



Minister for Transport and Main Roads Minister for Digital Services

Our ref: PET55044
Your ref: A1335283

12 September 2024

1 William Street Brisbane 4000
GPO Box 2644 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3719 7300
Email transportandmainroads@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Website www.tmr.qld.gov.au

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petitions 4102-24 and 4153-24 lodged with the Legislative Assembly by Mr Shane Knuth MP, Member for Hill on 20 August 2024 about Barron River bridge and Kuranda Range Road.

The Kennedy Highway between Smithfield and Kuranda (locally known as Kuranda Range Road), including the Barron River bridge, serves as a vital link in the transportation network in Far North Queensland.

Inspections completed in 2020 found cracks in certain steel components of the Barron River bridge. The Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) undertook thorough investigations and commenced a planning study to identify options for the bridge – scheduled for completion in December 2024.

As part of the recent Miles Government budget announcement, \$15 million was allocated towards preconstruction, including a reference design. A re-elected Miles Government has also committed \$450 million to construct a new bridge over the Barron River.

TMR continues to monitor the bridge through an ongoing detailed inspection and monitoring program to ensure it remains safe and operational. Further inspections confirmed the bridge is safe for single-lane traffic under 42.5 tonne.

TMR's priority on Kuranda Range Road is the long-term repair of the sections damaged due to Tropical Cyclone Jasper and associated monsoonal rainfall.

In early 2022, TMR released the outcome of a planning study investigating capacity, safety and efficiency improvements of transport routes between Cairns and the Northern Tablelands. While the study identified there was no technical justification for a major capacity upgrade of existing routes, or construction of a new road along a new alignment, there are challenges relating to network resilience, travel reliability and freight access.

In response to these challenges, the Cairns to Northern Tablelands access strategy provides 60 recommendations, including upgrades to safety and resilience, to reduce the frequency and duration of closures due to severe weather events and crashes.

In line with these recommendations, the Australian and Queensland governments committed \$262.5 million for safety and resilience upgrades on Kuranda Range Road. Together with the Australian Government, we developed a Kuranda Range Road upgrade strategy prioritising safety and resilience upgrades at strategic locations. I am advised the aim of these upgrades is to reduce the amount and length of unplanned closures of the road and may include the following:

- a safe turn-around area, suitable for vehicles up to 19 metres, to provide an option to turn around and change travel plans in case Kuranda Range Road is unexpectedly closed
- an extension of the current Intelligent Transport System (ITS) technology on Kuranda Range Road by 5.5 kilometres and 10 ITS stations. The ITS stations are equipped with roadside data systems and variable speed limit signs. These stations provide real-time information on road conditions to the Traffic Management Centre (TMC), allowing TMC operators to detect hazards and monitor changes in traffic behaviour
- a concrete median barrier at the bend locally known as 'The Hairpin' to reduce the risk of head-on crashes.

Other treatments in the strategy may include guardrail, shoulder widening, centre line treatments, vegetation management and slope stability treatments.


The Cairns to Northern Tablelands access strategy included a review of various previously conducted studies into possible new road routes. Historic studies have explored a variety of long-term solutions—such as significant upgrades to the existing roads (for example, additional lanes), new road alignments, new rail alignments, new tunnel alignments, and a combination of these. Some options were not deemed feasible due to high cost, not serving potential growth areas, or their adverse impact on the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

An important consideration is how and where population and economic growth may happen in this region in future decades. Any new transport infrastructure must cater for future demands, including new residential communities, industrial and agricultural activity, and freight needs.

The Queensland Government is delivering its ninth record transport and roads infrastructure program in a row, as detailed in the *Queensland Transport and Roads Investment Program 2024–25 to 2027–28* which outlines \$37.4 billion in investment over the next four years and is estimated to support an average of 28,000 direct jobs over the life of the program. Of this, \$1.637 billion is committed across TMR's Far North District, estimated to support an average of 1280 direct jobs over the life of the program.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bart Mellish', with a stylized, flowing script.

BART MELLISH MP
Minister for Transport and Main Roads
Minister for Digital Services