

## UNEDITED TRANSCRIPT

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2001.**

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### **ARTHUR HIGHWAY - SORELL TO MURDUNNA**

**Mr PETER TODD**, MANAGER, ASSET MANAGEMENT, DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY AND RESOURCES; AND **Ms TARYN LAIRD**, PROJECT MANAGER, ARTHUR HIGHWAY, DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY AND RESOURCES.

**CHAIR** (Mr Wing) - Thank you for the information you have given us on the tour of inspection this morning, and for your hospitality; we appreciate it very much.

**Mr TODD** - Firstly, I would like to thank the committee and acknowledge the committee's granting permission for the department to issue a request for tender for this project, on the understanding that the awarded tender would be to this committee's approval of the project.

We have presented two reports to the committee: the report which you had earlier dated August 2001; and we have also presented today a supplementary report dated October 2001.

The department recognises the importance of the Arthur Highway as the principal road connecting the Forestier and Tasman peninsulas in the south of the State. It provides access to one of Tasmania's principal tourism attractions, the historic site at Port Arthur. The Arthur Highway is categorised as a class 3 regional access road within the road hierarchy for State roads. Regional access roads are the main access roads to Tasmania's regions but carry less freight traffic than regional freight roads. The Arthur Highway is a single carriageway with one lane in each direction, as we saw this morning. The average sewer width is 5.8 metres; the shoulders are predominantly unsealed with an average width of 1 metre. Edge lines exist only in a few isolated locations. There is a broad mix of vehicles using the highway, including a significant tourist component. Traffic volumes decrease progressively from Sorell to Murdunna down to Port Arthur.

In 1998, the department completed the Arthur Highway planning study and, as a result, a number of improvement works have been undertaken and others included in the department's forward program. Many of these high-priority projects focus on safety improvements, including improved overtaking opportunities.

I would like to give the committee some information on the crash history and some analysis we have done of that. I have some other information that I can table for the committee to consider, which perhaps expands on what I would like to present this afternoon. Since 1991 there have been 14 fatal road crashes on the Arthur Highway, resulting in 19 deaths. Eight crashes occurred between 1991-95; there was one in 1998.

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However there have been five fatal crashes in 2001, resulting in eight deaths. Over the same period 40 crashes have occurred in which a person sustained a serious injury, 74 crashes where a person sustained a minor injury and 280 crashes were property damage only. The most significant crash type occurring on the highway in this 10-year period is vehicles leaving the road without a collision, this comprises 35 per cent of crashes occurring.

The department has done a comparison between the Arthur Highway and a control site on the Tasman Highway to look at what are the factors that seem to be contributing or factors within those crashes. On the Arthur Highway non-local drivers comprised 82 per cent of all crashes for the period 1994-2000, compared to 66 per cent on the Tasman Highway - the control site. Drivers licensed interstate or overseas represented 18.2 per cent of crash involved drivers on the Arthur Highway, compared to 14.5 per cent on the Tasman Highway. Drivers aged under 25, who are generally overrepresented in road crashes in Tasmania and indeed across Australia, were represented in only 22 per cent, compared to 29 per cent on the control site. A relatively high proportion of crashes occurred during daylight hours and many of those were during summer when vehicle volumes are higher. So from the analysis of that data it is quite clear that the high tourist component on that road, the number of interstate and overseas drivers, is a significant proportion of the number of crashes.

The counter measures being proposed in this project include shoulder sealing and widening and will significantly reduce the number of accidents. It will also assist with the shoulders and reduce the edge fall-away, especially on the insides of bends. Guideposts, retroreflective pavement markers and curb warning signs should also assist drivers who are unfamiliar with the route. Roadside hazard removal and safety fence improvements will make the roadside more forgiving for any vehicles that do leave the road. In Tasmania roadside hazards are a factor in about 40 per cent of fatalities.

I would now like to talk a little about the project itself. In this financial year, 2001-02, the State Government has allocated \$3 million for the upgrading of the Arthur Highway and the work is comprised of two packages: the first is widening of the highway between Sorell and Murdunna to a minimum width of 6.8 metres and the provision of edge lines. This will cost \$1.5 million. The widening will be undertaken on a high speed signs along the highway and therefore does not include the townships of Forcett, Dunalley and Murdunna where speeds are much lower. The second package of work is safety improvement works to an additional cost of \$1.5 million, bringing the total improvement funding to \$3 million.

To assist with the selection and prioritisation of safety improvement works, the Arthur Highway working group was established, comprising representatives of the Tasman and Sorell councils, the RACT, the Arthur Highway Action Group representing the local community and the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources. I refer the committee to the supplementary report which provides additional information on the safety improvement works. The working group has agreed on a number of safety improvements which have been included in the first contract that has been called. Those include: installation of raised pavement markets on the road centre line from Sorell to Port Arthur; the installation of new guideposts with corner cube reflectors from Sorell to Port Arthur; upgrading of the existing post and cable fence between Sorell and Murdunna and installation of new safety barriers in several locations between Sorell and

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Port Arthur. These agreed safety improvement works have been included in the recently called 'widening contract' and are costed at approximately \$0.4 million. The first contract has been called and that we are currently evaluating is approximately \$1.9 million in total. This leaves a further \$1.1 million of safety improvement works which are currently being planned and costed based on the priorities from the Arthur Highway Working Group and these include roadside hazard removal - trees, hydro poles, rocks and so on. Sight-in-distance improvements which include sight benching, removal of other vegetation, warning advisory signs including speed zoning and treatments of sections of the road that are subject to ice and frost. In this planning and costing work environmental issues are being addressed and appropriate approvals will be obtained.

We are also looking at involving local groups in replanting along appropriate sections of the highway. Additional contracts will be called to deliver these safety works early in 2002 and we anticipate that this will probably involve a number of small contracts which will more than likely involve local contractors.

The department is also undertaking planning works for overtaking lanes on the Hobart side of Carlton River. These lanes will provide for overtaking of vehicles in both directions and would be located on an uphill section of the road. Funding is being sought for these lanes from the Commonwealth under the Roads of National Importance Program. The department has been unsuccessful so far. These lanes would be constructed as and when funds become available. The overtaking lanes are not part of this project but they are being integrated into our planning for the highway. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Mr Todd. Ms Laird, would you like to add anything?

**Ms LAIRD** - I was just going to expand a little bit more on the projects themselves. There are two distinct components of work that we are undertaking, the first is the pavement widening and shoulder sealing between Sorell and Murdunna and the second is the safety improvements identified by the local community for which \$1.5 million has been allocated. The shoulder sealing is to occur between Sorell and Murdunna which is the area where the majority of the fatalities have occurred and has the higher traffic volumes.

Between Sorell and Lewisham Road the shoulders are already sealed and have edge lines. No work will be undertaken in this section. We recognise that this does not meet the road hierarchy targets, however it does meet the minimum width for this project of a 6.8 metre seal.

In the areas of the widening, work will be undertaken on both sides of the road. The existing centre lane will be maintained and edge lines will be installed on all new work. From Lewisham Road to Forcett, which is approximately a kilometre, an 8.0 metre seal will be adopted. This reflects DEIRs road hierarchy standards for the traffic volume of over 7 000 vehicles a day.

From Forcett the traffic volume has dropped to under 3 000 vehicles a day. The seal width of 7.2 metres will be adopted, which is again consistent with our road hierarchy targets. In some areas a 7.2 metre seal is not possible without either large scale earthworks or property acquisitions and in these areas a minimum of 6.8 will be specified and about 15 per cent of the site will have that treatment. No widening shall be

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undertaken in the area of the proposed overtaking lane until we confirm whether funding is available for that or not.

Widening through the townships will be undertaken at a later date as a separate project due to the property and traffic management issues in those areas. In conjunction with the widening, about 50 culverts will be extended to ensure that they end water at least a metre from the edge of seal and some drain reshaping works will be required. No major earthworks are intended.

The second package of works is the safety improvements that have been identified by the local community and endorsed by the Arthur Highway Working Group. The working group has agreed to fund the following safety works, which will be undertaken in conjunction with the widening project, and that is: the installation of raised pavement markers and new guideposts from Sorell to Port Arthur, the upgrading of existing post and cable fence and installation of a new safety barrier.

The remainder of the safety improvements are currently being scoped. These safety improvements have been identified by the community and endorsed by the working group for DEIR to scope and cost. Community consultation will follow and a final decision will be made by the working group on which projects are to be undertaken. The projects that we are scoping are roadside hazard removal - we are considering the removal of roadside hazards within the road reservation for the entire length of the highway. This includes tree removal, relocation of power poles, installation of safety barriers and installation of frangible sign posts. In general, a clear width of 5.5 metres from the edge of the lane has been adopted, however in some areas this cannot be achieved due to the width of the road reserve and in these instances a consistent roadside environment will be provided.

Areas are currently being identified where sight distance improvements can be achieved through the removal or trimming of vegetation and minor earthworks, in particular it may be possible to achieve an overtaking opportunity west of Carlton River with the removal of roadside vegetation and some minor earthworks. Upon completion of sight distance work and the widening project a review of the existing barrier lines will be undertaken. Any adjustments shall then be implemented.

DIERS Traffic Management Branch is undertaking a review of the existing warning signs and advisory signs on the highway and this will identify locations where additional kerb warning and advisory speed signs are warranted. Warning signs for concealed entrances, school bus stops and wildlife are also being considered.

In conjunction with DEIRs maintenance contractor and the local community, sites subject to ice and frost are being identified. Appropriate engineering solutions will be developed, which may include the installation of temperature-sensitive warning signs. DEIR are conscious of the environmental implications of the projects. A botanical survey of all trees identified for removal will be undertaken prior to commencement of the work and the hazard removal list will be adjusted to take into account the recommendations of that survey and council approval will be sought prior to removal of any roadside vegetation. It is proposed that an appropriate program of planting shall be developed to replace the trees that are removed and at this stage it is envisaged that that will be undertaken in conjunction with local community groups.

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In terms of the construction program, the ministerial commitment for this project was given to the local community that the work would be undertaken within the 2001-02 financial year and the budget reflects that. Tenders have been invited for the widening works and a contract will be awarded upon approval from this committee. That work will take about four months to complete.

It is anticipated that the planning works associated with the safety improvement projects will be completed by the end of November 2001 and implementation will proceed following further community consultations and final prioritisation by the Arthur Highway Working Group.

**Mr GREEN** - Normally we'd have an environmental officer to give us a rundown, Mr Chairman, of the environmental concerns associated with large wholesale vegetation clearing. I remember when we had a look at the project heading off down to the Huon where a couple of blue gums had to be removed and it was a major thing. You are asking the committee to pass the project based on that environmental work being done?

**Mr TODD** - Botanical survey have been conducted and we will have to abide by the recommendations and the appropriate approvals. We can't step outside those guidelines.

**Mr KONS** - That will be scrutinised by the local municipality?

**Mr TODD** - Yes, that's correct. They are part of the working group. Certainly the community had identified the issue of trees by the road. There have been a number of local people killed, as we saw today, at that site in collisions with trees so the community here has voiced very strong support for appropriate vegetation removal.

**Mr GREEN** - How much of the cost of the planning for the dual lanes for that particular section relies on Federal Government funding, hopefully, is built into this project?

**Mr TODD** - We are funding separately the planning of that.

**Mr GREEN** - Are you?

**Mr TODD** - Our operational budget is a separate process, so it's not coming out of the \$3 million.

Mr Chairman, that was some more information on the accidents - some notes.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. They were very interesting statistics that you gave and most relevant. We will take that into evidence.

**Mr KONS** - Mr Todd mentioned there were about 150 hydro poles to be removed. The contribution for that, does Aurora or the Hydro entity pay for that or is it part of this cost?

**Mr TODD** - No, the road authority will have to pay for that. We will have to pay for that out of the project. That's the normal arrangement when doing road works and if we need to

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move services, whether they be poles, cables of the service authorities, we are required to pay for that cost.

**Mr KONS** - Part of the tender for that, will that be a contested tender for the removal of those poles or will Aurora be doing the work?

**Mr TODD** - I imagine it will be Aurora doing the work because it's their infrastructure. I don't think that we have much option but to get them to do it.

**Mr KONS** - As far as contestability for relocating the poles?

**Mr TODD** - No, I think they will organise that work and we would have to negotiate with them on a price. I don't think it's a contested issue from our point of view. We won't undertake the work and we won't manage it.

**Mr KONS** - No, because there's providers of that service to install poles around the State.

**Mr TODD** - Yes. That would be up to Aurora to organise and manage that.

**Mr KONS** - It would be up to the department to ask whether it would be contested?

**Mr TODD** - We could ask that, but normally they give us a price on what it costs to remove a pole or relocate a pole. We will be seeking the best price that we can, based on there being quite a number of them to be moved.

**Mr KONS** - How do you know it's the best price if it doesn't go out for full contestability?

**Mr TODD** - I think we can only go on their advice. The only way we will know is on previous experience with the cost of moving poles. I don't think we have any jurisdiction over what Aurora does in terms of whether they do the work themselves or they put it out to contract and make it contestable. I don't believe we have any powers in that area.

**Mr KONS** - I presume, as you're the entity asking for the removal of the poles -

**Mr TODD** - Yes.

**Mr KONS** - I think there's a process with Aurora - for example, new poles being located on rural properties - that you can give the responsibility to Aurora to erect those poles or you can ask Aurora that you want that to be a contested price, which means that private enterprise can have a look at it, which is Tasmanian Pole Renewals or removals, I think, or one of those other entities.

**Mr TODD** - I was unaware of that, so we will follow that up, certainly, as an option. That certainly may produce some cost savings.

**Mr HARRISS** - Mr Chairman, if I might pick up on a couple of points from the report. First of all on page 4, you've used some letters to identify something associated with your edge lines and about a third of the way down, 'the specific safety benefits arising from this project are twofold' and you talk about edge lines and upgraded guideposts and RRPMs.

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**Mr TODD** - Retroreflective raised pavement markers, colloquially known as cats eyes.

**Mr HARRISS** - You have mentioned in both of your submissions to the committee and also in this written submission that the department has a road hierarchy minimum target and for this particular project you've spoken about an 8 metre seal in some places due to traffic volumes and a 6.8 metre seal or a 7.2 metre seal in other areas. Can you advise the committee just what the road hierarchy minimum targets are all about and does it relate to traffic volumes?

**Mr TODD** - It certainly does. Mr Chairman, I would be happy to tender a copy of our target standards for the committee. As I indicated in my evidence, the Arthur Highway is a category 3- there are five categories. Can I give you an example, a category 1 is the Midland Highway, which is the main freight route for Hobart, Launceston and continues right through to Burnie, in fact. That is our highest one. Then we have at the other end, which are more local access roads, at class 5. The Arthur Highway falls right in the middle as a class 3 and we have a number of targets in terms of lane width and shoulder width on a class 3 road depending on the volumes - up to 5 000 vehicles we are looking for a three metre lane and the shoulder width varies depending on the volumes as well. So for the section north of Lewisham Road where traffic volumes are 6 000 to 7 000, we are looking for a three metre lane with a one metre shoulder, which if you add those together and double it it gives you an eight metre seal. Where the traffic volumes drop down between 1 000 and 2 500, which is predominantly the rest of the road, our hierarchy asks for a three metre sealed lane, a 0.6 metre shoulder, so if you add those together and double it, you get 7.2.

As Ms Laird indicated in her evidence, we will be able to achieve that on 85 per cent of the road. There's some places where it's more difficult because of property acquisitions and earthworks where we'll only be able to achieve 6.8, so we're very close. The lane widths would be the same but it would be just a slight reduction in the shoulder widths. So that is how the road hierarchy works. We increase the level of service depending on the function and the traffic function and that is how that works. I'm happy to tender that, Mr Chairman.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. We will take that into evidence.

**Mr KONS** - Mr Chairman, can we also have tendered the figures for the movements?

**Mr TODD** - Certainly.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. We will take those into evidence as well. The question of seeking Federal funds to construct passing lanes in the future, can you give some further indication of the likely funds required?

**Mr TODD** - It will be about another \$3 million. What we have done in our proposal to the Commonwealth is we packaged up a project called 'The Arthur Highway Upgrading'. I think the total was about \$7 million, which included the work we're doing in this project, the overtaking lanes - and there were some other works I don't recall at this stage. What we would be looking for would be RONI funding - which is Roads of National Importance - which is a dollar-for-dollar contribution, a dollar from the State and a dollar

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from the Commonwealth. What we would do, if we were successful with that submission, is we've now committed \$3 million in the project we've presented to the committee today. There would obviously be some additional funds we would need to find in the next year or the year after but if we received a similar contribution from the Commonwealth of \$3 million that would go into those overtaking lanes. That is about of the order that we're looking at for those.

**CHAIR** - There were some sections where improvement in alignment seemed logical, if funds were available, and there were a couple of sections we noticed where it seemed that it wouldn't be a major project. What does the department have in mind there in the future?

**Mr TODD** - It is certainly something that we'll monitor. We believe that the implementation of this project will deliver real safety benefits immediately. The cost of realignment is not insignificant. Through that sort of terrain my estimate is it could be \$500 000 to \$1 million a kilometre to rebuild a road like that. It's a very expensive exercise. It's a very narrow road reservation; it would require significant land acquisition and it would be a very long process. The department believe that by widening the road we can get some very good safety benefits now, but we would monitor the performance of the road - accidents and so on and traffic volumes - with regard to any future upgrading. But at this stage it's not planned.

**Mr GREEN** - The speed limits as we drove into Port Arthur after passing Eagle Hawk Neck is quite a built-up area.

**Mr TODD** - Yes. The speed limits are set by an independent group within the agency, our Traffic Standards Branch, and deliberately independent. They set speed limits on all roads in Tasmania, including State roads.

**CHAIR** - Really - Campbell Town and Cleveland too?

**Mr TODD** - Yes, and local roads as well.

**CHAIR** - Who are these people?

**Mr TODD** - Shall I name names?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

*Laughter.*

**Mr TODD** - The Manager, Traffic Standards Branch, is responsible for that.

**CHAIR** - Who is that?

**Mr TODD** - Milan Prodanovic. They are responsible for speed limits and there's a set of criteria which they use, which are nationally recognised criteria. I understand that there is likely to be a review of those procedures.

**CHAIR** - I'm delighted to hear that.



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**Mr TODD** - But, nevertheless, we are asking them to review speed limits on the Arthur Highway as part of this project but we don't know the outcome of that yet and that will be incorporated into the sign changes and so on.

**CHAIR** - How many people are on that committee?

**Mr TODD** - It's not a committee, it's done by the branch. I think there's four, five or six people within that branch -

**CHAIR** - I see.

**Mr HARRISS** - You'll need some help, Mr Chairman.

**CHAIR** - I think they do.

*Laughter.*

**Mr KONS** - Any specific objections, Mr Chairman, to any decisions that have been made?

**CHAIR** - Yes, the northern section of Campbell Town, 80 to 60, and Cleveland is quite questionable.

**Mr TODD** - I can't answer that I'm afraid.

**CHAIR** - Mr Todd and Ms Laird, thank you very much for your help and thank you for the form of your submission because they are very specific. They do not have padding, as we see in some submissions, and they deal directly with the points in question and I find that particularly helpful, so thank you very much for that.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**