

IMPROVE FLOOD IMMUNITY

FOR THE QUILPIE-THARGOMINDAH ROAD AND SOUTH COMONGIN CROSSING



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The South Comongin Crossing, situated 32km south of Quilpie on the Quilpie-Thargomindah Road (ID 7003), is a crucial transport route for regional connectivity among the Quilpie, Bulloo, Barcoo, Paroo, and Diamantina Shires. Constructed in 1972, this crossing over the Bulloo River serves as a lifeline for the transportation of groceries, fuel, mail, livestock, freight, tourism, education, and emergency services. As a vital link between Queensland and New South Wales, the crossing significantly contributes to the regional economy, especially during major tourism events like the Big Red Bash and the Birdsville Races.

Its importance extends beyond local boundaries, fostering economic and social ties across state lines and enhancing the vibrancy of outback Queensland.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) completed a business case study for the upgrade of the culvert crossings at the Bulloo River on the Quilpie-Thargomindah Road. The case study confirmed that the South Comongin Crossing has a very low level of flood immunity.

TMR's hydraulic analysis demonstrates the crossing passes approximately 40m³/s, which is far lower than the estimated 63.2% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) peak flow of 101m³/s.



When the crossing is closed, vehicles must take a 70km detour on an unsealed road, which is easily damaged, unsuitable for heavy vehicles, and prone to flooding and closures.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The South Comongin Crossing is a key crossing of the Bulloo River on the Quilpie-Thargomindah Road. Over the past 20 years, substantial investment has been made in sealing the road. The final section, Chainage 138.12-142.12 in Bulloo Shire, was completed in late 2024 through the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme (TIDS) program. This has resulted in a fully sealed 195km vital link between Quilpie and Thargomindah.

The Crossing, however is frequently closed or restricted, with an average annual submergence time of 53 days. In 2024, the crossing was closed for a total of 59 days. Due to ageing infrastructure and its deteriorating state, the structure is currently operating outside its designed margins, though still within safety factors. Extra precautions are necessary for inspecting and reopening the bridge after each closure. When the crossing is closed, vehicles must take a 70km detour on an unsealed Shire road, which is easily damaged, unsuitable for heavy vehicles, and prone to flooding and closures. This has recently led to essential goods destined for Thargomindah, which were transported under the State Government's Remote Communities Freight Assistance Scheme, being rerouted onto the Quilpie Shire road network, causing damage to this important Shire road.

COMMUNITY AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Council continues to receive numerous complaints regarding the frequent and prolonged closure of the South Comongin Crossing, which impacts the supply and access to groceries, fuel, mail, livestock, freight, tourism, education, and emergency services.

Ahead of the October 2024 State Election, Council workshopped local issues and adopted an advocacy document outlining three key priorities, including the acceleration of the project by TMR to improve flood immunity along the Quilpie-Thargomindah Road and South Comongin Crossing.

This advocacy aligns with Council's long-term strategic documents, such as the 2022-2027 Quilpie Shire Council Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan, shaped by extensive community input, focuses on creating well-planned, livable, and sustainable communities.

In October 2023, TMR completed an options analysis and concluded that increasing the height of the bridge should be pursued to improve the Annual Exceedance Probability immunity. This is the most economical option, delivering the greatest benefit and meeting TMR's minimum geometric standards.

CONCLUSION

As the Quilpie-Thargomindah Road is a state-controlled road, TMR has secured funding to develop a business case for the upgrade of the South Comongin Crossing. TMR estimates that it will take 12 months to develop a complete business case, followed by detailed design and construction phases. Given its regional importance, the Quilpie Shire Council is urging the Queensland Government to expedite this project to minimise the significant adverse impacts affecting residents across the Quilpie, Bulloo, Barcoo, Paroo, and Diamantina Shires and to build a stronger, more resilient future for outback Queensland.