

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM, HENTY HOUSE, LAUNCESTON, ON WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2006.

TASMAN HIGHWAY, BOURKES ROAD TO BARROW CREEK - ROADWORKS

Mr DAVID ROLPH, DESIGN CONSULTANT, GHD, Mr DAVID SONDERGELD, PROJECT MANAGER, DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY AND RESOURCES, AND Mr DAVID JONES, ST PATRICKS RIVER PROGRESS ASSOCIATION WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Harriss) - Welcome, gentlemen.

Mr JONES - Thank you very much. I have been a resident of Nunamara for the last four-and-a-half years, being the local shopkeeper and the postmaster of that region. The general public tell the local shopkeeper all the woes of the day and their troubles and whatever else. We have been constantly reminded over the past four years of the condition of the piece of the Tasman Highway that we are talking about. It is a very busy piece of road. A lot of the tourists who came to Tasmania in the boom years of three years or so ago and since found that basically the gateway to the north-east is off the *Spirit*, through Westbury, down through the expressway at the back of Kings Meadows, out onto the Tasman Highway and they're going east. A lot of them don't recognise and are not shown basically that there are other ways to the north-east. So the traffic was increased there.

Take the logging infrastructure that is within that region, particularly the upper reaches of the St Patricks River which is a very timbered area. It's a very large part of the Gunns plantation scheme and a large amount of traffic comes and goes through there. The local school bus operator was very afraid on many occasions, particularly during July/August last year. If I'd had prior knowledge of this, I could have submitted to your meeting, Paul, quite a few photographs that I took with a digital camera of a particular section of that road. It's extremely dangerous and I think, as some of the fellows here will probably say, that it could be edge-filled today, there could be a shower of rain, and virtually by the end of this weekend it would be back in a very dangerous situation. I think you could almost submit to any board of consequence relative to highway safety - the MAIB or whatever - that it is extremely dangerous. The surfaced area is barely wide enough in most instances to carry the local school bus. Keep in mind that this particular section of Trout Creek is perhaps the only passing area from the top of Waverley Hill right out to the foot of The Sideling almost. There is nowhere else much where you can safely overtake anybody. So you have overtaking or meeting. As a consequence, a lot of mirrors were taken off caravans and a lot of people were very frightened by that, the school bus operator in particular. There is some footage in the local newspaper, the *Examiner*. On occasions they photographed the bus with a sedan beside it. He I think mentioned to the local school bus authority that perhaps the school bus operations should cease because of the danger.

Moving on past that, we as mail contractors in the region see very frequently, by the hour almost, situations on some parts of that road which are extremely dangerous as far motor vehicle movement and heavy-laden log trucks is concerned. With 50 or 60 tonnes of log trucks, particularly some of these B-doubles, once they drop off the shoulder of that road - and the photographs that I had showed that very clearly - everything goes wrong and it is a matter hopefully of the zigs meeting up with the zags.

If there is to be a pulpwood industry, with a pulp mill placed on the reaches of the Tamar River in 2008 or whatever, with the amount of traffic that will generate - that will be the gateway, from the upper reaches of the St Patricks River down through the Trout Creek section, across to Nunamara and into what we call Prossers Road on to the East Tamar Highway - there need to be not only improvements to the highway, but also some infrastructure put in place or some research done relative to all that increased movement because it will be extremely busy. We see those plantations come and go, grow and be harvested, be replanted and grow again. I think the flux of the thing is probably on a low ebb at the moment. For example, the amount of traffic out there was far greater three years ago than it is now, based on the amount of timber in the area.

If that pulp mill gets the tick and goes ahead, there needs to be some very serious consideration given, not only to this section but also to other parts of the Tasman Highway. I chair a meeting which is attended by a handful of the locals - traditional people, such as the Calverts at the top of the Camden region, who have been there for a hundred years or whatever. The purpose of this little meeting is just to keep in touch with what is happening with government - at local, State and Federal level. Those people have had some concerns about what is happening on that road. Being the spokesperson for the group, I email Minister Cox's office every now and then so I can get some upgrades, but the information that has been coming back has been rather sparse, which is sometimes a bit disappointing. I did raise with the minister a couple of weeks ago the bottleneck on that bridge that crosses the creek. At the moment it is almost dry, but during the winter months there is a large volume of water coming off the foothills of Mt Barrow and flowing through the creek. That bridge needs to be reconstructed. I keep asking Minister Cox's office what is to happen to the bridge, but to date I have had no response.

My verbal submission to this authority would be, 'Please, let us have a look at the bridge. It is no good rewidening the road if we are to have the same situation that we had 25 or 30 years ago at the foot of the Dilston Hill, where we had the nice new wide East Tamar Highway with a narrow bridge.' I think that caused a lot of havoc and the same thing would apply out there because it is the only straight section of the overtaking area of that road.

Mrs NAPIER - I think you will be pleased with what the guys have been planning.

Mr JONES - I think so. Basically I do appreciate the fact that someone has allowed me to speak here. The local people have certainly been concerned about it for a long time. In general terms the road right through to the north-east of Scottsdale is practical, approachable, usable or whatever. This section is the bad part, which is now going to be upgraded. The school bus service is very concerned. There would be other documentation that could be tabled but I think we have come past that point. I can add

no more than what I have just said: the photographic evidence is there if anyone wants to view it.

CHAIR - Thank you David.

Mrs NAPIER - Has the School Bus Association had some input into the lay-bys for the school buses?

Mr JONES - No, I am not aware of that. I would have thought that would be the case, but I do not know.

CHAIR - Thank you, David; please feel free to stay and listen. Gentlemen, before you add your verbal component to your written submission, we want to express our gratitude for the site visit. It was certainly the best way to see exactly what is happening. We always endeavour to do that; it was a graphic illustration of just where the challenges are with the current road construction in the project before us.

Mr SONDERGELD - The Tasman Highway is defined as a category 4 feeder road under the draft Tasmanian road hierarchy and is intended to provide safe and equitable passenger vehicle and tourist movements between Launceston and the north-east region. Whilst it carries a low daily traffic volume, log truck movements represent a significant proportion of that traffic. The narrow pavement formation through this section results in considerable road user conflicts. Whilst Golconda Road has been identified by DIER, the Dorset Council and Tourism Tasmania as the preferred tourist route to the north-east, the Tasman Highway provides an alternative tourist access to the region. Tourist numbers using the Tasman Highway may vary over time and a challenge remains to provide a safe route for these travellers.

This \$5.2 million project is co-funded by the Federal and State governments. The Federal Government is contributing \$1.5 million through the AusLink Strategic Regional Program. There was a requirement from the Federal Government for the State Government to match their funding. The State Government then contributed \$2.7 million as part of its 2006 election commitments program. Later when it was determined that this would not be enough to deliver the project, a further \$1 million of State funding has since been added to the project from the State Roads Capital Investment Program. The Australian Government made their offer of \$1.5 million in 2004-05 and the State Government announced their contribution at the 2006 State election.

The section of highway included in this project is the missing link required to complete the construction of the highway between Nunamara and The Sideling, which was undertaken on the Scottsdale end in the mid-1990s and on the Launceston end more recently in 2003-04. The project involves reconstruction of two 4.2 kilometre sections of highway. The work involves improvements to the road alignment and widening of the road to provide sealed 3-metre lanes and 1-metre shoulders. The works proposed are based on design work undertaken in 1993. This design has been reviewed in order to bring the design in line with current AusRoads guidelines. Significant local community feeling is attached to this project. Expectations have been high since the initial consultation and design was undertaken in the 1990s.

Approvals are under way for AusLink funding. The Parliamentary Public Works Committee and the development application has been lodged with the Launceston City Council. A public contact plan providing information to the community has been developed and is being implemented. A brochure outlining the works has been developed and will be distributed to the local community prior to construction commencing. Land acquisitions for the works are under way and accommodation works are being confirmed with landowners.

The final design is nearing completion. It is proposed to tender the works in January 2007, subject to all approvals being obtained. Works are targeted to commence in April 2007 and be completed by April 2008.

CHAIR - Thank you, David. Nothing else to be added at this stage?

Mr ROLPH - I have a few more notes that are probably of a more technical nature. As the sections of the highway on either side of this project have been reconstructed, the Tasman Highway in the vicinity of the works does not provide the road user with a consistent driving environment. The works to be undertaken involve improvement of the horizontal and vertical alignment to provide a minimum 80-kph design in line with current guidelines provided by AusRoads. The pavement is to be reconstructed to cater for the anticipated traffic loadings over the next 20 years. With the first two kilometres through the flood plain, the proposed design will improve the low speed horizontal curves that connect the long straight lengths of road. At present one of these curves through the section is signposted with a hazard warning sign. As the road climbs up out of the flood plain, the proposed design will remove substandard and broken back horizontal curves as well as improving the vertical alignment of highway. The current road has poor sight distances throughout its length, particularly the last two kilometres, with poor sight distances at access and junctions. These concerns would be addressed by the proposed vertical and horizontal alignment improvements.

Passing bays will be provided at the road junctions. There will be some rationalisation of accesses. Some will be closed and some will be relocated at more appropriate locations. The existing total seal width varies from between 5 and 5.5 metres. The new road will provide sealed 3-metre lanes and 1-metre shoulders, giving a total sealed width of 8 metres plus curved lining where applicable. Currently heavy vehicles cannot stay completely within the existing seal when passing each other. The existing seal width will remove this concern and the extra width will provide greater benefits in loss-of-control accidents, having a greater width to recover. Where practical, we are removing roadside hazards. Safety barriers are to be installed where warranted along the highway to shield hazards that cannot be removed. The reconstructed road will provide a smoother surface. There is one ridge to be replaced at Coquet Creek, sometimes called Trout Creek, by a twin-sealed structure. This structure will be designed for a 100-year life.

All landowners with property within the site of the works have been contacted and accommodation is being arranged. The environmental investigations have been undertaken. Some of the investigations were undertaken in 1992. These investigations were reviewed and reports were prepared, where required. There are no threatened floral species recorded in the site of the works. From a fauna aspect, the proposed works will involve the removal of some localised areas of native vegetation which provide potential

habitat for threatened and non-threatened fauna species. Although this vegetation provides some potential habitat, it is small in size and is not considered to be core habitat and hence removal is not likely to have any significant impact on the threatened species. No Aboriginal heritage sites were identified within the site of the works. The area proposed for road widening by DIER has a history of agricultural and farm pastures. The previous study undertaken in 1992 revealed a historic milepost within the southern section of the proposed upgrade. More recent field investigations undertaken in 2006 do not identify any evident heritage features relating to past land uses and history of the area. Recent investigations could not locate the milepost. The proposed road improvements are not anticipated to have any significant impacts on heritage values.

CHAIR - Thanks very much, David. Mr Jones, you would have heard reference to the bridge in that presentation by David.

Mr JONES - I did.

Mrs NAPIER - We were discussing the school bus issue when we were out on the road and a couple of dangerous spots where you have run into problems with the sight lines. Can you outline to us what you are intending to do to try to improve the ability to more safely drop off kids?

Mr ROLPH - There are going to be pathways provided at the junctions at Nelsons Road, Mount Barrow Road and Bourkes Road. The bus bays are basically to the Australian standard. I think they have a 15 metre taper either end and 20 metres of parallel lanes so they'll be put off the road safely in those locations.

Mrs NAPIER - They will be signposted presumably?

Mr SONDERGELD - They're not normally signposted.

Mr ROLPH - There is one there that is an existing bus bay that is signposted. I was going to bring that up before the final design, that if we have signposts on one we should be looking at signposting the rest of them. I think the normal practice is to put school crossing signs on them.

Mr SONDERGELD - That would be good enough for me.

Mrs NAPIER - If you have signage there, as people are driving along not everyone will take notice but people get used to the fact that it is a school bus area. You would be aware that in the north-east region there is some sensitivity to that issue at the moment because of accidents - not on this road, admittedly.

Mr SONDERGELD - More bus bays will be constructed but then the sight distances and vision to the bus bays is going to be greatly increased so it is going to make it a lot safer. If we have new bus bays, greater sight distances and signage, that should be adequate.

Mrs NAPIER - We had a look at the Pecks Road access and the fact that there is a brow quite close to that. Could you outline to us what is involved in terms of the angle you would take to get out of Pecks Road?

Mr ROLPH - We intend to take out the vertical curve to the Scottsdale end. I will have to go back to the drawings to have a look.

Mr JONES - The same applies to that Mount Barrow turn-off which is the first one that goes to the right hand towards Scottsdale. A lot of people go up and down Mount Barrow for the scenic view of the north-east from there.

Mr ROLPH - With the vertical improvement, the design has been based on 80 km so they will improve that significantly. At the moment you would probably be lucky to get a 60 km design.

Mr SONDERGELD - If you look at that little section up towards the top, where it says 'Existing design surface' that is where the new surface will be. There is a reasonable cut through that area. Pecks Hill Road is on the left-hand side of that.

Mrs NAPIER - Yes, that makes sense.

Mr HALL - In regard to the bridge, there is a pretty big catchment going right back up towards Mount Barrow. Are you comfortable that that double-boxed section will cater for any water there?

Mr ROLPH - We have designed the opening to cater for a 100-year flood. That's the normal standard for road design.

Mr HALL - Given that there are forestry operations, there can be extra water run-off. That's why I asked the question.

Mr ROLPH - Yes. We have done the design.

Mr HALL - You have done it and you're all right. Okay. Can you tell us what's left to upgrade back towards The Sideling? Is there anything more that's left to be done on the Tasman Highway at this stage?

Mr SONDERGELD - Not in the five-year plan.

Mr HALL - But there are obviously deficient sections of road.

Mr SONDERGELD - There are deficient sections.

Mr HALL - Yes. Similar to what we are looking at today?

Mr SONDERGELD - There are the substandard curves around The Sideling itself. The department's planners will have to work out exactly what will be the function of this road later on and then ultimately develop projects in line with that. But in line with our five-year plan it's fixed for four. We are looking at the fifth year now and there is nothing in that fifth year.

Mrs NAPIER - So we're in the fourth year of a five-year plan, are we?

Mr SONDERGELD - No, it's a five-year plan so each time you come up to the next year we look at -

Mrs NAPIER - Oh, you push it on a year?

Mr SONDERGELD - Yes. We look at the projects that come on into that fifth year and there's nothing on the Tasman Highway.

Mrs NAPIER - That Springfield section which has the same kind of uneven surface, which is also a danger area with the right-hand turn-off to Springfield, is not in there?

Mr SONDERGELD - No.

Mrs NAPIER - I would have thought that would be the next one to tackle. It has the same vertical inclines, I think you call them?

Mr SONDERGELD - Vertical curves, yes. I have contacted the program manager and there is nothing in there, and they are looking at the fifth year now. There is nothing on that section of road.

In accordance with the NETAS study, a six-kilometre section was identified. The first two- and-a-bit kilometres were done in 2003-04, and this is completing the work done for that study.

Mr HALL - With the costings on page 8, you talk about a project-specific \$167 000. What is that?

Mr ROLPH - That is for the bridge replacement at Coquet Creek.

Mr HALL - Further down, does 'miscellaneous' mean contingency?

Mr ROLPH - That is for fencing, access reinstatement -

Mr HALL - As with the last project, we need a breakdown of some of those issues.

CHAIR - On a very recent project we asked for that. It is not explained tightly enough for the committee's consideration to just lump things under 'miscellaneous' without being specific.

Mr ROLPH - Okay. The other thing included would have been service relocations. The Hydro was about \$40 000 and Telstra was about \$25 000, but we are still coming to grips with the latter because they are going to relocate the line as part of the proposed work. There will be some minor Telstra work.

CHAIR - You would appreciate the need for accountability, so the committee needs your best estimate. We understand there are always contingencies but we are looking for documentation of those breakdowns. You could provide that to Mr Donnelly.

Mr HALL - I presume that contingency is built in?

Mr ROLPH - We have a contingency built into all items. This would have been done at the preliminary design stage.

Mr HALL - The last item is 'acquisition'.

Mr ROLPH - That is based on \$5 000 per hectare for planned acquisition.

Mr HALL - That would seem a bit light. In a recent project, the area acquired was 3.25 hectares and that equated to \$46 000 per hectare. That is somewhat different from \$5 000, so you might have to reconsider that figure.

Mr ROLPH - I received advice on that, but I will check it.

Mr HALL - How many hectares are you looking to acquire?

Mr ROLPH - About 4.2.

Mr SONDERGELD - We have an updated estimate of 5.2; we should be able to get it reasonably easily.

Mr HALL - If you extrapolate from a recent project you are looking at over \$200 000 for land acquisition. That could push up the cost significantly.

CHAIR - Those documents should go to Mr Donnelly very quickly because, if the committee wishes to approve the project, it would want to keep to your construction schedule.

You have mentioned that no flora of any consequence will be affected. However, at the bridge we saw that large tree which you indicated is to be retained because it is a landscape feature.

Mr ROLPH - It is an animal habitat, so it was recommended in the flora report that it be retained.

CHAIR - Who did that report?

Mr ROLPH - GHD's botanist.

CHAIR - How do you assess the matter of safety with such a large tree very close to the side of a road?

Mr ROLPH - The new bridge requires a guard fence, which will extend past the tree. The guard fence was required anyway, so it will protect the tree at the same time.

CHAIR - My personal view is that 50 metres away, off the road reserve, there is plenty of habitat for any wildlife. I am regularly concerned when projects come before the committee with, in some instances, a row of trees left in the road reserve. We have the opportunity to remove them for safety. We are precious about limited access highways for vehicles, yet we leave obstacles which are a threat to human life, notwithstanding that a barrier will be erected on this occasion. The superficial view would be that a chainsaw might be used on that tree.

Mr BEST - It was good to look at the road today. Given the corridor strategy, I was initially concerned, but I now understand that it is part of the infrastructure strategy. Obviously there are some very serious safety issues. Irrespective of what happens with that road, those issues must be addressed.

Mrs NAPIER - Deep drainage is being developed at the side of the road to handle water runoff, so what is envisaged with this section of the road?

Mr ROLPH - We will regrade all the drainage to make sure they flow into the culverts. Some of the existing culverts will be replaced with new culverts. Drainage into the properties was an issue, so as well we will have to construct some easements through the properties to relieve the drainage. It is a flat area, so grading for drainage could go for miles.

Mrs NAPIER - While I welcome improvements to the sides, the basic principle is to raise the road.

Mr ROLPH - We are going to raise the road as well.

Mrs NAPIER - If there is a dip, you fill it in the rather than -

Mr ROLPH - We will be raising the road through the floodplain. Through the second section we will have cuttings and will fill in the dips.

Mrs NAPIER - Are you likely to use culverts underneath the road?

Mr ROLPH - Yes; reinforced concrete pipes.

Mrs NAPIER - At first glance, \$643 000 was a big figure for drainage.

Mr ROLPH - Yes; there is some significant drainage work. We need to extend a reinforced box culvert. In a couple of spots, 1 200 mm diameter culverts need to be extended or replaced.

Mrs NAPIER - You showed us a bad drain during the site inspection; what would you do with something like that? It has significant water flow.

Mr ROLPH - We are looking to extend the culvert outside the clear zone, where the guard fence is not required. If we can't do that we will protect it with a guard fence. I'm not sure what we are doing at that spot, but our preference is to extend culverts outside the clear zone so that they are no longer a hazard. We erect a safety barrier if we can't do that.

Mrs NAPIER - What category road is the Tasman Highway from Scottsdale heading south?

Mr ROLPH - I assume it is still a category 4 road.

Mrs NAPIER - So it is three metres and three metres, plus one metre on either side?

Mr SONDERGELD - We don't have that detail at the moment.

Mrs NAPIER - I was interested whether the standard of this road was going to be the same as the reconstructed Tasman Highway - the Branhholm to Scottsdale section.

Mr ROLPH - I'm not familiar with that project.

Mrs NAPIER - Could you let the committee know, because that would be useful.

If the State Government has put in an extra million over the original budget, is that detracting from other roads or is it additional consolidated funding?

Mr SONDERGELD - It is coming from the State Government Capital Investment Program. It would have been in there as part of the division of funds for other roads.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.