

18 December 2020

Walkerston Bypass: Unsafe traffic bottleneck can be corrected by constructing underpass

CANEGROWERS Mackay CEO Kerry Latter said today that the Transport Minister, Mark Bailey, should accept the Deputy Prime Minister's request for more consideration of and a costing estimate for building an underpass on the Walkerston Bypass.

Mr Latter was speaking this morning after the Minister had told an ABC journalist the State Government would not hold up construction of the Walkerston Bypass to correct a serious safety issue which has been raised by cane growers. Heavy farm vehicles will have to use the planned Staggered T intersection to cross the Bypass during the busy crushing season.

In response Mr Latter said that the State Government had been filibustering on the issue for months and had apparently completely ignored recent interest in the underpass option by the Commonwealth Government to correct the issue.

He said it was ridiculous that the Minister had asserted DTMR had 'talked with' affected growers about the pros and cons of building an underpass when "everyone knows that the DTMR was reticent to discuss the option in full."

"This is despite the fact that an independent engineering report has squelched the DTMR's argument that an underpass would increase the risk of flooding in the area. In fact, an underpass fitted with proper drainage would markedly improve a wet weather situation by ensuring flood waters were properly channelled and managed," Mr Latter said.

"The Minister argues that building an underpass would hold up construction of the Walkerston Bypass for months. This is patently untrue. The engineering report showed that the underpass could be easily added to current plans without any significant hold up.

"When it comes to the safety issues raised by the growers, the Minister is adopting a 'nothing to see here' attitude which is simply breathtaking. This Department is clearly glossing over the safety risk which is the high level of heavy vehicle traffic which will use the intersection during the crushing season.

"At the busiest time of the year for the industry, the entire movement of industry transport in that district, including mill mud and dunder trucks from the mills, will travel through that bottleneck. At the same time, the road will be shared with fast moving tankers, freight transporters and general motor vehicles. It is an accident waiting to happen. Closing Stockroute Road and Hansen's Road will only intensify the situation.

"The Minister's patronising plea for drivers to simply 'drive carefully' is astonishing when the Minister must be acutely aware of the record rate of traffic accidents in this State. Here is an opportunity to correct a serious flaw in road design to improve motorists' safety and the efficient operation of a highway by physically separating traffic at the get-go, and the Minister ignores it, even ignoring an offer by the Commonwealth Government to consider paying for it.

"We ask the Minister to change his mind and offer motorists in the Mackay region a Christmas present they all deserve – the opportunity to safely use the Walkerston Bypass and enjoy many more happy Christmases in the future."

For more information contact: Kerry Latter, CANEGROWERS Mackay, on 0407 580 802.