

19 NOV 2007



**Warren Pitt MP**  
Member for Mulgrave



**Queensland  
Government**

Our ref: MC32596

Your ref: 816-07

**Minister for Main Roads and  
Local Government**

Mr Neil Laurie  
The Clerk of the Parliament  
Parliament House  
Cnr Alice and George Streets  
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petition No. 816-07, lodged with the Legislative Assembly by Mr Basil Streinikoff, on 10 October 2007 requesting that a road tunnel, rather than a four-lane road, be constructed on the Smithfield to Kuranda section of the Kennedy Highway (locally known as the Kuranda Range Road).

The Department of Main Roads has investigated the issues and advised the following. The tunnel option was carefully investigated and considered during the Transport Options Study and the Impact Assessment Study, before a decision was made not to pursue it any further.

Since 1998, Main Roads has undertaken extensive studies and community consultation on the Kuranda Range Upgrade project through the Integrated Transport Study for Kuranda Range. These planning activities:

- identified at least 18 options located in three different corridors between the coastal plain and the Kuranda - Speewah area. These included a variety of road and tunnel options.
- narrowed down the broad range of options to a four-lane surface road and a tunnel, generally between Smithfield and Kuranda.
- assessed the selected road and tunnel options in detail using a comprehensive set of environmental, economic and social criteria. This assessment included extensive community and stakeholder consultation.
- recommended that the road option be adopted. This recommendation was endorsed by State Cabinet in 2001.

The road option was found to be a better solution than the tunnel option for at least the following reasons.

- Both options are very expensive, but the tunnel option is at least three times the cost of the road option.
- The tunnel option has very high ongoing operational costs due to the need for complex and expensive mechanical ventilation and emergency response systems (for example, fire suppression, emergency evacuation tunnels, continuously manned control centre and emergency vehicles and backup electricity supply).

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- The design of the road option includes many features, which substantially reduce the environmental impacts of the road (for example, high-level bridges provide fauna connectivity, allowing native animals to move safely within their habitats). While the tunnel itself avoids severing the rainforest, the movement of hazardous goods still requires the existing road to remain open, because these are not allowed in the tunnel, meaning it would need to be maintained indefinitely.
- A huge amount of power would be needed to run the tunnel's ventilation system (approximately 11 gigawatt hours per annum or an average of about 1.25 Megawatts). This would be 2% of the outputs from the Barron Gorge power station or the equivalent of the power needed to run 750 homes.

While the road option will take years to design and construct, any tunnel option would involve a similar timeframe. For example:

- extensive geographical investigations would be required
- specialist machinery would need to be imported and assembled
- suitable sites would have to be found to dispose of the excavated material
- the bored tunnel would need to be structurally lined, and extensive lighting, fire fighting, ventilation and evacuation systems would need to be installed
- the approach roads, tunnel portals and control centre would need to be designed and constructed.

A tunnel would provide better protection against mud/rock slides and fallen trees during natural disasters such as cyclones. However, this advantage is not very significant when the following issues are taken into consideration.

- While the existing road is susceptible to mud/rock slides, the new four-lane road will include substantial slope stabilisation measures to address this issue. It will also feature removable barriers every kilometre. This means that traffic can be diverted onto the opposing carriageway should the need arise.
- Any mass evacuation will usually be commenced prior to strong winds arising. Hence, in most cases the issue of fallen trees should not arise until after the evacuation has occurred. In any case, and as demonstrated during Cyclone Larry in 2006, fallen trees can usually be removed relatively quickly from key transport routes.
- Following the tsunami alert earlier this year Cairns City Council produced the Cairns Tsunami Evacuation Guide. It specifies: "*Please note, there is no need to go to the Tablelands. In many cases, you only need to re-locate a few streets away*". The guide points out that the majority of the city is above the 6 metre contour, which is considered to be a safe level during tsunami and storm surge events.

Yours sincerely

Warren Pitt MP  
**Minister for Main Roads**