

Hon. Claude Williams  
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure  
2013-2014  
Main Estimates Speech – Operating Accounts  
Legislative Assembly  
April 2013

---

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to introduce the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure's ordinary budget estimates for 2013-2014.

With the financial situation facing our province and other jurisdictions around the world, these are definitely challenging times in which to govern and set budgets. My department has effectively met this challenge with the estimates I am now presenting for Transportation and Infrastructure.

This budget deals with our maintenance for ferries, bridges and highways, and allows for the planning, design, construction and management of our transportation infrastructure.

It also includes building design and construction, property management, facilities management and grants in lieu of municipal real property taxes.

The ordinary account estimates for this fiscal year total \$272.3 million, and include the following:

- \$57.6 million for winter maintenance
- \$53.0 million for summer highway, bridge and ferry maintenance
- \$60.3 million for buildings, property and facilities management
- \$58.3 million for grants in lieu of taxes
- \$24.0 million for the New Brunswick Highway Corporation
- \$17.9 million for financial and administrative services, policy and strategic development, human resources, information management, and district administration
- \$1.2 million for planning and design for bridge and highway construction.

Mr. Chairman, this year's operating budget reflects the department's ongoing commitment to finding cost and efficiency improvements in the department, while maintaining excellent service to our clients.

As Minister Higgs has stated, 13 departments are involved in the performance excellence and continuous improvement process to identify efficiencies and increase productivity throughout government.

For the next year, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure will be transforming its operations to become a performance-based organization. We are aiming to find \$26 million in efficiencies through reduced operating costs, increased labour productivity and more efficient use of equipment and materials.

We are learning to be more efficient and more productive in everything we do and, as a consequence, we will be doing things even better than we did before, while reducing our costs and saving tax dollars.

This is about changing the culture of government and the way we manage and measure and respond to our work. In fact, we want to maintain and improve services for New Brunswickers. The most important part of this process will be learning how we can be more efficient and more productive as a department, while living within our means.

The result will be a stronger, more efficient department leading to better customer satisfaction with the general public. By year's end, DTI will have implemented permanent, long-term change to improve the department and become leaders in performance excellence. Discipline, accountability, proactive management, daily due diligence, communication and better planning and scheduling of activities will be keys to our success.

I want to thank all my staff who are engaged and support the work we are doing to change our organization to one that is performance-based by focusing on performance excellence and continuous improvement.

I would now like to outline some of the specific initiatives that we are undertaking as a result of our focus on continuous improvement.

As announced earlier by my colleague, the Minister of Finance in his budget speech, we will be selling the government plane.

To ensure transparency, a public process will be implemented to complete this sale and maximize the financial benefit for taxpayers.

In collaboration with the Department of Government Services, we are looking at improving procurement activities. Given the number of tenders we issue and materials procured at DTI, there is tremendous potential to produce further cost savings by better planning our tender process.

At the Vehicle Management Agency, we are looking at better managing the parts inventory and increasing capacity in the shops by better managing workloads and work schedules and increasing wrench time.

A review of the government fleet is also being carried out as announced in the provincial budget. Government's goal is to significantly reduce the number of light vehicles in this fiscal year by a minimum of 10 per cent.

Fuel costs for transportation and heating costs for buildings are budget pressures we must also deal with in order to live within our means.

My department is working to reduce fuel costs in our government vehicles by monitoring idling and focusing on the efficient use of its vehicle fleet. We are also working to reduce fuel costs in the ferry service to the Fundy Isles by better managing vessel speeds and introducing shore power when the vessel is not in operation.

The buildings group continues to utilize the energy retrofit program to reduce heating bills. We are looking at selling several government-owned properties to reduce costs and generate revenue. We are also relocating office space to reduce the footprint of government and again reduce costs and produce savings for the taxpayer.

In winter maintenance, we have already seen tremendous improvement and reduction in sand and salt consumption and this improvement is projected to reduce our maintenance costs by well over \$2 million in 2013-2014.

These savings are being achieved by closer monitoring of weather temperatures in relation to road conditions and better adherence to sand and salt policies without affecting road safety. Also, we will see additional savings resulting from reduced fuel consumption and overtime worked by staff.

In summer maintenance, we are looking at better management of work schedules, including vacation schedules, so road repairs and projects are not delayed or costs increased due to lack of human resources and added time on the job and to ensure better quality in our workmanship.

The provincial budget has also called for a 20 per cent reduction in sick leave usage across all government departments. This initiative is expected to save the province \$20 million by 2015.

We have begun reviewing sick leave usage at DTI as part of this objective. An action plan will be developed to improve staff attendance in the department. Controls on overtime are also being implemented throughout the department.

Another goal we have for this year is updating existing policies, guidelines and regulations for commercial signage along New Brunswick highways, a platform commitment of our government.

We have consulted with stakeholders and will be working with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage to strike a better balance between policies that protect highways from driver distraction and the needs of businesses and communities.

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude my remarks, I would like to thank the hardworking staff at the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure for their stewardship of New Brunswick's buildings and properties and for their efforts in maintaining a safe and efficient transportation system. I would also like to recognize their commitment to DTI becoming a performance-based organization. Our government appreciates their dedication and commitment.

Today's budget estimates are a reflection of our government's efforts to take a realistic, responsible and balanced approach to governing in these challenging fiscal times. It is also reflective of my department's commitment to performance excellence and continuous improvement.

We believe that by governing smarter and more efficiently, we can continue to do more with taxpayer dollars, better focus on the needs of New Brunswick and rebuild New Brunswick together.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.