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Bridge fix inquiry

SINGLE-lane operation of the Kennedy Highway bridge across the Barron River at Kuranda will remain in place for the next six months while 1000 welds are individually checked and a multi-million-dollar investigation gets under way.

In February 2020 the Department of Transport and Main Roads imposed a load limit of 50.5 tonnes and since November last year commuters have been reduced to a crawl by traffic lights regulating vehicle movements.

An engineers' report completed in February is sitting with Transport Minister Mark Bailey, however, the department has been selective in the release of details contained in the report.

Transport and Main Roads North Queensland regional director Sanjay Ram said the new investigation would assess the best long-term solution to provide a safe, reliable crossing of the Barron River.

"We apologise for the ongoing inconvenience of those delays around the bridge but the safety of all road users is the absolute priority that guides our decisions on these matters," he said.

While the maintenance is under way, the state will start a \$2.1m investigation into solutions for either replacing or rehabilitating the bridge, which was built in 1963.

TMR said ongoing restrictions were required to ensure the safety of workers underneath the bridge and to safely manage the structure during the investigation stage.

Despite evidence of steel "fatigue" in the 58-year-old bridge, Mr Ram assured motorists the crossing was safe for vehicles under 50.5 tonnes.

"In late October 2020, routine inspections identified fatigue in some steel elements," he said.

"These issues have been caused by the accumulated impacts of heavy vehicles crossing the river over many years.

"Heavy vehicles are now much heavier than they were in the early 1960s, when the bridge was designed and built.

"Wear and tear like we've picked up is not unusual in steel bridges of this age and can be managed.

"Our bridge inspectors are continuing bridge investigations to make repairs."

Mr Ram said to date 300 of the 1000 bridge welds had already been inspected.

"Around half of those (have been) identified for repair," he said.

"We'd prefer we didn't have to reduce traffic over the bridge but that's not an option based on the work we need to complete, so we thank the community and the motorists who drive through this area for their patience as we continue these repairs."

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