

Question on Notice

No. 761

Asked on Thursday 15 April 2010

MR MESSENGER ASKED THE MINISTER FOR MAIN ROADS (MR WALLACE)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the frequent flooding of the Essendeen Bridge in my electorate, which stops visitors, local families and students of Agnes Water and the Township of 1770 from accessing basic social services such as lifesaving medical treatment and higher schooling—

(1) Will the Minister detail the plans his department has to upgrade, strengthen and flood proof Essendeen Bridge?

(2) For the last five years (reported separately), how many times have engineers inspected the bridge and what is the cost of those inspections?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Burnett for the question.

Much of central and north Queensland has experienced a prolonged period of wet weather and flooding since January 2010. The Gladstone Region alone experienced in excess of 510mm of rain during February and March 2010.

A result of this regional flooding was the closure of many state-controlled and local government roads, including Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road north of Bundaberg.

Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road provides a northern access point from the Bruce Highway into Bundaberg. The 110km connection carries approximately 1 700 vehicles per day and passes through the small towns of Mt Tom, Rosedale and Littabella. To the north, Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road also doubles as the main access to the coastal towns of Agnes Water and Town of 1770.

Essendeen Bridge, crossing Baffle Creek, is located on Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road, 10km north of Rosedale. The Baffle Creek catchment area exceeds 3000km² and stretches as far north as Tannum Sands.

Over the past five years, The Department of Transport and Main Roads has spent \$570,000 on upgrading works in the Essendeen Bridge area. These works included safety upgrades on the approaches to Baffle Creek along with shoulder sealing in the Baffle Creek area. Furthermore, the state government has spent around \$4.5 million over the same period on the remaining 110km section of Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road, including road resurfacing and rehabilitation, minor safety realignments, shoulder sealing and intersection upgrades.

In addition to these completed works, the 2009-10 Roads Implementation Program outlines a further \$24 million funding commitment for Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road. Approximately \$20 million of this funding has been targeted at replacing six bridges south of Rosedale.

Transport and Main Roads are committed to ensuring the safety of motorists using Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road and the current program of works will significantly improve accessibility between Bundaberg and Miriam Vale into the future. With limited funding and substantial investment already committed to Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road in 2009-10, further upgrades to Essendeen Bridge are not currently planned and will need to be prioritised over coming years.

In relation to the frequency that Transport and Main Roads engineers inspect Essendeen Bridge, the department conducts a state-wide bridge inspection program. Under the bridge inspection program, all bridges on the state-controlled road network receive a routine maintenance inspection annually. Between 2005 and 2010, Essendeen Bridge was inspected on six occasions through the routine maintenance inspection program. Essendeen Bridge was last inspected as part of this routine program in August 2009. In Central Queensland, the annual bridge inspection program (2009-10) has a budget of \$750 000.

In addition to the bridge inspection program, Transport and Main Roads has established procedures for the official closing and reopening of roads during flood events. As part of this procedure, a bridge which has been inundated by water is only reopened to traffic following inspection and approval from a Transport and Main Roads bridge (structure) inspector. In 2010, due to the repeated flooding of Baffle Creek, Essendeen Bridge was inspected on six occasions ahead of reopening Bundaberg – Miriam Vale Road to traffic. These emergency inspections were funded through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangement (NDRRA) after the event was declared a natural disaster.

The state government and Transport and Main Roads are committed to ensuring the safety of the state-controlled road network, particularly following prolonged periods of flooding. The inspection of critical assets, such as bridges and major culverts, is an important procedure carried out prior to reopening flooded roads and the government remains committed to such safety measures until funding is available to improve the flood immunity of these sections of the road network.