

Topdale Road, Tamworth.

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TOPDALE ROAD, TAMWORTH

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Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [5.59 p.m.]: I wish to detail a recent visit by the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Carl Scully, to my electorate for the purpose of inspecting roads in Tamworth and near Niangala. I am sure Minister Scully would agree that the highlight of his visit was his foray onto Topdale Road, where he met with a large, frustrated group of concerned local residents and road users and heard first hand how severely the road is impacting on their lives. The circumstances surrounding the use of the road had to be seen and felt to be fully appreciated. Minister Scully's virtual disappearance into a cloud of choking dust as a timber jigger roared past him was an image that certainly satisfied onlookers. Country people like Ministers to get personally involved in their issues, and to Minister Scully's great credit he took the elements in his stride.

Topdale Road is a regional road in the eastern sector of my electorate that connects Tamworth to the coast via Gloucester. For Tamworthians, it is the quickest route to the coast and in recent years, the popularity of this scenic route has dramatically increased with increasing numbers of tourists travelling to our region. Country music fans in particular are rapidly discovering the journey between Nowendoc and Gloucester is now bitumen sealed, with the 11-kilometre strip along Topdale Road being the only exception. As a result of several highly productive logging contracts under way in the area's State forests, a growing number of heavy vehicles now share the road with tourists and locals. Minister Scully heard how Brian Smith Timber Transport, which is based in Walcha, is about to begin three new log-harvesting operations in the Tuggolo, Tomalla and Nundle State forests.

Because of the direct route, the company's timber jinkers travel Topdale Road to access a variety of mills to the east in Grafton, Coffs Harbour and Dorrigo. Prior to these new contracts being filled, figures revealed that between October last year and April, the company averaged 3.6 loads of logs along Topdale Road per day, with a peak between October and December of 6.3 loads per day. As the new contracts crank up, the company expects the loads to double to between 8 and 12 per day. This will equate to as many as 24 truck movements per day along Topdale Road. Down the road in Quirindi the construction of McVicar Mill is under way. Much of the mill's capacity of 200,000 tonnes of logs per year is expected to be sourced from the forests around Nundle and Walcha. When the mill comes on line, truck movements on Topdale Road will be unprecedented.

Unfortunately, while pressure on the road has increased, funding to meet the demands of its maintenance has not. Over the years, the condition of the 11-kilometre gravel section has degenerated to the extent that repairs are now beyond the reach of the budget of Walcha Shire Council. It is the most expensive section of road in the shire to maintain and it seems even the most basic grading measures fall well short of community expectations. Residents such as Graeme Brazel, whose family lives 50 metres off the gravel road, were on hand during the Minister's visit to tell him that within a few days of council grading, deep wheel tracks return, making it difficult and dangerous for oncoming traffic to get off the road.

Mr Brazel fears for the safety of his children, three of 11 primary school children

who local bus driver, Graham Galvin, transports to Niangala school. Mr Galvin has been driving the bus for 16 years and believes it is only a matter of time before tragedy strikes either for his company or for MacPherson's Coaches, which also services the area. Malcolm MacPherson was at the meeting. He is not worried about his driving; he is worried about the ease with which people lose control on the gravel, especially tourists who are unfamiliar with the road and its condition. Topdale Road has already been the scene of four accidents this year: each of the vehicles involved rolled over and several people were seriously injured. The majority of these accidents go unreported.

Locals such as Neil Stackman frequently find themselves answering a call for help from an injured or mechanically disabled motorist. In a recent case Mr Stackman went to the aid of a man whose vehicle rolled and whose ear had been almost severed. Three weeks ago a woman's car rolled 100 yards from Mr Stackman's home; the woman was "knocked about" but, luckily, she escaped serious injury. The road is taking an emotional toll on residents such as Neil Stackman and Graeme Brazel—and it not only constitutes a physical danger. Dust rises in clouds and drifts in a pall over the nine homes that border the gravel section. Living closest to the road, the Brazels find the dust infiltrating every aspect of their lives. It took only 18 months for 5 inches of silt to settle into their newly installed rainwater tanks. The family co-ordinates washing days with slow traffic days because clothes taken off the clothesline can come off dirtier than when they went on. Computer equipment is not safe because, despite constant effort, dust is a permanent feature in the house.

Mr Brazel was one of many who gave an impassioned address to the Minister on the day of his visit, and I thank him for that. Another was Vicki Reynolds, whose husband, Kent, presented a petition with 930 signatures calling for action on the road. Mrs Reynolds made a deal with the Minister that should funding be made available she would begin a new petition acknowledging and thanking the Labor Government for its efforts. It was an offer the Minister could not refuse and I, as do the local residents, eagerly await news that he will accelerate Topdale Road on the Government's priority list for funding. This is a dangerous road and the community seeks the Government's help to seal it before a tragedy occurs. When Minister Scully was in the electorate he described me as a nag. I welcome his criticism. I intend to continually raise this issue until the community gets the result that it is looking for, and that is funding from the Government to seal the road, make it a safe passageway and improve the lot and the lives of the residents who live along this stretch of road.

Private members' statements noted.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Marie Andrews) left the chair at 6.03 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

Subjects: [Roads](#); [Forestry](#); [Road Safety](#).

Speakers: [Draper, Mr Peter](#).

Version: Proof NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard Article No.35 of 01/06/2004.

Speech Type: PRIV; Private Members Statements.

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