



Circular Economy Huon

Submission to the Public Works Committee

Huon Link Road

To address the deficiencies with the Huon Link Road proposal this submission will focus on the following:

1. Inadequate available data
2. Implication of building new roads
3. Cost of the Huon Link Road
4. Roads: An institutional problem
5. A better solution

1. Inadequate available data

There is a lot of information about vehicle flows available through the Geocounts Tasmania website. This records that on an average day, of the total vehicles heading north and south through Huonville, 3,738, or around 42%, were on the Channel Highway and around 8,800 were on the Huon Highway. Unfortunately, the data doesn't tell us the destination of vehicles on the Channel Highway. Some would have just been going to Huonville, some heading south to Franklin etc., and the remainder heading north to Kingston and Hobart. Without knowing the destination of vehicles on the Channel Highway it is impossible to know how many vehicles would use the new Link Road, or by how much congestion could be reduced in Huonville. This is a serious flaw in the whole project.

Another consideration is that not all vehicles are equal! The majority of heavy vehicles, trucks and semitrailers, going through Huonville are on the Huon Highway and associated with forestry, agriculture and aquaculture. These heavy vehicles usually move slowly through the centre of town, can easily take up the equivalent of 4 or more domestic cars and have high levels of emissions. Data is required to properly understand the impact that these vehicles have on congestion and road safety in Huonville. Furthermore, these vehicles will not be removed by building the Link Road.

The public information about this project does not include information about projected growth expected (or planned) for the Huon Valley. Over recent years growth has been around 3% per annum. If this continues it is reasonable to expect that many roads will become increasingly congested in the future requiring more infrastructure projects. We urge greater attention be given to understanding population growth and its implication be

built into any transport related recommendations prior to recommending large capital infrastructure expenditures.

Recommendations

- 1a. Undertake further research to determine the destination of journeys being made along the Channel Highway north from Cygnet and the true impact of heavy vehicles in the centre of Huonville.
- 1b. Conduct a population study to understand better the future population in the Huon Valley in the major townships

2. Implication of building new roads

One of the main implications of building a new road or widening or lengthening an existing road is that it results in more vehicles using that roadway. This is referred to as 'induced demand'. Therefore, due to the construction of the Huon Link Road it will attract more through traffic, not less traffic on the Channel Highway.

The implications of induced demand are that in future years it is likely that there will need to be further 'modifications' to the Channel Highway; more road widening, lanes added, improvements to intersections, and so on. By spending funds on one section of roadway now it is certain that more will need to be spent in the future. Also, there are inevitably maintenance costs associated with all new road infrastructure.

Another implication of building the Huon Link Road, with the impact of induced demand is that it will increase traffic heading north and this will cause congestion further up the Huon Highway. This may be in Kingston, requiring more parking or improved intersections etc. It will also exacerbate the congestion going into Hobart at the bottom of the Southern Outlet on Macquarie and Davey Streets. The Huonville Link Road will lead to 'transferred congestion' in other locations.

Prior to spending \$millions on a new road it would seem reasonable to undertake a masterplan for the township of Huonville. Consideration should be given to future parking requirements, what measures may be needed to improve pedestrian and vehicle movements on Main Street and how suitable other roadways are for a car-dependent community. What route will people follow to access council and state Government services? Are the roads and parking adequate for accessing shops such as Woolworths and John Clennet's Hardware store?

It is unclear what will happen in the future to The Esplanade roadway. At one time it was suggested that it could become a 'Recreation Precinct' for the public to make better use of this beautiful stretch of river. If this is developed it is not known if there would be a through road for vehicles going from the Channel Highway to and from Franklin etc. If it becomes a pedestrian-only area more vehicles would need to travel along Main Street.

Recommendations

2a. Investigate other transport options before proceeding with the Huon Highway link project.

2b. Develop a masterplan the whole of Huonville for the future before proceeding with the road project.

3. The cost of the Link Road

According to 2022/23 Budget Papers, the total cost of the Huon Link road was estimated at \$21.7 million. We understand that due to increases in material and labour costs over the past two years the eventual cost of the project is likely to be several million dollars higher than those listed in the 2022/23 Budget Papers – probably over \$25 million.

The yearly breakdown of planned project expenditure is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Huon Link Road expenditure by financial year

Source of funding	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Total expenditure ¹	\$0.2 million	\$3.98 million	\$16.2 million	\$1.32 million
Australian Govt Expenditure ²	\$0.2 million	\$1.70 million	\$10.0 million	\$1.30 million

Source:

1. Budget Paper 2, 2022/23, Vol. 1, p.287, Table 6.4
2. Budget Paper 1 2022/23, p.123, Table 11.8

The scheduled expenditure for this financial year, 2022/23, is \$0.2 million and this money is from the Australian Government. This will mean that up to June 2023, no money from the Tasmanian Government will have been spent on the Huon Link project but the basic planning documentation will have reached a stage of completion. This would be a convenient and financially responsible time to pause the current narrow direction of the project to take a more wholistic view about what would resolve congestion issues and assist mobility in Huonville. The framework for an alternative and better solution is set down in Section 5 of this submission.

Ideally a financial comparison would be made between this project, and the options being recommended in Section 5 of this submission. Unfortunately, these figures are not available. It is possible to say though, that the amount of money spent on roadbuilding would be less both on this specific project and on the need to continuously upgrade other sections of road in the Huon Valley, Kingborough and Hobart City Council. If implemented the alternative solutions presented in Section 5 would see a shift from private car travel to the use of public transport of various kinds. But the CEH model would require money to be spent on other aspects of transport such as community transport, vehicles and drivers, rather than road infrastructure.

As no other solutions to congestion had even been considered prior to going full steam ahead with the Huon Link roadway it is hard to see how it can be financially justified. In our

view this project represents irresponsible and wasteful use of Australian and Tasmanian taxpayers money.

Recommendation 3

Pause the Huonville Link Road project for one year to investigate other transport options for the Huon Valley, with comprehensive community input from the Council and residents. And then decide on the best use of the allotted funds.

4. Roads: An institutional problem

Tasmania has restricted vision in its approach to transport planning brought about by institutional shortcomings in the Department of State Growth (DSG). DSG is far too heavily focused on opting for road building which is probably a reflection of skill sets within the organisation, and unexamined assumptions about public transport. One is reminded of the way the Hydro saw dam building as the solution to Tasmania's development in the middle of the last century.

It should be noted that according to Budget Paper 1, Chapter 6, Chart 6.2, \$712.5 million or 54% of the total infrastructure budget in Tasmania in 2022/23 is to be spent on roads and bridges. Whereas only 15% is spent on Human Services and Housing, 9% on Hospitals and Health and 7% on Schools, Education and Skills. Spending on roads is excessive, not providing answers to congestion and needs a major overhaul.

Instead of spending on road building, a revised approach to traffic planning is needed to canvas broader solutions by looking at jurisdictions overseas that are adopting strategies to bring about behavioral change in how people approach transport and mobility. This is particularly relevant in considering commuter traffic to and from Hobart.

Another indication of roads as an institutional problem is the consultation process for the Huon Link Road. The public consultation on the congestion was tailored so that the community could opt for one of two roads! It didn't provide the opportunity for wider discussion and the individual comments from the public have not been published.

Recommendation 4

It is beyond the immediate scope of this submission but as a matter of urgency consideration needs to be given by the Tasmanian Government to forming a more broadly based *Tasmanian Transport Authority* separate from DSG.

5. A better solution

The approach that Circular Economy Huon is recommending was written 12 years ago! It is the '*Southern Integrated Transport Plan 2010*', a collaborative initiative of the Tasmanian Government and the Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority. It covers the importance of longer-term planning and the need to bring about behavioral change in the way people travel by increasing the number of people using public transport, car-pooling and actively

traveling. Since the report was written, technology is now available that can greatly improve the efficiency of delivery of transport services including *on-demand public transport*.

Improving transport without just resorting to building roads requires new skill sets to analyse what is required. International companies like Liftango are equipped to develop solutions and have a range of case studies from solutions they have introduced in Australia, the UK, and elsewhere in the world.

CEH is not saying that no new roads should be built in Tasmania. But what does need to happen prior to any new road building is to take a broader view and see how transport options can boost vehicle occupancy to reduce the number of single occupancy journeys by car. In terms of considering better options for people travelling to Huonville from Cygnet and surrounds, it will mean looking at other ways that people can travel apart from driving or using one of the three buses a day that is the 'service' now offers. It is likely to include more public busses, smaller commuting minibuses, on-demand public transport options, and car-pooling systems. For people living in, or closer to, Huonville there needs to be better provision of active transport infrastructure for cycling, walking and the use of scooters. This approach will greatly reduce the large amount of money spent on roads, encourage better land use, have less environmental impact and provide greatly improved mobility for the whole population.

Recommendation 5.

Take a portion of the \$1.7 million funding set aside in 2023-24 for building the Huon Link road to employ consultants to look at how and what other transport options would reduce car usage and thus congestion, as well as improving mobility options through an *integrated transport strategy* for the Huon Valley community.

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