

2005

(No. )



2005

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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

# **Bass Highway, Sisters Hills Upgrade Dallas Hill Climbing Lanes and Myalla Road to Rulla Road**

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*Presented to His Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1914.*

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## MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Mr *Harriss* (Chairman)  
Mr *Hall*

House of Assembly

Mr *Best*  
Mrs *Napier*  
Mr *Sturges*

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By Authority: Government Printer, Tasmania

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## INTRODUCTION

To His Excellency the Honourable William John Ellis Cox, Companion of the Order of Australia, Reserve Forces Decoration, Efficiency Decoration, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY

The Committee has investigated the following proposal: -

### **Bass Highway, Sisters Hills Upgrade Dallas Hill Climbing Lanes and Myalla Road to Rulla Road**

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*.

## BACKGROUND

The Bass Highway is one of the key rural highways in Tasmania. It extends along the North West coast from Launceston in the central north to Marrawah on the west coast. The highway provides access to the sea ports of Devonport and Burnie and to the airports at Burnie and Wynyard and links the major cities Launceston, Devonport and Burnie in the north of the State. The Bass Highway carries a significant number of heavy vehicles and is increasingly being used by tourists visiting the attractions of Tasmania's North West.

The section of the highway west of Wynyard provides the only arterial, and in some locations, only access to the far North West of the State. The Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER) have classified this section of the highway as a Regional Freight Road, the second highest of five classifications.

Between Wynyard and Smithton, the Bass Highway may best be considered in three sections. The first portion from Wynyard to Boat Harbour traverses rolling basaltic soils that are extensively used for intensive agricultural production. The road through this section has good alignment and width. The section from Boat Harbour to Rocky Cape is narrow and winding, restricting opportunities for passing. Furthermore, many of the local roads connect to this section of the highway with sub-standard junctions and in areas with restricted sight distances. This middle portion is known as the Sisters Hills section. The third portion of the highway, from Rocky Cape to Smithton, is located on the coastal plain and generally has a satisfactory alignment with adequate widths. There are more regular overtaking opportunities than in the middle section of the highway.

The current proposal encompasses the two parts of project B, B1 and B2, as well as project H, of the suggested improvements at Sisters Hills. As the design development continues, it is expected that further submissions will be made for other projects in priority order.

Project B1, from Montumana Road to the Wilsons Creek crossing (west of Brakeys Road), is to construct a 1 km climbing lane for eastbound traffic, on the northern side of the existing road. Some adjustment to the vertical alignment east of Brakeys Road is also proposed.

Project B2, from east Dallas Road to east of Wilsons Creek, involves the modification of two 500 m long overtaking lanes from an alternating three-lane sequence to exclusively westbound overtaking lane. The junctions at Pollards Road and Dallas Road will also be upgraded.

Project H, from Myalla Road to Rulla Road, encompasses the extension of the existing climbing lane east of Rulla Road, improvements at Devils Elbow Road (east), and minor improvements to the alignment of the highway west of Myalla Road.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the projects are to:

- improve safety;
- provide improved overtaking opportunities and thus enable the road to better cater for the diverse mix of traffic; and
- create a road geometry that is consistent for the length of the project or that varies in accordance with appropriate changes in the speed environment.

## PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

There have been a number of traffic accidents in the Sisters Hills vicinity recently, eliciting public and political interest in road upgrades for safety reasons. The road has insufficient capacity to accommodate the significant increase in traffic. There are too few opportunities to overtake, and these opportunities are short for such undulating terrain, where heavy traffic advances slowly or with inconsistent speed. The justification for these projects derives from the safety and operational improvements to the road. These are discussed below.

### Safety Benefits

The proposed works will result in significant safety improvements for the road users as follows:

#### *Project B1*

- Increased stopping sight distance (SSD) at the crest of the hill, west of the junction with Montumana Road (west), to 80 km/h standard for users travelling along the road;
- Eliminated or reduced traffic build-up (caused by loaded semi-trailers being able to move at only 40 km/h up the 8.5-9.0 percent gradient of the

east bound lane) and the consequences of subsequent dangerous manoeuvres ;

- Improvement of the Brakeys Road junction to 90 km/h standard sight distances; and
- A wider pavement with sealed shoulders, reducing the likelihood of run-off-the-road accidents.

### *Project B2*

- Safer overtaking provided for westbound traffic by replacing the existing overtaking lanes for both east and westbound traffic that are too short and encourage dangerous overtaking manoeuvres;
- Increased safe intersection sight distance to 90 km/h standard for users of junctions and the accesses to the road; and
- A wider pavement with sealed shoulders reducing the likelihood of run-off-the-road crashes.

### *Project H*

- Increased length of the overtaking lane for eastbound traffic east of Rulla Road from 600 m (including tapers) to 950 m (including diverge and merge tapers);
- Positioning of the merge taper on a straight prior to a horizontal curve to increase visibility and ease of merge east of Rulla Road;
- Increased stopping sight distance with new position of merge taper east of Rulla Road;
- Eliminate horizontal curve of insufficient radius (250 m) located to the east of Devils Elbow Road;
- Reconstruction of the junction with Devils Elbow Road, approximately 50 m further west to bring the angle of intersection to within safe and acceptable limits;
- Increased stopping sight distance and safe intersection sight distance to 90 km/h standard for users travelling along the road at Devils Elbow Road;
- Provision of left turn lane and right turn passing bay to prevent rear end collisions for stationary vehicles turning right at Devils Elbow Road;
- Minor alignment improvement west of Myalla Road giving increased horizontal curve radius from 275 m to 400 m to bring up to a 90 km/h design speed;
- A wider pavement with sealed shoulders reducing the likelihood of run-off-the-road crashes; and
- The removal of roadside hazards, reducing the severity of run-off-the-road crashes.

### **Road User Benefits**

In addition to increased road safety, road users will derive benefits from the following:

- Reduced delays due to a build-up of traffic;

- Improved ride quality, through the reduction in road roughness and the smoothing of horizontal and vertical alignments; and
- Better control in wet and dry conditions, due to new pavement surfacing.

## THE EXISTING SITUATION

### The Road

The following information is taken from a DIER report prepared by Ricky Smith: *Bass Highway Burnie to Smithton, Sisters Hills, Proposed Infrastructure Projects, February 2004*. The area encompassed by Projects H1, H2 and H3 listed below have been combined to form Project H, as detailed elsewhere in this report.

#### *Project B1*

The gradient for eastbound traffic in the vicinity of Brakeys Road is between 8.5 and 9.0 % in sections. The overall length of this climb is approximately 1 km. Loaded semi-trailers travel at approximately 40 km/h causing significant traffic queues. The crest of the hill west of the junction with Montumana Road has a stopping sight distance (SSD) for marginally less than 80 km/h. Horizontal geometry is generally adequate, although the radius of the curve at the top of the hill may be slightly deficient. There are numerous accesses on both sides of the road through this length, several of which are residential.

#### *Project B2*

The existing road, on a long straight, consists of two short (approximately 500 m) overtaking lanes in an alternating three-lane sequence. The existing merge taper for westbound traffic is located on a section of poor vertical alignment (crest SSD 70 km/h). The existing sealed width is below desired target standards. Adjacent residences place additional constraints on this location. There are several property accesses on both sides of the road through the project length. Dallas Road junction is at the eastern end of the project site and Pollards Road junction is located approximately half way through.

#### *Project H1*

The existing climbing lane for eastbound traffic is approximately 600 m including tapers, and is too short to effectively perform its function. This has resulted in dangerous traffic manoeuvres. The existing sealed width is again below desired target standards. The merge taper of the existing climbing lane is located over a crest, with 85 km/h SSD, and the junction with Devils Elbow Road (east) located at the end of the merge taper. There is a horizontal curve of deficient radius (250 m) located to the east of Devils Elbow Road.

#### *Project H2*

The existing junction with Devils Elbow Road (east) intersects with the Bass Highway at an acute angle, is unsealed and is located at the top of a crest. There is localised unsealed shoulder widening to the south of the junction, which may be used for school bus stops.

### *Project H3*

The existing horizontal alignment comprises a sub-standard horizontal curve (275 m radius) on a relatively steep downgrade for eastbound traffic. If the climbing lane were to be extended as detailed in Project H1, this curve would probably be deficient for the resultant predicted increase to average traffic speed.

### Traffic Conditions

#### *Traffic Data*

Traffic Characteristic	Value
Traffic flow (two way)	2350 AADT
Percentage trucks	23.3
Percentage semis	14.9

This data is from DIER counts taken during one week in May 2003.

#### *Crashes*

The table below outlines the crash information for the Links associated with the projects under consideration. These measures are in the high to medium range for crash rates on equivalent roads in Tasmania.

#### *Crash Data*

Project Location/Link	# crashes	Severity of crashes (/6)	Number of vehicles involved
B1 / 71	3	2, 5, 4	1, 1, 1
B2 / 66	4	2, 1, 4, 1	2, 1, 1, 2
H1 / 64	3	4, 1, 2	1, 1, 1
H2 / 64	Nil		
H3 / 64	1	5	1

#### *The Road Side*

The abutting land use is rural used for crops and dairies. Most of the land, except that on Sisters Hills, is cleared with some trees along the roadside and creek lines, and a few scattered in the paddocks. The typical roadside environment along Bass Highway is agricultural land, beyond which lies either the coast or the mountains.

Much of the land adjoining the Bass Highway is prime agricultural land. The proposed roadworks will require the reacquisition of some of this. Approval of the Resource Planning and Development Commission has been sought to convert prime agricultural land to road reserve. To obtain approval it needs to be demonstrated that



there is an over-riding need for the use or development in terms of community benefit and that no suitable alternative site exists. A land capability assessment has been undertaken to assess the extent of the impact.

There are a number of property owners who will be affected by the proposed projects. Land acquisition is required from six property owners on Project B1, three property owners on Project B2 and six property owners on Project H.

No sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage value were identified in the project area during the Aboriginal cultural heritage survey. A vegetation and fauna habitat assessment has identified several species of interest, detailed below.

Shade peppergrass (*Lepidium pseudotasmanicum*), occurs at the macrocarpa pines at Pollards Road (Project B2) and is listed as rare by the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*. The proposed roadworks will impact on the species at this site. Consequently a 'Permit to Take' a threatened species has been sought from the Threatened Species Unit of the Department of Primary Industry, Water and Environment (DPIWE). Shade peppergrass also occurs near Devils Elbow Road on Project H. The works will not affect the plants at this location.

The flora species Showy willowherb (*Epilobium pallidiflorum*), listed as rare pursuant to the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*, occurs in the area surrounding Project H, but will not be affected by the project.

In the area of Project H, a remnant of one native plant community, *Eucalyptus obliqua* wet forests occur. This community is considered adequately reserved and of low priority for conservation both regionally and state-wide. The works will not impact on it.

An historic heritage survey of the site identified the following historic heritage and cultural landscape items within and adjacent to the area of the proposed works:

- A house on the corner Bass Highway and Brakeys Road on Project B1 is listed in the Tasmanian Heritage Register. Opposite this house, a stand of 50-year-old Bhutan Cypress trees is located in the road reserve at the top of a steep cutting. Officers of the Tasmanian Heritage Council have indicated a preference to retain these trees, even at the expense of the road encroaching into the heritage-listed property.
- The Rocky Cape Hall, located on the northern side of the highway opposite Montumana Road (west) on Project B1.
- A concrete milepost (S40/B47) in Project B1 that will require relocation as part of the works.
- A small stand of five conifers in a paddock set back approximately 25 m from the southern side of the highway in Project B1.
- The former Roman Catholic Church on the northern side of the highway west of Montumana road (west).
- A concrete milepost (S27/B27) in Project B2 that will be relocated as part of the works.

- Eighteen Cupressus macrocarpa trees, in excess of 60 years old, are located on the eastern side of Pollards Road. These will be removed as part of the works.
- A small gable-roofed, timber framed and corrugated iron clad shelter shed located on the south-western side line of the Bass Highway will be relocated as part of the works.

The Aurora poles along the affected areas will require relocation to accommodate the proposed works at various points for each project.

There are no main telecommunication cables affected by the works associated with Project B or Project H. However, some local cables and associated small pits will require relocation.

The proposal for Project H involves raising the road level by approximately 3 m under an existing high voltage transmission line. Transend have advised the minimum vertical clearance between the road and the conductor should be 6.7 m. It is expected that the transmission line will not require modification as a consequence of the roadworks. This will be confirmed with Transend during the detail design phase.

Hydro intend on constructing a 110 kV transmission line parallel to and immediately north of the existing transmission line. The existing line will remain operational. Discussions will be held with Hydro during the detailed design phase to ensure that adequate vertical distance between the conductor and the road is achieved and new transmission towers are not placed in the clear zone.

## THE PROJECT

### Proposed Works

The proposed works involve the reconstruction of overtaking lanes to bring them to acceptable length and design for efficient operation and to improve safety, reinstatement of the road pavement, widening of the road through the construction and sealing of the shoulders, and horizontal and vertical realignment to improve safety and sight distances. The proposed works essentially follow the existing road. Specifically, the roadworks comprise the following components for each project.

#### *Project B1 - Dallas Hill Overtaking Lane*

The proposed works for Project B1 are:

- Construction of a new eastbound passing lane;
- Construction of a G-Turn at Brakeys Road;
- Construction of a new pavement to cater for the anticipated traffic loading for the next 20 years;
- Widening of traffic lanes from approximately 3.0 m to 3.5 m;
- Provision of a 1 m sealed shoulder that is widened further in the vicinity of the junction; and
- Improvement of the alignment of the road to provide stopping sight distance for a speed of 80 km/h over the top of the hill and 90 km/h elsewhere.

### *Project B2 - Overtaking Lane at Pollards Road*

The proposed works for Project B2 are:

- Modification of two short overtaking lanes from alternating sequence to exclusively westbound;
- Minor relocation of Pollards Road junction to provide a perpendicular junction;
- Widening the throat of Dallas Road junction;
- Minor sight line improvements at Dallas Road junction;
- Widening of the existing traffic lanes from approximately 3 m to 3.5 m;
- Provision of 1 m sealed shoulders; and
- Strengthening of the pavement to cater for the anticipated traffic loading for the next 20 years.

### *Project H- Myalla Road to Rulla Road*

The proposed works for Project H are:

- Extending the existing eastbound passing lane;
- Realign the junction with Devils Elbow Road (east) to provide a perpendicular approach to the Bass Highway;
- Strengthening of the pavement to cater for the anticipated traffic loading for the next 20 years;
- Widening of the existing traffic lanes from approximately 3 m to 3.5 m;
- Provision of a 1 m sealed shoulder that is widened further in the vicinity of the junction; and
- Improvement of the alignment of the road to provide stopping sight distance for a speed of 90 km/h.

### **Specific Design Issues**

The proposed works include the following:

#### *Project B1*

It is proposed to use kerb and gutter on both sides of the road immediately east of Brakeys Road. This will limit the impact of the project on the heritage-listed property on the corner of Brakeys Road and the Bass Highway.

Cut and fill batters up to approximately 7 m high. Fill batters up to 10 m high.

A shed and stock-loading ramp on the property owned by M & W Berechree will require relocation. A Council building permit is likely to be required.

The property owned by R & E Sharman has a large pivoting irrigator. The irrigator rotates in a 247 m radius circle. As a result of the earth works, the central pivot point of the irrigator will require relocation and the radius reduced to 242 m.

Modification to 16 licensed accesses of abutting properties along the length of the works to provide safe intersection sight distance at each access for a speed of 90 km/h as determined by the Austroads guide. It is proposed to design residential access for light vehicles and agricultural accesses for semi-trailers and large farm machinery.

### *Project B2*

Construction of batters up to 1 m high is required.

It will be necessary to remove a row of *Cupressus macrocarpa* trees. A small bus shelter will also require relocation.

A tourist cabin development has been proposed by Mr E Brosell adjacent to Dallas Road. The proposed improvement to the junction as part of this highway improvement project will not inhibit the future construction of the tourist cabin development if the owner decides to proceed.

### *Project H*

The proposed cut batters on the new road are up to approximately 6 m high.

The Devils Elbow Road (east) junction will be a Type A in accordance with Guide to Traffic Engineering Practice Part 5 Intersections at Grade, Austroads, Sydney, 1988. This will involve widening the shoulder on the Bass Highway opposite the junction to 2.5 m and a 30 m left turn taper.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There will be limited impact on the nearby natural and built environment by the proposed works. The following processes and actions will be incorporated into the project:

### **Soils and Land Use**

The proposed roadworks for Project B1 and B2 will require the reacquisition of approximately 1.86 ha of Class 2 land and 0.79 ha of Class 3 land. The proposed roadworks for Project H will require the reacquisition of approximately 0.71 ha of Class 2 land and 0.4 ha of Class 3 land

Land acquisition has been kept to the minimum practical level required to undertake the proposed roadworks. Reacquisition of the Class 2 and Class 3 agricultural land at the various sites is considered to be in the public interest, as the proposed works will significantly improve traffic movement and safety on this section of the Bass Highway. The public benefit that will arise from this is considered to far outweigh any loss of public benefit associated with reacquisition of the prime agricultural land. A public benefit assessment of the need for reacquisition has been forwarded to the Resource Planning and Development Commission.

## Drainage and Water Quality

Construction of the proposed roadworks will not impact on the drainage patterns of the area, as the only works in the drainage lines will involve extensions to the existing culverts. However, there could be some minor impact on water quality, in particular turbidity levels, as a result of construction activities.

In accordance with Section 35.1 of The State Policy on Water Quality Management 1997, all road construction works will employ measures consistent with best practice environmental management to prevent erosion and the pollution of streams and waterways by runoff from sites of road construction. Sedimentation controls will be used, where required, to reduce the particulates in surface water run-off from entering local waterways. All drainage from the site drains will be directed to outfalls with sediment traps. These controls will be established prior to commencing the works and will be removed following completion of the earthworks, once disturbed soil has stabilised.

## Botanical Values

No species of national significance were recorded from the project area or are thought likely to occur. Two plant species of state significance were recorded from the project area during this survey, Shade Peppergrass (*Lepidium pseudotasmanicum*) and Showy Willowherb (*Epilobium pallidiflorum*).

Both these species are listed as 'rare' according to the *Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995*.

Approximately 12 plants of the Shade Peppergrass were recorded growing between two macrocarpas, part of a longer row of 16 macrocarpas on the eastern side of Pollards Road (Project B2). Realignment of the Pollards Road junction will require the removal of the macrocarpas in the area and the destruction of these plants. A 'Permit to Take' the specimens of Shade Peppergrass (*Lepidium pseudotasmanicum*) at the Pollards Road junction has been sought from the Threatened Species Unit of DPIWE.

A much larger and healthier population of this species occurs in another area of the wider Sisters Hills project (Project H, Myalla Road to Rulla Road), where approximately 100 – 150 plants are distributed around the base of the macrocarpa trees. This population will not be affected by the proposed roadworks in that area and will be protected with environmental fencing for the duration of the roadworks. Clearing for road construction will be kept to the minimum to ensure that any other impact on botanical values in the area is minimised.

All weed areas will be identified and requirements for treatment of the various declared weeds and environmental weeds will be included in the construction contract documents.

## Zoological Values

As the area is highly modified it offers little habitat opportunities for native fauna. There will be no impact on threatened fauna species, as habitat loss associated with

the proposed works is minimal and insignificant to the carrying capacity for large fauna in the area.

There will be no impact on the riparian habitat of the giant freshwater lobster (*Astacopsis gouldi*), as the project does not involve any works within the vicinity of the creeks in the area.

The mature blue gums in the vicinity of Myalla Road (Project H), a potential foraging resource for the endangered swift parrot (*Lathamus discolor*), will not be affected as they are well outside the area of the proposed works.

### **Aboriginal Heritage Values**

There will be no significant impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage values in the area, as no Aboriginal sites or cultural landscape values were identified in the modified landscapes adjacent to the Bass Highway.

### **Historic Heritage Values**

An historic heritage survey undertaken in the area of the proposed works identified a range of historic heritage and cultural landscape issues within and adjacent to the area of the proposed works.

The following details the historic heritage and cultural landscape items that may be impacted upon, and the management measures proposed.

The proposed roadworks in Project B1 will have some impact on a small stand of conifers that survive in a paddock on the southern side of the highway at Dallas Hill, west of Montumana Road. Impact on this isolated remnant has been kept to the minimum. At this stage of design, the impact of road construction has been restricted to the removal of one tree only, the northernmost of the five trees.

In the Project B2 area, there will be some impact on the property of the former Dallas House & Stables Site (listed on the Tasmanian Heritage Register) on the southern side of the highway east of Brakeys Road. Roadworks have been restricted to the area north of the existing power line to avoid any impact on the house. A building inspection will be undertaken prior to construction to identify measures that can be undertaken to minimise any effects of vibration on the house during construction. An exemption from the provisions of Part 6 of the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995* has been granted from the Tasmanian Heritage Council.

The proposed roadworks will impact on a concrete milepost on the northern side of the highway on Project H. The milepost will be removed prior to commencement of the works. On completion of the works it will be reinstated in the same relative position such that it will still be visible to road users but will not pose a hazard.

Environmental fencing will be used to protect a line of four *Cupressus macrocarpas* of cultural heritage significance, on the southern side of the highway at approximately 120 m east of the Devils Elbow Road (Project H), for the duration of the works.

## **Topography and Visual Impact**

The road design has incorporated the minimum possible cuts and fills consistent with appropriate gradients, sight distance and good design in order to minimise the impact on the local topography. The proposed works have been designed to minimise any impacts on landscape values to ensure that the visual amenity of the area is maintained. Accordingly, potential impacts on the roadside plantings have been kept to a minimum practicable level consistent with good road design.

## **Social Implications**

Potential social and economic impacts as a result of the proposed works will be positive, as the aim of the works is to improve safety and traffic flow on this section of the Bass Highway, including the Pollards Road and Brakeys Road junctions.

Once complete, the works will provide improved safety on this section of the Bass Highway by providing more and better overtaking opportunities and improved access to the Highway from these secondary roads, together with increased sight distances at the intersections.

The completed works will provide economic benefits, as these improvements will significantly increase safety on this section of the highway.

There will be some short-term social impacts arising from inconvenience associated with the road construction activities.

## **Public Consultation**

From 1993 to 1996, DIER undertook a corridor planning study on the Bass Highway between Somerset and Smithton. This Planning Study identified a number of road infrastructure improvement and safety projects, some of which have since been constructed by the State Government.

A number of road crashes have occurred on the Bass Highway in the vicinity of Sisters Hills in recent times, raising safety concerns among the local community and leading to a public meeting at the Rocky Cape Hall on 29 April 2003, attended by the Transport Minister, Jim Cox.

The meeting established a Working Group comprising representatives of DIER, Burnie City Council, Waratah-Wynyard Council, Circular Head Council, the Cradle Coast Authority, RACT and the local community. The Working Group reviewed the previous Planning Study, assessed the outcome of constructed projects, and developed a revised list of 13 possible improvement projects.

Of the 13 projects presented, five were assessed by the community as having the greatest priority.

As a result of the public consultation process, Projects B and H have been chosen as priority projects for 2005. Planning investigations for the four remaining projects (one project has been split into two parts) will be commenced throughout this year.

### **Property Matters**

All potentially affected property owners have been consulted and are generally in acceptance of the proposed acquisitions. There have been discussions with the affected property owners to determine what accommodation works are necessary and to enable acquisition of the necessary land. Every effort has been made to ensure that individual concerns have been addressed.

The accesses to the abutting properties will be adjusted to facilitate the construction of the roadworks and to ensure that each access has adequate sight distance.

### **Planning Approval**

The area for Project B is located in the Circular Head Council Municipality, while Project H falls within the Waratah-Wynyard Council Municipality. A Development Application has been lodged with both these Councils seeking Planning Permits for the Projects. This process provides the local community with a formal opportunity to raise concerns and provide comments and input to the project in addition to the consultation undertaken as part of the design development processes.

The relevant planning provisions within each of these Local Government areas are listed below.

#### **Circular Head Planning Scheme**

The proposed overtaking lanes at Brakeys Road and Pollards Road (Project B1 and B2) fall within the road reserve – within the Circular Head S. 46 Planning Scheme No. 1, 1995, any road is deemed to be land within a road reserve, irrespective of how such land is marked on the Plan. Once the necessary land required for the proposed upgrade has been acquired, it will be deemed to be land within the road reserve. Development within the road reserve for the purposes of that road is permitted as a right – not requiring an application for a Planning Permit.

The Circular Head S. 46 Planning Scheme No. 1, 1995 includes a schedule listing Buildings of Historic Interest that require a discretionary permit for works or development. The historic Dallas House site on the corner of the Bass Highway and Brakeys Road is one such property. Accordingly, a discretionary permit is required for the roadworks.

#### **Waratah Wynyard Planning Scheme**

Project H is located within the Primary Industries Zone of the Waratah-Wynyard Planning Scheme 2000. The roadworks are classified as Utilities Use Class, which is a Primary Use Class in this zone.

The proposed roadworks will require a discretionary permit as it involves the resumption of some prime agricultural land (as detailed in Criteria 2.1 of 9.4.1, Issue 2.0:- Prime Agricultural Land of the Waratah-Wynyard Planning Scheme).



## CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM AND COSTS

### Construction Program

Construction is programmed to run concurrently for sub-project B and H. Construction on both projects is expected to commence in February 2006, with Project B completion anticipated by June 2007 and Project H completion expected by March 2007.

### Costs

The costs of the works have been estimated, based on historical rates for similar works delivered by DIER in recent years, and are shown in the following table.

### Estimated Cost

PROJECT	PROJECT COST
Project B1 - Climbing lane at Dallas Hill	\$3,200,000
Project B2 - Modification of overtaking lanes near Pollards Road	\$2,200,000
Project H - Myalla Road to Rulla Road	\$3,300,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8,700,000</b>

## EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Monday, 5 December last with an inspection of the site of the proposed works. The Committee then returned to the Conference Room, Rocky Cape Tavern whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

- Hein Poortenaar - Project Manager Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources; and
- Brian Williams - Consultant (Pitt & Sherry).
- Craigie Elphinstone, Residents of Bass Highway, Sisters Creek

### Background

Mr Poortenaar outlined the background of the proposed works to the Committee:-

Following a number of high-profile road crashes in the Sisters Hills area and the public meeting in April 2003, DIER worked with Burnie, Wynyard-Waratah and Circular Head councils, the Cradle Coast Authority, the RACT and the community to develop a funding submission to upgrade approximately 15 kilometres of road through the Sisters Hills area on the Bass Highway to enhance road safety outcomes. The project focused strongly on safety improvements on the topographically-constrained Sisters Hills area. The submission was sent to the Deputy Prime Minister in August 2004, with the full support of the Bass Highway Working Group. The Australian Government approved funding for four specific road projects under the AusLink Roads to Recovery Strategic Regional Fund, which included the Bass Highway at Sisters Hills. These were a commitment that featured in the Coalition's election platform prior to the last election. The Australian Government commitment for Sisters Hills was up to \$15 million on a dollar-for-dollar basis. In its May 2005 Budget, the State Government matched the Australian Government's contribution, enabling the project to go ahead.

We first reviewed the estimates, and it was determined that the five major projects identified by the Bass Highway Working Group were high priority and could be completed for the available funding. The five projects extend from Myalla Road, over Sisters Hills, to a point just east of Rocky Cape Road - a distance of 12.8 kilometres. The upgrade improves the alignment, widens the road and provides overtaking lanes providing a safer road and improving travel times. There are a number of lower priority projects not being undertaken at either end of the subject area, however if it becomes apparent that there will be other expenditure on the five projects committed to, some of these projects will be added to the scope of the existing contracts. The design phase is complete and the project is out to tender. The Australian Government transport department - DOTaRS - is currently considering the project proposal.

The development application for the Myalla to Rulla roads has been approved by the Waratah-Wynyard Council and the RPDC has approved the resumption of agricultural land for road works. We have a permit to remove some threatened species, which is a plant under the macrocarpas on Pollards Road. Circular Head is still considering the Dallas Hill development application. I understand their council meeting is due in December and they will be letting us know in early January.

Acquisition surveys are complete and valuations are under way. Accommodation works with the various owners have been agreed. The design is also under way on the more complex projects on the Sisters Hill summit and the Wilsons Creek bridge. These projects have longer lead times and it is desirable to define the preferred alignment so that the owners of two houses that are potentially affected are advised at an early stage whether their houses will need to be acquired. Developing the preliminary designs in parallel also enables cut-and-fill over the balance of the project to be optimised. It is

anticipated that the project on the eastern side of the Sisters Hills will be tendered in April 2006, with construction commencing in July 2006. The project on the western side of the summit will commence six months later.

A public contact plan providing information to the community has been developed and will be implemented throughout the project. There are currently public displays at Burnie, Wynyard and Circular Head councils and a feature advert which was in the newspaper a few weeks ago. The minister has written to residents in the area and has distributed a brochure. The Bass Highway working group continues to be involved with the project and is a useful forum for input from the key stakeholders.

I have just listed the other projects and where they fit in: climbing lanes at Dallas Hills, which we are currently doing, \$5.4 million. The anticipated start is February next year and completion in June 2007. Extension of the climbing lanes at Rulla and Myalla roads and other alignment improvements: again, a February start next year and December completion, \$3.3 million. Extension of the climbing lanes from the summit of Sisters Hills on the eastern side: a July 2006 start with December 2007 completion for \$5.4 million. The realignment of the climbing lanes to the summit on the western side of Sisters Hills: a February 2007 start with a May 2009 completion for \$8.2 million. Replacement of Wilsons Creek bridge with a wider bridge and realignment of the approaches on both sides: a start in February 2007 with a June 2008 completion for \$3.5 million. Lastly, alignment improvements west of Montumana Road, the eastern junction: an October 2007 start with June 2009 completion for \$4.2 million.

## **Project Objectives**

Mr Williams outlined the project description, project objectives, and the environmental and other issues as follows:-

*The objective of the design part of this project has been to provide a consistent alignment and consistent widths throughout the job and provide sight distance for both travelling along the road and from accesses and junctions. The prime aim of those changes is to improve the safety of operation of the road. We have done that while trying to minimise the impact on the adjoining landowners and the environment.*

*On Dallas Hills we are providing an overtaking lane and improving the alignment of the road. It is an east-bound overtaking lane and that will complement what is happening at Pollards Road where the two overtaking lanes are being converted to west-bound only.*

*At the back of Dallas Hills there are also improvements at Brakeys Road junction, mainly to improve the sight distance. It also will make it easier for*

*farm-access vehicles, particularly semitrailers, to get in and out of Brakeys Road without interfacing onto extra lanes on the highway and provide a G-turn because at Brakeys Road the right turn into Brakeys Road will be from the overtaking lane. We are providing a G-turn so vehicles can exit the highway and then come back across and cut right across the highway rather than propping in the fast lane. The lanes are going from 3 metres wide to 3.5 metres wide, with a 1 metre sealed shoulder. Those are the main improvements there.*

*At Pollards Road it is using the existing alignment and there will be some pavement stencilling works at both the road junctions. That is, Pollards Road and Dallas Road will also be brought in at right angles rather than both coming in at an acute angle at the moment with, once again, the lanes being widened.*

*At the Myalla Road to Rulla Road junction it is very similar. The road is being straightened considerably to provide sight distance and acceptable alignment for travel speeds. The east-bound passing lane there is being extended instead of stopping just at the crest of the hill. It will be extended over and taken over the top of the crest so the slow-moving vehicles will have a chance to accelerate on the downgrade before they need to merge in with the rest of the traffic. Devils Elbow Road East is being maintained and being brought in at the right angles to the highway to improve sight distance and in a location with an adequate sight distance for the travel speed. Once again, the lanes are being widened from 3 to 3.5 metres with 1 metre sealed shoulders.*

*The environmental impacts of the project: some of the land is class 2 agricultural land and we have a permit from RPDC for conversion of that land to B reserve. The botanical values: there is a shade peppergrass and a showy willowherb and other little plankton. They are both rare on the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act. We need to remove some of the shade peppergrass at Pollards Road and we have a permit from the Threatened Species Unit of DPIWE for that removal. There is no impact on the showy willowherb. There is also a patch of shade peppergrass that is being protected opposite Devils Elbow Road under the macrocarpas.*

*There is no real impact on zoological values or on Aboriginal heritage. The property at the corner of Brakeys Road and the Bass Highway from Dallas Hills is historic property on the Tasmanian Heritage Register and we have an exemption and a works permit from the Tasmanian Heritage Council to do the works in the front yard of that property. There is very little visual impact by the works.*

*There has been considerable consultation with the landowners and while not all landowners' requests have been met, the vast majority have where it has been economically feasible to do so.*

## **Project management**

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to how the works would be managed to cater for traffic flow. Mr Poortenaar replied:-

*... wherever you are realigning an existing road, a fairly narrow carriageway that follows the ridges, the contractors are very limited in how they manage the traffic without impacting on adjacent property. So there will be long lengths of road that will be gravel but they will generally have two lanes open for most of the time. It will only be for fairly short periods that they will have sections closed. We are a bit limited: we can only seal in the summer. So we cannot progressively do, say, 500 metres of a section, so there may be probably a kilometre of gravel that may remain gravel for a few months. But generally it is not uncommon for roadworks like this to be done over a year, and traffic management generally is quite adequate. People realise that there is something going on and they are reasonably patient. Generally, we are trying to limit the number of jobs we have at the same time. If they have three delays then they get annoyed, but if they just have one or two then they accept it.*

## **Programming of works**

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to how the works were to be programmed. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

*The commencement that we have given is June 2007 for the completion of Dallas and Pollards roads and December 2006 for the Rulla to Myalla roads. In the actual contracts we have given the contractors much less time than that so we are hoping to finish Pollards Road this April and Dallas Hills before Christmas 2006 and the same with Rulla to Myalla road - December 2006.*

## **Contractors**

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether the programming of the works would allow Tasmanian contractors an opportunity to tender for the works. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

*The contractors that are interested - Shaws, Van Ek and Hazells - are all very big and this would just be one of a number of projects they would be doing. They would want to finish it and be ready for the next stage of Penguin to Ulverstone. They want to do it quickly and we have not had any negative feedback about the time frame at the moment.*

*We have collapsed (the time-frame of the works) because we have information about how much money they spend per month and the original political commitments we gave were probably a bit over cautious just in case there were unexpected delays but certainly, with the length of road and the quantities et cetera, it does seem like a comfortable time frame and we have had feedback from contractors saying that they want the job tendered as soon as possible and they are ready to start. We want them not to drag it out too long.*

### **Brakey's Road/Dallas House**

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to what effect, if any, the resistance to the removal of the cypress trees had upon the proposed design and the alignment of the road through the Dallas House property. Mr Williams responded:-

*The simpler solution is to leave open drains along the side of the highway, because it is easier to see whether the drains are blocked and therefore water might be getting into the pavement, which is an ongoing issue for the department with regard to maintaining the pavement. The solution we have relies on subsoil drains, so drains you cannot see, and so there is a bigger risk. The first solution would be open drains. That would take more space. So you either have to take it off one side or the other or both. The solution we have is not the normal solution in a rural area but it is a solution which the department is happy to live with. There is bits of kerb and gutter with subsoil drains in many locations in rural areas and usually for some properties it is reasonable.*

*The alignment of the road is not compromised (by the desire to retain the cypress trees). The alignment meets the required standards, the sight distance and lane widths and those sorts of issues. It is only the issue about how you drain the pavement layers that is an issue and that, as I say, is an often new solution.*

### **Stock underpasses**

The Committee questioned Mr Poortenaar as to the provision of stock underpasses in the proposed works. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

*We acknowledge that the stock underpass is a benefit to both road users in terms of safety and to the farm owners, who would obviously be able to more conveniently and better use their land because they will not have to really think about it when they cross the road. When I went to my manager and asked him what the general policy was he was quite insistent that on a category 2 road we generally wouldn't provide them. Recently, on the Ridgley main road the same issues were raised. There was a general feeling that it would create a precedent and we would end up providing a lot of stock underpasses. However, where the owner makes a substantial contribution then we feel that, if he values it enough, we are getting something back and then we are prepared to contribute the other half and put the works in.*

*At the moment we have had some quite frank discussions with the Elphinstones and the door is always open. We have put the stock underpass in the tender documents so we will have a price back on that. If it is a lot cheaper than we expected, which we would anticipate given that the road is already going to be constructed so there will not be any further costs, we may well be in a better position to go back to the Elphinstones and say, 'This is the latest thing and it's*

a provisional item, so we'll be able to make that decision after the price has come in'.

The following exchange later ensued:-

*Mrs NAPIER* - Okay. Coming back to the stock underpass questions, when you put it in for the quote in relation to the underpass, does it look at the differential as to whether there would be an underpass or not? There seems to be some question being raised about the quote that was being provided to the Elphinstones about what it might cost relative to the price of the culverts themselves.

*Mr POORTENAAR* - Yes, originally Pitt and Sherry advised that it would be of the order of \$100 000, just from past experience. I did an estimate after ringing up the suppliers and basically the actual crown units themselves are \$30 000 or so and the remainder of the cost, which is probably another \$80 000 for 2.4 by 2.4 is the head walls, the crane hire, the base slab et cetera, but that may well be different. What you tend to find is that the contractors will get the price from Humes over the phone, will go to Duggans or whoever and get a much more competitive price.

*Mrs NAPIER* - Presumably you wouldn't charge for fill and realignment if you are going to be building the road in the first place?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - No.

*Mrs NAPIER* - How expensive would it be to put stock underpasses later on?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - It would be more expensive but not hugely more expensive. It is mainly the inconvenience of having to close the road and get the crane platform there and that sort of thing. When you backfill it there is always the issue of the backfill settling, so it is cheaper while the contractor is on site to do it. There are no establishment costs, but it would probably add \$20 000 or \$30 000 if you came back to do it later, I would have thought.

*Mrs NAPIER* - This is a major freight route, isn't it?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - It is a category 2 freight route.

*Mrs NAPIER* - Where else in the State would we have cattle movements across a major freight route?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - I believe that in the works they have just done at Scottsdale they have provided a stock underpass for someone. I think it was to do with the realignment and the landing position and they also ended up building a dam for someone. I am not sure of the specifics.

*Mrs NAPIER* - Maybe we could build one, but not quite as expensive.

*Mr POORTENAAR* - There are a number of crossings on the Midland Highway and on the Bass Highway - the new section past Westbury. Apart from minor sheep ones, I am not aware of too many others.

*Mrs NAPIER* - What category is the Ridgley Road?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - That would probably be a category 2 now, given it is the main route to the west coast. That is only 3 metres wide, so I am not entirely sure.

*Mrs NAPIER* - How much wider, in effect, will the road be near the Elphinstone's? What will the difference be between what the width is now and what the width will be once it is built?

*Mr WILLAMS* - The shoulders on the road - that is outside the white line - are probably about half-a-metre wide, and there is nothing beyond that, so the new road will have half a metre extra in each lane, half a metre extra on the shoulder, so that is 2 metres in total. There will be half a metre of verge, that is just beyond the gravel shoulder, so the top will be about 3 metres wide.

*Mrs NAPIER* - It will be about 2 metres wide, then won't it, compared to what it currently is?

*Mr WILLAMS* - No, 3 metres wide. It will go from 7 metres to nearly 10 metres.

Later in the hearing the Committee returned to the issue:-

*CHAIR* - Can I revisit the matter of the underpass. Hein, you addressed your mind to that a while ago. Remind me, please, whether it is two or three lanes in that area which will exist after the reconstruction?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - Yes, it is two lanes and the merge taper is before you start going down to the Elphinstone's driveway. So it is two lanes.

*CHAIR* - Mrs Napier pursued that matter, quite rightly, at some length when you were talking about costs but can I ask you to address your mind to the safety issues. We are talking about reconstructing a whole section of highway here and we have three components of the project in front of us now. If stock movement across the highway is to continue, and one can only presume it reasonably will need to continue, given that the Elphinstones own substantial tracts of land on either side of the highway, then surely user safety on the road would be pre-eminent? My understanding, from reading Mr Elphinstone's submission is that, at the moment, to move stock across the highway is quite a logistical exercise in terms of signage and people appropriately dressed in



coloured clothing and signs and the like and if there is stock on the road for any period of time, no matter how short, then traffic will come to a screaming halt after travelling at 100 kilometres an hour and I guess there are safety issues associated with that. We are providing a much better highway in that vicinity. What is your view about the compromise to safety or the challenge to safety with stock continuing to cross the road, if indeed we can address it in another way by means of an underpass?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - Definitely stock crossing the road will mean that traffic will have to slow rapidly and anything that changes the drivers' patterns, which is basically just to put your blinkers on and drive from A to B without stopping, is going to be a safety issue. This section of road, I think people have to realise, is a prime agricultural area. At certain times of the year, not today but a couple of months ago, you would travel along and pass a mini-harvester and a tractor going at 20 kms an hour. There are lots of similar hazards where you come across unexpectedly slow-moving traffic or vehicles turning in and out of gates. I think people have to realise that it is an agricultural area and they need to drive appropriately. It depends on the category of the road. This section of road was obviously a fairly low-use rural road and is gradually becoming more and more busy with tourist and commuter traffic and a lot more freight traffic. At some point there will be a need to separate those agricultural activities from the highway activity. At the moment the department feels that these two different uses of the road - agricultural and high-speed - are not uncommon. That was my direction, that generally we would not provide safety-wise; it is something that people will just have to adjust their driving for.

*CHAIR* - You say the mixed use of the road is not uncommon and I understand that but I at least want to be on the record as suggesting to you that with a reconstruction program such as we have in front of us, if the opportunity arises, as it seems to with what is happening in the road construction area, to in fact install an underpass, I would have thought it would be just so fundamental that the department would pick up that proposition and proceed, given that there seems to be an acceptance by the Elphinstones that they would surrender a couple of other road access points that they have if there can be this addition to safety. It seems so fundamental to me that it is something you would pick up and move with.

*Mr POORTENAAR* - To some extent I agree. My directions were that that was DIER's accepted practice. I think they are wary of having in the past provided underpasses that are then never used and sections of land changing hands and the use appears for some period and then one section of land is sold and it is no longer required. I think when we get the price in I will be asking my managers and the traffic safety people to sit down - the minister is also interested in the issue - and give me some direction as to which way to proceed. We haven't said no and we haven't said yes; we would like a contribution but if none is forthcoming then we will have to ask, 'Do we proceed anyway?'

*CHAIR* - You would be aware, as Mrs Napier has indicated to you, that Mr and Mrs Elphinstone have suggested that they are quite prepared to make a contribution. It is a matter of you making a value judgment as to whether that contribution is sufficient. They have said in their submission to this committee, and I will quote:

'If a stock underpass was constructed, we would be agreeable to reduce the number of accesses to four. As a gesture, we have made an offer to the Roads Department to pay \$5 000, plus pay all received compensation money, including land acquisition, disturbance et cetera to go towards the cost of the underpass'.

And, in answer to a question from Mrs Napier, you indicated that at this stage you don't have a handle on what the compensation for the acquisition component of the land is so that can't be quantified at this stage, is that a fair assessment?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - I believe that the land value itself would be of the order of \$2 000 but then there is the other compensation for part of a poppy crop and maybe some other compensation.

*CHAIR* - Okay, so you do not have a complete total on that at this stage?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - I cannot really give you a figure but my feeling, from what John told me the other day, is that it would be of the order of \$5 000 or something.

*CHAIR* - Okay, you will be here when we hear from Mr and Mrs Elphinstone later. I do not want to labour the point but it just seems to me that there has been so much comment about this whole section of road, which will be embraced by the \$30 million expenditure ultimately, revolving around crashes and deaths and here we have an opportunity to mitigate that sort of possibility even further. So, my strongest encouragement would be for the department to consider that and probably move ahead with it.

*Mr POORTENAAR* - Another issue that the department is conscious of is that we have works that we want to do but cannot afford to do so the bit of money that we have to spend on other things just means less work we are able to do on some road.

*CHAIR* - Your submission suggests that there are other parts of the project at each end that you would like to attend to but in the scoping so far you may not be able to. However, if the costings come in favourably then you will attend to them. I would suggest that this be thrown into that mix as well.

*Mr POORTENAAR* - Yes.

### **'G-turns'**

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the provision of 'G-turns' as the design solution for vehicles wishing to turn right from the highway into the Pointons' property and at Brakey's Road. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

*One of the owners there operates a low-loader which is slow to manoeuvre in and out but we would have probably provided a G-turn whether there was one there or not.*

Mr Williams added:-

*Putting in a slip lane creates some other issues in the middle of a three-lane road - about exactly how it fits in. In this situation I think it is probably better to provide the G-turn off the road. There are a couple like that just this side of the Wynyard where there is a right turn lane next to the overtaking lane and you still have to come across a slow moving vehicle and it is still a bit of an issue about how you get to the right turn lane. If you are going along you have to go into the fast lane before you can go into the right turn lane.*

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether 'G-turns' placed too much pressure upon slow moving vehicles to quickly cross three lanes when a break in the traffic flow eventuated. Mr Williams responded:-

*I think with the traffic flows on this road at present, it is not much of an issue. This morning, for instance, when the Advocate photographer was there, he had to wait a while to find a couple of vehicles to photograph.*

*... if you wait a couple of minutes then there will be none. There is no traffic at the moment and then a lot of cars go through - it tends to move like that. So there is a fair time when the road is quiet, enough to make a turn across and you might just have to wait. We consider that the G-turn arrangement is probably the best - not have the vehicles propped in the centre of the road at all, but take them off the road completely to make the turn.*

### **Land acquisition**

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to what area of land was being acquired from the Mr and Mrs Elphinstone. Mr Elphinstone responded:-

*There is a bit of a dispute about that at the moment too because the original survey showed that our southern boundary was approximately where the road fence is, which is where we thought it was. Those were the original plans that were shown to us. Several weeks ago we were shown the final plans and they showed that the southern boundary was 14 to 20 metres into our paddock. Therefore, the department is saying that they do not need to acquire as much*

*land on the southern side because they already own it and in fact we can buy some of it back which we have been paying for the last 25 years because they will not require it at the top of the hill, with the roads being moved to the north at the top of the hill. But on our northern side, I think it is just under two acres or something they will be requiring - an acre and a half, I think.*

As to the value of such land, Mr Elphinstone estimated the value to be in the vicinity of \$6 000 or \$7 000 market because it is prime agricultural land.

The Committee questioned Mr Elphinstone as to whether there would be an opportunity for 'land exchange' as a result of the realignment. Mr Elphinstone responded:-

*The department's policy is that any land, when they do a road realignment that is surplus to their requirement they will sell it back to the adjoining landowner which I fully support because there is no point in having those strips of land that are overgrown with rubbish and weeds and all the rest of it. So with land that is surplus to the requirements, we are quite prepared to buy that back, as long as an agreeable price can be agreed to. But our problem at the moment is that on our southern boundary, we were never aware that the actual road boundary was 14 to 20 metres inside where the road fence currently is. As a result of that we have decided to employ our own private surveyor to do a check survey because it seems very odd to us. Once you go to our next neighbour, the boundary reverts back to where the road fence is and that is exactly in line with where our road fence is. We have a shed there at the top of the hill. According to Mr Frank's survey, it shows that the road goes through the front of the shed wall. It seems very strange and very odd to us and that is why we decided we wanted a second opinion on it. If their surveys are right, they will not need to acquire any land from us on the southern side because their surveys are showing they already own it. But if the boundary is where we think it is, they will have to acquire some land on the southern side as well as what they are acquiring on the northern side.*

### **Elphinstone property**

Mr Elphinstone made the following submission to the Committee in respect of the proposed works:-

*I wish to speak on the Bass Highway upgrade and our endeavour to have a stock underpass incorporated into the construction. The highway is to have a major realignment and upgrade through our property and a couple of acres of our farmland will be acquired by the Government for this project. The supervising engineer of the project has agreed that there is an ideal location to install the stock underpass during construction and it could be easily accommodated in the highway upgrade. The road is to be moved south where the stock underpass is proposed and it will cause minimal disturbance to traffic during the road upgrade. At present we have two licensed accesses at this*

proposed site, which we will lose due to guard railing being installed on the new highway. If we do not get an underpass, we will end up with three accesses side by side, which is a waste of time and it pushes the accesses closer to the proposed overtaking lanes extension.

We have offered to reduce our accesses from seven to four if we get a stock underpass. Putting stock across a highway has become a nightmare in recent times and will become an even bigger one once the upgrade is completed as traffic will be travelling even faster. We have offered to contribute about \$15,000 towards the cost of the stock underpass, which is made up of \$5 000 cash which we would pay first up, plus it was indicated to us that our compensation costs would be in the order of about \$10,000, which we considered to be a reasonable and significant contribution considering that the department cannot give us a definite cost of installing a stock underpass. We believe the department's rough costing to be inflated as our own enquiries from Humes has indicated a maximum cost of \$30,000 for the actual culverts.

We would appreciate support in our endeavour to get the department to install a stock underpass during the highway upgrade to alleviate future traffic disruption. We fully support the highway upgrade and believe that it is certainly not before time because we have attended many accidents that have happened in our area of property that is near the highway. However, we would like the new highway to be as safe as possible for all concerned.

The following exchange then ensued in relation to stock crossing the road:-

*Mrs NAPIER* - How often do you cross the road with cattle?

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - It depends; it can vary a lot. We might go for two or three weeks and not put anything across the road and then we might have to put a number across on the same day. It all depends on your stock husbandry and management.

*Mrs NAPIER* - It is our information that you have stockyards on both sides of the road.

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - No. We have stockyards on our house side of the road, but on the other side of the road the stockyards are at the other end of the property, which is about three-quarters of a kilometre away.

*Mrs NAPIER* - When you use those far stockyards, do you use the direct road access that is currently there from the paddock or do you come back through another road?

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - When we put stock across the highway, at the moment we have three double accesses so it depends on which paddocks we are wanting to put the stock in as to which accesses we use.

*Mrs NAPIER* - Right. You referred to the potential for an extension of the three-lane section. Can I redirect that question, if I may, to Hein. Is it likely that at some stage in the future there would be an extension of the three lanes coming down that hill and running across the intersection with the Elphinstone's property?

*Mr POORTENAAR* - I would not have thought so. You would not extend the overtaking lane further down the hill because you don't want it to conflict with the Myalla Road junction.

*Mr WILLAMS* - I think the possibility of extending the lane down the hill is remote in the extreme. It is not long since the department removed the downhill overtaking lane just north of Oatlands where the speeds at the merge got so fast that a couple of vehicles got out of control. So I couldn't see it being extended downhill.

*Mrs NAPIER* - I have asked the question about the value of the land. If the underpass was provided, what would be the anticipated configuration of your property with the highway? What would your accesses be?

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - If the stock underpass was incorporated, it would be put where at the moment there are two existing accesses so that would assist. We would be doing away with the two accesses off the highway and using the underpass instead and we would also do away with one of our other accesses and we would just end up with two double accesses onto the highway.

*Mrs NAPIER* - If you have the underpass, would you only have then an access from the house side?

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - No, we would still have an access -

*Mrs NAPIER* - You would still want the access from the other side?

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - from the other side as well, yes. That is what I was saying, a double access. At the moment we have basically three-and-a-half double accesses. We have four accesses on one side and three on the other side and if the underpass was put in, we would have two accesses on one side and two accesses on the other side which would be opposite each other.

*Mrs NAPIER* - Okay, because you have an access further up the hill towards the shed.

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - Yes.

*Mrs NAPIER* - My thoughts were that if you can reduce the number of accesses to a road from a particular property but still make them functional

then there might be some added safety advantages not just to do with cattle crossing but also access points from the property. Could I ask that of Brian or Hein? If you did put in the underpass, what would you do in terms of access?

*Mr WILLIAMS* - I presume we would provide the four accesses that Mr Elphinstone has spoken about. It would reduce from his current seven to four.

Just a point of clarification, a stock underpass probably can't be built at the point where the gates are on Mr Elphinstone's submission.

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - It is in that vicinity.

*Mr WILLIAMS* - We bored a hole to have a look at the foundations and it was a bit soft or a bit deep so it would have to be up the hill a bit further.

*CHAIR* - When you say, 'Up the hill a bit further', Brian, past where the new access is going to be?

*Mr WILLIAMS* - Probably directly in front of the house is as far as we would have to go.

*CHAIR* - Thanks.

*Mrs NAPIER* - So that is down the hill from where the current accesses are shown?

*Mr WILLIAMS* - The current house access, yes.

*Mrs NAPIER* - Okay.

*CHAIR* - Mr Elphinstone, I know the time taken to move stock across the highway will vary depending on the number of stock, what is an average time that you would need to have personnel manning each end of the stock crossing and getting the stock across the road?

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - With the preparation and everything it is probably a fair bit of an hour but the actual putting of the stock across the highway we try to do as quickly as possible to minimise the disruption to traffic. In recent times we normally have tried to do it very early on a Sunday morning because we have found that is when there is the minimum amount of traffic; there are not the trucks on the road on a Sunday morning. That is the main issue we have really since the railway has closed. All the freight from Circular Head is going by road now.

*CHAIR* - Would it take five minutes?

*Mr ELPHINSTONE* - To put the stock across the road, probably 10 or 15 minutes, depending on the numbers.

*Mrs NAPIER - And the time that the traffic would be stopped to prepare it?*

*Mr ELPHINSTONE - About 10 or 15 minutes.*

## DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

The following documents were taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources; and
- C. & J. Elphinstone.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is satisfied that the need for the proposed upgrade of the subject sections of the Bass Highway was clearly established. Once completed, the works will provide the following benefits:

- Improved safety by providing greater overtaking opportunities and longer overtaking distances;
- Increased sight distance;
- A wider pavement with sealed shoulders;
- A smoother vertical and horizontal alignment;
- The removal of roadside hazards and the installation of safety barrier; and
- Improved ride quality and safety due to resurfacing of the pavement.

Notwithstanding the merits of the proposed works, the design does not provide for a stock underpass to connect the adjacent properties of Mr and Mrs Elphinstone. The Committee heard in evidence from Mr Poortenaar that such decision was made on the basis that it was a 'category 2 road' and that a precedent would be created were an underpass to be provided.

Under examination by the Committee, Mr Poortenaar agreed that a "stock underpass is a benefit to road users both in terms of safety and to the farm owners" and that "where the owner makes a substantial contribution then we feel that, if he values it enough, we are getting something back and then we are prepared to contribute the other half and put the works in". Further to that point, Mr Elphinstone indicated that he was prepared to reduce his accesses from seven to four and contribute approximately \$15,000 towards the cost of the underpass, such figure yet to be finally determined consequent upon land acquisition settlement.

The Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources has classified this section of the highway as a 'Regional Freight Road', the second highest of five classifications, and it is the only arterial and, in some locations, only access to the far North West of the State. The Committee is consequently astounded that the Department has not taken the opportunity to provide in the design, the installation of a stock underpass at the site of the Elphinstone's property in order to alleviate the considerable



exposure to the risk posed to road users, many of whom are tourists and agricultural workers, that is entailed in moving stock across such an important route.

The Committee notes that the negotiations regarding this matter are ongoing, however given the obvious merits of the installation of such an underpass together with the willingness of the property owners to make a significant contribution towards its cost, the Committee is strongly of the view, that notwithstanding the outcome of such negotiations, additional funds should be sourced by the Department in any event, to fund the construction of an underpass to enhance the safety integrity of the subject road.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends the project, in accordance with the documentation submitted, at an estimated total cost of \$8,700,000.

Parliament House  
Hobart  
22 December 2005

Hon. A. P. Harriss M.L.C.  
Chairman