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**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Ontario Rebuilding
and Recovery Act, 2020

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Wednesday 18 November 2020

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2020 sur la reconstruction
et la relance en Ontario

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mercredi 18 novembre 2020

Chair: Natalia Kusendova
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Présidente : Natalia Kusendova
Greffière : Tanzima Khan

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE**

Wednesday 18 November 2020

Mercredi 18 novembre 2020

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2 and by video conference.

**ONTARIO REBUILDING
AND RECOVERY ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020 SUR LA RECONSTRUCTION
ET LA RELANCE EN ONTARIO**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 222, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of transportation-related matters / Projet de loi 222, Loi modifiant diverses lois à l'égard de questions relatives au transport.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order. We are here for public hearings on Bill 222, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of transportation-related matters.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Thursday, November 19, 2020. The deadline for legislative research to provide committee members with a summary of oral presentations and written submissions is 5 p.m. on Friday, November 20, 2020. The deadline for filing amendments to the bill is 5 p.m. on Monday, November 23, 2020.

We have the following members present in the room: We have MPP Thanigasalam, MPP Bell and MPP Harden. We also have several members participating on Zoom. I will call upon the ones who haven't done the check previously. MPP Vincent Ke?

Mr. Vincent Ke: Yes. I'm in North York, in Ontario.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. MPP Aris Babikian?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Hi. I'm here in Queen's Park in Toronto.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. We also have a call-in member. Could you please introduce yourself and state where you're calling from?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's Mike Harris, and I am here in Ontario.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you, MPP Harris.

We are also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard and broadcast and recording.

To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly

and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Since it could take a little time for your audio and video to come up after I recognize you, please take a brief pause before beginning. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Once again, in order to ensure optimal sound quality, members participating via Zoom are encouraged to use headphones and/or microphones if possible. Are there any questions before we begin?

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Seeing none, it is my pleasure to welcome the Honourable Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation, and the Honourable Kinga Surma, Associate Minister of Transportation. You will have 20 minutes for your presentation, followed by 40 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition and two rounds of five minutes for the independent members as a group. I will give reminders of the time remaining during the presentation and the questions.

Ministers, the floor is yours. Please state your names for Hansard before you begin. Thank you.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Caroline Mulroney, MPP for York-Simcoe and Minister of Transportation and Francophone Affairs. Merci, députée Kusendova, pour votre présentation.

I'm very pleased to take this opportunity to discuss in more detail the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act, which I had the honour of introducing in the Legislature last month. I'd like to thank the committee members for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to hearing your feedback as we work together to get Ontario back on track.

If passed, this bill would accelerate the planning, design and construction of critical infrastructure projects to create jobs and lay the foundation for a robust economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cet ensemble proposé de mesures législatives et politiques soutiendrait la construction de grands projets d'infrastructure, y compris les routes et les transports publics.

Through our government's smart, bold and ambitious investments, we're moving forward with unwavering

determination to get people back to work by building healthier, safer and more prosperous communities.

Across Ontario, we've had to make drastic choices to limit our day-to-day activities to help slow the spread of COVID-19. While we've all felt the impacts of this virus, the burden has fallen most heavily on those least able to manage it.

In 2020, over the February to May period, Ontario employment declined by almost 1.2 million. This year, our national GDP is expected to decline by as much as 6.6%, the sharpest single-year decline since the end of the Second World War.

Whether you're a business trying to get your doors open and pay your employees or a municipality providing critical front-line services while facing historical deficits, 2020 has been incredibly challenging. In a time of so much uncertainty, people are ready to roll up their sleeves and put in the hard work needed to rebuild our province.

C'est pourquoi notre gouvernement a pris des mesures pour tracer la voie de la reprise. En travaillant côte à côte avec la population de l'Ontario, nous allons construire un Ontario plus fort et plus résistant.

As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and kick-start our economic recovery, investing in the province's infrastructure will be critical to our long-term success and prosperity. Now more than ever, we are committed to making targeted investments that support the hard-working people and business owners across Ontario.

I am proud to have introduced the Building Transit Faster Act, which laid the foundation to accelerate our priority subway projects. Earlier this year, our government also introduced the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, which included the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, a piece of legislation that will help us create dynamic mixed-use communities near stations along those subway lines.

Si elle est adoptée, la Loi de 2020 sur la reconstruction et la relance en Ontario s'appuiera sur ces textes législatifs et nous aidera à accélérer d'autres projets d'infrastructure dans tout l'Ontario.

Today, I want to share with you the three pillars of the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act and how they will support our efforts to build a better future.

First, we propose to amend the Building Transit Faster Act. As you know, this act came into force last July. It introduced new measures that streamlined project delivery and supported the accelerated completion of our four priority transit projects for the GTA. Those changes were welcomed by industry, who understand their potential to help create market confidence, remove roadblocks, create jobs, and more.

As Anthony Primerano, director of government relations for the Labourers' International Union of North America, put it, that legislation "will help expedite the much-needed transit infrastructure on time, on schedule and on budget. Cost certainty is essential to create confidence in the market, which will translate into needed construction jobs for our workers."

The proposed amendments that are part of the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act would enable the extension

of measures in the Building Transit Faster Act, as appropriate, to other provincial transit projects by providing regulation-making authority to name such projects. This would help ensure that Metrolinx can apply a clear and consistent legislative tool kit across various projects as we work to accelerate their delivery. It would also help to remove the risks of these projects running over schedule and over budget by providing a backstop measure if we cannot reach an agreement with our partners.

Second, we are proposing amendments to the Public Service Works on Highways Act to provide stronger measures to enforce provisions related to the relocation of utilities for highway projects, which will help avoid unnecessary delays. These changes would add a provision for a court order if a utility company fails to comply with a direction to relocate—like the measures that exist within the Building Transit Faster Act.

Third, we are proposing to extend the measures granted under the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, through regulation, to other provincial transit projects, including GO rail expansion and light rail transit projects, such as the Hurontario LRT.

Ces modifications permettraient à notre gouvernement de déléguer à Metrolinx et à d'autres organismes publics le pouvoir de conclure de nouveaux types d'accords commerciaux pour les collectivités axées sur le transport en commun, dans le cadre de nouveaux projets provinciaux de transports en commun. L'extension de ces mesures nous aiderait à mettre en place davantage de communautés axées sur le transport en commun dans un plus grand nombre d'endroits, afin que davantage de personnes puissent en profiter.

Je tiens à préciser que les mesures proposées, comme celle de la Loi de 2020 sur la construction plus rapide de transport en commun, sont uniquement des mesures de soutien, destinées à éviter des retards importants si nous ne parvenons pas à conclure un accord avec nos partenaires pour la réalisation d'un grand projet.

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Major infrastructure projects create good jobs, improve people's quality of life and have the potential to turbocharge our economy. That's why we're making the largest infrastructure investments in schools, hospitals, public transit, roads and bridges in the province's history. Our government's 10-year, \$144-billion infrastructure plan will ensure our province is ready for the future. These investments will make a difference in the lives of the 14.5 million people who call Ontario home.

With our population expected to grow significantly over the coming decades, we need to set ourselves up to meet future demands. By 2041, Ontario's population is expected to grow by about 30%, and our infrastructure needs continue to grow with it. Plus, Ontario has had a decades-old infrastructure deficit that has seen our municipalities struggle to keep up with repairs to critical infrastructure like roads, sewers, hospitals and more. Meanwhile, cities worldwide have invested in state-of-the-art infrastructure projects that bolster public services. They are already reaping the rewards.

La modernisation de notre réseau d'infrastructure aidera l'Ontario à répondre aux besoins d'une population croissante et à renforcer notre économie—not just from a transportation perspective, but in areas like health care, education and more. We can't afford to wait any longer.

Si elle est adoptée, la Loi de 2020 sur la reconstruction et la relance en Ontario permettra d'accélérer la réalisation d'importants projets d'infrastructure qui dynamiseront notre économie et qui contribueront à remettre rapidement au travail un plus grand nombre de personnes.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup. With that, I'll turn it over to Minister Surma, who will discuss how this legislation supports our Transit-Oriented Communities Program.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, Minister Mulroney, and thank you, Chair Kusendova, as well as all the committee members, for inviting us this morning. Our government is making infrastructure a priority, both to create jobs to help our economy recover and to prepare our province for the future. We have made great progress since our government was elected, but much work remains in our efforts to reduce red tape and simplify policies in the planning, design and construction processes for major public infrastructure projects.

The Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act, if passed, builds on the historic progress made earlier this year with the Building Transit Faster Act and the Transit-Oriented Communities Act. If passed, this legislation will apply these same principles to other provincial infrastructure projects, modernizing outdated approaches and enabling communities to benefit from our investments sooner. We are laying the foundation for the province's economic recovery from this virus, fuelled by growth and driven by the Ontario spirit.

No matter your political affiliation, I think we can all agree that the choices we make today will determine the quality of our lives for generations to come. Our future economic prosperity depends on the success of our smart, strategic and well-planned long-term investments in Ontario's infrastructure.

Our government inherited a stagnant approach to building the infrastructure projects that Ontario needs. This old approach has resulted in decades of inaction, leaving people stuck on congested roads, crammed into outdated transit and without an adequate housing supply for a growing population. There is no time to waste. We must secure our future as Canada's economic powerhouse by accelerating major infrastructure projects so that we can get the economic benefits of our investments sooner.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes these investments even more important. Under the Minister of Transportation and the Premier's leadership, I know we will meaningfully connect people to transit, housing and jobs in new, innovative ways that allow us to rebuild what we've lost, because only by working together will we be able to usher in a new era of bold investment in infrastructure that gets more people back to work safely.

As Ontario's first Associate Minister of Transportation focusing on the GTA's unique transit and transportation needs, I know how important the next decade will be for this region. By 2031, the GTA's population is expected to

grow by 2.6 million, which means almost 7.5 million people will call this region home. By 2046, the number will climb to 9.5 million. People want to build a life in our thriving cities, which is excellent news, but we need to be prepared for the needs of a growing population.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that public transit is critical. So many of Ontario's front-line and essential workers rely on public transit every single day. They need and deserve a more convenient, reliable transit network. That's why our government is taking bold action to make public transit a priority here in the GTA and across the province of Ontario. It's efficient, environmentally sustainable and a solution to the rising congestion issues we're facing.

Building a world-class transit network will give people a more convenient and affordable alternative to driving. Our \$28.5-billion new subway transit plan for the GTA will transform the region's outdated subway system into a modern, integrated rapid transit network that offers more options and reduces travel times to make life easier for the people. It will bring rapid transit to new neighbourhoods and make the GTA far better connected.

But our plan is about more than just building new subways; it's about using the land near stations in a smarter way to build better communities. As part of the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act package, we introduced the Transit-Oriented Communities Act to support our four priority transit projects in the GTA. I'm proud to be leading this program and supporting our efforts to work with municipal and regional partners to build more housing, including affordable housing; create jobs; and offset station construction costs.

Our Transit-Oriented Communities Program will help us create vibrant mixed-use communities on lands needed for station construction or lands already owned by the government, like surplus lands at GO stations, all while saving taxpayer dollars, communities where people can live, work and play within walking distance of their homes and close to transit stations. People will be able to run errands, drop their kids off at daycare and travel to and from work all without having to get into their cars. Under this program, we will save taxpayer money while increasing transit ridership, reducing congestion, creating jobs and homes, and stimulating the economy for years after COVID-19.

Since our government announced our plans to make transit-oriented communities a priority, the response has truly been tremendous. We continue to work collaboratively with the city of Toronto and York region to support Transit-Oriented Communities Program delivery across the four priority subway projects, but we've also heard from other municipalities that want to see transit-oriented communities in their neighbourhoods as well. We are already seeing some take steps to work with Metrolinx to make transit-oriented communities a reality. We need to make it easier and faster for them to do so.

More than ever, underserved communities need more access to public transit, better developments and our attention and our support. It's time to take the principles working here in the GTA and expand them to other provincial

transit projects across Ontario. As I said earlier, decades of inaction mean we have no time to waste. We need to move as fast as possible to get Ontario back on the path to rebuilding and recovery.

This proposed legislation would amend the Building Transit Faster Act and the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, extending the authorities granted under both pieces of legislation beyond our new subway plan for the GTA. These proposed changes would allow our government to delegate authority to Metrolinx and other government agencies to enter into new types of commercial arrangements for transit-oriented communities. If passed, we will apply these same principles to other provincial transit projects such as GO rail expansion and other large transit projects, accelerating the delivery of needed infrastructure in different parts of the GTA and beyond.

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Of course, we are committed to proactive collaboration and will engage the public and other interested parties on transit-oriented-community proposals on a site-by-site basis to ensure local communities' unique needs are understood. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to combine the development of thriving communities with transit planning, city revitalization, suburban renewal and walkable neighbourhoods.

Our Transit-Oriented Communities Program is one of our government's many initiatives that will help generate growth that creates jobs, encourages entrepreneurship, empowers innovation and attracts employers and talent from around the world. This will play a key role in Ontario's economic recovery after this pandemic.

People are relying on our government to help rebuild the province and get people back to work, and that's exactly what we are doing. We will make Ontario one of the best places in the world to work, live and raise a family. I look forward to working together to get Ontario back on its feet.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you, Minister. We will now begin our rounds of questions. We will begin with the official opposition for seven and a half minutes. MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the Associate Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Transportation for coming here today.

The first question I have is around the purpose of Bill 222. The purpose of Bill 222 is to speed up transit construction. The problem is that when I look at the pace at which planning and financial close and transit construction are happening in the GTHA and beyond, I'm seeing some very concerning trends. When I look at Infrastructure Ontario reports, I see very clearly that some key transit projects are already falling behind schedule. My concern is that the legacy of the Ford government is going to be not much because, for some of these projects, it's slated that financial close—that's contract signing—won't even happen until after the next election.

I'd like to give you some examples to get your understanding of what is happening. For example, we've got the GO expansion project, which has already been in active

procurement for two years. The latest Infrastructure Ontario reports are showing that it's already been delayed by another year, from 2021 to 2022.

Then we've also got the Ontario Line. The goal there was 2027, right? I went to the press conference in Etobicoke. In 2027: I saw it many, many times. Already, when I look at Infrastructure Ontario reports, we're seeing that the financial close has been delayed 18 months, to spring 2024—which essentially means that there's a huge chunk of the project from Pape up to Eglinton which would need to be built at the astronomical, never-seen-before pace of construction of three years. That's never been done before.

What I am sensing is that although this bill's purpose is to build transit quickly, what we are seeing with government reports is that key transit projects that you've committed to, the Ontario Line and GO expansion, are already falling behind schedule. What's going on?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, MPP Bell, for the question. You opened by talking about the purpose of the bill. Minister Surma and I talked about why we're bringing this bill forward: to build on the foundations that were laid in the Building Transit Faster Act, to remove a lot of the roadblocks that had traditionally delayed transit projects.

After we introduced the Building Transit Faster Act, we heard from a lot of stakeholders. Then, during the course of the pandemic, we set up ministerial advisory committees; most of the ministries did. Within the transportation sector, we heard from a lot of stakeholders about the need to extend these authorities to other transit projects and to other types of transportation infrastructure projects, as well as to other kinds of infrastructure projects, like long-term care, education—

Ms. Jessica Bell: Minister Mulroney, I would like it if you could focus on the issue of the Ontario Line and the GO expansion projects, because financial close and the process leading up to financial close have nothing to do with Bill 222. Let's focus in on the construction piece.

What I'm seeing here with the delay in financial close is that period—which is often the reason why projects get delayed—is constantly being pushed back. Could you speak to that piece around the Ontario Line and GO expansion? Why are they being delayed?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Absolutely, but I'd like to just lay the context, given that we're here to talk about Bill 222. I'd also like to highlight that since the beginning of the pandemic, as we've all been focused on the health and safety of Ontarians, we have continued to move forward with our four priority transit projects. Even in the middle of the pandemic, we were able to move forward on the RFPs, the RFQs for the Ontario Line, two of them. In August, we announced the request for proposals for tunnelling both for Scarborough and for Eglinton Crosstown West. Those were significant milestones in the procurement process.

I know that it was very well received by the market that in the middle of the pandemic we were able to move forward with these major milestones. So we have not stopped moving forward.

I think what you're referring to with respect to the Ontario Line, perhaps, is the fact that we have decided to split up the procurement for that project. Instead of delivering—

Ms. Jessica Bell: I do want to be clear, though: The whole project was scheduled to be finished by 2027. Even when you split it up, what we're going to see is that a large chunk of the project that is geared towards helping underserved communities is already well beyond schedule. There's not a chance that it is going to be completed by 2027.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: The market will determine what the timelines are. Our job is to ensure that we're putting together a procurement that is successful, that attracts participants from around the world, we hope, so that it can be a globally competitive procurement.

We want it to be successful. The fact that we've attracted three bidders for each is actually a very, very good sign for Ontario, for Infrastructure Ontario and for Metrolinx for this project. That is our goal, and that is what Bill 222 and the Building Transit Faster Act did. It also signalled to the market that Ontario is very serious about getting roadblocks out of the way so that we can deliver a successful procurement—

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for that answer. I'm going to move on because we have limited time.

What I have learned is that some of the main reasons why transit projects get delayed is because governments change their mind on what needs to be built and then the money is not allocated for the transit project being built. When it comes to construction, which this bill aims to fix, that's not actually a big reason for why transit projects get delayed.

So I want to speak about the funding for these projects. This government has announced, many times, that there is a large chunk of money that eventually, in the future, will be allocated to these projects. I don't see it. When I look at the latest budget that has come out and I look at how much money is allocated to transit infrastructure spending, what I see is that the amount of money that is going to transit infrastructure spending for this year has dropped, from \$5.5 billion in your original budget to \$4.7 billion in this current budget, which is a drop of \$700 million.

That is not the action of a government that is on target to meet its transit infrastructure deadlines. It is the action of a government that is delaying. What do you say to that?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I would refer you to the timeline of milestones that I just laid out, showing that we're moving forward with our procurement—

Ms. Jessica Bell: I have the milestones right here—

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I would also say—

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): MPP Bell, I'd like to remind you to make all comments through the Chair. Thank you.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I would also point out that with respect to transit spending, last year we spent \$4.3 billion and this year we will be spending \$4.799 billion—\$400 million more. I think, MPP Bell—

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Minister, my apologies. We are out of time for this round.

We will now move on to the government members. MPP Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Good morning, everyone. Thank you to Minister Mulroney and Minister Surma for your presentation and, of course, for your strong leadership in building our transit projects.

My question is to Minister Mulroney. Minister, during your remarks, you mentioned that from February to May 2020, Ontario employment declined by almost 1.2 million and that for all of 2020, national GDP is expected to decline by as much as 6.6%. Can you tell the committee why it is so urgent that we build transportation infrastructure to help reverse these trends?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, MPP Thanigasalam, for that question. It's clear that the pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for Ontarians from a health standpoint. But from an economic standpoint, it has affected all sectors, including the transportation sector. You've pointed out the job losses, the impact on our national GDP—and it has an impact on our provincial GDP, so we know that there's a long road to recovery ahead.

0930

Ontarians have been coming together. The Premier and all of us talk about the Ontario spirit, the things that we're all doing to help one another. As we look towards the next year and the next few years ahead, we believe that our government needs to do its part to also lay those foundations for an economic recovery.

We've seen through history that when societies have gone through very difficult times, infrastructure has been the solution that government has gone to. There was the New Deal after the Great Depression. After World War II, there was a boost in infrastructure spending. Even here in Canada, after the recession of 2008-09, the Canadian government launched Canada's Economic Action Plan. So we know that infrastructure is the right response to the kinds of challenges that we're facing from an economic standpoint today.

Since our election, we've been talking about an ambitious infrastructure program. We've been talking about \$144 billion in infrastructure spending for the next 10 years. We know that we have an infrastructure deficit. I think the members of the NDP and the members of our government are aligned on the fact that the Liberals did not do enough while they were in office for 15 years—did not work across party lines, did not work across levels of government to deliver infrastructure. We know that while it was urgent before, it's become even more so now.

We want to clear the roadblocks through this legislation so that we can get shovels in the ground, because we know that infrastructure projects create jobs. For every \$100 million that we invest in public infrastructure, that supports about \$114 million in real GDP. We know that our four priority transit projects in the GTA are expected to support up to 20,000 jobs during their construction. That's exactly the kind of economic boost that we're looking for.

We have had the plan; our government has been developing it since our election. We introduced and passed

the Building Transit Faster Act so that we could expedite the delivery of those four projects, but we heard from stakeholders across our economy that we needed to extend these authorities to projects beyond because our economy needs it.

We are all hopeful that, coming together, we'll be able to get through the health crisis, but we have to lay the foundations for a solid and sustained economic recovery. That's what Bill 222 will do.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): We still have three minutes remaining. Do you or any other government members have any further questions? MPP Martin, go ahead.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Sorry, I'm using the three minutes to open my mike.

Minister Surma, I think I want to direct this question to you. You're a GTA member, and I know MPP Bell is as well, so I'd assume that she also hears these things, as I'm sure MPP Ke and MPP Babikian do. I want to know what you're hearing from your constituents. I'm certainly hearing a lot in my riding in the middle of the city about the need for better transit. It's the number one thing that always comes up at the door: how important it is to build our transit and get it going, especially in the Toronto west region, which I abut and I know is your area.

How important is our \$144-billion infrastructure investment plan to stimulating the economy and getting this part of our transit working as quickly as possible? Can you just comment on that?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Absolutely. Thank you very much for the question. It's so important to my constituents, and I'll speak to that first.

Many people in this part of the city feel that they don't have proper access to fast, reliable public transit. For many years, even before the election, my community here has been very, very clear that they want to see investment and that they want this option available to them. We have lots of families, growing families, here. We have lots of newcomers here. We have a lot of seniors here as well. We would like to make it a little bit easier for them to travel throughout the riding and also connect to the city so that they can visit friends and family and not feel so isolated.

In terms of the city of Toronto as a whole, I think you would agree and I think all members on the committee would agree that transportation is always top of mind in every single election, whether it's municipal, provincial or federal. This is something that's very important to people, because it affects their daily lives.

When we can build and expand a subway network—and the investments that we're making will expand the subway network by 50%, serving hundreds of thousands of people. Whether it's saving them 20 minutes of time commuting or 30, or even saving them time from walking and hopping on a bus and then getting on the subway, either way, that's a positive impact on their lives. That means that that hard-working mother can greet her children when she gets home, or pick her children up from

school, or maybe run to the grocery store for dinner, or spend more time with friends and family or whatnot.

This has been an issue here in the city of Toronto and the GTA for 20 or 30 years, where we haven't kept up with the pace of the population growth and the development that we have seen in the city. We're already playing catch-up at this point in time. Given the situation that we are facing with the health crisis before us, it is so important that we use this time to build the infrastructure that the people need so that we can—

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): My apologies, Minister. I'm so sorry, but we are out of time.

At this time, I would like to welcome our independent member, MPP Karahalios, and invite her for her five minutes of questions.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I don't have any at this time, Madam Chair, but thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you, MPP Karahalios.

So we will now go back to the official opposition for seven and a half minutes of questions. MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Minister Mulroney and Minister Surma, for being here this morning.

I have a question that comes out of a debate where I live, in Ottawa. As you know, we have been going through a pretty wrenching debate about our LRT system. Phase 3 of the system, as proposed by the city, would displace 120 units of affordable housing—there's very little of it left in our city—in an area of Nepean called Manor Village. A number of those residents have made representations to our office. They've made representations to the city.

What worries me about this bill and what I would like you to comment on is the powers of expropriation and the lack of compensation that may be facing tenants in a situation like this. We are living in a pandemic, but even before the pandemic, we know there was a huge shortage of affordable housing for low-income families. That's what we're talking about here for Manor Village. So I'm wondering if you could just reflect on what this bill's implications are for this debate we're having in Ottawa.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, MPP Harden, for the question. As you know, Ottawa's LRT project is a municipally run project. Obviously, I'm well aware of the challenges that it's facing. MTO has as much as possible tried to assist where it can, but it is a municipally run project. The powers that would be granted within this bill will apply only to provincially run projects, so I don't see any direct implications for the Ottawa LRT project per se.

But, that said, I'd like to still take a minute to address the concerns about the bill that you're raising, I think, in your question. You're talking about the powers of expropriation. Bill 222 affects property in two ways. One is by exempting properties along the transit corridor from hearings of necessity. That was done in the Building Transit Faster Act, in the previous bill, and it's extended here to other provincially run transit projects, but also to highway projects.

We spoke at length, and MPP Bell and I debated it in the Legislature, about this exemption. The reason we're taking this exemption is because we've determined in the

work that we've done around hearings of necessity that in fact they've actually become obsolete. They don't protect landowners in the way they might have thought that they were being protected. The results from a hearing of necessity decision are non-binding, so they may or may not be followed.

0940

I'll give you an example. In the case of the Eglinton Crosstown, there were 35 requests for hearings of necessity. Five led to actual hearings. For those 30 in between, Metrolinx continued with a good-faith negotiation and arrived at a settlement. Five moved on to hearings and in all cases resulted in a confirmation that those lands were needed. That's what the hearing of necessity is: Are those lands actually needed?

In a transit project, these are linear projects, and often once they've been designated, they're deemed to be necessary. So landowners may not be getting the kind of protection that they were thinking of from hearings of necessity. What they've done is, instead of giving those kinds of protections, they have resulted in significant delays. We're working on an alternative process to take in comments from landowners, such that if Ottawa were a provincial project, we could take in their comments. So we're working on that, and we'll have more on that in the coming weeks and months.

The other element here is access to property. If I can just touch on the other element in this bill—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): I am so sorry, MPP Bell, but all comments do have to go through the Chair.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, Chair. I think MPP Harden has signalled that the answer that Ms. Mulroney has provided is sufficient and we'd like to go to the next question.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I had another point—

Ms. Jessica Bell: We only have a few minutes, so out of respect for the very short period of time we've got—getting back to this, I think MPP Harden also wanted to point out that landowners might get benefits from having their land taken away from them but tenants don't, in Bill 171 or this one.

I want to talk about community benefits agreements. Both the associate minister and the Minister of Transportation have talked about the need to provide benefits to local communities and to create local jobs. What we are finding with the Eglinton Crosstown community benefits agreement is that the targets that need to be met to hire locally, hire disenfranchised community members, hire racialized community members, make sure that some contracts go to helping local businesses that are suffering from the pain of construction—the Eglinton Crosstown is behind on every single one of those targets. The main reason is because there's no enforcement mechanism if the construction company doesn't meet the target.

We're also seeing now, with the new transit projects that are being moved forward on, that there is a real need to provide community benefits, such as in the case of the Jane and Finch community, how they've been begging for

a community centre for so long. They're very concerned that there will be no hard, beneficial commitments in some of these new transit projects.

My question to you is, are you committing to build the Jane-Finch community centre? And can you commit to integrating community benefits agreements into these new priority projects?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you for the question, and thank you for raising the Jane and Finch community hub. It was a significant issue, and members of the community were disappointed, rightly so. We understand how important it is to build the Jane and Finch community hub, and Metrolinx has stated that it will move forward with building that community hub.

With respect to community benefits on our four priority transit projects, the motivation for a lot of these, in addition to building better transit and creating those connections, is to create community benefits. The business cases of the four different lines lay out the specific community benefits that will be created.

That said, we are early in the procurement and so we are still developing ways that we can improve upon creating local jobs. We know, as you pointed out, that there are challenges with the model that was developed and used for the Eglinton Crosstown. We heard it from community groups. We've heard it from labour groups as well. We are working on developing a better approach. It's still, as I said, very early in the procurement to be able to state what that is, but we are looking at examples like the Jane and Finch community hub and like the experience on the Eglinton Crosstown to guide us in ways that we can look for solutions.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you, Minister. We are out of time.

Now I'd like to give it back to the government members. MPP Babikian.

We cannot hear you, MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Sorry. Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Ministers, for your presentation. The residents of Scarborough–Agincourt and northern Scarborough and North York are quite excited to hear the news of the investment because, finally, the dream of extending the Sheppard subway east will become reality in the next phase of our plan.

My question is to Minister Surma. During the Minister of Transportation's remarks, the minister highlighted the impact COVID-19 has had on Canada's economy. This proposed legislation is part of Ontario's stimulus plan to get our province back on track. Expediting transit projects and getting shovels in the ground faster is a crucial part of this. Would you imagine any scenario where someone would be opposed to this historic transit expansion, given this pressing need to get back on track?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, MPP Babikian. Again, thank you very much for hosting me so graciously in your riding when I spoke to your constituents about the importance of expanding the subway network to other parts of the city. I'm very grateful to you.

In terms of the economic situation that we are in today, I think the Minister of Transportation highlighted very,

very well about how important investing in our infrastructure is during difficult economic times.

When I was consulting and reaching out to mayors in the greater Toronto area throughout the pandemic to touch base with them to see what kind of help and support—and to collaborate with them, as you know. Many of the mayors spoke to the very important need of city-building initiatives. Expanding our subway network by 50% and unveiling the Transit-Oriented Communities Program are very much city-building initiatives that will stimulate the economy, that will create jobs, that will make life easier for hundreds of thousands of people.

In terms of the TOC Program itself, really looking station by station at the local community needs, working with the city of Toronto and York region and moving forward with truly building communities that will enhance existing neighbourhoods is so important and critical at this time.

I just want to re-emphasize that public transportation and the investment in public transportation and the traffic and congestion—this is an ongoing issue for 25, 30 years that we have been facing. The population continues to grow, cities continue to boom and develop, and we need to address this long-standing issue. I'm very proud of Premier Ford's leadership. I'm so proud to work for Minister Mulroney, the Minister of Transportation, who has just been such an incredible leader. We're finally tackling this very long-standing issue head on and investing in infrastructure, which is certainly the right thing to do during this very difficult time.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): I believe MPP Ke has some questions.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you, Minister Mulroney and Minister Surma, for your wonderful presentations, and thank you, Aris. My colleague brought the Sheppard subway extension into this issue. It's great news. I will ask a different question.

My question is to Minister Mulroney. During your remarks, you had mentioned there are three pillars to this important piece of legislation. The first of these three pillars is to amend the Building Transit Faster Act so that those measures can be extended to all the provincial transit projects. Minister, could you please tell the committee what other projects would benefit from the extension of the Building Transit Faster Act's powers?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, MPP Ke, for the question. The Building Transit Faster Act was a narrowly tailored bill that would apply only to our four priority transit projects. As I mentioned, we heard from numerous stakeholders that sought an extension of those measures to other transit projects and highway projects.

The proposal before the committee will enable the extension of the measures to other provincial transit projects as applicable, and that will be named through regulation at a future date. That could include, for example, GO rail expansion, light rail transit and/or bus-rail transit projects. The applicability and the impact of those measures will vary based on the nature of the specific project and the stage at which they are. We'll be working with proponents who are bringing forward projects that they wish to have named by regulation, to see if the applicability of

these measures is consistent with their project. But as I pointed out to MPP Harden, it does not apply to municipal transit projects at this time.

As part of Bill 222, it also involves—as you know, MPP Ke—some consultations with municipalities through the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on future extensions of these measures to other projects. What would municipalities like to see? I heard, and Minister Surma heard as well, in our consultations with municipalities at AMO a great desire to see more accelerating measures to help with some of the projects that municipalities have ongoing.

With COVID-19, the deficits that municipalities are facing are incredibly high and difficult to bear. Measures like those that we're proposing here will help streamline the delivery of projects and therefore reduce the costs of those projects. There is a great deal of interest from, as I said, proponents of other light rail transit projects and BRT projects, but also municipalities, to see if there is a way that we can take the measures that we're proposing in Bill 222 and extend them.

Finally, obviously it extends as well to highway projects. Highway construction is core to making sure that Ontario is a safe place to drive, making sure that we rehabilitate and repair our roads and our bridges, but we also have a great deal of expansion work that's under way. We want to be able to work collaboratively with our partners, but we also want to be able to deliver our projects on time and on budget for the benefit of Ontario taxpayers.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much, Minister.

I believe MPP Karahalios does not have any questions at this time. So with that, I would like to thank our ministers for a robust and informative discussion this morning. This committee now stands in recess until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 0953 to 1300.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order. We are here for public hearings on Bill 222, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of transportation-related matters.

I would like to welcome the first set of presenters, but before I do that, I would like to welcome MPP Park, who is with us. If you could please introduce yourself and state where in Ontario you're calling from today.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Hi. This is MPP Lindsey Park. I'm in my office in Toronto.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much.

ONTARIO REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATION

MR. DON BOOTH

MS. VEE LEDSON

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): I would like to welcome our first set of presenters this afternoon. From the Ontario Real Estate Association, we have Jason Lagerquist, who is the head of government relations; Mike

Stahls, chair of the government relations committee; and Bradley Mayer-Harman, chair of the Ontario Realtor Party committee. Welcome. Thank you for joining us.

You may begin. You have seven minutes for your presentation. Please begin by stating your name for the record.

Mr. Mike Stahls: Thank you and good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Mike Stahls. I'm a broker at Royal LePage Real Quest Realty in Orillia, and I'm the chair of the government relations committee at the Ontario Real Estate Association. Joining me today is Bradley Mayer-Harman. Brad is a realtor at Century 21 in Brampton and is chair of OREA's Ontario Realtor Party committee.

By way of background, OREA is the trade organization that represents Ontario's 80,000 realtors. It's our pleasure to be speaking to the committee today in support of Bill 222, the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act.

COVID-19 has brought devastating impacts to the Ontario and Canadian economy. All sectors have been impacted, and the real estate and housing market is certainly no different. Home sellers and buyers have been significantly impacted, with many sellers holding off putting their homes on the market while buyers are remaining on the sidelines, with much uncertainty about how the pandemic is going to impact values and prices.

With the introduction of legislation that will facilitate the creation of new affordable housing construction along transit lines, the government is making it clear that housing will be the engine that helps lead Ontario's economic revival. This new bill will help Ontarians rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic through the creation of more housing options, along with better access to much-needed transit. With home ownership rates on the decline in Ontario, now more than ever young families need the government to be a champion of affordable home ownership by addressing the housing supply crisis and investing in connected communities.

The economic benefits generated by transit-oriented projects have never been more important. Development around transit nodes can bring positive economic impacts to communities across Ontario, encouraging higher spending on construction and creating thousands of jobs in the province. OREA believes that transit corridors have untapped development potential, with transit-oriented communities being key to unlocking more housing.

For the province to encourage new housing supply, it must continue to prioritize transit projects that can support new communities. OREA has developed several recommendations that will help to encourage the development of transit-oriented communities. I'd now like to turn it over to Bradley to provide the details of our specific recommendations. Brad?

Mr. Bradley Mayer-Harman: Hello, and thank you, Mike. As Mike mentioned, I'm Bradley Mayer-Harman and I'm the director for central Ontario at OREA.

The issue of housing affordability and lack of supply has been a chronic problem in Ontario's real estate market. To help provide the province with some practical ideas to help stimulate the economy following the downturn that

has been caused by the pandemic, OREA produced a research paper called Rebuilding Ontario: A Framework for Recovery. The paper was authored by Mitchell Davidson and focuses on how housing can be the engine of Ontario's economic recovery.

One of the recommendations in our paper is for the province to stay committed to transit-oriented communities, which we are pleased to see is a major focus of Bill 222. OREA's recommendation that we put forward is that the province look to expedite development around major transit station areas and the Highway 413 corridor.

When it comes to the growth plan, the major piece still being implemented is a forced density within an 800-metre radius around major transit station areas. With this, many municipalities have indicated a desire to appeal various major transit station area requirements before the 2022 deadline. To encourage a uniform approach for appeal submissions, the government could consider setting out a 90-day timeline for appeal rulings, as well as designating the 25 new stations under the GTA transit plan as major transit station areas requiring densification.

The government's endorsement of transit-oriented development will help create office space and housing in frequently trafficked neighbourhoods and would be consistent with Bill 222, which aims to strengthen development powers and reduce building timelines around new transit stations. Additionally, OREA would like to encourage the government to look beyond transit-oriented development related to rail stations and consider possibilities for critical development near new highways.

As part of its election platform, the government indicated a willingness to build Highway 413, a new corridor that would connect the existing Highway 400 in the north with Highways 401 and 407 in the east. When developing this new highway, the government could consider expediting the development of the surrounding land for new residential properties, increasing the overall housing supply through the growing regions of Peel and Halton. By focusing on encouraging municipalities to increase density requirements around new transit stations and highways, the government will be able to expedite new housing projects near the infrastructure that people use to travel across our province.

As far as as-of-right zoning, with the government's interest in bold policy initiatives related to transit development, OREA believes that implementing as-of-right zoning to encourage transit-oriented communities is one of the key ways to unlock new housing supply in Ontario. As-of-right zoning encourages intensification along transit lines to accommodate transit-oriented communities. These communities are being used globally to encourage transit use, curb urban sprawl, and link housing, jobs and services.

When zoning rules in Ontario were first being created, cities were largely building single-family homes in suburbs. As we look to what Ontarians need today, these out-of-date zoning rules are standing in the way of millennials and their first home in urban areas. In order to influence zoning changes, the government can mandate and establish zoning rules around transit hubs that protect

against the displacement of renters and vulnerable communities living in those areas.

By eliminating low-density zoning near transit and job centres, developers will be able to build affordable housing in these locations so that more people can live near transit and near where they work. In 2019, it was estimated that over 30% of the space surrounding Ontario's major transit hubs was made of single-family homes. It is also estimated that there exists the capacity for up to four million new housing units around the transit stations across our province which, if developed, could support the expected population growth of the province for the next 24 years.

Not only will as-of-right zoning build enough homes to satisfy Ontario's long-term housing needs, but it will also keep thousands of cars off our roads and support our low-carbon transit systems. As-of-right zoning will also support the creation of new jobs across a multitude of sectors, contributing to the province's short- and long-term economic recovery.

I'd like to take a second to pass this back to Mike to finish our remarks—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Unfortunately, the time is up. Thank you very much.

I would like to call upon Mr. Donald Booth to make his presentation. Mr. Booth, you have seven minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Don Booth: Thank you. My name is Don Booth. I'd like to thank the members of the committee for the privilege of addressing you this afternoon.

I live on Gainsborough Road in Toronto, across the street from three tracks, soon to become four. Construction has begun and is projected to last until 2024 or 2025. Since 2017, I have spent hundreds of hours in meetings with Metrolinx. The time spans the period of official consultation mandated by the environmental assessment process and the time since the environmental assessment was approved. I've wrestled with Metrolinx under the Wynne government, and now under Ford.

The current EA process is a sham. At every meeting, from the very beginning, Metrolinx's response to citizen input is to hire people with no knowledge or authority in any project to listen carefully and then to promise to study requests and to meet later to discuss further. In no case has Metrolinx implemented any request, regardless of how minor or inexpensive. The only way that neighbourhoods have been able to mitigate the impact of Metrolinx's plans and construction work has been through loud, public and political protest or by dragging Metrolinx to the Canadian Transportation Agency.

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This government's willingness to wipe the slate clean provides a rare opportunity to create a new process—a more efficient, less costly and more honest process—and to implant a new corporate culture that recognizes the existence of communities along the rails' right-of-way.

I have yet to meet a person who does not support this improved transit or who does not understand that the work that needs to be done is highly intrusive but necessary. I

have also never met anyone who understands why Metrolinx refuses to do even the smallest thing to mitigate the impact of this work on our communities.

Environmental assessment brings together a complex web of laws and regulations. The agency must show that they have lived up to the letter of these rules and, if they have integrity, to the spirit as well. Since Metrolinx is exempt from municipal bylaws, it is only provincial and federal statutes that apply. It's the responsibility of the government of the day to make sure that these statutes support excellent transit serving healthy communities.

Perhaps the most egregious and easiest to fix are the regulations governing noise and vibration. Metrolinx works to interim standards from 1995. One example: Our track is a one-kilometre stretch where all of the homes are located close to the tracks. Homes on the north side will receive a noise barrier; homes on the south side will not. Homes on both sides will experience the same trains every three and a half minutes from 5 a.m. to 1 a.m. Though Metrolinx claims that they go above and beyond regulations, they have stuck to the letter of the law in this case, and it's typical.

The work in our neighbourhood has already begun. Currently working during the day, but soon to switch to late nights, it is incredibly loud, and the work to come will literally shake the ground. From the beginning of the EA process, we have asked again and again for some simple things: an emergency phone number, or a number that we can call when crews point lights in bedroom windows. We've asked for a schedule so that we will know when they're coming, how long they will stay and the nature of the disturbance, only to be told that work will take place over a period of weeks or months over several kilometres of track, and it's useless. The work is so loud that we need to make arrangements to live or work elsewhere. This is incredibly difficult during COVID times.

Every single neighbourhood faces the same issues and every neighbourhood must wrestle with the same public relations teams that offer vague promises to study suggestions and meet again and again. In a spectacular waste of time and resources, Metrolinx was kind enough to arrange a meeting of our community groups with Infrastructure Ontario and their colleagues at Metrolinx who write the agreements with contractors. We asked if they could include a code of conduct and perhaps a few other issues of importance to thousands of neighbourhoods. They refused. Instead, they assured us that contractors will be generous and sensitive to community issues. I'm not sure if irony or humour was intended to be part of the discussion, but I remember laughter.

You now have the opportunity to implement a set of standards and practices that will put Metrolinx's construction work on a level similar to a good contractor. There needs to be a good code of conduct. There need to be world-class regulations of noise and vibration. These are very basic. They boil down to nothing more than, "Be polite, and remember that you're a guest."

But there is a fundamental problem that is more difficult to remedy than noise or a code of conduct because it is difficult to measure or codify, and that is one of

corporate culture. Laws, standards and guidelines are useless unless there is goodwill on both sides. Metrolinx meets serious questions and concerns with obfuscation and blind intransigence.

If I were a member of this government, I would be ashamed. Government agencies are supposed to set a shining example. They should not behave like a rogue, fly-by-night contractor, but that is exactly what we have.

A few things are obvious: Get rid of the interim noise regulations and move swiftly into the 20th century. Pass a series of regulations bringing Metrolinx construction up to the highest standards, just like their train service, which is wonderful.

Perhaps the government or even this committee can tackle the problem of a sick corporate culture. Perhaps this committee could investigate this sick culture, laying it bare by calling community members to testify on the obfuscation and broken promises, and then calling Metrolinx executives to justify their reasons for doing so.

This committee can and should call these executives to task. Let them know that they need to behave in the public interest or they will be replaced. Their behaviour has tarnished the reputation of the government and of the governments preceding it. Take them to the woodshed and make them behave. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you, Mr. Booth.

Before we move to our next presenter, I would like to call upon MPP Fee to confirm her presence and location. MPP Fee?

Ms. Amy Fee: Hi, everyone. I am in Kitchener this afternoon.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay, thank you.

Now I would like to call upon Ms. Vee Ledson to make her presentation. Ms. Ledson, you have seven minutes. Thank you. Go ahead.

Ms. Vee Ledson: Good afternoon, members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

For 16 years, my husband and I have owned a home that backs onto the GO Transit rail line near Woodbine and Danforth in Toronto. Our backyard is 56 feet from the closest of the three existing train tracks. Since purchasing our home, we have welcomed a son into our family, Frank, who is now 10 years old. We bought our home because of its proximity to public transit. It's an eight-minute walk to Woodbine subway station. We believe that Toronto and Ontario need more, not less, public transit.

Back in 2004, there were relatively few trains travelling on the rail line at the end of our backyard. Trains stopped early on weeknights and were very rare on weekends. However, we have seen dramatic increases in the trains over the last 15 years as more riders are commuting into Toronto at all times of the day, seven days a week. Despite the dramatic increase in noise, there has been no mitigation of its impact: no noise barrier of any sort, no interest by any level of government in how those who live adjacent to these busy rail lines are being impacted.

Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone while they're vacuuming, or to read a good book

in your hammock while your spouse mows the lawn nearby? How about tucking in for a good night's sleep in a tent 50 metres from a busy highway? This is increasingly our experience of our yard and our home.

Over the last couple of decades, there has been research into noise pollution and its effects on people's health and well-being. Our municipal, provincial and federal governments all address the issue of noise pollution on their websites. The province of Ontario recognizes the importance of noise in the environment on its website and in its policies, stating that "Noises are considered to be at an acceptable level if they are between 40 and 60 decibels, or match the ambient background noise—whichever is higher. Any sound above acceptable levels is generally considered noise pollution."

I encourage those who don't live near the train tracks to spend a little bit of time in one of the parks or ravines that run adjacent. It will quickly become apparent that a passing train does not "match the ambient background noise" and certainly exceeds 40 to 60 decibels. When a train passes our home, we measure over 60 decibels inside my son's open bedroom window and over 70 decibels in our backyard.

When the fourth line is installed in the narrow swath of land between the third track and our yard, the impact of noise on our quality of life will be ever greater. Couple that with the plan to have trains heading in each direction every five or six minutes, or one train every three minutes, from before sunrise to well after midnight, seven days a week, and the situation starts to look pretty grim.

The planning process for construction of the fourth track thankfully required that Metrolinx conduct a number of assessments to determine how the addition of a fourth line would impact its neighbours, the community members who live, work, sleep, play and study adjacent to the tracks. This sort of assessment is nothing excessively time-consuming, arduous or costly, given the scale, timelines and cost of this project. It was only by virtue of having done some sort of assessment that the impact of increased noise from the fourth line was identified and Metrolinx determined that some of us who are adjacent to the tracks may finally see sound barriers erected.

My husband and I believe in the need for expanding the public transit system in Toronto and Ontario, and doing so as quickly as possible, but it must be done as well as possible too. Transit corridors are not temporary; they will be part of the communities they run through into the future for generations, as far as the mind can imagine people living in our province. Trains will likely run along the tracks at the back of our home for the rest of our lives and our children's lives and their children's lives. The decisions you make now not only affect the residents of Ontario today, but the residents of Ontario into the future.

Back in the early 1900s, the city works commissioner, R.C. Harris, had the foresight to demand that the lower level of the Bloor Street viaduct be able to accommodate a subway in the future. Apparently, this view was not popular with city council at the time, given the added expense. But 50 years later in the 1960s, when the subway was extended across the viaduct, everybody was grateful

for R.C. Harris's foresight, because errors made in infrastructure at the time of construction are even costlier and less likely to be fixed later on.

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This is why I am speaking today. Environmental assessments need to be done in advance of, not alongside, construction. This is just logic. Measure twice, cut once, as the saying goes.

When Transportation Minister Caroline Mulroney says, "We're still going to respect property rights, negotiate in good faith and treat people fairly," I must respectfully take issue with the use of the word "still." "Still" has never happened. The trickle of information our family has received from Metrolinx has left us in the dark on almost all aspects of this project, and only by chance was I able to attend one of the very small number of information sessions. My non-English-speaking neighbours never received notifications from Metrolinx in any language they could read and understand.

Those living along the track have no idea when ear-popping machines will arrive just outside their homes, forcing them to endure weeks of noise. My husband, my son and I, and all the other residents living adjacent to the rail line, need to be given notice. We should know approximately when these machines will arrive. We should know the amount of noise we will be dealing with and whether it is safe to endure it for weeks at a time from morning to night.

Ontarians voted for you because we believe that you will make the right decisions for the long term, not just what is expedient at the moment. For all the families who are or will be enduring mind-numbingly loud construction for days on end without notice, for all the adults, the seniors, the parents, the children and babies whose sleep is being or will be interrupted by transit construction or the result of this construction, I ask you to ensure that transit planning and construction are done right, with the proper consultation, notification and communication. I urge you to recognize that organizations like Metrolinx need more, not less, governance, because citizens of Ontario deserve more, not less, consideration and more, not less, communication. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you, Ms. Ledson. Now we will go to two rounds of questioning. We will start with the government side. You have seven and a half minutes. MPP Harris, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to our presenters who are here today. I hope everybody hears me okay. I was having some volume issues earlier, but I think everything is sorted out.

My questions where I'd like to start off here would be really mostly directed to the folks who are here from OREA. I'm just going to pull up an article and I'm going to read you some stats here, if you just give me a second.

I'm a member, obviously, from the Kitchener-Waterloo area. I have about 40% of my riding in southwest Kitchener, and the other 60% is in three rural townships that do almost an upside-down horseshoe around the city. I believe—if I'm wrong here, which I don't think I am—we're actually the eighth-fastest-growing city, or region,

in all of Canada, and the fifth in Ontario, which is quite substantial.

But one of the things we're lacking here, in a region of about 600,000 people and a catchment area, really, of about a million people, is fast, reliable GO train service. So I have quite a vested interest in seeing service expansion out to western Ontario. I know that MPP Fee, who is my riding neighbour and who is here with us today, also shares those same sentiments.

I just wanted to quickly read a couple of things here. This is an article that I think actually came out today by 570 News or kitchenertoday.com. I'm going to paraphrase a little bit here because we don't have a ton of time, but it says, "The Kitchener-Waterloo Association of Realtors ... released statistics for October on Wednesday, which show 691 residential properties were sold through the MLS that month, which is up 28% compared to October 2019.

It also states that there was an increase of 25.6% in detached homes, 26.4% in townhomes, 34% in condominiums—which we're seeing a lot more buildings going up in uptown Waterloo and downtown Kitchener—and also a 48%, so almost 50%, increase in semi-detached homes. The average price of residential properties increased almost 20% since last year. The average price of a detached home increased almost 22% over last year, and that number comes in at \$742,596.

For those folks who are from Toronto, those might not seem like big numbers. But for us members who are from, I guess you could say, outlying communities of the GTA—and MPP Burch, of course; you'll be seeing a lot of those bigger numbers coming up in the Niagara region as well. You've now started to get a little bit better GO train service there as well, which I think is fantastic.

But I guess my question is: If we're able to build transit faster, we'll be able to build more capacity on these lines. As we see people moving out of Toronto and the GTA to outlying communities where things are a little bit more affordable than the million-dollar price tags for very small homes that we see in Toronto, how do you think this will affect the market? Do you think it's going to be able to allow people a little bit more flexibility? Do you think it's going to allow more homes to be built?

Obviously, when you see increases like we're seeing out here in KW, when you talk about the price of a home versus what it was only a year or two ago, it's almost unattainable for most people, and affordable housing—you know, almost forget it. It's extremely difficult. Do you think this will help lower some of the pricing by getting more people to be able to get in and out of the region easier? Do you think it will spur on developers, like homebuilders, to go ahead and build more housing?

Mr. Mike Stahls: I'll make a comment, and then maybe Brad. Addressing the numbers, first off, we had three months this year during the pandemic where we only had about 40% of the normal number of monthly sales this spring, when we usually have our highest number of sales. The spring market in most parts of the province is pretty seasonal. Those are carried over now, and they're catching up in these other months. The number of sales are certainly

higher, but they're higher because we had so much fewer in the first quarter. That's one thing.

The other is the increase in prices. We're seeing that all over the place, even where I am in Orillia, and I am an hour and a half north of the city. We're seeing that here too, and that's because of a lack of supply. More people are moving out, and there's not the supply to keep up with people, so the prices go up. If there's more supply, the prices don't go up as dramatically, right? They may increase, but they're not going to increase as dramatically.

We don't have people selling. There are some people who don't want to sell right now, because they don't want to move during a pandemic and it's hard to find another place. There are a lot of factors in that.

But to get back to the building of homes: Certainly, we have a number of ideas; we can supply you on that. Expanding the transit—right now, a lot of the current regulations date back to the 1970s. Our communities are traditionally single-family homes, more suburban; they don't have the density. So what we're doing and why we're saying we need some more as-of-right zoning in effect around transit zones is so that those areas closer to the transit can have more higher density than what currently may be allowed in a lot of these communities' zoning, so that we can get more product on the market. And it would be at a lower price point than, say, detached homes, because you're looking at more density—condo-type stuff, that kind of thing—so that it can help people who may also be able to travel to work by transit and not have to have a car, that kind of stuff, or put as many miles on a vehicle.

It's a combination of you need the transit, but you need the zoning there to allow for the product to be built without getting a whole lot of red tape in the way of getting new homes on the market.

I don't know if anyone else wants to comment?

Mr. Bradley Mayer-Harman: Just a couple sentences: I work just outside of Brampton, so I take clients down to Cambridge or down to Niagara all the time. Higher density means more affordable housing. Right now, the larger the home, the more expensive it's going to be, the more buyers that are going to be pushing that price point up. The more you make inventory available, the more access people have to transit systems, the more likely developers are going to have incentives to build there as well. They recognize that millennials like myself—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you very much. The time is up.

Now we will move to the opposition side. You have seven and a half minutes. MPP Burch, go ahead, please.

1330

Mr. Jeff Burch: I have a couple of questions for the Ontario Real Estate Association.

A number of you have mentioned Niagara. That's where I'm from, and that's where I'm calling from. We actually have an article in today's local newspaper about affordability and how we're just on the edge of homes becoming completely unaffordable for people in Niagara. There's a large discussion going on with our local chamber

of commerce and with the real estate association here that you're probably aware of. Some of that has to do with transit.

I'd just like you to comment on the affordability issue specifically. Obviously, supply is one factor in affordability. I'm not sure if it's a very large factor in the present day, quite frankly. Increasing supply of housing does not necessarily increase the supply of affordable housing, as I think we all recognize. Density does not necessarily increase the amount of affordable housing. Transit, specifically—as Mr. Harris mentioned, as transit and GO trains become more of an issue and more of a reality, it's actually increasing the price of real estate.

What are the mechanisms that we can use to address the affordability issue? When we look at the issue of zoning around these developments that are around transit hubs, are you as an association in favour of ensuring that a certain percentage, for example, of those developments are dedicated to affordable housing?

Mr. Mike Stahls: Obviously, we're very much in favour of affordable housing. One part of that is, we're seeing these increases, and dramatic increases, because we have multiple offers on everything. We're getting that all over the place right now. You're only getting multiple offers on things because there's a lack of homes for people to buy. If you've got 10 or 20 buyers for every home on the market, you need more supply, right? That's why getting those increases under control means needing more supply in the marketplace for people.

We're seeing a lot of push because of the dramatic increase in the city and the GTA. People are going further out. This year is, I think, exacerbated because of COVID and more people working from home now. A lot of those jobs will remain at home. They're now able to move further out from the city to areas that maybe they're putting more pressure on them now too. Whether there's transit there or not, we're seeing it all over, even up here in cottage country. It's been a crazy, crazy year, because people just want out of the city now because they can be. So that's another factor.

Maybe Bradley, who works the GTA area a little more, would have more to say on that too.

Mr. Bradley Mayer-Harman: Yes, I'd say that trend—you speak the truth about people who had the opportunity to work less days in the office and more at home. They're going to travel further. Again, I travel hundreds of kilometres in a given week just to show people houses that are reaching their affordable pre-approvals. Niagara and Cambridge—again, I work very much on the west end of Toronto. I'm pretty much delivering these people to you guys because they have no other options here.

I can say this much: When we go there, you guys have a lot of small detached properties, but not as much density as we may experience where we are, in Brampton, or like in the city. It's appealing for these people, but at the same point, I think that's why it's driving the price point up, because the alternatives here are quite small. Having a backyard now is a premium, even when you go to Cambridge or Niagara, from our experience.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Just to follow up, I do realize that the people moving to Niagara and other areas from Toronto and other large urban areas is definitely a factor in driving up prices, possibly the main factor at the moment. However, developers are going to build homes that they can make money on. People moving from large urban centres out to places like Niagara and Cambridge are not people who are going to look for affordable housing. They're people who have money. They sold their homes for more. They're moving to these areas and they're getting much cheaper real estate, even though the price is drastically increasing. That trend is not going to improve the affordable housing issue. If anything, it's going to exacerbate it.

What mechanism do we use to increase the amount of affordable housing in those areas? As I asked before, do you think that designating a certain percentage of developments, which is something that's been used in the past, is an effective way to ensure that we are at least keeping up with affordable housing, much less addressing the issue, which in many of these areas is a crisis?

Mr. Mike Stahls: Jason may have some more details on some of the studies that we've had done.

I guess everyone has a different definition of affordable housing. We're not talking subsidized; we're talking about how to make something affordable in the city. It's going to have to be smaller. You're going to have to allow for smaller and different types of dwellings as well.

But maybe Jason has some input on that one.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: Yes. Thank you for the question, MPP Burch. Designating a certain percentage of housing as affordable is not something that we've considered to date, although I'm happy to take it back and take it up with Mike, who is the chair of our government relations committee, and look at some options that we might be able to bring forward in the future.

I'm just curious: In your perspective, how would you go about designating what percentage of housing needs to be affordable? What constitutes affordable housing, from your perspective?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a mechanism that's already used. As a former city councillor, when a development happens, when you're doing the planning process, part of the planning process is designating a certain part of that development to be affordable. For example—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you very much, MPP Burch. Unfortunately, the time is up.

Now we will move to the independent members. You have four and a half minutes. MPP Karahalios, any questions?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the presenters who are Zooming in today. I have two questions. I will start with Mr. Booth and Ms. Ledson, since you guys haven't had a chance, really, to respond to questions as yet.

I live in Cambridge. I'm the MPP for Cambridge. It is a great community. One thing that is a big issue here, as MPP Harris mentioned, is two-way, all-day GO. But where the station is currently located is central Kitchener. There is no parking. The people in Cambridge want a station in our city, which makes sense. We have a lot of

commuters, we're about 100 kilometres from Toronto—still very manageable. We are getting a highway expansion, which is fantastic.

But I think what people don't realize is the things that you have both commented on today, which is the change in your lifestyle when tracks are added, whether that's having additional tracks or them just being put in. I'd like either of you to comment on what exactly you would like to see when it comes to track expansion, something that we can bring back to the minister, obviously, but things that the people in my community would like to know. What are some of the things you would have liked to see and would like to see moving forward?

Mr. Don Booth: I believe I can address that. It's very important that Metrolinx—who leads this, as far as I know—understands that these tracks really pierce the community, especially when they're coming in for the first time, and that they need to find a way to understand what life goes on where the tracks are currently located if they're extending them or what it will mean to introduce tracks for the first time in a new area.

I'll give you a very small example. There is a little street called Strange Street that kind of intersects the tracks downtown. If you look at the bottom of Strange Street, it might appear to you as just the backs of people's houses and a little parking lot. In fact, it is the beginning of a very healthy and thriving little business spot. There's a brewery there; there's a restaurant. It's the kind of place that, if it is allowed to benefit from a station that's going to be right nearby—the station will feed business and will make life more vibrant.

1340

The current plan is to put in six tracks directly adjacent to this spot, with absolutely no mitigation. It will kill the current business and certainly disallow anything new from going on, and, if I judge from my community, people will leave. People will sell their houses and leave a community that was vibrant, and a place for growing families will be much less so. So it can add to a community, or it can not only detract from the community but kill economic activity.

Does that answer your question?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: It does, yes. Thank you.

Ms. Ledson, did you want to add anything to that?

Ms. Vee Ledson: Yes. One of the questions that I had early days was at what point does the sound barrier get built? The answer I received was that the sound barrier is the very last thing to go in. I'm sure there are practical reasons for that, but I didn't really receive any explanation for why a sound barrier couldn't go in earlier and actually mitigate the noise earlier.

The increase that we've had in trains already, the construction that's going on—I know that those construction vehicles need to access the route, but a barrier is right at the very edge. It's where my property line would meet their property.

There are many things that I think if there was some—

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. Unfortunately, we are out of time.

I would now like to move on to the official opposition for seven and a half minutes. MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, all of our deputants this afternoon, for sharing your thoughts with us. I wanted to follow up with our colleagues from OREA, just carrying forward a point that MPP Burch made.

Am I understanding you clearly, gentlemen, that as an organization, you're not necessarily in favour of inclusionary zoning, as has been approved in other cities and other jurisdictions around the world, to promote more affordable ownership and rental housing? Am I right in that assumption?

Mr. Mike Stahls: Maybe Jason could take that one.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: Yes, thank you very much for the question. I think we're in favour of smart zoning policies that incent the supply of housing. So I don't think we're offside with what you're suggesting, no.

Mr. Joel Harden: Okay. I look forward to any clarification you may offer as an organization subsequent to this, but following some public presentations you made previously, I'm taking the assumption that you're not in favour of inclusionary zoning. It's unfortunate, because the previous Parliament made inclusionary zoning a voluntary option in the province of Ontario, and that was something we thought was a mistake.

What I think is at stake here in the debate over this bill is the fact that we will potentially have a situation that we currently have in Ottawa under a municipal project that I spoke with Minister Mulroney about this morning, where 120 units of affordable rental housing are potentially being removed in an area called Manor Village of Ottawa because they stand in the way of a particular extension of the third stage of LRT.

My question, gentlemen, is: Why aren't we, with policy tools, going to bat to ensure that low-income families have access to affordable rental and ownership housing? And if not, what is the policy tool? The one major policy tool I've seen debated in Ontario is inclusionary zoning. It works for the city of Vancouver. It works for the city of Montreal. Why can't it work in Ontario?

Mr. Mike Stahls: Maybe Jason can respond, but I don't think we specifically delved that deep into that particular topic. Obviously, we want affordable housing; that's a no-brainer. How to go about it, actually telling a builder that they have to have X number of units for every development, is not something, I don't think, we have really looked that deep into as to how that would work and what percentage or anything like that.

Mr. Joel Harden: I would encourage you to pick up the phone and call your colleagues in Vancouver and Montreal, in other countries, because it works. My own family, the Harden family, is actually in the development business in Quebec, and they're required, after 100 units of housing, to make sure that a percentage of that housing is available for affordable ownership and rental housing. What I will say is—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): My apologies; MPP Babikian has a point of order.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think our subject today is the transportation plan and Bill 218. Affordable housing might be a side issue, but focusing

only on affordable housing I think will—we will be losing time on issues relevant to the bill we're discussing today.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you, MPP Babikian. Today we are discussing Bill 222, so I would like to ask MPP Harden to try to focus his comments on the bill we are discussing today. Thank you.

Mr. Joel Harden: Indeed, Chair Kusendova. In referencing something that our colleagues from OREA mentioned, which—they're here to promote the expansion of transit to ensure affordable housing, so I was in fact bridging upon that. I would honestly ask my colleagues to pay attention to the fulsome nature of my remarks. I'm talking about the premise upon which our friends from OREA were appearing today. They want more affordable housing; they think transit projects could contribute to that. I'm asking them to consider that the way in which we do transit projects could actually displace affordable housing. That's what is happening to the residents in Manor Village in Ottawa.

I also want to give some other folks who had a chance to present an opportunity to comment. I'm wondering, from your perspectives—you're living near major transit projects. You have voiced concerns, Mr. Booth, in particular around Metrolinx's handling of its consultation with the community on this. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on that for us today.

Mr. Don Booth: I'm not sure exactly what more you would like me to add.

Mr. Joel Harden: How could they do better? How would you actually feel heard?

Mr. Don Booth: Oh, okay. It's a very difficult question, because it requires goodwill, as I said in my presentation, on behalf of Metrolinx. It requires that they not only give us little bits of information that they pick and choose, but it requires that they understand that the communities through which their trains pass have a certain amount—not only are they entitled to mitigation of the impact of the work, but we hold information that we would love to share with them regarding the nature of our communities, the very detailed and granular aspects of the lives that we live. If they're really smart and really resourceful, not only will they be supplying information, but they could be making a contribution to small groups of people, but also in a much larger way.

A very small example, but an important one: Occasionally, Metrolinx will build a pedestrian overpass over the tracks. Passing over the tracks, especially when they're electrified, needs protection—those tracks are very, very dangerous—so the walkway is enclosed. Passing over one of those walkways now is a whole lot like walking through a maximum security prison. But with a little bit of imagination, the high point of that walkway, the view that it offers, can become the high point in a person's day. Coming home after a hard day, you stop: It's interesting, it's a little bit beautiful and there are a couple of nice details.

It's the kind of thing that enhances the community. Oddly enough, it enhances things like real estate, because it turns a hostile place to live into a nice place to live. It's those little details of life that you come across—and hardly notice, except when they're not there—from time to time

that you go, “No, this is a really cool place. I’m going to tell my friends about it. I want them to move here too.” As opposed to the opposite—

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. We are out of time.

1350

I would now like to move to the government. MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Chair. Once I manage the technical challenge—can you hear me?

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): We can, but faintly. Please speak loudly.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Sorry. I will maybe get my face in here a bit more; maybe that helps. Sorry about that. Once I manage the technical challenge—hopefully I am heard now.

I want to thank all the presenters for coming today and sharing their thoughts with us. I did want to say to Ms. Ledson and Mr. Booth—and I think, Mr. Booth, you presented at the building transit faster committee hearing as well, if I’m not mistaken. I was there too. I do understand some of the concerns that you’ve been raising. My riding is the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence here in Toronto. The Eglinton LRT runs along the south end of my riding and disrupts just about everybody and has been doing so for many years.

Really, I do want to say that although these transit projects of course bring disruption, we all in Toronto, as you both acknowledged, want more transit projects. Sometimes part of this is the painful experience, when you’re in a built-up community like Toronto, of living through the transit projects and the disruption that they bring. So I do acknowledge your concerns, and I share your concerns, as a Toronto resident and somebody living close to ongoing transit projects, of how difficult that is for people to live through, frankly. I do understand that. I want you to know, especially Mr. Booth, as you were here last time as well, that we are reporting everything you say to the minister.

I also have concerns about Metrolinx and how well they have operated up until this point in time, as far as consulting with people and being responsive to the community. I’ve raised these concerns, of course, with the minister. Certainly everything you’re saying we have raised and are raising with the minister to make sure that they can address concerns with Metrolinx and with how Metrolinx works with the community, because that’s an important part of making these projects successful.

The other important part of making these projects successful, frankly, is getting them done as quickly as possible, because the time during which you are massively inconvenienced will then be reduced. That is the intent behind the Building Transit Faster Act. It’s to try to build the thing so we get it done and so the inconveniences are more confined in time.

But I do want to say that we are working with, and our Ministry of Transportation is working with, Metrolinx to try to have a better process by which to work with the community. I really wanted to talk about that.

Maybe I could just go to OREA to ask this question for a starter: When the province is trying to collaborate with industry associations such as yourself and with community organizations, community members etc., what do you think are some of the things that we can do to be more collaborative and work better together? Because so much of this is coordination. I’m just wondering if any of the members of OREA want to talk about how you feel we can address these collaborative issues better.

Mr. Mike Stahls: I feel we’ve had, actually, a great relationship with all parties for a while on much of what we deal with. I like to see the collaboration that we have had, to be honest with you, and thank all parties for listening and giving us their time.

But Jason, being a staff person at OREA, would maybe have more insight into how that connection works and what might work better.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: Thanks, Mike. And thank you very much, MPP Martin, for the question. Just building on Mike’s point, I think that the government—not just the government, but quite frankly all members of the Legislature—do a really good job of collaborating with OREA on different issues. We’ve had several meetings on this bill and others. It’s very important for us to hear the perspectives of all parties in the Legislature on this and all issues. I really think that everyone deserves a lot of credit for the level of collaboration that we’ve seen both on this bill and on many other bills and issues that have come up.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Okay. I know with our Eglinton LRT project, for example—I heard MPP Bell yesterday dismiss construction delays as not significant delays in these transit projects. That struck me as not accurate, from the experience that I have been privy to. I think she was suggesting that other delays were more important. Government changing its mind, I think, is the one she put forward; I’m sure that happens too.

But construction delays are quite a significant issue, as I understand it, in getting these projects to move forward. One of the things we’re trying to address in this bill is this coordination so that these kinds of delays are minimized as much as possible. I’m just wondering if your group has any insights as to how we can improve upon that even more and whether you think that these are the sources of some significant delays so far on our transit projects, like the Eglinton LRT, and if we’ve learned some things that we could improve upon so we can get out of people’s neighbourhoods and communities faster.

Mr. Jason Lagerquist: That’s a great question, MPP Martin. Thank you so much. From my understanding, a major part of this legislation that we’re talking about today is about streamlining processes and cutting red tape to enhance the ability to complete these projects quicker, so it would minimize the amount of disruption that we heard.

I must admit I’m not familiar with—I haven’t seen MPP Bell’s comments, so I can’t comment on that specifically. But I do think more generally that this legislation, if passed, will go a long way to help move some of these major transit projects along more quickly to help minimize disruptions.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Booth, did you want to tell us what you'd like—I think someone asked you this already, but further, if there are ways that you think we can help speed this up as a way of getting out of your community sooner and making sure that we've coordinated appropriately with community groups along the way. Is there a way to do that?

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): I am so sorry, but we are out of time.

I will now return to the independent member, MPP Karahalios.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Mr. Booth, you can answer that question that MPP Martin posed to you during my time, if you'd like, because I do not have a question.

Mr. Don Booth: Sure, thank you. Really, I can only address processes that have to do with the relationship between Metrolinx, the various governments and the community. As I said, the process as it currently exists is a complete waste of time, because, frankly, it's dishonest. It's really, really important, from the very inception of a project, that there be a very clear dialogue between all of the parties involved, because everyone is affected.

We need to do this quickly, but we need to do it well, because it's really hard to change things afterwards. Doing it well doesn't necessarily take a long time, but it does take some time. And it's worth taking that time to do it well so that everyone really does gain from it.

The other thing that I should say is—and it's related, because partially it's, "Let's get these things done and let's get these people out of our communities quickly"—they're going to be there for a while anyway, and it's essential that the time that they spend there makes the least impact possible.

One very, very quick win that the minister could have would be to standardize sections of the agreement that Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario make with the contractors so that they specify aspects of the way the work is done, so that it minimizes impact on the communities. All contractors know these things; it's just a question of insisting that they be done—simple things like contact phone numbers, simple things like if you're using generators, they must be silenced generators, especially if you're using them in the middle of the night.

1400

There's a long list of details. I'm not a contractor. This isn't reinventing the wheel, but if it's just a standard part of Metrolinx contracts: "Here's how to be a Boy Scout"—that's kind of an ancient way of putting it, but "Here's how to behave yourself." Just put it in the contract. The contractors know they have to do it. The contractors know that if they breach their contract, there will be a penalty, and we'll have them there for whatever time is required. We hope that they will work efficiently, but let's make sure that they do it with respect. The costs are negligible compared to the cost of destroying communities, which is happening in some cases.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): We have one minute remaining.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you very much.

Mr. Don Booth: I'm sorry I didn't provide anything more. I could dance.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Seeing no further questions, I'd like to thank our panel this afternoon. Thank you very much.

LIUNA

MR. ERIC YAPP

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): We can now move on to our next set of presenters. We have with us Jason Ottey, the director for government relations at LIUNA. Thank you very much. You have seven minutes for your presentation. You may begin by stating your name for the record.

Mr. Jason Ottey: Good afternoon. My name is Jason Ottey.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): You may begin.

Mr. Jason Ottey: Thanks.

At LIUNA, we have a long and storied track record of working with the government and private sector employers to deliver infrastructure projects, from hospitals to highways. LIUNA members have anchored construction projects such as subways, LRTs and highways, the very systems that move Ontario from point A to point B. We take a positive and proactive, progressive approach to ensuring a safe workplace for our members and providing them with well-paying jobs. We're proud to lead initiatives that aim to increase diversity and inclusivity in the construction industry, and we're continuing to develop strategies to remove racism, sexism and other forms of workplace violence from the jobsite.

Previous transit planning has resulted in gridlock and failed to render effective results. The investments that the province makes today must support Ontario's tomorrow. The province's infrastructure projects are an opportunity to invest in reliable transit to support the region's growth. Reliable public transit offers the greatest benefit to currently underserved communities. Ontario's transit projects will bring vital relief to existing lines, make high-order transit accessible for more communities and speed up commutes across the province.

The C.D. Howe Institute estimates that the GTA loses up to \$11 billion a year in lost productivity due to gridlock. The Toronto Region Board of Trade says it costs approximately \$125 per household each year. These two figures are a few years old, and I think we all know the situation has not improved since. It's only getting worse, unless we update it.

All parties agree that we need more transit and better roads across the province, and we need to build it now. This is the infrastructure that gets our people in to work on time, food to our grocery stores and essential supplies to our hospitals and long-term-care facilities.

The GTA is expected to be the fastest-growing region in the province. It is projected that the GTA population will grow by 2.6 million by 2046. This means over 9.5

million people will call this region home. From a transportation perspective, this should be a wake-up call for all of us. Simply put, the population is going up, and we need infrastructure that is accessible and efficient to meet the growing demand. Public infrastructure and urban planning must be ready to accommodate our province's expanding population.

The Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act will support the construction of better-connected highways, public transit and transit-oriented communities. This will allow our region to break the gridlock and unleash the GTA's full economic potential. The Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act will streamline the project delivery process while ensuring a fair and responsible approach to development. Major transit highway projects inevitably involve the relocation of people, buildings and utilities. What is important is that that be fair and that they be duly compensated in that process.

By reducing red tape, the bill will help keep construction projects on time and on budget. LIUNA believes the cost certainty created by this legislation will establish confidence in the market, which will translate into more jobs in our industry. There will always be naysayers who do not like the plan, the route or the investment, but the vast majority agree that they just want it built.

This bill will allow our industry to do what we do best, which is to build. It means that Ontarians will see results faster. Transit-oriented communities are a holistic approach to developing our local economy. Transit opens the door to opportunities through accessibility. Ontarians will be able to commute to economic hubs with far fewer delays. It means less time spent commuting and more time spent with family members.

Ontario's urban centres are growing. The neighbourhoods have to accommodate that. Building transit-oriented communities is critical to sustaining urban growth. As labourers, we live in the communities that we help build. Transit-oriented communities enable our members to get to those places they want to go in far less time.

From our perspective, there are obvious benefits to our members. The economy was hit hard by the COVID pandemic. This act would serve more to us today. It will lay the foundation for a strong economic recovery, which will benefit generations to come. The passage of the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act will help accelerate transit, highways and projects throughout the province, which will speed up economic recovery for LIUNA members, their families and those involved in the projects.

The government's focus on building communities and public infrastructure is matched by some of their recent legislation. Ontario's new skilled trades strategy will create more opportunities for construction workers to start their apprenticeships. Across the province, skilled trades are in high demand. As the government invests in these infrastructure projects to help recover the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, we need a strong plan to address that skilled trades shortage.

Ontario's plan will enable more people, including youth, people of colour and Indigenous community members, to get well-paying, high-demand jobs that come through apprenticeships.

That's pretty much the sum of my remarks. I can take questions, if you like.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much.

Now we will move on to Mr. Eric Yapp for his seven minutes. You may begin by stating your name for the record.

Mr. Eric Yapp: Hi. My name is Eric Yapp. Just an introduction: I'm a Toronto native. I've lived here for over 50 years of my life, only leaving to go to university—away from the city and came back. I've lived in my neighbourhood, which is just north of the Danforth in what's called the Golden Triangle, Pape and O'Connor, for over 21 years with my wife, three teenaged boys and a dog.

As many of my friends have moved off to the suburbs, I'm a loyal Toronto supporter. I've lived here all my life, like I said, and we've stayed. I'm a real urban person. I'm pro-transit. I also am part of PACCT, which is the Pape Area Concerned Citizens for Transit. We're a pro-transit community-based group that believes we need to build transit properly, to build it right. We desire consultation and communication through the engagement period, particularly the Ontario Line north portion, which runs from Pape station all the way up to the crossing of the Don Valley and into Thorncliffe Park.

I have spoken on Bill 171, only a few months ago. Now that Bill 222 comes out, it seems like this gives the government even more power and less oversight on the existing bills that it amends: Bill 171 and two others.

I do have a bachelor of economics degree from the University of Western Ontario, and I have studied and definitely know the macroeconomic tools that governments use in times of economic crisis. Some of the examples that come to mind are Maple Leaf Gardens being built in only 18 months after the Great Depression—even the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco being built in that period. So a lot of infrastructure projects were certainly built in the 1930s. In the United States, they had FDR's New Deal.

But of course, times have changed since the 1930s. We did have a shovel-ready project—which people like to talk about in infrastructure, “shovel-ready”—and that was called the downtown relief line. This government went ahead and changed and stopped that project to build the Ontario Line.

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The timing of this bill and the consultation process are highly questionable. We were given two days to respond, to submit for speaking today, and only a couple more days to sign up and do our research, which is inadequate in my estimation. This isn't really a fair public consultation. This feels like a ticking of a box, to say that it's been done. As it relates to Bill 171, when I know there were quite a few speakers, no changes happened as that bill went into its readings.

We're past the one-year anniversary of the announcement of the Ontario Line, and we have held as a group three meetings with Metrolinx. We've been promised public consultation; however, there has been very little consultation. It has been very one-sided, us pulling information. Metrolinx is really meant to be an arm's-length, independent body, but this act gives unbelievable power to that organization. It really seems that it's just an extension of the government.

A government should listen to its people. The government should listen to the taxpayers and the voters who put them in power. I don't feel that we're getting that kind of consultation and opportunity and engagement, particularly as it relates to the routing and some of the environmental oversights that are happening.

We understand that the levels of expropriation and powers from the government to be able to do this for transit projects are unparalleled, which really goes against some of the private property rights that have been established and part of our framework for over 100 years. The ability for a small homeowner or business owner to be able to have any kind of remedy has been removed by some of the legislation.

Metrolinx's record recently on public expropriation has not been stellar. There are two particular areas that hit the media over the summer. One was the Jane-Finch community centre and the other one was the Hamilton LRT, where the expropriation has not been done in a manner that really was in consultation or transparent with the communities. In the case of the Hamilton project, homes and businesses were expropriated, only to be told that they were not needed as that project was shelved. This is exactly the type of thing we're trying to stop this time around, this unnecessary disruption to homeowners and business owners.

We've seen a real turn against the environment with some of the legislation. Living near the Don Valley system, I've been in the trails through the pandemic as a form of physical and mental exercise. I've seen three deer sightings. I've seen other wildlife: foxes, rabbits. I've watched the salmon migration up the river. I wouldn't call myself a tree-hugger, but I definitely see that the environment is finally rebounding after years of neglect. What we're talking about, building infrastructure right in this area, could undo years of this area rebounding.

The additional legislation really seems to be targeting the environment, and there are some examples of other types of MZOs, minister's zoning orders, in cases like Duffins Creek in Pickering or the West Don Lands. This again seems like an abuse of power by the government, being able to override the municipalities' right to govern and zone their own areas.

This government also seems to be very hypocritical in its position on some of these transit projects, an example being the Eglinton LRT. Over a nine-kilometre stretch in the west portion will be buried underground at an additional cost of \$1.8 billion, when that portion of Eglinton is over six lanes wide plus additional greenspace that was

allocated for an LRT future, years and years ago. And yet, this is Doug Ford's riding and therefore that portion of the line will be underground.

COVID has been an unprecedented change in all of our lives, but the one thing it is also doing is keeping people at home. This is changing ridership and transit patterns. I do agree: We are pro-transit. I am pro-transit. Most of the time I've ridden the TTC to jobs in downtown Toronto from my home in midtown. But we need to understand that and we need to allocate that—and understand what the ridership levels will do to the funding of this project, and how we're going to pay for it if ridership levels don't come back.

From residential construction projects, the adage called "measure twice and cut once" seems to apply here. We're trying to rush to build things faster, but faster isn't always better. If we're going to cut a billion things and cut it up into small pieces, we're then going to be trying to mash it together. I really think that the overall length of the project is still the same, but we need to invest more time at the beginning of these projects to understand the impact of the routing, the environment. Then when it's done, with that type of consultation, the end result will be the same. That concludes my presentation.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. I will now invite the government to begin their seven and a half minutes of questions with MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Madam Chair, before I ask my question, I would like to correct the record. Earlier today, I misspelled the number of the bill. It is 222, not 218. My apology.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much, MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Now, my question is to Mr. Ottey. As you may know, our government stands with and supports our skilled tradespeople. Our 10-year, \$144-billion infrastructure plan cannot be delivered without our dedicated and hard-working skilled tradespeople. Can you tell the committee how this historic transit project will help get the skilled workers back to work or will promote the skilled trades as a career to others?

Mr. Jason Ottey: Sure. As you know and as everybody is aware, there is a skilled trades shortage. I am on the minister's Skilled Trades Panel, and we are in the process of trying to devise a new apprenticeship system that meets the needs of the future economy.

But that is all predicated on having things to build. We can talk about increasing the demand for skilled trades and trying to attract more people into the skilled trades, but if that's not supported with meaningful long-term infrastructure projects, like transit and the types of projects that would be expedited under Bill 222, it's going to be all for naught and we're doing a great disservice to the many people that we've been saying, "The skilled trades is an excellent opportunity. The skilled trades is a pathway to economic security and financial security." To not support that by having projects that provide a long-term horizon—projects like the Ontario Line will provide an apprentice

to start his or her journey and complete his or her journey on one project. That's typically very rare.

One of the biggest challenges apprentices face is finding work where they can get their hours and continue along their apprenticeship continuum. The Ontario Line and the other projects supported by this bill would solve that. We could have a meaningful outreach process, attract more people into the trades and provide them with an opportunity to learn while they earn.

I will say as well there is an opportunity to increase the level of diversity in the industry. We can use these projects to encourage people who are underrepresented in the trades to start their pathway in the construction industry. Projects like these are an excellent opportunity because there are often large, sophisticated employers who have the ability to appropriately address all of the infrastructure and health and safety issues on a construction site.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Mr. Ottey, as you know, Canada's national GDP is expected to decline by 6.6% in 2020. From February to May, Ontario's employment declined by almost 1.2 million, representing the largest three-month employment decline on record. Can you explain not only the urgency, but also the importance of building infrastructure for Ontario's recovery? Thank you.

Mr. Jason Ottey: In addition to the need that existed and the demand for the Ontario Line, the pandemic, as we all know, has caused a massive economic shock to economies across the world. Infrastructure is the primary stimulus to reignite economies.

That being said, the infrastructure needs to be there when we are ready to re-stimulate the economy. If we don't do this advance planning now to be ready to hit the road running as we come out of this pandemic, it will not provide the necessary and immediate stimulus that the economy needs to get the wheels of the economy going again.

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I'll also say that these types of infrastructure tend to be localized, and they provide immediate and direct shots in the arm to local communities. At the end of it, as we know, the benefit is that you have this long-term asset that will continue to contribute to the GDP growth in Ontario and the region specifically. Right now, more than ever, if COVID has presented an opportunity, it is to seize on the ability to actually take these projects, get them going and provide immediate relief and economic sustenance to Ontarians who participate in their construction.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you. Madam Speaker, do I have time?

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): A minute and 45 seconds.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I will try to squeeze in another question. How do you think the government can work collaboratively with the development sector to help ensure that work on adjacent developments can be carried out while balancing the government's objective to build transit faster?

Mr. Jason Ottey: By the development industry, do you mean the residential construction industry?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Yes.

Mr. Jason Ottey: So the more we have this higher-order transit—it really does beg the need for intensification along those lines, supporting higher-density-type accommodations. As we know, as we move to a greener economy, and just from the nature of consumer taste, there is a demand for all types of housing, but in particular affordable housing. What the Ontario Line will present is an opportunity to intensify along the line, where appropriate, and really encourage intensification along with accessibility to transit, which decreases dependencies on automobiles and, as we're starting to see, really does encourage localized economic growth as the basis of recovery.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. That concludes our time. We will now move on to the official opposition for seven and a half minutes. MPP Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Mr. Ottey and Mr. Yapp, for your presentations this afternoon. I very much appreciate your being here.

I have a particular concern around Bill 222, given our experience with a municipal project, a major project: the LRT in Ottawa. I'm looking at how this bill will come into force and the projects it will impact, and I have some concerns.

I want to begin with you, Mr. Ottey, around workplace safety. I know you're familiar with the LRT project in Ottawa. I'm sure many of your members worked on it. A particular matter was brought to our attention. You may have heard about it. It was covered in the Ottawa media; perhaps it was covered beyond that. There are four lawsuits currently pressing against the builders of the LRT from subcontractors, and all of them repeat these concerns around massive speed-up delays and inefficiencies.

In one gentleman's case, a gentleman by the name of Frank Schwenzer—and Mr. Schwenzer, for the record of the House, was the person who built the major military installation in Kandahar for our service people over there, and he himself is a service person. He came back to found a very successful Toronto-based construction company. He was contracted to help build the LRT. His company, Hardrock Concrete, sprays concrete.

What Mr. Schwenzer said to me as the downtown Ottawa MPP and to our media was that there were consistent safety problems, where his members were being sent into situations which were very dangerous, and consistent delays. He's now in a protracted lawsuit with the builders. He has raised particular concerns with me around the public-private partnership consortium and the lack of transparency and accountability behind it. I know this bill will facilitate many major projects that use that model for building.

Mr. Ottey, from a workplace safety perspective, I'm wondering if you have any concerns with respect to this

that we have heard through this municipal project. If you do, we would love to hear more about them.

Mr. Jason Ottey: With respect to the health and safety piece, I can't speak to the specifics of the Ottawa LRT. I wasn't involved in that project. Our Ottawa local was involved; I believe our members were part of that bill process.

Generally speaking, what we say from a health and safety standpoint—what we have seen over the course of, I'd say, the last 10 years or a decade or more, is a decline in the number of lost-time injuries that are occurring in the construction sector. That's because of a number of factors, but primarily, it's because the industry took a much more systematic and detailed approach at looking at, "How do we address this, and where are these accidents occurring?"

One of the innovations that came out of that was, for example, mandatory working-at-heights, because we found out through that process that a number of fatalities and critical injuries were coming from falls, and so we needed to really strengthen that area of training and expertise to focus on preventing falls on construction sites.

I don't know the interplay. I can't suggest to you that there is an interplay between the project being a P3 and being unsafe—or was it the nature of the tendering process and the fact that some of these companies perhaps weren't aligned with higher order prevention products that are offered through the government and through groups like the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association that encourage accreditation of all of the contractors participating on sites? There, they have to meet certain benchmarks and have certain processes in place to ensure that workers are safe.

Obviously, as a union representing construction workers—and construction work, by its very nature, can be very dangerous—we take health and safety very, very seriously. It's always our job in what we do. Our first priority is to make sure that our members return home safe every day.

Mr. Joel Harden: I take your point. But from the perspective that Mr. Schwenzer shared with me that I'm endeavouring to share with our committee in our deliberations this afternoon, he would show up at the workplace, where there would literally be three feet of mud or massive amounts of garbage in the way of them even beginning their day. When reporting to some of the organizations in the consortium—which are not trifling organizations; we're talking about major leaders, organizations like EllisDon and ECS Group, organizations I know your members work very hard for and do very good work for. But in this particular situation with Mr. Schwenzer's case, which is a public case, he has said that he was being compelled to send his 26 employees into a situation which was manifestly unsafe.

Coming out of that experience working with that particular consortium—and again, he felt like he did his due diligence. He felt like, "I'm working with major organizations here. This is an important transit project. I want to be part of it. I can create livelihoods for people

who work for me." But his take-away now is that he would much rather work in a publicly tendered project because of the opaque nature in which oversight was done here.

That's my only concern here, Mr. Ottey, given that this bill will empower construction powers that may—or may not; who knows—embrace this same operational model. I take for granted that you folks care about your members' health and safety, absolutely. But is this sending up any red flags in your mind?

Mr. Jason Ottey: My experience with EllisDon and other very large contractors and small contractors is that they take health and safety very seriously. I don't believe that the health and safety infractions that—sorry, Mr. Schwenzer?

Mr. Joel Harden: That's correct.

Mr. Jason Ottey:—that Mr. Schwenzer was subjected to are an indictment of the P3 process as much as the fact that perhaps there was not the necessary attention called to that area of that work that would have prevented potential injuries and hazards.

Obviously, there is a process to deal with unsafe work, right? Mr. Schwenzer knows that his workers have the ability to refuse unsafe work, and Mr. Schwenzer knows that he has the ability and the obligation as an employer of those workers to report unsafe conditions both up the chain to the general and, as well, to the ministry. Where there are unsafe conditions, Mr. Schwenzer knows that the Ministry of Labour will be called on-site to investigate those activities. Just because the project is a P3 project—excuse me.

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a mouthful.

Mr. Jason Ottey: It's a mouthful, yes.

Just because the project is a P3 project, it does not absolve itself from the Ministry of Labour inspection process.

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Those concerns raised by Mr. Schwenzer are very serious. We would never accept putting a member in harm's way to do their work, especially when the employer recognizes that that condition is unsafe. But I would ask that Mr. Schwenzer, as an employer, has that obligation under (2)(h) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much, Mr. Ottey. That concludes our time.

We will now move on to the independent member. MPP Karahalios.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Mr. Ottey, if you wanted to finish up what you were saying, I have no questions.

Mr. Jason Ottey: Sure. I kind of lost my thought, but I think it was basically that under (2)(h) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, he has the duty to take every reasonable precaution to protect his employees. Was there a breakdown? It sounds like there was. I don't know the specifics, but I am hoping that there was not a tragic incident that resulted from it. But I guess my only caution would be to say: Was that breakdown an indictment of the P3 process or this construction site in general? My comments are with regard to that.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. We will now go back to the government. MPP Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to all the presenters for your presentations.

My first question I will ask to Mr. Yapp. Thank you for the presentation, Mr. Yapp. My question is very straightforward. In terms of the concerns that you have raised, how would you balance the government's objective to build transit faster with your concerns that you presented today? And how can we balance to move forward? Because we see that these are important projects, especially the four priority projects that the government proposed last year. What's your solution, or the balance mechanism, to balance the project as well as the concerns that you brought forward today?

Mr. Eric Yapp: Clearly I'm not an urban planner or a transit specialist. I'm only speaking as a private citizen, as a taxpayer and as a transit user. We had a shovel-ready project called the downtown relief line. They had gone through all the assessments, all the environmental assessments. It was an underground route all the way. I really don't think there was a lot of objection to the downtown relief line. It served its purpose of bringing people in from Scarborough and points east to downtown Toronto, where often many of the jobs are located. It takes people off Line 1 and transiting and interchanging through Bloor and Yonge, so a lot of those objectives were already met by that line.

I totally agree that we need the transit—we're pro-transit—but the route and the consultation that is being done are just being jammed down too quickly. Our experience is that these projects are multi-year projects. The Eglinton LRT is maybe a poor example of something that has gone on for over 10 years. If we're taking a little bit of extra time at the beginning, the transit will still get built, but it will get built the right way.

One of the things we've asked Metrolinx is that we need to see the cost comparisons of what a complete underground route looks like. I understand there are some challenges and there are some cost challenges, but as we've seen, the transit projects have gone tremendously over budget in many cases. I think if you actually plan properly up front, then the budgets can be locked down and some of those variables can be reduced by picking the right route that will have fewer objections, fewer environmental issues. When you stay underground, you just avoid so many of those pieces.

If you look at some of the major infrastructure projects around the world, in Europe, in other major cities, they build through mountains, they build under large rivers. Other cities have huge geographical challenges. Toronto has some ravines. These are not insurmountable, but we need to build it properly.

We don't want to just get the shovel in the ground just to say that we're working post-COVID and putting people to work, only to find out that those efforts are wasted. We've seen that in orphan projects that get abandoned and

stopped. It's really about spending the money the right way and doing the planning process in consultation with the neighbourhoods affected. We're not going to unnecessarily hold things up. When some of those challenges are overcome, we want to get those projects going quickly.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you.

My next question is directed towards Mr. Ottey. Mr. Ottey, you talked about the economic impacts. You mentioned economic shock due to COVID-19 and how it impacts the economy and the unemployment rate. Obviously, my colleague the member from Scarborough—Agingcourt talked about the impact on the GDP as well. So we are all aware of these impacts.

Could you please explain the critical importance of this bill, the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act, and how this bill would be a good source of economic boost by creating these infrastructures and creating this transportation infrastructure? Pretty much how this bill and the impact of COVID can be able to balance or at least mitigate the future impacts—for example, there is a prediction that the unemployment rate will definitely go down. It's already 1.3 million, which is the highest employment reduction in the last three months.

So could you please explain the critical importance of this bill, given the challenges COVID-19 has brought in the last seven to eight months?

Mr. Jason Ottey: Sure. A lot of industries were hit very hard, as you're aware, by the pandemic. The hospitality sector is a good example that was decimated. Restaurants, as we know, also small businesses, were what typified a small business that any interruption in their ability to service customers can be devastating to their long-term outcomes.

But what I will say about what the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act will do, in our opinion, is it will facilitate the ability to have this large-scale infrastructure build ready to go, shovel-ready for our members to start building. As I mentioned in my previous comments, infrastructure is one of the fastest ways to stimulate an economy, because the investment is a direct and an immediate shot in the arm.

That being said, I will say that you have two problems: You have money and the ability to put it into a project, and then you also have to have the availability of workers there to do the work. As we go through this pandemic and it becomes elongated, we as an industry will suffer hardship and we will lose members. We will lose members who might not come back, and that will exacerbate the already tight labour market for skilled trades. It hits two points: one, infrastructure investment as stimulus. This bill will facilitate that process, because we know we can't just start building right away. This groundwork needs to be done and it needs to be done in an expedited way, but I will say that the expedition of this project should not cut corners or risks.

We need to reduce the red tape, but we also have to do it in a meaningful way that ensures the project viability and, as MPP Harden has noted, that corners around health

and safety are not taken. So it provides that opportunity. It provides an opportunity for new entrants into the labour market, particularly the construction labour market, to start and potentially end their apprenticeship on one site with large, sophisticated employers—

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. We are out of time.

I will now return to the official opposition. MPP Burch, go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'd like to ask a question of LIUNA. Mr. Ottey, earlier in your presentation, you mentioned local labour and the importance to the local economy of getting local people to do local projects.

One of the best practices in Ontario has been awarding projects based on giving some of the points in the RFP to proponents that can demonstrate they're using local labour and also local labour agreements, where proponents can approach, as I'm sure you're aware, local unions and can synchronize local labour agreements to get not only a better price on projects, but also to utilize local citizens who are paying the taxes for those projects. There have been some very successful examples of best practices across Ontario.

Can you comment on how that can be used around these local transit projects?

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Mr. Jason Ottey: Sure. It's an excellent point. The process that we call it in the industry are community benefit agreements, or CBAs, not to be confused with collective bargaining agreements. What that is: It's an opportunity for communities that often see a lot of construction work in their communities happening, but they never have an opportunity to participate in it.

As part of my process on the Skilled Trades Panel, we spoke to apprentices, and one thing that amazed me was their grit and determination to finish their apprenticeship. But it was not without hardships in entering a trade. They're looking at a job site, they're looking at people working, and they're saying, "I don't see anybody that looks like me." It can be overwhelming and almost exclusionary.

What we're suggesting is these projects present a fantastic opportunity for the government to lead, as best practices, on creating community benefit agreements. But those community benefit agreements need to be negotiated, in my opinion, between the employer and the union that's representing the unions that are working on-site. They need to have a goal of increasing diversity on job sites, providing localized people an opportunity to participate in a meaningful apprenticeship so that they can take that skill—if they're not able to complete that apprenticeship on that job—to another job.

We're seeing a lot more talk about community benefits. I would go so far as to say that there needs to be some language that almost requires a discussion around having a community benefit agreement, but it's more important that that community benefit agreement be with the subtrades as well as the general. What happens is, they do it with the general—this is one thing we're noticing—and

then there's not the communication downstream with the subtrades to say, "Hey, we're participating in this agreement. You do the bulk of the hiring through the subtrades, so we want to make sure that you're participating as well." The more that community benefit agreement is part of the procurement language and process, the more contractors can appropriately price their participation in that.

We believe diversity is a strength—our union was built on that—and that the cost of that is no different than the cost of training an apprentice. Obviously, an apprentice is not as productive as a journeyman, but at the end of that apprenticeship pathway, you will have a journeyman who will be productive. So community benefits are an important element of this infrastructure process and this bill, but they do need to make sure that they are appropriately negotiated between the parties participating in them to have real and meaningful buy-in.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you for that. As a municipal budget chair, I've also participated in the process that you're describing. One of the interesting benefits that came about was actually a huge reduction in health and safety or in compensation claims. The work that occurred actually was done more safely—obviously, because the project I'm thinking of in Niagara had one of the lowest incidences of injury of any project of its kind in Ontario. One of the benefits of this community benefit agreement was actually a much safer workplace. Is that your experience as well?

Mr. Jason Ottey: I do believe employers who participate in community benefit agreements have a higher level of sophistication. Because of that, that level of sophistication also extends to their practice in health and safety.

I'll just maybe rephrase it and say that if you are going to participate in a community benefit agreement, you do need to make sure that that company has a very good health and safety track record because they are taking new entrants into the industry. As we know, new entrants often are at the most risk of injury, so there needs to be particular attention to the type of work they're doing, to make sure that it's safe. It can be overwhelming stepping on a job site with a tunnel that's 60 feet wide, and there are trucks moving here and there. There's just a lot going on. To somebody new to a construction site, that can be overwhelming.

But as part of the CBA process, they will be getting mandatory health and safety training in their eight-week in-class portion to sensitize them and socialize them to the hazards in construction sites. They'll have their mandatory health and safety and, as I mentioned, the working-at-heights and all of the other prescribed pieces.

I'm not surprised that you saw a reduction in lost-time injury claims by virtue of a CBA. I think it's complementary, but I think it is definitely a discussion that needs to happen, to make sure that they're complementing each other.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thanks. I'm not sure how much time I have left, but you did mention in your presentation affordable housing. I'm wondering if you see development

projects that happen around transit hubs as an opportunity for us to build some affordable housing.

Mr. Jason Ottey: As we know, there is a housing supply issue, particularly on the affordable housing side. I do think that this would present an incredible opportunity to—

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much. We are out of time; my apologies.

MPP Karahalios?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: No questions at this time, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Natalia Kusendova): Thank you very much to our presenters. This concludes our business for today.

As a reminder, the deadline to send in a written submission will be 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on November 19, 2020. The deadline for legislative research to provide committee members with a summary of oral presentations and written submissions is 5 p.m. on Friday, November 20, 2020. The deadline for filing amendments to the bill will be 5 p.m. on Monday, November 23, 2020.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on November 30, 2020, for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 222. Thank you to all our members and all of our staff today. Have a wonderful afternoon. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1448.

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