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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

# **Murchison Highway Corridor Upgrade— Stitt River Bridge to Henty Main Road**

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*Brought up by Ms Butler and ordered by the House of Assembly to be printed.*

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## **MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

### **Legislative Council**

*Ms Rattray (Deputy Chair)*

*Mr Valentine (Chair)*

### **House of Assembly**

*Ms Butler*

*Mr Tucker*

*Mr Wood*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	3
2	BACKGROUND.....	3
3	PROJECT COSTS .....	5
4	EVIDENCE .....	6
5	DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE .....	20
6	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....	21

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Committee has the honour to report to the House of Assembly in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1914* on the -

### **Murchison Highway Corridor Upgrade–Stitt River Bridge to Henty Main Road**

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This reference recommended the Committee approve upgrade works on the Zeehan Highway and Murchison Highway to improve driver safety and travel efficiency between Roseberry and Zeehan.
- 2.2 The Murchison Highway and Zeehan Highway are the main and most direct routes for road users between Roseberry and Zeehan on Tasmania's west coast. The Murchison Highway is a key freight and passenger route connecting both the western and northern regions of Tasmania. It is critical for the movement of freight to Burnie Port for export and to other locations within Tasmania. The majority of mining freight is moved via this road.
- 2.3 The Murchison Highway Corridor has been identified for upgrade works under the Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI) program, which aims to deliver improvements to freight movements, support regional economic growth and connectivity, and provide improved safety for all road users. The Department of State Growth has undertaken analyses and consultation which has identified works priorities on the Murchison Highway Corridor, with upgrades prioritised based on the greatest improvements to road user safety and best value for money outcomes.
- 2.4 As a result of this process, the highest priority works have been identified and will be undertaken in the Murchison Highway Corridor Upgrade–Stitt River Bridge to Henty Main Road project. The highest priority works are located on the Zeehan Highway between Henty Road and the Murchison Highway turnoff, and the Murchison Highway between Ring River and Argent River / Serpentine Hill. This project will be delivered under two separate stages:
  - Stage 1, a 4.5km section Zeehan Highway, from the Murchison Highway turnoff to Henty Road.
  - Stage 2, a 7.1km section of the Murchison Highway, from Ring River to Argent River/Serpentine Hill.
- 2.5 The proposed works include the following elements:
  - increasing the overall sealed width of the road to 8.0m, with the road cross section consisting of:
    - 3.1 m wide sealed traffic lanes;
    - 0.9 m wide sealed shoulders; and
    - 0.5 m wide unsealed gravel verges;

- passing lanes in up to two locations in each direction on the Murchison Highway;
- three new pull-over bays and load checking sites for heavy vehicle users; and
- improvements to the Zeehan Highway/Henty Road and Zeehan Highway/Murchison Highway intersections.

2.6 The works are expected to provide the following benefits:

- a safer and more efficient travel environment, by providing a consistent and contemporary road geometry;
- improved freight efficiency by providing more passing opportunities and installing up to two passing lanes in each direction;
- improved heavy vehicle pull-over bays for load checking;
- reduced maintenance by improving the road surface;
- increased opportunities for freight export through more efficient and safe road travel;
- support for more tourism-related traffic; and
- increased local employment opportunities.

### 3 PROJECT COSTS

- 3.1 Pursuant to the Message from Her Excellency the Governor-in-Council, the estimated cost of the work is \$21.5 million.

The following table details the p50 and p90 cost estimates for the project:

	<b>P50 (\$m AUD)</b>	<b>P90 (\$m AUD)</b>
<b>Base Cost Estimate</b>	<b>\$16.375</b>	<b>\$16.375</b>
<b>Contingency</b>	<b>\$1.875</b>	<b>\$3.246</b>
<b>Total Project Cost Estimate</b>	<b>\$18.250</b>	<b>\$19.621</b>
<b>Escalation</b>	<b>\$1.807</b>	<b>\$1.981</b>
<b>Total Outturn Cost Estimate</b>	<b>\$20.057</b>	<b>\$21.602</b>

## 4 EVIDENCE

- 4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry at the West Coast Council Chambers on Wednesday, 18 May last with a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed works. The Committee then commenced the formal hearing, whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

### Proponent

- Richard Hunter, Project Manager, Programming and Delivery, Department of State Growth
- Zack Hepburn, Team Leader, Programming and Delivery, Department of State Growth; and
- David Peck, Network Planner, Transport Network Planning, Infrastructure Tasmania.

The following Committee Members were present:

- Hon Rob Valentine MLC (Chair);
- Ms Butler MP; and
- Mr Wood MP.

### **Overview**

- 4.2 Mr Peck provided an overview of the proposed works:

*Mr PECK - ...The Department is continually trying to invest our road program budget in priority projects. The Murchison Highway has been identified by the state as a key West Coast transport corridor and for the last several years has had a continual program of safety upgrades along the highway.*

*Since 2010, the Australian and Tasmanian Governments have contributed \$71.73 million into safety upgrades along the Murchison Highway. This investment commenced with a 2010 election commitment of \$21 million of state only funding. This was then complemented with a further investment of \$6.98 million from the State and from stage five of the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program. This was then augmented with \$43.75 million from the Roads of Strategic Importance program (ROSI) which is the funding that we are asking for use under this current road projects program.*

*The investment started with projects in the northern section of the Murchison Highway and has proceeded south to the Sterling River Bridge just north of Rosebery.*

*We are now coming to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works to access funding for the remaining works on the Murchison Highway and the Zeehan Highway under the ROSI program.*

*If this program is approved by this committee, we will then proceed with our submission to the Australian Government for approval of the ROSI co-funding.*

### **Design of Pull-Over Bays**

- 4.3 The Committee questioned the witnesses on the design and expected use of the pull-over bays. The witnesses noted they were primarily designed for load checking

purposes for one vehicle at a time, rather than for longer rest stops, or for multiple heavy vehicles:

**CHAIR** - With the pull over bays again, thinking of the frequency of traffic, how many vehicles could they accommodate? Is it just a single B-double or would they be able to accommodate more than that if you've got a number of trucks on the road that are wanting to pull over and check loads and things like that?

**Mr HUNTER** - I would be saying that they're suitable for one truck because it is really a load checking bay. It's not a pull over rest area bay; it's a load checking bay. It's not designed for having five B-doubles pull up there and have a meeting and a coffee and fags, et cetera.

**CHAIR** - Are they directly off the side of the road? The drivers don't need to take a deviation off the main road?

**Mr PECK** - There's no barrier -

**CHAIR** - And there is no barrier between the trucks and the road?

**Mr HEPBURN** - Ideally, they would be for one truck, they are substantial in distance. I believe they are 90 to 100 metres in length. Realistically, they could accommodate two or three trucks if they needed to be there at the same time.

**CHAIR** - Or if they were polite drivers recognising that others might want to pass?

**Mr PECK** - They have tapers on them, so we don't want them stopping on the highway and then pulling in. As a result, there's a long taper coming in and there's a long taper coming out so they can gain speed as they come out. You really wouldn't want more than one there at a time.

**CHAIR** - As for signage, in relation to those pull over bays, are there signs which give drivers plenty of warning that there's a pull over bay coming, giving light vehicle drivers information that indicates for safety reasons what's going on? The sort of signage that complies with the national signage requirements.

**Mr HUNTER** - Yes it will. That is part of the consultant's brief and one of the requirements of the design.

...

**CHAIR** - The Austroads guidelines for the provision of heavy vehicle rest area facilities and the like, that talk about key safety features; safe vehicle movement and access capacity and parking bay size; separation of light and heavy vehicles; and unidirectional flow, all of those sorts of things; is it fair to say that you follow those guidelines?

**Mr HEPBURN** - Yes. Those guidelines would be key in coming up with the design. Obviously, we don't always meet the guidelines, depending on what we're trying to achieve, and where we're trying to achieve it. This particular design is, as we've stated, a load checking pull off. It's not a heavy vehicle rest area. There is quite a difference in the two. Certainly, the standards are what our design consultants are using to come up with a safe spot for these things.

**CHAIR** - You're not cutting any corners, so to speak. Pardon the pun.

**Mr PECK** - There's no reason to cut any corners.

**Mr HEPBURN** - That's right. It's all about safety, really. It's a different element of safety in terms of load checking and securing the load, but if it wasn't safe to have these there, we simply wouldn't have them. It is as simple as that.

**CHAIR** - You have on-road markings for something like that, arrows pointing?

**Mr HEPBURN** - Generally speaking, no. We wouldn't have these delineated so much, other than through edge lines and our standard reflective pavement markers.

- 4.4 The Committee understood that slow-moving heavy vehicles would be using the pull-over bays on to the highway. The Committee sought an assurance that the design of the pull-over bays ensured that truck drivers using the pull-over bays could do in a safe manner, and did not create safety risks for other traffic:

**Ms BUTLER** - ... If you could run through some of the design specifications to ensure that there is proper visibility for vehicles that may be travelling along, for instance, the Zeehan Highway. Are heavy vehicles pulling out of one of those pull over bays? How does the design enhance safety features there?

... If you're cruising along, sitting on your 80 to 100 kilometres an hour, and then you've got a heavy vehicle pulling out slowly in front of you. What design -

**Mr PECK** - This is the Zeehan here. It looks like it's on a long tangent, straight piece of road.

**Ms BUTLER** - They're both on straight sets of road. What kind of design enhancements are featured to ensure that it's as safe as possible?

**Mr HEPBURN** - Sight lines are going to be our key and critical element there. As you're aware, and as we're viewing on the screen, there's no formal features in a way of having major acceleration or deceleration lanes for those trucks. These are, although formal pull-offs to check their loads, they don't have that facility that you would see on a formal truck stop, per se, like we've talked about at Fossey River or on the Midland Highway. What we're trying to achieve in this design in having a safe space for the truck - enough distance for them to pull off, for them to pull over, for them to check their load. They need width, so they can have the truck parked and be on each side of the truck to check their loads, and then get back onto the road safely - namely the Zeehan Highway here. The key feature for the travelling public and the user of that pull-off is the sight lines on approach to it, really.

**Ms BUTLER** - Or for tourists who haven't been on that road before, and unaware that that's a potential risk as well.

**Mr HEPBURN** - Yes. As with any sort of heavy vehicle pull off, or pull over, we do consider all standards in regards to signage. It might be 'trucks entering' or 'be aware of trucks', or whatever they might be, to give advance warning as well as having the adequate sight lines, so it's nothing surprising when someone's travelling the corridor.

- 4.5 The Committee was keen to understand what facilities, if any, would be provided for truck drivers at the pull-over bays. The witnesses noted the pull-over bays would not include toilet facilities, as they are primarily designed for load checking reasons, other facilities were available in nearby townships, and another facility at Fossey River would receive a significant upgrade:

**CHAIR** - ... Can you describe why toilet facilities aren't being provided at any of these truck stops as opposed to having reasonable facilities given the distances involved? Can you give us that rationale? The Tasmanian Transport Association is keen to see proper facilities for their drivers.



**Mr PECK** - We're keen to provide them where we can. Yes.

**CHAIR** - Can you describe how you might be complying with the Australian Standards and also the Department's strategic heavy vehicle driver rest area?

**Mr PECK** - Section one of this project is less than 5 kilometres. It originates in Zeehan and heads to the intersection of the Murchison Highway.

**CHAIR** - Are there facilities in Zeehan that drivers can use without going into minor streets?

**Mr PECK** - When we look at population centres, I don't think we go down to the practice of walking the streets and seeing if there's a toilet available, but we look at population centres.

There's a population centre in Zeehan where they could stop if they needed to. You wouldn't provide something, a toilet, within 5 kilometres of that. We have one on either side of the highway on the Zeehan within 4 kilometres of the previous stop. We think that's practical. On the Murchison Highway we've got a northbound pullover, which is close to Rosebery, so we don't feel there was a requirement to put in toilet facilities there.

**Mr HUNTER** - There are toilets in Rosebery, I know that. I'm not clear about Zeehan but I know there are in Rosebery.

**CHAIR** - Are they accessible?

**Mr HUNTER** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - They aren't 2 kilometres off the road?

**Mr HUNTER** - They're literally within 100 metres of the main corridor.

**CHAIR** - So they're accessible to a driver that might be on a B-double who has to park it next to the kerb.

**Mr HUNTER** - He could pull in on the main road there and then walk up to the toilets. With regard to Zeehan, I'm trying to remember, but I'm not familiar enough with the township itself but I think there are public toilets there as well.

**Mr HEPBURN** - Probably an example of where we - and obviously this is all in very close consultation with industry and in particular the heavy vehicle industry - look at providing and we are looking at providing facilities but under a separate project and program we mentioned off the record is Fossey River.

These locations, as David indicated, are not four or 5 kilometres or even 10 kilometres from major cities or town centres. It's where you're getting maybe 50 kilometres of travelling time or travelling distance and subsequent time between those designated areas, whether it be a female or a male transit driver needing to transit, they could pull over and have that facility available to them. We are working on Fossey River as one of the potential designated stops where we would incorporate -

**Mr PECK** - There is one there right now that's in very poor condition and we've got a design to upgrade that substantially.

**CHAIR** - I asked the question specifically because one of the panel members, Tania Rattray MLC, had a specific concern about that. She wasn't able to be here today so I said I'd put that question for her.

*It seems like there is a strategy - you're looking at upgrading the Fossey River site and then these others are close enough to other amenities.*

**Mr PECK** - The Department can assure the Chair that we are going to upgrade Fossey River. We have the funding to do it. We have the designs in place and it will be done.

**CHAIR** - To your knowledge, the Tasmanian Transport Association is happy with it?

**Mr PECK** - They are very involved. Simon Buxton is leading that consultation.

**CHAIR** - Are they happy with that outcome?

**Mr PECK** - Yes.

### **Overtaking/Passing Lanes**

4.6 The Committee sought further clarification on the number of passing lanes that would be provided under the project:

**Ms BUTLER** - ... in relation to the use of language on 2.3 Scope of Project with the second dot point passing lanes in up to two locations in each direction and... that language is used again in section 4: up to two passing lanes. It makes it seem like potentially it might not be two or it's not definite if it is up to two. Will there be two overtaking lanes?

**Mr HUNTER** - ...The up to is on the stage 2 works. We have two southbound but only one northbound and due to the Serpentine we can't fit one in that area there and there isn't another opportunity in that section to fit another overtaking lane. The idea originally was that we were hoping to, but we can't in reality, as the design has developed and so it's 'up to' two overtaking lanes. We've maintained two in the southbound direction but in reality we will only end up with one in the northbound now.

### **Works at the Renison Bell Mine Entrance**

4.7 The Committee was aware that work would be undertaken on the Renison Bell Mine access in the Stage 2 works package. The Committee sought further information on the extent of these works:

**CHAIR** - You mention that access to the Renison Bell Mine is included within the extent of the stage 2 roadworks. Do you envisage any major issues there? Or is this just a bit of pavement that's going to be changed?

**Mr HUNTER** - No, there's works that we are looking at around that mine entrance, and we're just working through that design at the moment, and then we want to sit down with the CEO, et cetera, and just go through what the Department's intending to do, and get their feedback as well in regards to that. That's all in train, but hasn't happened as yet.

**Ms BUTLER** - Beforehand, you mentioned that one of the potential designs on that mine entrance and exit would be a lane for traffic to continue on if there was a right-hand turn going in and out, going into that mine. Was that correct?

**Mr HUNTER** - We are looking at, from the south direction, a slip-lane effectively to turn down into the mine, but we're not putting a formal right-hand turn from the Rosebery direction into the mine.

...That would require widening the road, and would be quite extensive.

**Ms BUTLER** - So by a slip lane, can you just run through for the record what that means?

**Mr HUNTER** - It is just a widening of the road.

**CHAIR** - Just leads off the main route.

**Mr HUNTER** - That's right. It's just an easier turn. So, rather than stopping and having to turn, they can slip down into that mine entry. Apparently a lot of the traffic comes from Zeehan for the mine.

**Ms BUTLER** - So, traffic that's not turning into the mine area can then continue along the highway relatively uninterrupted by that turning-in traffic?

**Mr HUNTER** - Yes, that left turn.

**Mr BUTLER** - Just for the record also, some of those loads coming out of that mine area, I gather, would be quite slow, and they would be heavy vehicles potentially pulling out onto incoming traffic. Will considerations be made with that design to ensure there is adequate visibility for traffic to see that there is a heavy load coming out of that area?

**Mr HUNTER** - There's quite good sight lines there currently, but that is all part of the consideration as we finalise that design.

**Ms BUTLER** - And there will be appropriate signage so that people are aware that coming up there may be heavy vehicles pulling on?

**Mr HUNTER** - Trucks entering and that sort of stuff, yes.

**CHAIR** - There is a bit of an acceleration sort of space?

**Mr HUNTER** - That is to be refined. I can't say at the moment because the consultants are looking at all of that area at the moment.

**Ms BUTLER** - Do we know what kind of traffic flow at the moment is entering and exiting that mine area and whether or not that will be accelerated and what kind of plans they have in so far as capacity?

**Mr HEPBURN** - ...I know we have had past discussions with the mine on their future plans and some of them are significant, which is why we are incorporating their access into this project. Generally, we don't upgrade accesses as part of our projects, per se. This is a commitment where we are trying to enhance the safety of that access to account for what they think will be quite significant increases in their operations. ...The future usage is just an assumption that the mining company could make, because in that industry things change daily and we can never be sure whether it is going to go up or down and how it is going to fluctuate over the coming years.

### **Design Changes to Avoid Environmental Impacts**

4.8 The Committee understood design changes had been made to ensure environmental impacts were avoided. The Committee sought clarification on what design modifications had been made:

**Ms BUTLER** - I have a question on 2.2. In relation to the Natural Values Assessment (NVA) undertaken in April 2022, it states here that the design has been modified to avoid the impact on the *Eucalyptus ovata*. Can you explain what that modification looks like?

**Mr HUNTER** - ... My understanding of what happened at that stage was that we had located our pull over load checking bays to avoid having any impact on the area. We've got an area around there near the intersection which is a reserve and so we've located our truck pull over bays so they're outside of that reserve area. We're not having any environmental impacts on it.

**Mr HEPBURN** - In the original scoping phase it would have been very high level. It would have been just looking at distances in terms of the ideal locations for those truck pull over bays and then you do your NVA to get more informed on some of the values there. In this case, if it was found to have values, it would mean as we progressed the design, we would try to avoid impacts to those as opposed to taking them or having impacts on them.

**Mr HUNTER** - The other one is the northbound overtaking opportunity that we've got on the stage two works, the Murchison works. We've moved that because it was going to impact the Serpentine area. We can't do any of anything in that area.

### **Addressing Issues Raised by the Tasmanian Transport Association**

- 4.9 The Committee sought to understand what issues have been raised in consultation on the proposed works, in particular with the Tasmanian Transport Association, and how these have been addressed in the design:

**Ms BUTLER** - ...It states here that issues were raised by ... the Tasmanian Transport Association. I'm interested in what were some of the issues that were raised...

**Mr PECK** - The TTA issues were the ability for trucks to have a place to load check and that's what those pullover bays are for. They are also interested in the amenity for the drivers; toilets and things like that are issues that they brought up.

**Ms BUTLER** - Okay. It was mainly to do with amenities, the issues raised by -

**Mr PECK** - The amenities and safety.

...It's very important. Once a truck gets on the road and goes over some bumps the strappings and things can come loose or come off. After they get underway for a short bit, they need a place to pull over to check their loads and make sure that those strappings are as they should be.

**Ms BUTLER** - Did the Tasmanian Transport Association raise any concerns because of the increase in size and tonnage of those heavy vehicles now compared to when those roads were initially built, any safety concerns about suitability with the new vehicles on some of that older infrastructure?

**Mr PECK** - These vehicles are currently accessing the road network and driving to the conditions. We can't upgrade this to a very high standard because of the geometry out there, it's very curvy and the batters on the cut side and the fill side are very steep. I think there's a general understanding that if we can provide edge lines and shoulders for runoff protection that that's the level of upgrade that we can do at this point in time.

... These roads are 2.8 metre lanes now and we're bringing them up to 3.1 metres with an edge line. We are widening the road to accommodate these larger vehicles and sometimes they have different turning radiuses than some of the older vehicles. This is the standard road width that we're trying to institute across the state for heavy vehicles.

**Mr HEPBURN** - ... What has been communicated through past projects, under this program, is that consistency is a big thing for the heavy vehicle transit drivers. That's what we are trying

to achieve here. So, while we are widening, we are getting a consistent 8 metre or 3.1 metre travelling lane for those drivers, which does help them understand and navigate the road.

### **Ensuring Pavement Durability on the West Coast**

- 4.10 The Committee recognised the West Coast environment presented challenges for road construction and pavement durability. The Committee sought further information on how this would be managed:

**CHAIR** - So in general terms, road building on the West Coast, how have you found the earlier work to stand up to the heavy vehicle usage to date?

**Mr PECK** - ... It varies around the state. You would know that over on the Tasman Highway in Bicheno, it's beautiful and dry most of the time and over here you have a very short construction window. We can build in November, December, January, February and over in Bicheno you can build almost year-round. There are a lot more drainage issues on this side and drainage is one of the keys to keeping your road base formation intact.

If you have heavy vehicles tracking on wet roads, they break down really quickly. Drainage is a key consideration on the West Coast.

**CHAIR** - Does that dictate the style of surface that you've got as well?

**Mr PECK** - No. The surfaces are usually seals in most instances.

**CHAIR** - Chipseals?

**Mr PECK** - Yes, instead of asphalt.

**CHAIR** - What I'm getting at, is that some of the chipseals that we've seen have broken up months after a pavement has been... laid. A classic one is north of Perth: it was only months before it started to strip off the chipseal on the top down to bare bitumen. Around here, the precise temperature you need to be able to lay it properly is in colder weather and that might present issues.

**Mr PECK** - It certainly does. Yes.

**CHAIR** - Have you made any particular allowance for that in how you might select your contractor?

**Mr PECK** - No. It has more to do with the construction season and when the Department goes out to tender. We realise that on the West Coast there's a very short construction season. So, we go out to the market earlier so we can get a contractor in place when the weather is good and they can get to work.

### **Crash statistics**

- 4.11 The Committee questioned the witnesses on the number and severity of crashes in the works area:

**CHAIR** - ... The number of crashes and the severity of them. For the record can you indicate some statistics in that area if you can just reiterate -

**Mr PECK** - I think Richard noted earlier that there were 21 crashes on both sections of the highway and in the last period.

**Mr HUNTER** - On each section. There were 42 in total on the two stages.

**Mr PECK** - There were the three severe ones on the Murchison Highway section.

**CHAIR** - But no severe crashes on the Zeehan Highway?

**Mr PECK** - There was property damage, but that was the most.

### **Heavy Vehicle Traffic**

4.12 The Committee noted a key driver of the works was related to use by heavy vehicles. The witnesses provided further information on the relative volume of heavy vehicle traffic that travels the Murchison Highway:

**Mr PECK** - The heavies are 13 per cent, which is slightly higher than most highways. That probably indicates that there's a lot of mining traffic and a lot of heavies.

**Mr HUNTER** - That's usage rather than crashes -

**CHAIR** - Do you have any indication of the size of the heavy vehicles using these roads compared to the size of vehicles using the Midland Highway? Because of mining and all the rest of it, are they likely to be much heavier here or are they just general -

**Mr PECK** - No. They are load limited so they can't just, you know, fill it up with gold and it weighs so much that the tyres squeak. The same vehicles can travel throughout the state at their load limit.

**CHAIR** - So there are no significantly heavier vehicles on this road than anywhere else?

**Mr PECK** - Zack has actually done one of these projects just north of here and he was probably out at site quite a bit and may have noticed if there was any special vehicle use out there.

**Mr HEPBURN** - My understanding, as Richard said, is that the average number of heavies is quite high on the Murchison Highway and this would transpire onto the Zeehan Highway as well. However, the size of the heavies is very consistent with what you would see along the Midland Highway or any other road. What I did notice is the length of those heavies is probably smaller on average than you would see on the Midland Highway.

### **Cost Estimate Contingencies and Escalation**

4.13 The Committee questioned the witnesses on the reasons for the differing contingency and escalation values applied to the cost estimates:

**CHAIR** - ...Interesting in the p50 base cost estimate, contingency is 11 per cent and with the p90 it is nearly 20 per cent contingency. Is that a general thing between p50 and p90?

**Mr PECK** - Yes. The p stands for 'probability'. As you go through your design, you design out contingency and risk. We have quite advanced designs on stage 1, but we do not on stage 2. So, for this stage of a project, where you have preliminary but not detailed design, these are the appropriate contingency and risk factors for projects.

**CHAIR** - But looking at the escalation percentage, it is 9 per cent on p50 and 10.1 per cent on the p90. Is that because escalation will in fact impact on them equally?

**Mr PECK** - Yes. The escalation factors that the Department uses are given to us by the Australian Government. We report them back to them when we apply for funding in the PPR. Escalation, if you are going to build it in this current year, you have zero escalation. If you are looking to build a project in the future, out year one, out year two, or out year three, then you start to apply the standard approved by the Australian Government escalation and risk factors to that.

**CHAIR** - Thank you for that explanation. That is interesting. When it comes to things like building schools, we have noticed of late almost a doubling of the cost from \$39 million up to 70-something. But that had out years, as you have just pointed out, that this will not be that long before it is commenced if it gets approval.

**Mr PECK** - Yes. Stage 1 will go to construction this next construction season, but stage 2 will not. There would be escalation applied to that.

### **Relocation of TasNetworks Infrastructure**

4.14 The Committee and the witnesses discussed issues associated with the relocation of TasNetworks infrastructure required as a result of the project:

**Mr HEPBURN** - We could probably add, Chair, that the stage 1 works and the associated easement there that we have mentioned for TasNetworks' relocations is the only impact to a private residence or property, and that is where we are DA exempt already. We know that.

**CHAIR** - Would there likely to be any fixtures on that property at the moment like buildings and things that might be impacted, or is it likely to be just open ground?

**Mr HEPBURN** - It is just open ground on the property adjoining the highway, so it is minor.

**CHAIR** - There would be a pole or two on a property.

**Mr HUNTER** - It's a single pole to go up on that property.

**CHAIR** - So it is not likely to be anything significant?

**Mr HEPBURN** - It is not dissimilar to what is there at the moment. However, TasNetworks do require a formal easement now when we are doing relocations as a result of our roadworks, so it is formalising that easement.

...

**CHAIR** - ...You were talking about easements on land, and the ownership was another Government Department. Stage 2 talks about some power poles that need to be relocated as part of the project to allow for the roadworks, likely electricity easements will be required from private properties to facilitate this. Yet, we were talking about Government land. I am bit confused there, on the stage 2 side of it.

**Mr HUNTER** - None of these drawings have gone to TasNetworks yet. We're not clear as to what works will be required for their assets.

**CHAIR** - So when we were talking about it before, Zeehan Highway -

**Mr HUNTER** - Yes, with stage 1 we've gone to TasNetworks, and we've got their design, and so we've had an easement that we've had to negotiate for them on their behalf, and that's in hand and in train at the moment. This stage 2 works, we haven't got the drawings at a stage that we can send them to TasNetworks for their review and then their design. Until we get all of that stuff, we don't know what impacts there may be regarding easements, et cetera.

**CHAIR** - Okay. You don't envisage anything significant?

**Mr HEPBURN** - We're not envisaging any acquisition at this stage from private residents. Potentially, depending on the TasNetworks design, maybe some easements over those private residences.

**CHAIR** - Again, it's not likely to involve people not being able to use their facilities because there's an electricity pole running close to their dwellings?

**Mr HEPBURN** - No. In most cases here, because we're doing a standard, minor road widening, it's very minimal impacts in terms of easements. Obviously, any associated construction works are managed very closely by the successful contractor that the Department gets on that job. They'll be working very closely with any of those property owners, in particular, should we be working around their access or something to make sure they maintain access at all times.

...

**CHAIR** - ... talking about power poles and the like. Has consideration been given to putting in steel poles, as opposed to wooden because of the capacity of fire to burn them down?

**Mr HUNTER** - That is all on TasNetworks. We are not involved in any of that design. TasNetworks run their own design department. They specify what sort of poles. It is a Titan Pole of some sort they are putting on this stage one pole relocation. But yes, TasNetworks is driving all of that, and they have their own upgrade program going on, totally independent of us anyway.

**CHAIR** - Yes, that is interesting. Same with undergrounding lines rather having them overhead.

**Mr HEPBURN** - We do have some involvement in that particular aspect of undergrounding versus overhead and it generally depends, again, on the length of upgrade we are doing. If we are only doing a single pole replacement it is never considered.

...But then on a longer section like, say, a Midland Highway, where you might have 20 kilometres, there is that opportunity to consider at times whether or not we do transfer to a different side of the road or whether we transfer from an overhead to an underground and things like that. Obviously, it comes with considerations in regard to cost and also the effects of what we are doing. There is a substantial difference in an overhead easement and the impacts of the works versus undergrounding. Undergrounding, although much more expensive, is obviously a lot less detrimental on the environments, because your easement width is much more constrained.

...



**Ms BUTLER** - How will you communicate with the affected people with potential power outages or changes with the removal of those electrical easements?

**Mr HUNTER** - TasNetworks manage all of that part of it. We also have policies within our stakeholder engagement plans, et cetera. TasNetworks manage all the communication regarding their outages because they are managing those works.

### **Managing Traffic During Construction**

4.15 The Committee was interested to understand how traffic flow might be managed during construction, noting the current situation on the Midland Highway:

**Ms BUTLER** - Also in relation to that, with the actual constructability of the sites, what kind of time delays do you expect? I am not going through step-by-step at the moment, but it is a question we wanted to ask as a general overview. What kind of time delays do you expect for traffic whilst it is under construction?

**Mr PECK** - We stipulate in our contracts there cannot be a delay of over 15 minutes.

**CHAIR** - Fifteen?

**Mr HEPBURN** - That is correct and that is for the total site. Now, if by some chance we ended up having two stages under construction at the same time, we would still give consideration to the accumulative effects. As David said, our individual contracts stipulate a maximum of 15, but we do give consideration to accumulative sites as we are in the Midland Highway at the moment where we have multiple sites.

**CHAIR** - Further to that, seeing as we are talking about time delays. Everybody would realise that traveling up the Midland Highway is a nightmare at the moment because you have 40 kilometres and 60 kilometres and 80 kilometres per hour and rightly so when workers are around. But when you are travelling up early in the morning when there is not a worker in sight and you have a 40 kilometres section on a country road that would normally be 80 kilometres, do you stipulate to your contractors they have to either hood those when they leave the site, so people are not unnecessarily traveling at 40 kilometres per hour for a significant distance when there is no one working?

**Mr HEPBURN** - Yes, it is probably more of an issue you do see on sites like the Midland Highway, as opposed to one we are talking about today.

**CHAIR** - Longer distances.

**Mr HEPBURN** - It is certainly something the Department is aware of and we are considering.

**Mr PECK** - We monitor it but we no longer have possession. We give possession of the site to the contractor and they are responsible for managing that. Yes, we have a superintendent we can discuss issues with the contractor. If they have some inappropriate speed designation, we can go to them and talk to them about it, but they actually have possession of the highway.

**CHAIR** - Can you put in the contract that once workers leave the site the speed limits have to put back to a reasonable -

**Mr PECK** - Yes. Obviously, this is an ongoing issue for many a year and this Department does have a contracts branch with lawyers. It is nothing we have any control over, but it is obviously an issue reviewed by the General Manager of State Roads and the contracts branch which looks at those issues.

**Mr HUNTER** - A lot of those speeds are for safety. It may not be there are workers there. There may be a 300-millimetre drop-off, if you are doing 60 and all of a sudden you go over that drop-off, then there is an accident.

**CHAIR** - I understand that entirely. I think a lot of people understand that. It is just that when you have significant distances and do not have drop-offs like that and might have temporary fences -

**Mr PECK** - Everybody wonders. When we drive up the road as private citizens, we wonder why is this still posted at this.

**Mr HEPBURN** - It is something that is on our radar and we are looking at ways we can improve it through our contracts, as you say, because at that point, we do have control over what we put in our contracts and specifications to restrict or limit the contractors when we hand over possession of site. Although I cannot say too much on any major improvements, I can guarantee that is on our radar. We are trying to improve it where possible whilst maintaining the safety, but also giving consideration to the duration of any project. The fact if we do restrict the contractor on-site from what they are doing and how quickly they can do work, it can delay the actual delivery of the project, which then creates another problem for the public who are travelling through this.

#### **Does the Project Meet the Requirements of the Public Works Committee Act?**

4.16 In assessing any proposed public work, the Committee seeks an assurance that each project meets the criteria detailed in Clause 15(2) of the Public Works Committee Act 1914. Broadly, and in simple terms, these relate to the purpose of the works, the need for and advisability of undertaking the works, and whether the works are a good use of public funds and provide value for money to the community. The Committee questioned the witnesses who provided the following confirmation:

**CHAIR** - ... There are standard questions that we ask at the end of each hearing with these sorts of projects and I need a clear response on them. The first is, does the proposed works meet an identified need or needs or solve a recognised problem?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works the best solution to meet identified needs or solve a recognised problem within the allocated budget?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works fit for purpose?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Do the proposed works provide value for money?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - As far as you are aware at this stage.

**Mr PECK** - Value for money is one of the things we try to work through on all of our projects. The works that are involved in a lot of these safety upgrade projects do not show a very high VCR but they are value for money.

**Mr HEPBURN** - That does tie into that previous point of fit for purpose as well.

**CHAIR** - So it is benefit cost ratio?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - *Are the proposed works a good use of public funds?*

**WITNESSES** - *Yes, they are.*

**CHAIR** - *Thank you. They might sound obvious questions but they basically arise from the Act and we need to verify that after listening to your submissions.*

## **5 DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE**

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

- *Murchison Highway Corridor Upgrade – Stitt River Bridge to Henty Road*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Department of State Growth, 1 May 2023

## **6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 The Committee is satisfied that the need for the proposed works has been established. Once completed, a consistent road environment will be created, providing a wider and safer road for all road users.
- 6.2 The proposed works are expected to improve road user safety and travel efficiency, for general, freight and tourism-related traffic. It will achieve this by widening the overall sealed road width from 6 to 8 metres including the provision of sealed shoulders, gravel verges, an increased number of passing opportunities, additional load checking pull-over bays, and intersection improvements.
- 6.3 Accordingly, the Committee recommends the Murchison Highway Corridor Upgrade–Stitt River Bridge to Henty Main Road reference, at an estimated cost of \$21.5 million, in accordance with the documentation submitted.

**Parliament House  
Hobart  
14 June 2023**

**Hon Rob Valentine MLC  
Chair**