



# ***TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr SR King MP—Chair  
Mr LL Millar MP  
Mr BW Head MP  
M JP Kelly MP  
Mr LA Walker MP  
Mr TJ Watts MP

**Staff present:**

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

## **PUBLIC BRIEFING—PUBLIC WORKS INQUIRY INTO THE STATE CONTROLLED ROADS BETWEEN BIRDSVILLE AND BEDOURIE AND BIRDSVILLE TO WINDORAH**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Monday, 9 October 2023**

**Brisbane**

## MONDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2023

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**The committee met at 9.00 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare this public briefing for the committee's public works inquiry into the state controlled roads between Birdsville and Bedourie and Birdsville to Windorah open. My name is Shane King, 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 Millar MP, member for Gregory and our deputy chair; Bryson Head MP, member for Callide; Joe Kelly MP, member for Greenslopes, who is substituting for Joan Pease MP, the member for Lytton; Les Walker MP, member for Mundingburra; and we will be joined by Trevor Watts MP, member for Toowoomba North, who may have to step out at some stage for another meeting.

On 22 May 2023 the Transport and Resources Committee resolved to conduct a public works inquiry into the state controlled roads between Birdsville and Bedourie and from Birdsville to Windorah. The purpose of today's briefing is to assist the committee with its consideration of the inquiry. The committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As parliamentary proceedings, under the standing orders any person may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, 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—and no doubt have been before the committee before—so we will take those as being read and understood.

The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present—and usually flock to our transport meetings—and will be subject to the chair's direction at all times. Media rules endorsed by the committee are available from committee staff if required. All those present today should note it is possible you might be filmed or photographed during the proceedings by media and images may appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone present to turn mobile phones off or to silent mode.

**HILL, Mr Gavin, District Director, Central West District, Department of Transport and Main Roads**

**KNOX, Ms Ann-Maree, General Manager, Program Delivery and Operations, Department of Transport and Main Roads**

**CHAIR:** We welcome representatives from the Department of Transport and Main Roads who have been invited to brief the committee. If you both could make a short opening statement after which we will have some questions for you.

**Ms Knox:** Thank you, Chair and committee members, and good morning. I am the General Manager of Program Delivery and Operations for the Department of Transport and Main Roads. With me today is Gavin Hill, the District Director for the TMR Central West District. Gavin is also a Registered Professional Engineer of Queensland, RPEQ. TMR has provided a written submission addressing the terms of reference for the inquiry, and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee this morning. I would like to briefly outline how TMR is improving the state controlled network near Birdsville located in our Central West District, especially our delivery of key projects over the last five years and our planning priorities going forward.

For context, TMR's Central West District supports 4,378 kilometres of state controlled road network that traverses some of the most remote parts of the state. The district is the largest in Queensland, being almost the size of Victoria. In the past five years TMR has progressed more than \$32 million of works to seal additional sections of two key unsealed routes into Birdsville: the Eyre Developmental Road between Bedourie and Birdsville, which provides access from northern Australia via Mount Isa; and the Birdsville Developmental Road between Morney and Birdsville which provides access from western areas, including Longreach and Quilpie, and on to major centres along the east Brisbane

coast. Specifically, this investment included progressively sealing more than 36 kilometres between Bedourie and Birdsville through five separate projects totalling \$23 million. Now there is only 15.7 kilometres of unsealed road remaining on this 163-kilometre link. Between Morney and Birdsville, \$9.2 million in sealing works have been delivered via two separate projects on this 265-kilometre road, reducing the length of unsealed sections to 196.7 kilometres.

To optimise the funding available and increase road safety outcomes by ensuring the longest length of road possible was sealed, these projects applied a six-metre-wide seal width on an eight-metre-wide formation. This is consistent with national guidelines for low-volume roads with an annual average daily traffic volume of fewer than 150 vehicles. Eight-metre-wide sealing has occurred in places to provide overtaking opportunities and in recognition that this is expected to become the future sealing width vision. The \$32 million investment in sealing works is enhanced by \$17.9 million in routine maintenance provided in the past five years for these two roads along with the Diamantina Developmental Road from Windorah to Bedourie which forms a transport loop between Birdsville, Bedourie and Windorah. Importantly, the sealing projects and routine maintenance were delivered by local crews from Diamantina Shire Council and Barcoo Shire Council, supporting local jobs and reinforcing local councils as a key delivery partner for TMR's Central West District.

While close to \$15 million has been invested in improving and maintaining the state controlled road network near Birdsville over the past five years, TMR does acknowledge that there is more to do. The Eyre Developmental Road between Bedourie and Birdsville is now the highest ranked unsealed road priority in TMR's Central Queensland region. For the remaining 15.7 kilometres of this unsealed road, TMR is progressing two separate planning projects to fully seal the link, noting the technical and cost complexities involved with upgrading this last section of the road. This is due to its location within significant catchments of the Lake Eyre Basin, including the Cuttaburra Crossing, a permanent water hole and wetland on Eyre Creek. There are multiple concrete floodways on the approaches to the Cuttaburra section which will be considered as part of any future upgrade. TMR will continue to seek construction funding through various state and federal programs to deliver these projects and fully seal this road. For the Birdsville Developmental Road between Morney and Birdsville, TMR is completing planning activities for a sixth overtaking opportunity to be located around 220 kilometres east of Birdsville and is currently seeking funding for its construction.

In closing, TMR recognises that Birdsville is home to a vibrant and passionate community, is a key tourism destination with iconic annual events and supports various industries including aquaculture and mining. We understand the importance of the state controlled road network in providing a safe driving experience, enhancing liveability, strengthening supply chains and enabling the local long-term growth of the local grassroots businesses, markets and broader industry. While a number of activities have been delivered to improve the state controlled road network near Birdsville, TMR is committed to identifying and pursuing opportunities for continual improvement. The department welcomes the opportunity to assist the committee with its inquiry. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Before we move to questions, could I ask that any answers to questions taken on notice be provided by 12 pm on Wednesday, 18 October. You discussed the remaining 15.7 kilometres. We were made very aware by some of the families and pastoralists out there of the nature of sealing that and what that would mean with water flow and everything. Is there any sort of time frame for that work to proceed or be completed?

**Ms Knox:** Planning is underway for both the pave and seal and the upgrade to the main crossing. Projects have been funded under our Transport System Planning Program, so it is definitely a priority. The pave and seal planning project—the easiest one—is nearing completion, with the business case expected to be finalised in December 2023. The structures upgrade planning projects are in the early stages, with the business case expected to be finalised in mid-2025. Meanwhile, we are submitting nominations as part of the Australian government's road safety program, under which a lot of the works have already been delivered, and we continue to seek funding through various state and federal programs. It is a difficult section with the number of floodways. Gavin, did you want to add anything else?

**Mr Hill:** The Cuttaburra Crossing, which is five kilometres in length, already has some culverts in that section and the department would be looking to undertake sufficient planning to understand how many more culverts could be installed. The important aspect is to not hold back the water so that the water can sufficiently cross the road or get through to the other side, which is required by the property owners with their dams downstream of the location of Cuttaburra. The debris that is delivered when Eyre Creek is in flood is problematic because it can clog up the culverts, albeit that they are very low height culverts. We will be looking to consult with the community—particularly Diamantina

shire and their reps who have knowledge of the location—so that we can be informed of the standing water height of that section and know what height we can deliver and subsequently the culverts to be installed through there.

**CHAIR:** Answer this as you can because it is a bit of a pipe dream we heard out there, but I think there is value in it. When we looked at the border with South Australia—and I understand that the South Australian government would have to do a lot of work—I was wondering whether there have been any discussions about a road from Adelaide to Mount Isa? It seems simple, but the logistics might be a nightmare from an engineering perspective. I did not know whether there had been any discussions about that. I imagine the trucking industry and others would find that an amazing opportunity. Like I said, it was just something that was said and had to be asked.

**Mr Hill:** I am not aware of any discussions that have occurred with South Australia and anything to do with the link south of Birdsville.

**CHAIR:** All right; thank you.

**Mr MILLAR:** I refer to the Birdsville to Windorah road. One of the issues that people out there—obviously they are very grateful for the passing lanes—find with the high tourism numbers is people trying to get a LandCruiser wagon with a pretty heavy caravan around road trains that are going to the east. The committee has heard that the existing five-kilometre-long passing lanes that these roads host should be upgraded to around about 10 kilometres to optimise safety when passing a road train. Does TMR have a view on the optimal length of safe passing lanes?

**Ms Knox:** Absolutely. Overtaking opportunities are typically located on sections of flat and straight road widened to an eight-metre seal. As I said, we generally widen to six metres with an eight-metre formation, but, if we can, we do the eight metre. That would be sufficient to allow a vehicle to safely pass another vehicle, including the road trains, and also travel in the opposing traffic lane for a period of time, which is why overtaking opportunities are only allowed when it is safe to do so. The five overtaking opportunities on the Birdsville Developmental Road are between two to four kilometres in length—not five and certainly not 10. We have a strategy of implementing a minimum length of two kilometres where the road is already sealed or four kilometres where the road is unsealed and this allows adequate time for a vehicle's dust cloud to clear prior to an overtaking opportunity. Definitely there is a minimum of two and four where the road is sealed. The five that we have already done are between two to four kilometres in length.

**Mr WATTS:** Are they signposted as to their length so people are able to pass?

**Ms Knox:** They are definitely signposted as overtaking opportunities. I am not sure about the length though.

**Mr MILLAR:** No, they are not. I have travelled that road plenty of times. What I am trying to explain here is that you are going for the minimum of two and then to four. The problem when you have big triples going down the road is there is a lot of dust. What happens is that the tourist says, 'I have to get around this road train' so they just step on it. Sometimes they do not make it because the dust goes for a couple of kilometres. If we could lengthen them to 10 kilometres it would make it a safer opportunity for people to be able to pass a road train. I know you have your minimums and maximums, but there is a concern out there by locals—and obviously emergency services—that we may need to extend that.

**Ms Knox:** We definitely think in terms of minimums. We tend not to think in terms of maximums. We very much think in terms of what we can deliver for the funding that we have available, but I would probably also suggest that the safety of these longer length opportunities would come into consideration as well. You would have to have a certain road geometry and site distance.

**Mr Hill:** If I can add to that, on highways the design standards would be actually less than two kilometres for an overtaking lane opportunity. What we are talking about is overtaking opportunities whereby we are widening the road to eight metres minimum and that eight metres is occurring for the length of two kilometres in sections that are already sealed and six metres in width where it is unsealed sections and we are adopting a four-kilometre length. That four kilometres is purely falling back on funding. If we had further funding available we could do 10 kilometres and the like, but it is caught up in the strategy of the frustration of the motorists, the caravaner, driving behind a road train, type 2 trucks and the like and convoys. You are right, there needs to be a sufficient length of road to get in front of long vehicles and overtake them and we are falling upon four at the moment.

**Mr MILLAR:** Just for the committee record, I would like to see 10 kays. I would be advocating for 10 kays.

**CHAIR:** We went for a drive and saw the dust. I had not seen anything like that. I had not travelled in Outback Queensland. Other states where I have been it has been sealed the whole way—states such as Western Australia. You know your roads better than anyone. Diamantina shire are the ones doing the work. That is what was requested and safety is a priority.

**Mr WALKER:** My question is in relation to the emergency aircraft that land in the area. The committee has heard evidence that existing landing spots, and we got to see one in the Central West, are not compatible with the new upgraded King Air 360 aircraft currently being initiated for use by the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Does TMR have a time line to address this issue and has there been any communication with the Royal Flying Doctor Service about this?

**Ms Knox:** I am only aware of this in terms that it is the only section that has a 10-metre seal width, and it kept coming up in the proceedings, which is the minimum seal width required by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. To answer your specific question, member, I am not sure. Gavin, do you have anything to add?

**Mr Hill:** I do not have anything further to add. There have been no conversations with the Royal Flying Doctor Service on future locations. The current location is a 10-metre wide, four-kilometre length. However, that would not meet the standards of today, requiring as much as, I believe, 14 to 16 metres in width as well as a longer length. I go on record to say the department paid for the extra width of the existing one out there with its own funds for that airstrip to be there. It really was an additional commitment that the department provided. There can be turnaround points at the ends of these lengths of strips that could be looked into. Everything is on the table to be discussed further with available funds.

**Mr HEAD:** As part of this inquiry, the committee has heard that recent restrictions on the use of gravel quarry areas because of native title and other rules and restrictions has drastically increased the cost of road maintenance on roads. As the constructing authority, is TMR involved in negotiations with relevant government agencies to resolve this issue?

**Ms Knox:** TMR is obviously aware that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is no longer issuing permits for the quarries previously authorised under sales permits held by local government authorities without native title consent negotiated through an Indigenous land use agreement. Clearly we understand the importance of local government access to state owned quarry material to deliver their work, as well as our own work, under the RMPCs. We have been engaged and attending monthly working group meetings with representatives from DAF, LGAQ, Barcoo and Quilpie shire councils, the Department of Resources and so forth. It is certainly a priority issue as demonstrated by a meeting that took place with the Deputy Premier in August. We will continue to liaise with DAF, LGAQ and relevant councils and will certainly make it clear what our requirements are for local governments to deliver all of our works. Gavin, did you want to add anything else to that?

**Mr Hill:** Thank you. There are ongoing discussions, and TMR is at the table with the Department of Resources, on the native title issue and the determination. What I can update the committee on is the Windorah Airport, which was caught up in the approval for gravel from a closed pit, that that project is going ahead because discussions and negotiations have occurred between the native title claimants, and an ILUA or an interim agreement is now in place. Progress is being made on a job-by-job process and being whittled away. So, there is progress occurring.

**Mr MILLAR:** Just to follow up: the upgrade of the Windorah airstrip is going to go ahead? We can be confident that it will happen?

**Mr Hill:** It is progressing. As of this week the announcement was made.

**Mr MILLAR:** Fantastic.

**Mr WATTS:** I was not able to attend the hearing, but from what I have looked at there was information relating to dust and speeding and what causes accidents. I am wondering what relevant data you might have on the nature of particular types of accidents and what the causes might be—sealed versus unsealed; six metre, eight metre or 10 metre, whatever it might be—and if there is any correlation between the number of accidents, the volume of traffic and the condition of the road?

**Ms Knox:** That is quite a complex question. You have thrown a bit in there. Certainly road safety is a top priority for TMR on these sections of road. We certainly have 30 educational signs in place on these roads. I think that the major challenge for driving on an unsealed road is probably the experience of the drivers and the load that they are carrying. In this particular area you have these iconic annual events with sometimes very inexperienced drivers. I am thinking back to my road safety

days and I do not think there was a significant increase in crashes on sealed roads where people are used to driving on the sealed roads. Gavin, you might have more information. I think traffic volume is probably the main component of crash history.

**Mr WATTS:** What I am interested in is the data being differentiated in terms of there is a conclusion to the cause of the accident: was it inexperience, was it dust as they have tried to overtake, was it undue speeding—(a) is that data being captured; and (b) is there a correlation to this 'section is particularly dusty' or 'this section is where people go particularly fast' or whatever?

**Ms Knox:** You touch on why it is so important that you have local people working in the area. I am sure Gavin knows which sections are riskier than others and that might be road geometry, it actually might be the distance that you travelled from your last stop break. To answer the bigger question, there is a major investigation by QPS, and TMR are often involved, following every fatality, and there are probably 60 categories which are ticked or not ticked—whether fatigue is involved, whether the road environment was involved, whether there was drink or drugs and so forth. That is captured and used to access funding. You may have noticed that there was actually quite a bit of road safety funding that was used to seal a lot of these sections of road and the annual events would have been a key input into that—inexperienced drivers and so forth. There most certainly is at a whole-of-state level but then we use our local people to really target where we think every dollar would help in the road safety cause.

**Mr WATTS:** Sorry to keep adding to it, but where you have then sealed or widened or done some road improvement, does that show up in the data? If we analyse the data going back over five years, is that all there for us to see?

**Mr Hill:** I do not believe the data will reflect truly that the sealed road will lessen accidents in the Central West. It very much improves the ride and the efficiency of getting between A and B, but if I could elaborate a little bit further: dawn and dusk is problematic—looking into the sun. We are still seeing accidents whereby motorists are being affected by the bright light low on the horizon and not seeing other vehicles. That includes, unfortunately, hitting cattle and obviously kangaroos and other wildlife. So accidents occur from that. Interestingly, on an unsealed road or a road with a lower speed limit motorists can be a little bit more cautious. When the road is sealed and it is a faster speed zone obviously they speed up and there is a bit more traffic that also is generated in that location. There are various reasons accidents can occur on a section of road and all accidents are attractors, as Ann-Maree said. The department has, over the years, also identified fatigue zones which are locations between townships where run off the roads or accidents occur more often and we have tried to target them with signage and the like. It is ongoing, from my experience.

**Ms Knox:** I will just add one more thing: speed is the killer. Sometimes when you have sealed roads people just go faster. That is why it is not a really obvious relationship between seal and road safety.

**CHAIR:** The unsealed roads were pretty good and we were told that they were at their best—that at the time we were not witnessing them at their worst—but also everyone remarked on the quality of work by the Diamantina Shire Council and how well they did do the work. I had a question and it brings in something that I have seen and heard chairing this committee for so long in its different iterations. The widened line marking treatment that has been proven to save lives, is there a particular road width where that can be put in? The one thing that we did remark upon again and again is that out there it is quite narrow to be passing a road train when you have a caravan. It would not be optimal. I do not know what the road width is for that widened centre treatment.

**Ms Knox:** The short answer is 10 metres is needed to accommodate the treatment. Most of this is 100 kms an hour so a wide centre line really does need to be a metre wide at those speeds and generally you have got more than 2,000 vehicles per day, but it is actually the sealed width of 10 metres that is required.

**Mr WALKER:** During our visit to Birdsville, the committee inspected an existing causeway over the Diamantina River that was downstream from the bridge towards the Birdsville Racecourse. The causeway has been damaged by various flood events, but it is regularly used by foot traffic. Submitters advise that heritage and environmental regulatory issues have been impeding the repair of this causeway for a number of years, despite its capacity to facilitate emergency vehicles and foot traffic and events in the event of the bridge's closure upstream. Can TMR provide any further information regarding the rectification plans for this causeway? When this bridge is really busy and there are big events, there is a causeway downstream where people walk through—which is a good thing, getting them away from the highway. If there is an event where the bridge is closed there is a bypass. At the moment, once that bridge is closed there is no way around.

**Ms Knox:** I am hoping Gavin has the answer because I certainly do not.

**CHAIR:** We did understand that the TMR road is the bridge—correct me if I am wrong. Everyone works together. It seemed like additional safety to have that. It is cracked up at the moment. You could not walk across it now. You certainly would not drive a vehicle through it because you do not know what is underneath it, particularly if the river is flowing. It could lend itself to being even more dangerous if someone attempted to do that because you did not know what is there. Local police informed us about.

**Ms Knox:** Before we go to the answer to your question, I want to highlight that the outback Regional Roads and Transport Group work really closely with TMR—I hope that you got that sense.

**Mr WALKER:** That was highlighted, Chair, during our committee hearing.

**Ms Knox:** There are definitely opportunities to prioritise work.

**Mr Hill:** The correct answer is what has been said by the honourable member. It is a council controlled road and segment. The department does not have jurisdiction or has not moved into that to put traffic on that segment of road at any time. We do collaborate with Diamantina shire. An example is on the Bedourie to Birdsville road where we have utilised the Lake Machattie road as a bypass around the Cuttaburra Crossing section. We have actually deployed a council road to get traffic around a known wet spot. The location in question that you are referring to is south of Birdsville. The department has not had any dealings with council on that yet.

**CHAIR:** We are not asking you to do any extra work, but it was highlighted to us as a safety issue. When the races are on you have foot traffic across the existing bridge, as well as vehicular traffic, particularly large vehicles transporting horses, and it is a safety issue. I understand it is a council facility, but I wanted to put that out there when everyone is working together that we want everyone to be safe.

**Mr WATTS:** There is a sealing program going on. What is the schedule for maintaining that quality? When it is done, what is the time rotation required before it needs to be resealed or maintained, and how is that affected by adverse weather events?

**Ms Knox:** That is a really good question. The whole point of sealing is that we reduce our routine maintenance burden; the roads become a lot more resilient. We still have 800 kilometres of unsealed road in the Central West District so there is a real competition for funds. When we seal the road, we are reducing the maintenance burden. Are you asking how long that seal lasts?

**Mr WATTS:** I guess what I am concerned about is that everybody says, 'The road is sealed, fantastic.' We leave it for X number of years because it is sealed and, therefore, it is less maintenance. Then, all of a sudden, we have a lot of resealing to do. What is the process to make sure that same standard that it was laid at is maintained through weather events and other activities?

**Ms Knox:** We clearly work with local councils through the routine maintenance performance contract. We always address safety first, but it is safe to say that we also look at our asset maintenance program. We do not let things go if we can possibly avoid it. The sooner we intervene the less it costs in the long run.

**Mr WATTS:** Could you drop a memo to my council?

**Ms Knox:** There is always a competition for funds and that is the problem. There is never enough maintenance funding which is, again, why we work so closely with local council to prioritise safety first always, what will give the road user the safest outcome and how we manage the funding we have in asset maintenance.

**CHAIR:** Just on that, and far be it for me to cause trouble amongst my colleagues, but it was mentioned to us by the Diamantina Shire Council that the quality of base there is such, rather than in the blacksoil country and other country where there is a lot more movement, that once you put a road down it is stable. That is why the existing unsealed roads are so stable and solid as well. You put it down, it lasts for a lot longer.

**Ms Knox:** You have to start with a good base, absolutely.

**CHAIR:** I am not an engineer; we have a professional amongst us.

**Ms Knox:** You have been around for a while now. The fact that we were able to secure stimulus road safety funding meant that we could do a good job up-front—that saves the burden moving forward.

**Mr MILLAR:** Do we have a figure on the backlog maintenance for those two roads?

**Mr Hill:** I would definitely have to take that question on notice—

**Mr MILLAR:** I am happy for that.

**Mr Hill:**—to look at the particular shire?

**CHAIR:** That is an estimates type question. You have had that opportunity already.

**Mr Hill:** Is that a particular shire or—

**Mr MILLAR:** That is Diamantina shire, so Bedourie to Birdsville, Birdsville to Windorah.

**CHAIR:** We will take that question on notice. That is one less question next estimates.

**Mr HEAD:** In your opening statement this morning you mentioned the national standards for an eight-metre form with a six-metre seal for roads with less than 150 cars per day. Is the department aware of any modelling of what the increase in traffic would be if these roads were to become fully sealed and potentially attract more cars?

**Ms Knox:** Often we get the reverse feedback that once we seal it becomes less attractive to certain segments of our society. A quick answer to your question: no, I do not have that information. What is your sense, Gavin?

**Mr Hill:** I have nothing further to add. Yes, there is an amount of tourists who are travelling who want to drive on gravel roads and have the gravel road experience, as opposed to driving on bitumen and getting between A and B as quickly as possible. There is damage that can come from both sealed and unsealed roads.

**Ms Knox:** It does not make sense to me, but certainly in terms of our freight task and the fact we have type 2 road trains on these roads, a smoother service is very much appreciated by the freight industry.

**Mr Hill:** Yes, absolutely. If I can add to that, that is what the cattle trucking companies, as well as the property owners, want—smoother roads so there is not damage to the cattle on the long-haul roads in the central west and the like. So, smoother and wider roads are best for them for travelling.

**Mr HEAD:** On one hand, if you set your standard to 150 cars per day and then all of a sudden it is sealed and you have a lot more sedans come out there, it throws that figure out the window. I am assuming that there is a risk metric that the government looks at when they are looking at when they are deciding what is a justifiable spend. Does it factor in the peak times that communities like Birdsville have where there is thousands of cars for a few days of the year, but then it might be 100 for the rest of the year? Is that part of the risk metric when you are doing a six-metre seal?

**Ms Knox:** It certainly assists the district—and I think they have done a fantastic job—in their funding submissions. Whilst the 2,000 vehicles per day or whatever it gets in the tourism season would not impact the standards that we set, it certainly helps in terms of the funding submissions, given the broader economic benefits to tourism and so forth. Given the amount of unsealed network in the Central West District I was amazed how much money the Central West District has secured to seal their roads. I put a lot of that down to the iconic events and the number of visitors in the tourism season.

**Mr Hill:** If I can add further: the engineering term is an annual average daily traffic, an AADT, and that is taken on the whole of the year and obviously averaged back down. So we do take in the peaks and the troughs, night-time and day-time traffic volumes.

**Ms Knox:** We are focusing on sealing as much as we humanly can because those six and eight give some good outcomes for the community and the asset.

**CHAIR:** Once the cattle are loaded up—and one of the committee members probably knows more about this than me—there is a certain time they can stay on a vehicle before they have to be unloaded again; is that right?

**Mr MILLAR:** There is a time frame. I cannot give you the correct time frame.

**CHAIR:** The roads are pivotal in that. Obviously the better the roads—

**Ms Knox:** The damage and the distress to the animals—

**CHAIR:** We heard a lot about how the roads are only for four-wheel drives or only for this or that. When we were in Birdsville there were two fully-electric Porsche SUVs that had come across the desert and survived quite well. One of them had a bit of sand that they had to remove from the undercarriage and they were bemoaning no charging stations. They had to charge up at the motel over a lengthy period of time, but it was amazing to see and discounted a lot of the things that we have been told.

**Mr WATTS:** Did they have a generator with them?



**CHAIR:** They did. It is called the sun. I know the member for Toowoomba North asked this before, but is there any correlation between traffic accidents on sealed roads versus unsealed roads? We were led to believe there were more accidents on unsealed. I am pretty sure the factors were the dusk to dawn, the sun, the dust and everything else. I note that you said the speed limits on unsealed versus sealed. Is there any hard data on that?

**Ms Knox:** We would have hard data because I remember looking at it five years ago and I remember being extremely surprised that the number of crashes on unsealed roads were not higher. Then I extrapolate that to speed because, as you know, when we were in COVID there was far less traffic on the road, people were going faster and the fatalities grew correspondingly. Yes, we would have data. I do not know that we have it for this section of road, but we would have it for the Central West District.

**CHAIR:** If we could take that on notice that would be fantastic.

**Ms Knox:** Just for the Central West District?

**CHAIR:** Yes, that would be great. Thank you.

**Mr WALKER:** We are talking about maintenance a lot. When you consider the budget for maintenance in that area around the Birdsville, Windorah and the other connectors, what factors do you consider? You could have one wet event and you could have budgeted for three wet events. What factors do you consider in your maintenance process to make sure you have adequate funding for maintenance? Does that fall short when you have extraordinary events and how do you make up the shortfall?

**Ms Knox:** If Gavin wants to jump in, I will absolutely let him.

**Mr Hill:** Routine maintenance, performance contracts, allocations are fairly stagnant and traditionally are allocated based on the asset, so the road length and the standard of the road. We measure against some identified intervention levels—the height of the grass growing, we want to mow it back, if there is an edge break on the bitumen road and the depletion of that bitumen surface. Those are engineering requirements and intervention that occurs and that is what we use our maintenance moneys on. Additional to routine maintenance is program maintenance and that is where we do our reseal funding allocations. Again, we do some rehabilitation from time to time also from separate program moneys. You mentioned before that there is a backlog. Yes, that backlog is taken into account to understand what our maintenance moneys can be utilised for, but we always fall upon safety aspects to utilise our moneys in the best way possible. It is a juggling act of constant inspections, knowledge of the network and bringing in more money if required for the problematic sections of road.

**Ms Knox:** It is prioritisation, re-prioritisation, re-prioritisation with our local government partners. Often for those extreme weather events to which you are referring, there is sometimes the opportunity to rebuild the road to a better standard. If we are forecasting one event and we have three it can be diabolical. It is that constant re-prioritisation process and then how we move into the next year.

**CHAIR:** With that, we have been beaten by time. We do have two questions on notice. One was about the backlog funding.

**Mr MILLAR:** That is from Birdsville to Windorah; Birdsville to Bedourie.

**CHAIR:** The other was any accident data that you can correlate for us.

**Ms Knox:** Sealed versus non-sealed roads.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. A transcript of these proceedings will be provided on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 9.47 am.**