

Question on Notice

No. QON652

Asked on 9 May 2006

MS LEE LONG asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (MR LUCAS) -

QUESTION:

With reference to the natural disasters of cyclones Larry and Monica recently experienced by far north Queensland which caused the closure of all range roads connecting the coast to the tablelands-

Will he now consider opening Quaid Road to the public to provide an alternative road link, not just in wet weather, but all year round?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Tablelands for the question.

During natural disasters such as cyclone events, any range road in the region is prone to being blocked by fallen trees or landslides, including Wangetti-Southedge Road (also known as Quaid Road).

I am pleased to say that access to the Tablelands, via the Kuranda Range Road, was possible within around eight hours following category 5 Cyclone Larry and, following category 3 Cyclone Monica, travel for emergency vehicles was possible within 10 hours and for all other traffic within 24 hours. This is a commendable effort given the high wind and/or rainfall that occurred as a result of these cyclones. Similar closures on Quaid Road, due to fallen trees or landslides, would have been likely.

Quaid Road is not a state-controlled road, nor a council-controlled road; it is a private road that was constructed during the late 1980s and passes through private land and Crown land that falls into various categories, including Wet Tropics World Heritage Areas.

The Department of Main Roads continues to have a 'no road opening' policy on this private road, due to the high costs in bringing the privately-designed and privately-constructed road to acceptable safety and structural standards. Although it would be necessary to carry out concept planning to develop an accurate estimate of costs involved, Main Roads' very preliminary assessment is that it would cost at least \$30m in capital costs and \$0.5m a year in maintenance costs to make the road structurally sound and safe for use by the public.

As Quaid Road joins the Cook Highway at Wangetti, opening the road would also increase traffic capacity pressures on the Captain Cook Highway, between Wangetti and Cairns.

Further, no studies have been undertaken to prove (or otherwise) that the road would not cause unacceptable impacts on the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Given the extensive studies required for the Kuranda Range Road upgrade, to satisfy both federal environmental legislation and the requirements of the Wet Tropics Management Authority, it is likely that similar rigorous studies would be needed for this road. If the state government was to propose opening Quaid Road – which it is not – the outcomes of such studies could also be a requirement for measures to significantly reduce environmental impacts, which would substantially increase the very preliminary assessment of costs involved in opening the road.

Instead, and as you are aware, the State Government has been planning the future upgrade of the Kuranda Range Road. The proposed upgrade will be designed to improve the stability of slopes and embankments, to minimise mud/rock slides.