these costs? This is potentially the largest public infrastructure project we've seen, so will the Ministry of Infrastructure or Infrastructure Ontario be involved with this technical evaluation? And if so, how much taxpayer money is going to go down that rabbit hole?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the member for the question. The member will always have an opportunity at question period when the House returns to ask more questions.

I'm happy to be here. I think the Premier was very clear this morning. I was very pleased to join him to talk about the issues that we're facing in the province and the greater Toronto area, and that's traffic and congestion. It is one of the reasons why the Premier led the way in expanding the subway system by 50% in the city of Toronto and York region. It's also a great motivator to us for building transit-oriented communities—which are included in our estimates, as you can see—so that people can live near transit and not be car-dependent.

But that being said, there is a traffic and congestion issue that we're trying to address. It is not included in our estimates. This is a new initiative that was explained by the Premier today. The Ministry of Infrastructure, Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation will be working together on that feasibility study.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much.

I actually want to pick up where we left off last year, Minister, with our estimates: with questions about Ontario Place. In the ministry's estimates briefing book, on page 68, we see the government has allocated \$88 million for

infrastructure partnership projects, which includes spending on the Ontario Place rebuild. This is just the beginning of hundreds of millions of dollars in planned expenditures to enable this vision for Ontario Place, which includes a 95-year lease for a private luxury spa operator.

I'm asking questions to better understand the processes that are the basis of the minister's spending plans. These are mostly yes-or-no questions, although—here we go.

Minister, one of your first acts as infrastructure minister was to announce the selection of Therme as a partner in the Ontario Place revitalization, following the call-for-development process. Last year, you described the Ontario Place call for development as a “competitive process”. You've used this term, “competitive process,” repeatedly when talking about the integrity of the process. However, we've obtained the government's process participant form for the Ontario Place call-for-development process, which bidders were required to sign. This document explicitly states that the process was, “not a binding process, nor a formal competitive bidding process.”

So my question is, Minister, were you aware that this was not a competitive process when you repeatedly described it as such?

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd just like to remind the member that this is estimates and that questions on policy don't tie into estimates. If there's a question about the money that was being allotted to be spent, that would be very different, but she's discussing policy, not estimates.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I would encourage all members to stay on topic for this set of estimates.

I will go back to MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'll finish the question, because, as I said, this is about the minister's spending plan. Was the minister aware this was not a competitive process when she was just repeatedly describing it as such?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much. I'm happy to take this question.

The province did, through Infrastructure Ontario, lead a call for development. There was great participation in the call for development. I believe that there were close to, if not, 30 or so participants that made submissions that were then evaluated by an arm's-length agency, Infrastructure Ontario, which then came to government with recommendations.

Therme was a successful proponent in that process. And from articles that I've seen in the past, even through procurement with the previous government, Therme was also a participant in that process, as well. That being said, we were successful in selecting, at the time, three very good tenants that would invest—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, I will ask to reclaim my time.

Minister, I reviewed last year's estimates, and we don't need to rehash this. I think you and Infrastructure Ontario were clear about that last time. But what I'm talking about is, the process participant form for the Ontario Place call-for-development process says clearly it is “not a binding process nor a formal competitive bidding process.” You

have called it a competitive process, so I was asking if you were aware it was actually not a competitive process, according to the documentation. So—

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Member Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Again, I'll renew it: There's not a question in there about the finances of it. There's not a question related to estimates. I would request that the member be reminded that this is about the estimates of the spending of the ministry, and there is not a question there about spending.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will remind all members that the questions should be about estimates.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, this is about the ministry's spending and estimates. This is a massive amount of spending. I think that this is our one chance to ask real questions, and for government members to interrupt and try to rag the puck is, I think, a shame. I will move on to the next question, because I don't see an answer there.

The process participant form says that all ideas and content in a bid submission would become the property of the government to use as it pleases. The document also says that the government was free to select a participant that had not met eligibility requirements. The government could even select a participant that had not submitted any bid. The document says the government may waive any and all perceived, potential or actual conflicts of interest. The form required participants to sign a non-disclosure agreement that prohibited them from sharing any information about the process. These are very unusual terms for a procurement process and may have affected the willingness of prospective participants to submit bids. Was the minister aware that this process required prospective bidders to assume such risks?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, back in 2019, we had a call for development which was competitive and included 30 participants. Participants were evaluated by an arm's-length government agency, Infrastructure Ontario, and through that process, recommendations were made to government. At the time, three future tenants were selected: Therme, Écorécro and Live Nation.

I will hand it over to Mike Lindsay to speak about the call-for-development process.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, specifically, I asked if the minister was aware that this process required prospective bidders to assume such risks. I don't need a walk back through the process; it is on record. You've done a good job doing that at the last estimates. Was the minister aware?

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Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, all government procurements under our ministry pertaining to P3 or other large infrastructure projects are led by Infrastructure Ontario, which is an arm's-length government agency.

I will turn it over to Michael Lindsay.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, Mr. Lindsay, if you're able to answer whether the minister indeed knew that this was not a competitive process or that this process required prospective bidders to assume such risks—if you would be happy to answer that, that's what I'm looking for today.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Please go ahead.

Mr. Michael Lindsay: Mr. Chair, for Hansard: Michael Lindsay, president and CEO of Infrastructure Ontario.

MPP, thank you for the question. I would say that such legal language is actually far more common with government procurements than you might otherwise believe. It would be natural for us, as an independent agency running a process on behalf of the government, to have an expansive set of rights for the government in connection to anybody participating to our process. So I think that the exceptionalism of this that you're pointing at isn't as wide as you might think it is.

I will just say that I believe absolutely the call for development process was transparent. It was structured by publicly disclosed objectives of the government. All bidders were evaluated by subject matter experts consistent with those objectives, and recommendations were made to government on that basis.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, I'm circling back, because the actual government's process participant form for the Ontario Place call for development process which bidders were required to sign explicitly states, "Not a binding process nor a formal competitive bidding process." Minister, even this morning, you've again referred to it as a competitive process.

If it says it is not a competitive bidding process that you are requiring them to sign, and later an NDA, I guess I'm wondering why you're continuing to call it a competitive process now. Is this something you were familiar with? Did you already know it was not a competitive process in the government's own writing on the government's own form?

Mr. Michael Lindsay: Michael Lindsay, president and CEO of Infrastructure Ontario. Again, MPP, I would disagree with the characterization of this as not having been a competitive process. Again, procurement documents issued by the government of Ontario—all of its agencies often have expansive rights that are described for the provincial authority, which allow us maximum flexibility in respect of what we can and can't do with bids. We are then governed by custom—and our market expects it—to run competitive processes, which is what we did here.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. If it indeed was intended to be a competitive process, I guess I wonder why the language on that government form explicitly stated otherwise.

I'll move on. The NDP obtained via FOI a copy of an email that was sent on July 17, 2020, when the call for development process evaluation was under way. The email was sent to officials at Infrastructure Ontario and the tourism ministry by a Therme lobbyist, John Perenack of StrategyCorp. Mr. Perenack was warning these officials that the Toronto Star was working on a story about the call for development and Therme's bid. Perenack writes, "Unless otherwise directed, we will not be providing a response." One of the officials contacted was Infrastructure Ontario's Craig Lorentz, who was serving on the Ontario Place bid evaluation team at the time.

Is the minister aware that a Therme lobbyist had contacted a member of the bid evaluation team while the bid evaluation process was still under way?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to say that's out of order. This has nothing to do with what we are here to discuss today.

Again, just to repeat in case I haven't been clear enough: In 2019, we had a call for development. We had participants. We had close to, if not, 30 participants that participated in the process and made submissions. These submissions were then evaluated by Infrastructure Ontario, which is an arm's-length government agency, which made recommendations to government. We have kept the public—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, I'll reclaim my time.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will turn to MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Anything to do with this ministry's spending is before us right now. Ontarians are very concerned that we don't have transparency or an understanding of where the money is going, and now when I have questions about the bid process to ensure that the accountability and the government spending is indeed in line with Ontarians' priorities or that things are done above board—I'm asking a legitimate question. Will the minister answer? Was the minister aware that a Therme lobbyist had contacted a member of the bid evaluation team while the bid evaluation process was still under way? Yes or no?

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I fail to hear anything in that question related to actual spending. We are discussing the estimates of the spending of the Ministry of Infrastructure. Questions that have nothing to do with spending are out of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I would encourage all members to tie their questions directly back to spending and the estimates that are before us today.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

Flip back to page 68, then. As we had talked about, in the ministry's estimates briefing book, page 68, the government has allocated \$88 million for infrastructure partnership projects, which includes spending on the Ontario Place rebuild. I'm asking about the Ontario Place rebuild.

Also, I find it fascinating that the government members, not the minister, are jumping in to protect the minister. I think I have more faith in the minister's ability to answer for herself than some of her colleagues might.

Minister, you don't have to answer, but I am asking you a question. Were you aware that a Therme lobbyist had contacted a member of the bid evaluation team while the bid evaluation process was still under way?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Sandhu.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: The minister has highlighted many times in the House that the process was competitive and fair, as it should be. I think now is the opportunity for the member to ask about the government's spending.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That's not a point of order.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Can you stop the clock?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: You will get that opportunity when—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Sandhu, is this a point of order?

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Oh, my goodness. This is a grown woman who can handle herself, boys—like, honestly.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: You also get a rotation.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you. I will remind the members that they are to bring their questions to the estimates, and secondarily that any point of order should be risen in the format of a point of order through me before going further.

I will come back to MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Minister, I don't know whether they'll let you try again, if you can answer this for yourself, as the grown woman that I have faith that you are.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I will answer the question, and I will say that I think this government does truly understand what government priorities are. I think you could see that reflected in the estimates that we are reviewing today, with the fact that we are constantly increasing not only the operational, but the capital budget for the Ministry of Infrastructure in order to build this province. We are providing municipalities with the support that they need in order to ensure we have the infrastructure at hand to serve communities.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Minister. It is a yes or no; I can see that that's not forthcoming. If it isn't a no, if you aware of this, then I wonder if you were aware of it prior to the government's approval of the 95-year Therme lease on April 20, 2022. That's spending, while we're here at estimates discussing spending—spending of a lot of money, potentially.

I'll move on. That same Mr. Lorentz who I had referred to, who was one of the officials contacted—Infrastructure Ontario's Craig Lorentz, who was serving on the Ontario Place bid evaluation team at the time—then forwarded the email to Patrick Sackville, who is currently the Premier's chief of staff, who wrote: "I understand you've been all over this, so perhaps you've already seen the latest below. I'm available to discuss at your convenience if helpful. I've been crystal clear and very aggressive in my messaging that the rules of the NDA apply, and we will not tolerate external communications." Mr. Sackville responds, "Well aware."

If Mr. Perenack's email was only "the latest," what other such external communications occurred during the call-for-development process?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, the call-for-development process was run by an arm's-length agency, and that is Infrastructure Ontario, which then provided a recommendation to government. But what I will be clear on is that we have been fully transparent on the entire process. We spoke about what our vision is for Ontario Place, to bring it back to life and make it a tourist attraction and destination for families, and we also came back to government with a greater majority. So what you can see in the estimates is the fact that we are spending money to get the site prepared for our future tenants to bring Ontario Place back to life.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): You have two minutes left—a little less.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay.

The NDP obtained evidence via FOI that the government was planning a publicly funded garage near the Therme site at least as early as January 2021, half a year before the government announced Therme in the Ontario Place redevelopment. This is despite the call-for-development document clearly warning perspective bidders the government would not pay for such facilities.

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Were other bidders informed that the government was actually now willing to pay for new parking facilities at Ontario Place and given an opportunity to submit bids based on this new information?

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm looking for a yes or no.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I have a point of order from MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Could the member please direct to where in the estimates binder the spending for that is?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): That's not really a point of order—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, it absolutely isn't, and any policy requiring government resources to implement is part of the spending plan.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: You get the gold star today, Mr. Smith, for interruptions. Well done, you. You've used up a lot of my time, but I have faith that the minister knows what she's talking about and can answer for herself.

So, Minister, I'm asking: Yes or no?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Please bring your comments through the Chair.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I will first respond to the question, and then I will pass it over to Michael Lindsay, CEO of Infrastructure Ontario.

I've been clear in the House that a parking facility is absolutely necessary if we want this to be a tourist destination and attraction for families. We are connecting the Ontario Line and bringing it to Ontario Place, which will make it far more accessible. There is a GO there, but not everyone can take public transit when they're travelling with families, and so this has—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: And I've heard this in the House, Minister. I'll reclaim my time.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Five seconds.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Did the minister inform the Premier or cabinet that under the lease agreement, Therme would be provided with—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): And I thank you. That's the end of the question period.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Today—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you. I have to cut this off. I'm sorry, Minister.

I will now turn to the member of the independents—MPP McMahon, if you have questions—for 10 minutes.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sure. Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. It's great to see you back here at Queen's Park.

I was going to ask questions on the same topic, but I'm just going to switch it up for interest's sake, and I'll go back to that.

I would like to ask questions about schools. The government asked the TDSB for a list of shovel-ready schools. They came back with a list of five, and the first one was Kapapamahchakwew—sorry about any mispronunciation—Wandering Spirit School, and their proposal. Working and investing money and building that school would go a long way towards truth and reconciliation. That school is to be located in Toronto–Danforth.

The second school was St. Margaret's, which desperately needs a rebuild, and it has a long-term-care organization interested in partnering, which is fantastic. That's kind of the way we like to build communities, I think, is partnering an intergenerational ability for kids and seniors to connect. That school is in Scarborough–Guildwood.

The third school is in beautiful Beaches–East York. It's Secord Public School. It has the largest and oldest portapack system in the TDSB system, and that has been waiting for a rebuild since the Premier and I and you, Madam Minister, were at city hall. That's how long we've been waiting—eons ago.

And then, there's the fourth school on the list. So number 4 was Etobicoke City Centre Elementary School, and that was the winner. That is interesting, because a Conservative member of provincial Parliament represents that area, and the other ones ahead of it in the list were not. There's no Conservative rep there. So I'm just wondering what the selection process was to choose that school.

Hon. Kinga Surma: The normal process for school capital program and redevelopment—our government is spending \$16 billion building more schools in the province, but what I understand the process to be is that the school board rates and recommends projects to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education then does an assessment and then provides funding through their capital year program.

What we are doing, though, to help expedite the building of schools, is standardize designs to make it easier so that we can get those schools built faster, and that is our involvement in terms of helping the Ministry of Education build more schools across the province.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But the TDSB listed one, two, three, four, and four was chosen by—

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, I think that would be the appropriate minister to ask, the Minister of Education. My understanding is that the school boards make recommendations and the Ministry of Education evaluates them and then provides funding. But again, I think the more appropriate minister to ask would be the Minister of Education.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: We'll leave that one for now.

Next question is, what is your government doing to invest in cycling infrastructure in Ontario?

Hon. Kinga Surma: You would have heard me earlier speak to the \$10.2-billion provincial funding through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. It is my understanding that through the transportation stream, there were

several active transportation projects that were funded in different municipalities.

I think that one of our priorities as a government is to invest in public transit infrastructure to help move people, which is why we're expanding the subway system in Toronto and York region by 50%. It's why we're building the Hurontario LRT, otherwise known as the Hazel McCallion Line. It's why we provided funding to Ottawa, because we know that it's so desperately needed in terms of helping to ease congestion and traffic.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: That's great. I'm a big transit user, for sure. I also drive, I also walk and I also ride my bike.

I know the Premier is very proud of his brother's—the former mayor of Toronto—record on putting in bike lanes, and bragged about it this week, that he put the most bike lanes in versus previous mayors. So I just wonder if you can give me some concrete examples of bike lanes and other safe cycling infrastructure that your government is investing in, because I know we want to keep all road users safe. There have been six cyclist deaths in Toronto already this year. I myself had a collision years ago, and thankfully I'm here to fight for more—preferably physically separated—cycling lanes.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thankfully, I used to be the Associate Minister of Transportation and I can speak to the fact that we were very involved in presenting the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act, which does have measures in place to keep people safe on the roads.

As well, as I mentioned, there were several projects across the province that were funded through ICIP, which was a \$10.2-billion investment provincially. But, Mr. Speaker, our focus is to invest in public transit, it's to invest in roads and highways, it's to make sure that people have options. We presented a historic subway expansion plan. We're expanding the subway system by 50%. We are going to make it more accessible to millions of people, but at the same time, we also want to make sure that people can get around by car if they so need to.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Right. I think that that's great. You're investing in roads for drivers and transit for transit riders. I'm sure you'll continue to invest in cycling, because we know that for every cyclist that's one less car on the road. We want to keep all Ontarians safe.

Moving along to waste water treatment plants: We heard when we were going around for our regional governance review that a lot of municipalities are having difficulty achieving their housing starts because of the lack of waste water treatment plant capacity, I guess I would say. I know my hometown, Collingwood, had a moratorium at one point on development, and we want to build housing. I'm sure you do, because we're in a crisis. Can you explain how much your government is investing in that and whether that's enough or not—what you're hearing from municipalities?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the member opposite. That's exactly what we heard from municipalities, which drove our announcement in budget 2024 of \$1.9 billion to invest in drinking water, stormwater

and waste water infrastructure for municipalities. There were several communities, as you mentioned, that had moratoriums and such and could not approve more housing units. Therefore, we awarded 54 projects through our \$970-million investment in 60 communities, which will unlock 511,000 homes.

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We have a second stream for water infrastructure which we announced, which closed on November 1. We hope that this will also help unlock thousands of more units across the province. Then we have our core servicing stream of \$400 million for roads, bridges, culverts and other enabling infrastructure

So we're at 511,000 more homes through our infrastructure program, and we hope to do more. We hope we can get to our goal and help support communities to welcome new families.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): About a minute and a half remaining.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Are you hearing from the municipalities that that's enough? Because we know how expensive just even one water and waste water treatment plant is. The initial funding was like it would cover two plants, and you know how many municipalities we have in Ontario. So what are you hearing from municipalities?

Hon. Kinga Surma: An amazing response. The mayor of London: the investment of \$28 million will unlock 17,000 units in the downtown of London. Hamilton: extremely excited because it will help unlock units in their area. Prince Edward county: 5,000 units through our investment there.

Every single community is so excited about the funding that it's receiving, because you're right, the cost of these assets can be quite expensive and burdensome for communities to bear. These facilities can vary in cost, and, sometimes, with their tax base, they don't have enough capital to fund it. But the response has been overwhelmingly positive. It's actually, I think, one of the most successful things that we're doing at our ministry.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: All right.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): About 10 seconds left, if you want it.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): At this time, I will turn to the government. MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Minister, for your very, very important presentation. Also, thank you for all your hard work, and thank you to all your team for being here and participating in this wonderful presentation.

Minister, we are in the middle of the housing crisis. Our government is the one that is working hard to build millions of homes in Ontario. This is great news. We initiated it six years ago.

One of the key initiatives in the plan to bring more affordable housing for Ontarians is to develop more transit-oriented communities. You emphasized this in your presentation, that this is going to add to the housing stock.

I have to personally thank your ministry staff for reaching out to me to involve me in the planning and development of the expansion of the Milliken GO station, which is vital for not only the Markham–Thornhill riding, but Scarborough as well; three or four ridings are going to benefit from this core transit station. It's huge, the pedestrian activities there.

So, Minister, can you please elaborate on how much housing is being developed and how those transit-oriented communities will help the province? This is a great initiative. Personally, I was a municipal councillor before, and we talked about transit-oriented development at the council chamber for 15 years—never materialized. I can see the momentum that is built up by our government under your leadership and our Premier's leadership, and I'd like to hear more about that.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you. It is reflected, actually, in our estimates. We are putting in more resources for our TOC team. The program, led by Infrastructure Ontario and MOI, has now expanded to include the GO rail TOC program as well. Just with the subway expansion and the TOCs involved there, we're building 54,000 units in Toronto and York region.

These units are very important, because they are going to be homes for people. People want to live near transit because it makes their life easier. It eliminates the fact that you have to own a car in order to travel. They'll be on the transit line, and there will be other community amenities that will be negotiated as part of those transit stations. East Harbour, for example, will be home to thousands of new people as well.

So we are proceeding, and that's reflected in our estimates. We're actually adding more resources to our teams in order for us to deliver more because we know how important more housing opportunities are to the people of this province.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you. I'll transfer it over to my colleague.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thanks to the Minister for this informative presentation. You know that we are facing a housing crisis in Ontario with a lot of immigrants, lots of refugees. Lots of the newly landed Canadian immigrants are coming to Ontario. With the federal government's plans to expand accepting more immigrants to Canada, we see the crisis. We see the lack of availability of housing in all the different scales of housing. We have an ambitious plan to build infrastructure, to build those houses, to build roads, to build hospitals, to make these infrastructure projects available so that the municipalities can build up and meet the requirements from a housing and affordable housing point of view.

You attended AMO with us, and you've seen every municipal government has been saying, "We cannot meet the infrastructure costs. We cannot build enough infrastructure to be able to allow more permits on the housing side." They are struggling. How is your ministry putting in some support for those municipalities to be able to expand?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Able to—sorry?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Expand their lands and projects.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Of course. As everyone knows, planning and development is really a municipal responsibility, and so the municipality also has a role to play. They have a role to play in their policies, in their programs, in the permitting, development application process and approvals. That is happening. But I think the mayor of London said it best at one of our announcements: The province is stepping in, and we're helping through our water infrastructure funds and our housing-enabling funds, the \$1.9 billion. We're helping them with some of the capital infrastructure costs so that they could do their jobs better and they could expedite more approvals.

Again, I will reference places, municipalities that cannot approve more housing developments because of that limitation. I believe, through Premier Ford's leadership, we are providing great support to our municipal partners to ensure that they have those very basic core infrastructure services needed in order to welcome more people in their community responsibly.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Chair, if you can indulge me for just a minute, I'm going to ignore your riding, because you're the Chair and can't ask any questions.

At present, we have five GTA members—and yes, Ottawa is part of the GTA. We have somebody from the Ottawa area, and we have two from southwestern Ontario. I'm the only member here who has the Canadian Shield, the forestry industry and mining as part of their riding. We've had some great discussion about some things that have predominantly been southern-Ontario-focused, but we're a government that works for all of Ontario.

When I look at one of the greatest challenges that we have in northern Ontario and in some parts of southern Ontario—and anyone who lives south of the 401 believes that Peterborough is northern Ontario, so it's kind of interesting that way. Everybody in northern Ontario recognizes that Peterborough is not in northern Ontario, but we do share with the Great White North a lot of similarities. The forest cover that we have makes significant challenges in getting broadband and cell service. The fact that we have Canadian Shield makes it extremely difficult to tunnel and run fibre optic into a lot of areas. We have very sparse areas. My riding is roughly the size of Prince Edward Island; I've said that a number of times. We face a lot of challenges.

What we saw during COVID was that high-speed Internet is really becoming the railways or roadways that transformed our economy more than 100 years ago. I've said, wouldn't it be fantastic if you could be living in God's country, my riding, and have high-speed Internet access so you're connected to everywhere else in the world?

You made an announcement with our federal counterparts in my riding about high-speed Internet and the expansion of it, and it was a significant amount of money that we are investing in that. Could you provide an update for us, please, on where we are with that broadband? Because

it's great service in Toronto that everyone has with high-speed Internet, but we need to reach out to the more rural part of Ontario, to the northern part of Ontario and ensure that everyone has access to something that really is transformational in our economy.

1400

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the member. As I said in my remarks, northern Ontario is very critical to unlocking the potential of the entire province. We know, we learned. Actually, this government started investing in broadband before COVID, but obviously during COVID it really did highlight exactly how important it was, when you have to work from home or educate your child from home or run your business from home in a lot of cases, and so we expedited all of our efforts. We've presented two pieces of legislation. We've backed that with a \$4-billion investment. The construction is under way and happening.

SWIFT has basically almost done everything they were supposed to do, and that's why we provided them with an additional \$34 million to add more premises, to help us ensure that everyone is connected. Some 75% of the projects are in initial stages or in some stages of construction, and we formed an executive table with all of the partners involved to make sure that we are addressing issues very, very quickly as they come up. Government will be taking more initiatives in the fall to make sure that we can reach our timeline. And then, of course, we had our procurement for a satellite provider to help us connect the remaining toughest to reach places because of the geography, because of the terrain, because of the remoteness, and so those are in its final stages, and we should have more to say.

But we are doing literally everything possible. We are providing the funding. We are removing barriers. We have executives around the table, with our senior representatives solving issues to make sure that the work is occurring. We are speaking to municipalities. We have technical assistance teams that are providing supports to municipalities so that we can reach our timeline and make sure that no one is left behind.

Mr. Dave Smith: How much time is left?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): About 10 minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith: About 10 minutes?

I want to pick up on the broadband side of it—

Mr. Joel Harden: You can give us 10 minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith: To my colleague from the Ottawa area: No.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Please keep the comments through the Chair.

Mr. Dave Smith: Sorry, Chair—through you to my colleague from the Ottawa area.

I'd like to expand, if I could, on high-speed Internet. I recognize that the Universal Broadband Fund was a partnership with the federal government, but there were a lot of gaps that were as a result of that. So we came up with an ICON project on that—

Hon. Kinga Surma: No, we didn't—that first, and then UBF came after.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay. Basically we recognized that there were going to be gaps when we were working with the federal government on this.

So if I could, you mentioned a little bit about the satellite Internet as one of the possibilities in it. Again, bringing you back a little bit to my own riding, we have the Canadian Shield there. We have a significant amount of forestry. We cannot run the fibre optic lines to all of the areas. One of our service providers, actually—we had a meeting with you about it. He was describing some of the technology that he's trying to advance to do the tunnelling, but the challenge comes with the granite that we have to go through. It doesn't make sense, then, from a cost perspective to try to tunnel through granite to run a fibre optic line.

So the high-speed Internet through satellite is something that really needs to be explored more, really needs to be expanded upon so that we have that fairness, that equity, across all of Ontario for it. If I could get you just expand a bit for me, please, on the satellite component to it. Why we did decide to do that investment, and what do you think the results are going to be for the average person in Ontario who doesn't live in the GTA?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Just a couple of things I want to tackle in that response:

(1) Internet service providers are being creative and innovative. We're seeing new technology that's been deployed to help make sure that they connect every home.

(2) There's also the aerial work that can happen by attaching to poles, which is also ongoing, and we're working very closely with Hydro One and other asset owners in order to ensure that that happens. We've provided a guideline so that it can happen in a safe way, in a cost-efficient way.

(3) The satellite: We had a procurement—it's not finalized yet—where a satellite provider is being evaluated. We hope we can update the public very, very soon. We anticipate the satellite provider will help us connect the homes that have not yet been addressed because of their location or the difficulty, or perhaps the fact that fibre wireless was not an option. But that evaluation is happening, and we will have something to say in the coming weeks and months as to who this provider will be and how many homes that they will help connect. At the end of the day, there will be a service. Everyone will receive a service, 50/10, by the end of 2025—maybe with different technologies.

Then, of course, in order for us to be transparent, we also launched the website so that any resident in any part of the province can look to see where our provincial dollars are being invested for what type of connection, the cost associated with it and the timeline.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Sandhu.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee. It has been such an honour to work with you for the last three years as your parliamentary assistant, and seeing first-hand the investments this government is making, especially at the Ministry of Infrastructure. We are not leaving any stone unturned

when it comes to investing in infrastructure, because we need infrastructure to address the growing population, whether it's building highways or whether it's building long-term-care homes, hospitals or the medical schools.

Most importantly, as your parliamentary assistant, I had the honour to meet with the municipalities. There were 50 municipalities at the AMO conference, and they were very appreciative of the investments this government is making in the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund. There were many projects that they were waiting to apply for from the last many, many years and they never got the opportunity, even though we've been calling on the federal government for more funding in infrastructure. This is kind of the step we have taken alone, because we have heard from the municipalities across the province that water infrastructure is the number one enabler to build housing.

Can you touch more on the HEWSF funding and the \$970 million? How will that benefit the municipalities?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, and it's always a pleasure to work with you as my parliamentary assistant. In fact, you're so good, I think you're going to take all of the question period questions coming up in the fall session. I really appreciate all of the work that you do, helping with all of the municipalities that we meet at AMO.

You're right: Our ministry, with your help, worked really hard to negotiate with the federal government to encourage them to support the water infrastructure program in order to enable housing. Unfortunately, they did not want to participate, but that's okay, because I think the provincial success speaks for itself.

We listened to municipalities; it was their number one barrier. It was a barrier because sometimes the facility just costs so much money that their tax base cannot bear it alone. And so, by investing in these 54 projects across the province, we are unlocking 511,000.

We also heard that they wanted more, which is why we opened up the second intake, \$250 million. And then we also heard that there were other municipalities with different needs, but needs that needed to be met in order to unlock more lands, which is the \$400 million that is also there for municipalities to apply.

So we tried to be flexible but also very focused on the outcome, and I believe that the \$1.9 billion that the PA assisted with in terms of funding housing-enabling infrastructure is the most aggressive housing-enabling program in the country.

Although houses can't be built overnight, we will see the fruit of that in years to come when families are moving into the new subdivisions that are allowed because of this water infrastructure.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Sandhu, go ahead.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Minister, thank you for your response. Recently, just last week, I was in the municipality of Lincoln to announce \$22 million for housing enabling, and they were very appreciative of the fact that this is the largest investment they had ever got from the province. You were in Brampton last month—

Hon. Kinga Surma: I was going to say, Brampton got something too.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Exactly. Also, there are a lot of other announcements that we'll be making in the coming weeks and months.

Can you touch more on the second phase? Because municipalities were very thankful that for those municipalities that were not successful in the first phase, we didn't waste any time to launch the second phase.

1410

Hon. Kinga Surma: That's right. When the member asked about feedback, one of the points that we've heard was the fact that we were able to execute on these dollars very, very quickly. This was the shortest application intake process timeline I think we've ever had at the ministry in terms of what was involved and how quickly we got those dollars and those approvals out the door. And so we're doing it again for the second round.

We know it's going to be very competitive. We had \$2.5 billion worth of asks for the first round, so we know it will be competitive, but again, this is about enabling housing across the province. And again, ministry staff will evaluate those applications and make those recommendations, and we hope that we can get to those 1.5 million more homes in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): A little over a minute left, MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Minister, and all your staff, for being here. I'll be real quick, because I'd be remiss if I didn't thank the minister or her staff about two municipalities in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton: the city of Sarnia, which received, I think, \$8 million, which is going to open up a whole new part of the city for development and a lot of housing; and St. Clair township, which received \$33 million.

I remember meeting with the minister a number of years ago, long before I had the pleasure to work with the minister—anyway, they were very grateful. They received \$33 million.

I've read a number of stories in Toronto and the GTA—\$25 million here, \$30 million there—and they made a great announcement about this \$33 million in Sarnia-Lambton, in St. Clair township, which is very important there because it's going to open up opportunities for both industry and housing, which were at a critical point.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Ten seconds.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Once the Diageo distillery comes, they'd be out of spots. But thank you again, Minister and your staff.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Congratulations to you and your towns.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): At this time, we start the second round of questions. We move to the opposition.

I will remind all members that communication is through the Chair, and please allow for full questions and answers when being addressed.

I turn to the opposition. MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Minister, for being here today. You noted in your presentation that transit-oriented

communities are an important part of what we're looking at in the estimates today. On page 7, in fact, is where we're looking through the details.

As the transit critic for the province, I regret that we're walking into this conversation in the shadow of what happened with Vandyk Properties in Mimico: the bankruptcy, where people in that community who wanted a transit-oriented community are looking at an enormous "hole in the ground"—I'm going to quote the Mimico Village BIA president, Kelly Farrell. That's her assessment, Minister, that that project, given that Vandyk is in receivership, is nothing more than "a hole in the ground" after 10 years.

And I note recent reporting around the Bridge and High Tech stations of the proposed Yonge subway extension, reporting that indicates that the De Gasperis family may actually be personally benefiting from the rerouting of this project. So my question to you is: Were any ministry officials involved in the consultation with this particular project and how it advantages these developers, who we know have close ties to the Premier?

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: You can't impugn motive—that absolutely was.

Mr. Joel Harden: It's not a point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will encourage the member to stick to the estimates that are before us—

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm on page 7, sir.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee):—and the spending on that. Form the questions with relation to the estimates, please.

Mr. Joel Harden: I just did. I'll rephrase the question to the minister, Chair: Did your staff have any consultation with respect to the rerouting—so-called project 3—of the subway, which stands to benefit the De Gasperis family, close friends of the Premier?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much for the question.

In terms of the Mimico station and the fact that it's in receivership, that is truly an unfortunate circumstance. We know that things are very difficult in the market, but that being said, we've preserved our right to negotiate with a future landowner in order to make sure that the GO station sees its expansion and the community benefits are realized, and the city of Toronto is working with us on that.

In terms of the TOC program as a whole, Mr. Chair, there is a process that is followed. Metrolinx—you announce the transit plan and then, of course, there are opportunities—

Mr. Joel Harden: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time.

Hon. Kinga Surma: If I could just finish the question, that would be great.

Mr. Joel Harden: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will come back to MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, I had a specific question. The specific question was: Was any staff from your ministry assigned to evaluate the efficacy of this project 3, this transit-oriented commun-

ity for the High Tech or Bridge TOC? Were any staff from your ministry assigned to work on this?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, there is a process that is followed for all of our TOC stations. Sometimes, there's an existing landowner which then has an ability to partner with government, or at times, Metrolinx has to acquire lands which are then bundled together and go out to the market to collect and compete. The purpose is, if there's an existing landowner—

Mr. Joel Harden: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time.

Hon. Kinga Surma: —that the landowner can make a contribution—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Please let the minister answer the question.

Mr. Joel Harden: No, I'd like to reclaim my time, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I have to go to MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: That's not an answer to the question. Unfortunately, what the people of Ontario learned through that answer, Minister, is that some of your staff may have been involved in this decision or may not. But what reporting is showing that the De Gasperis family stands to personally benefit from a plan that will have 16,000 fewer riders per day. I implore you to investigate and to make public to the people of Ontario whether or not your staff were involved in this particular rerouting of a project.

Can you, today, commit to provide the committee with copies of all of your ministry's agreements with transit-oriented community partners? Can we have copies of those government agreements, please?

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Smith—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The minister is right here.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): One moment, please.

Go ahead.

Mr. Dave Smith: I don't know how many times I have to remind that this is the estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure and that the question needs to be framed in a way that deals with the finances and the estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Mr. Joel Harden: It's not a point of order. I'd like my time back.

Mr. Dave Smith: Now, the member can disagree with me all he wants, but I heard nothing in that question about finances of the Ministry of Infrastructure.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will remind the MPP that our questions should be about our estimates and the materials before us today.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you. Chair, what my friend, who would perhaps think of himself as an ethical goalie, is not missing here is an opportunity to interrupt. However, the agreements the ministry signs with our partners determine how we spend the money, which is the business of the estimates, which is what we're talking about.

So again, Minister, are you prepared to make copies of those government agreements with transit-oriented communities and its partners public? Yes or no?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, there's a process that follows. All negotiations with any landowners are done and led by Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx.

Mr. Speaker, we announced the program in 2020. We announced that particular station in 2022. The mayor was with us. The mayor endorsed the program and called it sustainable growth and development. Mr. Speaker, we are building not only transit in York region, but also 40,000 units—

Mr. Joel Harden: I'd like to reclaim my time, Chair. I'm not having my question answered.

Hon. Kinga Surma: —new homes for families in Ontario.

Mr. Joel Harden: I'd like to reclaim my time.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you very much.

Minister, I respect the fact that you don't want to answer that question, but that's not putting us in good stead six minutes into my time. We have no answer as to whether your staff were involved in a questionable rerouting of a major transit project under your watch—no answer whatsoever—and we have no commitment to provide signed agreements for the expenditures of your ministry to the people of Ontario so we can scrutinize them. We have to take it on faith that these agreements are going to help us build transit, build housing.

As a member of the opposition of the House, I'm not prepared to take things on faith. I want to see those agreements, and I'm hoping you can change your mind by the end of my 20 minutes today. We need to see those public agreements, but so far, unfortunately, the answer to the question appears to be no.

I'm wondering, Minister, if we can switch gears a little bit. I noted in your opening remarks—and I fully agree with you—that the work your ministry does is part of what makes our roads safer. I agree. I think it's important we build infrastructure in Ontario that makes people safer.

I was concerned, however, when the member for Beaches–East York was asking you a question about active transportation infrastructure from the estimates that we're studying right now where you couldn't summon a single project that the ministry has invested in. I'm concerned about that, Minister, because we have had, as the member said, six cycling deaths in the great city of Toronto. We've had the Premier making claims in recent days that active transportation lanes—not only for cycling, but for many modes of active transit—are somehow behind the congestion problems of the city, a problem you've identified, so that's factually incorrect.

So I'm wondering the degree to which you consider it to be the mission of your ministry to make sure that everything that is built in transit-oriented communities and everything that is built by your ministry is safe for all road users.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much for the question. My mission is to build this province. My mission is to make sure that we expand hospitals, and we're investing in 50 of them. My mission is to make sure we get to 30,000 long-term-care beds. My mission is to make sure that children have a good school in which to learn. My mission is to

make sure that there's fast, reliable public transit available for people. And my mission is to make sure that I assist the Minister of Transportation in providing a highway network so that we can get goods to market so that they are less expensive, they can get there quickly and so that families aren't stuck in congestion.

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Also, you ignored my previous answer when I said that through the ICIP program, \$10.2 billion worth of provincial dollars—there were active transportation projects that were funded—

Mr. Joel Harden: I'd like to reclaim my time, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: You missed my point, Minister, with respect: that you couldn't name a single project your ministry has funded. What that leads me to believe is that—the point of view that I've heard through many residents who have contacted me since the Premier's meandering comments about active transportation lanes and congestion is that your government is not caring enough about safety for all road users.

Like the member said, I'm a car driver. I'm a cyclist. Maybe one day, because of the sports I've chosen to play over my life, I'll be a wheelchair user. The point being, we have to make sure that infrastructure is safe. I'm concerned, Minister, that I haven't heard you commit to that.

I'm going to do this, and people will probably get upset about this, but this is a family in Ottawa who lost their son.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I'm sorry, MPP Harden. No props—

Mr. Joel Harden: This is a family in Ottawa who lost their son. This is the dump truck driver who inadvertently ran over their son. These are preventable tragedies, Minister—preventable tragedies. But we are not building our infrastructure in a way that ensures people's safety. We have a leader in this province, the Premier, who is making factually incorrect claims about active transportation lanes causing congestion.

So I am going to ask you again: Is safety a top priority for you in how we build infrastructure in this province? And are you prepared to tell the Premier that some of his rationale for active transportation, which you're funding through the ministry, is factually wrong?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Before the minister answers that question, MPP Harden, I will remind you that props are not allowed. I think all members of this committee understand that props are not allowed during this process, and I will declare you out of order if you use such props again.

Back to the minister.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much. Of course, safety is a priority in everything we do. The hospitals we built, they need to be safe. The highways we built, they need to be safe. There are standards and guidelines that we follow and that proponents follow.

That being said, our job—the Ministry of Infrastructure and Infrastructure Ontario—is to build this province, and we are making that investment: \$190 billion. Our budget has increased this year alone through our very estimates of

\$1.2 billion this year, in order to make sure that we're building housing, in order to make sure that we're building highways, in order to make sure that we're building transit-oriented communities—

Mr. Joel Harden: I'd like to reclaim my time, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: With fairness, Minister, I've heard that speech before. It's well delivered; you've practised it well. But you're not answering the fundamental question I'm posing here. I'm glad we agree on safety in rhetoric, but the actions of the government indicate otherwise.

I want to note for the record, Chair, that there was a woman killed in the west end of the city last night: Julia Cleveland, 46 years old, a pedestrian. Two cars collided, and the cars juttied into the sidewalk and ran Julia over. This was a percussionist, a music promoter in our city. People are grieving. The vehicle that was knocked into the sidewalk ran over lots of sidewalk infrastructure. But do you know what might have prevented that death, Chair? An active transportation lane with a rigid border. So when humans make errors, which we do, there would be something to protect Julia. I would say the same thing for Mr. Robert D'Aloisio, a dentist, an 85-year-old hit and killed by a driver in Sudbury seven years ago—similar situation, no protected infrastructure.

Minister, you're responsible for the safety of the infrastructure that's built under your ministry. You've said you want to make sure that the projects are delivered safe, and your goal is to build, build, build. But do we want to build things that run people over, or do we want to make sure that the Premier is making accurate comments, factually correct comments with respect to the need to keep all road users safe? Is that a priority for you, yes or no?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Mr. Chair, as I've mentioned, we do fund active transportation projects through the ICIP program. But let me remind that member that the municipality is the one that is responsible. It is the municipality that applies to the provincial government for that funding. Municipal roads or municipal parks or other municipal lands are the ones that are used in order to build those active transportation infrastructure—

Mr. Joel Harden: I'd like to reclaim my time, Chair. I'd like to reclaim my time and just remind the minister—

Hon. Kinga Surma: —and therefore are a responsibility of the municipality.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: As I pass the mike in a moment to my friend from Oshawa: I understand there could be legislation before the House where the Premier is going to ask municipalities to make sure that they get his approval. So who is in charge, Minister, in the end? The people you're talking about, or the minister or the Premier, who appear to have their facts wrong with respect to road safety?

I'd like to pass the rest of my time to MPP French.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to take us back to Ontario Place. Regarding the FOI that the NDP obtained about the government planning a publicly funded garage

near the Therme site at least as early as January 2021, the call-for-development document clearly warned prospective bidders that the government would not pay for such facilities. So I was wondering—and I think I've asked this before—were bidders other than Therme informed that actually the government was willing to pay for new parking facilities at Ontario Place, and were they given an opportunity to submit bids based on this new information? And this is a yes or no; we can all read last year's estimates for the other details.

Mr. Michael Lindsay: Mr. Chair, the Clerk tells me I no longer need to state my name. I've arrived in some sense.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Mr. Lindsay, I'm happy to hear from you.

Mr. Michael Lindsay: During the process of call for development, where we had 30 submissions from an international set of bidders—you're right—the call-for-development process asked those bidders to specify solutions for parking in Ontario Place. During the course of any competitive procurement, which is what happened here, we had conversation with those bidders in respect of what was and was not required in order to animate their business models.

We made recommendations to the government on the basis of a call-for-development process that was intentionally designed to try to create some flexibility for the government of Ontario to think about how it would animate Ontario Place. We landed on a multi-tenant solution associated with the redevelopment of Ontario Place. As part of that, based on what we heard through the call-for-development process, we came to appreciate that it would be necessary for the government of Ontario to provide a parking solution to animate all of the uses of Ontario Place. We then—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Then specific—

Mr. Michael Lindsay: Sorry.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, no. And further to that: Were bidders other than Therme then apprised of that change in perspective or approach that the government was now willing to pay for new parking facilities?

Mr. Michael Lindsay: After the selection of the three proponents that we had coming out of the call-for-development process as we entered into the phase of actual commercial negotiations with those counterparties, all of those selected counterparties were advised to the fact that we were considering publicly provided parking at Ontario Place, consistent with the needs not only of those tenants but also, we hope, the hundreds of thousands of people who will benefit from the extensive public realm investments that are happening down in Ontario Place.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. Did the Minister of Infrastructure inform the Premier or cabinet that under the lease agreement, Therme would be provided with a publicly funded parking garage that had been explicitly denied to other bidders prior to the government's approval of the 95-year Therme lease on April 20, 2022?

Hon. Kinga Surma: The parking structure is there to serve all residents. It is there to serve the tenants, and it is there to serve all residents. Again, the Ontario Line will

connect. That will mean that there will be a subway connection to Ontario Place. There's a GO station, but not everyone will be taking public transit to the site.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, I'm going to reclaim my time. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. So I don't think that I'm going to get an answer from this minister on that.

Infrastructure Ontario has refused to disclose its 95-year lease with Therme, citing third-party confidentiality. The third-party-confidentiality exemption under a section 17 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act applies only to information supplied by the third party in confidence, but the Information and Privacy Commissioner has written that a contract between an institution and a third party does not normally qualify as having been supplied, because its terms are mutually generated.

So is the minister claiming that the terms of the lease were supplied by Therme? I guess what I'm really asking is, why is Infrastructure Ontario ignoring this explicit guidance from the Information and Privacy Commissioner?

Hon. Kinga Surma: We're very proud of the tenants that were selected to be at Ontario Place. Not only will Ontarians have activities for families to do, we're also going to see a \$500-million investment on the site and we're also going to see annual dollars for annual maintenance in order to upkeep the site so that families can continue to enjoy it. This is a shift—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. Chair, I'm reclaiming my time.

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The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The question was specific: Is the ministry claiming that the terms of the lease—the 95-year lease with Therme—were supplied by Therme?

Mr. Michael Lindsay: I think, if the intimation is that Therme gave us that term and it was not negotiated extensively with them, that that is not correct, MPP. It was the subject of much ongoing negotiation in view of the capital investment being made by Therme, a private entity, in its facility at Ontario Place.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. In that case, as the Information and Privacy Commissioner has written, "A contract between an institution and a third party does not normally qualify as having been 'supplied'" because its terms are mutually generated. So I accept what you have told me, that if there was negotiation and a back and forth, then it would indeed be a contract.

In that case, why is Infrastructure Ontario ignoring the explicit guidance from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and can we see a copy of the contract, of the lease?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): One minute remaining.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much. Again, we are very proud of the tenants that we selected at Ontario Place—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No. I'm talking about third-party confidentiality, which has been used as the shield,

and Infrastructure Ontario. I'd be curious to know: If this is indeed a contract, then how can you claim third-party confidentiality? It was signed following an opaque and irregular procurement process that the government and paperwork has said, as I mentioned earlier, is not competitive and was not bound by conflict-of-interest requirements. The winning bidder was given a publicly funded parking garage that was refused to other bidders. There was a contract between a winning bidder and the bid evaluation team—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): You have 10 seconds remaining.

Ms. Jennifer K. French:—so there was no Fairness Commissioner. How is secrecy here in the best interest of Ontario?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): At this time, I have to call that session. Thank you, all.

We'll move to the independents. We have 10 minutes through MPP McMahon.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Ask them the same one.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm going to ask about housing. Thanks. I'm my own person.

I know you're a big believer in transit-oriented communities and I just wonder where you're at with the MTSAs.

Hon. Kinga Surma: That question should be directed to the Minister of Housing, as that is his purview, but I'm more than happy to speak about the 12 stations that we're building along our subway lines and the fact—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Have the MTSAs been signed off?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, you're asking the wrong minister. That question is more appropriate for the Minister of Housing. That falls within his purview and that is something—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Presumably you two work together and you would be building housing—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP McMahon, please direct your comments through the Chair.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: All right, thank you—working in silos, I guess.

So now, looking at resilient infrastructure—

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry, peanut gallery. I'll take a minute back on that. Resilient infrastructure—

Interjections.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry, Chair. Can I have my time back? Because I cannot concentrate with the peanut gallery across from me.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I would ask all members to respect the member who has the floor's time.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you.

Resilient infrastructure: The summer of 2024 ranks as the most destructive season in Canadian history when it comes to severe weather. These are figures that were recently released this past week by the Insurance Bureau of Canada. We're all very worried about these storms that are upon us more regularly. And so, based on initial estimates from analytics firm Catastrophe Indices and Quantification Inc.,

weather events in the summer caused a combined total of over \$7 billion in insured losses.

I'm just wondering what your ministry is doing to work on existing infrastructure to make it more climate resilient, and for future infrastructure, what the focus is there.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member. I will remind the member opposite that stormwater infrastructure does fall within the purview of the municipality, but of course, the province is always very willing to help, and that is why stormwater management infrastructure was included as part of the \$970 million. Brampton, for example—the work that they're doing on the stormwater management side will help them unlock more housing, but it will also help protect existing homes, and it will help protect the quality of water.

The best thing we can do is invest in water infrastructure. We need to make sure that water is clean, that it doesn't, because it has nowhere to go, end up in rivers and lakes and end up affecting the aquatic habitat. So one of the best things you can do is invest in stormwater and water infrastructure, which our government is doing with our \$970-million investment. I would encourage municipalities—I will always say this: They have a responsibility to continue investing in their water infrastructure assets.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Are you familiar with when the Financial Accountability Officer came out a while ago about the huge, high cost of inaction? I won't bring up the greenbelt, but that was part and parcel. We need to have our green spaces and be investing in more, and flood protection, just the focus your ministry has on that, taking it seriously.

Hon. Kinga Surma: It's \$970 million worth of focus right now, actually. Thank you.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okey-doke. Now, we'll move along to the Eglinton LRT. What is the total cost to taxpayers to construct the Eglinton LRT, and do we have any idea—any idea whatsoever—as to when it will finally, finally be open for ridership? Because obviously the head of Metrolinx has no idea.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Always happy to speak about public transit, Mr. Chair. The Eglinton Crosstown West extension that we're building—the tunnel-boring machine was actually dismembered, because the tunnelling work is completed, and that line is under way. The Ontario Line is also under way, as is Scarborough, and Yonge North is in procurement. So the subway expansion plan is going very, very well.

The existing Eglinton Crosstown was a project that was started 13 years ago. The project was not initiated by this government; it was a project that was inherited. The Minister of Transportation is working very closely with Metrolinx and the TTC and the city in order to have it completed. It's my understanding that they're now working on integration with the TTC and they are working on final testing. Of course, all of us want that line to be open as quickly as possible, but it's important to note that this was a project that started 13 years ago that our government inherited, and we're trying to make sure that we can finish it and make sure that it is safe for users in the future.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Six of those years have been under this government. What Ontarians don't like to see is finger-pointing. In the past six years and in the past six weeks, six days, six hours—how do we not know when this is going to open? For the businesses that are there, for Ontarians, for Torontonians to jump on that train—you're mentioning that you're keen on building transit. When is it going to open, essentially?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, this is a project that started 13 years ago. You're right; we have been in government six years. We are working very diligently to make sure that it is safe for users when it opens. We are working on integration with the TTC. But, Mr. Speaker, a lot of what happened at the Eglinton Crosstown are learnings that we took. We presented the Building Transit Faster Act in order to remove those barriers to make the process faster for us to build public transit, and we're seeing that as we expand our subway system. Again, Eglinton Crosstown tunnelling is done. Tunnelling at Scarborough is under way. Work on the Ontario Line is under way.

The approach that now we're taking with our proponents, you'll see, is a progressive procurement, an alliance model where we are very much collaborating with our partners. We have a development phase that can be anywhere from 12 to 18 months, where parties sit down together and talk about risk, talk about schedule, talk about project delivery and talk about some of the challenges. That's the model that we are using, and we took those learnings from the Eglinton Crosstown experience so that we can make sure—of course, projects take time, but so that we can make sure that we build them as quickly as possible so that the public can use them.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: In other cities around the world, it wouldn't take 13 years. I lived in Japan; it sure as heck wouldn't take that long—even the six years that you've been in office.

But now we're moving along to the science centre. What has been the loss of revenue from the abrupt closure of the science centre in June?

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Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much for the question. As you know, our government had a very difficult decision that it had to make a number of months ago. Based on an engineering report through Rinkus, we found that it was very urgent. We shared that with the board. The board made a unanimous decision in order to not allow the public to visit the building any longer for safety reasons. The government stands by this decision. There is work on its way in order to build a brand new science centre and also to find an interim location.

I will also note that attendance to the existing science centre has been going down since 2009. I will also note that in the AG's report, the AG specifically mentioned that many of the exhibits haven't been updated in many years, which presents the government an opportunity to build a modern science centre for the future that families can enjoy. We will do so on the waterfront, as well as have an interim location for families to enjoy.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): A little over one minute remaining.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, that's interesting about that report, because the science centre didn't flood in the last storm we had, but the Premier's house did. We're not closing that down, but I guess we can close the science centre down for all Ontarians—just really interesting.

Tell me about the interim place. Where? When? How? People are desperate. In 2024, to close something with science, STEM, tech, is actually completely ludicrous and robbing our youth of future careers and goals and activities. So where's this interim place?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, we did a call-out to the market in order to find an appropriate interim location. We want to make sure that it's accessible, that it has enough space and also that the exhibits can function within that space. The ministry staff are evaluating this as we speak. When we have an update to the public, we will provide it.

It was an unfortunate circumstance that the board of the science centre made the decision to close it to the public, but that is the reality nonetheless. But again, there will be an interim location, and there will be a brand new science centre for the public to enjoy for years to come—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): At this time, I must cut you off, Minister. Thank you. That concludes the 10 minutes.

We move back to the government side. MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Minister, for being here again. One thing I want to ask a question about—no one else has, so I'll ask—is something I walk by every day when I come to work, the Macdonald Block. I'd like to know some progress, where we're at with the Macdonald Block. I think it's going to save a lot of money whenever we can get, I understand, as many as 6,000 Ontario public servants in that building. I know we're renting numerous buildings around the city and the downtown core. Could you give us a little update on that and just where we're at?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you so much for the question. Yes, that work is under way. That work started a number of years ago, and we were able to continue during COVID, which was a very good thing.

Unfortunately, the project has met some challenges, and there is a delay. We've been forthcoming with that delay, and currently, today, we are negotiating with partners to make sure that we can finish the job as quickly as possible. But one of the benefits is that we'll be able to house 2,000 more OPS workers within that complex, which means that it'll give us the ability to reduce our lease space here in Toronto, which, as you know, can be costly.

So we're working very hard. IO is leading the negotiations and terms in order for us to finish that project and get that building ready for the hard-working OPS staff.

Mr. Michael Lindsay: Mr. Chair, I would just highlight that the Macdonald Block complex reconstruction is an excellent example of the unexpected things that happen when you rehabilitate in situ a 50-to-60-year-old facility with unknown conditions associated with it. It's very instructive in respect of what happens when you try to do that.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you.

I'll yield my time to my colleagues.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you, Minister, for all the information you have supplied. The Ministry of Infrastructure has a history of delivering major projects to ensure the needs in the province are met. I'm talking about Mississauga, where we have the LRT, the Hazel McCallion Line. We are talking about the biggest hospital in Canadian history; it's almost close to 1,000 beds. This is going to be the biggest current and historical, as well as the biggest ER in Canada overall.

There are lots of other infrastructure projects, like the water and waste, which we, the municipality, just got to be able to meet our housing needs and affordable housing needs, and different levels of housing needed in Mississauga, which is growing. It's now currently the sixth-biggest city in Canada, and I think very soon is going to be the fifth—coming to that spot now.

Now, the ministry plays a crucial role in this growth in Mississauga and many other municipalities in Canada. We announced that the government is putting a major investment of over more than \$190 billion to help fund major infrastructure projects in the province. Can you elaborate on how this investment will be used towards it and how this will benefit all Ontarians?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much. Peel region and Mississauga are a very big beneficiary of that \$190 billion—you're right—with the most recent Peel water announcement; with Trillium Mississauga, the largest hospital investment in the country; with the Hazel McCallion Line providing public transit for those who live in Mississauga, but also the extension to Brampton connecting Peel region; community centres through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, as well as other funds.

But it's really important to the people of Ontario that when they need health care, they should have a hospital and the capacity there to serve them. They should be able to access public transit reliably and they should have those community amenities and facilities in order to have a good quality of life here for their children and their families. And so, \$190 billion is a historic amount that we're spending on infrastructure, but it's certainly well worth it and Ontarians appreciate it.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for your answer, and thank you very much for adding the South Common Community Centre, which is a huge \$52-million investment. I just didn't want to specifically speak about projects in my riding; I was talking about the general infrastructure projects in Mississauga.

As well, we are hoping—the whole MPPs, the teams of Mississauga and Peel, are working very hard to try to get some coverage and some infrastructure money for the two-way Milton line that's coming, and we need to look into this, please. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Minister. In your presentation, you mentioned how building a home requires so many things. Before you put the shovel in the ground, you have to do a lot of underground work—

Hon. Kinga Surma: Sorry. Can you put your mike up?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Sorry. Minister, in your presentation, you mentioned how building a home requires so many things, so much infrastructure—water, waste water, clean water infrastructure—bringing so many things into that site to build a home.

Minister, the announcement of more funding for municipalities to promote homebuilding infrastructure for housing is an exciting development. We heard over and over again from so many municipalities about critical needs for their infrastructure.

So my question to you: With all of Ontario investing in the Canada infrastructure program—the funding now fully allocated—what is our government's plan for a new federal-provincial funding framework to help municipalities to deal with the reality of climate change adaptation?

Hon. Kinga Surma: The Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, which also supports many active transportation projects, unfortunately came to its conclusion. All of the dollars have been allocated. Our ministry, alongside other ministries and the Premier's office did advocate with the federal government to have another program of that kind where the federal government, provincial government and municipal government would make a contribution and can support different infrastructure projects in the province.

Unfortunately, the federal government did not want to participate, and so that's exactly what led us to announce our \$1.9-billion infrastructure program in the last budget, which predominantly focuses on housing-enabling infrastructure like water and other critical core servicing in order to unlock more homes. Again, the method behind that or the reason behind that was that we heard, during that time we were advocating with the federal government, from municipalities that water infrastructure was mostly the barrier in unlocking homes, unlocking lands for development for more homes.

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So again, it's unfortunate that the federal government did not want to contribute to enabling more housing and to this infrastructure program, but we are very happy that it was included in the budget, and again, the response from municipalities has been overwhelmingly supportive.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Minister.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I'll go to MPP Rae.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I know there's been a lot of discussion about Ontario Place at committee today. I know many people in Ontario are interested in this project, obviously. I'd like to highlight to my Toronto colleagues that it's called "Ontario Place." I know the Minister of Infrastructure here and the Premier have a great vision for that facility and the park and the many amenities are proposed for that through the consultations to make it a place for all of Ontario: southwestern Ontario, eastern Ontario and northern Ontario as well when they come to the beautiful city of Toronto.

And I know it's been needed. Previous governments did not do that needed rehabilitation, and I know our government is taking action on that.

So, I just wanted to give the minister an opportunity—and Mr. Lindsay, if he is so inclined as well—to talk about some of the many consultations over many years, from my understanding, that have gone into the redevelopment of Ontario Place and some of that public feedback that we received from the public at large all across Ontario.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you for that opportunity. I'll pass it over to Michael if there's anything that he'd like to add.

We are very much excited about this project. Governments and legislators have been debating as to what to do with the lands since I was born. Oftentimes, governments have been providing subsidies for many, many years. Now we're in a place where we will have two very good tenants that will contribute to annual maintenance, that will inject private sector money to help us rebuild the island. We will have food and beverage. We will have 50 acres of public realm space. That's 14 acres more than Trinity Bellwoods Park. We will have a functioning, active marina. We will have a new, all-season amphitheatre so that those who enjoy going to concerts can actually go see them in the winter-time.

And we're very excited about the progress that's being made, which is reflected in our estimates today. Site servicing is under way. Rehabilitation of the pods and bridge work are happening. And we have an active procurement on the science centre right now; the science centre will also be a part of this vision.

This will be a destination for people. When people come to Toronto, they will want to go to Ontario Place. They will want to go to the science centre. They will want to see a concert. They will want to walk around the marina and enjoy themselves and have some ice cream. So we're very thrilled about this vision. We're very thrilled about the progress made thus far.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): To Mr. Lindsay,

Mr. Michael Lindsay: Thank you, MPP. You've given me the opportunity to say thank you to the 9,200 people who have participated in the public consultation between 2021 and 2023, as well as to the Indigenous communities that have provided us with feedback on the redevelopment vision, as well as stakeholders at the city of Toronto and elsewhere. It's been exceptionally helpful, I think, to the ministry and to Infrastructure Ontario to have the benefit of that feedback, as it was to have the benefit of the previous studies, of which there are many, about the future of Ontario Place.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Mr. Lindsay, and thank you, Minister. I just have another question, changing topics, though. Minister, thank you for coming—

Hon. Kinga Surma: Is it about SWIFT?

Mr. Matthew Rae: It is about SWIFT. And I want to thank you, Minister, for coming to my riding recently to announce \$34 million with the SWIFT program, but I know it's a part of a larger investment across Ontario with rural broadband. As MPP Smith also mentioned, in eastern Ontario and northern Ontario, it is a necessity, whether it

is for work, school, and any connectivity that businesses may need—even for agriculture as well, with robotics now.

I was just wondering if you could elaborate on how we're ensuring that we're going to meet those very ambitious deadlines that we have set to ensure that people are connected to high-speed Internet by the end of 2025, and what initiatives—and legislation and spending, obviously, at estimates here today—our government will continue to do going forward to meet those ambitious deadlines.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much. It was nice to see you in your riding and announce the \$34 million to help connect 3,000 additional premises.

I'm very appreciative of SWIFT. They provided a lot of good counsel and advice to government when we were building our broadband program. They were already doing a lot of work connecting communities and a lot of their experiences helped guide our policy, and so I'm very thankful to the SWIFT team and very happy that they're taking on 3,000 more premises.

As I mentioned earlier, all of the contracts have been awarded. We are looking at our satellite proponent to help connect the 43,000 remaining premises, but right now, we are working with Internet service providers and asset owners to make sure that construction continues as quickly as possible. We have removed barriers in the past with two pieces of legislation. Of course, we are addressing issues as they come along, and should we need to do more, we absolutely will to make sure that everyone is connected by the end of 2025.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): I go to MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Before I get into my question: You mentioned Ontario Place and one of the things that jumped out to me was ice cream. I really hope that you take a look at Central Smith ice cream from my riding, Kawartha Dairy from Laurie Scott's riding or Chapman's from another MPP's riding.

What I wanted to talk about: Premier Ford is on record multiple times as saying that you can't manage what you are not measuring, and the asset management planning that we have asked municipalities to do, I think, is something that is extremely valuable.

Obviously, with OCIF funding, that is about infrastructure funding. There is funding that comes through another ministry, OMPF, that helps out a lot of the smaller rural municipalities as well. This is invaluable to us. But we really couldn't figure out what's the most appropriate way to come up with a funding formula for those municipalities, for that infrastructure, if we had no idea what they had for assets, what the challenges were with some of those assets and what the lifespan was.

We did some funding in my riding on the causeway between Bridgenorth and Ennismore. We've pointed out a number of times that on some weekends over the summer, there is more traffic on that causeway than some sections of the 401. When we're talking about a community, Selwyn, that has about 9,000 people in total in the township—about 1,200 or so in Bridgenorth and around 700 in Ennismore—that's a massive burden that's placed upon that residential

taxpayer when the township or the county has to come up with the money. This was a \$30-million project to rehabilitate that bridge, for lack of a better term. But we wouldn't be able to figure out where the needs were if we didn't do that asset management plan, if municipalities weren't asked to do that.

So could you elaborate for us then, please, on what truly is the value of the asset management plan and why the Ministry of Infrastructure needs to have that information to determine the funding?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much for the question. That is a very good one.

We're very happy to know that municipalities have all submitted asset management plans to the province. This was something that was initiated even, I think, before my time as the Minister of Infrastructure, but I'm certainly very happy that it's under way.

It has two really big benefits: It ensures that the municipality is being responsible in evaluating their assets to help them with their own budgeting, but then it also provides us information which helps guide our program decisions. We will have a very holistic view of what the condition of assets are in different parts of the province. We have an idea, but now we'll have evidence in order to back that up, and then that will help us drive further investments in the future.

So we're very happy with the work that municipalities have done. We know that there are some smaller communities that may not have the resources, and so we worked hard, alongside AMO, to provide them with supports so that they can meet the timelines and deadlines and be a part of this. And then again, a fund that we're providing smaller communities is the OCIF fund, as you know, which is annual dollars to municipalities and communities. We increased that fund significantly and the feedback from that has been overwhelmingly positive as well.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Minister. I just want to point out—again, excluding the Chair—North Kawartha township is one of my townships. It's about 700 square kilometres. They have 3.4 people per square kilometre. That township, with the exception of MPP Rae, is bigger than the ridings of everyone else that's sitting here. So having that asset management plan, having that funding that comes from the ministry is so valuable when you look at 3.4 people per square kilometre. That's not a very large tax base, having to maintain all of those roads. So thank you very much for that, and I'll turn it over to one of my colleagues.

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The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): MPP Sandhu.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): About two minutes—a little more.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I'll further continue our conversation on broadband. Minister, we understand it is very important for businesses and people to have access to broadband. This is basic infrastructure that every Ontarian should have access to. I have travelled across the province in the last three years to make announcements on your behalf—

those happy announcements connecting communities with high-speed Internet.

I believe the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of having high-speed Internet. Our government is investing nearly \$4 billion to ensure that every household, every business, will have access to high-speed Internet by 2025. Can you further highlight this investment and how many households we have connected so far?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much. I'm always happy to speak about broadband. To date, we have a plan and funding in place to connect 550,000 homes, and then, again, there are 43,000 remaining premises that we are hoping to address. We're working with all Internet service providers, with infrastructure owners, and of course, we're evaluating the satellite procurement that is under way in order to make sure that we connect everybody by the end of 2025.

We're working very closely with AMO and our municipal partners. They have a role to play in this, because the infrastructure is being built in their respective communities and often requires permits and service agreements. So that work is very much under way, and we will continue addressing issues as they arise. We know that the timeline is approaching, but we continue to move forward on the program.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): About 30 seconds left, if you want to add something.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: No, thank you, Chair.

Given the time we have, I want to thank you for your work as the Minister of Infrastructure. Keep up the great work. Thank you.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you.

And I think I owe the Chair an apology. I referred to you as "Mr. Speaker" a couple of times in the heat of debate. I'm just practising for question period. But thank you so much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you.

Thank you, everyone. That does conclude our time for the consideration of estimates today for the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Thank you, Minister. If you'd like a minute to clear the room—you're welcome to stay if you wish, of course, but if you'd like a minute to clear the room before we move on.

Hon. Kinga Surma: It was such a pleasure. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ric Bresee): We'll give it just a moment.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of these estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 4001, ministry administration, carry? All those in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 4003, infrastructure policy, planning and projects, carry? All those in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 4006, government real estate, carry? All those in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall vote 4007, infrastructure partnership projects and agency oversight, carry? All those in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure carry? All those in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure to the House? All those in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried. Thank you.

That concludes our business for today. The committee is now adjourned until October 2, 2024, at 1 p.m.

The committee adjourned at 1505.

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