



Transport
for NSW



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Received by Liz Clark
Date: 25 / 2 / 21
Resolved to publish Yes / No

Ref: OTS20/02000

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Received by ANDREW RATCHFORD
Date: 26 / 02 / 21
Resolved to publish Yes / No

Dear Ministers

Re: Road access and safety

I refer to Minister Constance's letter of 27 February 2020, regarding establishing a 40m clearance zone around state managed highways. Transport for NSW (TfNSW) is committed to creating a more resilient transport network to improve evacuation capacity and support access for emergency services, as well as reducing the time taken to return the network to service following an emergency event.

The 2019/20 bushfires impacted 880 kilometres of the State's road network as well as the Main Western rail line. As part of the recovery, TfNSW sought to replace damaged infrastructure with more resilient infrastructure wherever possible. For example timber crib walls and timber safety barrier posts were replaced with steel, barriers were extended to account for slope exposed to runoff risk, thin walled HDPE culverts were replaced with fire resistant HDPE and vegetation was removed from culvert inlets and outlets during replacement. High risk trees were also removed in fire affected areas along the road and rail network, including trees damaged by fire that were assessed as at high risk of falling. This repair work has now been completed.

TfNSW has developed a three point plan that is consistent with the approach established by Resilience NSW and based on an understanding of the risks to the transport network. This plan is scalable based on funding available and will focus on key strategic transport corridors (rail and road).

1. Plan for a resilient network

To improve the network's resilience, TfNSW in consultation with local government and relevant agencies, will identify critical evacuation and transport corridors and specific sections for improvement. By addressing the weakest elements in each corridor, regardless of who manages them, the resilience of the whole corridor will be improved. This initial work is underway and will be completed by end July 2020.

As sections of the network are identified, the most appropriate treatment plan will be developed for that location to improve performance and resilience. This may include maintenance activities (for example, vegetation management), minor capital works (for example, High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) culvert or timber crib wall replacement), and

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major capital works (for example, shoulder widening, lay down areas for emergency vehicles, overtaking lines).

In preparation for the 20/21 bushfire season a program of vegetation clearance with a clear focus on improving time to clear and re-open strategic corridors will be implemented. Teams have been mobilised in the northern and southern regions to undertake this activity from July – September.

2. Invest in resilience improving maintenance and capital projects

TfNSW intends to initially direct \$30 million (Opex) over two years to enhanced road and rail maintenance, including clearance zone maintenance, minor capital works, fuel reduction and hazardous tree removal. This funding could be sourced from the potential stimulus package or from reprioritisation of existing resources.

There is also an opportunity to deliver new projects or accelerate current projects along key corridors to improve resilience. TfNSW will modify the existing investment prioritisation criteria for maintenance and capital improvement to create a positive bias for projects that improve the resilience of the road and rail network. Projects may include carriageway and shoulder widening on critical sections of key evacuation routes, renewal of vulnerable timber structures such as culverts and poles and timber bridge replacement and or protection on the road and rail network, improved track stability through upgraded drainage and runoff controls and renewal of signalling infrastructure in areas vulnerable to fire and flood events. This activity is scalable based on available funding.

3. Improved Operational Capacity

A review of the emergency management framework will be accelerated, to align and integrate response, recover and repair/restoration across all modes. Proposals to enhance coordination during an emergency, boost TfNSW's emergency response capacity and improve communication will improve our operational capacity to respond to future emergencies impacting the network.

TfNSW undertook a series of 'lessons learnt' workshops following the 19/20 bushfires and is currently in the process of finalised updated bushfire preparedness activities including Business Continuity Plans and localised exercises to ensure the TfNSW team is well position to respond in the event of any bushfires in 20/21.

In response to Minister Constance's specific request to establish a 40m clearance zone, TfNSW has limited power to establish a 40m clearance zone under the Roads Act 1993. TfNSW would consider that the above approach will substantially address the concerns outlined in the correspondence and seeks the ongoing support of both Ministers to deliver this program across the State.

This plan will be adjusted in response to the various inquiries and reviews being undertaken of the recent bushfire events. If you have any further questions, Carol-Anne Nelson, Deputy Secretary Regional and Outer Metropolitan Division, would be pleased to take your call on

Yours sincerely

Rodd Staples
Secretary

31/07/2020