

# NATIONAL HIGHWAY A1

**COUNCIL:** CAIRNS, MAREEBA, CASSOWARY COAST, HINCHINBROOK, TOWNSVILLE

**STATE ELECTORATE:** BARRON RIVER, CAIRNS, MULGRAVE, HILL, HINCHINBROOK, TOWNSVILLE

**FEDERAL ELECTORATE:** HERBERT, KENNEDY, LEICHHARDT

## THE ISSUE

An integrated and efficient road transport network is critical for economic stability and growth in northern Australia. In Tropical North Queensland (TNQ), the road network underpins the economy and is vital to the resident population of 278,080, ensuring accessibility to health, education and community services.

Due to rapid population growth, TNQ's road transport system faces increasing pressure, particularly on the road network in and out of Cairns which acts as the main distribution hub for the region. Meeting the growing demand for freight has strained existing infrastructure, impacting transport costs and service levels across the supply chain. The strain has been exacerbated by uneven population dispersion, the shared passenger transport task on TNQ roads, and resilience gaps in the road network which is frequently impacted by weather events.

Via road, the city of Cairns is serviced by four main arterial roads, two of which are critical freight routes – the Bruce Highway and the Kennedy Highway.

The Bruce Highway is part of the National Highway A1, providing the vital link between Cairns and Townsville, other Queensland coastal cities and Brisbane. The highway supports the transport of freight into and out of the region and currently ends in Cairns at the sea port.

The Kuranda Range Road (Kennedy Highway, Cairns/Mareeba section) links Smithfield with Kuranda and is the coastal gateway to Mareeba, Atherton Tablelands, Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf Savannah. It is a critical link for commuter, commercial and visitor traffic in TNQ and a vital strategic corridor linking the Atherton



Tableland, North Tropical Coast and Cape York to the Cairns Airport.

Both the Bruce Highway and Kuranda Range Roads underpin the commercial viability of primary industries, producers and exporters in the region. However, both are operating at or near capacity with safety and traffic efficiency now at critical levels for action.

While unprecedented State and Federal funding has been allocated for Bruce Highway upgrades between Cairns and Townsville, to maintain and grow TNQ's competitiveness through improved productivity a number of catalytic projects are still needed. These include a strategic transport plan to deliver a transport plan linking Cairns and Townsville, together with a significant upgrade of Kuranda Range Road.

This need is supported by the 2009-2031 Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan, which recommends that the Department of Main Roads plan for and preserve transport corridors to construct bypass roads around Innisfail, Ingham, Cardwell and Tully, and plan for and construct the duplication of Kuranda Range Road.

## BRIEFING NOTE SUMMARY

- TNQ's road transport system is under pressure due to population growth, particularly on the road network in and out of Cairns which is the main distribution hub for the region.
- The Bruce Highway is one of Australia's highest-risk roads and in the 5 years to 2017, there were 328 casualty crashes and 22 fatalities on the stretch between Cairns and Townsville.
- The Kuranda Range Road has already exceeded its capacity of 9,500 vehicle movements per day, catering for up to 10,000 daily traffic movements.
- While the Bruce Highway has seen unprecedented State and Federal investment since 2013, many future TNQ projects are scheduled for commencement after 2023. It is essential these be brought forward to 2019-2023 to address critical congestion and safety issues.
- A strategic transport plan linking Cairns and Townsville is required, together with a significant upgrade of Kuranda Range Road.

Queensland Department of Infrastructure and Planning, Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan 2009-2031

Australian Automobile Association, How Safe Are Our Roads? Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP): Risk Mapping, 2016

Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP), Risky Roads Project

Examples include: McIntyre M (2000). Integrated Transport Study for Kuranda Range: impact assessment study. Prepared for Department of Main Roads; Environment North (2004). Integrated Transport Study for Kuranda Range – Impact Assessment Study IAS Addendum. Prepared for Department of Main Roads; Environment North (2006). Integrated Transport Study for Kuranda Range Further Information Report. Prepared for Department of Main Roads.

Department of Main Roads: RTI 135-05880 North Queensland Region

## ↓ BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, the Bruce Highway has consistently been rated one of Australia’s highest-risk roads. In 2016 the highway accounted for 48% of Queensland casualty crashes and more than half of the State’s fatalities. Nationally, this equates to more than 17% of fatalities on only 7.5% of the entire national network. On the 299 km section between Cairns and Townsville, which carries an estimated 17,250 vehicles per day, in the 5 years to 2017 there were 328 casualty crashes and 22 fatalities.

To address the significant safety issues, in 2013 the Federal Government introduced the \$12.6 billion Bruce Highway Upgrade Program, which has led to step-change investments in north Queensland sections of the highway. Together with the State Government, to date this has delivered: \$595 million for Stages 1 to 4 of Cairns Southern Access upgrades with another \$226 million committed for Stage 5; \$20 million committed for Innisfail bypass planning and to improve flood immunity between Cardwell and Ingham; \$48 million committed to plan for upgrades to the Cardwell Range; and another \$63 million committed for Townsville Northern Access upgrades.

In contrast to the Bruce Highway, the Kuranda Range Road has been the subject of multiple impact assessment and design studies dating back to 2000 but is yet to see significant investment. The road has already exceeded its capacity of 9,500 vehicle movements per day, catering for up to 10,000 daily traffic movements. And in the 10 years to August 2018, the Cairns to Mareeba section of Kennedy Highway experienced 493 unplanned closures with total closure time of 1,111 hours and an average close time per incident of 2 hours and 15 minutes. While the need to upgrade the road was identified in the 2009-2031 Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan, more than 12 years on this remains a critical infrastructure project but is yet to secure significant funding.

## ↓ NEXT STEPS

A number of significant investments have been announced that will continue to address safety and efficiency challenges on the TNQ road network. However, many of these projects are scheduled for commencement after 2023. To address the critical congestion and safety issues faced on the road transport network, it is essential that the following key projects be brought forward and commenced in 2019-2023:

1. Kuranda Range Road: Undertake Strategic Assessment of Service Requirements (\$1 million) and Preliminary Evaluation and Business Case (\$20 million) with a view to completion by 2021.
2. Kuranda Range Road: Commence development of the Cairns to Northern Tablelands access strategy (\$1.25 million) with a view to completion by 2021.

3. Bruce Highway, Innisfail Bypass: Continue to preserve the existing bypass corridor and commence transport project planning (\$9 million) with a view to completion by 2022.
4. Bruce Highway, Ingham to Cardwell Range Deviation: Continue to preserve the existing transport corridor and commence transport project planning (\$48 million) with a view to completion by 2023.
5. Bruce Highway, Townsville Northern Access Intersections Upgrade: Commence transport project planning (\$72 million) with a view to completion by 2023.
6. Bruce Highway, Cairns to Townsville: Undertake Strategic Assessment of Service Requirements and Preliminary Evaluation and Business Case with a view to completion by 2024.

## OUR RECOMMENDATION

- That through the Roads of Strategic Importance Fund, in 2020-2022 the Queensland and Federal Governments commit \$21 million (shared 50:50) to undertake the Strategic Assessment of Service Requirements, preliminary evaluation and Business Case for Kuranda Range Road.
- That through the Bruce Highway Upgrade Program, the State and Federal Governments bring forward their commitments to upgrade north Queensland sections of the National Highway A1 to 2019-2023, and commit to developing a strategic transport plan linking Cairns and Townsville.

	2020-2021	
	Kuranda Range Road SASR	Kuranda Range Road Business Case
<b>ESTIMATED PROJECT COST \$21M</b>		
Recommended State Investment	\$0.5m	\$10m
Recommended Federal Investment	\$0.5m	\$10m