



Hon. Paul Lucas MP



**Queensland
Government**

Our ref: MC15613

**Minister for
Transport and Main Roads**

Your ref: 503-05

28 OCT 2005

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Re: Petition No 503-05

The Watsonville to Irvinebank section of the Herberton to Petford Road

I refer to the petition number 503-05 lodged with the Legislative Assembly on 10 August 2005 by Ms Rosa Lee Long MP, Member for Tablelands, regarding the Watsonville to Irvinebank section of the Herberton to Petford Road in North Queensland.

Queensland has a vast State-controlled Road Network of almost 34 000km, the longest of any state in Australia. While progress is being made in reducing the length of the unsealed network across the state, it is a very challenging task. In 1980, 39% of the network was unsealed. It is quite an achievement that now only 18% is unsealed.

Some \$22m was spent in 2004-05 on extending the bitumen seal on state-controlled roads in North Queensland. Decisions on funding priorities are made based on the role roads play in the overall network: whether they provide a mainly local benefit, a wider regional benefit or have a state-wide strategic role, particularly a role in providing an interstate freight and passenger route.

Most unsealed roads generally carry much lower traffic volumes and their benefits are often restricted to a local area. The state government has responsibility for the largest road network of any state in Australia and must carefully prioritise funding to address the many challenges across this network.

The state-controlled network includes a high proportion of single-lane sealed roads which have a higher priority for funding to carry out widening works. These roads carry higher traffic volumes and play a wider regional or state strategic role. They also have safety issues associated with their higher traffic volumes and mix of traffic types. These range from a high proportion of heavy vehicles servicing the mining and grazing industries, to tourist traffic unfamiliar with such road conditions and local traffic.

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Sealing the Herberton to Irvinebank section is only being considered in the much longer term. Sealing further westwards, between Irvinebank and Petford, is not being considered. It will be maintained as a formed gravel road.

In the short to medium term, the Department of Main Roads strategy for gravel roads, (such as this road) is to maintain them as well as possible, taking into account existing traffic volumes, and carry out minor priority upgrading projects to target areas that can deliver the greatest benefits for local communities, when funds become available.

Main Roads has formed a partnership with the Local Government Association of Queensland, called the Roads Alliance, to share management and decision making about funding allocations for some roads.

Under this initiative, some state and local government funding has been earmarked for local roads, which serve a wider purpose and benefit a large number of people, when compared to other similar local roads on the network. The roads may be part of the state-controlled or local government road network. These roads are known as Local Roads of Regional Significance (LRRS). Regional Road Groups, comprised of representatives from relevant local governments and Main Roads, manage these roads and decide on future upgrading projects and the maintenance strategy for this network.

The Herberton to Petford Road has been classified as an LRRS and is now managed by the Far North Queensland Regional Road Group (FNQRRG). State government funding of \$100 000 has been approved under this arrangement for minor works on the road. This work, which is additional to routine maintenance funding provided by the state government, will include grading, gravel resheeting and signage.

In early July 2005, Mareeba Shire Council, on behalf of the FNQRRG, discussed with the residents of Irvinebank possible options for expenditure of the \$100 000 on the section of road between Watsonville and Irvinebank. Work on the chosen option, supported by the majority of residents, will be carried out in late October 2005, in conjunction with routine maintenance grading of the entire length of the Herberton to Petford Road. The chosen option was to carry out gravel resheeting on various sections of the road from the first causeway on the Irvinebank side of Stannery Hills turnoff for approximately 3.4km towards Irvinebank.

This gravel resheeting will help the road to better withstand wear and tear from traffic and weather, while improving travelling conditions for motorists and vehicles, including school traffic. In the interim, a maintenance grade was carried out in late July 2005 on the section of road from 2km west of Watsonville to Irvinebank.

Involving local government and residents in decision-making about the use of funds on roads such as this is an important step as it provides a realistic approach to addressing priorities within available funding.

An assessment of school bus traffic revealed that it was no longer economically viable to provide two school bus services, given that the number of students had declined. Queensland Transport was, therefore, willing to amend Whitecars' contract to reduce the western part of its route.

The remaining school transport service west of Herberton, which is provided by Mr Noel Kelso, has been reduced by some 5km. Instead of ending at Jumna Creek, the new western terminus for Mr Kelso's service is at Rural Property No 1602, just east of Hales Siding Road near the Bakerville junction.

Eligible parents will receive financial assistance towards the cost of transporting their children to meet the school bus, if they live further west of where the bus service ends.

Queensland Transport recently wrote to the parents of the affected children, providing them with application forms for possible conveyance assistance.

Queensland Transport officers will investigate the number of students wishing to use the school bus service to establish a clearer picture of future demand for school transport assistance.

Yours sincerely

PAUL LUCAS MP
Minister for Transport and Main Roads