

KIMBERLEY FLOODS — TRANSPORT LINKS

**7. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Transport:**

Before I ask this question, I would like to acknowledge the devastation of the floods across the Kimberley and the efforts of the agencies and volunteers to support those communities that were impacted.

I refer to the ongoing recovery response in the Kimberley, including the rebuilding of critical transport links. What is the time line and definitive date for the Fitzroy Crossing Bridge to be restored, and when will an alternative route be reopened for heavy transport for east–west haulage in the Kimberley?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

I thank the member for that question.

Of course, between Christmas and January we saw the devastating floods throughout the Kimberley. Anyone who has been up there can see the enormous impact that has had on our transport infrastructure. From the outset, I say a big congratulations and thank you to the workers up there who have been working day in, day out to re-establish the links across the Kimberley. I also want to acknowledge the member for Kimberley, who has tirelessly been with all the ministers who have been up there, in a sense, forming that connection with the local groups and understanding their local issues and how we can respond proactively to support them through this very, very tough time.

The plan that we set out has five parts. One was to re-establish the connection between Broome and Derby. Members will know that that link has been re-established. From Thursday to Sunday, Great Northern Highway was opened to allow vehicles to move between those two parts. That allowed families and businesspeople to reconnect or get their stranded assets; many cars were left behind. As a result, since yesterday, there have been convoys in the morning and the afternoon to support those connections. Again, those four days also gave the crews there a chance to take a breather after working every day. They are now back on site delivering those road improvements. We expect the two-way connections to be re-established over the next two weeks. Again, that is an incredible effort. Of course, it is the wet season. We never normally build roads during the wet season because it is very tricky to build them during the wet season. We are trying to re-establish links in a wet season after massive devastation. It is an enormous challenge.

The next part includes the barge. That process is underway. As I recall, the embankment on the west side has been finished and work on the embankment on the east side is underway. We will be trialling those barges this week and, hopefully, we will get it established next week, if all weather conditions support our efforts.

The next part is the low-level crossing. We want to establish that crossing before the dry season, through May and June, to allow for vehicles, and road trains in particular, to be able to cross that river. Again, that will depend on our ability to make those tracks and establish the causeway. The river levels are a lot higher than we had anticipated at this point in time, but we will continue to work. Again, we hope and believe that we will have that established before the dry season, plus the barge. We want to have both systems operating. That will give people the ability to have a choice. If, for example, the low-level crossing is washed away, we will have the barge in place. We want those two systems operating.

A fourth key component, of course, is to rebuild the Fitzroy Crossing Bridge. I think everyone has seen the vision of the piers that were washed away. Those piers were sunk about 14 metres into the sand. Just imagine the volume of water required to actually wash away piers that were sunk 14 metres. That is a significant dredge for a port. The volume of water was absolutely incredible. We have teams out there currently assessing and surveying the water depth and looking at whether we can find some bedrock to put the piers in. We have gone into a very fast-tracked tender process. That tender process finishes on 17 February, and we hope within the next week to announce the successful tenderer. We will establish an alliance contract with the state government and work with local Aboriginal communities to make sure that we have a project on which the contractor, the government and local communities can work together to deliver what will be a significant project. As I recall, the original width at the crossing was 160 metres; it has now increased to 240 metres because of the sand that has been washed away. We hope to be able to announce that next week. Of course, we will be working with the successful contractor to deliver that as soon as possible.

Another point I will outline—the fifth point—is that we have supported extra flight services between Broome and Derby. We are also looking at what we can do to support Kununurra over the medium term and we are looking at expanding our ability to move barges across the north west. Another thing that this natural disaster has brought home is the ability to swap between modes and support shipping, and domestic shipping, as an alternative to bring in volume product. We need to make sure that our ports are ready and able to support that. That is what we are doing.

Again, a huge thanks to the Main Roads team, which is working very well with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. I again acknowledge the Minister for Emergency Services and the teams. Across the entire government there are people who have been working on the ground tirelessly day in, day out in very tough conditions. I very much thank all those people out there doing that work. As a minister, I am proud that people are just getting on

with it and making sure that they can reconnect the Kimberley and support local communities, and we will assist freight movements in the future.