

Question on Notice

No. 501

Asked on Monday 15 March 2007

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

QUESTION:

With reference to the Question on Notice Nos. 905 and 907 of 2006 in relation to the engineering capacity of the Department of Main Roads and Queensland Transport –

1. How many engineers and engineering technicians are currently employed in each district and region (reported separately)?
2. How many engineering and technical vacancies exist in each district or region (reported separately)?
3. What is the period of time each vacancy has existed (reported separately) and the classification level of each vacant position (reported separately)?
4. How many overseas trained engineers were employed and retained by the Department of Main Roads following the Department's attendance at the Opportunities Australia Expo (OAE) held in London in October 2005?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Hinchinbrook for the question.

As the House is aware, my portfolio has been charged with delivering a substantial infrastructure works program, a program that has grown rapidly in response to the growing needs of the Queensland community and is the largest in the state's history.

The 2006-07 State Budget contained a record \$3.98 billion for transport and road infrastructure. This included \$2 billion for Queensland Transport, rail and ports capital, and \$1.98 billion for Main Roads and Queensland Motorways Limited capital works. Spending on transport infrastructure is up 27 percent, or \$418 million, and on Main Roads capital works by 58 percent, or \$727 million, compared to 2005-06.

The workforce capability challenges faced in delivering the program are equally substantial, with broad and deep skill shortages across the engineering and construction industry.

The skills shortage situation has arisen primarily due to the strong economic growth Queensland has experienced over the past five years, the resultant significant increase in engineering construction activity generally (especially in the mining industry), and Australia's changing population profile. It should be added that this is not a state, or even a national problem, but something that is currently occurring across the globe.

Credible bodies such as the Institute of Engineers Australia, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) and Australia Bureau of Statistics have all recognised the issue of skills shortages for professional and technical industries. Engineers are identified in the top 5 key skills required on the DIMIA Migration Occupations in Demand List.

In response to this challenge, Main Roads has embarked upon a series of retention and attraction strategies to address the workforce needs and ensure that Queensland continues to have an efficient, effective and safe road system now and into the future. These include:

- Transport Infrastructure Capability Scheme (TICS). This scheme will assist in attracting and retaining competent technical staff with highly in-demand skills within the portfolio. The intent of this scheme is to provide a mechanism over and above standard rates of pay and employment benefits, as a means to attract and retain key staff in highly in-demand positions identified as core to the portfolio's ability to deliver the program.
- Graduate Development Program. Graduate and scholarship schemes across professional and technical areas experiencing a skills shortage are being expanded. The number of graduates and scholarship holders has increased from 39 in July 2004 to 98 in December 2006.
- Rural and Remote Area Incentive Scheme. An expanded scheme is being implemented to attract and retain qualified and experienced staff.

In relation to your specific questions, the following information is provided.

1. Table 1 details the regional breakdown of engineer and engineering technician headcounts across Main Roads and Queensland Transport.

Table 1

| Region/District | Engineers (Professional Officers) | Engineering Technicians (Technical Officers) |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| MAIN ROADS | | |
| Central Region | | |
| Central | 27 | 36 |
| Central Highlands | 10 | 9 |
| Central West | 6 | 6 |
| Mackay | 20 | 20 |
| Northern Region | | |
| North West | 13 | 4 |
| Northern | 35 | 20 |
| Peninsula | 36 | 34 |
| Southern Region | | |
| Border | 17 | 13 |
| South West | 14 | 11 |
| Southern | 32 | 60 |
| Wide Bay | 17 | 18 |
| South East Region | | |
| North Coast Hinterland | 38 | 38 |
| South Coast Hinterland | 53 | 45 |
| South East Metropolitan | 325 | 140 |
| | | |
| QUEENSLAND TRANSPORT | | |
| South East Region | | |
| South East Metropolitan | 2 | 0 |
| | | |
| TOTAL | 645 | 454 |

2. Table 2 details the regional breakdown of engineer and engineering technician vacancies across Main Roads and Queensland Transport.

Table 2

| Region/District | Engineer Vacancies (Professional Officers) | Technical Vacancies (Technical Officers) |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| MAIN ROADS | | |
| Central Region | | |
| Central | 4 | 7 |
| Central Highlands | 4 | 5 |
| Central West | 1 | 1 |
| Mackay | 1 | 5 |
| Northern Region | | |
| North West | 7 | 4 |
| Northern | 3 | 6 |
| Peninsula | 10 | 9 |
| Southern Region | | |
| Border | 3 | 0 |
| South West | 1 | 4 |
| Southern | 4 | 5 |
| Wide Bay | 5 | 2 |
| South East Region | | |
| North Coast Hinterland | 12 | 7 |
| South Coast Hinterland | 19 | 16 |
| Metropolitan | 67 | 32 |
| | | |
| QUEENSLAND TRANSPORT | | |
| South East Region | | |
| Metropolitan | 4 | 0 |
| | | |
| TOTAL | 145 | 103 |

3. I am advised that in accordance with department practice, vacancies that remain on the system for an extended period (that is, greater than 12 months) which have not been filled either on a permanent basis or in an acting capacity through that period are considered to be no longer required and flagged for removal from the system. However, recognising the difficulty in attracting staff to western centres, vacancies are not removed from these establishments and recruitment activity is actively pursued.

The classification levels of vacancies are: PO1/PO3* x 54; PO2 x 1; PO2/PO3* x 3; PO3 x 12; PO4 x 46; PO5 x 14; PO6 x 15; TO1/TO3* x 5; TO1/TO4* x 49; TO3 x 8; TO4 x 25; TO5 x 15; TO6 x 1.

** Positions advertised across multiple classification levels.*

4. The objective of the trip to London to attend the Opportunities Australia Expo (OAE) was to source skilled professionals (particularly engineers) to fill positions over the next three to five years to assist in the delivery of the government road works program.

The department's attendance at the OAE generated over 300 applications, which translated into more than 50 applicants who were deemed suitable. As a result of the trip, 11 of the applicants are currently working with Main Roads. All applicants placed as a result of the Expo continue to work for Main Roads, thus the retention rate has been 100%.