

28 February 2023

Mr Luke Gosling OAM MP

Chair

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure & Transport

PO Box 6021

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

via email: rdit.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Gosling,

RACQ submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport – Inquiry into the implications of severe weather events on the national regional, rural, and remote road network.

On behalf of our nearly 1.8 million members, RACQ is pleased to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport.

RACQ has a long history of advocating on issues of importance for Queenslanders, urging Governments to take action that saves lives, builds and strengthens roads, and enhances disaster resilience and recovery in communities. RACQ holds considerable policy expertise and member insights on mobility, infrastructure, and road safety that may assist the Committee deliver on its priorities.

This submission focuses on historical road condition issues and difficulties in resilient construction along Queensland's vast network as we experience increasing frequency of significant weather events.

We make 11 recommendations to the Committee and Federal Government outlined below.

General comments

A booming population and increasing freight transportation are placing increased stress on our road network and structures such as bridges and culverts. These stressors include inferior soil conditions, difficulties in sourcing good quality road building materials, increased material costs and damage from increased frequency and intensity of weather events. As a result, Queensland's road infrastructure has been under extreme demands, negatively impacting its quality and condition, particularly in regional areas.

The move towards decarbonisation may also lead to generally heavier (electric) vehicles being present on roads, including increased steer axle weights. This will increase forces on pavements and structures, subsequently accelerating the deterioration of the network unless appropriate interventions such as improved construction standards and adequate funding, are implemented.

RACQ has conducted numerous surveys of its members and the public (e.g., [2022 RACQ Unroadworthy Roads Survey](#) and [Regional Road Inspection Tours](#)) which show motorists continue to be concerned with the condition and quality of the Bruce Highway and other national and state roads throughout Queensland. This work indicates that the construction and maintenance of roads has not



met or achieved an adequate standard, negatively impacting on safety, vehicle operating costs, travel times, reliability, accessibility, tourism, and freight productivity.

In addition to increased investment for upgrades and reseals of regional roads at appropriate intervention levels or seal age, RACQ supports greater investment in maintenance funding and betterment initiatives to reduce the backlog and ensure major roads are safe, productive and support regional tourism. Local government roads also greatly need higher levels of funding assistance through critical construction and maintenance programs such as *Roads to Recovery*. This program should deliver a minimum of \$800 million per annum nationally.

Maintenance specific comments

RACQ members report the quality of Queensland's roads among the top priorities with "poor maintenance" and "safety issues" ranked among the top three concerns for main roads in regional areas of Queensland (sourced through our member surveys).

RACQ previously called for a minimum 2% of the gross replacement or road asset value per annum to fund maintenance activities. For the Federal and State road networks in Queensland, this is calculated at approximately \$1.5 to \$1.6 billion annually. Queensland's Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) data indicates that funding is around \$1.1 billion annually, and with increasing costs of delivery and materials, the necessary required annual investment by both levels of government is likely to be higher.

Reactive maintenance provides for temporary emergency repairs and the re-opening of roads for immediate transport needs. However, the reactive maintenance approach to repairs leads to continuing issues of pothole repairs and patches being required again during or after the next significant rainfall event or wet season. This is of particular concern along the Bruce Highway, Warrego Highway, Flinders Highway, Gore Highway and Cunningham Highway in Queensland. Longer term suitable and timely funding is required to deliver more permanent, long-lasting, and resilient repairs.

RACQ Recommendation:

1. RACQ calls on the Federal Government to work closely with the Queensland Government to deliver the required levels of the funding to adequately maintain the Queensland road network.
2. The Committee should engage with Queensland road agencies to gain a full and clear view on maintenance funding requirements to meet the performance standards in the Queensland Government [Service Delivery Statements](#). Page 4 of this document reports on the percentages of rural state-controlled roads that should be in better condition than the specified benchmark and the requirements for 'Road ride quality – Traffic weighted roughness (the percentage of the network in very poor/poor condition)'.

Furthermore, the 2019 Australian Infrastructure Audit identified an underspend on historical maintenance, short budgetary and funding cycles, a lack of data and incentives, and inadequate reporting as factors contributing to maintenance backlogs across infrastructure sectors. The Queensland National Land Transport Network (NLTN) Stage 1 submission to Infrastructure Australia's (IA) Priority List also called out the current backlog in maintenance.

RACQ Recommendation:

3. Both Queensland's National Land Transport Network (NLTN) Maintenance and National Road Maintenance Backlog projects listed in the Infrastructure Australia (IA) Priority List (Stage 1) should be progressed through further stages of the IA assessment process to be made ready for Federal Government investment.



INQUIRY SPECIFIED TERM OF REFERENCE FOCUS AREAS

Road engineering and construction standards required to enhance the resilience of future road construction.

RACQ supports research, trialling and use of new technology, construction methods and materials such as foamed bitumen or flexible pavements, geofabrics and other stabilisation materials. Our members expect roads to be built stronger and built back better to resist future damage from weather events thus saving expenditure in the long run.

RACQ understands that the resilience or life expectancy of regional roads can be attributed to the quality of foundations, materials, construction/compaction methods and waterproofing to prevent water ingress. Areas with poor in-situ materials, or roads constructed through black soil areas (expansive clays), which are common in Queensland, are notoriously difficult and costly to provide long-term pavements.

While traffic volumes and types of vehicles also play a role in how long pavements last (equivalent standard axle/loads), the quality, strength and resilience of a road is ultimately determined and constrained by the funding allocated to deliver those factors to a high standard. Longer lasting, more resilient roads, built to better engineering and construction standards, generally have a higher initial cost but are very likely to save on costs over the long term.

Structures such as bridges and culverts are also prone to damage from increased frequency and intensity of weather events. There is a need to consider higher standards for these structures, especially for scour protection on bridge banks/abutments and bridge piers.

TMR has the knowledge and experience to build stronger, more resilient roads (e.g., foamed bitumen) in regional Queensland. However, RACQ believes the pavement design and construction standards in most regional areas are built within the constraints of limited funding. We understand life expectancy and resilience is a lower priority. Road authorities do the most with available funding, but standards are not typically aimed at longevity.

A lower level of construction and maintenance standards has resulted in the inability to achieve and maintain a high level of road surface quality and condition on roads throughout Queensland. Extreme weather events, rising costs of resources and materials, and continuing increases in traffic volumes and loads on pavements, will only exacerbate the quality and condition issues of our road network.

RACQ Recommendations:

4. The Committee should consult with Queensland road agencies and consulting engineers who understand current pavement and construction standards and the difficulties and costs in delivering long lasting pavements.
5. The Committee should investigate the need for, and costs involved in, specifying higher minimum standards for pavements in regional areas, as well as structures like bridges and culverts.
6. Federal Government should provide additional funding to deliver pavements and related structures, if higher minimum standards are committed to.
7. Federal Government should introduce a new requirement to fund betterment initiatives over replacement/reinstatement, for all future maintenance or Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) projects delivered on national roads. Additional funding could also be delivered as proactive projects under an increased budget and scope for the Disaster Ready Fund.



Identification of climate resilient corridors suitable for future road construction projects.

RACQ believes the identification of climate resilient corridors should be based on flood studies (hydrology surveys and reports) to ensure major highways achieve a minimum flood immunity standard which effectively balances costs against the frequency and duration of road closures due to flooding. RACQ supports the standards set by TMR for flood immunity and road closure duration, depending on the road function and road hierarchy.

RACQ Recommendations:

8. Federal Government should consider offering access to funding for hydrology and flood studies on roads across Queensland, especially for Local Government who may not have the resources or experience to identify climate resilient corridors.
9. Federal Government should identify critical climate resilient corridors in Queensland, utilising flood studies and standards set for flood resilient roads.

Opportunities to enhance road resilience through the use of waterproof products in road construction.

Increasing traffic volumes and pavement loads and increasing frequency and severity of wet weather/flooding are increasingly impacting on the quality and condition of our road network. Construction of concrete pavements and floodways, where suitable and possible, may be beneficial in areas prone or exposed to frequent water flows or inundation, and/or severe rainfall events. RACQ understands that foamed bitumen, while difficult and costly to implement, has also been proven as strong and resilient in areas that are regularly inundated.

As stated above, RACQ supports research and cost benefit analysis into new technology, construction methods and products/materials to resist future damage and increase climate resilience. Additional funding is required to enable and deliver these activities across Queensland roads. RACQ also supports further research into, and use of, recycled materials in road construction and repairs (e.g., glass, plastics, crumb rubber).

RACQ Recommendation:

10. Federal Government should invest additional funding to support research and cost benefit analysis into flood resilient technology, including recycled materials, in road construction and maintenance.

Any related issues

RACQ Recommendation:

11. The Committee should consider the likely increase in emissions related to more frequent construction and repair activities due to increasing severe weather events.



RACQ appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments and recommendations to the Committee and hopes this Inquiry can lead to stronger, more resilient roads and communities for Queensland's future.

If you require further information or discussion on any priorities, projects or initiatives in this letter, RACQ's Head of Public Policy Michael Kane can be contacted at Michael.Kane@racq.com.au in the first instance to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

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