Question on Notice

No. 163

Asked on 9 March 2021

MR S MINNIKIN ASKED MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS (HON M BAILEY)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the Director-General's advice at estimates that information about the department's maintenance program would be available in February 2021—

Will the Minister advise, as of 30 June 2020 and the forecast for 30 June 2021, the (a) maintenance backlog, (b) number of culverts with a rating of poor or very poor and (c) number of structures with a Structure Management Plan?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Chatsworth for the question.

At the 2020 State Election, as part of the Member for Chatsworth's shadow the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) portfolio, the LNP announced a plan to utilise funding from the $1.177 billion 'Other Construction Projects (Transport and Main Roads)' line item in the Capital Program 2020 Update to fund $695 million towards the Coomera Connector project.

The $1.177 billion line item contained capital investment in programs and projects, including capital maintenance works, such as rehabilitation and programmed maintenance, as well as projects jointly-funded with the Australian Government (such as Bruce Highway Safety Package works). This line item included $604.5 million which would have been intended for maintenance funding.

The 'Other Construction Projects (Transport and Main Roads)' line item in the LNP plan also included the 2020–21 capital component of the $1 billion in road stimulus funding, including jointly-funded stimulus projects, which the Palaszczuk Government secured for Queensland to assist in economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did the LNP cut the roads and transport budget previously by $1.6 billion, which has had an ongoing impact, but it went to the election with a plan to impose new cuts to the maintenance program and stimulus projects as set out above.

With respect to the Member's specific queries relating to the condition of the state-controlled road (SCR) network as at 30 June 2020, please be advised as follows.

a) The estimated maintenance, preservation and operations deferred maintenance backlog is $5.852 billion. While the estimated cost of required works has increased by eight per cent since 30 June 2019, the total length of network requiring programmed maintenance or rehabilitation continues to decline and has been reduced by a further 204 km.
b) The number of major culverts with a rating of either poor or very poor is 1269. Of this, 136 are rated as very poor, representing 2.8 per cent of all major culverts (4848). Notably, taking into account the condition of all 4848 major culverts, none have been assessed as unsafe.
c) There are 114 structures, being 60 bridges and 54 major culverts, with certified structure management plans to ensure their continued safe operation.

Finally, TMR does not compile forecasts for these metrics and, as such, is unable to provide an estimated result for 30 June 2021. As per pre-COVID-19 years, this analysis is undertaken post 30 June and finalised by the end of October each year.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to maintaining a safe and resilient road network for all Queenslanders. That is why our government invested a record $4.44 billion for maintenance, preservation and operation of the SCR network in the *Queensland Transport and Roads Investment Program* (QTRIP) *2020–21 to 2023–24*, an average investment per annum of $1.1 billion.

Queensland has the longest SCR network of any Australian state or territory. As at 30 June 2020, the SCR network comprised 33,367 kilometres of roads, including 398 kilometres of motorways, 3919 kilometres of unsealed roads, 3108 bridges, 4848 major culverts and 32 tunnel sections. The National Land Transport Network component of the SCR network comprises 4996 kilometres for which the Australian Government has primary funding responsibility.

To support the management of the State's largest public asset, TMR has a well-developed asset management process which target the highest priority needs and maintain the safety of the state's road network. TMR's 'run-maintain-build' philosophy supports the prioritisation of investment in maintenance, preservation and operations to get as much as possible out of the existing network. This process continues to mature and improve through research, innovation and implementation into practice. This framework was recognised by the Queensland Audit Office as a mature approach to investment and programming.

The deferred maintenance backlog is generated through a network-level assessment of structures and road sections identifying candidates for maintenance and preservation activities. This analysis informs the distribution of available funds for maintenance and preservation rehabilitation activities, from which projects are generated and prioritised. The optimal renewal timeframe for the road network is the point in time to renew, replace or rehabilitate the asset from a whole-of-life cost perspective. Highest priorities are addressed first, and available funding is balanced to meet multiple competing objectives.

Safety is our number one priority, and focusing adequate funding for routine maintenance activities ensures that all state-controlled roads are as safe as possible for the travelling public.

Funding is balanced between routine and preventative maintenance so that TMR ensures that the network is maintained in a safe and serviceable manner. As evidenced in page 149 of the *2020–21 Service Delivery Statement* related to transport infrastructure both the Road Ride Quality and Road System Condition measures continue to remain within the targeted performance range, evidencing competent investment management.

TMR also continues to invest in works packages that will reduce the demand on the overall maintenance task moving forward. The additional investment includes:
- the *Queensland Economic Recovery Strategy: Unite and Recover for Queensland Jobs*, where more than $400 million in extra stimulus funding was provided for Queensland roads, of which $200 million was directed to road network resilience, widening and progressively sealing key freight routes across the state and upgrading older bridges and culverts. This $400 million funding injection will improve network resilience of the state-controlled road network. It will also support 430 direct jobs across Queensland, including 360 direct jobs in regional Queensland
- a $415 million jointly-funded roads and road safety package. This package of works is comprised of capital upgrades to improve safety, productivity, connectivity and asset resilience on state-controlled roads, supporting 670 direct jobs, and economic recovery across Queensland
- a jointly-funded targeted road safety package which will deliver a $290 million package of works supporting a further 950 jobs across Queensland.

As evidenced above, the Palaszczuk Government is taking steps to ensure that the State's road network is not only maintained in a safe and serviceable condition, but also is better able to mitigate the impacts of future major flooding events. As at 30 June 2020, the estimated value of the maintenance backlog on Queensland's state-controlled road network was $5.852 billion.

The current QTRIP also includes a record $4.44 billion investment by the Palaszczuk Government in the maintenance, preservation and operations budget, compared to the $2.77 billion invested by the Newman LNP Government in its final QTRIP in 2014–15. As I have highlighted in previous responses—the Newman Government committed $1.67 billion less over four years than that invested by the Palaszczuk Government's in the current QTRIP, or, on average, only $692 million per annum as compared to $1.1 billion on average per annum under Labor.

Thanks to the Palaszczuk Government's investment, since 2016, the total length of the SCR network that requires rehabilitation or resurfacing has been reduced by 847 km (as at 30 June 2020). This comprises 766 km that has been eliminated from the length of network requiring road resurfacing treatment, and a further 81 km eliminated from the length requiring rehabilitation. This is a substantial physical reduction in the backlog.

A number of aspects are impacting the value of the maintenance backlog. For example:

- between 30 June 2019 and 30 June 2020, the cost of rehabilitation of granular pavements has increased by approximately eight per cent across the state. This is attributed to increases in the market cost of bitumen sealing works (six per cent) and increases in the costs of line marking works (two per cent)
- between 30 June 2019 and 30 June 2020, the cost of rehabilitation of asphalt pavements has also increased by approximately four per cent across the state. This is attributed to increases in the market cost for asphalt pavement works (three per cent) and increases in the costs of line marking and other ancillary works (one per cent)
- these are additional to previous cost drivers identified, including improved provision for road worker and road user safety and change in work patterns (including nightwork) to reduce impact on road user travel times, changes in specification for asphalt incorporating stiffer binders for increased durability and longer life and increased use of an intermediate layer to prevent cracks from propagating through to the surface from the underlying pavement.

To manage the backlog, TMR continues to prioritise lower-cost and non-infrastructure solutions, for example, managed motorways, which can generate similar outcomes to new infrastructure and reduce the need for significant capital expenditure, thereby freeing up funding to be redirected towards sustaining the existing network asset. In addition, TMR continues to explore sustainability benefits through research and innovation in road building materials, such as gravels, concrete and bitumen, to reduce the initial cost of construction, increase the resilience of the pavement to extreme weather events and extend the service life of the road.

While the Palaszczuk Government has been steadily increasing its commitment to roads and transport investment, with its fifth record investment in QTRIP, the Australian Government has refused to properly fund maintenance of Queensland's National Network by only contributing some 50 per cent towards related maintenance costs. Not only did the former Newman LNP Government fail to increase investment in maintenance, but it also cut $1.6 billion from the roads and transport budget and there was a reduction in the maintenance, preservation and operation budget in the first QTRIP delivered by that government in which the Member was an Assistant Minister. The total funding reductions and savings arising from the Newman Government's cuts, total $7.5 billion impacting to this financial year.