



# ***CLEAN ECONOMY JOBS, RESOURCES AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Ms KE Richards MP—Chair  
Mr PT Weir MP  
Mr BW Head MP  
Ms JC Pugh MP  
Mr LA Walker MP  
Mr TJ Watts MP

**Staff present:**

Ms M Telford—Committee Secretary  
Dr A Ward—Committee Secretary  
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Monday, 4 March 2024**

**Brisbane**

## MONDAY, 4 MARCH 2024

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### **The committee met at 9.30 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open this public briefing for the committee's consideration of the Department of Transport and Main Roads annual report 2022-23. My name is Kim Richards. I am the member for Redlands and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate in this country to have two of the world's oldest continuing living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share. With me here today are: my deputy chair, Pat Weir, the member for Condamine; Bryson Head, the member for Callide; Jess Pugh, the member for Mount Ommaney, substituting for Joan Pease, the member for Lytton; Les Walker, the member for Mundingburra; and Trevor Watts, the member for Toowoomba North.

This briefing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in these proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. You have previously been provided with a copy of instructions to witnesses so we will take those as read. I also remind any members of the public that they may be excluded from the briefing at the discretion of the committee. I remind committee members that departmental officers are here to provide factual and technical information. Questions seeking an opinion about policy should be directed to the minister or left to debate on the floor of the House.

These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone present to please turn their mobile phones off or to silent mode.

**MAHON, Mr Andrew, Deputy Director-General, Policy, Planning & Investment, Department of Transport and Main Roads**

**STANNARD, Ms Sally, Director-General, Department of Transport and Main Roads**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement.

**Ms Stannard:** Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am conscious that the purpose of the hearing is to support your consideration of our annual report 2022-23. Accordingly, I would like to commence by acknowledging the work of the department when it comes to our annual reporting. The department last year received its 10th consecutive gold award from the Australasian Reporting Awards and we are very proud of that achievement.

Our current annual report describes a period of significant change for the development of Transport and Main Roads. There were many highlights, and it is my pleasure to give you a quick overview of those. A range of major road projects commenced and continued under our Queensland Transport Roads and Investment Program, or QTRIP as it is commonly referred to. Key deliverables included commencing the Coomera Connector; the Bruce Highway Upgrade program, including between the Caboolture-Bribie Island road and Steve Irwin Way; and the Rockhampton Ring Road. We also see record investment in rail to deliver better journeys for Queenslanders, including commencement of Logan and Gold Coast Faster Rail and continued delivery of Gold Coast Light Rail.

In addition, we are providing more choice in how our customers plan and pay for their public transport journeys via our Smart Ticketing project. Over 12 million trips have been taken, as of Friday last week, using those new ways to pay. More than \$439 million was delivered in safety treatments across Queensland roads through our Targeted Road Safety Program. Finally, we supported the establishment of community operated digital service centres on country in Cherbourg and Palm Island. That represents tremendous work by Queensland's customer and digital group.

Meanwhile, Queensland's population has grown strongly. I am sure you have seen that in each of your local areas. This is driven by record high levels of interstate migration and has substantially increased post COVID. Queensland's population growth in 2022 was recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to be the highest annual growth since June 2009, and South-East Queensland is currently the fastest growing region in Australia. We can see that during 2020 to 2023 the number of vehicle registrations in Queensland increased and has continued to show a strong increase, at around three per cent per annum, highlighting the direct impact of the growing population in our state.

One of the most critical ways we connect our growing population is the transport network. We have the longest state controlled road network of any Australian state or territory. It is comprised of over 33,000 kilometres of roads, including 5,000 kilometres of the National Land Transport Network; almost 400 kilometres of motorways; over 3½ thousand kilometres of unsealed roads; over 3,000 bridges; almost 5,000 major culverts; and 36 tunnel sections. The length of the busway network is 29 kilometres. This year our public transport system has seen more than 152 million passenger trips on bus, rail, ferry and trams within South-East Queensland and almost 12 million passenger trips outside South-East Queensland on bus, ferry and air.

The Queensland government is committed to maintaining a safe and resilient transport network for all transport users. We do that by delivering significant levels of investment in roads and transport. The current QTRIP outlines a record investment: \$32.1 billion of works over four years, including \$10.8 billion in Australian government funding and supporting over 25,000 direct jobs over the life of the program.

While TMR is still delivering on record levels of investment, government cannot overlook the challenges we are facing across the sector. Significant cost pressures include the cost of labour and materials and broader inflationary pressures. Infrastructure Australia's 2023 Infrastructure Market Capacity report indicated that Australia's infrastructure, housing and energy agenda is under threat amid challenges associated with local building materials and a shortfall of 229,000 public infrastructure workers. Trade and labour shortages are growing at the fastest rate and will remain high until 2025—an expected peak of 131,000 full-time workers this year.

Key regions across the country are expected to experience ongoing extraordinary growth in the three years from 2024-25 onwards. In addition, Queensland is faced with hyper-escalation rates across the construction sector. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has an index called road and bridge construction Australia and Queensland, and both those indexes outline that in some cases hyper-escalation has increased construction costs by more than 20 per cent per year from the time we did those business cases.

Further to this, on 16 November the Australian government announced findings of their independent strategic review of the infrastructure investment program. We refer to it as the IIP review. That review included a commitment by the Australian government to maintain a pipeline of transport infrastructure investment at \$120 billion over a rolling 10-year period. The aim of the commitment is to provide certainty to the market and ensure a sustainable rolling program of investment, much as we do in Queensland with QTRIP. However, the IIP review has put increased pressure on projects across Queensland in particular, because of the changes in how the state and Commonwealth funding splits are anticipated to be managed, moving from a typical 80-20 split to a 50-50 split going forward. This will have ongoing impacts on the state's ability to continue to fund this range of program. With this in mind, the Queensland government will continue to advocate, and has been, for both the state's important priorities within the program as well as the state's fair share of the national program, given the significant growth that I previously mentioned.

The key insight for TMR is that there are a number of factors that have and will continue to impact our projects and programs and many of those are outside our control. Our department will continue to support the statements made publicly by Minister Mellish in being transparent about those impacts as they arise. TMR's transport plans and strategies provide a comprehensive and structured framework for responding to current and future challenges and delivering transport outcomes that align with statewide and regional objectives for the community, the economy and the environment.

In terms of disaster recovery, we have a strong history in responding to major weather events. The 2022-23 year was no exception and it has continued this year. Six disaster events were activated for the financial year 2022-23 under the jointly funded Commonwealth-state Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. TMR spent \$226.87 million repairing state controlled roads following natural disasters in 2022-23. More recently, the record December 2023 rainfall in the north of Queensland region as a result of ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper caused significant damage to the transport network, and we are continuing to support recovery efforts in this area. Further major rainfall events since then, including Cyclone Kirrily, have continued to put pressure on our National Land Transport Network,

particularly in the northern areas. Up north, landslips occurred on all four range roads between Cairns and the Tablelands: on the Palmerston Highway, the Gillies Range Road, the Kuranda Range road and the Mossman Mount Molloy Road. We have been working closely with all local councils impacted by those recent weather events but in particular ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper. We recognise councils' urgent need to reopen all roads within their local government areas, including those local government roads, and we understand the critical situation of communities that are still isolated or have impacts to access. TMR's support will continue to be directed towards reconnecting communities as a priority. I was very pleased to hear from the community last week in Cairns and to provide them with the latest information we have.

In terms of our Digital Licence, this is another important way that TMR supports Queenslanders to make it easier and safer to share their information and control how much information they share with others. The Digital Licence app was made available to all Queenslanders in November last year and to date there have been more than 380,000 downloads of that app. We are excited by this technology, especially as it is the only digital licence in Australia which is fully compliant with international standards and therefore able to be used anywhere in the world. We are excited that we have people at the centre of the design process and that we have developed the app in direct consultation with Vision Australia and the Queensland Disability Network, among others. We are turning our attention now to how to use the Digital Licence as a whole-of-government digital wallet, a way to make other credentials available to customers and for the Queensland digital identity to replace the ageing QGov platform. This will allow more seamless access to log into Queensland government websites. With this strong foundation and exciting next steps, we are confident the Digital Licence will continue to gain traction with the community as they access and use it for a far more modern, agile service delivery.

I trust my short statement has provided an overview of some of our key deliverables and challenges and how we are working to keep Queenslanders safe and connected. We are more than happy to take questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for the work that you have done after Tropical Cyclone Jasper. I had the chance to see your crews at work reconnecting the causeway at Holloways Beach. I have never seen something happen so quickly, just the sheer pace of being able to reconnect communities. Well done to you and your team. Deputy Chair, would you like to ask the first question?

**Mr WEIR:** I will go straight to that funding split you were talking about, the 50-50. You are talking about that in relation to joint federal-state projects. All agreements that are not signed as of today will be a 50-50 funding split; is that what you are saying?

**Ms Stannard:** The Australian government has released that finding overall from the review. We are still working through with them the details of how that will apply to every project and we will only see that when the budget is released—when it is handed down by the Australian government in their budget.

**Mr WEIR:** That will have a significant impact on the state's budget for roads and bridges. This committee, in the energy bill inquiry we just completed, heard about huge problems with bridges and roads and accessing areas where renewable energy infrastructure is going to be built. That will need a significant investment in those areas. That might not be a state and federal partnership, but it would impact on the budget of Transport and Main Roads to do those projects, would it not?

**Ms Stannard:** In our development of QTRIP this year, and through the state government budget, you will see how we prioritise those important investments in bridge assets, among others, where renewal or investment is needed to ensure we can handle the loads that are going through each of those locations. Our engineering and technology team take a very detailed approach to examining each structure and provide movements for oversize and overmass vehicles when we need to. In some cases we can facilitate that movement on a bridge that would not normally carry those loads. We can facilitate that movement through centre running on the bridge. We also have very important monitoring occurring on key bridges. In a number of locations we are able to provide that access in a supervised manner.

In other locations we will need to invest, together with our partners in local government, because some of those access pathways are local government roads or local government structures. The funding that is provided jointly to local government through state and Commonwealth funding is very important, because some of those assets are requiring upgrades beyond what would be normal in a local government budget. At one of the meetings I recently attended we talked to that local mayor about how we would work jointly to support them in their assessment of local bridges, because the energy program is moving very fast and there are a number of key access pathways that we will need to support to contribute to the Energy and Jobs Plan.

**Mr WEIR:** As an example, has funding been secured and locked in for the Bremer River bridge? What is the situation with the Bremer River bridge—the western bridge corridor?

**Ms Stannard:** We do have some important monitoring on that bridge at the moment to provide access and we also have some alternative pathways. We are in the process of investigating what the appropriate long-term response is for the Bremer River bridge. I will ask Andrew if he has any additional information that we can provide at this stage, but my understanding is that we are still in that detailed planning stage.

**Mr Mahon:** That is correct. The team are working through the final detail of what rectification works will be required for that bridge and what they will cost. We are expecting that to be considered and worked through as part of this year's budget. Hopefully we will have something in this year's QTRIP, when that is released later in the year, to enable those improvement works to get underway and rectify the problem we have on that westbound bridge. Hopefully, in the not-too-distant future we will be able to have an outcome for that structure.

**Mr HEAD:** Further to the federal government's infrastructure review, I am curious as to what depth of discussions were had with your department and the federal government during that review process?

**Ms Stannard:** We were invited to present to the Commonwealth on our priorities. In that presentation we outlined the significant growth pressures in Queensland and the important needs we have on the network, as outlined in QTRIP. We are one of the only jurisdictions in the country that has a published infrastructure pipeline in the way that we have in QTRIP. We were able to work through with the Commonwealth all of our priorities and why each of those projects mattered. That was our ability to then communicate with them about the priorities in Queensland—what is in front of us in the next four years.

We also talked to them about our strategic plans. For example, we have a plan called SEQ Rail Connect that talks about our ambition for rail. We have other plans across the state in the form of our regional transport plans that paint a picture over the next 10 years for each of those regions. Using that strategic planning, we were able to inform the Commonwealth and their independent reviewers as to what our strategic needs are for the region. They then took that on board as part of their review. That was really our role as the bureaucrats to provide that strategic and program level advice about the challenges we saw and the priorities we had.

**Mr HEAD:** When did you get the proposed list of changes that were eventually released by the federal government? Did you get something back from them ahead of time before the public release?

**CHAIR:** Isn't that what comes out in the budget?

**Ms Stannard:** The details will come out in the budget. There is no receipt for us of a list ahead of their release. When they made that release, they provided that into the public domain at the same time as to us. It was not that they were working with us on a list.

**Mr HEAD:** As far as setting those priorities are concerned, did they give any indication as to what the state may be left with more on the tab for?

**Ms Stannard:** They certainly canvassed their priorities. They talked about decarbonisation. They talked about the priorities they see for access for First Nations communities. They talked about regional communities. They talked about the National Land Transport Network, but they did not go through with us a list project by project. They talked more about those broader priorities. They set those out in the terms of reference. They then came and met with us and talked about those priorities. We were then able to reflect how Queensland's projects lined up with those. In fact, our submission back says, 'These are your priorities. Here's how the projects in Queensland align to those.' That was our opportunity to canvass those priorities.

**Mr WATTS:** Obviously time is short. We have just 20 minutes of questioning on a 252-page report.

**CHAIR:** You will get the chance to do it all again very shortly, member for Toowoomba North!

**Mr WATTS:** I wanted to talk about Glenore Grove or the range crossing, or the Toowoomba north-south corridor. Given the time, what I am interested in is the Bremer bridge, which is a vital piece of infrastructure for the people west of us. There have been a lot of closures and a lot of slow-down. I see that they are setting up lights for contraflow and other things on that bridge. I am very concerned about what that will mean for traffic flow west to us and everything that moves in that

direction. I am also interested to know whether there has been any political input into that, bearing in mind that we have a by-election in that electorate, and whether this announcement should have been made already so that people understand what is coming and can start making alternative arrangements. What exactly is coming and when will it be announced to the general public?

**Ms Stannard:** I could not comment on what will be announced or when it will be announced. I can confirm that we have done detailed engineering examinations of the bridge to ensure that the movements we are facilitating are safe and that the movements we have requested to be diverted are also safe in their alternative access. We are working hard to make sure that industry particularly are aware of what those options are for access and what level of traffic control is in place. We will continue to ensure that we communicate, because we know that that access is limiting access for operators, for companies and for businesses that are trying to get their job done. You will continue to see from us communication about that access because we do need to make sure the bridge is safe. That is our paramount requirement at the moment—to ensure it is safe. The detailed work is underway to complete that design. When we have completed the design of the repair works, we will propose that to government for funding.

**Mr WATTS:** In terms of the traffic lights and contraflow that I see being constructed, that is going to have a major impact. When is that likely to start? When will people in the region and west of the region be told what is going to happen?

**Ms Stannard:** We do have those traffic lights coming to ensure we can manage the safety of staff who are in that location. Obviously it is safer to have a traffic light situation rather than a person controlling traffic. That is more stable and provides industry with 24-hour access. That is the reason we are moving to that solution. As for when that commences, I would need to go back and get some detailed information from my team. I am happy to come back to you so that the community can have that relevant public information.

**Mr WATTS:** That would be good if you could take that on notice, through the chair.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr WALKER:** Can you provide an update on the Peninsula Developmental Road and the Cape York Region Package Stage 2 project? Is the project still aiming to seal 55 kilometres of the Peninsula Developmental Road, leaving about 145 kilometres remaining unsealed by the end of June 2024?

**Ms Stannard:** We are absolutely focused on the PDR and on how we improve that all-weather access through the cape. Disasters like the recent one show us exactly how important it is, and the flooding that we have seen inland has also impacted communities. The PDR remains a key focus for us. Sealing aspects of that road have indeed provided access for locals and for tourists who access that beautiful part of Australia. It remains a priority and will be examined through QTRIP. The funding will be confirmed as that project is published. I do not have any information that would suggest we are doing anything different from our strategy and our approved process going forward.

**Mr WALKER:** I want to thank the teams in the north who have helped in the region's recovery from the recent cyclone. The other question I have is in relation to the Digital Licence. I was one of the lucky ones to be part of the pilot program in Townsville. I thought the Digital Licence was an exceptional piece of technology. Does the IP belong to the Queensland transport department?

**Ms Stannard:** Yes. In the development of the project we did have partners who contributed to helping us deliver that, but we have purchased that app.

**Mr WALKER:** The Queensland government or the Department of Transport and Main Roads owns the IP. Is there potential for the Queensland government or the Department of Transport and Main Roads to get revenue by selling the IP or sharing it with interstate partners? When I went through this pilot program, they were talking about our IP being superior in Australia compared to Victoria and New South Wales. New South Wales was looking at working with the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads to purchase or partner with us on this IP. Is that true? Are there opportunities down the track?

**Ms Stannard:** I appreciate the compliment of the work that has been done.

**CHAIR:** That is an interesting question.

**Ms Stannard:** It is nation-leading. This is the only digital licence in Australia that meets all of those international standards. IP law is a complicated space, so I would not want to make a commitment to the committee that I am not across the detail of. Often you can own IP but not have the ability to then onsell that to others. My understanding is that we have purchased the app for our use but not necessarily to commercialise that.

I thought at first you might have been indicating that we raise revenue from customers. We would not do that in any way beyond what we are doing at the moment. I could not comment on whether we have a revenue-raising opportunity. We certainly have a desire to share that learning with our colleagues. In fact, we hosted an international delegation here in Brisbane to see how that licence had been developed and progressed.

**Mr WALKER:** For the record, the revenue-raising side of it is not from the consumer being a Queensland registered driver. I am talking about other governments.

**CHAIR:** You are looking to sell it on behalf of Queensland?

**Mr WALKER:** No. There was some conversation early in the piece on how that could potentially work.

**Ms PUGH:** My question is about the Centenary Motorway. I will take you to page 69 of the report. In your opening statement you talked about the growth that Queensland is bearing. A lot of that growth is happening not necessarily in my community but certainly out in that western corridor that uses the Centenary Motorway and the Ipswich Motorway. Obviously the Jindalee bridge construction is well underway now. It is looking fantastic. It always seems a bit mysterious, I think, to people as to how parts of a corridor are selected to be done. Then the comment I often get is, 'That's not going to fix anything. You're moving the problem.' I think this bridge is going to do a lot of great work to ensure smooth traffic flow. It is a well-known black spot. Could you explain for the committee and all of those people listening at home how you actually select the part of a corridor that is going to get the most bang for buck and how you select that second stage, as we are about to open community consultation for the next stage of the corridor between Darra and Toowong?

**CHAIR:** That was a big question.

**Mr WALKER:** It was bigger than mine.

**Ms PUGH:** It was actually a small question with a lot of words around it. I do apologise.

**Ms Stannard:** Networked infrastructure is indeed a place where we make investments in one location. Often we can then progressively improve corridors, and that is the work of the department and consumes much of our attention. When we choose elements to invest in, often big structures are a part of our early investment. They can be complicated and take time to deliver and to design. Even in areas like that where it is a water-based environment, there are particular controls we need to have in place. Environmental approvals take time. Often we choose those big structures to get in place and then we can progressively upgrade corridors around that.

The other way that we choose our priorities in corridors is to look at where flow is interrupted. You might see us do intersection upgrades rather than whole block lengths. An intersection is often a place where we can improve the flow for traffic through that area without needing to widen entire corridors. More and more you will see the work of our statewide network operations branch focusing on where traffic flow is interrupted and what small-scale interventions we can do to ease the flow of traffic. That can prevent significant impost of corridor widening but get more people through the same corridor.

Then there is our ability to manage intersections to get traffic lights in sequence. You will experience when you drive along a corridor sometimes you get a red light, then a green light and then a red light. We do a lot of work to try to sequence that flow and make smaller scale interventions to make sure the flow of traffic benefits. In this case my expectation is—it was before my time, I acknowledge—that it was a big structure that takes time to deliver and then corridor improvements can flow from that as we move forward.

**CHAIR:** We have definitely seen that on Cleveland Redland Bay Road.

**Ms PUGH:** Yes. It is looking really good. The Sumners Road overpass, which was also before your time, is an amazing piece of infrastructure.

**Mr WEIR:** Very recently this committee went to Cairns and we went up the Kuranda Range to the Tablelands for some hearings. There was a report a few years ago that said that the Kuranda Range would still be suitable for another 30 years or something like that. Is that still the position? What is the current status of the Kuranda Range and the alternative?

**Ms Stannard:** There was indeed a report that examined whether we need an alternative pathway through the range. The report found that there is not sufficient demand on that crossing for another pathway through there—a tunnel or a different route. The report did find that the reliability of the range, being able to keep the range road open more often and reliably, is critical for the region—for the communities on the Tablelands and for tourists who want to explore the beautiful hinterland of the coast.

You will have noticed perhaps when you visited that we have installed some ITS. That is a technical term for those speed signs where we can change the speed through camera-based observations of how the network is performing. That ITS was in test mode when Tropical Cyclone Jasper approached the coast. What that meant was that the operation centre was able to decrease the speed of traffic on the road but keep the range open longer by observing the impacts of wind and cyclonic conditions on the range. When we can control that speed environment, we can enable the range to be open for longer. Similarly, if there were to be an accident on the range we could slow the speeds down rather than just close the range. That is, in fact, something we have had to do in the past.

The report made a recommendation of 60 different things that we can invest in over time. That work is funded—I think \$260 million has been allocated—to improving the reliability of all of the range crossings because the four range crossings work together. When one is impacted, people rely on the others, as we saw recently with the Palmerston Highway. That will be a sustained program of investments to improve the reliability and resilience of the Kuranda Range crossing to enable us to ensure it is open for use more of the time.

We will examine some sharp bends on the range to ensure we can reduce the number of accidents that occur on the range, because that is another reason the range road sometimes has to be closed. There are some urgent repairs underway at the moment where some additional slips have occurred and they have undercut some of the pavement. It is essential that we do those repairs to keep the range safe, because there are still some single-lane sections of Kuranda Range at the moment following Tropical Cyclone Jasper. To answer your question, the report did not find the need for an alternative pathway through the range at this time. It did find that we could make significant investment to improve the reliability and resilience of the Kuranda Range crossing.

**Mr WEIR:** What would be the trigger point for an upgrade of the range? You said that the report did not find a need. What is the trigger point?

**Ms Stannard:** Typically we look to the demand on the corridor. At about 9,500 vehicles a day there is not sufficient demand to warrant an alternative corridor. In that territory, the land is very steep and is prone to high volumes of rainfall—I think we had four metres of rainfall on the Palmerston Highway. Those are very difficult conditions in which to work, making for very expensive infrastructure. They are beautiful natural environments as well. In that context, on the basis of the demand and the likely cost of delivering an alternative corridor, the demand is not there to warrant that investment. With the investment that is there, we can significantly increase the reliability of that corridor so that it is open more often.

**CHAIR:** Terrific. Thank you very much. That concludes our briefing today. Thank you for appearing before us. Thank you to our Hansard team. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. There was one question taken on notice with regard to the Bremer River bridge. If we could get a response to that by 4 pm on Wednesday, 13 March, that would be terrific. I declare this public briefing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 10.01 am.**