

Question on Notice

No. 118

Asked on 8 February 2007

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

QUESTION:

Will he provide the accident statistics (including both the levels of hospitalisation and fatalities) for the last five years for the (a) Gore Highway (from Toowoomba to the southern side of the Millmerran Shire boundary), (b) Toowoomba Range crossing (from the top of the Range at James Street to Withcott), (c) Warrego Highway (from Withcott to the Ipswich Motorway), (d) Ipswich Motorway (from the Warrego Highway to Brisbane) and (e) New England Highway from Toowoomba to Warwick?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Cunningham for the question.

The Department of Main Roads has provided the accident statistics for the five years from 1 January 2002 to 30 June 2006:

(a) Gore Highway (from Toowoomba to the southern side of the Millmerran Shire boundary) - a total of 129.5km.

The Gore Highway is a National Highway and \$8.32m has been spent on projects on this road during the period including the construction of an overtaking lane and intersection improvements under the Safety and Urgent Minor Works (SUMW) program.

The Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) (2005) varies from 20,000 vehicles per day (vpd) in Toowoomba to 1,600vpd west of Millmerran.

There were a total of 232 accidents including 11 fatalities and 58 hospitalisations.

I recently inspected the highway with representatives from Pittsworth, Millmerran, Waggamba Shires Councils and Main Roads' staff to ascertain the type of projects needed to upgrade this important freight route. The Queensland Government will be making strong representations to the Federal Government for funding under the next round of Auslink.

I am also advised that late last year representatives from these shires also met with the Deputy Prime Minister Vaile, federal Ministers Lloyd and Macfarlane and local federal Member Bruce Scott to put their case forward for funding to upgrade the highway. Federal Ministers will know first hand how strong Queensland's case is for additional funding for the Gore Highway.

(b) Toowoomba Range crossing, (from the top of the Range at James Street to Withcott) - 6km.

The Toowoomba Range Crossing forms part of the Warrego Highway (a National Highway) between Ipswich and Toowoomba and has a significant accident history. \$6.3m has been spent on this section of road.

There were a total of 165 accidents including 4 fatalities and 33 hospitalisations. The AADT on the Toowoomba Range is 20,000vpd including 12% heavy vehicles.

The Toowoomba Bypass, when constructed, will address noise, pollution, safety and congestion issues on the existing range crossing and through Toowoomba. The federal government provided funding of \$33.25m for detailed planning and to resume the corridor and this is now complete.

From late 2004 to early 2005 I met with the then Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson MP and the Honourable Jim Lloyd MP and consistently stressed the project's importance in terms of improved safety and regional economic benefits. In January 2005 an additional funding request was made to DoTaRS for further planning and a PPP Business Case. On 30 November 2005 the federal government announced a further \$10m to progress development of the PPP business case. On 21 February 2006 I wrote to the federal government advising of the proposed governance and management framework.

Following a further letter on 9 May 2006 from me to Minister Truss, federal approval was finally given on 25 August 2006 for the \$10m (\$5.5m business case and \$4.5m Pilot Tunnel).

(c) Warrego Highway (from Withcott to the Ipswich Motorway). On this 85.3km section of the highway there were a total of 615 accidents including 24 fatalities and 168 hospitalisations. The AADT varies from 26,200 near Ipswich to 15,500 near Withcott.

\$11.8m was spent on this section of road during the period.

The Department of Main Roads continues to maintain and upgrade the Warrego and Gore Highways within the constraints of the funding provided by the federal government.

Under the federal government's five year AusLink plan, Queensland's funding amounts to approximately \$2.166b for roads over the period from 2004-05 to 2008-09 (including the recent announcement of \$268m extra funding allocated in the 2006 Federal Budget).

This level of AusLink funding represents about 20% of Queensland's total road funding. It is far less than the \$7.3b that the State Government will spend on road construction and maintenance over the same period. In addition, the State Government will spend a further \$2.95b on rail and public transport.

Auslink provided no new funding to meet identified needs on national highways in rural areas of the state. At least \$100m per annum is needed for improvements works along these corridors. Moreover, at least \$100m per annum in extra funding is required to

address the maintenance backlog on national highways in Queensland and for targeted road safety initiatives to reduce the road toll.

It is also worth noting that the federal government will collect \$14.65bn in petrol and diesel excise revenue in 2006-07. Only \$2.58bn (17.6%) of this will be returned to roadworks Australia wide. This is a very poor return to industry and the community for the costs incurred in accessing the road network. You will be interested to know that federal funding for works to be undertaken in Queensland in 2006-07, including grants to local governments, is \$560m. This represents only 3.8% of the total fuel excise collected in Australia.

Despite this Main Roads continues to manage the road network and plan for future upgrades of these sections of the national highway.

As recently as October 2006, Main Roads had input into DoTaRS, Brisbane to Darwin Corridor Study where rehabilitation works and interchanges at major locations such as Blacksoil and Minden were nominated as priorities.

The National Highway System Forward Strategy Report 2004-05 to 2008-09 prepared by Main Roads clearly outlines the needs across Queensland.

(d) Ipswich Motorway from the Warrego Highway to Brisbane -19km long.

Under AusLink 1, \$615.4m was allocated to the Ipswich Motorway. On this section there were 943 accidents including 4 fatalities and 155 hospitalisations. The AADT varies from 64,700 to 71,900 vpd.

On 5 March 2007, the federal government announced the construction of the Goodna Bypass but no funding to upgrade the motorway. The bypass will cost at least \$2.3 billion and is an option that only the federal government supports. The preferred option of the State Government, the State Opposition, the RACQ, and the mayors of Brisbane and Ipswich would have delivered an upgraded road sooner and cost \$1.2 billion less. The upgrade of the existing motorway would provide a six-lane highway and service lanes between Dinmore and Goodna and be opened sooner.

Even though this is the second best option, Canberra will get full cooperation from Main Roads on construction of the bypass. A major concern of local residents is that the bypass option does not include a connection to the major feeder roads for traffic south of the motorway in suburbs like Dinmore, Bundamba, Booval and East Ipswich.

Safety on national network

A high proportion of serious and fatal accidents occur on the AusLink national network in Queensland.

The Australian Automobile Association conducts an annual survey on the safety of the rural road links on the federally-funded AusLink national network.

The Australian Automobile Association's annual report card on the AusLink national network highlights that Queensland has the most dangerous links in this federally-funded network.

According to the Association's annual report card criteria, all of Queensland's national network links, with the exception of the Barcaldine to Winton link, are in the high or medium-high category for severe crashes.

In a media release in June 2005, the RACQ said that "Queensland roads consistently rank lower than their interstate counterparts in independent surveys".

Following the October 2005 Unroadworthy Roads Survey, the RACQ reported that "The worst state main roads and national highways generating most responses were:

- Bruce Highway between Bowen and Tully;
- Bruce Highway between Cooroy and Gympie;
- Warrego Highway between Toowoomba and Chinchilla;
- Kennedy Developmental Road (Hann Highway) between The Lynd Junction and Hughenden; and
- Kennedy Highway between Smithfield and The Lynd Junction.

This is as a direct consequence of the historically inadequate level of Australian Government funding on the national highway system.

Both the Australian and Queensland Governments have signed up to the targets in the National Road Safety Strategy, particularly the target to reduce the road fatality rate by 40% to below 5.6 deaths per 100,000 population by 2011.

The findings of that strategy show that targeted improvements to reduce road trauma can be achieved through upgrading roads. Other improvements will stem from safer vehicles, improved driver behaviour and improvements in technology.

In response, the Queensland Government has significantly increased its commitment to road safety through the Safer Roads Sooner program.

The Australian Government has only committed \$26.7m over three years for targeted road safety improvements in Queensland under its National Black Spot program, none of which can be spent on the AusLink national network.

In fact, the Australian Government does not even dedicate any money specifically for road safety improvements on the AusLink network. There is no dedicated safety program. All safety initiatives must be funded from the current AusLink maintenance budget which is only \$66m per annum for the state. This \$66m per annum is included in the current \$2.166b five year commitment under AusLink1.

(e) New England Highway from Toowoomba to Warwick is 69.6km long with an AADT varying from 23,500 in the centre of Toowoomba to 3,000vpd closer to the Warwick end. There were 329 accidents including 3 fatalities and 67 hospitalisations. A total of \$12.5m was spent on this road during the period.

Included in this figure is a \$1.9m project to widen and overlay a 2.3km section of the highway and upgrade three intersections near East Greenmount that was completed in May 2006 and a further \$1.32m project to construct a 1.0km long northbound overtaking lane and undertake intersection improvements 24km south of Toowoomba that is currently underway.

The state government is also spending \$17.5m upgrading a number of intersections on the New England Highway through Toowoomba as part of its commitment to upgrading roads under the Rural and Regional Roads Funding Initiative.