



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

TRAN • NUMBER 043 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 7, 2017

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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I call to order the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, in the first session of our 42nd Parliament. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is our study of infrastructure and smart communities.

We are glad to have the witnesses that we have before us today. We have Dr. Taiber, chief technology officer, International Transportation Innovation Center. From Google Canada, we have Colin McKay, head of public policy and government relations. We have Barrie Kirk, executive director, the Canadian Automated Vehicles Centre of Excellence.

I look forward to hearing information from all of you. Who would like to start?

Mr. McKay.

Mr. Colin McKay (Head, Public Policy and Government Relations, Google Canada): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

A new set of technologies, including pervasive and ubiquitous connectivity, real-time sensors, precise location services, autonomous systems, and digital manufacturing are going to help transform life in our cities and our communities. We carry many of these technologies in our pocket or purse every day. The ready availability of sophisticated mobile computers, which we casually refer to as phones, means that we have unprecedented access to data about our individual behaviour and our interaction with our community, and an instantaneous ability to communicate with the services and infrastructure around us.

At Alphabet, which is the umbrella company that owns Google and a number of other companies you're familiar with, we recognize that these technologies will make cities more responsive, equitable, innovative, and livable. But that will only happen in collaboration with the communities themselves.

Let me give you a quick snapshot of how Google and our parent company, Alphabet, are working to improve, through technology, how we all live. There are obstacles to making sure that the integration of technology and cities truly offers opportunities for social and economic growth for all citizens. Many disadvantaged groups within cities lack cheap and easy access to the Internet. That's why we're working with governments in Toronto, New York, and across India to deliver Wi-Fi access to underserved communities.

But we recognize that Google alone cannot address the challenges facing our cities. We have to work with urban planners, social policy specialists, community activists, architects, and others if we're going to understand the complex dynamics of our cities. Dan Doctoroff, a former deputy mayor of New York City and the founder of Sidewalk Labs, an Alphabet company, has described the complexity of the challenge that faces communities and governments alike. He wrote:

Whatever we do, we know the world doesn't need another plan that falls into the same trap as previous ones: treating the city as a high-tech island rather than a place that reflects the personality of its local population.... There are no magical fixes to tough urban problems. Anything we try will require lots of discussion, refinement, and adaptation. Responsible innovation at the city scale requires self-reflection and a willingness to make adjustments based on local feedback.

I assume you are all familiar with our Street View mapping vehicles. We have collected data that informs Google's detailed maps of almost every community in Canada. Using these mapping vehicles, we have worked with local groups to begin pilot projects to help collect information about air quality and pollution in cities across the United States. We've deployed environmental sensor networks to build detailed maps of air pollution. We've worked with the Environmental Defense Fund to build similar maps to identify the ebb and flow of methane leaks in some cities. Our shared goal with these groups is to help build useful and detailed maps of these pollutants and share them with citizens and government who can then work to address these environmental challenges.

In the United States, we launched Project Sunroof, which uses satellite imagery to help homeowners not only estimate the benefits of installing solar panels on their roofs, but connect them with nearby installers and estimates the cost of that installation.

More importantly for this committee, what ambitious goals should we set for a smart city? Let's remember that the conversation around urban development is shaped by century-old technologies: grids of streets and alleys, water and sewer infrastructure laid decades ago, and Internet service that still relies on telephone and cable access points. Commuters need data that gives them the most efficient and fastest routes to their destination. For a bicyclist, this means the safest route down streets with dedicated lanes. For a community organizer, this may mean detailed data about admission rates at health clinics, or a real-time database of volunteers responding to a crisis.

What investments do cities have to make in real-time monitoring? How do they develop services that help their citizens understand how traditional infrastructure is dealing with contemporary pressures, in the process making themselves more accountable but also surfacing data that can support an argument for different infrastructure investment decisions?

How does a city become more adaptable? How can data help cities become more flexible and inform infrastructure investments that encourage alternative transportation, efficient energy use, and other innovations? As I've suggested, the development of smart cities requires careful planning, a phase of integrated experimentation, and then collaborative implementation.

As we tackle city- and community-wide challenges the best strategy may actually be to identify specific districts where technology and community can work together to identify targeted strategies, specific data collection frameworks, and implement ongoing assessments. At Google we feel it's a data-driven approach that sets ambitious goals with demonstrable results in partnership with communities.

• (1110)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McKay.

Mr. Kirk.

Mr. Barrie Kirk (Executive Director, Canadian Automated Vehicles Centre of Excellence): Thank you, Madam Chair, and members of the committee for this invitation to be here.

Self-driving cars have tremendous benefits for Canada and for Canadians. Unfortunately, when I look around the world, and especially at the G7, we in Canada are dead last in getting ready for self-driving cars. We're way behind the other six countries. Let me just give you a quick thumbnail sketch here.

The first generation of self-driving cars is already with us. These are low speed, limited capability, but they're working now. A client of mine has a fleet of six fully automated driverless shuttle buses, electric, operating in Civaux in France. The second generation of self-driving cars will arrive in about 2020, as will drivers' taxi applications. These will not be the ultimate, but they will be fully self-driving cars. Through the 2020s we're going to see a gradual increase in capability and speed, and by 2030 our world will look very different from the way it does today.

One of the two biggest impacts will be safety. A joint study we published a year ago with the Conference Board of Canada predicts

that with full deployment in the future we can prevent 80% of the present traffic collisions, deaths, and injuries, a huge improvement. Second, the arrival of driverless taxis in the 2020s will have a big impact on many aspects of our lives—on our cities, on parking, on policing, on health care. The auto sector is prepared for a massive disruption. Mary Barra, the CEO of General Motors, has said, and I agree with her, that the auto industry will change more in the next five to 10 years than it has in the last 50. This will be very disruptive. There will also be a big impact on infrastructure.

Anthony Foxx, the secretary of transportation in the Obama administration, wrote an article that was published about a year ago. He said that with a combination of autonomous and connected vehicle technologies we can increase the traffic-carrying capacity of our existing highway and road infrastructure by a factor of five. That's huge. To be honest, I don't believe Secretary Foxx, but if we can increase the traffic-carrying capacity of the roads and highways by a factor of two or two and a half, I wonder how much of the planned and future infrastructure build we really need. We'll need some of it to do repairs, but we need to plan infrastructure for the arrival of the AVs.

Also, it will have a big impact on transit, and hence on transit infrastructure. About a year ago, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, published a report, which is free and public, predicting from a European perspective that self-driving taxis could completely replace the need for traditional transit in small and medium-sized cities.

A year ago, I published a white paper for the federal government with 30 recommendations. I don't have time to go through all of that. Let me pick out two recommendations that are particularly relevant to your committee.

First, I made a recommendation that any application for funding for infrastructure for transit or transportation should come with an analysis of the impact of autonomous vehicles on the business case and the design. I've told the Ontario government the same thing.

Second, there's a lot of focus nowadays on smart cities and smart infrastructure. I'm recommending that part of the infrastructure spend be not just on asphalt and concrete but also on smart infrastructure. We can achieve a lot with that and it will be a lot cheaper—following on with what Secretary Foxx said—to increase the capacity of the highways with smart infrastructure rather than with more asphalt.

• (1115)

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kirk.

Dr. Taiber.

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber (Chief Technology Officer, International Transportation Innovation Center, Cerco Cable): Dear Madam Chair and members of the committee, I'm very privileged to speak today to this committee. I will give you a quick overview of the ITIC perspective. I have prepared a couple of slides.

First of all, we can say that the transportation world is currently in a very revolutionizing phase. We have the prospect of having no accidents at all on the road in the long run. We have prospect of dominantly having zero-emission vehicles. We also have the technology in place to secure connected vehicles and automated vehicles to avoid damage, and we are currently improving our networks to always have services available to us.

What is important in my opinion, from a federal perspective, is to focus on two key areas. One area is connected and automated transportation, where the federal government has to give guidance on safety and security regulations, and to prepare the communication infrastructure to support connected and automated transportation systems.

On the other hand, we need to go into a major electrification process of the transportation systems, which, again, needs safety and security regulations, but also a major investment in charging infrastructure to support the transportation systems.

If we go to the view of how are our cities and urban environments are changing, it's safe to say that we are moving from what I call a cost-centric, urban-planning development approach to a people-centric, smart community approach. As we make this transition, we want to change the regulations and rules of how we organize traffic. This means trying to keep personal vehicles out of the urban cores. It means that we have to reorganize parking. We have to reorganize the way goods are being transported in the urban cores and within the urban cores. We have the opportunity to reorganize a multi-modal, zero-emission transportation system that works on demand.

If we look into the need, what I would recommend for the approach here in Canada is to consider the implementation of a nationwide network of transportation innovation testbeds. That means that in these testbeds, which you can implement in different locations across the country, you are organizing mixed test fleets that are automated. You're sharing use cases, data, and algorithms with different stakeholders that are participating, and you need to put a lot of thought into where these test beds should be.

It's not only a question of certifying the vehicles for automated driving. It's about certifying the whole urban ecosystem and organizing it to allow for automated connected driving and zero-emission driving.

Finally, I would recommend the development of a national transportation innovation program, which would address connectivity and automation, electrification, and on-demand mobility services. In terms of the test beds, you basically need closed and open test beds. Closed test beds are to validate the technology before it is put in a setting where you interact with people and other transportation participants.

I would also recommend, from the beginning, seeking interaction with other transportation innovation test beds in the world. In Europe, in the U.S.A., and in Asia, those centres are being developed. To seek communication with them will create export opportunities for Canada. It will also give you a benchmark opportunity to compete with the best centres in the world.

Thank you very much.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you all very much for that information.

We are going to move immediately into questions from our members, starting with Mr. Rayes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here with us today.

My first question is for you, Mr. Kirk.

You said that, when we compare ourselves to the other countries around the world, we are dead last when it comes to self-driving cars. Why are we last? What is the explanation?

[English]

Mr. Barrie Kirk: We are the latecomers, and I think there are two reasons for that. I don't want to get too much into politics. I'm an engineer. I don't know much about politics, but I feel up until now we've not had enough of a focus on innovation, and that shows up in the results.

I look at other governments and how they are supporting their high-tech industry in this area. Let's take the U.K. as an example. The U.K. is doing four things that we are not doing. First of all is funding. The U.K. has put in 100 million pounds into research, development, and testing of autonomous and connected vehicles.

The federal government has, in fact, got some money within Transport Canada for a virtual framework, but the federal government has not funded industry. The best we've done in Canada is Ontario, which has put in \$3 million. If you compare \$3 million to 100 million pounds, you can really see the bar chart.

Second, the U.K. government has been a real cheerleader. It has set itself up as a target to be the world's go-to place for AV testing.

Third, they have understood the need to break down the silos within different departments. They have created a special government institution called CCAV, the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles, which operates across departments. One example of this is that they have taken the policy group from the British version of Transport Canada and they've taken the policy group from the Innovation, Science and Economic Development equivalent, and they've created a single policy group that spans two departments. You get a level of integration and synergy that we're not achieving.

It makes a big difference with those areas. Our technology industry is excellent. It's a cliché; it really is world class, but to be more effective, they need support from government the way that other governments are supporting their tech industries.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: In your view, what is the role of the state and of the federal government if we want to move ahead and become a world leader again? What should the government's role be specifically in terms of self-driving cars?

[English]

Mr. Barrie Kirk: I think we need a number of things. As I mentioned, a year ago I wrote and published a white paper. In it there are 30 recommendations as to what I feel the federal government should be doing. A lot of those transpose into provincial—

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Let me stop you there.

Could you forward the white paper to the Clerk of the Committee so that we can have access to those 30 recommendations that seem very useful?

Please continue.

[English]

The Chair: If you would submit it to the clerk, then it will be distributed to all of the members.

Mr. Barrie Kirk: Yes, I will.

The Chair: Thank you.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

Go on, Mr. Kirk.

[English]

Mr. Barrie Kirk: I am impressed with the level of expertise and enthusiasm from the technology industry. When I look five or 10 years ahead, not only will the auto sector be completely transformed, there's going to be a convergence between the auto and the tech sectors.

At the moment, an average car has about 4% to 5% of its value in technology. In the 2020s, say 10 years' time, an average car will have between 40% and 60% of its value in technology, and that creates a huge opportunity for Canada's tech companies to get into the auto sector. That includes companies in processing, in communications, sensors, and algorithms. The best example, of course, is BlackBerry QNX, but they need the support from government, as I mentioned earlier.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Let me clarify my question.

What should the state's role be in this system? Where should it invest? What support could it provide?

[English]

Mr. Barrie Kirk: It's a combination of roles, which certainly includes investment. It includes a much looser regulatory frame-

work. It includes specialized institutions that will be created just to steer this forward. It would include being an active cheerleader for the space. It will certainly include working with the provinces. It's not one specific thing, but rather it's guiding and encouraging a revolution.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Kirk, I have to cut you off there. Thank you very much, Mr. Rayes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I'd like to acknowledge we also have at the table Karen McCrimmon, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, and Marc Miller, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure, who are joining us and observing today.

[Translation]

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be sharing my time with my colleague Gagan Sikand.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here today to share with us their expertise on smart cities.

Some countries, such as Australia and the United States, have put in place a smart cities strategy. In Australia, the federal government invited the states and local governments to agree on common goals for investments in infrastructure suited for smart cities.

My question is for the three witnesses.

What are the advantages of having a national smart cities strategy on in addition to specific plans for each city?

[English]

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: Maybe I can try to answer some of your questions.

In the U.S., there was a program called the smart city challenge. This program was basically connected with a prize. The prize was \$50 million from the U.S. DOT and \$10 million from Vulcan Ventures, which is a fund from Microsoft co-founder, Paul Allen. Seventy-seven cities participated in this challenge. I was personally involved in some of these applications. One city won. Obviously, the value of this exercise was that 77 cities had to think through a smart city strategy and develop a master plan for these cities, which can then fertilize other cities. We have a large community of cities of different sizes that were going through this exercise.

My thought for Canada is to maybe consider not just doing one prize, and one city gets the prize, but maybe supporting a cluster of cities. Make funding available, but not just have one winner but many winners, so to speak.

In Germany, where I originally come from and where I'm still quite involved in the development, we have a situation where the department of transportation is deliberately selecting different cities in Germany to develop smart city test beds. They are particularly addressing automated driving, but they also picked highways to support automated driving. What they are trying to do is to incentivize the private sector to engage in these developments, but also to give guidance on the regulatory side. There's a lot of unanswered questions and liability.

• (1130)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

I'm just going to give some time to Mr. McKay to respond to the same question.

Mr. Colin McKay: Thank you very much.

I think we also need to look at the tools that are available to the federal government and at how a strategy might guide the better implementation of those tools. We've heard from both my colleagues here about the need for flexible regulations that allow for experimentation across different products and technologies, and the availability of test beds across different communities. But this needs to be tied in at the federal level to decisions we're making about substantial infrastructure investments, and it needs to be tied into decisions we're making about how we structure the regulations around urban living for the foreseeable future—and I'm going to underline urban living as separate from transportation. While Mr. Kirk painted a picture of 2020 and then 2030 and then 50 years from now, I think we're really in a much more accelerated time frame.

We're going to be looking at a vision in which urban centres and communities will be changing fundamentally. The infrastructure investments we're making around concrete and asphalt and telephone poles won't meet the challenge of having a truly implemented smart-city strategy across the country.

Where the federal government can land is identifying those areas in which there needs to be intense concentration on the cost-benefit analysis and what the federal government can do to reduce the cost and amplify the benefit in partnership with both community governments and organizers, and then the private sector. It is a fundamental challenge.

Unfortunately, there are many companies that are working in the space of connected cities, connected communities, smart cities, or automated vehicles, but they don't have the datasets and they don't have the resources to do the fundamental quantitative analysis around the impact that will inform decision-making for hundreds of billions of dollars in the near future.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): You pretty much answered my question, but you took me down memory lane when you were speaking, so I'm going to share my thoughts with you.

I remember studying Hobbes in my undergrad, and he argued that a rational monarchy would empower its people in order for them to survive, so if you keep them rich, you'll stay rich. Just drawing some parallels there, how can the government make money off of empowering people? The currency has changed—information

technology, access—we want everyone to have that, but then how do we generate revenue from it in smart cities?

Mr. Colin McKay: The response isn't really about making money but is more in response to your question around empowering citizens. If we have a fully informed way of making infrastructure investment decisions, we'll be able to allocate resources to more important government services and services within the community. Instead of highway infrastructure costs, we'll be able to invest in health care costs.

As Mr. Kirk hinted, we'll have fewer injuries on the roads, which will also free up health care costs, which will allow us to spend more on social services. We in fact will have a more equitable government that serves citizens' needs more clearly because we'll have broken free of these bonds of 100 years' worth of infrastructure investments by using these resources much more efficiently.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McKay.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being with us today.

What a vast topic, if I may say so, for a computer dinosaur like me. Let me tell you from the outset that I have a really hard time with the concept of smart cities. Before we describe the concept as smart, we should talk more about connected cities.

My first question is for you, Mr. McKay. I would like to take advantage of your dual expertise, both at Google and as a former employee of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

For those connected cities to grow, it will also mean that a lot of data must be collected. How can we reconcile the development of connected cities with ethics in terms of personal data?

• (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin McKay: Thank you for the very informed question.

I think we need to consider data as split into two very separate streams when we talk about connected cities.

One is, as you mention, personal data that's identifiable to an individual and relates to the decisions that individual makes in interactions with government and with private sector companies.

In the broad concepts that I described in my notes, I was dealing more with de-identified data, aggregated data, the sort of information that is collected by your phone in terms of motion and distance and speed. This is the information that allows companies like Google, Apple, and others to give you traffic information. When you look at the map, you don't identify a single driver; you identify the trends that were collected from thousands of drivers on the road at the same time as you. It's the same with many of these other more generalized services. The implemented technology has privacy safeguards that aggregate the data to a level that allows you to have precision about location or behaviour, without having precision to the level of an individual.

I just want to make the final point that you're right in identifying that there's a shared responsibility there. If you're using an Apple phone or a Google phone, you need to understand that the phone manufacturer, the company, and the application developer have your interests in mind. Government agencies and their partners also recognize that there must be an imperative to protect personal privacy in implementing those technologies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

My second question is for everyone, but I will first ask Mr. Kirk since I drew my inspiration from his remarks.

When you said that Canada was dead last, I was wondering what we could do to give priority to all the aspects that make our cities more and more connected. Transportation is not the only aspect.

I was thinking of my recent trip to Africa where I noticed that most Africans now have a cellphone. They skipped directly to the cellphone without going through the stage of having landline telephones at home.

That made me think of our case, in particularly the federal government, and the fact that we don't even have a program for buying electric cars. Are we not in the same situation where we'll have to skip over one type of technology to go directly to a more advanced one that is worthy of the future?

You can tell me whether the future is in 10 or 15 years.

[*English*]

Mr. Barrie Kirk: That's an excellent question, and I agree with you. Looking 10 to 15 years ahead, I see, potentially, the end of infrastructure. There's a lot of work going on with the old Jetsons vision of a driverless car. In Europe, Airbus has spoken about its program to develop a pilotless drone to carry people. It will be electric, with vertical takeoff and landing, and it will be a potential replacement for cars for commuters in the future. They plan to have a full-scale demonstration by the end of this year.

Uber has announced that it will start offering a service to carry people using pilotless drones within 10 years. This technology is moving very quickly. In Canada, we have an excellent drone industry. I am on the board of Unmanned Systems Canada, an association for the drone industry. I think we can build on that technology and leapfrog self-driving cars, if you like...well, not leapfrog completely, but move towards the future, which is flying

cars and three-dimensional highways. It's no longer science fiction. It is being seriously looked at.

I also want to mention that Ontario's Ministry of Transportation has a wonderful visioning program under way now to look at transportation in the Golden Horseshoe for the next 50 years, with an extension for another 10 or 20 years beyond that. We all realize that any vision for transportation in 2050 or 2070 will be wrong, but I applaud them for having the guts to look that far ahead, make those kinds of decisions, and have those visions that will help to inform short-term decisions.

So, yes. If there were some money available, I'd love to see the government put it towards flying cars.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, Monsieur Aubin, your time is up.

Mr. Hardie, go ahead.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a fascinating discussion, but with respect, you seem to have anchored yourself—and I'm asking you to disabuse me of this notion—on a very old model, to the point where, when you're looking at the future, it's like you have one foot on the dock and one on the boat. I've heard an awful lot today and in our previous session about driverless cars and flying cars, but do you not think that, in fact, in our rapidly connected world, the need to actually move about is going to decline substantially?

We're going back to the future already. When I was a kid, they delivered milk and bread to my door, and they're doing it again. Are we necessarily thinking about the right things in imagining this wonderful future? I'll just leave that.

We'll start with Dr. Taiber, please.

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: You're on the right path. I do think that the connectivity means that we don't have to travel that much or move that much. However, keep in mind that a lot of the traffic issues are from commuters who are going from suburban areas to urban cores, for example. Do we have, with the millennials, a trend that they want to live in more urban environments? If so, then they still have a need to move around. They might have some conveniences, as you mentioned, such as goods delivered to their door. I think you're right in the sense that the need for transportation and the patterns are changing, but we still need transportation.

The technology is currently changing in such a way that the services we are using will be different in the future. We have new options. That's how I would see it.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'd love to hear others. Feel free to submit things after the fact.

Mr. McKay, go ahead, quickly, please.

Mr. Colin McKay: I hinted, in my remarks, at the idea of having to focus our experimentation and implementation on districts. This is going to hit at some of the major changes that you're imagining and I think we're all imagining. It's also a bit to Monsieur Aubin's point, which is that we need to get into a phase of implementation rather than experimentation, and that's going to require a really focused concentration on changes that are significant to communities.

Mr. Ken Hardie: All right. Maybe I can interject there because I have a couple more questions, and then I'll just leave it open.

Where is the public in this? What does the public tell you they want? There are a lot of bright-eyed innovators out there scheming and putting forward things, and the public is going, "Oh God, what's going to hit us next?" Are we talking to the public about what they want?

Second, where do you sit on the degree to which we bring about this change: social engineering versus attractive options that manage demand?

We'll start with you, Mr. Kirk.

Mr. Barrie Kirk: When you asked the question, my mind went back to that very famous quote from Henry Ford that if you had asked people what they wanted in those days, they would have said "faster horses". When I talk to people today—and I do a lot of speaking—there are three different responses. There is a general acceptance that self-driving cars are going to be wonderful for seniors and handicapped people and really improve their mobility. They're going to be one of the early adopters. The other group of early adopters will be millennials, who, studies have shown, have not taken to driving or car ownership in the way my generation did. The daughter of a friend of mine says that she doesn't like to drive because it's a big distraction from her texting.

For the middle part, the middle-aged people who were brought up in a culture of getting your driver's licence and your car at the earliest opportunity, it's going to be really difficult to get that steering wheel out of their hands, but I do see a progression. Nobody enjoys commuting in heavy traffic. I see car-driving changing. I see people using driverless taxis for the unpleasant stuff, commuting. I see people keeping an old-fashioned car, with a steering wheel, in the garage so they can go out on the weekend and have fun.

• (1145)

Mr. Ken Hardie: To what degree does government swoop in and start to impose things versus you guys coming up with stuff so that people say, "I have to have that"?

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: What I want to suggest is to really work with these pilots and test bed areas, because that's a way you can show the technology to the public, get feedback, and then, by learning from their reactions and thoughts, make a decision over time as a federal government about what you really want to prioritize. I think that's an important aspect.

Mr. Ken Hardie: With this interconnected world of ours, does the concept of clusters really matter anymore? Is it necessary to co-site a variety of complementary activities?

Mr. Barrie Kirk: Can I start?

In January I submitted to the Government of Ontario a white paper specifically on the creation of four AV innovation centres. I'm

waiting for some official feedback on that. I know the Ontario government is very keen on that. Premier Wynne has said she wants that to happen. It is very important at this stage to have those clusters and I'd love to see Ontario do this. I also know that the Ontario government wants these to be collaborative efforts with the federal government.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kirk.

We're now on to Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I had that wrong. We're on to Mr. Badawey. Kelly, I was trying to give you an extra opportunity.

Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am really excited about this conversation because it validates what this committee has been doing for the past few months in terms of proposing different directions with respect to strategy vis-à-vis the national transportation strategy, which also includes the innovation program as well as the infrastructure of smart communities that we're trying to embark on. With that, it also validates the government's direction with respect to those same initiatives, and I applaud you for aligning those dots in tandem with those strategies because, simply put, that is 2017 and beyond.

I also applaud you in recognizing the investments that have to be made through our infrastructure programs to once again align with those very strategies and satisfy the recommendations that are going to come out from those strategies.

I want to state from the onset that I do encourage your continued participation with us to make this happen, and then, as was mentioned, to start on a process of implementation and execution beyond the talk, and of course, the politics. Sometimes that gets in the way of just simply trying to do better and be better with respect to a nation.

With that, I'll lead off with a question, and I'll keep it very broad in terms of your thoughts with respect to sustainable funding sources. Being from Ontario, I'm sure, Mr. Kirk, you recognize that we do have an opportunity through the Municipal Act to offer municipalities incentives through community improvement plans, growth plans, to then work with the private sector to put in place those very strategies.

We also have a gas tax that the federal government has offered the nation with respect to sustainable funding to then do infrastructure work with.

Do you feel that the federal government should or can look forward beyond 2017 to a sustainable funding source similar to the gas tax to, therefore, satisfy recommendations that are a result of community improvement growth plans that municipalities have put in place as part of their economic and growth strategies?

Mr. Barrie Kirk: That's a great question. The answer is obviously, yes. What form that should take, I'm not quite sure, but you've mentioned some options there.

I would also add in parallel with that it needs to have an outreach program. We, in CAVCOE, and a partner of ours in Paris have just responded to a request for proposals from the Government of France. As part of their outreach, they are planning a series of workshops all over France and a newsletter from the Government of France to help inform and educate people in municipalities and in the private sector about the opportunities. That is one thing the federal government could do as part of outreach education. France is doing that.

Just having the money available is one thing but you also need to educate people. There are a lot of people who don't really know enough yet about what's happening.

• (1150)

Mr. Vance Badawey: That's a great point.

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: I wanted to point out that if we go down the road of more electrification, we basically have a decline in the revenue from the gas tax, so that needs to be considered. What I know from the U.S. and other countries is that they are discussing a road usage tax, which is a different concept. You could also consider something like a connectivity tax. There are alternative ways in the future of connected, automated, and zero-emission driving. You have to find those revenue sources because these technologies require an infrastructure that needs to be funded.

Mr. Vance Badawey: That's a great point, as well. As municipalities right now are going through their budget processes, they're grappling with their infrastructure deficit with respect to traditional roads, water, waste water, etc., keeping up from the past but as well—as you correctly mentioned—putting in place new infrastructure that can make up for a lot of that deficit.

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: Yes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I leaned over to Ken earlier and said that to some extent we already have driverless vehicles. They're called public transit.

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: Yes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Therefore, how do we, through strategy, encourage more usage of that public transit?

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: In the U.S., for example, with the highway infrastructure fund, rules are currently being changed. To my knowledge, they are investing not only in the pavement but also in the sensors. If the government invests in sensor networks and there are private stakeholders that are utilizing them, that could be another revenue source.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Do you find the federal government's role is simply facilitating between the different levels of government, such as the provinces, which in fact are really municipalities?

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: Yes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Then, of course, their partners at the municipal sector, which is more localized—and I'm just playing this out—would be utilizing the process of their established strategies: community improvement plans, growth plans, and infrastructure plans. From there, as well, there is the opportunity to then create sustainable funding sources. Also, I think what has to be recognized is the discipline of assets, so encouraging asset management plans, which quite frankly are financed for more sustainability.

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: Also, most likely you need to balance this out, because there are those provinces that have more infrastructure and fewer people. That needs to somehow be compensated, so I assume the federal government has to come up with a plan on how to balance this.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Now, Mr. Kirk—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Badawey. Your time is up.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I am really enjoying this conversation, and I want to thank all of you for being here.

I too really appreciated Mr. Hardie's questions. I think they demonstrate the much larger picture that we're looking at when we begin to talk about smart communities.

Mr. Taiber, you ended your comments—and in fact we have the slide still in front of us—with the recommendation that the federal government develop a national transportation innovation program.

Following your presentation, Mr. Kirk, you referenced a couple of white papers you've written. The first one you mentioned was approximately a year ago. You began to state that it contained 30 recommendations, many of which would probably be better placed with the provincial governments. That's what I thought you were about to say.

I want to perhaps follow up on what Mr. Badawey has highlighted in terms of respecting the various orders of government that provide leadership to communities and that have the authority to make decisions. He highlighted many of the tools municipal governments have.

When we look at the development of a national strategy—and you focused on an international transportation network—I'm wondering how we bring this back to what needs to happen among municipalities, provincial governments, and the federal government. Where do we start?

• (1155)

Mr. Barrie Kirk: One of the most honest conversations I had a while back was with one of the municipalities in the GTA. They acknowledged that they had trouble getting their arms around the whole issue of self-driving cars and the impact on their cities. It's huge. It's multi-faceted. One of the things I find exciting is that it's going to affect virtually every aspect of our life—very literally.

I look back to the 20th century. It was 100 years ago today that Model T Fords were coming off the production line. We know by looking back how much cars changed lives in the 20th century—individual lives, the look and feel of our cities, the country, and the entire world. This is an exciting time for us because we have an opportunity now to witness cars 2.0. It's going to change everything all over again, with equal magnitude.

Very quickly, a while back, we did a project for the City of Toronto. I'll tell you a secret. Well, it's not really a secret; they know this. Before we started work, I thought that the biggest city in the country would have the most inertia. I was dead wrong.

The City of Toronto is inquisitive. They know that they have the opportunity to completely redefine the city of Toronto over the next 25 years. They are asking a lot of good questions. They don't have the answers yet, but they have established a city-wide committee to look at the impact of AVs, not only on transit and transportation but revenue, policy, zoning, and all the other parts of city government.

This is going to change everything. To try to get our arms around this in one hour is impossible, to be blunt. It's going to have a huge impact. I think we need to at least put the institutions in place, as my colleague was saying, to start to address this and have the conversations at all those different levels of government.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: I want to comment here that I think you need to consider two elements. One is the competitive element between municipalities, and then the enabling one. Certain technologies should be coming to all the municipalities, and then others want to be quicker. These two streams have to be considered.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I think with the fact that you have very large urban centres and small urban centres, some cities feel they have been very innovative by putting bike lanes in their city to address a need that their constituents have raised. I can appreciate that.

I am going to give the rest of my time to my colleague.

The Chair: You have a minute and 10 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here with us to answer our questions.

We have been talking just now about smart cities. I used to be the mayor of a small municipality of 25,000 people. Everything that you've been describing from the beginning I think applies only to big cities in terms of transportation and new ways of helping people get around large cities. How can a small municipality turn into a smart city? How could it take the lead and try to find its place within the global competition of smart cities?

Mr. Taiber, Mr. Kirk, please answer quickly.

[English]

Mr. Joachim G. Taiber: Yes.

Mr. Barrie Kirk: Thank you. Again, that's an excellent question.

Small towns will find a real benefit in intelligent mobility. A friend of mine has a mother who lives in Arnprior. As many of you know, it is a small town, 100 kilometres to 150 kilometres from here. There's no bus service. My friend's mother is slightly handicapped. She's in her eighties and can't afford taxis, so she's really limited in mobility.

If we look ahead a few years to having low-cost driverless taxis, that will be a good alternative to having public transportation in a small community like Arnprior. It will benefit the handicapped, seniors, and other people in small communities where there is no bus service at the moment.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much. The time is up.

You can see that we appreciated all of the information you have shared with us. I'm sure that the parliamentary secretary has taken note of a lot of the comments, as well, on these issues.

Thank you all very much for coming. No doubt we'll be in touch.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry. At this point I'd like to move that the remainder of our meeting be held in public.

The Chair: Okay. Can we excuse the witnesses?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Sure.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Madam Chair, if I may, I just want to confirm the request made by Mr. Rayes with respect to tabling the white paper or the white papers that Mr. Kirk was speaking of.

You mentioned one federal and one provincial. Can we please have those tabled?

Mr. Barrie Kirk: Will do.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Kirk.

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for being here.

Mr. Hardie, you've asked that we deal with the upcoming committee business that was scheduled to be in camera in a public session. You're suggesting that we not go in camera, that we stay in public session.

Mr. Ken Hardie: That's correct.

The Chair: I'm going to ask what the committee's intentions are here.

All those—

Mrs. Kelly Block: I just have to ask one question clarifying his request.

Because I moved a motion in camera and that discussion took place in camera, how do we then move into public to speak about what was in camera?

The Chair: It's up to the committee to decide whether it wants to do it in camera or not. The motion was not moved; notice of it was given. It's the choice of the committee.

Mr. Hardie has moved that we stay in a public session for the upcoming committee business. All in favour of staying in a public session for committee business?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Everyone is in favour. Thank you. We will stay in a public session on this issue.

Mr. Luc Berthold: What is on the table?

The Chair: We're in a public session to deal with the motion by Ms. Block.

Before we get into that, I was asked by Mr. Badawey in particular to clarify whether or not we paid any witnesses.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I would ask you to suspend the meeting, if we have to have discussions in camera. We should suspend for a few seconds to allow you to clearly establish where you want us to go. We can then resume the public meeting.

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to suspend for one minute. If anybody needs any clarification, please receive it now.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: I want to clarify the motion that Ms. Block will move in a moment, as I understand. I was asked to clarify the issue. From a committee's perspective—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, if we want to discuss the motion, Mrs. Block must first move it before anything else. We are discussing a motion that was introduced only through a notice of motion. Logic dictates that Mrs. Block moves her motion and then we can clarify matters. You are discussing the content of a motion that has not been put before us yet.

[English]

The Chair: We'll do it that way, and I will give you the clarification after you've moved your motion.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Just to clarify, once I move my motion here at committee, I will have an opportunity to speak to that motion.

The Chair: Of course.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay.

I will go ahead and move my motion at today's committee meeting:

That the committee not consider any briefs received for its study on the Navigation Protection Act as evidence until which time it can be determined whether any of the organizations that submitted briefs received funding from the Government of Canada to support the production of these briefs.

I want to speak to my motion.

First, Madam Chair, let me state that I am not suggesting through this motion that this committee paid for the production of the briefs that were submitted, nor am I suggesting that there was anything inappropriate by witnesses who applied for participant funding to provide feedback to Transport Canada as part of their consultation process. I want to make those two things clear.

There is no doubt in my mind that neither this committee nor the House of Commons did in any way pay for the production of these briefs. It is my contention that many of these briefs were solicited by Transport Canada, and their production was at least partially funded by Transport Canada and other agencies and departments of the Government of Canada.

Transport Canada's website advertises this committee's study on the Navigation Protection Act and encourages people and organizations to submit their views to the committee in the form of briefs. Having been a member here for some time, I will note that it is unusual for a government department to be encouraging organizations to send briefs to a parliamentary committee. Transport Canada

should accept the briefs and consider them as evidence as part of their consultation on the legislation we will be seeing later this year.

As I stated at our last meeting, it is not for Transport Canada to determine what witnesses the committee hears. That is our role as members of the committee.

Transport Canada's website notes that:

A participant funding program was open to applications between August 23 and September 23, 2016, and funding has since been allocated to support participation in this phase of the review.

The phase of the review that is being referred to is this committee's study on the Navigation Protection Act. Transport Canada approved funding for organizations to participate in this phase of the review. My office has gone through every submission that the committee received. I won't go through every one of them today, but suffice it to say that of the submissions received at least 22 of them make reference to, first, being asked to make a request for participant funding, second, waiting for participant funding from Transport Canada to make their submission, and third, not immediately receiving the funding they were approved for or that the deadline to submit briefs to this committee was too soon after the date they received participant funding.

Now I'm going to try to read the names of these different first nations groups appropriately.

The NunatuKavut Community Council noted in their brief submitted to this committee that:

NCC was invited to participate in the NPA Review process, and to submit a request for participant funding. We received confirmation of participant funding only on November 4, 2016, and we were asked to make a submission to this committee by November 30, 2016. The level of funding was significantly less than requested.

The brief submitted to this committee by the Musqueam Indian Band noted that:

As of yet, participant funding has only been partially disbursed to Indigenous groups. Therefore, through no fault of our own, we are not in a position to submit our views despite fast-approaching deadlines. The confusing and entangled funding and engagement processes (both of which have been unilaterally created by the federal Crown) undermine our ability to participate meaningfully.

We expect the appropriate time and resources to provide meaningful review and comments.

The brief submitted to this committee by the Mushkegowuk Council notes that they "only received approval from Canada for funding to begin work in relation to these submissions on November 15, 2016".

• (1210)

The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke noted in its brief that "funding for this review was limited and only approved on November 14th, 2016".

The Mi'gmawë'l Tplu'taqnn noted in its brief that they were:

...invited to participate in this process, and to submit a request for participant funding. Mi'gmawë'l Tplu'taqnn only received confirmation of their participant funding on November 17, 2016, and was asked to make a submission to this committee by November 30, 2016. The level of funding was significantly less than requested, and work could only commence on the date of confirmation of funding.

The Southern Chiefs' Organization noted in their brief that they were informed on December 7 that they had received \$16,500. For comparison's sake, this committee budgeted \$16,300 for its entire study of the NPA.

Madam Chair, I could go on with examples, as I've mentioned earlier, from these briefs of organizations that submitted briefs to this committee contingent on receiving funding from the Government of Canada to do so. If Transport Canada disburses participant funding for groups to submit briefs to this committee, then witnesses, I would assert, are being paid for their submissions to this committee. This is not right. A parliamentary committee does not pay for testimony.

To be clear, that the minister through Transport Canada is conducting his own consultations on the Navigation Protection Act is not a problem. That there is a fund for participants to provide their comments to the minister through Transport Canada is not the issue. That these processes are happening parallel to one another is not the issue.

The issue here is that Transport Canada, on its website, has muddied the waters by advising organizations and individuals that the funding program has since been allocated to support participation in this phase of the review that, again, I would suggest, is the committee study, which is why so many of those who applied refer to the committee, its study, and the timeline for receiving their funding. Again, I will state that it is not for the minister through Transport Canada to determine who this committee hears from and what form the testimony should take through their own set of questions.

Finally, it is not in the spirit of Parliament that committees would function in this manner.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Block.

Again, just to clarify, yes, we approved a budget of \$16,300 for our Navigation Protection Act study. We spent \$1,910.76 for video conferences, \$1,518.81 for travel, and \$128.85 for committee meals, for a total amount of \$3,558.42.

To reiterate, the committee only paid reasonable travel costs incurred by the witnesses. We did not pay any group, individual, or community to compile or research their testimony. When we ask groups to give us comments and testimony, they are certainly free to submit whatever they choose. How ever they went about preparing that is totally and entirely up to them.

The participant funding program has been around for many governments and is used often. As an example, it is used for FCM or other areas when the department is looking for comments on legislation and so on. It is something that has been around.

On the first nations in particular, the reason we're doing this review ourselves—and the other two committees—is because of the fact that the indigenous community and the Senate report refer to the fact that there was insufficient opportunity for the indigenous communities to be able to participate and to comment. They did not have the resources in many ways to do that.

We have Mr. Fraser first, then Mr. Badawey.

•(1215)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I appreciate the explanation behind the motion, Kelly.

My point of view is that we have good evidence and we should use it. I don't have a problem with the way the funding for the departmental consultation took place. I would have a problem if they withheld the funding until the report was compiled and there was some suggestion that they were trying to buy certain testimony, but that is not what happened here.

If we apply the same logic that you laid out for the “muddying the waters” argument, we could never invite the Federation of Canadian Municipalities here. If it received funding on how to plan for asset management in municipalities, and then gained expertise, I want to hear that expertise if it comes to testify.

If we have reservations about the quality of the evidence in these briefs, that's another thing. I expect the answer would be no, but I'd gladly entertain a motion to bring those witnesses in here to testify in person. We can cross-examine on the quality of the evidence, but I think we've spent a good chunk of time on this study, so I don't think that's where we want to go.

I have a real concern here, and I think it paints a terrible picture. If I put myself in the shoes of a first nations person who took the time to prepare evidence that did make its way to this committee, and I look back at the process of the changes to the Navigation Protection Act, I will see that in the 2007 to 2009 period when there was a study by the TRAN committee in which there were no witnesses from first nations.

When I look at the briefs that were submitted to the committee during that time, I think there were 28, and not one of them was from a first nations community. When it actually came to a debate in the House, it was part of omnibus budget legislation, and a lot of the comments I heard around this had to do with there not being sufficient time for the issues to come to light. Now, by design or by accident, if we were to support this motion, again, we would be largely excluding evidence of first nations communities on an issue that is of extraordinary importance to first nations.

If I were one of the groups putting evidence forward, I would feel that it is being implied that my behaviour is unethical or that my evidence is being buried because it's disagreed with. You went to great lengths to explain that this is not the case, but the consequence of this motion is going to communicate that very strongly to our community members from first nations, and for that reason I can't support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Badawey and then Ms. Block.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I don't have to reiterate Mr. Fraser's comments. I think he stated very well the reasons why this funding was made available.

As you said, Madam Chair, it's not a new concept. It is used to allow those folks without deep pockets to participate in these issues and to give their testimony with respect to how it affects them in their different jurisdictions throughout the nation.

Let's be clear; they never had that opportunity the last time. Although Ms. Block explained the process that we're embarking on today, I think I have to be clear in bringing that back to when it was actually decided upon previously, by the previous government. These folks never did have a chance and were never encouraged to have a chance with respect to the funding being made available to them to participate in the process that then became legislation.

We went beyond inviting groups, inviting different organizations, including the aboriginal communities across the nation, to participate in this very exercise, and as Mr. Fraser stated, that's very important, because, obviously, they have an extreme interest in the NPA and we want to hear about that interest. We want to hear how it is now affecting them and how it is going to affect them. We have to be very clear on that.

I'm not going to get into a lot of the other thoughts I had in my mind with respect to why the funding of these individuals was being asked about. I'm sure those thoughts did not have to do with it being a tainted report because we're paying them, and Ms. Block made very clear that's not the case. I appreciate those comments, because honestly that's where I thought you were going when you actually introduced it at the last meeting in a closed session.

Having said all of that, I think we're moving in the right direction. I think we've heard from a lot of different witnesses, moving forward now, about bringing this legislation back to the table in an amended fashion, and along with that I think a lot of the folks who were most affected by this legislation, those from the aboriginal community, have now had a chance to participate. With that, I hope that we will move forward with an all-inclusive process that obviously puts proper legislation forward, more inclusive legislation, and therefore, addresses a lot of the issues and of course the concerns that a lot of folks throughout the nation did in fact have.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I just want to follow up on a couple of points. The first is around something that Mr. Fraser pointed out when he used the example of FCM.

I absolutely agree that it doesn't matter whether a witness has received participant funding to provide some sort of feedback to a department, on any given question that they are being asked, and for us then to invite them to committee so that we as committee members can ask questions of them. That, to me, is like two different sets of testimony. One is what's being considered by the department based on the specific questions that they were asking. The other is what committee members from all parties would potentially ask, which perhaps would be very different questions from those asked by the department.

I would never preclude a witness who has participated in another parallel study from being a witness to this committee just because they received participant funding. My concern, and I think I've laid it out, is that we are receiving briefs from another study as though this committee heard from those witnesses.

Now, I have been in committees before where, if there are other studies available, a motion is made to also look at the testimony from another study. I think that's most appropriate. But to presume that the study this committee is conducting on the Navigation Protection Act and the consultation process that was undertaken by the minister through Transport Canada are one and the same—that's where my issue lies.

I believe that this committee, due to the very composition of it, with members from all parties sitting on it, would perhaps ask very different questions of witnesses than would a government department, or even the minister's office. This is where I am highlighting that I do not believe that the briefs that were received as a result of the consultation process called for by the Minister of Transport should just automatically become part of the testimony that this committee is hearing. Yes, there are communities that receive participant funding and they were responding to a specific consultation process by the Department of Transport.

The Chair: Just to clarify, the....

Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Berthold. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I would like to give a little refresher for the people who are listening to us now.

The study on the Navigation Protection Act was undertaken by our committee as a result of a letter we received from Minister Garneau. In that letter, he was strongly encouraging the committee to review the decisions made by the previous government under the Navigation Protection Act. He was sort of urging us to adopt his initial premise on the matter. The minister strongly encouraged the committee to undertake that study. Clearly, it has been undertaken with the support of the government members.

The opposition did not decide the timeframe for listening to witnesses and the date by which the report had to be completed. We received the agenda, and we accepted it because that's how it was submitted. We never set a final date for hearing from witnesses. It's not up to the official opposition to set the date. It is important to point it out. If more time had been needed to hear from First Nations, that would have been complicated.

As you know, Madam Chair, we have tried a number of times to hear the testimony of First Nations for this study, but it did not always work.

Transport Canada refused a few times to confirm whether formal hearings and consultations would be held on the review of the Navigation Protection Act. We have often asked questions about that. We were told that people can submit their comments, but that Transport Canada would hold no official consultations.

When Deputy Minister Keenan came to meet with us, we were told about a letter that he had sent to Marilyn Slett, Chief of the Heiltsuk First Nation. The letter confirms two or three things. It is worthwhile reading, Madam Chair.

At our meeting, you indicated that your organization had applied to Transport Canada for participant funding, in addition to asking the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to appear as a witness for the review of the Navigation Protection Act. You were concerned that you did not receive a positive response.

I have looked into the issue and discovered that the department had received a request for participant funding from both the Coastal First Nations and the Heiltsuk First Nation.

There was considerable interest in the participant funding program and the department received many more requests for funding than expected. As a result, it took more time than anticipated to complete the evaluation process. Please know that we are nearing completion and we will respond to the funding requests from your organizations by November 18, 2016.

... That said, we will contact and encourage the committee to listen to what the Coastal First Nations and the Heiltsuk First Nation have to say. A member from your organization could still take the opportunity to reiterate your interest in giving testimony before the committee. The committee's contact information is at...

And the letter goes on.

Madam Chair, my colleague has just identified an interference between the legislative and executive powers. Our parliamentary committee is independent. However, since the beginning, we have felt the government's intrusion in our work.

I have rarely seen a deputy minister encourage groups to participate in a study in committee to obtain their support, while they are supposedly holding their own consultations on the same topic. We must admit that there is a confusion of roles. As a committee, it is our role to point it out so that we can avoid similar situations in the future.

We really must make a distinction between consultations conducted by a department and by a parliamentary committee. Those are two completely different ways of communicating with the government. We must not allow any interference between the two. It is parliamentarians' privilege to be able to question witnesses. They will say things to parliamentarians that they might not say to the executive power, and vice versa. That is why it is very important to know for a fact whether or not Transport Canada funded people to testify for our study.

• (1225)

We must send a clear message to Transport Canada: when a committee studies an issue, it's the committee's business, not Transport Canada's.

We have repeatedly asked whether, yes or no, Transport Canada funded those groups for the preparation of those submissions. That's the question that needs to be answered today. Has the Department of Transport, yes or no, funded groups so that they could appear before us? That has nothing to do with the groups' positions and opinions, which are very interesting and relevant. As part of our study, we want to have access to the testimony from First Nations. However, we must shed light on what transpired and on the interference in the process. That's what we must denounce.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to be very clear on this because I think to some extent we have to realize that for Mr. Berthold, Ms. Block, and Mr. Rayes for that matter, we all come from the same background. We're all former mayors. We all come from a background where we bring in information, we learn from those that are affected by different issues, and we respond accordingly. We implement, we execute, and we move on to the next issue.

I find this to be the same thing. Although with the federal government, sometimes it's extremely frustrating when we have to play the politics of it, and/or the different administering, and of course, legislating and hearing from witnesses. I'm not too concerned with who hears from who. What I'm more concerned with is what they bring to the table. Whether it comes through Transport Canada or whether it comes through a department to me is irrelevant. It's valuable information. It's here before us. We can take it or we can leave it. That's my first point.

My second point is the fact that we had these witnesses show up to our meetings. You have had the opportunity to ask many of these witnesses from these different groups the questions that you're speaking of asking them. They weren't asked.

Here we are, as Mr. Fraser said, at a point in time where we want to move forward on something that is, I believe, in the best interests of Canada. I think and I would hope and I would respect the fact that you're all looking for the same outcomes because, even though we're on different sides of the table, even though, as you mentioned, Mr. Berthold, you're the opposition and we're the government, that is irrelevant. The bottom line here is that we're trying to move forward in the best interests of this nation. That's what we're trying to do. If you want to debate that, that's fine and that's fair. However, at the end of the day that is our attempt.

Coming to the issue at hand, regardless of where that information that helps us do that comes from, if it comes from a department or it comes from anybody for that matter, if it lands on our desks, it's a good thing. As Canada, we would try to encourage that participation regardless of where it comes from. They're participating. That's the main thing. That's a good thing, not a bad thing. Quite frankly, it was something that didn't happen last time around when this was tabled.

I applaud that direction. I also applaud where the committee is going. I would only expect that all members of this committee would have the right thoughts in mind to get to the right outcomes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1230)

The Chair: Your turn, Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I go back to, basically, the definition of a stakeholder. A stakeholder is somebody with a material interest in a decision by an authority—in this case the government. I found it astounding that, first of all, only 28 briefs were heard in the consultation for the changes that were made, yet we have attracted 256 briefs, specifically from a group that wasn't heard from, wasn't even represented in the 28. There are first nations all over the country who were clearly concerned about what was going on and what was snuck through in a very large and cumbersome omnibus bill. I think it's the failure of process, in the first instance, that has led to this situation.

Most people who submitted to this committee did so directly. In fact, I'm told that none of these submissions came from the ministry to us. They were basically repurposed by the people who, in some cases, had prepared them for the ministry's consultation, but in fact, in that process of repurposing them, in many cases they had made some adjustments to the testimony so that it would be pertinent to the questions we were asking.

The notion that somehow we have to prove that the payment for information somehow biased the material that we got, first of all, is quite insulting to the people who made it. Secondly, I guess we would turn that on its head and ask what evidence there is that they were biased. That would be interesting to hear.

Generally speaking, the idea of taking information, asking for the capacity to provide informed information, evidence-based information that will have an impact on decisions or at least recommendations out of this committee, that's not a bad thing. In a previous session, we just had an example where one of our witnesses cited a white paper that he did, and we asked for it. He's going to repurpose that. There's ample evidence that this sort of thing is seen as quite necessary, especially when we want to hear what people have to say.

Some people viewing or witnessing this might get the impression that this isn't about process; this is about not wanting to hear what stakeholders, who had such a material interest in the original decision, have to say. I hope that's not the case, because what these people have to say is vitally important to them and to us.

• (1235)

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would first like to say that I am truly very happy that this discussion is public. I think it is important for us to be able to hear all the views on the matter. I must admit that I have some difficulty with Mr. Badawey's allusions, for instance when he says that his hope is that everyone around the table has the best interests of Canada at heart. That's not something that should even be brought up. We are all working and we have all been elected in our ridings with that goal. I think we are working from the heart with dedication and in the best interests of the people we serve. So let's dispose of that point.

As in the case of all motions, the issue with the motion before us is that, when we are debating it, it is difficult to be two moves ahead the way you do in chess to plan the victory. I fully understand the procedure that Mrs. Block's motion is trying to safeguard. I have to

say that the committee's autonomy is sacrosanct to me. The rules governing the way we operate have not been established by chance. They are the result of many years of experience and I think there would have to be a serious reason for us to call them into question or to circumvent them.

It is also true that it is important for the committee to hear the viewpoints expressed in the few dozen briefs submitted that are the subject of this motion. Having read a number of them, I see that many of them clearly express similar opinions or visions. So I think it is important that, even if we are just voting on the wording of the motion, we can perhaps open and expand the discussion to the possibility of what happens next.

If we were to vote in favour of Mrs. Block's motion, would we have to stop our work right now? I think a way to come to an agreement would be to agree collegially that we extend our work by one or two meetings and that we mutually agree on the representatives we want to hear from. If we agreed not only on the number of additional witnesses that we want to hear to ensure that their viewpoints are included in our study, but also on the representatives we choose to hear from, I think we could bring together all those viewpoints in a study that, let's not forget, is not complete.

In a nutshell, the idea is not to reopen the study that we have already done because it is not completed at this very moment. I would even say that it is a unique feature of our committee to have two, three or four studies on the go at the same time. So I don't see a problem with continuing the work, without dragging things on indefinitely, just to be sure that the viewpoints contained in the submitted briefs, which will be disregarded by Mrs. Block's motion, can be reflected in our study on this bill.

I basically agree with Mrs. Block. The committee's autonomy is sacrosanct and essential. So let's hope that we'll get a clear and specific answer about whether or not the department granted funding for the production of the briefs, which would close the discussion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to make a brief comment.

I was also surprised to hear Mr. Badawey's comments, which are a veiled suggestion that we may not be working in the interest of Canadians. I think it's very clear that we are working in their interest.

As for the somewhat moralizing tone about how to proceed, I don't think the Liberal Party can teach anyone any lessons about how to work. The committee has work to do. The department has work to do. The Minister also has advisors who are quite familiar with how each organization works. I think it was done voluntarily. There was an intention. Rather than trying to dump responsibility on a motion that, I think, is entirely legitimate in the circumstances, especially given the remarks of the witnesses themselves, we should show some humility here.

Personally, I think Mr. Aubin's proposal is very interesting.

● (1240)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the input from all of the members around the table. I want to reinforce the comments made by colleagues Mr. Berthold and Mr. Aubin in terms of the autonomy of this committee.

If this motion has brought us to this conversation, that is exactly what was intended. This truly is about the autonomy of the committee to do its work, free from intervention from the minister or the department. If you read the motion, it is very clear that it doesn't preclude an action that comes out of it. It is to have the conversation so that we understand what is actually happening when a committee is conducting a study, and another part of government, the executive branch of government, is doing something parallel to it and it's deemed that the work they are doing then will become part of the committee's work. I think that distinction needs to be maintained and kept.

I want to reiterate that the fact that the Minister of Transport has decided to conduct consultations on the Navigation Protection Act is not an issue. He's well within his mandate to do that, and it is his right to do that as a minister. That there is participant funding provided for witnesses to participate in these kinds of studies is not an issue.

You've pointed out yourself, as has Mr. Badawey, that this participant funding has been available for a long time, to any number of organizations that want to participate but don't have the means to do so. I believe that when we look at the correspondence we've received from various organizations, when we look at their call for us to delay our study, that there was confusion around what exactly they were applying for through Transport Canada and the work of this committee.

I think it's that confusion, and the muddying of the waters that has transpired as a result, that I am trying to address through this motion, and the autonomy of the committee, as Mr. Aubin has pointed out.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Block.

Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to be clear here. The motion reads:

That the committee not consider any briefs...for its study on the Navigation Protection Act as evidence until which time it can be determined whether any of the organizations that submitted briefs received funding from the Government of Canada to support the production of these briefs.

It's been stated today that they have, that groups often receive funding. It is the norm. Simply put, they may not have the wherewithal to fund their participation in any issue—including, by the way, the FCM, which submits briefs to us on most issues.

Having said that, we have to understand the magnitude of the briefs that are asked, through the motion, not to be allowed. There are 256 briefs, 142 of which had funding. There was the opportunity for questions to be asked of the witnesses when they were here, some of which were part of that process.

I want to be very clear to Mr. Aubin's comments. There are no illusions. This is very simple. Ms. Block is attempting to block 256 briefs from this committee's attempt to make a more inclusive decision based on many organizations, many cities, many communities throughout the nation. The 256 communities that are affected by the Navigation Protection Act are being asked to stand down. That is not right. No illusions, that is simply not right.

We are stating that we should include these briefs as part of this process, once again, to make it more inclusive versus exclusive, which was the fact the last time this was brought to the table by the previous government.

● (1245)

The Chair: Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Since I can't play two moves ahead, I'm always tempted to find a solution. It's a friendly proposed amendment that is almost in the form of a question to Mrs. Block, who appears to have identified the briefs that are under contention, implying that many others are not being challenged.

So would it be a reasonable accommodation or amendment to replace the words "That the committee not consider any briefs" with "not consider any briefs that are under contention"? So some of the briefs would be in order and others would not for the moment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I feel a little weird right now. I represent the citizens of Mégantic—L'Érable as best I can. I do it for the good of my riding, the province and all of Canada. I don't think what I have said here today is any different. My work now is doing exactly that: representing the interests of Canadians.

In my opinion, the outcome that Mr. Badawey wants to bring to the debate shows a lack of respect. We are currently trying to determine whether the legislative and administrative powers should be allowed to intermingle in this way and give the administration the capacity to influence the work of parliamentarians to such an extent.

I'm sort of surprised that we aren't rather indignant about this today. That's where we should be directing our indignation. If there hasn't been any interference and funding in relation to briefs, Transport Canada has to confirm it. The subject will then be closed, and we won't speak of it anymore. We want to know if this has happened. If it hasn't, we want to tell departments not to do this, since it's a matter for parliamentarians. It is important to keep a very clear boundary between administrative work, departmental offices, and parliamentary committees.

If it is the will of the committee, which is composed mostly of representatives of the government party, to continue the study and to hear the problematic testimony, it must be proposed, and we will follow. At least we will have the opportunity, as parliamentarians, to ask people questions and find out what they have to say. If we want to know why their studies need to be funded, we will ask the witnesses those questions.

The official opposition doesn't think it's urgent to conduct this study on the Navigation Protection Act. Legislation is already in place, and most witnesses have said before this committee that it hasn't caused them any problems to date. I want to make it clear that continuing this study and hearing witnesses isn't a problem. We want to hear what people have to say about the revision of the Navigation Protection Act.

However, that isn't the issue. The issue with the motion is whether we will let any department fund groups that are going to say what the department in question thinks. That's what we don't know. If the groups are present, we could ask them. I'm concerned when I see a deputy minister strongly urge groups to submit briefs to this committee when there is no clear consultation exercise at Transport Canada.

That's the point we're trying to discuss today, despite all of my colleague's attempts to paint us as people with political interests on this issue. That isn't the case. The only interest I'm defending today is that of Canadians and the people I represent, who expect that, as members of Parliament, we are doing everything we can to separate the administrative and parliamentary areas. That's how our system is. If, as members of Parliament, we don't defend this when we feel that breaches are forming, who will?

No member of the public will stand up and say that the rights of parliamentarians are being violated. The big, well-funded machine that has the money will decide on all the witnesses. Every time the government wants to pass legislation, it will be the departments that will designate who will appear as witnesses.

Can we just avoid that, ask whether or not this happened, issue a warning and stop painting us as people who don't care about Canadians?

As I said before, this is a unique opportunity. If it is the will of the committee, we can hear from the witnesses, invite them to appear and continue the study. We will then take the time to discuss with the people who sent us briefs. We have received more than 200 since the end of the study, and 70 of them came from indigenous communities. Most of the others were circular letters from the Council of Canadians.

• (1250)

So perhaps we don't need to hear from everyone who submitted a brief. We could have the Council for Canadians again so that they can come and explain their campaign. We can hear from representatives from indigenous communities.

To say that we don't want to hear from witnesses, I think there is a huge disconnect. That's not what is at stake here today. What is at stake is the autonomy and independence of the committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Iacono.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: What a show you're putting on! It's quite the drama.

You're confused. I could find many other suitable adjectives. It's odd that you have forgotten so quickly what you did and how you acted when we were conducting this study. Have you forgotten your behaviour? Have you forgotten what you said and what you required of the witnesses who appeared before us? You had them come and meet with us a second time. So act like parliamentarians.

During the study, why didn't you act like parliamentarians? Why didn't you ask—

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Let me finish. Why didn't you act during—

Mr. Luc Berthold: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: On a point of order please, I have Mr. Berthold and Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, the hon. member is attributing motives to me, which is completely unethical, about what I could have done, about our role as parliamentarians. I ask him to please withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Madam Chair, I will not withdraw my remarks. I was alluding to facts.

Mr. Robert Aubin: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I had Mr. Aubin as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I will leave it up to Mr. Iacono whether or not he withdraws his remarks, but I would at least like him to make a distinction between the different parties. I don't think we all acted in the same way, if I understand what he is saying and what he is referring to without actually saying it.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My comments are directed at the Conservative Party, not the New Democratic—

[English]

The Chair: Please keep your comments specifically to the issue at hand.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes.

[Translation]

Witnesses appeared before us during the study. During that meeting, the Conservatives used all kinds of ways to try to slow the work. It was a filibuster. Two witnesses from western Canada had to appear before us again so that we could hear what they had to say. These were witnesses we had not heard from before.

We are criticized and told that we must act like parliamentarians. I think we need to check the “blues”—

Mr. Luc Berthold: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: —that we have to read the meeting transcripts and verify how we acted.

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, I'm sorry.

What's your point, Mr. Berthold?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, the witnesses did not have to come back to appear before us because the discussion was held by videoconference.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes, that's right. It was by videoconference.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, that's not a point of order.

Please continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: The witnesses had to come to appear by videoconference. They did not come in person, but they travelled twice. Why were they summoned to appear by videoconference twice? What happened the first time they appeared before us? What procedure did you initiate?

Knowing that we received these witnesses at the scheduled time, why didn't we ask them questions then? Why do we now have to take the time to make all kinds of comments and insinuations?

I think this is a real drama being played out. If we want to act like parliamentarians, we have to be a little more serious when we are doing the study. I think we need to be when the witnesses appear before us and ask questions at the appropriate time.

And now we're going to rule out 256 briefs?

• (1255)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Obviously this has become heated. I think it was heated at different moments throughout the course of the study. Despite the fact that there have been some heated exchanges this morning, we should all be able to respect each other and expect that we are all trying to promote the interests of Canadians and our

constituents, in this party and all parties. That said, I understand some of the frustrations that have come out to date.

As we wrap up this meeting with only a few moments to go, we have a motion on the floor to exclude 256 briefs that were submitted until such time as.... I forget the language in the specific motion. We have a motion that the committee not consider briefs for its study until it can be determined whether those organizations received funding. We've heard different arguments about the creeping influence of the executive and counter-arguments about the impact it will have on the ability of first nations—who have not had their fair say—to testify.

In the interests of completing the debate before our time expires today, I move that the question be now put.

The Chair: All right.

We're just moving that we vote on Ms. Block's motion.

We have that on the table. We have four minutes left.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Do you still have people on the list to speak?

The Chair: I have you at the moment, and then I could have Mr. Aubin, and Mr. Rayes again.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, we have a motion before us, which you came prepared to answer. The motion was that we not consider any briefs until such time as it can be determined whether any of the organizations that submitted briefs received funding.

If that question has been answered, the next question perhaps becomes, “So what then?” Is there an opportunity to note in the report that some of the testimony came through Transport Canada?

I agree that it has already been determined that some of the briefs were paid for by Transport Canada because of the process that some of the witnesses undertook in terms of submitting them to this committee. We can vote on this, but the fact remains that we know the answer. Now what do we do with that, if anything? That is exactly what the opposition has been trying to get to with this motion.

The Chair: Let me just say very quickly that it is not unusual at all for any of the departments to have a process parallel to the ones that committees have. It is not unusual or out of the question for the department to pay any group. I used FCM. FCM's funding did not come from this participant funding. It came from somewhere else, but it is established, as it was in the previous government, to allow groups to be able to prepare submissions, and so on.

It's not unusual at all, and it was done from the departmental perspective of Transport Canada for various components of this Navigation Protection Act. It was made available to organizations or groups, in particular aboriginal groups, that did not have the resources to be able to prepare, and so on, for the department or for whatever was chosen to help us with this process. The fact that 142 of the aboriginal organizations required funding in order for them to be able to prepare a brief from the department has nothing to do with us. It was their role.

On this committee we did not pay for anybody. We received 256 briefs on a variety of issues. The clerk has no ability to screen, to ask where something came from, or ask any questions at all. We, as a committee, receive them. There has been no interference between us and anything else.

It is important to ensure, as we go forward, that there is always a clear distinction between our role as parliamentarians, independent of the government, which is what our committee is, and the government itself, so that we are able to do our work without any interference from anyone. From that perspective, there is nothing wrong with helping organizations that don't have resources to pull resources together in order to provide us help as we move forward. Certainly, the opposition can put something in a dissenting report if they continue to have concerns, but we are where we are.

I have attempted to clarify that this committee had no interference from anyone and did not pay anyone to do anything or to submit any report. I am now going to go back.

We have a motion on the floor. Do we go to a vote on this motion now that we've had as much clarification as we have?

• (1300)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Can I have the opportunity to speak?

The Chair: Only if it's very short, just because it's one o'clock.

Does the committee want to take five more minutes?

Mr. Rayes, and then Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Since our meeting is public, I would like to take this opportunity—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Rayes, I got it backwards. It's Mr. Aubin, and then Mr. Rayes.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a question about procedure.

Can we vote on this motion even though I have submitted a proposed amendment favourable to Mrs. Block—a proposal she has not reacted to—that indicates that we say instead that the committee will not consider any submitted briefs that may be contentious?

Does the fact that Mrs. Block hasn't reacted to my proposed amendment mean that it is automatically rejected?

[*English*]

The Chair: There were 142 briefs that were part of the departmental review.

Your amendment, Monsieur Aubin, is that the committee not consider any briefs. Well, Ms. Block's motion is that the committee not consider any briefs. What are you suggesting, Mr. Aubin?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I suggested that the committee—

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it that they exclude the 142 that Ms. Block is suggesting because they worked with the departmental review?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I proposed that the committee not consider any briefs listed by Mrs. Block that are considered potentially contentious. Therefore, all the others would be acceptable.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is that the 142 that had worked with the department on the funding side? Then you would be denying 142 briefs to go forward.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Well, you're saying “any”, which is 256.

Mrs. Kelly Block: No, that is not the spirit of this motion. It does not say that we will exclude. It says we want to determine.

It says we will “not consider any...until which time it can be determined”.

The Chair: Has it been determined? Are you comfortable now as to the source of support for the briefs that we received?

Then we don't need to go forward with your motion, and you can withdraw it if you like. You've made your point, I think.

Ms. Block, do you wish to withdraw the motion?

Mrs. Kelly Block: We will withdraw the motion on the basis of this conversation that we've had today and in terms of what has been provided to us by way of how many briefs were, in fact, supported through funding.

(Motion withdrawn)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to adjourn the meeting. My apologies, we're five minutes late.

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