

## Courier Mail 21-22/4/24-Bruce Highway Feature

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/qld-politics/bruce-highway-action-plan-to-finally-finish-our-deadliest-stretch/news-story/c04ce86907dbd083f23603013e85e960>

Funding for the Bruce Highway by state and federal government must be increased, real-time weather warnings explored and an audit of rest stops undertaken as part of a blueprint to fix the problem-plagued route.

The action plan comes amid growing calls from local government leaders and peak bodies for a commitment from state and federal government leaders to significantly improve the Bruce Highway.

The Courier-Mail is partnering with NRMA Insurance and regional news mastheads across Queensland this year to drive positive outcomes through the Help Our Highway advocacy campaign.

The wishlist includes increased funding commitments from the state and federal government for the route between 2025 and 2030 and exploring technology solutions for real-time weather, flooding and pothole warnings.

There should also be an audit of rest stop areas to ensure there are enough and are fit for purpose, and for the state government to finalise the strategic vision for the Bruce Highway as recommended by a special advisory council in late 2022.

A number of regional Queensland projects should also be prioritised, including the \$48m Gairloch flood immunity upgrade north of Townsville, the Burdekin Bridge duplication, and flood mitigation at Goorganga Plains north of Mackay.

As part of the Help Our Highway campaign transport minister Bart Mellish reaffirmed crucial Queensland data outlining deadly crash hotspots on the Bruce Highway would be made public by 2025.

The Bruce Highway is the biggest carrier of traffic in the state. It is also the longest highway in Australia at about 1700km — a distance equivalent to driving from Paris to Naples.

NRMA Insurance chief executive Julie Batch said public sharing of important road safety data was critical for funding decisions and prioritisation of projects that will have the greatest impact on the safety of Queenslanders.

Queensland Trucking Association chief executive Gary Mahon said fit-for-purpose rest stops along the Bruce Highway were essential, with the peak body arguing there should be one every 200km along the route.

But at the moment the rest stops are randomly dispersed and of “pretty ordinary” standard, he said.

Mr Mahon also called for “ambition” from government leaders in the lead up to the Bruce Highway’s centenary, which is just 10 years away.

“We should have a progressive program set forward for the centenary year ... and the focus should be on the regions,” he said.

Townsville Enterprise chief executive Claudia Brumme-Smith said the Bruce Highway was the main connection between the northern and southern ends of the state and disruptions on the road hamper economic prosperity.

“We have a \$38bn pipeline of projects coming into our region in the next six years ... if this highway gets flooded, or taken out for weeks on end, it affects timings and cost of projects,” she said.

“Big projects like the Burdekin Bridge duplication are once in a generation projects.”

## **POINT BY POINT**

- Long-term, detailed commitment from the federal government to finally “finish the Bruce”
- Finalise the strategic vision recommended by the Bruce Highway Trust Advisory Council
- State and federal governments to increase funding commitments from 2025-30
- Explore technology solutions including real-time weather, flooding and pothole warnings
- Audit rest stop areas along the Bruce Highway to ensure there is enough and they are fit for purpose
- Prioritise regional Queensland projects including:

Delivery of the \$48m Gairloch Flood Immunity Upgrade north of Townsville

Fast-track safety improvements and overtaking lanes at Inkerman (Bowen-Ayr)

Burdekin Bridge duplication

Improve rest areas between Ayr and Bowen where there are high incidences of fatigue-related crashes

Flood mitigation at Goorganga Plains north of Mackay

Complete the Rockhampton Ring Rd on time

Deliver the Tiaro Bypass north of Gympie

Queensland government to release publicly Bruce Highway safety data from AusRAP (WIN)

Editors Column

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/opinion/editorial-it-is-clear-the-bruce-highway-must-be-finished/news-story/c0eab7a232a43e8fa1666dcc0309539a>

Surely it is not too much to ask of our nation's politicians that they stop treating Queenslanders like mugs and commit to "finishing" the one frustration that unites us all: the Bruce Highway. The Hume Highway between Melbourne and Sydney was "finished" in 2013 when all of its 840km was finally completed as dual carriageway.

The Pacific Highway between the Gold Coast and Hexham at Newcastle (and so Brisbane to Sydney) was similarly "finished" in 2021 after a 15 years of work to make it a four-lane divided road.

That project cut two and a half hours off the 657km drive and has led to a 70 per cent reduction in fatal crashes.

No government has yet pledged the same for the 1679km Bruce Highway that links Brisbane with Cairns, the closest being a promise to do so over 15 years at a cost of \$33 billion by the state opposition at the 2020 election that it lost.

This should change. Dual carriageways are safer. They save lives and cut travel time.

The Courier-Mail's Help Our Highway campaign, in conjunction with our regional mastheads, was prompted by the fact this is an issue that unites Queensland.

Today we call on the politicians to be bold and commit to doing what has already been done for motorists in Victoria and NSW.

Yes, the Bruce Highway is much longer than both the Pacific and Hume highways – and yes, the population centres it links are not as large. But surely it is not too much to ask for a commitment – in the long term – to such a vision.

Such a commitment is required for political reasons, too. The challenge we have at the moment is that upgrades to sections the highway are too often prioritised based on what the local political situation is – with marginal or target seats getting the attention.

Instead, funding should be allocated based on a program of need. Treating the highway as one big project underpinned by sections means the trouble spots can be dealt with accordingly.

This is why it is a good thing that state transport minister Bart Mellish has promised to make public crucial data that rates each small section of the highway on the same criteria.

This AusRAP data is currently hidden from public view and so the scrutiny is limited. Having it out in the open will help guarantee that decisions are being made for the right reasons.

A commitment to “finish” the Bruce is top of the list for our Action Plan that we publish today after a week of reporting that has set the scene for us to spend the next few months shining a light on the highway as the state and federal elections near.

To guide that promise we will be highlighting ongoing delays in the development of the strategic vision recommended by the Bruce Highway Trust Advisory Council.

Both state and federal governments need to boost funding commitments for the highway between now and 2030.

We think there should also be an audit of rest stop areas to ensure there are enough that are fit for purpose.

And we have compiled a list of quick fixes that are needed right now to improve safety in the problematic areas.

This is a chance for politicians at state and federal level to look after themselves, too.

A renewed focus on the Bruce Highway would be popular at the state election in all the regional communities that both sides will be wooing.

Federally, Labor will have to pick up some Queensland seats to win a majority at the next election. A big, bold commitment to the state would certainly help.

It is clear that Queenslanders care.

A new survey of motorists for NRMA Insurance for this campaign found three-quarters of us have been held up by an accident on the highway and one in three have avoided it altogether when deciding where to go for family holidays.

Again, the Bruce unites in more ways than one.

A commitment to work towards fixing it properly is well overdue.

## Courier Mail Article 21/4/24

### Truck drivers forced to rely on empty petrol stations to take breaks on Bruce Highway

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/truck-drivers-forced-to-rely-on-empty-petrol-stations-to-take-breaks-on-bruce-highway>

Truck drivers on long haul trips along the notoriously dangerous Bruce Highway are unable to pull over to take legally mandated breaks.

Truck drivers on long haul trips along the notoriously dangerous Bruce Highway are unable to pull over to take legally mandated breaks due to an alarming shortage of heavy vehicle rest areas, it can be revealed.

Drivers navigating the deadly highway say they have been forced to rely on empty petrol stations to take breaks, with rest stops unavailable for up to 400km on some stretches.

Queensland Trucking Association chief executive Gary Mahon said the astonishing lack of rest areas went directly against widely promoted advice that tells drivers to take a break every two hours.

“The lack of rest areas is chronic,” he said.

“There should be rest areas every 200km, that’s a reasonable request and we’ve been asking for it for a long time.

“You could probably drive for 300-400km sometimes or more for a rest stop.”

By law, truck drivers must comply with certain maximum work and minimum rest limits including a 15 minute rest for every 5 hours and 15 minutes of driving, 30 minutes for 7.5 hours, 60 minutes for a 10 hour shift and seven continuous hours if they are driving a 12 hour shift within a 24 hour period.

One driver told the Courier-Mail the minimum rest facilities available were so unsanitary and infested with bugs, they would rather “go in the bush”.

He said drivers prayed for available space when approaching the few shared rest stops or service stations and if their trucks couldn’t fit, they simply had to “push on”.

“There’s next to no rest stops and if you get to a service station and it’s full you’ve got to drive back out and keep going,” he said.

“They drive that extra two hours so they can get off the road and it’s a huge fatigue thing, but we don’t have the luxury of stopping.

“And half of the rest areas we do find, you’re parked right on the fog line, a metre off the highway and are expected to fall asleep.”

A Transport and Main Roads spokesman said the governments Bruce Highway Upgrade Program established in 2013 saw \$54 million put towards 35 new rest areas and 30 upgrades to existing rest areas. Three new areas remain in the late stages of design or construction, while six upgrades are yet to be complete.

“The scope of work varied from site to site, however, generally included the replacement of toilets, shade shelters, tables and chairs, installation of solar lighting, improved accessibility for vulnerable road users, pavement rehabilitation, all-weather sealing, water tanks, water bores and other improvement activities,” he said.

**Courier Mail 21/4/24**

## **Dashcam footage captures shocking Bruce Highway reality faced by truck drivers**

<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/dashcam-footage-captures-shocking-bruce-highway-reality-faced-by-truck-drivers/news-story/a158c9fc18e1b735d974127e6077148c>

Startling footage has laid bare the deadly conditions faced by truck drivers on the Bruce Highway as the boss of one of Queensland's largest freight companies reveals why he waits by the phone each night.

The deteriorated and underfunded highway has become a landmine for crashes, with truck drivers forced to navigate potholes, outdated bridges and narrow shoulders at the expense of their own safety.

Major concerns have been raised over lack of rest stop areas and overtaking lanes, with footage showing frustrated motorists dodging oncoming traffic to pass trucks on dual lanes.

Followmont Transport chief executive Mark Tobin said road conditions on the Bruce had become so rife, he challenged anyone to drive a truck along the highway and "see if they have their ribs left".

Mr Tobin operates one of the largest Bruce Highway delivery services, with 100 Followmont B Double trucks sent to North Queensland and back each night.

"I can send anyone from Brisbane to Sydney and know they're safe but from Brisbane to Cairns, road conditions are unpredictable," he said.

"How my guys come home each time I have no idea."

The former statement was raw for Mr Tobin, who lost one of his drivers on the Bruce Highway just four weeks ago.

Followmont driver Daniel Stuart lost his life driving past an intersection in Maryborough when a disqualified driver turned onto the highway, directly into the path of a semi trailer, causing a head-on collision between the two trucks.

The trucks exploded on impact, killing both drivers.

"To make a phone call to his family after 30 years in this industry is the hardest thing I've ever done," Mr Tobin said.

"It's not fair that a man who did all the right things doesn't get to go home to his family. Dan just went to work.

"We put everything in those trucks to make people safe, and I still sit by the phone and wait for a call."

Those who manage to stay alive on the road experience near misses regularly, with motorists frequently driving into oncoming traffic to pass trucks.

Dashcam footage provided to the Courier-Mail shows one incident of a hire van speeding on the opposite side of the road to overtake a truck barely missing two oncoming cars, forcing the truck driver to slam their brakes to allow the van to cut back into the correct lane.

Other videos show cars reversing or pulling out in front of trucks, and driving over double lines on tight corners, with trucks jerking to the left to avoid being clipped.

Between 2020 and 2023, 134 people lost their lives in 121 separate fatal crashes on the Bruce Highway, with stretches between Bald Hills and Caboolture, Ingham and Innisfail and Mackay and Proserpine found to be the most dangerous head-on hotspots.

Linehaul manager for OzWide Freight and experienced truck driver Brendon Edwards recalled a recent crash at a parking bay in Gin Gin when a caravan driver “drove straight into him”.

“He totalled his car and told me he didn’t see me,” he said.

He described the Marlborough stretch as an “absolute nightmare,” and said potholes became “next level” after rain events -some big enough to take wheels off cars causing further extensive delays.

“The way the road flicks your trucks around and throws you off the road is insane,” he said.

“If you look at the highway from Brisbane to Sydney and compare it to Brisbane to Cairns, we’re just so far behind.

“Last fortnight my mate who drives for another company was sideswiped north of Rockhampton and lost his legs and he’s an experienced driver, has been doing it for 35 years.”

Mr Edwards said drivers became so “cranky” after waiting at crash sites for hours, he instructs his drivers to remain on the side of the road for their own safety.

“It’s mayhem everyone’s trying to overtake,” he said.

Constant crashes also create extensive delays for freight companies, with limited to no available heavy vehicle detour routes.

Drivers forced to pull over behind a road incident end up waiting so long, others are sent out to crash sites for emergency shift changeovers.

Nolan’s Interstate Transport’s Anne Lipp said if the company doesn’t meet its scheduled delivery timeslot, loads of fresh produce could be rejected.

“Any delay and cost to the transportation of goods effectively increases the price of the product for the customer, increasing the cost of living for everyone,” she said.

Ms Lipp said sections of the Bruce Highway were so narrow, there was no room for cars to overtake wide load trucks safely, and narrow bridges had dangerously little clearance room between vehicles travelling in opposite directions.

She said truck companies would hugely benefit from getting the green light to use higher productivity freight vehicles, which have more capacity than B-doubles and would ultimately reduce the number of trucks on the road.

“A standard 26m B-double can carry up to 34 pallets, usually 32 with mass limit compliance, while a higher productivity freight Quad Quad B-double vehicle can carry 42 pallets,” she said.

“For every three Quad Quad B-double combinations you could take a standard 26m B-double off the road.”

Sunshine Coast concreator Michael Jung said he travels on the Bruce Highway regularly for work and described it as “sh\*\*house” despite several recent improvements.

“Yeah it was absolutely sh\*\*house for ages, you could travel like 20kms down the road and it would take two hours or something,” Mr Jung said.

“I mean it’s good now that it’s got the three lanes but anytime you travel past Gympie you don’t go anywhere fast.”

Mr Jung also said that during job hours, he would try to avoid the Bruce Highway at all costs.

“If I’m travelling from Caloundra to Noosa Heads, yeah I’ll try and not get on the Highway, it’s just too hard sometimes,” he said.

Mr Tobin said all Bruce Highway issues could be fixed if the government came to the table.

“They need to get out and around to see how bad it is,” he said.

“We can fix this issue but it needs to be through structure, forward vision and putting money in the right place.”

Transport and Main Roads Minister Bart Mellish earlier this week conceded funding had been impacted by the federal infrastructure split decision which saw the state take on a 80:20 split instead of the previous 50:50.

Despite this, he said 57 per cent of the government’s \$32 billion infrastructure investment would be spent in regional areas, with \$18bn spent towards Rocky and Mackay ring road projects and the Gympie Bypass.

“This includes a record \$5.03 billion investment toward maintenance, preservation and operations,” he said.