

Bruce Highway Trust Advisory Council

Communique Meeting #3

On 16 September 2021, the third Bruce Highway Trust Advisory Council (BHTAC) meeting was held in Brisbane at the Department of Transport and Main Roads, chaired by Mr Peter Garske, Company Director, Queensland Transport and Logistics Council, and supported by Deputy Chair Ms Barbara Madden, Company Director of the Smithfield Group.

The role of the Council is to oversee the development of a new 15-year Vision for the Bruce Highway (Brisbane – Cairns) and to identify priorities to be delivered through rolling five-year Action Plans and the *Safer Bruce 2030 Action Plan*, in order to inform future Federal and State Budget deliberations.

The objective of the BHTAC is to guide the BHTAC-Technical Working Group (BHTAC-TWG) in the preparation of the Vision and Action Plans, which includes providing advice and direction to the BHTAC-TWG on stakeholder needs, expectations and priorities.

BHTAC Chair Peter Garske and TMR Director-General Neil Scales welcomed the six recently appointed members to the BHTAC, acknowledging the unique regional, road safety and road user perspectives and experience they individually and collectively will bring to the Council.

Key issues, suggestions and queries raised by BHTAC members included:

- Flooding – BHTAC-TWG members confirmed that, to the extent possible, potential climate change impacts have been considered in the Bruce Highway Link Flood Study.
- Sustainability – members highlighted the need to ensure works are planned and delivered sustainably. TMR meeting attendees confirmed the department has a strong focus on sustainable planning and delivery of infrastructure, including the use of flood-resilient and sustainable construction materials and practices.
- Road Safety –
 - Council members expressed the need for wider road shoulders, wherever possible, to safely accommodate all vehicle types and road users, including vulnerable road users.
 - BHTAC-TWG members confirmed that:
 - with the exception of the decrease in fatalities in 2012-14 attributed to the roll-out of Wide Centre Line Treatment (WCLT) and Audio Tactile Line Marking along the Bruce Highway in critical locations, the 'peaks' and 'troughs' in Serious and Fatal Injury statistics are a demonstration of the typical fluctuations in crash rates due to the randomness of crashes
 - non-infrastructure initiatives to improve road safety relate to the other pillars of the Safe System approach; for example, vehicle safety features, safer road use, and speed management type initiatives, such as reduced speed limits
 - head-on crashes (which WCLT is intended to reduce) were relatively infrequent at intersections, with the majority of crashes being associated with turning movements. TMR attendees agreed to provide further advice to BHTAC members on the potential benefit/possibility of extending WCLT through intersections to provide increased protection to right-turning traffic.

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- Infrastructure planning, delivery and traffic management –
 - In response to queries about the impact of construction works on traffic and road users, TMR confirmed that where there is sufficient width available and where costs are not prohibitive, side-tracks are considered, where possible, to assist with traffic management and reduce delays whilst works are underway.
 - Members reinforced the importance of adequately maintained facilities at Heavy Vehicle Rest Areas
 - Members suggested consideration be given to the ongoing incorporation of electric vehicle charging points at rest areas.

TMR provided BHTAC Members with an update on the delivery status of the current \$13 billion Bruce Highway Upgrade Program (BHUP) (2013-14 to 2027-28), including:

- existing Australian Government and Queensland Government commitments for the Bruce Highway
- key recent achievements and delivery progress .

TMR also updated Council members on work being undertaken by the TMR BHTAC-Technical Working Group and TMRs' Customer Experience Branch, on behalf of the BHTAC, to support the development of the draft 15-year Vision, rolling five-year Action Plans and the *Safer Bruce 2030* Action Plan.

Results of recent Customer Research activities to inform future investment priorities

BHTAC members welcomed a briefing on the results of the latest phase of customer research, designed to provide further insight from customers' perspectives about where the Bruce Highway is currently performing well, and where future improvements are desirable. This phase also included one-on-one meetings with BHTAC members to gain advice on the priorities of their members and the customers they represent.

The purpose of this phase of the research was to gain perspectives from a larger group of customers and stakeholders and to quantify customer priorities and experiences of the Bruce Highway in relation to the three objectives to *unlock economic growth, build flood resilience and improve safety*.

Focus Groups

In April 2021, BHTAC members and TMR hosted focus group sessions with caravanners and campervanners, refrigerated warehouse owners, transport operators and heavy vehicle drivers to get first-hand advice from road users and businesses on their priorities for the Bruce Highway upgrade.

While all three objectives were important to participants, safety was top of mind in all three focus groups and a high priority objective for improvement. Participants explained that addressing safety concerns had an 'every trip' impact on their experience of the Bruce Highway, and that investing in initiatives to improve safety makes an immediate positive impact for all road users. Focus group participants also provided important information on the quantity and design of rest stops, the quantity and length of overtaking lanes, road quality and design (width and single lanes), traffic flow and flooding impacts from their perspectives.

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Focus group participant perceptions of the importance of the BHTAC objectives



IMPROVING SAFETY

Safety was top of mind for participants in all 3 focus groups and improving safety along the Bruce Highway was considered a high priority area.

Improving safety was highly prioritised partly because addressing safety concerns had an 'every trip' impact on focus group participants' experience of the Bruce Highway. Initiatives to improve safety were seen to potentially make an immediate positive impact for road users (e.g. additional signage to locate overtaking lanes as suggested by Heavy Vehicle Driver participants).



UNLOCKING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Participants in all focus groups recognised the economic importance of the Bruce Highway, but translating what unlocking economic growth meant for them as individuals or businesses was harder to articulate than other objective benefits.

Compared to the other focus group participants, Refrigerated Warehouse Owner and Transport Operator participants could most easily articulate financial impacts and concerns. Heavy Vehicle Driver participants used the language of 'schedule' and 'logistical' effects to describe economic impacts while Caravanner and Campervanner participants described inconveniences and frustrations when referring to economic impacts.



FLOOD RESILIENCE

Participants across all focus groups believed that flood resilience was an important long-term goal for the Bruce Highway to achieve. However, flooding had a less frequent impact on most focus group participants due to them not experiencing flooding on an 'every trip' basis. Therefore, flood resilience was not as top of mind as other objectives but still considered an important objective for the highway.

Refrigerated Warehouse Owner and Transport Operator participants were the customer group most impacted by flooding, facing indirect (logistical) and direct financial costs. Heavy Vehicle Driver and Caravanner and Campervanner participants also reported facing logistical impacts from flooding. However, the flexibility in Caravanner and Campervanner participant schedules often meant the impacts were lessened in comparison.

Bruce Highway online customer survey 4-18 June 2021

The objective of the online customer survey was to quantify customer priorities and experiences of the Bruce Highway with a broadly representative sample of Queenslanders. In June 2021, the BHTAC and TMR conducted the online survey seeking views from regular road users, businesses and commercial drivers who rely on the Bruce Highway operating efficiently.

The online customer survey received 3,954 responses across the three customer groups: (private citizens; commercial drivers; business owners/operators). In the meeting, the finding that survey respondents ranked priorities for the Bruce Highway differently depending on the purpose of their travel/impact of the priority issue and by specific locations resonated with Members.

The customer research work is informing the technical activities, including the development of a prioritisation approach that takes into account likely forecast traffic demand, highway deficiencies and customer priorities. Members requested that the next BHTAC meeting focus on the prioritisation approach in more detail.

Members were pleased to see the strong focus on customer and stakeholder issues and needs, together with the integration of this research with the technical work underway.

Results of recent BHTAC-TWG activities to inform future investment priorities

BHTAC Members gained a greater understanding of the current technical vision standards and treatments applied through the current Bruce Highway Upgrade Program, in particular, improvements in flood resilience resulting from recent investments in the Bruce Highway.

Members received a briefing on the key findings of a strategic road safety review of the Bruce Highway. The purpose of the review was to inform the identification and selection of infrastructure-based projects to reduce the rate of fatal and serious injury crashes. The review applied, for the first time in Queensland, the use of a 'road stereotypes' methodology and process developed by Austroads.

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Acknowledging the critical role the Bruce Highway has in supporting the movement of freight to customers and markets, TMR briefed Members on the current level of access for Heavy Vehicles on the Bruce Highway, and analysis undertaken by the BHTAC-TWG on important considerations relating to the potential for targeted increases in access in the future, within the context of planned upgrades to the Inland Freight Route (Mungindi - Charters Towers).

Members discussed a number of funding and policy 'tensions' that have come to light through the technical and customer research work that will require further consideration, so that investment decisions in one area do not unduly impact another.

The Chair BHTAC noted the intention is for the next BHTAC meeting to be held in a regional location and to include the opportunity for site visits.

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**Bruce Highway Trust Advisory Council members and attendees at the Brisbane meeting,
Department Transport and Main Roads Conference Centre – 16 September 2021**

Member	Position	BHTAC Position	Proxy
Mr Peter Garske	Company Director, Queensland Transport and Logistics Council (QTLC)	Chair	
Ms Barbara Madden	Company Director of the Smithfield Group	Deputy Chair	
Mr Neil Scales	Director-General, Department of Transport and Main Roads	Member	
Mr Phil Smith	First Assistant Secretary, Infrastructure Investment Division, Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	Member	
Dr Georgina Davis (Apology)	Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Farmers' Federation	Member	
Mr Daniel Gschwind	Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Tourism Industry Council	Member	
Mr Greg Hallam (Apology)	Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland	Member	
Mr Gary Mahon (Apology)	Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Trucking Association (QTA)	Member	Ms Jan Pattison, proxy for QTA
TBC	Branch Secretary, Transport Workers Union (TWU) Queensland	Member	Mr Mark Walker, Proxy for TWU Queensland
Mr David Carter (Apology)	Group Chief Executive Officer, Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ)	Member	MJ Bellotti, Group Executive Member and Community, RACQ
Ms Elise Pearson	Regional Representative	Member	
Ms Anita Mumford	Regional Representative	Member	
Ms Julie Boyd	Regional Representative	Member	
Mr Robert Dorgelo	Regional Representative	Member	
Ms Tania Dennis	Regional Representative	Member	
Mr Brian Hughes	Regional Representative	Member	