



The Warrego Highway

Functions

As Queensland's principal east-west freight route, extending west 714km from Brisbane to Charleville, the Warrego Highway (M2/A2) is an important strategic link in Queensland's national and state road networks.

The highway connects Brisbane to Toowoomba and southern Queensland, central and western New South Wales and Victoria (via the A39 Gore Highway) and the Northern Territory (via the A2 Landsborough and Barkly highways). (Refer Figure 1, page 6).

West of Brisbane, between Ipswich and Morven, the highway forms part of the Australian Government's National Land Transport Network Brisbane – Darwin national corridor. The Ipswich to Toowoomba section also forms part of the Melbourne – Brisbane national corridor.

West of Morven, the highway becomes an alternative route to the A2 national corridor via Charleville,

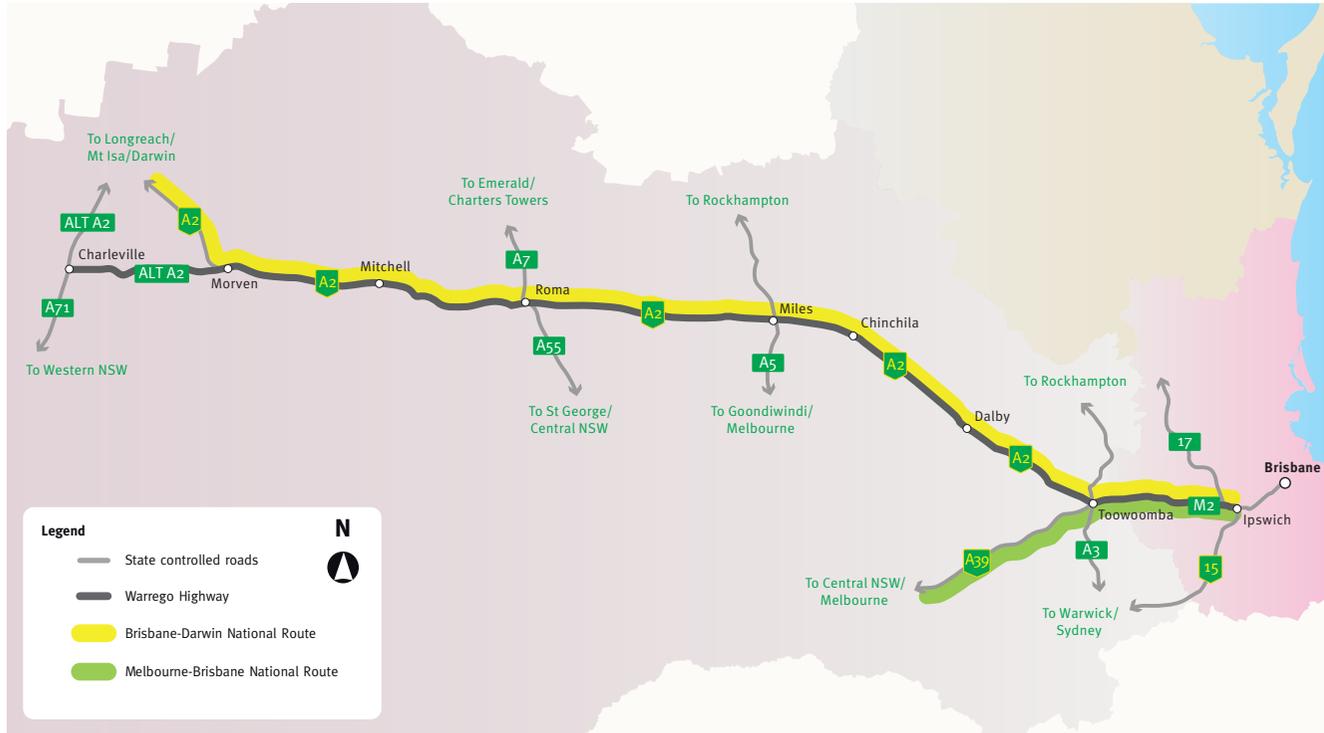
providing access to communities and the gas and oilfields of south-west Queensland.

The highway supports a range of interstate, intrastate, inter-regional and local functions, including:

- connecting primary producers and industries in southern Queensland and central New South Wales to the Port of Brisbane
- serving as the east-west spine of southern Queensland's road network, providing connections to key north-south interstate routes to Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin, and intrastate routes to Rockhampton and Townsville
- serving as the principal freight route to the emerging Surat Basin energy resource province
- connecting produce growers of the Lockyer Valley to domestic markets in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria

- connecting towns and rural/remote communities to essential services, including health, education, employment and commerce
- providing improved access for industry and the community to domestic and international airport facilities in Brisbane
- serving as a strategic interstate tourist route, it represents one of the key linkages for drive-based tourism to Queensland's outback regions, which are important to the economy of many towns on the Warrego Highway and beyond
- serving as a strategic military route between southern Queensland and the Northern Territory and as a link between key military installations in southern Queensland, including Amberley RAAF base, Oakey army aviation centre, Borneo Barracks and the Greenbank military area.

Figure 1. Warrego Highway and major connecting routes



Freight access

The Warrego Highway provides the following heavy vehicle access:

- Ipswich to Toowoomba – up to 25-metre B-doubles (and up to 30-metre performance based vehicles PBS Level 2B under permit to the Port of Brisbane)
- Toowoomba to Mitchell – up to Type 1 road trains
- Mitchell to Morven – up to Type 2 road trains
- Morven to Charleville – up to Type 1 road trains

The National Network section of the Warrego Highway is a high-capacity freight route with Higher Mass Limits vehicle access. The highway is currently being upgraded between Mitchell and Roma to extend Type 2 road train access to the western outskirts of Roma.

A vital freight artery

The Australian and Queensland Governments recognise the vital role the Warrego Highway plays in transporting people and freight between and around the southern region. As part of the National Land Transport Network and the proposed National Land Freight Network, the highway provides for major freight movements interstate, and regionally (between the administrative and commercial centres of Toowoomba, Dalby and Roma, the agriculture sectors in the Lockyer Valley, Darling Downs and the south-west, and the energy and resource developments of the Surat Basin).

The highway carries large volumes of seasonal harvest exports, such as grains and cotton to port; cattle between pastures, saleyards, feedlots and abattoirs; produce to domestic markets; coal to power stations;

mining and drilling equipment and supplies to mines, as well as general freight, including food, consumer goods, building materials, fuel, petrochemicals, fertilisers and machinery.

Brisbane, at the eastern end of the Brisbane – Darwin and Melbourne – Brisbane corridors, is one of the fastest growing economies in Australia. As the centre of significant commercial and industrial activity, Brisbane is the origin of general freight, beverages, plant and equipment, fuel and other products that are transported via the Warrego Highway to south-west, central-west and north-west Queensland through to Darwin.

Agriculture plays a major role in the economy of southern Queensland and provides a major contribution to Australia’s food security.

The rich fertile soils of the Lockyer Valley and the Darling Downs produce over a third of the total value of agriculture in Queensland. This includes the majority of the state’s wheat and oilseeds, approximately half its maize, as well as oats, sorghum, barley, millet, cotton, soybeans and sunflowers.

Livestock production is primarily focused on beef, but also includes wool, lamb, pork and poultry products. Local saleyards (including two of Australia’s largest cattle saleyards at Roma and Dalby), feedlots and several major abattoirs (including Beef City, west of Toowoomba, the largest meat packer and export facility in Australia) form a vital link in the state’s food supply chain.

Warrego Highway is a vital link for the movement of cattle and agricultural products



Connecting communities in southern Queensland

The Warrego Highway is a vital transport link for communities and rural settlements in the Lockyer Valley, Darling Downs, Maranoa and south-west Queensland regions. Strong population growth is planned along the South East Queensland western corridor, comprising Ipswich City and the Scenic Rim, Lockyer Valley, Somerset and Toowoomba Regional Councils and, more generally in South East Queensland within the next 20 years. As such, the Warrego Highway will play a major part in supporting regional growth.

The corridor from Toowoomba to Dalby is projected to experience strong population growth associated with the development of the Surat Basin energy province and resurgence in the agricultural sector following the end of the extended drought of the last decade.

By 2031, the population of the Surat Basin (including Toowoomba, Western Downs and Maranoa Regional Councils) is projected to increase by 95,000 people, with approximately 90 per cent expected to live within the Toowoomba Regional Council area.

Supporting the Surat Basin Energy Province

The Surat Basin contains vast coal and gas energy reserves which will see the region transform into a major energy province over the next 20 years. The region is estimated to contain 6.3 billion tonnes of thermal coal, 565 billion cubic metres of coal seam gas, 6 million barrels of oil and 2.6 million barrels of liquid petroleum gas.

The region is already a major producer of electricity with 10 coal and gas-fired power stations generating over 6000 megawatts of electricity.

Additional stations are proposed, including the proposed Solar Dawn solar thermal gas hybrid plant at Chinchilla, which forms part of the Australian Government's Solar Flagship Program.

Coal mines around Wandoan are also planned, with the region's existing five coal mines (New Acland, Commodore, Wilkie Creek, Kogan Creek and Cameby Downs) currently supplying thermal coal to domestic and international markets. Industries are also considering opportunities for alternative uses for coal; for example, Linc Energy's \$1.2 billion gas-to-liquids Chinchilla demonstration facility is currently investigating options to convert coal to syngas to produce diesel.

Most development, however, will focus around the coal seam gas fields which will feed Queensland's developing liquid natural gas (LNG) industry at Gladstone.

The LNG industry has already committed to over \$50 billion in private sector investment. Agreements are in place for the export of over 27 million tonnes per annum (mtpa), however, this could grow to 50 mtpa, creating over 18,000 direct and indirect jobs across Queensland, including over 4,300 in the Surat Basin. This industry growth is expected to double the Surat Basin's population and fuel economic growth, doubling gross regional product to over \$9 billion per annum.

As the principal road link to and within the Surat Basin, traffic on the Warrego Highway is expected to grow faster than the current 6 per cent per year, which is double the current state average. This will place major strain on the already stressed highway.

Catering for regional employment opportunities

Development of the Charlton Wellcamp Enterprise Area will create a significant industrial area for southern Queensland. Strategically located 13 km west of Toowoomba at Charlton, Toowoomba Regional Council estimates the 1,600 hectare industrial and transport hub has the potential to generate approximately 10,000 jobs.

Proximity of the Charlton Wellcamp Enterprise Area to the Warrego, Gore and New England Highways and the proposed Melbourne-Brisbane inland rail project also means that it will be a critical element of the state and national freight and logistics network connecting southern Queensland and the southern states – and, in the course of time, central and north western Queensland.

The proposed Melbourne-Brisbane inland railway would result in a major transformation of freight haulage network in eastern Australia and bring a national rail freight focus to Toowoomba. When developed, the railway would establish Toowoomba as a major inland multi-modal freight hub.

Challenges

The Warrego Highway is critical to the economic health and wellbeing of communities and economic activity in southern Queensland, particularly supporting the development of the Surat Basin energy province.

The main challenges going forward for managing the highway are to improve capacity, safety, asset condition and preservation to cater for the existing and emerging freight task.

Specific challenges that need to be addressed are:

- growth in travel and freight movement double the state average, due to strong population growth along the highway corridor and economic development in the Surat Basin
- safety and access on non-motorway sections of the four-lane highway between Ipswich and Toowoomba
- freight efficiency heavily constrained at the crossing of the Great Dividing Range escarpment and through Toowoomba central urban area
- flooding, which closes the highway in numerous places, causing delays and costs to freight and passenger travel
- safety and capacity from increased traffic on two-lane highway sections and mixing of heavy vehicles and local traffic, including drive-in, drive-out workforces from south-east Queensland and regional centres to the remote gas fields and mines
- managing increased traffic movement through and around cities and towns.

The planned and proposed infrastructure investment outlined in this Strategy will help address these challenges.

Current investment initiatives

The Queensland Government, in partnership with the Australian Government, has committed to delivering a number of projects focused on improving safety and freight efficiency. These include:

- \$15 million for overtaking lanes and rest areas between Oakey and Dalby (Federal funding)
- \$50 million upgrade between Mitchell and Roma, including a new bridge across the Maranoa River at Mitchell, to extend Type 2 road train access from Mitchell to the western outskirts of Roma (Joint funding)
- \$8 million Federal Blackspot program at various locations
- \$7.5 million upgrade of Lockyer Creek bridge at Helidon and Dogwood Creek bridge at Miles to improve heavy vehicle access. (Federal funding)

Recognising the highway's vital role in supporting economic growth in southern Queensland and the emerging Surat Basin energy province, the Queensland Government has committed an additional \$164 million to:

- \$30 million Stage 1 of Warrego Highway Safety Improvement Program between Ipswich and Withcott
- \$96 million Stage 1 of highway duplication between Toowoomba and Oakey
- \$11 million for intersection safety improvements in Toowoomba
- \$10 million additional funding for pavement widening and strengthening between Macalister to Warra (total project \$37 million)
- \$10 million for project planning and preconstruction for developing future highway upgrade projects between Toowoomba and Morven
- \$7 million additional funding for safety and asset preservation.



Warrego between Dalby and Chinchilla – Development of the Surat Basin energy province has resulted in rapid growth in traffic volumes