

## **Question on Notice**

**No. 55**

**Asked on 7 February 2007**

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

QUESTION:

With reference to the Kuranda Range Road upgrade-

What progress has been made to date and what is the expected progress over the next 12/24 months?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Tablelands for the question.

The state government's support for the project was clearly articulated at the recent Atherton Community Cabinet.

To date Main Roads has made significant progress in developing this important project. The Integrated Transport Study for Kuranda Range was undertaken when the FNQ Regional Plan, adopted in 1999 by the Queensland Government and all eight local councils, made a priority infrastructure recommendation for the need to upgrade the Kuranda Range Road to four lanes with the capacity to handle B-Double vehicles.

The study has included a Transport Options Study, an Impact Assessment Study (IAS), and extensive public consultation. Progress to date also includes the September 2004 completion of the project's concept planning (including preliminary design) and submission of an IAS Addendum to the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) and the federal Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH), as the basis for seeking environmental approvals.

In May 2006, the WTMA board recommended to the WTMA Ministerial Council that it approve rezoning of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA), needed for the project to proceed.

In 2006, there was further liaison between Main Roads and DEH regarding further detailed information requested by the latter as part of its consideration of approvals for the project. Main Roads provided this further comprehensive information in December 2006. DEH has advised that it expects to provide its decision on whether the project has been approved, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act C'wlth*, during March 2007. This includes timing allowed for the federal Minister for Tourism, as a member of the Ministerial Council, to comment on the EPBC draft approval, as required under a provision of the *EPBC Act*.

The Ministerial Council also is currently considering whether to approve the re-zoning and the issuing of a permit for investigations to be carried out in the WTWHA, as needed for the project's detailed design phase. There is no firm timeframe for the Ministerial Council approval but Main Roads hopes to have this decision around the same time as the EPBC decision.

Expected progress in the next 12/24 months is heavily dependent on whether or not environmental approvals are received and, should they be granted with conditions, the extent of those conditions and the work required to meet them. The project cannot proceed further to the investigations needed for detailed design and to construction without those approvals.

If the WTMA Board's recommendation is formally endorsed/approved by Ministerial Council, it will then be referred to Governor-in-Council for approval, then referred back to WTMA to issue a permit, which will include conditions. Main Roads is preparing a Master Environmental Management Plan that will document environmental measures to be implemented throughout the project's design, construction and maintenance phases. This document should also assist in satisfying conditions placed on the approval.

I draw your attention to the environmental benefits that the proposed upgrade will deliver. Main Roads' preliminary design for the upgrade to four lanes includes the following features to improve environmental outcomes, such as:

- bridging along 40% of the length of the road, to improve safe movements between habitats for native animals and reduce roadkill
- avoiding rare native plant species as much as possible and carrying out research to ensure they could grow under most of the bridges
- plans for top-down construction of bridges in highly sensitive areas, to reduce clearing needed during construction
- plans for extensive revegetation to reduce visual impacts as well as improve environmental outcomes
- revegetating all areas of the existing road that are not covered by the upgraded road
- minimising clearing so that the upgraded road occupies only 16.3 hectares more than the existing road, with most outside the Wet Tropics World Heritage area (2.5 hectares within the area).