



TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SR King MP—Chair
Mr LL Millar MP
Mr BW Head MP
Mr JR Martin MP
Mr LA Walker MP
Mr TJ Watts MP

Staff present:

Dr J Rutherford—Committee Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS' ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021-22

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 27 March 2023

Brisbane

MONDAY, 27 MARCH 2023

The committee met at 9.15 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 for 2021-22. My name is Shane King. I am the member for Kurwongbah and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respect to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share. With me here today are: Lachlan Millar MP, member for Gregory, who is our deputy chair; Bryson Head MP, member for Callide; James Martin MP, member for Stretton; Les Walker MP, member for Mundingburra; and Trevor Watts MP, 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 the 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 previously have been provided with a copy of instructions to witnesses so we will take those as having been 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 the director-general is here to provide factual or 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 the chair's 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.

SCALES, Mr Neil, Director-General, Department of Transport and Main Roads

CHAIR: I welcome the Director-General of the Department of Transport and Main Roads, who has been invited to brief the committee on the department's annual report. Could you please make a short opening statement, after which I am sure we will have some questions for you?

Mr Scales: Thank you, Chair, and good morning. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning, Hansard and committee staff. I also would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering today, the Turrbal and Yagara peoples, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and any First Nations people who might be in the room or online.

I am very pleased to be able to present the department's annual report for 2021-22. It is probably worth reflecting, colleagues, that the report covers a time when COVID-19 and its repercussive events were still with us. The borders to this state were opened on 13 December 2021 and, during that time, the department was heavily involved in mitigating COVID's effect. We supported our police and other colleagues on border controls. We ensured our 21 ports were fully protected and made sure that crew transfers were relatively easily undertaken. During this time the freight task did not diminish and the supply chains had to be protected. We also continued with a full bus, rail, ferry and tram service, and we kept all construction sites fully operational. It is probably worth noting that our colleagues in New South Wales and Victoria closed down some of their construction sites. We also ramped up the information at that time through both our stakeholders and our departmental staff. All 90 of our customer service centres were fully operational.

In general, climatic conditions were also front of mind at the department, with rainfall events in February and May 2022 when the Brisbane River became a very difficult place in which to operate, with very high water flow and turbidity issues right to the fore. Members might also remember the famous—or infamous—Drift restaurant, which managed to detach itself and hang itself up on a very precarious position on the riverbank and also blocked the cycleway. Throughout all of these issues, the department and its 9½ thousand staff, 80 different work groups and over 100 locations continued to deliver for the people of Queensland.

The Peninsula Developmental Road is of particular interest to me. I have been working on that project for over a decade now. It is 527 kilometres long. We are currently in the second stage, a \$237½ million package which also includes \$47½ million for the Community Access Road Program. Since package 1 kicked off nearly nine years ago, we have sealed about 200 kilometres of that road. It does have significant benefits for the people along there: safety, environmental, less damage to vehicles—which is important—employment and training opportunities for local business and also scholarships. With that, Chair and colleagues, I will conclude and take any questions from the committee.

CHAIR: From our inquiry into vehicle safety, standards and technology including engine immobiliser technology we proposed some changes to the written-off vehicle scheme. Can you update the committee on any changes that are planned there?

Mr Scales: On the written-off side of things, we are still looking at that. Obviously the issue is: if you put a part or a white goods part on there, does that still follow the vehicle identification number? We are trying to get to the bottom of that to make sure that whatever we put forward does not fetter the industry moving forward or fetter people who want to do up cars or vehicles.

CHAIR: As an avid motoring enthusiast, I appreciate that.

Mr Scales: It is not about penalising that sort of group of people; it is about making sure we do not rebirth vehicles. We are still pursuing that. From an engineering point of view, I can see the benefits of doing it. It is just that we do not want to allow rebirthing of vehicles, which would be very bad, but we want to make sure the enthusiasts are not subject to a burden that would be unreasonable.

Mr HEAD: I refer to a Department of Transport and Main Roads document from March 2021 in relation to the stage 1 update for the Coomera Connector. It states that construction is expected to commence from mid-2021. When did construction commence at the Coomera Connector?

Mr Scales: Members will be aware that the Coomera Connector was officially launched yesterday, I think, by various members. The issue that we had was—basically, we got ready to construct. We had done a lot of geotech. Geotech has already happened. If you class that as construction—and I do, making sure we are ready for full-blown construction—the issue was with the EBPC Act and the fact that we only got clearance on that probably last week. That goes for 30 years. We were somewhat held up by the necessary approvals to make sure we were looking after koalas and their habitat—and of course we are. We actually purchased a very large piece of land for any koalas that need to be relocated. For the benefit of members of the committee, we have been working very hard to protect koalas for a long time now. If you take the Moreton Bay Rail Link from 2016, we translocated a lot of koalas. When did it actually start? I would have to give you an exact date. Because we had done all the geotech work—and bear in mind that we gazetted this on 15 March 2019—a lot of geotech will have started. If you are talking about major construction, that is underway now.

Mr HEAD: Officially, the construction started only recently—this year—so officially the project was delayed?

Mr Scales: I would not say it was delayed because we got on with the geotech. In other words, we are doing the planning and making sure the geotech works. Geotech, as your colleague Mr Watts will understand, is a particularly tricky issue. We are underway.

Mr HEAD: I am just trying to understand. The minister said that construction started officially on the weekend.

Mr Scales: Full construction, that is right.

Mr HEAD: So construction started on the weekend. Official construction was delayed from that initial date then?

CHAIR: I think you are debating a bit there, member. The director-general has answered. Do you want to provide a further answer?

Mr Scales: I am trying to concentrate on the annual report and accounts and the Peninsula Developmental Road. On that major project, certainly we got on with as much as we could before we got the EBPCA green light to go. These things are very tricky. We did a lot of engagement with the local stakeholders and the routing had to be really confirmed in a lot of detail before we went ahead. I hope that helps.

Mr WATTS: My inevitable question relates to geotech as well. Obviously we have seen the Toowoomba Bypass—second range crossing—transferred over to now be the main Warrego Highway going around town. There was a lot of chatter in the early days about whether it should be

a tunnel or how we should go about it. I am trying to understand what went wrong in the initial geotech that led us to this place. Was it a Nexus issue? Was it contractual? How did we get to a situation where we can open a road, then have to close it for an extended period of time and then face the repairs we have now?

Mr Scales: On the tunnel side of things, that is one of the things we abandoned early on. If you put in an 800-metre tunnel in, it means that you cannot put any explosives through it. It is like fertiliser. It seemed to us to be pretty nonsensical to build a \$1.6 billion project and not be able to take all of the fertiliser vehicles out of the town. We were faced with two things. One was a unique geological formation that no amount of background work would have found, because effectively we found ourselves with two metres of rain being dropped on that in a very short space of time so the embankment moved. I see that as a very positive issue, because it was something that we did not anticipate and it happened. Now we have actually taken steps with Nexus, the operator and also the maintainer, to fix that up. I do not think it went wrong. It was a unique geological formation, and we did not anticipate two metres of rain to be dumped on the range at that point in time. To be honest, as an engineer I am glad it did happen now, when the range crossing is relatively new. It is not costing us anything to fix because it belongs to the contractor at the moment. We did not get it open as quick as I would have liked, but certainly there is one lane eastbound now and two westbound. We are working with the contractor now to get a permanent fix for that.

Mr WATTS: Going forward, bearing in mind at different times this road may have connectivity broken, has there been any looking at putting some holes in the central concrete so that we can do contraflow to keep it operating if we lose one of the two-lane roads on either side?

Mr Scales: The issue for us is that the centre median, being concrete, was there for safety reasons. The department is thinking now whether we put some sections in there where we can do contraflow. It is certainly something we are looking at. Hindsight is always 20/20 vision. I do not think it would have stopped us on the routing we had or the engineering solutions we had with the information we had at that time.

Mr WATTS: What learnings would you have from the management of this project and its contract that we can use going forward in managing other contracts where we might run into similar unforeseen geological problems?

Mr Scales: It relates back to the earlier question from the member for Callide. I think the more geotech you can do the better, to be honest. Bear in mind, that was going through 42 kilometres of virgin land. We had never done anything there in the first place, and we thought—and the contractor thought as well—we had done sufficient and adequate geotech. As an engineer, I think the more geotech the better, but you always end up running out of time because there is so much else going on. It is certainly a learning for me for the future where we will do lots more geotech, because the more ground condition information you have the better it is, without a doubt.

Mr MARTIN: Coming back to the Coomera Connector—I think you mentioned it briefly—can you expand on any offsets that are included in that project to mitigate the impact on the environment? I think you mentioned koalas.

Mr Scales: On the Coomera Connector we have bought quite a large tract of land which we will be using for any translocation of koalas. We are pretty good at this now in the department in tracking them. It is amazing the amount of distance they cover. They actually move around quite a bit, something that was news to us. We will also make sure that if we take any koala habitat down—trees—I think for every one we take down we will plant five. That is certainly the case in the Moreton Bay Rail Link. We will do offsets like that. We are well set on the offsets and we always exceed whatever the EPBC Act says. Koalas are very important to not just the department but also Australians, I would have thought. Whatever the framework is, we always exceed the framework.

Mr WALKER: Are you able to update the committee on the progress of building the second Bruce Highway?

Mr Scales: That is the additional one to the north. We are doing a lot of planning on that, and of course with planning you have to make sure that geotech is right and all the environmental side is right. Fortunately, we have a lot of land already on the corridor, and we are making sure that the business case is put together and everything is correct. We do a lot of consultation in the department with affected people and stakeholders. As I said, the 2021-22 annual report was right in the middle of COVID, and COVID did affect our ability to consult with people so we could not do it face to face. We have had a lot of catch-up to do on that score. Yes, it is underway. It is fifty-fifty funding between ourselves and the feds, so it is progressing well so far.

Mr MILLAR: In relation to Sunshine Coast heavy rail, when will the planning work be finished for this project?

Mr Scales: That was in the press today. We are committed to having the business case done by the end of this calendar year and then we will be consulting stakeholders on that. It was always the case that we would be doing that. It is 37 kilometres long, and there is a lot of work to do to make sure we have everything in a row before we actually go out. Planning is underway. The business case will be by the end of this calendar year.

Mr MILLAR: You did mention the media. In the media today it says it lacks a specific route, a finished business case and even a proposed time frame. Can we be assured that this will be done?

Mr Scales: You can be assured, member: the department is working flat out on it, and as soon as we have something we will be able to go out to the public. We do not have the benefit of CAMCOS. That corridor has been there for a long time now—it probably predates me by 20 years—and there are only a set amount of corridors you can use because of gradient and the fact that, if you are operating trains on it, you need to make sure you minimise the gradient. Work is underway. When we have something that is concrete, we will be going at it.

CHAIR: Going back to the annual report—since the member mentioned trains, we are all excited about trains—I would not be forgiven by the member for Maryborough if I did not ask about the train manufacturing program. Can you give us an update on what is happening there, please?

Mr Scales: Again with the EPBC Act, last week we got the green light to go and consult with people on Torbanlea. Torbanlea will be the manufacturing facility for the 65 new trains. We have already got the connection in from the Bruce at one end and we have got the local roads at the other end using part of the department's resources through RoadTek, which members would be aware of. We have a proponent now. We went on a worldwide exercise to get the right proponent. I am very happy with the proponent that we have got. We can now do the consultation. The place is an old pineapple farm, so I do not expect to see anything untoward there.

Again on the geotech side, we are doing lots of geotech to make sure we are right on that. We went with the proponent for the shed—that will be the manufacturing shed—and that will be a common-use facility. We have also designed a test track, so we will have a test track in this case. The vehicles that we got from India did not have a test track, so by the time they were shipped here and we got them out of the box we had to test them all. That will not happen in this case, so we will be able to test them up in Maryborough with lines and speed but also curves. That is an incredible advantage to us as a department but also as a state. It means that the vehicles, when they are ready, will be able to go out online in service pretty quickly. That is happening. We are just finalising the issues that we need to on the contractual side, but I am very happy with the proponent we have. It is doing really well. So far, so good.

Mr HEAD: In relation to costs of Cross River Rail, six months ago the minister said that the costs were going to be reviewed because costs were rising. Has that been completed, and do we know what the increase might be?

Mr Scales: That, I think, is better addressed to the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority. I am the chair of that, but that is a separate bit of the organisation. I am not being difficult—

CHAIR: Estimates would probably be the best time for that.

Mr Scales: I think so.

Mr HEAD: That review is still underway then?

Mr Scales: I am trying to think of the best way to answer this without getting into difficulties. I am the chair of it, but really one of my colleagues should be answering that question. I will take the chair's guidance on that.

Mr MILLAR: One of my favourite subjects, as you know, is backlog maintenance on the roads.

Mr Scales: Yes, I know.

Mr MILLAR: This time last year we had a maintenance backlog of \$5.753 billion. What is the maintenance backlog 12 months on?

Mr Scales: We have done a lot of work in the department on this. We have been using a device called IPAV, the Intelligent Pavement Assessment Vehicle, which is the large truck I was waxing lyrical about at the last estimates. We now have a new one, which has a better laser doppler array on the back but it also has ground-penetrating radar. That has allowed us to get a much better handle on what the pavement is like underneath.

I am pleased to inform the committee that we have saved probably about \$1.344 billion on the backlog. How have we done that? We have done it because we do not actually have to dig anything up anymore when we think it is towards the end of its useful life. We know from the digital information we have from the IPAV vehicles that it might look a bit tatty on the top but underneath the structure is pretty good.

The other thing we are doing—we are calling it capital renewal and investment needs, because it is not really a maintenance backlog. If you take where we would have been at June 2022, I will just read these into the record for the member: surfaces, \$657 million; pavements, which is the road surface, \$4.183 billion; and 3,153 bridges and 4,918 major culverts, \$1.258 billion. That makes a total of \$6.098 billion, which is the number you want. Having done all of this additional work, surfaces comes down slightly, to \$614 million; pavements reduces massively, to \$2.882 billion; and bridges and major culverts stays the same, at \$1.258 billion. The actual number now is \$4.754 billion, so it has reduced by \$1.344 billion.

The issue is that on major culverts and bridges it is not really a maintenance backlog because all you can do is inspect them. That is why that number stays the same. But because we have so much data now on the condition of the roads—we have ground-penetrating radar and we have digital information—that has reduced from \$4.183 billion to \$2.882 billion. The numbers go from \$6.098 billion to \$4.754 billion. I must point out as well to the committee that that is our number. It is not a number that has come from outside; that is a Department of Transport and Main Roads number. The number is also driven in part by the cost of materials, and materials costs have gone up tremendously, so much so that if you take the assets I am responsible for, which is \$90 billion—it is now over \$100 billion because of the replacement cost, so replacement cost has gone up—the good news is that it has gone down, but the better news for me as an engineer being in charge of this department is that I now have information that is accurate and relevant but also timely, because the IPAV moves at line speed. You do not have to close sections of the road and drill holes in it; it actually moves at line speed. We are continuously building up the information which is on the digital sets. Because the new IPAV has ground-penetrating radar, I have a really good understanding of what is underneath the road.

A great example is beef roads, which you would be intimately aware of. They were put down 50 years ago. They are in great shape because of the surface they were put down on and the way they were constructed. They are not wide enough, but we will get around to that eventually. Roads that look pretty tatty on the top are actually fundamentally alright underneath. The number is \$4.754 billion. So we have not sat on our hands. We have done a lot of work in this regard because how would you work out the surface of the road without actually digging holes in it? The IPAV does that. We have invested a lot in that.

Mr MILLAR: Talking about beef roads, one of the roads out my way is the Tambo-Springsure Road. There was significant federal government funding of \$40 million to the road. Where is the Tambo-Springsure Road up to? When is construction starting and when do we see completion?

Mr Scales: I would have to come back to you with exact dates. As we all know, the weather has not been kind to us out west, although some farmers would say that is good. Other farmers would say it is not so good. I think the roads of strategic importance as a capital sum as well as the money that is being put forward by the government—we have had over a billion allocated for COVID. I think the answer is that we will get around to everything eventually on that specific road. I do not think it is in the annual report. If I can come back?

Mr MILLAR: Yes, if you could come back with an answer on notice.

CHAIR: If it is not in the annual report, it is valid. It is not hard to take that on notice.

Mr Scales: I think, rather than disturb the committee with it, if the committee wills it I can go straight back to the member.

CHAIR: So we will not place the question on notice.

Mr MARTIN: I have a question about personal mobility devices, or electric scooters. I was wondering if the department had any information on how many people are using them. Are they taking cars off the roads or are they people getting out of public transport and using them? What role broadly do these electric scooters play within our whole transport network?

Mr Scales: Certainly it is a new mode of transport that has risen to prominence recently. We as a department have been concerned on a number of fronts—certainly my minister has as the road safety minister—and the minister has got the department to put some constraints around them. There

are speed limits, you cannot be on the road with them, you have to have a suitable helmet on and you have to have respect for pedestrians. Our colleagues in BCC say that there are up to 15 million journeys now, but I think that is from the start of the trial and where they are now with it.

Getting numbers on whether it has actually taken cars off the road would be very difficult. I am not being hard on this; it is just difficult, because COVID really moved the travel patterns around. As we sit here, we are over 80 per cent of pre-COVID levels on bus, rail, ferry and tram, but a lot of people who went back to the car have not come back to the network yet. Colleagues will be aware that Monday and Friday, which used to be quite heavy days on the transport network, are quite light. So on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I think there are quite a lot of vehicles on the road at that point. It is very difficult to actually move out what a particular mode of transport has done. It has certainly helped if you are riding it properly and you are keeping to the speed limit and you have a helmet on. It is certainly taking some vehicles off the road. Whether it is having an effect on rideshare or taxis, it is probably too early to say.

It is certainly a question I can take away and do a bit more analysis on. We do not have all the datasets. Because the datasets are not with the department, it is very difficult to get to a conclusion, but I will say this: it is a different mode of transport. We have a trial going on in UQ called ODIN, which is a package where students can get scooters or electric bikes, taxis, bus, rail and ferry all in one app. It is doing really well because students, who are notoriously good at getting good value for money, are buying this app—bundled all up together.

To answer your question in a different way, member for Stretton, I think it is an addition to the mix. I think as long as it is used safely it can contribute to the overall transport mix and probably is. Getting down to a figure on how many vehicles it has taken off the road is probably difficult because originally I think the scooters were geofenced so they would only go so far and stop. I think that is changing slowly now.

The issue for me is that it is a contribution towards the overall multimodal mix that we have in any city. Taking large steps back, they are in all the major cities here and they are in all the major cities in Europe with the same issues: people not wearing helmets, maybe having a few beers or whatever before they get on them, people riding two-up instead of being just one-up. My minister is taking action to tighten up the regulations, which I think is the right thing, on safety. All of that helps. It is probably too early to say. What we could do is give committee members a pack on ODIN—where it has got to and some of the metrics on that, which are probably interesting—if the committee is interested, because if students are buying it, in my world it is a good thing.

CHAIR: We would be interested to see that if you could produce that to us.

Mr WALKER: Are you able to update the committee on the number of taxis and the value of the taxi licences in Queensland over the last year?

Mr Scales: The number of taxis is fixed. The number of taxi licences is 3,600 and something. I can never remember. On the value of the licences, that certainly is a commercial arrangement so it is whatever the market will actually pay. I would not like to speculate on how much it is, member for Mundingburra. It will change. When I got here 11 years ago now, taxi licences were worth more on the Gold Coast than they were here, I think mainly because of patronage. With the advent of rideshare, obviously the taxi licence value has gone down, but the number of taxi licences across the state is constant. I do not have it to hand, but it is certainly 3,600-odd and they are located in each of the areas in Queensland, if that helps.

CHAIR: I know that the number would be in a comprehensive report that we did back in 2015.

Mr WALKER: Do we have an understanding of how many rideshares are on the road?

Mr Scales: We have a handle on the overall rideshare organisations, like Uber and Shebah and so on, but the actual number comes in and out. I am just speculating, which is probably the wrong thing to do in this committee, but it depends on if people want to make some money at weekends. I know that some taxidriverers are also Uber drivers. I hate taking things on notice, Chair, but I will take that one on notice and confirm the numbers and give it a best estimate on rideshare and send it back to the committee.

Mr WATTS: A lot of businesses in Toowoomba have oversize and heavy equipment that they move around. Over a period of time through the permit system they are finding that certain crossings, whether it be a bridge or a particular road or whatever, are getting taken out of their ability to access that because it has had X number of overuses. I guess what I am trying to work out is: what is the plan for addressing that before we find ourselves ring fenced and unable to efficiently access more remote parts of Queensland with the oversize pieces of equipment that they need?

Mr Scales: Just before I answer that, I have turned to the fast facts in my own report, which is on page 22, and I will just read it into the record and then I will go to the member's question. The numbers are: limousine licences, 475; taxi service licences, 3,248; authorised booking entities—that is the booking entity that does rideshare—455; and booked hire service licences—that is Uber and all the rest of it—14,489. That is at the date of this report. I am sorry about that, member for Toowoomba North; I did not want to lose it.

We have been working really hard with the industry, particularly the crane industry, on oversize, overmass and special purpose vehicles—special purpose vehicles being largely cranes. We have identified a number of bridges that require attention. A good one that is always in the news is the Barron River bridge, which is limited to a particular tonnage. If you take the two really large pieces of turbo generator that were landed at Gladstone for Callide, we actually moved those—280 tonnes each—and we had to strengthen Neerkol 1, Neerkol 2 and another bridge which always escapes me. We strengthened all those bridges and we made sure that the vehicles carrying these large lumps of metal were doing four kilometres per hour across the centre line.

We have mechanisms now where, if we know that there is a particular large or really heavy load on a particular route, we can do the assessments on the bridges and work that through. Wider than that, the department has a program going where we are looking at the bridges that were actually designed 50 years ago for loads that probably were okay at that time, but we all know loads are increasing. We have a program now going where we are looking at whether we replace the bridge altogether or strengthen the bridge. If you take Mackay to the mines, there is a bridge called Bee Creek Bridge. Bee Creek is dry. We put loads of props underneath and we make sure that any large load goes right down the centre line at low speed so that we can get machinery from the port of Mackay and the maintenance facility there to the mines and back again.

We have strategies going forward, but you are absolutely right: we do not want to be in a position where, as vehicle weights increase—and I was at the Volvo plant last Friday and they have prototype battery and battery hydrogen vehicles which have increased loading. We are looking at where those can operate now, but we are also looking at our asset going forward. We have a plan. It is part of the bridge count, which is 3,153 bridges. We are narrowing that down and we are putting engineering effort into it. Over the last year and a half we have been working in particular with the crane industry and the previous member for Callide, and we have a solution there where I think the bridges can be strengthened or we have solutions to work around them. The crane industry has been particularly pleased with the way we have handled that. We have a plan moving forward.

Mr WATTS: Is there a map that shows the mass loading that can be accessed from point to point in terms of both oversize and overweight?

Mr Scales: I think the answer to that is yes, and I think it is on our portal. If you take Gladstone port again, because one of the bridges is actually in the river, that has a mass loading of 88 tonnes, for example. Bee Creek Bridge had a mass loading of whatever it was, but we increased that by putting lots of props underneath, and we can do that where we have engineering solutions. In moving 280 tonnes of turbo generator to Callide, we actually strengthen bridges on the way.

The issue moving forward will be wind farms, because the blades now are not 60 metres or 75 metres but are getting towards 90 metres. You have to move street furniture—what I mean by that is traffic lights—you have to heighten cables that go across the road and you have to make sure they manoeuvre all right. The pedestals—the towers that carry the blades—are getting increasingly heavy. We are working with the local authorities and other departments to make sure that, whatever route we have, the bridges and the structures are capable of handling that load. That is working as well. We are getting there slowly.

Mr HEAD: Speaking of heavy vehicle routes and restrictions being placed on them, Dogwood Crossing on both the Warrego and Leichhardt highways—one bridge for two highways at Miles—is currently off-limits for oversize and overmass vehicles. I note that for both it and the Roma-Condamine road, which is where these heavy vehicles now have to go, there is no mention of either road in the annual report. Are there efforts underway to either repair or upgrade some of the Roma-Condamine road, which these oversize and overmass vehicles now have to go on, or are there plans underway to fix Dogwood Crossing at Miles?

Mr Scales: On those bridges I am not sure of the detail, but they will be captured on all the bridge stock we have. We will get around to all of them eventually. It just takes a while for us to make sure we have the right engineering solution. It might be strengthening a bridge; it might be like Bee Creek Bridge, putting lots of props underneath. It might be a complete bridge replacement. Certainly when we have oversize, overmass or SP vehicles using that route, we can take individual action on that. The answer is that I do not know when those particular bridges will be on the list, which is your

question, really, but they will be on a list and we will get to it eventually. It is all about traffic volume, what types of loads are there and whether it is on a regular basis or whether it is one-off. Then we will put it into the system.

Mr HEAD: When decisions are being made to close bridges because of safety concerns, do you do any modelling on impacts to the economy of these changed or reduced routes and these restrictions?

Mr Scales: If you take Cunninghams Gap, where we are having to close that for rolling maintenance issues—the sides of the gap, as everybody probably realises, are 100 metres high and they are pretty steep—we have gone out to the public in the last two weeks and told them what we are trying to do. If it is the case that we have to close a bridge for maintenance—Barron River Bridge is a good example of that. We have Barron River Bridge instrumented now. There are instruments underneath—strain gauges—so we know what is happening to it, and we are logging that data so that when we get around to a replacement strategy we will know exactly what is happening.

The answer is: when we are closing a bridge we go and talk to the local stakeholders and we make sure that the alternative routes, as far as we can—because if you take Cunninghams Gap, it is 700 kilometres to go around it, so we actually make sure that everybody is aware of what we are trying to do and why we are doing it. It is essentially safety. It is all about making sure that the travelling public are as safe as they possibly can be. I have told you a story about that. When we close anything we go and talk to the local people and make sure that our local district officer or regional office is reaching out to people who use that route. It could be graziers, hauliers, quarries—anything. Yes, we factor it in.

Mr HEAD: The other day I mentioned to you in passing the John Peterson Bridge upgrade in relation to page 63 of the annual report. I understand it is nearing completion. Would you happen to have a completion date or an approximate time line of when that bridge might be completed?

Mr Scales: Not off the top of my head, seeing as there are over 5,000 bridges, but I will come back to the committee with that.

CHAIR: Do you want to take that on notice?

Mr Scales: Do you want to do it direct?

Mr HEAD: I am happy to take that direct, thank you.

Mr MILLAR: In terms of the annual report, customer service is very important to a director-general. You have done a good job. I would like to thank the department for heading out to Apis Creek Road, which is in Duaringa and goes 80 kilometres north. That road has not been sheeted, according to the local graziers, for over seven years. It has plenty of grazing families on that road and over nine children need to access that road to get to school. I was on the road last Friday. It is dangerous. What can be done to look at these roads and give them the urgent upkeep required given that, according to the graziers there, it has not been sheeted for seven years?

Mr Scales: Basically, we are slowly sealing all of our unsealed roads. In the last decade—I cannot remember the exact numbers; I am not going to guess—certainly the number is coming down as we continue to seal roads. A good example is the Peninsula Developmental Road. Over the last 10 years we have sealed 200 kilometres of that. We are sealing things as best we can, bearing in mind that we have the largest road network in Australia of 33,400-odd kilometres.

On that particular road we have either maintenance contracts with RoadTek or maintenance contracts with the local authority. We have good relationships with the 77 local authorities, some of which do the maintenance for us. They look at the condition and then the condition-based monitoring will either have it resheeted or there will be urgent action taken. On that particular road—I do not have details to hand—

Mr MILLAR: I am happy to talk to you about it.

Mr Scales: I think that would be good, Chair, if you are happy with that. It is very much a local issue. If you take the north at the moment, with the huge amounts of flooding we have had around Carpentaria and Burketown in particular, that is somewhere that certainly one minister has been to and my minister is anxious to get up to as soon as he can, as am I, to see the condition of the road. We are very much in the recovery side of things.

If you take the river bridge around Camooweal, we have just fixed the abutment on that. We have sealed the Barkly Highway, which is the major arterial road into the NT. We are doing quite a lot of that now. Members will be aware that when we have a major flood or a tropical cyclone it does stretch our network. We get around to things. It is safety first, and then we will eventually get around to sealing. I am not saying tomorrow, but we will get around to sealing everything eventually.

CHAIR: We have sent you some questions on notice to do with our inquiry into the Peninsula Developmental Road. I have a few other questions about that. At the end of the Laura to Weipa project, which I think finishes up in the middle of this year, how many kilometres—you might have mentioned this earlier, but for the benefit of the committee—will remain unsealed?

Mr Scales: The road itself is 527 kilometres from Lakeland to the mine boundary. The mine boundary is 42 kilometres from the port to where it starts. I have a number somewhere in here, if I can find it, but it would certainly be less than 200 kilometres. The issue we have, of course—as members will be acutely aware—is that they can only work on that road for six months of the year. I have an exact number here. Once stage 2 is finished—that is 55 kilometres of the PDR—that will leave 149 kilometres of the 527-kilometre road unsealed. It is the best part of 150 kilometres left.

One of the things that happens when we seal the road is that all of the dust that is on the road does not go into the bush, so it looks a lot better. The vehicles that use it do not get as much damage on brakes, steering and suspension and certainly they do not get clogged up with dust underneath, so that is good. We use local labour as much as we can. Over the last nine years, Bama, which is based in Cairns, has gone from being a company that was cutting the grass and doing what I call soft furnishing—landscaping—to buddying up with Downer and now bidding for major contracts. Kalan Enterprises at Coen went from doing environmental works to being able to bid for road maintenance.

Part of the strategy is to not just seal the road but also have the local Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people able to maintain the roads. We are training the kids as well on scholarship. I am very proud of it. We have an ILUA for the whole of the road. The key result areas we have in there have been exceeded. I am very happy with the way that is going.

The only issue we have, if you take the Archer River bridge, which we are about to give you some detail on, is that for the first time in two decades the river was still running. This was a surprise to us. It is the hardest rock I have ever seen in my career, apart from the rock on Albert Street in Cross River Rail where we had to blast it out. We have access to the site. We have covered all of the sacred stones. I am itching to get back on to that when it is the dry season. In terms of the questions you gave us on notice, it is taking some time to pull all of the detail together.

CHAIR: That is fine. During our Inquiry we had a stakeholder with some concerns, Mr Roderick Burke. I am wondering if his family—

Mr Scales: That was the individual who turned up at the hearing in Cairns.

CHAIR: He was concerned about the naming of the bridge or something like that, from memory.

Mr Scales: On the naming of the bridge, what we do is we go to the community and that goes up to the minister with recommendations. The naming of structures is something that the department has been doing for a long time. Sometimes it is straightforward and sometimes it is not. Fortunately, I do not have to make that decision.

Mr WALKER: Are you able to update the committee on Queensland's Zero Emission Vehicle Strategy 2022-2032?

Mr Scales: We have over five million vehicles on the roads. About 30,000 are fully electric and that number is going up exponentially. The government has a subsidy for buying electric vehicles. One of the things that has happened with COVID and the supply chain issues and the effects of the war in Ukraine is that delivery times have gone out a lot. We have the largest vehicle-charging network in this hemisphere—from Cairns to the Gold Coast and from here out to the Isa. We keep putting more charging stations in. The minister is red hot on this one and is actually pushing the department forward. The more electric vehicles we have on the road, the less emissions we have and therefore the less greenhouse gases.

When we think about the Olympics in 2032, the department will not be buying any diesel powered vehicles after 2025. All buses after that point will be either battery or hydrogen—probably battery at this point, because we have manufacturers on the Gold Coast who can do battery vehicles. It has to be a net zero games. There will be no private transport to any of the venues. It will all be done by public transport or walking or cycling. There is a whole raft of things going on.

One of the things I was doing at the Volvo last Friday was looking at their battery hydrogen powered vehicles, because that is the way forward. All European manufacturers have said that they are getting out of internal combustion engines. As a net taker of vehicles, we are going to be in a position where we can only get battery or hybrid or hydrogen powered vehicles. We have the only Minister for Hydrogen in the world. That is Minister de Brenni. I think that stands us in good stead.

There is a whole range of things happening. We are only borrowing the world from our children and our grandchildren so it is incumbent upon all of us to do what we can to knock greenhouse gases down as far as we can.

Within the department we have a strategy for crumbed rubber. You can grind up truck tyres and bus tyres but not car tyres. We have specifications where the private sector can use crumbed rubber in road surfaces. Down the coast on the M1 we are grinding up the road surface and re-using it—again, reducing the carbon footprint. We are also using EME2, which is a high modulus road surface. It is French and I can never remember what it is called. It uses 25 per cent less greenhouse gases in its production. The department is doing quite a bit to contribute to net zero emissions. The policy settings the government has on electric vehicles, the charging network and the games being net zero emissions I think will certainly help all of us.

Mr HEAD: You mentioned earlier in passing the increased loading from batteries and hydrogen. Does the department have information on the braking distances and the safety hazards associated with this increased loading?

Mr Scales: We are not original equipment manufacturers so we rely on the OEM to do that—Scania, Volvo, MAN and then you have Ford and all the rest of them. They provide all of that information. That is to the engineering ISO standards, which are in Geneva. We take them and that basically is our standards.

To come back to the member for Gregory's question on maintenance, the iPAVE vehicle will give a roughness count as well. As the vehicle goes around it gives a roughness count. You cannot account for weather and account for leaves on the road or whatever. On the stopping distances, that is certainly the original equipment manufacturer rather than us, if that helps.

Mr MILLAR: You mentioned that from 2025 the department will only be buying electric vehicles. Is that statewide?

Mr Scales: Yes, buses through TransLink. That will be statewide.

Mr MILLAR: Are we talking about RoadTek vehicles?

Mr Scales: They are bought through QFleet. QFleet purchases all of our vehicles. We have electric vehicles in the department's fleet now. We also have one hydrogen vehicle. As QFleet transitions to zero emissions for all vehicles that are bought for the 23 departments, we will get the benefit of that.

Mr MILLAR: I am trying to picture in my mind RoadTek crews going from Birdsville to Boulia in an electric vehicle. I am not saying it is wrong; I am just asking whether it is practical.

Mr Scales: It is only buses we will be buying.

Mr MILLAR: It is not the Hiluxes? I wanted to clear that up.

Mr Scales: No, but it is getting there. As the battery energy density goes up and the cost comes down, I am sure we will all see the benefit of that. We have to do it at some point.

CHAIR: I know that the member for Toowoomba North was excited about the battery F150. He said that that would be the only electric vehicle he would have.

Mr Scales: In Europe we have battery powered trains and hydrogen powered trains. We have battery powered trams and hydrogen powered trams. We have battery and hydrogen powered vessels. It is the way the whole world is going. Eventually it will turn up.

CHAIR: Submarines are battery powered too, are they not?

Mr Scales: I do not know a lot about that.

Mr MILLAR: We have to have the infrastructure out there for that to be able to work. We have to keep vehicles moving and people moving. We do not have public transport out in the west so we have to have the ability to move around.

Mr Scales: You are absolutely right. That is why the Queensland Electric Super Highway is a massive investment and a real innovation. We are looking at charging stations probably once every 200 kilometres. A lot of people have range anxiety—when are they going to get to the next point and charge up? As we see more and more development in electric vehicles, the range is certainly going up and the costs are coming down.

Mr MILLAR: It is easy to get a jerry can full of diesel and fill up to try to get to the next stop. It is probably harder to get a battery powered vehicle—

CHAIR: Solar.

Mr Scales: If you think about Mr Benz in the 1800s, he could only buy fuel at chemists and things. You had your little can on the side of the running board. Now you have fuel stations all over the place. It will change.

CHAIR: Interestingly, I heard a presentation recently that in the 1920s all the taxis in New York were electric. It was happening way back then.

Mr Scales: All the taxis here were hybrid for ages. The reason for hybrid was that they were cheaper to operate.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. In terms of e-scooters and the ODIN project—

Mr Scales: I will get you a pack on that.

CHAIR: If we could have that answer by 4 pm on Wednesday, 5 April that would be fantastic. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.15 am.