

Question on Notice

No. QON697

Asked on 10 May 2006

MR JASON O'BRIEN asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (MR LUCAS) -

QUESTION:

- (1) How much has the State Government spent overall on the Peninsula Developmental Road in the last five years, broken down year by year?
- (2) How does that compare with the Australian Government over the same period?
- (3) Are there any opportunities to increase the Australian Government's commitment to the Peninsula Development Road and what is his department doing to take advantage of any opportunities?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Cook for the question.

- (1) The Peninsula Developmental Road extends some 737km from Mareeba to the Comalco lease boundary, 26km east of Weipa. The state government will have spent \$53.2m on upgrading and maintenance works, along the full length of the road, over the past five years:

2000-01	\$21.538m
2001-02	\$7.702m
2002-03	\$7.106m
2003-04	\$6.514m
2004-05	\$10.363m

Planned expenditure in 2005-06 is \$9.671.

With the release of the 2006 state budget on 6 June 2006, I announced almost \$10m in state funding was being provided in 2006-07 for a range of projects on the Peninsula Developmental Road, mostly to extend bitumen seal.

- (2) Persistent lobbying by the state government saw the Australian Government declare the section of road from Lakeland to the Comalco lease boundary a Road of National Importance (RoNI) in August 2002. This made the road eligible for state and federal government funding for upgrading projects on a 50/50 basis.

The state government's efforts to secure federal funding included an investment strategy completed in 2000, which formed the basis of the submission seeking RoNI status, and senior Main Roads officers taking senior federal Department of Transport and Regional Services officers, Australian Defence personnel and representatives from Queensland Treasury, Premier's and Department of State Development, on an inspection of the road in late 2000. This eventually resulted in the road being declared a RoNI by the federal government

As a result, the Australian Government provided \$5m in matching federal funding for two sealing projects on the Peninsula Developmental Road between Mt Molloy and Laura. The first project between Coalseam and Laura River was completed in December 2004. The second project located south of Kennedy Creek is about to commence. Its construction was delayed because of Cyclone Monica.

With the introduction of AusLink in July 2004 and the abolition by the Australian Government of the RoNI program, the only opportunity Cape York residents have to secure federal funding for this critical link, is through the AusLink Strategic Regional Programme.

Clearly, Canberra has abandoned the most remote communities in Australia by not including the Peninsula Developmental Road in the new National Network, where the bulk of federal funding will be spent.

The Australian Government now contributes only small amounts each year from Natural Disaster Mitigation and Relief Arrangements and even then, these programs attract a greater proportion of state funding. The Australian Government has contributed an average of \$1m a year through the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements (NDRA) fund, over the past five years. However, this funding only repairs damage, it does not contribute to upgrading the road to provide better access and to help it better withstand events such as Cyclone Monica.

It is also clear that the state government has spent five times the amount of money on this strategic link.

- (3) A real opportunity currently exists for the Australian Government to increase its commitment to the Peninsula Developmental Road.

Under AusLink arrangements, there is \$127m available, nationally, through the Strategic Regional Roads Programme and the money can be used to fund transport projects, such as roadworks on the Peninsula Developmental Road.

Main Roads recently assisted Cook Shire Council to prepare a \$20m funding submission to seal a 30km section of the road between Lakeland and Laura. Should the Australian Government provide the matching \$10m, the State Government is more than happy to match this amount and, on 26 May 2006, the Premier announced that state funding had been set aside for this purpose.

Towards the end of 2006, the Australian Government plans to announce which projects have been successful.

The Australian Government officials toured the Cape and have seen first-hand the extensive damage Cyclone Monica caused to the road. Should the Australian Government decide to make the funds available, Main Roads could deliver these works during the 2007 and 2008 dry seasons.

I join the Premier in welcoming the Prime Minister's \$250,000 announcement of a feasibility study to consider upgrading the Peninsula Developmental Road so that it can better cope with events of this kind and the annual wet season. However, I also support the Premier in his statement that the study must lead to a commitment from the Australian Government to provide matching funds for the upgrading. The federal government collects \$14 billion in fuel excise annually, but only returns 16 cents in every dollar to Australian roads.