



# ***TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr SR King MP—Chair  
Mr JR Martin MP  
Mr LL Millar MP  
Mr LA Walker MP

**Staff present:**

Ms D Jeffrey—Committee Secretary  
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC BRIEFING—CONSIDERATION OF THE 2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS AND AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT NO. 10 OF 2021-22 TITLED *TRANSPORT 2021***

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**MONDAY, 28 MARCH 2022**

**Brisbane**

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**The committee met at 10.41 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open this public briefing for the committee's consideration of the 2020-21 annual report of the Department of Transport and Main Roads and Auditor-General's report No. 10 of 2021-22 titled *Transport 2021*. 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 respects 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 Miller MP, the member for Gregory and deputy chair; Les Walker MP, the member for Mundingburra; and James Martin MP, the member for Stretton. Trevor Watts MP, the member for Toowoomba North, and the member for Callide are apologies for today's briefing.

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 have previously been provided with a copy of instructions to witnesses, so we will take those as read.

I also remind 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 or technical information. Any 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 mobiles 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 come along to brief the committee on the department's annual report and the Auditor-General's report. Director-General, could you make a brief opening? Then we will have some questions for you.

**Mr Scales:** Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathered today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

The annual report of the Department of Transport and Main Roads is a key accountability document and the principal way the department reports on non-financial and also financial performance, and it is tabled in the Legislative Assembly. It is a statutory requirement that the department's annual report complies with the Financial Accountability Act 2009, the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019 and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's annual reporting requirements for Queensland government agencies.

We take a detailed, independent report when preparing the department's annual report. This includes collaborating with senior and executive leadership team members but also content experts across the TMR divisions—and there are five divisions in the department. We try to ensure we are producing a balanced annual report that demonstrates how TMR is performing against the strategic plan but also government's objectives for the community. There is a series of robust approvals in place with the department's executive leadership team. I finally sign off the report before it progresses to the minister's office and then to parliament.

The other part of this is that the financial statements are annually audited and certified independently by the Queensland Audit Office and these are also included in the annual report. The report is received in the office of the Minister for Transport and Main Roads for noting and to facilitate the tabling of the report in the Legislative Assembly. The department's annual report, I am pleased to say, has won the Australasian Reporting Awards Gold Award eight times, including last year, which was 2018-19 when we submitted it. Feedback from the adjudicators in the Australasian Reporting

Awards organisation said that we produced a high-quality report and it should serve as a model for other organisations that have to prepare their reports in a similar strict and transparent reporting process and requirement.

It is a massive undertaking to put it together because the organisation is really an ecosystem. There are 79 different work groups from MSQ—Maritime Safety Queensland—all the way to individual engineers. We have 90 customer service centres. We have TransLink, which has all the bus, rail, ferry and tram contracts to undertake. Bringing it all together in one report is a bit of a labour but a worthwhile one because it actually puts out into the field exactly what we are trying to achieve.

Our colleagues in the QAO obviously audit our annual report and accounts. I am pleased to say that we get an unmodified report, which is also good. We regard the QAO as a critical friend because it is always good to be able to get advice from outside the organisation which will allow us to further improve.

**CHAIR:** We all know that COVID-19 has changed the world and there are a lot of economic impacts on every department. Could you elaborate on how you are working with it and the effects it may have had?

**Mr Scales:** We are in an age of radical uncertainty—that is not me making a couple of words up; the noble Lord King, who used to be the governor of the Bank of England, and a very eminent economist John Kay have produced a book on this. It is about three years old now. It basically says that you cannot use past performance to forecast future situations. They use the global financial crisis of 2008-09 as an example, but COVID has been one of those areas of radical uncertainty. There is no model for it and, therefore, you cannot actually use past performance to move forward.

As far as the department is concerned, we were involved with our colleagues in the police, particularly our transport inspectors, when we closed the borders for the first time in a hundred years. We had our transport inspectors deployed at the border not just in New South Wales but also in Camooweal and Birdsville—Birdsville for South Australia and Camooweal for the territory. We helped our police colleagues out quite a bit there. We have 90 customer service centres. They have been operating all the way through the pandemic providing services to people going in for licences, renewals and those sorts of thing, although we have a big presence online for that.

We never stopped a single project. All of the massive projects that we have going on the civil engineering front kept going. We were fortunate that we were working with partners in the construction industry that kept their side of the bargain in terms of having a COVID-safe plan. We managed to keep that going. There were three individual stimulus packages that were issued by ourselves and also ourselves and the feds. We kept a full bus, rail, ferry and tram service. The reason for that was that there are a lot of essential workers who use the public transport network to get to work.

Of course, MSQ, Maritime Safety Queensland, kept our 21 ports safe. That was due to the work that MSQ did right in the early days. When we heard of a new virus coming from China originally, we made ships steam for 14 days rather than 10, so it slowed them down. We put all sorts of protocols in place with our colleagues in Queensland Health but also our colleagues elsewhere in maritime emergency so that we protected our ports. That worked really well. In fact, it was an exemplar. The same issues that we were facing obviously were faced all around Australia, so the same protocols we put in were cloned in New South Wales, Victoria and certainly Western Australia.

I do not think there is a single thing that we stopped doing. We kept it going. We were fortunate enough to get funding packages—\$400 million from our government, \$400 million or thereabouts from our government and the feds, and a separate one on road safety. From an economic point of view, we have managed to keep on going with building out of economic issues. The issue that we and all of Australia have had until recently is a dearth of engineers and technical staff, because if the borders were closed we were not able to get our engineers in. That is changing now with the borders being open. The whole of the eastern seaboard has more capital programs than I have ever seen, for the decade I have been here.

One of the issues we have is that steel has gone up by an enormous amount. The price of Brent crude is US\$120 a barrel today or thereabouts; last May it was US\$60 a barrel. That affects bitumen—all our bitumen is offshore—but it also affects other things like paint and white line materials. We are seeing an escalation in cost and in a lack of people to do the work. Fortunately, we have really good working relationships with the civil engineering fraternity here. Because we have QTRIP, which is unique amongst the states and territories, there is a pipeline of progress there.

I think we have worked really hard with our colleagues in Queensland Health, with construction and with the police to get the best possible output for the people of Queensland. One of the things that has really exploded—and I never thought that this would be a thing for the people here—is a Brisbane

massive increase in cycling and walking. Because we are spending something like \$200 million on cycling facilities in QTRIP—this is going to be used by families—we have seen a big uptake on that side of things. Fortunately, we have some really good segregated cycling paths and there is more to come.

I will probably steal somebody's question here, but if we look at where we are now in terms of patronage, we are at about 63 per cent of pre-COVID levels on bus, rail, ferry and tram. On the ferry side, the recent weather event has really knocked out the CityCats—in fact, it knocked one out and it sank to the bottom of the river. There is so much debris in the river. We worked out that we have taken out around 3½ thousand tonnes of rubbish. We have lassoed and rescued about 170 floating pontoons. There are all sorts of things in the river and the turbidity was so bad that we could not actually see to the bottom. That is why we have a minesweeper on board.

Just going back to the point, ferry patronage has probably fallen through the floor. One of the things that has happened, though, that is really interesting—and it is down to the minister; he actually had a trial of having pushbikes on trains during peak as well as off-peak times. That resulted in an uptick in traffic on the railway. The other thing we are seeing on the railway is that more people will probably be coming back to the railway because of the fuel prices being at \$2.25 or whatever it is. It used to be that at about \$1.90 we would see a flickback to rail, but that also depends on whether you have a free car-parking space or an accessible car-parking space in the city.

In summary, it has been a huge learning for me. One learning is that I should not book any holidays. I have changed my holidays three times because of COVID, and then during the last holiday there was this weather event so I had to change it again. Next time there will be a plague of frogs or locusts or something. I will tell you when I am having it so you do not take your holidays at the same time.

**Mr MILLAR:** What is the estimated deferred maintenance backlog on the state controlled road network at the moment?

**Mr Scales:** I am glad you asked that. It is in the billions. As we chop away at it—I am expecting this as a question in estimates as well. I can give you an exact figure in a second. It is certainly in the billions. The estimate of maintenance preservation and deferred maintenance backlog is \$5.753 billion at 30 June. The deferred maintenance backlog calculation is undertaken every 30 June and will be finalised by the end of October this year. It is indicated in the QAO report, which is something I have been working on. The good news for colleagues is that since the audit report was finalised the total length of the state controlled network that requires rehabilitation or resurfacing has been reduced by 626 kilometres as at 30 June last year.

It is like anything—and we have the longest state road network in Australia. We do keep a very close eye on it. We have one vehicle—and I think I let the estimates committee know this last time—which travels at line speed. It has a laser array and ground-penetrating radar. It looks at rutting.

Just for the record, there is a manifestation in the backlog of having so many roads to look after. We have had underlying increases in the supply costs of 21 per cent; an increasing level of night works, because obviously you cannot work throughout the day so you end up with higher costs; an increase in traffic management costs to address roadworker safety—last year we lost about 18 roadworkers across the whole of Australia, not just here; increased costs associated with ensuring further performance and resilience—in other words, we are trying to build back better; increased costs associated with line marking; underlying labour, plant and materials costs of about 10 per cent; and also specification changes. I am probably rehearsing what I am going to say at estimates, but I think those are the figures.

**Mr MILLAR:** Are there any forecasts of where the maintenance backlog will get to? In 2021 it rose \$400 million in just one year. Are there any calculations of where the backlog may be at the end of this financial year and the end of the next financial year?

**Mr Scales:** I will be better able to answer that at estimates because by then I will have a full-year effect. The intent is to keep chopping away at it so it has a trajectory downwards. We are helped by the fact that every time we have a flood event and we build it back, we are building back a piece of road that will hopefully not need building back again.

**Mr MILLAR:** Last week the federal government made an announcement of \$400 million for the inland highland, which goes from Mungindi to Charters Towers. What involvement has the department of transport had with the overall inland highway and how much has been spent so far, given this was an election commitment in 2021?

**CHAIR:** I do not expect you to comment on policy, but if the department has any works—

**Mr Scales:** We are involved in the planning side of that. Some of the roads exist anyway, so it is the new bits that we are doing the planning on. I hate taking things on notice, but I might have to take that one on notice.

**Mr MILLAR:** I am pretty happy with that, Mr Chair. If we can have an update on where the department of transport or the Queensland—

**CHAIR:** Where the department has got with the planning?

**Mr MILLAR:** Yes.

**Mr Scales:** Once we get to estimates I will be in better shape to answer that because we will have another year of background, if that helps?

**Mr MILLAR:** It is a very important road. It is an inland highway that we need.

**CHAIR:** All the roads that go through our areas are important. Page 83 of the annual report identifies the changes to the written-off vehicle scheme announced by the minister. Our recent inquiry into vehicle safety, standards and technology, including engine immobiliser technology, recommended that the minister reconsider the proposed changes. We note the minister tabled a response on the 24th, saying that there will be further consultation. Could you let us know what form that will take?

**Mr Scales:** The form will be actually talking to the industry a bit more. There were parallels drawn between our written-off vehicle policy and that of New South Wales. I think where the department is going to, with the guidance of the minister, is trying to balance it all up so that we make a good fist of this. There are certain vehicles that may be rebirthed. There are also vehicles that might have, say, a bonnet put on them from a written-off vehicle. The administration around that might not be as good as it could be. We are trying to take the direction from the committee but also the direction from the minister and end up with something that works. I think the minister's answer on notice is probably a good and accurate place of where we are now.

**CHAIR:** I am happy with that. As a committee we made a few recommendations and I am pleased to see that they are being taken on board. It is really good.

**Mr Scales:** On the engine immobilisers, you have to be really careful because—and I think I might have mentioned this in written evidence—if you immobilise a vehicle as it is travelling at speed then you lose control because as soon as the engine goes off on modern vehicles all the power steering goes off and it locks up and all the electrics go. We can see where the committee is going, which is great in terms of a strategic direction. The increased consultation will make it a better piece of public policy.

**CHAIR:** We got a clear indication during those proceedings about the danger of turning off a vehicle at speed. Basically, there are other forms of immobilisation—not doing it that way.

**Mr MARTIN:** I have a question about on-demand public transport. I note the trial that is happening on the Gold Coast, which has just been announced. Could you share with the committee what role on-demand public transport could have in the network? Is it based on any examples from overseas or anything that you have seen?

**Mr Scales:** It fills a gap in the traditional network. It is very difficult to change a tram or a heavy rail route because obviously they are very expensive pieces of kit. The buses are our most flexible network. Demand responsive transport is something that the department has been trialling in a number of areas. We have bought the actual platform so you can hang lots of other areas off it. Basically, it will operate and fill in the demand where the traditional bus network will not. People think that a full load on a bus should be 20 or 30, but a full load on a bus is seven to nine people, which is what you will see on average across the two peaks. That is the first point. The second point is that on the conventional bus network five minutes is a long time. If you say five minutes, that is another bus. If you can actually fill in the gaps with demand responsive transport, I think that is a good way to do it.

The second thing we are doing—demand responsive transport is the first bit—is looking at something called Mobility as a Service, or MaaS. That is where we are trying to integrate all modes of transport. It is not just the conventional bus, rail, ferry and tram but also electric scooters, cycling and walking. You will make your decision on how you will get to work, health care, shopping or whatever before you leave the house. That involves the platform. The platform we are building is based on new-generation ticketing, which we are spending a lot of money on.

There are two major impediments to using the public transport network. One is that you need a PhD to understand when the next bus, train or whatever is coming. The answer is that you download the TransLink app on one of these. That will tell you how the timetable works. The other bit is, when

you get on the bus, tram, ferry or whatever, how you pay for it. We are going for an account based system so that if you have a non-contacting bank card or one of these devices that will pay for your transport. It has been trialled elsewhere in the world but we actually have a really good integrated system here that we are going to push out. The south-east corner is probably the biggest operating area of public transport in this hemisphere at 10 square kilometres and this will push it out to areas like Toowoomba, Townsville and Cairns. You would also get the benefit of real-time information on that. That is another thing we are doing.

We recognise that, because the state is so big, at 1.7 million square kilometres, and we only have just over five million people, 85 per cent of Queenslanders are within 50 kilometres of the coast. We are trying to make the best of what we have, so more real-time information; more options like demand responsive transport; more technology solutions such as Mobility as a Service; integration of areas like electric cycles, electric scooters and all of that sort of thing; and more cycling paths so that people can get active. Demand responsive transport is one element of that.

When I worked in the UK we had demand responsive transport in Manchester and also in Merseyside, which was my last gig before I came here. They filled in the gap between the conventional network and the hard-to-reach network. The hard-to-reach network was largely people who wanted to travel maybe one or two times a week and found that the overall network was a bit daunting to use. The stuff we are using now is in collaboration with cab companies.

To take it to the next stage, we have a thing called the ODIN pass—I forget what the acronym means. It is for students. I think we have about 11,000 students signed up to ODIN. It is one card but covers lots of different modes of transport like demand responsive transport, cycles, taxis, bus, rail and ferry. If students are taking it up—we know what students are like for a bargain. That data is starting to come in.

The stated purpose of the department is to provide a single integrated transport network that is accessible to everyone, and the DRT, demand responsive transport, provides a very good plank for that. Because we are a big state, we cannot just say, 'Right, we're going to do it right across the network.' We have done it incrementally in areas where we know we have a demand, in areas where we know we have good partners and in areas where we know that we can get the data out and then get better. We have bought the software platform so we can put it anywhere now.

**Mr WALKER:** Director-General, page 5 of the annual report states—

... we're working to transition TransLink's urban bus fleet in South East Queensland to a zero emission fleet from 2030, partnering with bus operators to trial battery-electric, hydrogen fuel cell, and bio-ethanol fuelled buses across the network.

Can the department please update the committee on the percentage of the urban bus fleet that is currently at zero emissions?

**Mr Scales:** The integrated fleet in the south-east corner is, I reckon, about 3,800 vehicles. We are doing smaller scale pilots, so hydrogen, ethanol and battery but largely battery because we have a manufacturer on the Gold Coast, BusTTransect, that manufactures battery powered vehicles. The percentage is quite low, but my minister is pushing me quite hard on this because the biggest single contributor to climate change, greenhouse gases, is diesel or petrol. If we can move our vehicles to zero emission, that will not just do Queenslanders some good; it will do the world some good.

We are fortunate and very lucky to get the 2032 games. There will be no private car access to any of the venues. It will be a six-times bigger version of the Commonwealth Games. Buses are going to take the largest share of the mode there. It is a marvellous opportunity for us to propel the whole thing forward. We have 10 years to do it. Eighty-five per cent of the venues are already up so we know where they are. It is an opportunity to go from small scale to massive scale and use the impetus that is the 2032 games to do that.

The partners that we have, certainly in this area—that is, the south-east corner and beyond that—are trying to move their vehicle fleet there anyway because by 2030 or 2040, depending on who you talk to, you will not have any internal combustion engines. The original equipment manufacturers that make engines and kit for buses will not be doing diesel. It does not matter whether or not we are at 2032 with the Olympic Games, we will have to move that way anyway. I am speaking as an ex-bus operator from Manchester with 2,000 double-deckers and an ex-bus manufacturer. The whole thing is going to move that way anyway.

On the percentage at the moment, I will be able to give you the exact number. I have a really interesting—well, I think it is interesting—sheet of where all the different trials are, in Mackay, here or elsewhere. I can give you a sheet with that and all the numbers. That can give you the number of the integrated fleet, which I think is about 3,800, from memory.

**CHAIR:** That would be great if you take that on notice.

**Mr Scales:** Really, between 2030 or 2040 all the big manufacturers will move wholesale into non-internal combustion.

**Mr WALKER:** Director-General, you are right: it is a big impact on the world with air quality and moving forward with zero emissions. It is critical and you have hit the nail on the head with the Olympic Games but more so for our local residents and the trial here in South-East Queensland. Air quality directly impacts pedestrians, cyclists and people in those spaces. I note that a lot of these facilities are underground and there is interchange with trains, buses, vehicles, taxis and scooters. There will be an important direct impact on air quality moving forward for the city, the state and the world. I see at the airport they have electric buses, which are quite impressive. We have the private sector investing in heavy transport. For example, in Townsville there are the new hydrogen powered trucks at Sun Metals. They will produce their own hydrogen and use it directly. There is some capacity for other private sector users to be in that space. That is my fascination here: not only are we talking about it but as a government we are demonstrating moving forward what we are doing in that space. Just recently we had a report from QFleet on electric vehicles. They are doing their bit and they are on target. It is all coming together quite well. Thank you, Chair and Director-General.

**Mr Scales:** I refer to the recent fund for supporting electric cars that Minister Bailey and Minister de Brenni have been talking about. Minister Bailey has been pushing this forward. You can get a subsidy if you buy a car, but it is targeted at the lower end of the market rather than subsidising people who would already buy, say, a Tesla. I think these small-scale things are going to help us enormously.

The real issue for me is that if you listen to Ford—I think it is 2030 and some of the European manufacturers are 2040—you will not be able to buy an internal combustion engine anywhere. Buses in particular are quite a high-cost piece of kit but they do last 10 or 15 years. I think it is a massive opportunity to start greening the planet, because we are only borrowing it from our children and our grandchildren anyway.

**CHAIR:** That means all my classic cars with internal combustion engines will be worth more; they will be collectible. Recent news articles have indicated that the taxi industry is starting to show signs of improvement. From a department perspective, do you have any comment on the issue and what the department has been doing to support the taxi industry recently?

**Mr Scales:** The taxi industry has had a lot of support from government. As we have seen with the advent of rideshare, whether it be Ola, Uber or whatever, the taxi industry is still there. We have used them during COVID to great effect to do transfers from the airport into quarantine; that helped us a lot. Being fair to the taxi industry, they came on board really quickly with double-vaccinated drivers and cleaning vehicles for us. We have seen an uptick in that. I am not really sure how Ola and Uber have fared because we have no real vision over that. Before the advent of rideshare there would be 50 million journeys a year across Queensland in the cab world. I was in Sydney last week for a conference and then a board meeting and I used a cab when I got to the airport. I always have a chat with the taxidriver. They say that things are coming back slowly. We do grants for accessible cabs as well. Although the fixed number of cab licences in the state is about 3,800—I cannot remember the exact number—they are still there and they are still doing a good service, I think.

**CHAIR:** This committee in its previous iterations has had a lot to do with the taxi industry, as you know, over recent years, and the taxi industry certainly provide services that rideshare do not provide. It is good to see that they are starting to come back strongly.

**Mr Scales:** I think so, Chair. The other thing is that—people do not realise this—you get this surge pricing with rideshare. My kids are 26 and 23. I will not have them using rideshare if I can get away with it because at least with a cab you know it has been properly maintained and it is properly licensed.

**CHAIR:** It has a camera.

**Mr Scales:** It has a camera, yes.

**CHAIR:** It all came out during the inquiry. I know we are off track here, but it is a fact that the taxi industry has an obligation. In my area there are people who have never had a car and when they travel to do their shopping—it may be a \$6 fare, but a taxi will always pick them up, to and from, and that is a service that does not come with the other providers. Perhaps they will one day.

**Mr MILLAR:** My mayors from Central Queensland would not forgive me if I did not ask this question regarding Queensland beef corridors. It is the G7 of beef. The seven councils in Central Queensland have got together and are looking to seal some pretty important roads. What involvement has the department had with beef corridors, and can you give us an update of where we are going with that?

**Mr Scales:** We have had very little official knowledge. You might know better than I do, member for Gregory, but I think this was launched at a conference with the agriculture minister present. We are aware of the corridors. I think the best way to solve this is to use the existing network. We have the regional roads and transport groups—there are 17 of those—and, as the member would be aware, I try to attend those where I can, although COVID has restricted my movements on that a bit. If they raise it through that, I think that is the best way to do it. We are not involved directly yet but we can be.

**Mr MILLAR:** Is there an appetite from the department to be involved?

**Mr Scales:** There is always an appetite to help out producers, whether it be beef, grain, coal or whatever.

**Mr MILLAR:** What can I do to help bring the department and these mayors together so we can get some action on it?

**Mr Scales:** Just write to me. I always turn up.

**CHAIR:** I concur with that, Director-General. You do.

**Mr Scales:** Member for Gregory, that is a great question. I do not think we have been officially—well, maybe we are, but it would not have landed on my desk directly. Write to me directly.

**Mr MILLAR:** That is probably the best way. I have one more question on Central Queensland. Can you give us an update on the department's involvement with the Springsure to Tambo Road and costings?

**Mr Scales:** We are still progressively planning and then sealing that. I would have to take it on notice. I do not want to guess.

**Mr MILLAR:** Yes, please, take it on notice.

**Mr Scales:** I do not want to guess because I am very fond of the people out west and I try to get to as many RRTGs as I possibly can. I do take the point, yes.

**CHAIR:** I do not know if this is commercial-in-confidence, so you may not be able to comment on this, but on the issue of distracted drivers and where the cameras are targeted to be put, what is the mindset behind where they are? Is it at blackspots? Could you also make a general comment on whether there has been an increase in road safety due to those cameras?

**Mr Scales:** They have only been in place for a matter of months, but they can be anywhere at any time; that is the beauty of them. We can deploy them in areas where there is a lot of traffic or on rural roads. The technology is very good indeed. It sees right into the vehicle. If you have the seatbelt on and both hands on the wheel, it will move on. If you have no seatbelt on, it will take a photograph, it will be go to a human and then you will get pinged. If you have one hand on the wheel and one hand on some sort of device, it will take a photograph and send that off to a human. This is not machine-led; this is people-led.

Has it made an impact on road safety? It is probably too early to tell. I think once the fines keep on dropping through people's letterboxes—we are getting repeat offenders as well. If you have your hand on one of these or you are doing something with a mobile phone, you are just as dangerous as a drunk driver. It is a great initiative, but I think the policy is that we can deploy them anywhere, anytime. That is the key point: it is a deterrent. Why people would want to carry one of these and then use it while they are driving is beyond me. Why you would not wear a seatbelt I just cannot understand. I get the 'lives lost' figures every single day, as my minister does, and it just beggars belief the amount of people who just do not wear seatbelts. It is not all kids, either.

**CHAIR:** That was one of the questions that came up during the inquiry. It was before this committee. Some vehicles came out before seatbelts and there was a concern. For those people who drive those vehicles, yes, maybe they should have seatbelts fitted; I do not know. There is also the question as to whether it is safe to have them fitted because of the anchoring points et cetera. There was a concern from them that if they were seen without a seatbelt on they would get fined. I am sure, from memory, that that was alleviated because their vehicle would come up as 'This vehicle never had a seatbelt in the first place'.

**Mr Scales:** To that point, yes, it would come up as an historic vehicle. Having said that, they do not tend to travel very fast and they only tend to come out on weekends.

**CHAIR:** That is right. They are specialist and under a SEV scheme. The other one that came up during the inquiry was mobile phones put in a holder. They are in a holder and there may be a map on the phone that someone is looking at but they are not holding it in their hand, and that was fine. It was the issue of holding it in the hand, wasn't it?



**Mr Scales:** As soon as you touch it, you are in violation of the law.

**CHAIR:** Even touching a keypad?

**Mr Scales:** No, that is the same as touching a radio.

**CHAIR:** That came up during the inquiry.

**Mr MILLAR:** If I have my phone in a holder and I touch it to view a map, I am fine?

**CHAIR:** That is the same as touching a radio. It must have been last parliament that that one went through. It was very interesting, the distinctions.

**Mr Scales:** Member for Gregory, I will check.

**Mr MILLAR:** Could you?

**CHAIR:** Sometimes you do have a map in your car that you are touching while you are driving.

**Mr Scales:** I think so. The key thing is: if you have the device like this and you are doing things with it, you are not concentrating on the road. It is like being a drunk driver.

**CHAIR:** You do see a lot of people doing it. Hopefully this deters them. Thank you for that.

**Mr MARTIN:** My question is in relation to the workforce. The committee notes that the average age of departmental employees has been steadily increasing over the last eight years—I think it is up now to 48.5 years—and that 20 per cent of your employees are also eligible for retirement. Could you comment on this and any potential impact it may have on the department into the future?

**Mr Scales:** Member for Stretton, that is a good question. What I have tried to do, and building on work of previous directors-general, is to make Transport and Main Roads an enjoyable place to work and to be an employer of choice. We have been very successful. Last week I signed one certificate of long service for 50 years and two for 40 years, so people tend to stay with us for a long time. We recognise that. At the other end of the telescope, we are recruiting 40-odd graduates a year as we are trying to grow our own as well. It is always a balance. In actually making it the employer of choice, I am not getting a great turnover of staff, which also affects me increasing the amount of women into leadership positions. We have done quite well over the last 10 years. I think it is 30-odd per cent now. We are getting ahead of it. We are getting more than that. It is really good. I do not get the staff turnover rate that other departments might get.

We have over 800 RPEQs—in other words, engineers. I am very proud of the fact that more than 100 of those are women. We have done really well, but in doing really well and not having a high staff turnover and doing really well in terms of being the place to work, it also means you get people like me with grey hair. Having said that, it means that we have a mix of kids coming in through the graduate program and we are always oversubscribed by a long way. We are bringing in trainees as well, not necessarily graduates. We also have, through RoadTek, a lot of apprentices; we are growing our own there.

To be honest, I do not mind if we train somebody up and they leave, so long as they do not go offshore. Offshore is New South Wales or Victoria, as far as I am concerned. If they stay in Queensland, it means the water levels are progressively going up. We are trying to fix it at the other end of the telescope. We do have a workforce plan, as the government does. We are capped in terms of the number of FTEs, full-time equivalents, that we can have.

Also, what is not in those figures is that we have 2,040, I think it is—certainly over 2,000—school crossing supervisors, and a lot of those are at my end of the spectrum rather than the other end of the spectrum in age terms. They have been with us for a long time, doing the same job in the same schools, doing a fabulous service for the people of Queensland.

Will it have an effect? Yes. Are we doing as much as we can? I think so, by getting kids in at one end and trying to balance it all out. It is a balance. It is always going to be a balance. The department is 9,500 strong. Basically we are trying to balance it with a good mix of experience and youth and enthusiasm.

I have to say that when you are recruiting some of the younger of people today they interview you; you do not interview them. It is like, 'What is your environmental policy? What is your career path? What is your social licence? What are you doing for the Indigenous? What are you doing for the disabled?' These are really good questions to have to be able to answer. We have to temper their enthusiasm because they want to be at the bottom of the pile for about one or two months and then get my job. It is great having enthusiastic people, but we are trying to balance it all. That is why we reported in the annual report that, being an engineer, if you cannot measure it you cannot manage it. You need to be able to measure these things. That is why that matrix is in there.

**Mr WALKER:** Director-General, we have been talking about the use of mobile phones and the lack of seatbelt wearing. Pages 83 and 84 of the annual report provide commentary on the distracted driver reforms, including the trial and the importance of cameras targeting mobile phone and seatbelt offences. Can you provide an update on whether there has been any significant pattern of increasing or decreasing infringement numbers over each month since the inception on 1 November 2021?

**Mr Scales:** Unfortunately, it is showing no diminution at all at this point. We are still getting, I want to say, thousands a month. People need to realise that this could actually result in the loss of licence altogether. I think that is going to be one of the key points. The very important fact is that, quite frankly, my minister, being the minister for road safety, got fed up with people not wearing seatbelts and fed up with people using mobile phones; that is why he introduced it. He wound the fines up as well. At the moment we are not seeing any diminution, but that may be because it is from November to where we are now. Maybe we need a full-year effect to see what the actions are. I think at this point it has not had an immediate effect, which is really disappointing, but maybe it is a slow burn.

I still see the 'lives lost' stats every day and I see the amount of people involved. There is still the fatal five, one of them being not wearing a seatbelt, yet you still get to the point where not only kids but also adults are not putting the seatbelt on. It just beggars belief. Every one is a tragedy.

We measure the lives lost and we have the figures from over the last five years. With the effects of COVID, we thought there would not be so many vehicles on the road so we should end up with a reduction in deaths on the road. It went the other way. It went the other way, we think, partly because there were not that many vehicles on the roads in the early days so people were travelling faster—I think, maybe. It was counterintuitive at the start of COVID.

We are monitoring deaths, but it does not tell the whole story. There are about 8,500 people seriously injured, and that is pretty salutary as well. It is not just the headline figure; there are all the other figures as well that we monitor. They tend to be broken bones and head injuries—things that take a long time, particularly the more psychological injuries, to get through. Every life lost is obviously a tragedy, but there is another story there as well. I have probably told you a story there. The bottom line is, to answer your question directly, not yet, but once we have a year's figures we will probably be able to have a better idea.

**CHAIR:** We do not have any further questions. We do have some questions on notice, Director-General. I will just run through them. We will write to you, of course. There is the question from Mr Walker with regards to the trial of integrated bus zero emission sites. Did you not want that one on notice? Are you happy with the answer?

**Mr WALKER:** I am happy with the answer. It will be a growing figure over time.

**Mr Scales:** We have the opportunity to respond anyway, so I think we will put in the total integrated fleet, which tells you the amount of vehicles and the operator, and then we can say, 'Right, 12 vehicles; total line of ethanol or battery or hydrogen vehicles' and that gives the committee a base. Then if I am before this committee in another year I can say, 'This is what has happened.' I think that might be useful, Chair.

**CHAIR:** We will get that one then, thank you.

**Mr Scales:** I think so.

**CHAIR:** The next question was in respect of the update on the progress of the Springsure to Tambo Road, for the member for Gregory.

**Mr Scales:** I think so. I will get you an exact example. I cannot remember the length of the road. I can, I think, but I do not want to guess in front of the committee.

**CHAIR:** We will write to you on that one. The next is in regard to touching the phone if it is in a holder, which I am pretty sure from memory was okay.

**Mr Scales:** For the benefit of the member for Gregory, I will get the proper part of the road rules. I lump my phone in the boot. For the first few times when it goes off it is scary because you cannot get to it, but if you cannot wait for a few minutes—

**CHAIR:** Messaging is out, but most phone calls just come through now and you do not touch the phone.

**Mr Scales:** Hands-free.

**Mr MILLAR:** There are 417 kilometres between both my offices; I can deal with a lot of phone calls.

**CHAIR:** That concludes this briefing. We will need responses to questions on notice by 4 pm on Tuesday, 5 April. We will write to you about that. Thank you to everyone who has participated. 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 11.34 am.**