



Band-aid measure to improve Bindi Bindi bends

FOLLOWING representations from Agricultural Region MLCs Brian Ellis and Jim Chown on behalf of the local community and road users, the State Government is providing \$1 million in urgent improvement works on the section of Great Northern Highway (GNH) known as the Bindi Bindi bends.

The Fix Great Northern Highway action group has labelled the funding a “band-aid solution”. Peta Thorniley from the group said the \$1 million is only a token gesture.

“The Department of Main Roads has indicated that at least \$40 million would be required for the realignment project necessary to make this road safe for motorists and the heavy haulage vehicles who use this road to service the mining industry in WA’s north,” she said.

“The shoulder repairs would do nothing to address the narrowness of the sealed road, the sharpness of the bends or the near blind corners that drivers need to deal with while sharing the road with oversized heavy haulage vehicles.

“In some respects the current shoulder works being undertaken have made driving conditions dangerous for other reasons.

“As I drove through there myself last night, I passed three road trains while coming through the bends and as they came around a bend some of their wheels came off the road and I was left going through a sharp bend with almost no visibility as they created a thick dust cloud behind them.

“So although the \$1 million is welcomed, it by no means addresses the level of improvements that are required for the road to be made safe.”

To make matters worse, it has been reported that federal Transport Minister Anthony Albanese has handed out over \$1 billion of funding for road upgrade projects in nearly every state but WA.

The group has questioned the state government’s belief that the section of road is in urgent need of funding after a letter from Mr Albanese also revealed that when road improvement funding was being allocated for the period up to 2014 the Bindi Bindi bends area was not on the state’s list of priorities.

Transport Minister Troy Buswell last week acknowledged that this section of the highway was substandard and contained a dangerous mix of a narrow and deteriorating pavement and winding bends and has added

that they will continue to press the federal government to fund the upgrade.

“Great Northern Highway is part of the national highway network which is largely a federal funding responsibility and the ultimate solution will involve an upgrade and realignment of this section of GNH,” Mr Buswell said.

“However, the federal government has indicated that funding could not be considered until the Nation Building Program two commences in 2014-15.

“Mr Ellis and Mr Chown have made it clear to me that this work on the Bindi Bindi bends is urgently required, so I am pleased the state is able to make a significant contribution to addressing these safety issues.

“Of course we will continue to press the federal government on the need to commit to this important project on what is one of the nation’s most strategic road transport routes.”

Mr Ellis, whose family farms at Bindi Bindi, has welcomed the news as he knows only too well the dangers of that section of road, but condemned the federal government for failing to include the realignment works in its budget.

“The road badly needs realignment and has been on the books for federal funding since I was deputy shire president more than a decade ago,” Mr Ellis said.

“It is a disgrace that the Gillard government has put regional lives at risk by turning its back on this work, and I am delighted and relieved that the WA Minister for Transport has recognised the immediate danger and committed interim maintenance funds.”

Mr Ellis said he understands that the road winds along parallel to the railway line because the original landowner declined to grant permission for alignment along a straighter course.

“Whilst the original decision may have seemed reasonable many years ago, road traffic and, particularly heavy truck traffic, has increased dramatically and it is time for urgent action,” Mr Ellis said.

“Realignment would make it more functional in its role as a national highway which also accommodates trucks servicing mining areas to the north.”

Mr Ellis said he also welcomed a commitment by the WA Transport Minister to continue to press the federal government over the urgent need to fund the project.