

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 31 JULY 2023
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: All right, good afternoon, everyone. I'll start with the latest update on the recovery from the North Island weather events earlier this year. In this year's Budget, we established a \$6 billion *National Resilience Plan to support building infrastructure that's more resilient to the impacts of climate change. We need to ensure that transport infrastructure is rebuilt quickly following the recent weather events, but also that they're built in resilient ways, as increasingly severe weather events are likely to continue to hit New Zealand in the future.

Connecting our communities is critical to getting our regions back on their feet again, so the latest instalment of Government funding that we've announced today will be focused on roads. We're releasing a further \$567 million that will go to Waka Kotahi for immediate works on State highways in Tairāwhiti, Wairoa, Hawke's Bay, Coromandel, and Northland. The funding includes \$257 million for works on the East Coast and Wairoa, \$150 million for Hawke's Bay, \$76 million for Coromandel, \$44 million for Northland, and up to \$40 million for minor resilience works nationwide. These investments are on top of the \$525 million that was already provided to Waka Kotahi in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone.

Now that almost all of the road links have been restored in cyclone- and flood-affected areas, many of those roads need to be made safer and more resilient, so we need more permanent solutions in place—where *Bailey bridges were put in to reopen crossings, for example. This extra funding will replace or strengthen and rebuild damaged bridges. It'll also improve the road surface on major stretches of road where *pot-holes and cracks were left after the weather events; that's made travel slow and frustrating for locals.

In addition to the funding for State highways, the Government's already made a significant contribution to local road repairs, which normally would be the responsibility of the local government. This amounts to \$210 million since February. The Government's been working tirelessly with the agencies, councils, and communities to recover and rebuild after this year's devastating weather events and will continue to support the affected communities as we build back better. Over time, the plan will also address the severe infrastructure deficits that have for decades held New Zealand back.

Finally, the Government today has welcomed an agreement by the Hawke's Bay mayors and the regional council chair to take to their councils a package including sharing the cost of buying out high-risk residential properties in that region. The priority areas of the overall package will be addressing *category 3 property buyouts, flood protection, and urgent roading and bridge repairs. It's another significant step in the cyclone recovery process. In the next step of the process, the councils will be asked to ratify the agreement and consult with their communities as appropriate. As part of the package, the Government's also agreed to a contribution to flood protection projects that give some certainty for owners of properties that have been assessed as category 2 and to enhance the resilience of the Hawke's Bay region.

I do want to acknowledge at this point that leaving a home and a community is not an easy decision, but for some people the opportunity to start afresh without the fear of future flooding or landslides is the right choice. Councils will be working closely with individual property owners to determine the details of each individual offer.

In other regions, negotiations with Auckland and Tairāwhiti on cost-sharing agreements are progressing well, and we're hopeful that we'll have agreements for them to consider and ratify shortly.

Alongside these negotiations, the Crown is working through a process and a support package for the affected Māori land and the communities in affected regions. Funding for this work will sit outside the cost-sharing agreements that are being entered into with councils. Happy to open up for questions.

Media: Your transport Minister wouldn't confirm the future of Let's Get Wellington Moving post the election earlier today. Can you give them any more certainty before more cash is wasted?

PM: Let's Get Wellington Moving is a transport initiative that was launched, I think, in about 2015 under the last Government. I think many Wellingtonians—and I am a Wellingtonian—would feel that perhaps we haven't made as much progress through Let's Get Wellington Moving as many in the region would like to see, so it is something that we'll be looking closely at.

PM: I think with the big sort of transport initiatives that are covered under the Let's Get Wellington Moving umbrella, there is always a debate to be had around cost share with the local council. And so that is one of the things that we'll need to work through carefully, but, yes, I would like to see more progress.

Media: [*Inaudible*] to us what you mean by "looking more closely at"? What does that in practice mean?

PM: I'm not making any announcements on it today.

Media: I'm not asking for an announcement; I'm just asking what does "looking more closely" at this initiative mean?

PM: I'm not making announcements on Let's Get Wellington Moving today, but I am acknowledging I don't think it has delivered what it was set up to deliver in 2015.

Media: The *Government has already agreed with Wellington council to fund some of that. Are you walking back that promise?

PM: No.

Media: So you're committed to sticking to what you've already pledged to Wellington council?

PM: Well, I mean, ultimately, if you were to take a proposal, say, that abandons Let's Get Wellington Moving and goes with building new tunnels and so on through Government building, the question then remains: what happens to the cost-sharing arrangements that have been entered into there? Would they still apply? Those are issues that, ultimately, the people making those proposals would need to work through. Anything that we do in the Let's Get Wellington Moving space will answer those questions at the time that we make any announcements, which I'm not doing today.

Media: Was Let's Get Wellington Moving one of the programmes that you considered throwing on your policy bonfire when you did other transport-related things [*Inaudible*]?

PM: I've been looking closely at transport stuff, and you can expect to see more on that. I'm not making announcements on that today, though.

Media: In terms of when you announced the stuff that you weren't going to do any more, earlier this year, what's changed with Let's Get Wellington Moving between then and now?

PM: As I said, I never took that off the table in terms of the, you know—I think I've actually answered questions on this already and said that I want to see more progress in Wellington on transport projects.

Media: But no progress has been made.

PM: What's that?

Media: But no progress has been made.

PM: Well, I've only had the job a few months—or six months.

Media: Doesn't confusion like you're creating right now just delay those projects even further?

PM: No, I don't believe so.

Media: You're not giving any confidence to invest in infrastructure in our capital city.

PM: Well, no, what I'm saying is Let's Get Wellington Moving, at this point, doesn't seem to have been able to reach agreement on the major infrastructure and roading projects required in the region.

Media: Can you give us a *time line of when you or the *Government is going to be making any sort of decision on this. *David Parker seemed to imply that it was coming when Labour unveiled its transport policies. Can you give us some sense of when this final decision might be coming?

PM: So, I mean, I guess we're into an interesting period. There are two different things here: one is the *Government policy and the other is the *Labour Party policy. And whilst we are currently the *Government, of course, what we put out before the electorate as the *Labour Party in the election campaign may not marry up exactly with *Government decisions. So we have to work our way through that, and you'll see us do that in the next little while.

Media: I'm quite confused about that. So the *Government at the moment is still working through it, but the *Labour Party is going to decide on its future when it unveils its transport policy?

PM: So there is the Government policy statement, which every *Government has to do every three years. Some of what we're talking about in transport, of course, extends beyond three years. Those are the sorts of things that parties put in their manifestos rather than necessarily would be reflected in the Government policy statement.

Media: So can you say very concretely, when *Labour unveils its transport manifesto, will the future of Let's Get Wellington Moving within the next three years and beyond be part of that?

PM: It will be a mix of in the Government policy statement and in the manifesto.

Media: Prime Minister, can I talk to you about the secondary teachers?

PM: Yes.

Media: What do you make of the 14.5 percent increase that was recommended for secondary teachers?

PM: We said that we would go into arbitration with the secondary school teachers in good faith. Obviously it's a significant increase in the funding, you know, that will be required to meet that, so we'll take the next day or two to consider that. We indicated in the agreed timetable that we would need to take a few days to consider it, and so we absolutely do that. We'll have to think about how to fund that if we were to go ahead with the offer put forward through arbitration, and that will involve looking at where we can, you know, find the money in order to do that, because it's not an insignificant sum of money.

Media: With the cost nearly \$4.4 billion now being recommended, is it realistic for the *Government to approve this?

PM: Look, we need to take a few days to consider that, which is what we built in to the timetable. We will consider that, and that will include considerations of, if we went ahead with the recommendations that came out of arbitration, how we would pay for those.

Media: The education Minister has had to recommend this for Cabinet; will you be recommending it to your colleagues as well?

PM: As I've said, the timetable that we agreed was that we would take a few days to consider it, and we'll do that.

Media: Can you just explain why there is friction between *Labour Party policy and *Government policy on a major transport infrastructure project when you hold a majority *Government, and the *Labour Party can do literally whatever it likes?

PM: No, there's a statutory mechanism called a *Government policy statement that—

Media: Which you wrote, as the Labour Party—

PM: Yes, indeed, but it generally covers a three-year window. Many of the projects that we talk about with transport have a much longer lead time than three years.

Media: So why would you, the Labour Party Government, have written them into a Government policy statement if you didn't intend to do them as the Labour Party campaigning—

PM: No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying the opposite, actually. There might be things that aren't covered in the Government policy statement that would be covered in the manifesto commitment.

Media: Are you going to add to *Let's Get Wellington Moving?

PM: I'm not making any announcements on Let's Get Wellington Moving today.

Media: On the Hawke's Bay cost-sharing agreement, what's the current proposed split in terms of what entities are paying what?

PM: Ultimately we haven't announced the cost split at this point, because that's ultimately subject to ratification by the council, and so once that's happened, then obviously we'll share those details.

Media: What's the proposed split?

PM: As I've indicated, we haven't announced that yet.

Media: Why won't you be transparent about that?

PM: Because ultimately it sits with the council. The council—you know, the Government's negotiating with the councils in good faith. They need to have the opportunity to consider the offer that we've put to them.

Media: The Council is going to consult with communities, though; so, like, why can't you just tell us what the proposals—

PM: Well, because there'll be some councillors that haven't even seen that yet, so we need to give them the opportunity to do that.

Media: Can we expect the Labour Party's tax manifesto this week?

PM: I said last week that it'd be in the next few weeks and I'll stick to that.

Media: Why is it being pushed out? I mean, has this got anything to do with your revenue Minister deciding he didn't want to be the revenue Minister *any more?

PM: No, not at all. Labour's tax policy does sit within the context of our broader manifesto commitments, though, of course, as every party's will, and I note that other parties haven't released their tax policies yet either.

Media: Is it because National announced your policy last week that you—

PM: What's that?

Media: Is it because National announced your policy last week and you're coming up with a new one?

PM: Well, they took a guess at what they think our tax policy might be, and I'm not going to get into speculation on it.

Media: [*Inaudible*] the Māori Party announced their tax policies? You said—

PM: What's that?

Media: Haven't the Greens and Maori Party announced their tax policies? You said other parties haven't.

PM: The Greens and the Māori Party aren't the only other parties in Parliament.

Media: But they're going to be influential parties after the election, should you get up. Shouldn't you have at least read them?

PM: Look, we'll announce our tax policy in due course.

Media: But you're very critical of the National Party waiting for so long to reveal its tax policy and how it's going to cost its policies. Now you're essentially doing the same thing but you're not telling us why you've delayed it. Why have you delayed it?

PM: I haven't delayed it. I've said that I'll announce it in the next few weeks, and I'll announce it in the next few weeks.

Media: So from the beginning your plan was to announce the tax policy within the next couple of weeks. It wasn't this week or last week; nothing has changed in terms of your *time line on this?

PM: No.

Media: There's been a massive increase in the numbers of reported migrant exploitation. How has that gotten so bad under your watch?

PM: Migrant exploitation is something the Government's been looking very closely at. We have been focused much more on enforcement of migrant exploitation. I think that's reflected in the statistics. We've actually been more proactively looking for it, because I don't think migrant exploitation is acceptable. We have made some changes to various visa categories particularly where some of those visa categories were more prone to being exploited and we'll continue to look at what more we can do in that space.

Media: But experts we've spoken to, people who are working with people who are exploited on a daily basis now, say that it's the *accredited work visa which is the issue, because it's tying workers to employers and they're saying that instead it should be tied to a sector, for example. Is that something you would consider?

PM: One of the reasons that we have an accredited employer visa is that you can withdraw accreditation where there's any evidence that employers aren't following the rules.

Media: Why are we seeing so much of it, then?

PM: Look—

Media: If the entire visa was set up to prevent migrant exploitation—that was the whole reason for accrediting employers and now we've seen more complaints about migrant exploitation than we have in the last five years.

PM: And the system was designed to flush out migrant exploitation, and so the fact that there are more complaints means that we're in a position to do something about them, because we can withdraw an employer's accreditation.

Media: Prime Minister, you said you've been looking closely at transport policies. Can you confirm that includes light rail in Auckland?

PM: Obviously, the Government's been looking closely at light rail in Auckland for some time. I'm not making any announcements on light rail in Auckland today, though.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: I'm not saying that. I'm not making any announcements on light rail.

Media: Is it still a matter of policy to do it?

PM: Well, Government policy on that has not changed.

Media: Is it Labour Party policy to complete light rail to the airport in Auckland?

PM: I'm not announcing Labour Party policy for the next election today.

Media: Well, it was for last election, so has there been a change between 2020 and now?

PM: Oh, there's been three years. There'll be another manifesto for the coming election and I'm not announcing it today.

Media: When will you make a decision about the *Auckland Harbour crossing?

PM: You can expect to hear more on that in the next few weeks.

Media: Will you have anything concerns about the climate impacts of building a lot of new roads or *four-lane highways, as entertained in National's policy announced today?

PM: I think the biggest concern about National's policy today is that they don't seem to know how much the roads that they are proposing to build are going to cost. They certainly don't seem to have any idea of how they're going to pay for them. In terms of the climate impact, that's—you know, we're trying to have a balanced transport policy, as a Government, that recognises that people do need to be able to get around, and roads are a part of the way people get around, but that we need to be reducing our overall emissions.

Media: And slightly different topic: should the *Football Ferns get a parade? The men's team in 2010 got a parade when they didn't win any games. Should the football ferns get one? They did win.

PM: So first of all I want to acknowledge the massive achievements of the Football Ferns. They have done the whole country proud, they have gone further than any New Zealand team has gone in a football world cup before, they've inspired a whole generation, I think, of young women athletes, and I think that they can hold their heads high as a result of that. We should all be incredible proud of them, they've made history, and we should absolutely acknowledge that. In terms of the most appropriate way to recognise that, that's not something that I've turned my mind to yet.

Media: Do you feel compelled to give a defence of *Palmerston North, by any chance?

PM: I think Palmerston North is a great city. I know a lot of people that live in Palmerston North; they really enjoy living there.

Media: On the topic of light rail, can you just clarify please: it's quite something for you to campaign on two elections for that policy as a main transport policy and for you to not still be committed to it right now. Can you just give some clarity to Aucklanders on whether you are still 100 percent—

PM: What I'm saying—I think everybody reads into the fact that I don't, on any of these transport policy areas, that I'm not giving you a yes or a no or a black or a white answer on them, and it's simply because I don't have announcements to make on them. Until we do, Government policy remains Government policy, so the work on light rail is continuing to progress.

Media: Have you made decisions on all of them?

PM: What's that?

Media: Have you already made the decisions on all of them?

PM: So, again, I want to note that there are differences between Government decisions and Labour Party decisions—

Media: But the Labour ones, have you already decided your manifesto? Have you already worked out what is in and what is out for the Labour Party for the campaign, or are you still working on it?

PM: The final manifesto has not yet been signed off, no.

Media: Have you done the work on the transport manifesto?

PM: There's work happening on the transport manifesto. It's not finalised yet, no.

Media: But you do have a black and white answer then. You know the answer to whether or not Labour is going to campaign on keeping your promise to do light rail to the airport?

PM: I think I'll come back to my first comment on this, which is, I'm not announcing our transport policy today.

Media: Yeah, but you said you don't know the answer in black and white; you clearly do know the answer in black and white, so why don't you tell us?

PM: It's not necessarily that I don't know, it is that I'm not announcing it. Right—

Media: *Let's Get Wellington Moving was started in 2015 because the *Basin Reserve flyover fell apart. It hasn't worked for more than a decade. What is wrong the city that nothing can happen here?

PM: I think at the end of the day we have to accept that there does need to be a link between the *Ngauranga Gorge and the airport that is significantly more resilient than the one that we have at the moment is. That is going to involve some difficult decisions, and I think the idea that everybody is going to come together and somehow miraculously reach a consensus on that perhaps was a little unrealistic in 2015, and the intervening period from then till now has probably demonstrated that.

Media: The problem is a fractious relationship between the Government and the two councils, and those three parties not being able to agree on anything ever.

PM: I wouldn't necessarily go that far, to be honest. That's a little bit pessimistic—

Media: But on significant stuff, it has been decades since they've agreed on what to do. Is that the main problem, is it? Is it that relationship?

PM: No, not necessarily, but clearly I think we need to see some more progress on that—on that particular bridge.

Media: When you do announce the Let's Get Wellington Moving, or whatever transport policy that fills the hole, will you actually have a way of getting—like will you have a route that's preferred, or will it just be another "let's see"?

PM: Well now you're asking me to tell you what's going to be in an announcement that I'm not making.

Media: No, no not at all, it's like—are you going to announce a working group, or are you going to announce an actual route? Because it's been so long, as Thomas suggested.

PM: When I have something to announce, I'll announce it.

Media: Can you guarantee the Basin Reserve's untouched by it, essentially?

PM: I could do this all day if you want, but—

Media: Are you going to continue David Parker's Tax Principles Reporting Bill?

PM: Yes.

Media: Why?

PM: Because it's a good bill.

Media: Have you seen any estimates on the number of homes in *Hawke's Bay or people in Hawke's Bay in category 3 that will want to leave?

PM: I haven't got a number on that sorry, I wouldn't want to put a number on it. I don't have a number on it.

Media: Do you have an idea of how much central government may have to pay out under the proposal—under the draft proposal?

PM: I think if you—I don't have a number for that particular area but, if you look across the whole of the sort of the cyclone and flood – affected areas, I think we've previously had publicly a number in that category 3 of somewhere in the ballpark of—and these are very caveated numbers—but it could be, ballpark, somewhere around a billion dollars.

Media: Prime Minister, you've spent \$100 million on light rail in Auckland already. Are you going to walk away from that project?

PM: Like I said: we can keep going on this for hours if you like, but I'm not making any announcements on that today. The Government's policy on this has not changed, so work is continuing.

Media: You said that you were trying to get new talent into the Labour line-up but, in terms of your list rankings today, there are only about two new faces within the top 40, and it's dubious at best whether they will get in on the list ranking. Are you actually bringing new talent into your ranks, or is it just more of a refresh of what we've seen before?

PM: I think we should acknowledge that in 2017 and in 2020 we had a significant intake of new talent, and some of those MPs are just sort of starting to make their mark, and I think people are starting to see that. So those people do deserve the opportunity to continue to build on their parliamentary careers. The number of new MPs we get will ultimately be determined by the number of votes we get, and I'm out to get every single vote that I can.

Media: How concerned are you, Prime Minister, that three of the seven Māori seats are not on your list?

PM: In the case of—there are reasons for all of them, but, in the case of two of them, it's a timing issue, in terms of when the nominations came in. In the case of *Nanaia Mahuta, she made the decision that she wanted to opt out of the list process.

Media: *Tāmami Coffey is on the list and he only nominated yesterday, so it can't be down to a timing issue.

PM: That's a little more complex a question. The candidates in question didn't ask to go on the list. They did not nominate for the list.

Media: How important do you think this is? Is that the right strategy? Was that the right decision for those two particular candidates—*Hauraki-Waikato and *Te Tai Hauāuru? Is that a good decision? Do you think they made the right decision?

PM: Look, I fully back both of them. I think they'll both win the seats.

Media: Do you think it's a good thing that the US is teaming up with Australia to build missiles?

PM: That's a question for them.

Media: Do you think it's a good thing, from New Zealand's position?

PM: That's a question for them.

Media: Why won't you answer the question?

PM: Because we generally don't comment on the national security policies of other parties, other Governments, other countries.

Media: Australia is a country we are so close to, though.

PM: Yeah, and I'm happy to comment on the relationship between New Zealand and Australia, in particular in the areas of defence, which is very strong, but their defence relationships with other countries is a matter for them.

Media: We have a very strong military alliance with Australia. Are you comfortable with them building missiles with the United States?

PM: That's a question for them.

Media: Yesterday, on the **Marae* programme, **Willie Jackson* was on and he was talking about the fact that he didn't think there was enough support—it was in the context of the Debbie Francis review—specifically for **Māori* women when it came to them having issues and needing to speak to people, whether that be sort of an independent person that they could go to who also understood where they might be coming from, in terms of their own tikanga, their own cultural experiences. Do you agree with **Willie Jackson* that that is something that is lacking within Parliament?

PM: I think one of the things that Parliament as an institution has been grappling with in the entire time that I have been here is how best we support **members* of Parliament to do the job that they have in front of them, recognising the unique set of circumstances that we face. That is different to almost every other workplace in the country—that areas around mental health, resilience, professional support are quite different in this environment to any other environment, as well. I don't think we've ever really nailed this to the extent that we need to. I still think there are gaps in the system, and I still think we need to keep working on that.

Media: Are you worried, though, that the Debbie Francis review didn't necessarily take into consideration, when making recommendations about how that could be improved, whether a sort of one-size-fits-all approach is actually the right thing to do and whether there actually need to be—what *Māori* MPs, Pasifika MPs, Asian MPs, whoever it is—different mechanisms for different people, based on how they will be able to use and how they will relate to it?

PM: I mean, ultimately, I completely agree with the thrust of your question. I'll have to go back and re-read the Debbie Francis review to see how much that's reflected in there. But, no, it's not going to be a one-size-fits-all mechanism; different people have different needs. I think the Francis Review was very focused particularly on the working environment for staff who are in this complex—quite rightly so—but actually there are some unique issues around **members* and around **Ministers* that also need to have some more consideration, and I think we need to make sure we are doing that too.

Media: Prime Minister, when did you first learn about the missile agreement?

PM: I didn't get a nuclear briefing from Australia about it, if that's what you're asking.

Media: No, when did you first learn about it?

PM: Oh, in the last few days, I think. I don't know—I don't want to say that the New Zealand system didn't know about, but I only found out about it in the last few days.

Media: So it was after the US **Secretary of State* **Antony Blinken* hopped over the Tasman?

PM: Like I said, it was in the last couple of days.

Media: Are you concerned that the **Francis* report made no reference to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Treaty partnerships when it investigated the culture of **Parliament*—therefore, that might also impact on the culture around *Māori* and our wāhine *Māori* MPs in **Parliament*?

PM: I think it's important that we do consider the cultural appropriateness of all of the things that we're doing in this space. The questions about the **Debbie Francis* report are probably more appropriately addressed to the Speaker, who is ultimately the sponsor of that report. But I do think that in any work that we do in this space, we need to make sure that we're reflecting the diversity of cultures and backgrounds that we have here at **Parliament*.

Media: But specifically Te Tiriti and partnership—

PM: Yes, absolutely; I think that, integrally, also needs to be there.

Media: Was *Tāmāti Coffey tapped on the shoulder for *East Coast or did he ask to stand?

PM: So I can only refer you back to the comments that the party president made—and I think that I made, as well—this morning. Neither of us approached Tāmāti to ask him; I'm not saying that that doesn't mean that there wouldn't have been people within the party that might have said, "Hey, you should give this a go." And I fully support him doing that; I think he'll be a great advocate for the East Coast. He's an experienced member of *Parliament, he's very charismatic, he's very talented, he's very competent, and I think he's just the sort of person that the East Coast needs right at the moment.

Media: He says he was shoulder-tapped for it.

PM: Like I said, I can comment for myself and for the party president, and I wouldn't want to say that there aren't other people within the party organisation that didn't go to him and say, "Hey, we think you should do this."

Media: Just back on migrant exploitation, so the people that we've spoken to who work—again, work—with people who have been exploited, they say that when you tie an employee to their employer, it creates a power imbalance, and they're less likely to even report exploitation at all. What they say would be helpful is if you make it bound by a sector, rather than one specific employer. Is that something that you would consider changing about that accredited visa?

PM: I'm not proposing any changes to the *Accredited Employer Work Visa right now. It is something that we've indicated from when we first launched it that we would keep it under review, though.

Media: It sounds like you're saying that because we've made it easier to complain, that's why we're seeing more complaints. Do you acknowledge—like, people have told us that it is a problem with the visa—that that is some fault at play because of how you established that work visa?

PM: Migrant worker exploitation has never been OK. I think it's more visible now than it's been in the past, but it's still never been OK. So any allegations that there's been an increase in migrant worker exploitation is something, of course, the *Government will take very seriously.

Media: But do you accept that there is an issue with the visa that is increasing migrant exploitation?

PM: As I've indicated, one of the purposes of launching that visa was so that we had more tools to deal with migrant worker exploitation.

Media: But that's the ambulance-at-the-bottom-of-the-cliff approach, right? Like, instead of the prevention of making sure that people don't get into debt traps so they come here, so they're not treated like slaves by employers before they get here. Instead of treating that at the bottom of the cliff, why not make the moves to prevent it in the first place?

PM: Well, that is one of the things that the Accredited Employer Work Visa is designed to achieve.

Media: Yes, "designed to achieve", but people we've spoken to say that the specifics of that visa has thus made it worse.

PM: As I've indicated, the visa was launched in order to avoid migrant worker exploitation. When we launched it, we said that we would keep a close eye on it and we'll keep it under review, and we'll absolutely do that. OK, last couple of questions.

Media: Are you open to changing the route of *Auckland Light Rail?

PM: I'm not making any announcements on Auckland Light Rail today. Right, Tova—welcome back.

Media: Thank you. Would you consider a sugar tax? As part of your tax policy, are you considering a sugar tax?

PM: A sugar tax isn't on the table.

Media: Right, so you're ruling out a sugar tax, but you can't rule out reducing GST on fresh food and fresh fruit and vegetables?

PM: I see what you did there; that was actually really clever. I'm not going to get into announcing our tax policy today.

Media: But likewise, you committed to the tax reporting bill, but you can't commit to light rail?

PM: I've given all of the answers I'm going to give on both of those topics today.

Media: Are you going to rule out playing the "rule in and out" game? It's really hard to keep up.

Media: Is it still your plan to begin construction on light rail next term?

PM: The planning is already under way* for Auckland light rail. We've not made changes to that.

Media: So you are committed to it?

PM: We've not made any changes as a Government to the work that's currently under way around Auckland light rail.

Media: Do you think next term we're going to see some shovels in the ground?

PM: Well, bearing in mind that the work that's being done at the moment is to assess what the most desirable route and what the most desirable construction option is for Auckland light rail, we've not stopped that work; that work is continuing.

Media: Should it go down Dominion Road*?

PM: Got no answer on that one. OK, anything else?

Media: That was a bit of [*Inaudible*]. Should it go down Dominion Road?

PM: I'm not making announcements on it today. One of the—

Media: You should be able to answer that question.

PM: No, no. One of the bits that Auckland light rail are working on right now is the preferred route.

Media: Prime Minister, what do you think of the taxation of portfolio investment entities?

PM: Sorry?

Media: The taxation of PIEs.

PM: I'm not announcing any changes to tax policy today.

Media: Do you think they're taxed appropriately?

PM: I'm not making any announcements or pronouncements on tax policy today.

Media: Prime Minister, on forming your manifesto, because you're obviously working on that process, has that been a difficult process because the Government is pretty constrained on what it can do? And is that why you're looking at questioning whether you want to do all these projects, because there's just not that much governance that needs to do stuff in general, whatever it is?

PM: I missed the first part of your question because of other noise in the room. Do you want to have another crack at it?

Media: When you've been forming the Labour Party manifesto, has that been a difficult process because the Government is somewhat constrained in what it can actually do, and is that why you're a little bit unsure about this project, that project—because there's just a limited number of things the Government is able to do?

PM: All political manifestos involve a series of trade-offs. You can't do everything all at once, and so a manifesto, naturally, has to make some prioritisation decisions.

Media: What do you think of National's roads?

PM: As I've indicated, they still don't seem to be able to indicate how much they're going to cost with any accuracy or how they're going to pay for them, and I would have thought that was the biggest thing that they should really have been in a position to be able to answer when they announced their policy.

Media: Should those roads exist?

PM: What's that?

Media: Should those roads exist? Are you against the roads or just the costing?

PM: I don't have anything philosophically against the roading projects that they've announced, but it's a bit like Santa Clause coming and promising everything with, you know, no idea of how they're going to pay for them. They really have to be a bit more upfront about how they're going to pay for them and how much they're going to cost. Some of the roading projects that—some of the costings that they're relying on date back to the time that they were last in Government. If you look just over the last two years, the price of bitumen's gone up 100 percent. They don't seem to be allowing for that in their costings.

Media: Will you rule out introducing road user charges on EVs?

PM: I'm not making announcements on that today.

Media: So you're not ruling that out?

PM: I'm not making announcements on that today.

Media: Have you talked to Michael Wood, off the back of the list rankings?

PM: I haven't had a personal conversation with him, no.

Media: You know how he's—

PM: Well, like I said, I haven't had a personal conversation with him. I'm sure I will. I'm sure I'll see all of my caucus colleagues tomorrow, hopefully.

Media: What about Phil Twyford? Have you spoken to him?

PM: Not in the last 24 hours. OK. Thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference