



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

BERRIMAH ROAD DUPLICATION

TUESDAY 29 JULY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

I thank the Member for Fong Lim for raising concerns on behalf of the petitioners.

Petition No 14 – Immediate Resurfacing of the Entire Length of Boulter Road, Berrimah

The DEPUTY CLERK: Honourable members, a response to Petition Number 14 has been received from the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure. It has been forwarded to the member for distribution to the petitioners.

Thank you for your letter dated 22 May 2025 providing the terms of Petition Number 14, presented in the Legislative Assembly regarding the resurfacing of Boulter Road.

Boulter Road is identified as a strategic link in the Berrimah North Area Plan, established by the Northern Territory Planning Commission. As the area develops it will require future upgrades to accommodate increasing traffic volumes. Upgrading Boulter Road will require detailed planning, design and dedicated capital funding.

Boulter Road is under the care and control of the City of Darwin. Boulter Road was originally constructed as a rural profile road. As such, it lacks footpaths due to the presence of open, unlined drains along the verges. Boulter Road's surface is currently in poor condition, with extensive patching, cracking and recurring potholes during the Wet Season. I am informed that the City of Darwin installed streetlighting to improve the safety of Boulter Road.

Potential resurfacing via a reseal is an appropriate interim treatment to seal cracks and minimise pothole formation during the Wet Season. I am advised that an order of cost estimate to complete resealing of the full length of Boulter Road is approximately \$250,000.

The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure is upgrading the Amy Johnson Avenue and Boulter Road intersection to improve road safety, meet increased traffic demands and improve streetlighting. Amy Johnson Avenue is a government-managed road. The primary objective of the project is to provide a 3.5-metre-wide auxiliary left turn lane from Amy Johnson Avenue onto Boulter Road to improve safety for road users. Construction works are expected to commence in August 2025 and be completed within the current Dry Season.

I will provide notification of this petition and my response to the City of Darwin and continue discussions with the City of Darwin on these priority upgrades to be considered in future funding arrangements.

MOTION

Note Petition No 10 – Opposing the Berrimah Road Duplication Project

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the petition be noted.

This petition regarding the Berrimah Road duplication project is now, in fact, a settled matter. The Treasurer has, as part of his reprioritisation of infrastructure projects, recognised that this matter is not a priority. Notwithstanding, it is worth discussing, particularly in the context of what is infrastructure of necessity, because this initiative is indicative of the lack of a cohesive approach to decisions that were made on infrastructure by the preceding government over a long period. This is why we are dealing with the legacy of ill-conceived ventures such as this.

Without delving too deeply into it, I begin by drawing upon the impact statement regarding the proposed duplication because I think it speaks volumes. With the permission of the Principal of Haileybury Rendall School, Mr Andrew McGregor, I will draw out a couple of key points that were made regarding this project.

These community advocates, representatives of the school community, asked the Northern Territory Government to seriously reconsider this development and see it cancelled or, at the least, suspended for a time so that the school and surrounding businesses could be provided certainty regarding whether to move forward with a range of things. The impact of the proposed duplication would have been devastating to the school environment, businesses and 4,000 community members in that area. They had seen plans that suggested that a strip of varying widths, between five and 10 metres, running almost 800 metres along that property would be taken out on the edge of Berrimah Road.

There were a number of areas of concern as to why this might be a problem. They are worth recognising in their own right in order to understand why this was ever on the books. Firstly, there was the strategic planning impact of this initiative. The school and its board had considered that no serious consideration had been

given to the drastic impact of the proposal and that, equally, no form of amelioration or proper compensation had been considered, which is astonishing. Apart from other serious concerns due to the risk of the project, the board had to freeze all its capital expenditure until all aspects of the duplication matter were resolved, which is a significant thing for it to have to do.

Secondly, the board was concerned about the environmental impact, which was significant. Those of you who know Berrimah Road will know that there is an avenue of big old trees, and 70 to 80 mature trees and bushes would have to be removed from the property with no opportunity to preserve that land or to replace those trees. That barrier of trees not only was aesthetically pleasing and environmentally friendly but also reduced the impact of air and noise pollution to 1,300 staff and students who are on the campus. The health risks attendant with that was a whole different set of concerns. Increased air pollution would have come with increased truck traffic in that area if you essentially doubled the width of that road.

On the infrastructure impact itself, what was the infrastructure case for it and why were we doing this? It is difficult to know. Again, the extensive loss of land could have been in the order of 5,000 square metres. As well as destroying vegetation, that encroachment would have decimated the parking and traffic flow arrangements on the site; eight to 10 buses would have come off the site every day, twice a day; as well as 100 lost car parks for which there was no strategy to replace.

The traffic and flow disruption in drop-offs and school pickups would mean the entire facility would pretty much have to be redesigned. The cost would have run into the millions.

Again, what regard was given to safety concerns? There have already been vehicle crashes through the fence on that property close to where students play and where families and staff walk, and there was real fear that increased traffic flow in that area would lead to further accidents that would affect the community. Numerous students in that space also cycle to and from school, and there was no provision for what was to be done if they lost the external footpath leading to the school.

The impact on teaching and learning, of course, would have been significant as well. The traffic on Berrimah Road is already noisy and affects conversations and hearing on that side of the school. If you brought the road any closer to the classrooms and removed the natural barrier of the trees, you would see a great increase in noise pollution which, frankly speaking, the school was right in suggesting would affect its core business of teaching and learning.

There was a significant case to be made also for the genuine disruption and threat to the school's business model. I remind you what a significant and important school Haileybury Rendall School is in terms of a high-performance private school. We do not have a tonne of them, and this is an extremely well-performing one. We are looking at essentially knocking out its ovals, car parks, trees and business model—for what? Seriously, for what? That is my question to the Assembly.

The financial impact is not insignificant either. Haileybury Rendall School alone, as a stakeholder in that space, spent tens of thousands of dollars planning how to deal with the potential duplication occurring. That included legal fees, the cost of traffic engineers and future design costs. There was never any indication, from the time I have been involved with this, that there would be any compensation for these expenses or that compensation had even been clearly countenanced or calculated.

Then you have the loss of trees, roads, the car park and roadways that need to be replaced and all the new internal roads and infrastructure that would be needed. There was also extensive loss of land. The estimate was that compensation required would run into several millions of dollars in order to simply go ahead with the project.

The reason I raised this, given it is a settled matter, is that it is a fair question to ask how on Earth this initiative ever got to this stage. How is it the case that anybody thought it was a good idea in the last government to do this duplication? Quite seriously, I am still dissatisfied with the answers I had to that question. Part of the reason I entertained debating this is that I welcome contribution from a member of the former government to at least explain the business case underpinning what was going on there or, if they cannot do that, at least the essential underlying logic. What supported the logic behind the Berrimah Road duplication?

The key stakeholders in that space, including one of the most significant senior secondary private schools, and a tonne of businesses up and down that area, could not see the logic behind it. I have given long and interesting—in my mind anyway—speeches about the state of infrastructure, the poor choices that have been made and the *Utopia*-esque folly we have descended into over a long period.

This appears to be one of those projects that was just announced at a time that seemed to make thinly veiled sense—doubling the width of the road will be helpful for going out to East Arm. I do not see where the logic was underpinning this project.

I am here not just to ask that the petition be noted which, of course, we will formally do, but also for us to genuinely contemplate why we build infrastructure, where we put it, what is essential and enabling and what is vanity nonsense.

The Treasurer had to make cuts to the infrastructure spend. Remember a lot of those cuts were literally wiping nonsense off the books—things that were announced with a funding tag attached to them that did not result in anything being built or any money being appropriated or allocated to build these projects.

I have said it over and again: we will not go forward in this place on a range of big issues unless we can work cooperatively. The fact of the matter is that the federal government will not listen to us unless we all sing with one voice about what we would like the money for. What do we want to build? Where do we want to build it? Why do we need it?

This is an opportunity to reflect on something that, frankly speaking, had no sound business case that I could possibly tell, no money underpinning it, no community support, zero stakeholder engagement and no consultation with the relevant parties. It is important to do meaningful consultation. I take it seriously when the opposition and crossbenchers ask the government to engage in meaningful consultation. As a result, I think it is incumbent on you to also recognise that consultation was done poorly in respect to this initiative.

It is a settled matter. It is great that it is not going ahead and that Berrimah Northcrest has the certainty to continue doing good educational work in the place it operates from. It is also an opportunity for us to accept that this was not a good idea. It was indicative of how badly government was running infrastructure.

For all the potshots that are taken at my learned colleague and Treasurer, he has not wiped infrastructure off the books. He has started to wipe nonsense off the books that never had any money attached. With the money we have left, we need to be smarter about what we build because the return on investment for a lot of these things has been negligible to zero; whereas, we could be investing in smart projects, like the one I championed—the Stuart Park high street—which would have a fast return on investment for the Territory.

I will be grateful for a contribution from the members of the former government to explain the logic underpinning why this initiative—if you can call it that—ever got to this stage. If the opposition chooses not to speak, I will take it as tacit acknowledgement that we all agree finally that this was a dumb idea. Hopefully we can move forward to making smarter choices on infrastructure as a parliament.

Mr YAN (Logistics and Infrastructure): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Fong Lim for his input into this important petition. The key stakeholders of this project have made it clear that the Berrimah Road duplication was not something that they supported. The CLP government has listened. That is the difference between us and those opposite. Labor did not listen and the community paid the price for that.

I went to Haileybury School to hear the concerns firsthand. They did not mince their words. They raised serious, thoughtful and valid points. It was not just the management and the principal of Haileybury Rendall School; it was the students as well. It was clear that the previous government had not given them the time or respect to properly engage.

Local businesses in the area simply had enough. They had endured disruption, delays and detours for nearly two-and-a-half years, all thanks to the chaos that was the big, overpromised plan from the Labor government.

Their lifeline of access to their customers was cut off without warning or proper consultation. Their trade took a massive hit, and their confidence in government planning was shaken. That is unacceptable. Let me be clear: that ends now.

The CLP government will not stand by and watch Territory businesses become collateral damage from bureaucratic mismanagement. We stand with businesses. We are not in their way.

Icons of the Territory community, like Tommo's Pies, rely on predictable traffic, safe access and a government that listens. When I advised the owner that this project was off the table, the sense of their relief was instant. Since then, my office has become a more regular customer of Tommo's Pies. It is now a ritual for my office during sitting weeks.