



2006

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

**Bass Highway – Sisters Hills Upgrade: West of
Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane, East of
Cutting Climbing Lane Extension, Wilsons Creek
Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches,
West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment**

Brought up by Mr Best and ordered by the House of Assembly to be printed.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

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Mr Hall

House of Assembly

Mr Best
Mrs Napier
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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 -

Bass Highway, Sisters Hills Upgrade - West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment

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 Burnie airport at Wynyard and links the major cities of 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 northwest.

The section of the highway west of Wynyard provides the only arterial, and in some locations only access, to the far northwest of the State. The Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER) has classified this section of the highway as a Regional Freight Road, which has the second highest classification of five. The Australian Government has also classified the road as a Road of National Importance (RONI).

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 second portion from Boat Harbour to Rocky Cape is narrow and windy with restricted opportunities for overtaking. On this part of the highway many of the local roads connect to 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.

Between 1993 and 1996 DIER undertook a corridor planning study on the Bass Highway between Somerset and Smithton. A number of road infrastructure improvement and safety projects were identified as an outcome of that study, some of which were constructed by the state government. It was found initially that funding requirements for the majority of the projects outside the Sisters Hills area fell within the capacity of the State Government budget. However, the 15 kilometre section in

the Sisters Hills area, specifically from Sisters Creek to Rocky Cape Road, would require extensive expenditure beyond these capacities.

DIER presented the projects to the local community. Based on community feedback five of the projects were assessed as having the greatest priority. The five projects extend from Myalla Road over Sisters Hills to a point just east of Rocky Cape Road, a distance of 12.8km. One project was split into two to enable a more flexible contract arrangement resulting in six projects.

The first two projects were approved by this Committee in December 2005 and works are underway, these were: Climbing lanes at Dallas Hill & modification of overtaking lanes at Pollards Rd; and Extension of climbing lanes & alignment improvements between Rulla & Myalla Roads.

This reference encompasses four projects that have been combined, together with some safety issues specific to the site. The four projects are:

- West of the Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane;
- East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension;
- Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches; and
- West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the projects are:

- To improve safety;
- To widen the sealed pavement;
- To improve the alignment to facilitate safe travel;
- To improve the layout and safety of the road junctions;
- To provide improved overtaking opportunities by the improvement and provision of overtaking lanes to better cater for the mix of traffic using the highway.
- To 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 LOCATIONS

The projects are located along the north west coast on the Bass Highway midway between Wynyard and Smithton, Tasmania. East of Cutting Climbing lane Extension is located within the Waratah-Wynyard Council municipal area. The remainder of the projects are located within the Circular Head municipal area.



PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

There have been a number of traffic accidents in the Sisters Hills vicinity in recent times, eliciting public and political interest in road upgrades for safety reasons. The volume of traffic has increased significantly and there is general agreement that the road has insufficient capacity. There are too few opportunities to overtake and the existing opportunities to overtake are short for such undulating terrain, where heavy traffic advances slowly or with inconsistent speed. The justification for these projects derives from the safety improvements and improvement in the operation of the road. These main issues are discussed below.

Safety Benefits

The proposed projects will incorporate the following significant safety improvements for the road users:

- Increased stopping sight distance (SSD) to 90 km/h standard (80 km/h for West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane / East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension) for users travelling along the road.

- Increased safe intersection sight distance (SISD) to 90 km/h standard (80 km/h for West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane / East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension) for users of the road.
- Construction of a new eastbound overtaking lane on the West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane and extension of the westbound overtaking lane East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension eliminating or reducing traffic platooning (caused by loaded semi-trailers moving at reduced speed up the gradient) and the subsequent consequences of dangerous manoeuvres caused by this platooning.
- Extension of the westbound overtaking lane west of Pollards Road (Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches).
- Construction of a wider crossing of Wilsons Creek and removal of the small radius curves on the western approach (Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches).
- Realignment of the Devils Elbow Road (West) junction and Whites Road junction to provide a perpendicular approach to the Bass Highway (East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension).
- Construction of right turn lane at Devils Elbow Road and a G-turn at Whites Road (East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension).
- A wider pavement with sealed shoulders reducing the likelihood of run-off-the-road crashes.
- The removal of roadside hazards reducing the severity of run-off-the-road crashes.
- Provision of sealed bus stops, particularly for school bus services.

Road User Benefits

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

- Reduced delays due to platooning;
- Improved ride quality by 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 Bass Highway is the primary road link between the far northwest and the rest of Tasmania. It is used to transport primary produce and processed goods from the far northwest to markets, both local and export. The heavy vehicles on the road are predominately associated with primary production and forest harvesting. The heavy vehicles transport goods in both directions. In 2003 there were 1,387,000 tonnes of freight on long distance haulage along the Bass Highway through the Sisters Hills

area. This does not include short distance movements of freight between farms and movements of machinery servicing nearby farms and forestry areas. When compared with other Tasmanian highways, this tonnage of freight shows that this section of highway is one of the more important in Tasmania and justifies its road hierarchy classification of Category Two.

This section of the Bass Highway climbs in a westward direction from the rolling coastal plateau near Boat Harbour to pass over Sisters Hills and falls to the coastal plains near Rocky Cape.

The hilly terrain through which the road traverses presents many restrictions and has resulted in a highway of variable standard. The horizontal alignment generally complies with 70km/h. The vertical alignment is also constrained in some places to 70km/h. The coordination of the horizontal and vertical alignment is poor.

Traffic Conditions

Traffic data is summarised in the following Tables:-

Traffic Characteristic	Value
Traffic Flow (two way)	2210 AADT
Percentage trucks	16.9 %
Percentage Semis	10.0 %

This data has been derived from counts conducted by DIER during one week in August 2005.

Traffic Characteristic	Value
Traffic Flow (two way)	2350 AADT
Percentage trucks	23.3 %
Percentage Semis	14.5 %

This data has been derived from counts conducted by DIER during one week in May 2003.

Traffic Characteristic	Value
Traffic Flow (two way)	2340 AADT
Percentage trucks	22.7 %
Percentage Semis	14.8 %

This data has been derived from counts conducted by DIER during one week in May 2003.

Crashes

Both the Traffic Management and Infrastructure Development Branches of DIER have prepared an analysis of crashes. The analyses were over the periods from 2000 to 2004 and 1994 to 2003 respectively. Crash statistics show that from 2000 - 2004 the Sisters Hill section of the Bass Highway has had 44 reported crashes with the following characteristics:

- There were 2 fatal crashes in the ten-year period;
- There were 10 crashes resulting in serious injury;
- There were 58 crashes with property damage only;
- 61% of crashes involved vehicles leaving the road;
- 61% of crashes occurred in wet conditions;
- 44% of crashes involved vehicles leaving the road in wet conditions;
- 25% of crashes were at night;
- 15% of crashes involve trucks;
- 7% of crashes occurred at junctions.

The high percentage of run off road crashes is an indicator that the road is not sufficiently wide to allow users to recover if control of the vehicle is lost. Widening of the lanes and shoulders is an effective counter measure in this instance. Trucks are not over represented in the crash statistics. The high percentage of crashes involving wet conditions compared with the number of wet days (16%) at Stanley is likely to be as a result of poor skid resistance which will be addressed through a new seal on the road.

Giving casualty crashes a weighting of 1.0 and property damage only crashes a weighting of 0.5 the weighted crashes per kilometre was 0.46 compared with 0.26 for all DIER managed roads.

The Road Side

The abutting land use is rural used for cropping and dairying. 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 open vistas across the agricultural land to coast or the mountains beyond. The project area travels through the Dip Range Regional Reserve administered by the Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania; no management plan exists for this reserve. The roadworks pass through three Crown Land unallocated parcels that have been assessed as part of the Crown Land Assessment and Classification (CLAC) Project.

A significant proportion of the land adjoining the Bass Highway, excluding the climb over Sisters Hills, is Prime Agricultural Land. The proposed road works will require the resumption of some of this Prime Agricultural Land. 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.

A vegetation and fauna habitat assessment undertaken in March 2006 has identified the following:

- At a number of locations within the project area habitat for the threatened giant freshwater lobster *Astacopsis gouldi* was present.
- There are numerous records of road kill in the area, including the spotted tailed quoll *Dasyurus maculatus* and eastern barred bandicoot *Perameles gunnii*.
- A small patch of Showy willowherb *Epilobium pallidiflorum* listed as rare under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995.
- Saw banksia *Banksia serrata*, listed as rare under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995. These trees are part of a large band of 2 ha of the species in the area.
- Grasstree *Xanthorrhoea* sp. – Described in the Vegetation Survey and Fauna Habitat Assessment as *X. aff. australis*. These plants show taxonomic similarities to the commonest Tasmanian species *X. australis* and some similarities with *X. bracteata* (listed as vulnerable under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 and endangered under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999).
- Signs of the soil borne fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* were observed in some sections of the proposed roadworks.

An Aboriginal cultural heritage survey, undertaken in December 2005, found:

- The area has been subjected to significant landscape modification as a result of agricultural development over many decades.
- The road reserve has also been highly disturbed by past roadworks.
- No Aboriginal sites have previously been registered in this area.
- No Aboriginal sites or cultural landscape values were identified within the modified landscapes adjacent to the Bass Highway during the current assessment.

An historic heritage survey undertaken in the area of the proposed works in January 2006, found:

- There are no places within the area included in the National Heritage List, the Commonwealth Heritage List, and the Register of the National Estate or the Tasmanian Heritage Register.
- The Waratah-Wynyard Planning Scheme 2000 does not contain a list of places of historic heritage significance.
- There are no places within the subject area included in Part 12 of the Circular Head S.46 Planning Scheme No.1, 1995.

The Aurora poles will require relocation to accommodate the proposed works. Discussions have been held with Aurora and no significant issues have been identified.

There is an existing high voltage transmission line crossing the road at chainage 15360 on the drawings. The road improvements on the Bass Highway involve road

widening and overlay of less than 200mm in the section past the transmission tower. Therefore, the vertical clearance is believed to be adequate and it is not expected that the transmission line will require modification. This will be confirmed with Transend during the detail design phase. Transend proposes to replace the conductors and the relationship between the new line and the new road will require review as the design progresses.

There are optic fibre cables crossing the Bass Highway at Whites Road and at chainage 12500 on the drawings, the exact location is yet to be confirmed with Telstra. Otherwise there are no major telecommunication cables affected by the project. Local cables will require relocation; the extent of this is yet to be confirmed with Telstra.

The Bass Highway crosses a gas pipeline at chainage 14780 on the drawings submitted. There are some specific arrangements for working above the pipeline but these are not expected to be significant as the new design is just above the existing levels of the road. This will be confirmed with Alinta during the detail design phase.

THE PROJECT

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 road works comprise the following components for each project.

West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane and East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension

The proposed works comprise of the following:

- Widening of the existing traffic lanes from approximately 3.0 metres to 3.5 metres.
- Provision of a nominal 1.0m wide sealed shoulder that is further widened in the vicinity of the junctions and some accesses.
- Strengthening of the pavement to cater for the anticipated traffic loading for the next 20 years.
- Improvement of the alignment of the road to provide stopping sight distance for a speed of 80 km/h.
- Construction of a right turn lane at Devils Elbow Road.
- Construction of a G-Turn at Whites Road.
- Construction of climbing lanes for eastbound and westbound traffic.
- Lowering the crest at the summit.
- Realign the Devils Elbow Road (West) junction and Whites Road junction to provide a perpendicular approach to the Bass Highway.
- Rationalisation of accesses.
- Reconstruction of some property accesses.

- Straightening the western end where it is encroached upon by buildings and therefore acquiring a house.
- Relocation of Aurora and Telstra services.
- Providing two new truck-stopping bays near the summit of the hill.
- The acquisition of a house.
- Closure of the Rulla Road north junction with the Bass Highway, subject to community and Waratah-Wynyard Council acceptance.

Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches

The proposed works comprise of the following:

- Widening of traffic lanes from approximately 3.0 metres to 3.5 metres.
- Provision of a nominal 1.0m wide sealed shoulder that is further widened in the vicinity of some accesses.
- Extension of westbound overtaking lane.
- Construction of a new box culvert at Wilson's Creek.
- Vertical alignment improvements to an isolated crest between chainage 18300 to chainage 18600 on drawings.
- Construction of a new pavement to cater for the anticipated traffic loading for the next 20 years.
- Improvement of the alignment of the road to provide stopping sight distance for a minimum speed of 90 km/h.
- Reconstruction of some property accesses.
- Relocation of Aurora and Telstra services.
- The acquisition of two houses.

West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment

The proposed works comprise the following:

- Widening of the existing traffic lanes from approximately 3.0 metres to 3.5 metres.
- Provision of a nominal 1.0m wide sealed shoulder that is further widened in the vicinity of the junctions and some accesses.
- Construction of a new pavement to cater for the anticipated traffic loading for the next 20 years.
- Improvement of the alignment of the road to provide stopping sight distance for a speed of 90 km/h.
- Reconstruction of some property accesses.
- Relocation of Aurora and Telstra services.

CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM AND COSTS

The construction program and estimated costs of the works, including all fees, acquisition costs, contract administration costs and contingency, are shown in the following Table.

Project	Start Date	Anticipated Completion Date	Cost Estimate
West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane	December 2006	December 2007	\$8.1M
East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension	December 2006	December 2007	\$5.0M
Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches	November 2007	December 2008	\$5.7M
West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment	November 2007	December 2008	\$3.6M
TOTAL			\$22.4M

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

Soils and Land Use

The proposed roadworks will require the resumption of approximately 1.74 ha of Class 2 land and approximately 3.46 ha of Class 3 land for the project.

Land acquisition has been kept to the minimum practical level required to undertake the proposed roadworks. Resumption 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 improved traffic movement and safety on this section of the highway is considered to far outweigh any loss of public benefit associated with resumption of this prime agricultural land. A public benefit assessment of the need for resumption has been forwarded to the Resource Planning and Development Commission.

The West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane and East of Cutting Climbing lane Extension will involve the resumption of some land from the Dip Range Regional Reserve; a Reserve Activity Assessment has been forwarded to the Parks and Wildlife Service for evaluation.

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. There could, however, 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

Three plant species of significance were recorded from the project area during this survey, Saw banksia (*Banksia serrata*) and Showy Willowherb (*Epilobium pallidiflorum*), listed as 'rare' on the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 and the *Xanthorrhoea aff. australis*.

Preliminary advice from the Conservation Assessment Section of the Department of Primary Industries and Water (DPIW) has indicated that due to the taxonomic similarities to the commonest (and not listed) Tasmania *Xanthorrhoea* species, a Permit to Take is unlikely to be required for the *Xanthorrhoea aff. australis* – nevertheless measures have been undertaken to minimise the impact.

A patch of Showy willowherb (*Epilobium pallidiflorum*) occupies a small distinct area in a table drain infested with the declared weed Spanish heath (*Erica lusitanica*).

The Saw banksia (*Banksia serrata*) form part of a large remnant of 2 ha of the species in the area.

The Conservation Assessment Section of DPIW has been consulted and a Permit to Take as required under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 will be sought prior to any works occurring.

Clearing for road construction will be kept to the minimum practicable level 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. Signs of the soil borne fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* were observed in some sections of the proposed roadworks. *P. cinnamomi* management and hygiene specifications, based on the (now) DPIW Interim *Phytophthora cinnamomi* Management Guidelines, will be included within the contract and compliance documentation.

Zoological Values

As the area is highly modified it offers little habitat opportunities for native fauna species. 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.

Wilsons Creek (chainage 18300 on the drawings), two unnamed tributaries of Wilsons Creek (chainage 18725 and 12500 on the drawings) and Rulla Creek provide habitat for the threatened giant freshwater lobster *Astacopsis gouldi*, listed as vulnerable under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 and the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. A referral to the Department of Environment and Heritage has been made. It is considered that with appropriate culvert design measures it will not be deemed a controlled action.

There are numerous records of road kill in the area, including the spotted tailed quoll *Dasyurus maculatus* and eastern barred bandicoot *Perameles gunnii* notably where native vegetation provides corridors for fauna traffic in the vicinity of creek lines and ridgelines. The proposed roadworks will not additionally impact on either of these protected species. Therefore it will not be necessary to consult with the Conservation Assessment Section of DPIW.

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. Approval under the Aboriginal Relics Act 1975 will not be required for this proposal.

Historic Heritage Values

As no sites or features of historic heritage significance will be affected by the proposed roadworks, no specific management measures will be required. Approval under the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995 will not be required for this proposal.

Topography and Visual Impact

The road design has incorporated the minimum possible cuts and fills consistent with good design including appropriate gradients and sight distances in order to minimise impacts 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.

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 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 projects were assessed by the community as having the greatest priority. One of the five projects was split into two to enable a more flexible contract arrangement, resulting in six projects.

The first two projects were approved by this Committee in December 2005 and works are underway, the four projects outlined within this reference complete the six projects assessed by the community as having the greatest priority.

Property Matters

There are a number of property owners that will be affected by the proposed projects. The proposal will require acquisition of varying areas of land from a number of agricultural and residential properties, as well as several houses, as outlined below:

Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches:

- Five agricultural properties, including one house; and
- Two residential properties, including one house.

West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment:

- Five agricultural properties; and
- Five residential properties.

West of the Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane / East of the Cutting Climbing Lane Extension:

- Four agricultural properties, including one house; and
- Five residential properties.

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 and house (where applicable). Every effort has been made to ensure that individual concerns have been addressed.

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

Planning Approval

Three out of the four projects (Wilsons Creek Bridge Replacement and Realignment of Approaches, West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment and West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane) are located in the Circular Head Council Municipality and the remaining project (East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension) 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 proposal 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 projects fall within the Rural Zone of the Circular Head S. 46 Planning Scheme No.1, 1995. Development of a road within the Rural Zone is a permitted development – requiring the lodgment of a planning application.

Waratah - Wynyard Planning Scheme

East of Cutting Climbing lane Extension is located within the Primary Industries Zone of the Waratah-Wynyard Planning Scheme 2000. The road works are classified as Utilities Use Class, which is a Primary Use Class in this zone.

The proposed road works will require a discretionary permit as it involves the resumption of some Prime Agricultural Land (as per Criteria 2.1 of 9.4.1 Issue 2.0:- Prime Agricultural Land of the Waratah-Wynyard Planning Scheme).

EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Friday, 25 August last with an inspection of the site of the proposed works. The Committee then returned to the Function Room, Rocky Cape Tavern, Bass Highway, Rocky Cape 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;
- Brian Williams – Consultant, Pitt & Sherry;
- Molly Moles, Resident of Sisters Creek; and
- Jacobus Douma, resident of Sisters Creek.

Overview

Mr Poortenaar provided the following overview of the project:-

The background: following a number of high profile road crashes in the Sisters Hills area, and a public meeting in April 2003, the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources worked with the Burnie, Waratah/Wynyard 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 in the Sisters Hills area to improve road safety outcomes. It was strongly focused on the safety improvements in 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 projects under the AusLink Roads to Recovery Regional Fund. One of those projects was the Bass Highway project at Sisters Hills.

These are commitments that featured in the coalition's election platform prior to the last election. The Australian Government's commitment for Sisters Hills is up to \$15 million on a dollar-for-dollar basis. In its May 2005 Budget, the State Government matched the Australian Government's commitment enabling the project to commence.

The first thing we did was review our estimates to determine what we could deliver for \$30 million. It was determined that only the five high priority projects could be delivered for \$30 million. The five projects extend from Myalla Road over Sisters Hills to a point just east of Rocky Cape Road - 12.8 kilometres. The upgrade improves alignment; widens the road, providing a 3.5-metre lane and 1-metre shoulder; and provides overtaking lanes to make a safer road and improved travel times. There are a number of lower-priority projects not being undertaken at either end of the project. However, if it becomes apparent that there is funding still left towards the end of the projects that we are committed to, then we will have some designs in the drawer to complete those projects and to make sure that we spend the full \$30 million.

The first two projects, Dallas Hill and Pollards Road and the Myalla to Rulla Road, were previously approved by the parliamentary committee and were tendered in 2005. The contracts were awarded to Shaw Contracting and are proceeding on time and to budget. Construction commenced in February 2006 on Rulla Road to Myalla Road and was completed by the end of April - some months ahead of schedule. Construction on Pollards Road commenced in March but it was decided to leave the pavement works until spring, due to the wet April. Construction on Dallas Hill earthworks commenced in April and was similarly suspended over winter and has just recommenced. It is anticipated that Pollards Road and Dallas Hill will be completed by November - that is the commitment - but we think it might even be a month earlier. It is proposed that the construction of the next stage will commence as the previous stages are being completed. Preliminary designs for the remaining four projects are complete, and approvals are being progressed. It is proposed to obtain approvals for all the remaining projects as part of stage 2 rather than require more approvals at stage 3 in a year's time.

Approvals under way are Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works; RPDC for resumption of prime agricultural land, which has been approved; DPIWE permit to remove threatened species, which has been approved; Federal Department of Environment referral for the giant freshwater lobster, which is under way; a development application to Waratah/Wynyard Council, which is under way; also a separate development application to Waratah/Wynyard Council for closing Rulla Road north, which is under way; a development application to Circular Head Council which is under way; and a reserve activity assessment for the Parks and Wildlife Service for works on a reserve. There is no road reserve currently over the summit and we require approval to construct the road on the reserve. The road reserve will eventually be acquired.

Land acquisition for stage 2 is under way and accommodation works for stage 2 are largely agreed with owners. Final designs are complete for the project east of summit and substantially complete for the project west of summit. It is proposed to tender the project east of summit this Saturday and the project west of summit in September. Both projects will commence in November and be complete by the end of 2007. Preliminary designs are complete in the last two projects, which are Wilsons Creek Bridge and west of Montumana. The Wilsons Creek Bridge project requires the demolition of two houses and replacement houses will be built ahead of the Wilsons Creek Bridge contract, which commences in November 2007. The houses are subject to a DA and these have been agreed with owners and lodged with councils.

The public contact plan providing information to the community was developed and is being implemented. Plans of the various stages are on display at Burnie, Wynyard and Circular Head council chambers. Updates are regularly placed in the newspapers and letters and brochures are sent to adjacent owners and other stakeholders at key milestones.

The Bass Highway Working Group continues to be involved in the project and is a useful forum for input for the key stakeholders, especially regarding any changes of scope that we are planning.

I will not go through all the projects' budgets, which have been listed out, except to summarise. The first two projects, which were tendered late last year are under way and will be complete by November. The next two projects - east of summit and west of summit - will be started in November or December 2006 and be completed by the following Christmas - 2007 - at which point the last two projects - replacement of Wilsons Creek Bridge and west of Montumana - will start in November 2007 and be completed by December 2008.

Mr Williams addressed the technical aspects of the project:-

The existing Bass Highway does not provide the road user with a consistent driving environment. The curves are not consistent in radius. There are some compound curves which tighten and make driving difficult. The sight distance is often inappropriate for the likely travelling speed of motorists. All this increases the demands on drivers and most probably explains - at least to some extent - the poor crash record which is the reason for the project's existence. The objective of the project is to provide a predictable road environment with the aim of improving the crash record.

Specifically the improvements that are being made on all the sections we are considering today are widening the lanes from 3 metres to 3.5 metres; providing a sealed shoulder of one-metre width, so that the seal will generally widen from about 6 metres at the moment to 9 metres. That provides greater benefit in loss-of-control accidents by having a wider area to recover. The pavement will also be strengthened to cater for the anticipated traffic loading over the next 20 years. The alignment of the road is also being improved generally to the 80 kph guidelines provided by Austroads, which is a common design speed used for road improvements in Tasmania.

Specifically on each of the projects: on the summit project there will be right-turn lanes at Devils Elbow Road and Rulla Road and there will be a G-turn at Whites Road to improve safety for turning vehicles. There will be climbing lanes for both eastbound and westbound traffic coming from near the base of the hill, over the summit. There is no eastbound climbing lane at all at present and only a short westbound climbing lane. There will be a significant lowering of the crest at the top of the hill to improve sight distance and the side roads - that is, Devils Elbow Road, Whites Road and Rulla Road South - will be realigned to bring them in at right angles to the highway. There is some rationalisation of accesses - some have been closed and some have been moved to more appropriate positions - and all accesses have been reconstructed to match the new

highway. The straightening of the highway at the western end requires the acquisition of one house on this part of the project.

There will be truck-stopping bays provided to replace the existing informal arrangement at the top of the hill. They will not be opposite one another; they will be just on the start of the downgrade so that once the truck stops he can then accelerate as he then comes back into the traffic flow on the downhill out of the truck bay. On this project we are proposing to close Rulla Road north, and that is subject to approval from Waratah/Wynyard Council under the Local Government (Highways) Act.

On the Wilsons Creek project, there will be the same widening as is occurring on the summit project. We are constructing a new culvert on Wilsons Creek; the existing one is deficient in terms of strength to carry the heavy loads. The opportunity has been taken to make that improvement to the structure. To do that we are building that alongside on the northern side of the existing structure. On that, the climbing lane from Pollards Road heading westwards will be extended over the crest immediately west of the road to give a longer overtaking lane. To make these improvements, two houses need to be acquired on that section.

West of Montumana is fairly straightforward. There is some acquisition of agricultural land in that section and reconstruction of access is the main thing, along with general alignment improvements that we are making throughout the project. The project benefits include: providing greater sight distances, both along the highway and at the junctions and accesses; improving safety with wider pavement and shoulders; considerable improvement in safety barriers - not many places have safety barriers at the moment and they should have. Where practical we are removing roadside hazards and increasing the number of accesses of junctions. All those contribute to a safer road. We are providing a new, smoother road surface. The existing one is out of shape. We are improving alignment to provide more consistent travel speed and to improve overtaking opportunities.

We have looked at environmental aspects. Agricultural land has been assessed to identify prime agricultural land. As Hein mentioned, where it has been necessary to gain approval from the RPDC to convert agricultural land to road reserve, botanical, historical heritage and Aboriginal heritage surveys have been undertaken. The most significant botanical entity is the freshwater crayfish, which is present in north-west creeks. We have incorporated procedures in the contract documents to have creeks surveyed immediately before construction and to relocate any lobsters. You can't do the survey before then because the lobsters might return in the intervening period. Some spotted-tail quoll and eastern barred bandicoot have been identified in the area, mainly through road kill records. There is not much we can do about that.

There is a small patch of showy willow-herb at the western end of the project. It is on the Tasmanian threatened species list. We have a permit

to take one. It is nestled among weeds; if you deal with the weeds then the showy willow-herb can't be saved. The other major botanical issue concerns phytophera near the summit, in the white gravel. We have procedures in place to ensure there is no spread of phytophera. That has been agreed with DPIWE.

No Aboriginal issues were identified during the survey. There are no registered Aboriginal sites. There is nothing on the National Heritage list, the Register of National Estate, the Tasmanian Heritage register, or listed in either of the planning schemes. We have spoken to all the landowners at least once as part of the design procedure. Those landowners on the east of cutting section have been spoken to more than once - some of them quite often - to have them agree to the accommodation works that have to be undertaken.

Rulla Road

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the possibility of designating the Rulla Road intersection a 'left-only' turn for motorists turning towards Wynyard.

Mr Poortenaar responded:-

I realise that most people will be turning east towards Sisters Hills, which does not require them to cross the traffic. We could provide a slip lane. There is a limit to the distance we could extend it because the overtaking lane up to Myalla Road starts there. There has to be a separation, otherwise people are confused about whether it is an overtaking lane or a slip lane. If you are heading east you still have a problem with merging traffic when you are going relatively slowly and someone is coming up very fast behind you.

... We could provide a bit of slip lane to allow some acceleration, but you would still ... be lucky to have two seconds. You would still have the visibility problem and you would still need to merge relatively slow traffic with fast traffic.

The Committee questioned Mr Poortenaar as to the process of closing Rulla Road. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

The process of closing Rulla Road is with council. If council felt there was some way to alleviate it, then they could make recommendations. They can suggest to DIER that the road be kept open and that the design incorporate it. DIER will have concerns about safety.

... If you are trying to merge traffic that has accelerated to a reasonable speed then you would need to merge them on the climbing lane. That would not be desirable because we want to keep a separation between junction and climbing lane.

When questioned as to how a designated left-turn would be achieved, Mr Poortenaar responded:-

Normally just have a no-right-turn sign.

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the options available to motorists were Rulla Road North to be closed. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

Yes; you can go east along Devils Elbow Road.

... It is narrow, but there is reasonable visibility. We spoke to council about it. They felt it was the same standard as a lot of their roads.

... It is probably an acceptable standard, given the traffic using it.

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the quality of Devils Elbow Road, Mr Poortenaar responded:-

It is a gravel road and it is moderately steep. It would be typical of a gravel road in the wet. It would be acceptable. The main problem is that it is narrow. An oncoming truck would require you to back down to a passing bay.

... The main narrow section is over the creek, which is on a causeway. We are proposing to put up a wire-rope barrier to prevent people from running into the dam.

The Committee asked the witnesses whether the Department would be sympathetic to some upgrading of both the west and east Devils Elbow Road to accommodate some additional traffic in the event that the north Rulla Road was closed. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

I can't comment on whether the department would consider that. The main focus of this project is the highway. It is possible that we might have money left over at the end. However, there might be issues with funding not being spent on the Bass Highway, especially Federal money.

The Committee sought further clarification regarding the possibility of a left turn only from Rulla Road north, in particular what provision there was for turning left in terms of an acceleration lane. The following exchange took place:-

Mr POORTENAAR - *... it is a single lane downhill. You would not normally provide an acceleration lane for a junction like that. I understood (Mr Best) was talking about an acceleration lane at Rulla Road, which has been suggested by some of the residents. Generally if you have good visibility, and there you would have the 100 kph visibility, you wouldn't need an acceleration lane; you would be able to reach the same speed as the downhill traffic within the five seconds.*

CHAIR - But isn't it true that there is downhill traffic if you turn left out of Rulla Road?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes but there the problem is that you don't have enough view; you would have a much more limited time to accelerate because you wouldn't be able to see the traffic coming.

CHAIR - Yes, but isn't it also true that with the extra works which you are providing west of Rulla Road north, substantial excavation of the bank to provide a pretty reasonable sight distance, we are going to be increasing that sight distance substantially to the right of Rulla Road north if we are coming out to the west of Rulla Road north?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes. It is possible to improve the sight distance but there is a limit as to how much you can improve it from the topography.

Ms O'BYRNE - Isn't the argument about the bus being able to stop there because the bus has increased visibility options, quite substantially increased visibility options rather than just minimal?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, the bus being further up the hill.

Mr WILLIAMS - The movement of the bus is a separate issue, I think. The orientation of the bus when it stops is in line with the highway. It is not on a curve so he can use his rear vision mirrors to make a decision about whether to leave the bus stop and breach the traffic or not. It is about positioning the bus in the best position.

CHAIR - Won't the sight distance from Rulla Road north to the west be every bit as much as the sight distance from the west of Devils Elbow Road intersection after the excavations are done at the Rulla Road north area?

Mr WILLIAMS - I don't think I could answer, without doing a bit of work, exactly how much sight distance there is.

Mr POORTENAAR - When they did the original design, which was to keep the junction open, they designed it at an 80 kph distance, whereas the west one does have about a 100 kph sight distance, so it was better at the western end.

CHAIR - I must say that after the opening questions by Mr Best, I'm struggling to understand why you can't facilitate a left turn only, given that the traffic movements turning left out of Rulla Road north would in essence be no different from turning left out of Devils Elbow Road. At Devils Elbow Road we have no merging lane. You are suggesting that you could possibly build a merged lane out of Rulla Road north but you probably don't need it because of the topography being essentially the same. It's a downhill run when we come out of Rulla Road north, the same as there is a downhill run out of Devils Elbow Road. Your comment

to my question earlier was that coming out of Devils Elbow Road you don't need the merged lane because you can get up to speed pretty quickly because of the sight distance. The sight distance I saw at Rulla Road this morning is incredibly substandard right now but when I pictured the bank being excavated substantially I would have thought we'd be seeing right up to the corners at some 300 metres away. I would expect that you would be at least 300, probably even 400 metres to the west of Rulla Road with clear sight distance to turn left.

Mr POORTENAAR - *I think it wasn't as much as that in the original design but with more excavation I would have thought it should be able to be achieved. The other aspect that the chief traffic engineer had a concern with was that basically we wanted to rationalise junctions. Half of accidents are at junctions and here we have three junctions serving a handful of houses. Obviously it is very dangerous at the moment and they could be improved to some extent. The other aspect is that it is a different speed environment. The traffic coming down the hill at Devils Elbow Road is generally going slower because they are on a down grade, whereas at Rulla Road they speed up because they know they have a hill to climb up, so the traffic, as you would have noticed, is going a lot faster at Rulla Road. So, yes, the matter really was prompted by the sponsor of the project and the chief traffic engineer. Originally we designed it to keep it open but obviously it had limitations in what we could achieve because a large part of the driver was to get this tendered and not have problems getting it approved but the department felt that it would be a better safety outcome to close that junction and the matter is now in the hands of the council and the magistrate. Regarding the safety report on that junction and the community's concerns, the council and the magistrate will make a decision on that evidence. At the moment if the answer is either way we can accommodate that but there were reasons that the chief traffic engineer had for closing it.*

CHAIR - *The predominant reason seems to be from that contribution you have just made the rationalisation of accesses, not a safety matter, because you did say that the sight distances could be substantially improved. My proposition to you is that they will be substantially improved. I said 400 metres; at the very worst, 300 metres, I would have thought, from what I saw there this morning and from what I see on these plans in front of me with the chainages set down. Am I right in saying not that the sight distances could be improved but they will be as a result of the cutting which is proposed to provide the bus lay-by, if you wish?*

Mr POORTENAAR - *If we were keeping the junction open we would have to provide more cutting. At the moment the cutting that is proposed wouldn't improve the sight distance sufficiently to be safe.*

CHAIR - *Really?*

Mr POORTENAAR - *I don't believe so.*

Mr WILLIAMS - *The cutting that we had designed when we were keeping the junction open is larger than the cutting that we have now with moving the bus stop up there and space for the bus shelter and those sort of things, so it would need to go back further than we are currently proposing.*

The Committee sought detail of the excavation. Mr Williams submitted:-

The main difference in the cutting is not a lot. The area closer to Rulla Road north will have less cutting by probably 2 or 3 metres than it would if we had the junction left open. It pushes back on the western part of the cutting as we have widened that to get the space to allow the bus shelter to be in there and the footpath.

... The bus shelter will restrict the sight distance. We are just moving the existing bus shelter. That will be sitting there and that will be the limit on the sight distance. We would finish the works as proposed.

I would like to add one thing. On Mr Best's proposal to have it left only, I don't think that is a wise idea because if we cater for that only and provide the appropriate sight distances, it is hard to see how that is going to be controlled and stop people making the right turns. You can put up a sign 'No right turn' but some people tend to ignore signs and if they come down the road there will be nothing physical in the road to stop them from making that turn and so people might make the turn without the appropriate sight distance. So I would counsel against left only.

Bus Stop

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the siting of the bus stop. Mr Williams submitted:-

... We have had a number of discussions with the bus operator about where he stops and we have talked to him about standards of the bus stops. Our understanding is that he is happy with those. As to where the children cross the road, we have made sure of the sight distance to get across the road, which probably isn't the case at all current bus stops. Some of them are not in good positions and a lot of the bus stops are very poor in standard ...

As to the direction in which the primary bus travels, Mr Williams added:-

... In the morning he would come from Wynyard, so he comes along the highway and goes into Rulla Road. He goes down Montumana Road and then he goes right around in a big loop on Montumana Road and then goes back along the highway. In the afternoon he would do the same route in the opposite direction.

Residents of Devil's Elbow Road

Mrs Moles made the following submission to the Committee:-

First I want to draw the meeting's attention to the reduced number of junctions for Devils Elbow Road, the objective. Currently three junctions serve a handful of houses. The junction is in a dip where traffic, particularly trucks, are speeding to get up the next hill and get a head start on overtaking lanes, braking ability reduced due to grade, horizontal bend et cetera. They want to get the speed up before they get there. I do feel inclined to think that for safety the three junctions need to be open - for various reasons. I did cite in my statement the bushfire emergency which really brought it home to me because we were in darkness and that little north junction was very handy because the western one at that time was closed. The western one is essential because of the trucks, because that was part of the agreement, that they would travel that way. I do feel concerned about the children walking 50 metres in the pouring rain to a relocated bus stop. You looked at it from the bus driver's point of view but I wondered if anybody had asked the children or their parents because you don't drop a child off at a corner to walk 50 metres and get soaked before they get to the bus stop. It's just a bit strange to me.

It seems to me that the northern junction could be left open to a left-hand turn because that's what we're doing at the moment and there's never been an accident there in all the years that I've been there - nearly 52 years. The accidents are much further west. In view of the various fancy driveways and duck in here and duck in there, I feel a bit sad to think that we'll lose the prospect of losing our chief access road when you see everything else very fancy. It doesn't seem fair. I'm not taking my bat and ball and going home but it just doesn't seem logical to me.

If the bus stop remained at the junction, I'd be very happy to volunteer a bit more land for them to have a safe bus stop there. By the look of the maps I got yesterday, my donkey paddock is shrinking considerably!

But those surveying reports and the maps do prove that there will be much better visibility to the west. And as for the little bus shelter, it is not going to be sited in a traffic lane, is it? It is going to be in a bay, out of the visibility of people looking to the right. Now when I go out I look to the right; I count 11; I look to the left, have another quick look to the right and count some more, because there is room for one truck and two cars in that dip in the road. According to those maps, that bank will be gone and the bus stop will be there and the children will get wet if it rains! I do feel it is essential for the three to be left open. That is all I want to say.

The Committee questioned Mrs Moles as to whether she could propose an alternative to the proposed bus stop section. Mrs Moles responded:-

For it to remain at the junction, but to have a drive-in. I made this point in my submission, where I said:

I am no engineer or road designer, but -

1. Rulla Road north access remain open - left turn only. Vehicles travelling west and wishing to access northern Devils Elbow Road are then only crossing one lane of oncoming traffic.

2. Bus stop to remain at the junction, but situated in large drive-in area. Road widened considerably and general visibility improved. Important - appropriate signs strategically placed. It just could work!'

Since receiving those maps I can see that the visibility west is definitely going to be improved. I wish it had been done 50 years ago! I would be very happy with a left turn only there.

Mr Douma made the following submission to the Committee:-

When all the junctions on the highway have been standard upgraded, we still don't know the reason for closing down the north end. If we go out on the eastbound, we can turn left; for a right turn we have to go to Devils Elbow Road, and there is no right turn provision for people there - you have to cross two lanes to get into Devils Elbow. I have no problem with the junction. What I don't like is the signs on the highway saying that this is a bypass lane. These signs in big letters mean that people speed up for the junctions, and at junctions there are people waiting to make left or right turns. If the people are dropping children off and they do the right thing, they have to drive around to the east or west to drop the kids off. I have been trying to work out the distance that we can see the traffic coming downhill, and wait until the road is clear in order to turn to the left. We go uphill and in the bypass lane there are cars passing. I know that there is a lot of truck traffic, and with the braking distance on trucks, it is always dangerous in wet weather. Over Rulla creek it is a bottleneck - it is too narrow. I always come down and give people warnings that I am turning right and have no problems. But what happens in traffic is that people see the signs that there is a passing lane, so they speed up, and that is what causes the problem. It is not only the trucks, it is private cars as well. The closure of the Rulla Road northern junction makes it more dangerous for a lot of people. As Mollie says, it is possible that people can make a U-turn. I hate that and I hate the fact that people are speeding. It would be easy to make the road wider over Rulla Creek. It is better to make the highway properly so that it will last into the future than to spend it on Devils Elbow Road. I think you should make the highway safe. I have talked to politicians and urged them not to be hasty on this matter. 'Don't be hasty, look at the overall situation.' People come out from the south of Rulla Road have to cross at the T-junction and that is more dangerous in that they have to turn to the right to go east.

... I have tried to get the committee to see the point as to how the money can be spent. If you are driving along the Devils Elbow Road and you come face to face with a truck, you cannot pass. Somebody has to reverse back to the top of the hill, and trucks cannot reverse to the top of the hill in that road. People have to give way to big trucks on a slippery road. Once a year the council grades the road to remove the bumps and potholes. Is it cheaper for the Government to close the road down and the council have no money to upgrade the road. That was what the council told me. The council have not really improved the road in 38 years. There have been a few accidents on the Devils Elbow Road - a few cars have rolled over. If I come down the hill and a truck comes up, I go out on the north side. If someone else - a neighbour - comes down the hill and I am going up, I have to go to the left and there are big potholes there. I have to go back up to the top on the east end and wait for the trucks; in doing so on one occasion it buckled my new car. The insurance won't pay that; I have to try the council. The council won't pay it. The money is there to improve the road and I am sure the engineers could do something about it. If I have to drive to the west and go out or go in it means I have to drive an extra five kilometres.

The Committee recalled the proponents of the project. In reference to the evidence of the previous two witnesses who submitted that at Devils Elbow Road East to turn right, if one is heading towards Smithton, one is required to cross a double lane of traffic, whereas at Rulla Road North, one is crossing one lane of traffic, the witnesses were asked why Rulla Road North could not be made sufficiently safe by closing Devil's Elbow Road, if one of the aims is to rationalize accesses. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

Devils Elbow Road East accesses the Nichols' farm, so they would have to go the long way to access their farm. We have already upgraded it. They looked at the three junctions and decided they couldn't close the west one or the east one, so this was the only one left.

The Committee questioned Mr Poortenaar as to whether such decision was considered as part of the whole package with regard to Rulla Road North, or whether Rulla Road North was considered in isolation. Mr Poortenaar responded:-

I understand they did look at closing two junctions and leaving just one open, and they decided that they needed to leave the easternmost and westernmost ones open because it would be further for someone to go right round.

DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

The following document was taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources – “Bass Highway – Sisters Hills Upgrade: West of Cutting Realignment and Climbing Lane, East of Cutting Climbing Lane Extension, Wilsons Creek Bridge

Replacement and Realignment of Approaches, West of Montumana Road (East) Realignment”, dated July 2006;

- Mrs Mollie Moles, submission dated 16.8.06; and
- Mr J. & Mrs A.W. Douma, submission dated 16.08.06.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Committee notes the evidence of the residents of the Sister’s Creek community regarding the proposed closure of the northern junction of Rulla Road and the Bass Highway and the desire to have existing accesses remain open. The Committee further notes the evidence given regarding the quality of Devil’s Elbow Road, a “steep, narrow gravel road”, and the inevitable increase in traffic that will be generated as a result of the proposed works.

The Committee is strongly of the view that the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources should co-operate fully with the Waratah-Wynyard Council to upgrade Devil’s Elbow Road to a standard commensurate with the foreshadowed increase in traffic.

The Committee is satisfied however, that on the balance of the evidence received, once complete, the works will provide the following benefits:

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

Accordingly, the Committee recommends the project, in accordance with the documentation submitted, at an estimated total cost of \$22,400,000.

**Parliament House
Hobart
1 November 2006**

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