



Minister for Transport and Main Roads

Our ref: PET 3440-20
Your ref: A657373

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24 MAR 2021

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

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petition 3440-20 lodged with the Legislative Assembly on 23 February 2021 seeking a pause on works on the Townsville Northern Access Intersections Upgrade (TNAIU) project.

The Queensland Government, in partnership with the Australian Government, is progressing the \$107.65 million TNAIU project on the Bruce Highway north of Townsville at Black River, with construction expected to commence mid-2021. The project will deliver improved safety, efficiency and travel time reliability for the 14,000 freight and passenger vehicles that travel this section of the Bruce Highway every day.

The TNAIU project will see the duplication of 5.2 kilometres of the Bruce Highway between Veales Road and Pope Road, including the construction of a second bridge over Black River. In addition, the number of intersections with direct access to the highway will be reduced and three new service roads will be constructed to further improve safety.

I was pleased to meet with some stakeholders when I was in Townsville recently to discuss the project with them and listen to their concerns. The TNAIU project team has also been working hard to meet with members of the community to discuss their individual queries or concerns regarding the design of the project, and the project team has also been responding to telephone enquiries and emails. In many cases, these discussions are progressing well, with most queries either being resolved quickly or being followed up by the project team. This consultation will continue until the commencement of project construction in mid-2021, as well as throughout the duration of the project in relation to construction and traffic impacts.

I understand the community's primary concern is the safety of the new U-turn facility that will be constructed on the Bruce Highway as part of the project. The proposed U-turn configuration has been designed by road engineers as a result of considerable research into these types of configurations to reduce crash rates at intersections on duplicated rural highways.

The U-turn facility has been designed to safely cater for all vehicles approved to use this section of the Bruce Highway, including B-Doubles, defence vehicles and cars towing horse floats, caravans and boats. The TNAIU project design provides for the turning movements of these large vehicle types, and includes dedicated turning lanes to allow the vehicles to be clear of highway through traffic.

Currently, the Bruce Highway intersection with Black River Road and Bowden Road is a single lane, staggered cross arrangement. Given factors such as highway traffic volumes, traffic turning from side roads and multiple conflict points, this arrangement is no longer appropriate, and is becoming a road safety issue that needs to be addressed. For example, currently traffic undertaking the movement of travelling from Black River Road through to Bowden Road need to cross three lanes of traffic (two through lanes and one turning lane) with over 14,000 vehicles per day on the Bruce Highway approaching from both directions. This significantly limits the gaps in the Bruce Highway traffic for vehicles to safely turn onto the highway.

The new arrangement will separate north and south bound Bruce Highway traffic, so that vehicles entering from the side roads will only need to observe traffic approaching from one direction. Also, instead of Black River Road traffic needing to find a gap in 14,000 vehicles per day coming from both directions, they will now effectively only need to find a gap in 7000 vehicles per day coming from one direction.

I understand the U-turn arrangement is a new concept for the community to consider and recognise the safety benefits. Each of the U-turn movements will have a dedicated 235-metre-long turn lane to allow traffic to manoeuvre clear of the through highway traffic. The turn lanes extend back to directly opposite the Bruce Highway intersections with Black River Road and Bowden Road. This will significantly improve road safety, as traffic from the side roads will need to cross only one direction of Bruce Highway traffic before entering directly into a dedicated turn lane in order to undertake a U-turn.

Overpasses and traffic signals at Black River Road and Bowden Road were both considered during the planning phase of the project, however were not considered viable options. This was due to several reasons including safety, efficiency, costs, low traffic volumes, proximity to the Black River Bridge and a larger requirement for land resumptions. An overpass is typically used at a location where there are higher traffic volumes on the highway, as well as entering and exiting traffic.

Traffic signals would directly impact efficiency, without providing significant safety benefits over the unsignalised option. In turn, installing traffic signals could lead to more risk-taking behaviours and the potential for high-speed rear end crashes.

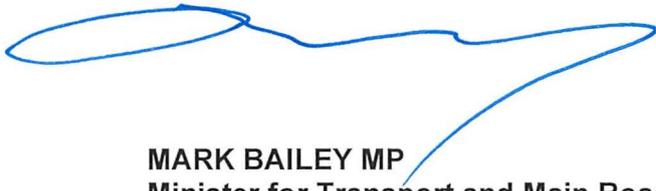
Regarding the speed limit, the current speed limit on this section of the Bruce Highway is 100km/h. Speed limits are set in accordance with Australian standards which ensures road users can be confident there is consistency with speed limits across Queensland. Operating a road at a speed lower than what would be reasonably expected by motorists can have adverse safety impacts and result in non-compliance by motorists. Speed limits will be reduced during project construction and, once the TNAIU project is completed (expected in early 2023), the Bruce Highway speed limit will be reinstated to 100km/h.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) will monitor safety outcomes and motorist behaviour following completion of the project and, if required, will undertake a speed limit review. Any changes to the speed limit will require consultation with local government and the Queensland Police Service.

Given the information outlined, I consider the design of the TNAIU project to be appropriate as it contributes towards a safer transport network. The TNAIU project will proceed to construction mid-2021. If residents would like to find out more about this important Bruce Highway upgrade project, they are encouraged to contact TMR's Northern District Customer and Stakeholder Management team via email at engagement.northern@tmr.qld.gov.au or by calling 1800 625 648.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke, positioned above the printed name.

MARK BAILEY MP
Minister for Transport and Main Roads