



Economic & Public Policy

Ipswich Motorway

Introduction

The Ipswich Motorway is a vital link between Brisbane and Ipswich. It connects Ipswich and Granard Roads at Rocklea to the Warrego and Cunningham Highways and Brisbane Road at Dinmore.

For many years, it formed part of the National Highway System (NHS), which was a Commonwealth Government funding responsibility. Since the release of the Commonwealth's *AusLink* land transport policy in June 2004, the Ipswich Motorway has been part of a broader National Network. The *AusLink* policy decreed that the states must share costs of the National Network, particularly in urban areas.

The Ipswich Motorway is one of Queensland's most congested roads, with stop-start conditions during morning and afternoon peak periods. It also has one of the highest vehicle accident rates in Queensland. Yet, the upgrading of this hopelessly inadequate and dangerous road has been subjected to extraordinary delays because of political bickering and dithering.

This document summarises the history of recent proposals to upgrade the Ipswich Motorway, analyses Commonwealth and State Government policies regarding the road, and outlines RACQ's position.

Background

The Ipswich Motorway upgrade project has been dogged by delays, conflict between governments, and political manoeuvring. In the meantime, road trauma and congestion continue to worsen on this very sub-standard stretch of the National Network. The following brief chronology highlights key events in this sad, sorry saga.

❖ 1997

The *Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland*, which was released in 1997, proposed commencement in 1997-98 of a major investigation in respect of an Ipswich Motorway upgrade.

❖ June 2000

The Commonwealth Government authorised the Queensland Government to undertake a major Ipswich Motorway upgrade planning study to investigate the long-term needs of road-users and the community and develop a concept plan.

Midway through this study, the Commonwealth Government requested consideration be given to an alternative northern corridor to by-pass the western end of the Ipswich Motorway.

❖ February – August 2002

The Queensland Government's preliminary and then preferred concept plans for a full-length, 6-lane upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway were publicly displayed for comment.

Main Roads carried out preliminary traffic modelling of a number of possible options for an alternative northern corridor. An "indicative cost range" of \$300 million to \$550 million was suggested. Results were discussed with officers of Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS).

❖ Early 2003

The planning study report was submitted to the Commonwealth Government for approval and funding of a \$684 million full-length, six-lane re-construction of the Ipswich Motorway.

The Commonwealth Transport Minister requested further analysis of a possible northern corridor linking the Warrego and Cunningham Highways at Dinmore with the Ipswich and Logan Motorways at Gables. This road, which would by-pass about 42 per cent (8km out of 19km) of the Ipswich Motorway at the western end, later became known as the Northern By-Pass.

Subsequently, there was heated political and public debate regarding the relative merits of the full-length, six-lane upgrade and the Northern By-Pass. The Queensland Government favoured the full-length, six-lane upgrade. The federal Liberal member for Blair, Cameron Thompson, championed the Northern By-Pass.

❖ April 2004

Commonwealth Roads Minister, Ian Campbell, said he was keeping an open mind on the full-length, six-lane upgrade and the Northern By-Pass options, pending completion of the requested Queensland Government study of the latter.

Senator Campbell proposed a Western By-Pass of Brisbane, linking the Ipswich Motorway and the Bruce Highway. He said that it made no sense that all through-traffic from the south-west of Brisbane had to go due east from Ipswich for half an hour to the Gateway Motorway before heading north again. Senator Campbell also proposed that the Commonwealth take control of the Logan Motorway from

the Queensland Government, remove the tolls, and make the road part of the National Highway System.

Implementation of these proposals would have taken pressure off the Ipswich Motorway. Also, it would have increased the longevity of the full-length six-lane upgrade or complemented the Northern By-Pass alternative.

❖ May 2004

The Northern By-Pass became the Commonwealth Government's preferred option, even though the Queensland Government had not commenced further analysis of the Northern By-Pass requested early in 2003. The Commonwealth would not commit to an upgrading of the eastern 58 per cent of the Ipswich Motorway, which would not be duplicated by the Northern By-Pass.

The federal Labor opposition promised to fund the full-length, six-lane upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway if it won the October 2004 election.

❖ June 2004

The Commonwealth Government announced *AusLink* land transport policy funding of \$627 million for the 42 per cent Northern By-Pass of the Ipswich Motorway, Brisbane Urban Corridor (BUC), and Gateway Arterial, including \$60 million for the Mains and Kessels Roads intersections on the BUC, \$52.7 million for safety works on the Ipswich Motorway, and \$160 million for the Logan Motorway/Ipswich Motorway interchange.

The allocation is not large enough to complete the two major intersections cited and the Northern By-Pass, leaving nothing for the eastern 58 per cent of the Ipswich Motorway, the remainder of the BUC and the Gateway Arterial. Also, 73 per cent of the allocation will not be available until 2007-08 and 2008-09.

The *AusLink White Paper* and accompanying funding package made no reference to Senator Campbell's earlier proposals to provide a Western By-Pass and remove tolls from the Logan Motorway. However, the document nominated the Logan Motorway and the southern extension of the Gateway Motorway, along with the Northern By-Pass, as possible future National Network routes.

Senator Campbell subsequently announced the Commonwealth would fund a trial removal of tolls for heavy vehicles on the Logan Motorway and the southern extension of the Gateway Motorway at night.

❖ July 2004

The Moggill Community Association released an analysis of the Northern By-Pass and Ipswich Motorway upgrade alternatives by Dr Ian Cameron, a respected engineer. Dr Cameron summarised his findings as follows:

“Summarising, the Northern By-Pass has apparently been hurriedly conceived by someone who has little knowledge of the terrain, flooding in the Brisbane River or the requirements for traffic movements. Taking into account the

considerable length of viaduct, two crossings of the Brisbane River, both at the apexes of 180 degree bends in the river, and the complex interchanges at both ends of the by-pass, the cost of the proposed Northern By-Pass at something like \$500 million will be very high compared with the cost of about \$300 million for the relatively simple task of widening the Ipswich Motorway between Dinmore and the Logan Tollway interchange. Although any accurate estimate of the cost of the Northern By-Pass will depend on the development of detailed structure designs and the interchanges at both ends of the by-pass, it can be safely said at this stage that it will be high enough to preclude serious consideration of the by-pass as an alternative route.”

❖ June-September 2004

The heated debate between the federal Liberal member for Blair, Cameron Thompson, and the Queensland Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Paul Lucas, intensified.

Mr Thompson claimed the Ipswich Motorway 6-lane upgrading would take seven years to build, traffic volumes would outstrip capacity of by the time of its completion, and traffic flows would be severely disrupted during construction.

Mr Lucas disputed these claims.

Mr Lucas claimed that two years of detailed planning costing \$13 million would enable the project to be completed in five years. He argued the 6-lane upgrade would be adequate until 2021, pointing out that the upgrade plan included service roads to reduce use of the Motorway by local traffic. Mr Lucas also claimed that construction of service roads first would facilitate management of traffic flows during re-construction of the motorway. He referred to the successful management of traffic flows during re-construction of the Pacific Motorway.

Mr Lucas pointed out that no planning had been done for the alternative partial Northern By-Pass. Until a feasibility study was undertaken, the feasibility, costs and construction time would not be known. Also, complex environmental, engineering and flood-plain issues would make planning and construction very long and very expensive processes.

❖ September 2004

Commonwealth Roads Minister, Jim Lloyd, advised that the Commonwealth Government would re-consider upgrading the Ipswich Motorway, if the Northern By-Pass feasibility study yielded a negative result. He said the Commonwealth would fund the former, if it was the only viable option.

❖ October 2004

The Coalition was re-elected to government federally.

The Queensland Government released a *Draft South-East Queensland Regional Plan* for public comment. One of the strategic thrusts of the draft plan is to divert

a substantial amount of population and job growth from local government areas north and south of Brisbane into Brisbane and a “western corridor” around Ipswich. The draft plan proposed, among other things:

- priority be given to planning transport networks in the western corridor;
- completion of an orbital road system in Brisbane to complement a network of north-south and east-west arterial connections; and
- a Western By-Pass.¹

The final version of the regional plan is to be completed in mid-2005 is to be supported by a *South-East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program* to be released around the same time.

❖ November 2004

The Queensland Government’s released its *Roads Implementation Program 2004-05 to 2008-09* (RIP) on 15 November 2004. It included an allocation of \$5 million for traffic studies, to facilitate planning for network improvements, including a Western By-Pass, in the western Brisbane metropolitan area.

The RIP document indicated Queensland Main Roads is working with DoTARS on planning for a Western By-Pass.²

Current Government Policy

The Queensland Government wants a full-length, six-lane re-construction of the Ipswich Motorway.

Nevertheless, immediately after the federal election, Mr Lucas sought and gained Commonwealth approval of terms of reference for an independent feasibility study into a partial Northern By-Pass of the Ipswich Motorway, with an interim report to be ready by the end of February 2005 and a final report by April 2005. Mr Lucas said that although this was not the Queensland Government’s preferred option, it would assist fully with the study. Maunsell Australia commenced work on the Northern By-Pass feasibility study in early December 2004.

On 9 November 2004, Queensland Transport & Main Roads Minister, Paul Lucas, announced an 18-month \$2 million planning study to develop a new connection road between the Warrego and Cunningham Highways at Dinmore. He said this link could be included in planning for the Northern By-Pass if the latter was found to be feasible.

The Commonwealth Government’s preferred position is fund a Northern By-Pass, rather than a full-length, six lane upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway.

The Commonwealth’s *AusLink* land transport policy includes, among other things, the following messages pertinent to the Ipswich Motorway funding issue.

¹ Queensland Government, *Draft South-East Queensland Regional Plan*, Brisbane: Office of Urban Management, October, 2004, pp.59-60.

² Queensland Government, *Roads Implementation Program 2004-05 to 2008-09*, Brisbane: Department of Main Roads, November 2004, p. 6.

- The states are expected to share National Network costs, particularly in urban areas;
- Urban congestion is not the Commonwealth's problem, except to the extent congestion affects the National Network;
- Funding by the Commonwealth will be conditional on other governments keeping large volumes of local traffic off the National Network;
- The Logan Motorway and southern extension of the Gateway Motorway are possible future National Network routes.

These principles seem to be incompatible with 100 per cent Commonwealth funding of either the full Ipswich Motorway upgrade in the event the Northern By-Pass is shown to be uneconomic, or the eastern 58 per cent of the Ipswich Motorway if the Northern By-Pass is economically viable. However, the commonwealth's position will remain unclear until after the Northern By-Pass feasibility study has been completed and considered.

RACQ Analysis

The Commonwealth Government's avoidance of provision of a high quality road link between Brisbane and Ipswich has meant the current motorway's serious congestion and road trauma problems continue to worsen. Also, it is still not clear what the Commonwealth will fund and when, apart from some urgent Ipswich Motorway safety works, the Logan Motorway interchange, and a feasibility study of the 42 per cent Northern By-Pass.

Commonwealth approval to proceed with the Ipswich Motorway upgrade study was obtained three years after the *Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South-East Queensland* recommended it commence. Commonwealth insistence on investigation of the Northern By-Pass, political bickering between the state and federal governments, and the Queensland Government's failure to comply with the request for about 18 months have set back commencement of work on upgrading the Brisbane-Ipswich road link by a further two years.

If the feasibility study of the Northern By-Pass is positive, it is expected that an additional two years will be required to secure the corridor, prepare an environmental impact statement, and finalise detailed design, planning and other pre-construction activities. The aggregate delay would then be seven years.

If the Northern By-Pass feasibility study demonstrates the northern corridor is not economically viable, the total delay would be five years, provided that the Commonwealth immediately approves commencement of construction of the full-length, six-lane Ipswich Motorway upgrade project. But, the Commonwealth has promised only to re-consider this project, not fund it. So, the aggregate delay could be significantly more than five years.

In the meantime, carnage and congestion continue to worsen on the dangerous, hopelessly inadequate Ipswich Motorway.

The advantages of the Northern By-Pass proposal include avoidance of disruption of Ipswich Motorway traffic during construction, the benefits of dual corridors, a cross-river link, and the addition of two extra lanes each way to the west of the Logan Motorway interchange, making a total of four lanes each way, instead of three each way.

The disadvantages of the Northern By-Pass are severe. There is no complementary plan to cater for the 80 per cent of Ipswich Motorway traffic to and from Ipswich, Warrego and Cunningham Highways that uses some or all of the Ipswich Motorway east of the Logan Motorway interchange. The estimated time required to plan and build the Northern By-Pass (42 per cent of the distance between Ipswich and Brisbane) is expected to be about the same as the time required to complete the full-length, six-lane, Ipswich Motorway upgrade project. Preliminary estimates of the cost of the Northern By-Pass (duplicating 8 of 19km) range from 73 to 100 per cent of the estimated cost of the full-length, six-lane upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway.

If the Northern By-Pass *can* be shown to be economically feasible, the Commonwealth can be expected to approve and fund it. In that event, pertinent elements of the *AusLink* land transport policy (see previous section) cast doubt on full Commonwealth funding of a six-lane upgrade of the eastern 58 per cent of the Ipswich Motorway not duplicated by the by-pass.

Notwithstanding political disagreements regarding corridor selection west of the Logan Motorway interchange, there is no practical impediment to proceeding with reconstruction of the eastern section (about 58 per cent of the length) of the Ipswich Motorway. Yet, the Commonwealth has refused to approve and fund that work. The Commonwealth's avoidance of approval of and funding for this section since early 2003 reinforces the *AusLink* policy inference that the Commonwealth wants to walk away from its responsibility to fully fund reconstruction of that urban segment of the National Network (formerly National Highway).

If the Northern By-Pass is *not* economically viable, it is unclear what the Commonwealth will do. Prior to the election, Commonwealth Roads Minister, Jim Lloyd, said his government would *re-consider* upgrading the Ipswich Motorway and funding it, *if it was the only viable option*. That is certainly not a commitment to fund a full-length, six-lane upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway or to any particular timetable. It gives the Commonwealth considerable room to manoeuvre to avoid this option.

Moreover, the *AusLink* policy (see previous section) casts considerable, additional doubt on 100 per cent Commonwealth funding for a full-length, six-lane upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway.

Further doubt arises from the Commonwealth's continuing neglect of the Brisbane Urban Corridor (BUC) or Griffith Arterial (Granard, Riawena, Kessels and Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Roads), connecting the Ipswich Motorway with the Gateway and Pacific Motorway components of the National Network. The BUC is another poor quality segment of the National Network neglected far too long by the Commonwealth Government. This neglect is consistent with the Commonwealth's prolonged avoidance of any commitment to either the full-length or eastern segment upgrades of the Ipswich Motorway.

The Commonwealth Government should not be allowed to avoid responsibility for providing safe, high quality links between Ipswich and Brisbane and between other National Network roads in the area: the Cunningham and Warrego Highways, the Pacific Motorway, the Gateway Motorway and the Bruce Highway. Such links are vitally important from national and regional economic perspectives and for road safety.

Similarly, the Commonwealth should not be allowed to wash its hands of serious urban congestion, such as that plaguing the Ipswich Motorway, because it is a national problem requiring a strong national response.

Congestion chokes growth of economic activity in affected urban areas as well as traffic. For example, the Ipswich City Council has expressed serious concerns about adverse effects of Ipswich Motorway congestion on growth of the city's economy. Urban areas, particularly metropolitan areas, such as Brisbane-Ipswich, are major engines of economic activity and growth in the Australian economy. Therefore, congestion is a problem of national economic importance.

In addition, the Commonwealth controls the major tax bases, but state and local governments have a disproportionately large share of expenditure responsibilities (Australia's federal system is afflicted by vertical intergovernmental fiscal imbalance). Commonwealth transfers to fund vital infrastructure, like a re-constructed Ipswich Motorway, help to compensate for this vertical fiscal imbalance.

Senator Campbell's proposal in April 2004 to build a Western By-Pass linking the Ipswich Motorway and Bruce Highway, to completely remove tolls from Logan Motorway and southern Gateway Motorway extension, and to include all of these roads in the National Network was a sensible, visionary plan. It is disappointing that this scheme was not included in the *AusLink* White Paper released in June 2004.

Implementation of this scheme would take considerable pressure off the Ipswich Motorway and prolong the useful life of the full-length, six-lane upgrade proposed by the Queensland Government. The Western By-Pass would divert traffic from the Ipswich Motorway, Centenary Highway, Western Freeway, BUC and Gateway Motorway, and provide a more direct link between Ipswich, western Brisbane and the Bruce highway. Removal of tolls from the Logan Motorway and southern extension of the Gateway Motorway would divert additional traffic from the Ipswich Motorway and BUC. The proposal could be made even more effective by removing tolls from the Gateway Bridge.

The Queensland Government sensibly proposed a Western By-Pass in the *Draft South-East Queensland Regional Plan* released in October 2004. In November 2004, the Queensland Government backed this up with an allocation of \$5 million to commence pertinent traffic studies and advice of co-operation between Queensland Main Roads and the relevant Commonwealth department, DoTARS, on planning for a Western By-Pass.

It is disappointing that former Commonwealth Roads Minister Senator Campbell's proposal to take over the Logan Motorway and southern extension of the Gateway

Motorway, include these roads in the National Network, and remove the tolls, resulted in a dispute with the Queensland Transport and Main Roads Minister regarding compensation and priorities, rather than co-operative action. However, a very tentative positive step forward has been taken with agreement between Ministers to trial removal of tolls for heavy vehicles for 12 months from 28 February 2005.

While the Queensland Government has justifiably pushed the Commonwealth Government hard on the importance of urgently upgrading the full Ipswich-Brisbane road link, the State Government itself has neglected overdue complementary improvements to the arterial road system in Brisbane's south-western and southern suburbs. For example, nothing has been done or planned to improve the Ipswich Road and Centenary Highway/Western Freeway/Moggill Road/Milton Road links to the central business district.

The proposal in the *Draft South-East Queensland Regional Plan* to divert substantial population and job growth into a "western corridor" around Ipswich will place increased pressure on Ipswich Motorway and links between that road and the Brisbane central business district. Fortunately, the draft plan recognised the importance of planning transport networks in the south-western corridor, completion of an orbital road system in Brisbane to complement a network of north-south and east-west arterial connections, and provision of a Western By-Pass. It remains to be seen how well this is translated into the *South-East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program* to be released in mid-2005.

RACQ Position

The RACQ believes the Commonwealth Government should fully fund a high standard, minimum six-lane link between Ipswich and Brisbane. The timing of funding should allow completion of the project within five years.

The upgrade could involve six-laning of the road along the existing corridor for its full length as proposed by the Queensland Government. Alternatively, the upgrade could include provision of a Northern By-Pass between the Warrego and Cunningham Highways and the Logan Motorway as proposed by the Commonwealth Government, plus six-laning of the Ipswich Motorway along the existing corridor between the Logan Motorway and Granard Road (BUC).

Provision of a partial Northern By-Pass only, without fixing the remaining two-thirds of the Ipswich Motorway, as proposed by the Commonwealth, is unacceptable.

In addition, the RACQ believes that the Commonwealth Government should acquire the Logan Motorway, Gateway Bridge and Gateway Motorway southern extension from the Queensland Government, remove the tolls, and include the facilities in the National Network. Consistent with this, the Commonwealth should commit to fully funding an upgrading of the Gateway Motorway, including duplication of the Gateway Bridge, without any attaching toll. Construction should commence within the next five years.

The Commonwealth should also fully fund urgent planning for, and construction of a Western By-Pass of Brisbane linking the Logan and Ipswich Motorways between Brisbane and Ipswich with the Bruce Highway and Gateway Motorway north of Brisbane.

This roads package will provide Brisbane with a toll-free outer ring-road system that is part of the National Network and links with other key parts of the National Network in south-east Queensland: Bruce Highway, Pacific Motorway, and Warrego and Cunningham Highways via an upgraded Ipswich Motorway. The package would be a very important component of an effective anti-congestion strategy for the Brisbane-Ipswich metropolitan area.

Funds payable to Queensland for acquisition of Logan and Gateway Motorway/Bridge facilities should be earmarked for implementation of further measures to tackle serious and worsening congestion problems in the Brisbane-Ipswich metropolitan area. These measures should include fuel tax cuts to make room for congestion charges, as well as funding of infrastructure. Funding would be allocated in accordance with a plan formulated jointly by relevant local governments, Queensland Government, the Commonwealth Government and the RACQ.

Further Reading

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