



MEDIA STATEMENT

FRA CLARIFIES MISINFORMATION REGARDING CURRENT ROAD CONDITIONS

17 October 2019

There has been much comment in the media regarding the current condition of the roads; and residents and road-users, particularly around the Central Division, will no doubt have seen the proliferation of potholes in the roads following the recent heavy rains; and many are wondering why there are so many and why they cannot be eliminated. This is an increasing concern for all of us as we enter a new wet season.

Many roads in the Central Division were constructed in the 1980's and 1990's and have outlived their serviceable life – the accepted life of a road is no more than 25 years, in areas such as Central Division with its severely wet weather this could be even shorter. The serviceable life of roads in the Central Division has been further reduced because throughout the 30+ year's life to date there has been little effort exerted to properly maintain any of the roads; with the result that deterioration is accelerating and we face the road condition situation that we are currently facing. Deterioration has also been accelerated through uncontrolled overloading for decades.

The only way to significantly reduce the number and frequency of potholes is to reconstruct or rehabilitate whole sections of roads and then properly maintain them.

In order to overcome this problem, the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) is undertaking a Road Rehabilitation Programme through the Division that focuses on forming new roads that will then be properly maintained through the Road Maintenance Programme for their entire serviceable life. In doing this the pothole occurrence will be brought under control.

This Road Rehabilitation Programme has already started with the recent rehabilitation work on Princes Road, Queens Road Lami, Ratu Mara Road and Ratu Dovi Road, as well as the New Road works along Kings Road between Nakasi and Rewa Bridge. Over the next 3 years the FRA is planning to expand this rehabilitation work to cover 15 major roads within Suva and long sections (the most severely affected sections) totaling almost 100km of Queens Road and Kings Road.

The problem that we are facing has three principle aspects:

The South Pacific climate is changing. Fiji is becoming more wet, more frequently, which is accelerating the deterioration. Frankly, we are starting to lose the battle against time and worsening road conditions and the only way to regain control is to accelerate the Rehabilitation Programme.

Time is against us. The longer it takes to achieve the Rehabilitation Programme the more rapidly the roads will deteriorate.

The available of funding is not there in the timescale required. Each kilometer of rehabilitated road costs around \$1Million. We have previously advised stakeholders and media that to provide a transportation network that performs to international standards will required an investment of around \$4Billion; a large proportion of this value is for road rehabilitation and reconstruction. This level of funding is simply not available in the short term, so we have to plan the rehabilitation work over a period of 15-20 years; and then we have start over again because those roads that were first-rehabilitated will be getting to the end of their expected service lives.

There have been accusations recorded in the media that the Fiji Roads Authority is somehow playing a 'Blame Game'. What some consider 'blame' we consider 'truth without spin'. Over the past year we have tried to explain to the Politicians, Media and Public-alike the reasons for the deplorable condition of the roads in Fiji. These explanations have been based on technical evaluations against internationally recognized standards that have led to what we consider to be the previously stated unassailable facts about the Highway Network over the past 30-40 years.

Throughout this explaining period the only 'blame' we have attributed is in the direction of those that underfunded PWD and mismanaged the infrastructure needs of Fiji. It these individuals that should be truly embarrassed and ashamed that their actions have resulted in what we see and experience today.

It is also noteworthy that those 'nay-sayers' about the work carried out by the FRA have not proposed any alternative process or methodology that will provide the rapid and permanent solutions that seem desperate to promote. The truth is that there is no practical rapid solution; we at the FRA wish that there was. Fiji does not have an economy that can support rapid recovery from this neglect, it does not have the numbers of resources that would be required to achieve rapid recovery and to attempt rapid recovery (if the funding and resources were available) would result in so much disruption on the transportation network that the country would effectively grind to a halt.

The honest, and undeniable, truth of the situation is that we will not see wholesale improvements for 4 to 5 years. There will be local improvement, and the FRA will be identifying the most severely damaged areas and working on their rehabilitation first, but large-scale improvement will not be seen until these first of the major Rehabilitation projects are complete (3 years from now). Until then the Fiji Roads Authority will continue to repair and maintain accessibility.

Jonathan Moore
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