

Question on Notice

No. 1662

Asked on Thursday 17 October 2019

MR R KATTER MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS (HON M BAILEY)—

QUESTION:

With reference to mines in the North West Minerals Province reporting transporting more bulk ore and intermodal freight by road instead of by rail creating more road traffic—

Will the Minister (a) confirm increased levels of freight moved on the highway from Mount Isa to Townsville over the last five years and (b) commit to more passing lanes commensurate with these reported increases ensuring safety standards are maintained on the road?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Traeger for the question.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) does not collect or hold commercial freight data for this period.

A comparison of Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) data estimates for 2014 and 2019 shows an increase in heavy vehicle movements for most sections of the Flinders Highway. However, the growth in heavy vehicle traffic is not consistent along the corridor. Some sections are experiencing less heavy vehicle traffic than they did in 2014 and the years in between. AADT data estimates do not necessarily reflect freight volumes or commodity types and simply reflect vehicle movements.

Increased road traffic on the Flinders Highway in recent years may have been attributed to extreme weather events, causing the closure of the Mount Isa to Townsville Rail Line, and contractual changes between rail operators and their customers. It is uncertain if these factors are the cause of increased road traffic.

To date, more than six kilometres of the Flinders Highway between Townsville and Torrens Creek has been improved as part of a \$22 million safety upgrade under the Northern Australia Roads Program. The highway was widened at Mingela and Sellheim, north of Charters Towers, and wide centre line treatments have been installed to better separate oncoming vehicles. Planning to widen an additional 1.5 kilometre section of the highway has also commenced.

As part of the jointly funded Australian Government's *Roads of Strategic Importance*, the Queensland and Australian governments announced a \$250 million funding commitment to upgrade the Tennant Creek to Townsville Road Corridor. To help inform the highest priority projects for this funding commitment, TMR is currently completing route and link planning studies for the entire length of the highway from Townsville to Mount Isa. The outcome of this planning will inform the understanding of the requirement for further overtaking lanes and strategies.

On 9 June 2019, the Palaszczuk Government committed \$20 million per annum for four years to reduce costs for end users on the Mount Isa Rail Line, supporting industry which transports mineral freight exports along this corridor, driving a shift from road to rail.

This is in addition to the 2018 Election Commitment to deliver another \$50 million taking the investment to \$380 million over the next five years, to help repair and maintain the Townsville to Mount Isa Rail Line.

The Palaszczuk Government is also investing \$30 million over two years (subject to the finalisation of a business case and government approvals) towards the construction and operation of a \$48 million freight loading and unloading intermodal facility, which is expected to reduce transport times, lower costs and encourage competition for above rail services.