

Smiths Road Rural Fire Brigade

*Serving the community*

Meghan Fitzharris

Minister for Roads ACT

Dear Minister

I am writing on behalf of the Smiths Road Rural Fire Brigade to bring your attention to the condition of the roads in our district with a particular focus on Angle Crossing Road where it crosses the Murrumbidgee River at Angle Crossing. I am also aware that concerned Smiths Road community members raised this issue in a recent submission to the ACT Government.

The low level crossing at Angle Crossing is of concern to our Brigade as this road is a major access point into and out of our community, connecting us to the Monaro Highway. Our community was at the southern end of the Canberra Firestorm of 2003, relying on fire crews from all over NSW and the ACT to control the fire and limit damage to property. Angle Crossing Road was a major route in for fire trucks attending this fire. Since then the Brigade has attended a number of fires on the eastern side of the Murrumbidgee, most recently sending units to the Carwoola Fire and to the Michelago fire in 2016. As a Brigade we may also be asked, on occasions, to attend vehicle accidents on the Monaro Highway.

The low level crossing at Angle Crossing is nearly permanently under water and the approaches are affected by the constant, strong flow of water. This flow of water and the general height of the river at the crossing make the crossing potentially dangerous at times. The river height and velocity of flow appears to have increased since the completion of the Murrumbidgee to Googong Transfer Project, and anecdotally, there have been more vehicle incidents in recent times. The height of the river is subject to rainfall upstream as well as from snow melt and water being let out of Tantangara Dam. This frequently makes the low level crossing impassable, with the road often closed by Roads ACT. However, residents have noted a significant time lag between increased river height and flow, and when the crossing is officially closed, and then reopened after the water has receded. For example, there are times when vehicles can safely cross but the signage still indicates that the road is closed, preventing access in and out of the community. This limits our Brigade’s ability to respond in a timely manner. The alternative to using Angle Crossing is to drive into Tuggeranong and back onto the Monaro Highway, adding half an hour, at least, onto the response time. The same delay would be incurred if our community were in need of assistance.

Smiths Road community has greatly appreciated the work that the ACT Government, through the auspices of Tony Gill and Ross Schofield, has undertaken and committed to undertake on the maintenance and sealing of Smiths Road, not to mention the construction of the new bridge across the Gudgenby River! This has and will make a difference, everyday, to the lives of residents and in particular to their safety and the longevity of cars travelling on the road.

As a matter of some urgency we request Roads ACT to turn its attention to the low level crossing in order to find a way to improve the crossing so that it is safer and less frequently closed during the year. The crossings at Point Hut Crossing, Oaks Estate and other water crossings in the ACT achieve this improvement by having culverts under the crossing and automatic crossing closure lights and signs. Although these crossings are also closed during flood conditions, the closures are short term compared with Angle Crossing which, during wet years, has been ‘officially’ closed for one or two months at a time.

Our Brigade is also aware that there are serious environmental impacts caused by the current low level crossing, due to the constant washing of hydrocarbons and other pollutants from vehicles crossing the River, and the risk posed by vehicles that have stalled on or been washed off Angle Crossing. This occurs quite often, as witnessed by residents who assist with recovery, even though may not be reported to Police or other ACT Government agencies. Pollutants in the river may potentially affect the water supply of Tharwa resident downstream, and also have negative impacts on the aquatic ecology of this environmentally sensitive river.

As outlined above an improved and upgraded crossing across the Murrumbidgee River at The Angle would greatly facilitate safe access into and out of our community at all times in the case of emergencies, and offer important improvements in environmental protection of the Murrumbidgee River.

We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss our concerns in more detail.

Yours sincerely

Peter Henry

President

Smiths Road Rural Fire Brigade

Cc:

Ms Emma Thomas, The Director General of Transport Canberra and City Services;

Mr Jim Corrigan, The Deputy Director General of Transport Canberra and City Services