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ROADS CRITICAL TO INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

Resilient and efficient roads are critical to increased productivity, especially in a previously remote underdeveloped tropical frontier regional economy such as ours.

The critical role road development has played in the economic development of the Cairns/ Tropical (Far) North Region over the past fifty years is obvious.

The final sealing of the last unsealed section of the Bruce Highway in the early 1970s between Sarina and Marlborough, its progressive upgrading and flood proofing has enabled the Cairns Region to develop whole new sections in its economy in road-borne tourism, but especially the progressive development of the now \$1 billion a year horticultural sector.

The region always could grow a whole range of tropical and off-season fruits and vegetable crops more efficiently and at lower costs than down south, but before the roads were improved and more efficient road freight vehicles developed, very high transport costs and slow delivery to major markets in the south were a killer.

More recently, the sealing taking place into the Peninsula has underpinned the development of a whole new agricultural district in the Lakeland area where value of production recorded by farmers is now topping \$100 million a year.

Beef road sealing in the Gulf has enabled that area to broaden its economy, especially in tourism and fisheries development and enhanced prospects of serious agricultural development.

But not only are improved sealed roads needed for the region's productivity and development, maintenance of existing roads is vital to avoid costly impositions on the region's industries and people. The fact the Kuranda Range and Cook Highway were effectively down to one-lane traffic for so long following the Cyclone Jasper flooding in December 2023 is unacceptable. These are two major arterial roads and the constant delays have imposed costs on the economy, apart from the cost to the government budget of traffic control personnel at choke points.

A similar event in 2011 saw the Warrego Highway over the range at Toowoomba (that at that time was four lanes) closed and restricted as repairs took place. It was fully restored to four lanes in eight months. While the two-lane Kuranda Range Road from Cairns to Mareeba has been down to one lane for well over two years, the equivalent major route over the Toowoomba Range now stands at eight lanes – four on the old road and four on the new bypass road.