

Question on Notice

No. 317

Asked on 8 March 2006

MR KNUTH asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (MR LUCAS) -

QUESTION:

With reference to the very dangerous road conditions which currently exist on the Torrens creek/Aramac Road because of flooding which regularly occurs on the Prairie Creek causeway -

Will he give an assurance that this causeway will be upgraded to a grid/bridge in order to alleviate both the dangerous conditions and also the severe inconvenience caused to rural road users in this area?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Charters Towers for the question. Firstly let me assure the honourable member that the Beattie Government is a government for all Queenslanders, with significant investments in rural and regional roads, which I will detail below.

Firstly, let me address more generally, flooding, which is a major issue for road users in North Queensland, and in particular for road users of the Bruce Highway.

The Bruce Highway forms part of the National Highway System (NHS) for which the federal government has had full funding responsibility for some thirty years. Under its new AusLink arrangements, the Howard Government – with National Party members as Transport Ministers - is looking to walk away from full funding responsibility for all national highways including the Bruce Highway. The five-year AusLink allocation for the Bruce Highway is \$547m for the years 2004-05 to 2008-09 with a number of committed projects and a \$210m bulk allocation to address the highest priority needs between Caboolture and Cairns. This funding falls short by some \$500m over the timeframe, and falls well short on the transport efficiency and safety outcomes that are paramount to the state's road users and industry.

As the local member would only be too aware, the social and economic impacts from flood immunity deficiencies on the Bruce Highway in Far North and North Queensland are significant. However, current levels of funding for the Bruce Highway from the Howard Government, do not allow for significant progress to be made in addressing flooding deficiencies without generally impacting on progress that can be made on other deficiencies.

However, there was some good news for residents of Tully on 23 March when Federal Roads Minister, Honourable Jim Lloyd MP and I jointly announced the route chosen to upgrade the 15km section of the Bruce Highway south of Tully, between Corduroy Creek and Tully High School, including the Tully River Bridge and Murray Flats sections that have been closed by current flooding. In December 2004, when we announced the start of the \$1.1m concept planning study and public consultation, we stated that this process would conclude in June 2006.

In light of Cyclone Larry, the Prime Minister announced he was prepared to release \$80m in federal funding ensuring the project will stay on track to be completed in 2009 (weather permitting).

Detailed design work is expected to begin within the next few months, allowing construction to begin mid-2007. The highway can be closed for up to five days in severe floods and averages closures of about two days each year in any wet season. This upgrade will deliver improvements so that closures in a severe flood (a one-in-fifty-year flood) will be at least halved to no more than two days and average closures would be about ten hours.

The Beattie Government has made a significant investment in improving safety and road conditions in North Queensland, including the particular road in question, the Aramac-Torrens Creek Road. I announced the upgrade in November 2005. Some \$2m in state funding is being spent in 2005-06 and 2006-07 on sections of the road within Aramac and Flinders Shires.

This includes projects such as that beginning this month, on upgrading a 9.3km section of the Aramac-Torrens Creek Road, 120km north of Aramac. This project will involve upgrading the gravel section of the road to a 6m-wide sealed standard on an 8m-wide formation, with widening to 8m at floodways. Upgrading this unsealed section of road will improve safety and driving conditions for all users. The Aramac Shire Council will be carrying out the work under contract to Main Roads, with the state government contributing \$650,000 and Council contributing \$600,000 to the project.

The Prairie Creek causeway on the Aramac-Torrens Creek Road is located in the Flinders Shire. The Aramac-Torrens Creek Road, under the Roads Alliance, is categorised as a Local Road of Regional Significance (LRRS), and is included in the set of roads which belong to the North Western Regional Roads Group (RRG).

Regional Road Groups have been established under the Roads Alliance between the Department of Main Roads and the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ). Flinders Shire is a member of the North Western Regional Road Group, which includes ten councils and Main Roads. Together with Main Roads, Flinders Shire Council nominates projects on the Aramac-Torrens Creek Road to be considered by the Regional Road Group on a priority basis.

Of the \$2m in state funding allocated to the Aramac-Torrens Creek Road over 2005-06 and 2006-07, some \$300,000 is targeted at the section within Flinders Shire. I am advised that the Prairie Floodway is not considered by Flinders Shire Council, nor Main Roads, as an immediate priority compared to other areas for improvement. The floodway has signage and floodmarkers that indicate the depth of floodwaters, so that

drivers are able to drive to the prevailing conditions and avoid putting themselves into an unsafe situation. Main Roads will assess the floodway with Council to determine whether it should be put forward for consideration as a future funding request. The determination of its priority will be undertaken by the members of the North Western Regional Roads Group.

Earlier this year, the state government allocated an additional \$644,372 to the North Western Regional Roads Group, towards upgrading of LRRS within its area of responsibility. When combined with additional funding announced in 2003, the North Western Regional Roads Group now receives \$1.35m additional state government funding each year.

Last November, the Premier, Honourable Peter Beattie MP, announced a record \$10.5 billion five year program of roadworks across Queensland. Funding under the 2005-06 – 2009-10 Roads Implementation Program increased by \$2.5 billion or 31 per cent over the previous program and has more than doubled from the \$5.2 billion that was allocated under the Coalition government, when the Beattie Government came into power in 1998.

The program details our commitment to rural and regional Queensland, in the same way as the additional five year, \$359m Rural and Regional Road funding program, the three year Accelerated Road rehabilitation program and the \$350m Regional Bridge Renewal Program. As well under the Beattie Government's \$84m Safer Roads Sooner Program, more than half the funds for the 158 new projects to reduce the state's road toll, will be spent outside south east Queensland.