



Minister for Transport and Main Roads

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31 March 2021

The Honourable Bob Katter MP
Member for Kennedy
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Dear Mr Katter

Thank you for your letters of 18 January and 16 February 2021 about the Barron River Bridge near Kuranda.

I understand the importance of the Barron River Bridge for communities on the Tablelands. Safety is the Queensland Government's top priority and the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) manages state-controlled roads and bridges to ensure safety for all road users, while minimising delays as much as possible.

With that said, I would ask that you avoid unnecessary exaggeration and take care to ensure that any actual or perceived risk is appropriately described. While the shock and outrage factor may work for some in particular circumstances, I would emphasise that there is no evidence that the Barron River Bridge is 'failing' as you suggest.

Additionally, there is no evidence whatsoever of any delay in critical freight, such as the delivery of medical supplies, to any communities due to restricted management of the Barron River Bridge. The single-lane operation does not prohibit travel between Cairns and the Tablelands via the Kuranda Range Road for vehicles legally permitted to use this road.

In late October 2020, routine inspections identified fatigue in some of the steel element of the bridge. These issues have been caused by the accumulated impacts of heavy vehicles crossing the river over many years. The bridge was built in the 1960s and is carrying much heavier loads now than what was originally intended. The current load limit of 50.5 tonnes has been in place since February 2019. Investigations to date have shown a further reduction is not necessary and the arrangements and load limit of 50.5 tonnes is safe.

TMR has advised that traffic control will remain in place for at least six months while repairs are carried out. Engineering investigations recommend continuing single-lane operation and load limits while 1000 welds on the bridge are inspected and repaired where necessary. These restrictions are required to ensure the safety of workers underneath the bridge and to safely manage the structure during the investigation stage. To date, about 300 welds have been inspected, with around half of those identified for repair. While maintenance is underway, the Queensland Government will start a \$2.1 million investigation into long-term solutions for either replacing or rehabilitating the bridge.

I can also advise that the Queensland Government has allocated \$1.6 million to undertake a planning study to investigate capacity, safety and efficiency improvements of transport routes between Cairns and the Northern Tablelands. The purpose of the project is to review previous planning and determine the most appropriate focus for further planning activities. When the project is finalised, TMR will have a better understanding of the best way to improve access between Cairns and the Northern Tablelands. The project is expected to be completed in mid-2021.

Additionally, the Queensland Government has allocated \$2.1 million for an investigation into long-term solutions for either replacing or rehabilitating the ageing bridge.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Bailey', with a long, sweeping tail stroke extending downwards and to the right.

MARK BAILEY MP
Minister for Transport and Main Roads