



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Tasman Highway and Great Eastern Drive Improvements

Brought up by Mrs Rylah and ordered by the House of Assembly to be printed.

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1 INTRODUCTION

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

Tasman Highway and Great Eastern Drive Improvements

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 This reference recommended the Committee approve works to improve road user safety and travel time reliability along the Tasman Highway, to cater for future development in the area and increasing popularity and number of visitors to this region.

2.2 The Great Eastern Drive is one of Tasmania's iconic touring routes, with visitation to the East Coast continuing to grow, including an increasing number of slower vehicles such as cyclists, caravans, campers and motorhomes. In recognition of the growing popularity of the region, the Government committed to undertake improvements such as overtaking lanes and courtesy stopping bays to reduce driver frustration, as well as road widening and turning facilities to improve road user safety at entrances to popular tourism experiences. These improvements are expected to:

- Enhance the brand of the East Coast and boost regional tourism through targeted investment in upgrading tourist infrastructure;
- Improve traffic flow and reduce driver frustration by providing increased opportunities to overtake and / or pass tourists and slow-moving vehicles; and
- Improve road user safety through provision of safe turn treatments and road widening.

2.3 The proposed works target improvements to road user safety, travel time reliability and enhancing the driver experience for a growing number of visitors. The works are also comprised of two sub-projects:

- Safety works between Diana's Basin and St Helens; and
- Safety upgrades along the Great Eastern Drive including provision of turning facilities at a number of junctions along the length of the Great Eastern Drive, provision of safe pull over areas and shoulder widening.

2.4 The works between Diana's Basin and St Helens include the following:

- Improvements to the cross section from Basin Creek Bridge to St Helens Point Road, by providing lane widths of 3.0 m, sealed shoulders of 1 m width, a 0.5 m wide verge to accommodate safety barriers where required;

- A northbound overtaking facility between St Helens and Diana's Basin (designated as T4) on a longitudinal uphill grade to allow for the noticeable speed difference of larger vehicles;
- A southbound overtaking facility between St Helens and Diana's Basin (designated as T5) on a longitudinal uphill grade to allow for the noticeable speed difference of larger vehicles. Horizontal realignment will also be undertaken to provide a straighter alignment for the overtaking facility with widening to allow for sealed shoulders and the new overtaking facility; and
- A southbound overtaking facility between St Helens and Diana's Basin (designated as T7) on a longitudinal uphill grade to allow for the noticeable speed difference of larger vehicles. It involves significant cut which allows for lane and shoulder widening.

2.5 The safety improvements along the Great Eastern Drive will be undertaken at up to 30 identified sites and include the following proposed works:

- Turn treatments at entries to popular tourism experiences along the Great Eastern Drive, including Rural Basic Right & Left Turn Facilities, Rural Channelised Short Lane Right Turn Facilities and Rural Auxiliary Short Lane Left Turn Facilities; and
- Pull-over bays to reduce driver frustration and / or provide a scenic viewpoint.

3 PROJECT COSTS

- 3.1 Pursuant to the Message from Her Excellency the Governor-in-Council, the estimated cost of the work is \$20.52 million.

The allocated budget for the Great Eastern Drive road improvements is \$22.88 million. The Projects undertaken along the Great Eastern Drive will be completed within the allocated budget. Some revision to the number of project sites selected may be required in order to ensure the upgrades are completed within the allocated budget. The expected cash flow for the Tasman Highway and Great Eastern Drive Improvements is shown in the table below:

Financial Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	Total
Budget	\$8.18 million	\$11.9 million	\$2.8 million	\$22.88 million

4 EVIDENCE

4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry on Wednesday, 21 August last in the Conference Room at the Beachfront, Bicheno, with a PowerPoint presentation from the Department of State Growth on the proposed works. The Committee then held a public hearing, whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:

- Kevin Bourne, Project Management Team Leader, Department of State Growth;
- Helen Cordell, Network Planner, Department of State Growth;
- Stefano Conforti, Project Manager, Department of State Growth;
- Todd Dudley, President, North East Bioregional Network Inc.; and
- Bill Manning.

Overview

4.2 Mr Conforti provided an overview of the proposed works:

Mr CONFORTI - I'll describe what the Department of State Growth would like to present today, that is, some upgrades of the Great Eastern Drive from Orford to St Helens, along 176 kilometres of road. The funding for this project will be part of the \$72 million investment the Government is putting towards improving the tourist routes around the state. The project drives to improve the safety, improve the drivers' experience and improve the reliability of the time to travel along the Great Eastern Drive. Today, we will look at two projects that are part of this program. One is between Diana's Basin to St Helens, and another one is for the rest of the section between Diana's Basin down to Orford.

There was a report done on this stretch of road, which took into consideration the main junctions and pull-over areas along the Great Eastern Drive. There was an analysis done on all the junctions to understand which ones of those we give priority. Again, that is in terms of safety and driving experience for tourists and locals.

In the section between Diana's Basin and St Helens, we looked at opportunity to overtake slower vehicles and to improve the section of the road. I am not sure how much detail you want to talk about at the moment in terms of technicalities of the project. The options that were suggested in the report were to include a northbound overtaking facility, two overtaking facilities in the southbound direction, and improve some 2.6 kilometres of road from a 2.8-metre lane to a 3-metre lane plus 1 metre of sealed shoulder and 0.5 metre of verge. Drainage and other physical characteristics of the existing alignment, including the sealing, was looked at and there was a suggestion for the best option, which is the one that I just described.

In the section between Diana's Basin to Orford there were some 67 locations that an external consultant looked at. They used the multi-criteria assessment to look at the safety and the broader community acceptance.

There was a stakeholder engagement process, which was involving the locals directly impacted by the proposal, the local councils and the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation that I understand was created on the east coast in 2012. That was preliminary stakeholder engagement. The stakeholder engagement will continue to the end of the process, so the wider community will be involved in different ways; that can be direct contact, meetings, public displays or even just on the website. We take a combination of all these initiatives during the project.

The allocated budget for this work is spread over three years with an amount of \$24 million or about that figure and that will be spread in this current financial year and the next two. The timing for this will be going from now. This one - together with the construction

industry, a meeting we had - is the first step of the process. The Department intend to go to tender with the 30 intersections that are the priorities out of the 67 that had been looked at in September. They will award the contract in December and start the physical works, continuing design and investigation as necessary, from January 2020.

Procurement Process and Scope of the Works

4.3 The Committee noted the works comprised 2 sub-projects; one being the upgrade of the road between St Helens and Diana's Basin, and the other being the 30 upgrades at tourist locations on the Great Eastern Drive between Diana's Basin and Orford. Noting the differing nature of the 2 sub-projects the Committee sought to understand how this would influence the procurement and tender process, and what impact the outcome of this process would have on the scope of the works:

Mr CONFORTI -The Department will look into a different set of procurement methods to carry out the works in the next three financial years and there will be two different approaches for the two different projects.

Mr BOURNE -As Stefano mentioned, there are two projects. The first project is the St Helens to Diana's Basin. We will prepare a detailed design and tender for that in the middle of next year, 2020. The other one is the 30 intersections. We are proposing we tender that so that we get early contract involvement from the construction industry. The contractors appointed will then engage designers and engage stakeholder engagement tasks to help further define the scope, then firm up a cost for the works, and construct the works. There will be an ongoing involvement between the Department and the contractor, and the designers and stakeholders.

Ms RATTRAY -In our earlier briefing this morning, you indicated that if the budget wasn't sufficient to undertake the two projects as identified in the submission that we have, the Diana's Basin stretch may be left out. I need to understand why that was chosen to be left out if there weren't enough funds in preference to some of the other 30 items on our list to be looked at as well.

Mr CONFORTI - At this stage, we have concept designs for both of the projects. The concept design would be high-level descriptions of what we intend to do. Following that, there will be investigations related to the habitat and the flora and the fauna, the heritage and planning issues, perhaps, depending on what kind of species we find. We may have to put in planning applications. At this stage it is a bit high level, and we are looking simply at concept estimates.

Once the works progress and more is known, the estimates refine as we go to when there would be the tender. It is the tender that will give us the market cost of the works. We have contingencies at this stage, just with the concept estimates, and because of that we may have extra funding or, as it happens, we may be a little bit short. Because of that, we will have to adjust the scope of the work; it may or may not be necessary. What I was saying in the previous sessions is that if the works cost more than what we predicted, we will have to adjust the scope. We thought perhaps an overtaking lane of the two in the southbound direction would be the least necessary part of the works. In the worst-case scenario that we do not have sufficient funds to realise the whole scope of the work, something will have to come out.

Ms RATTRAY - There won't be a relook at the 30 identified upgrades on this list?

Mr CONFORTI - That is a separate tender, so the 30 locations is one tender and the Diana's Basin to St Helens is another tender... .. they will go out to market separately.

4.4 The Committee sought clarification on how the scope of the works might change if all of the proposed works cannot be achieved within the allocated budget. The

witnesses noted that works would be prioritised and components would be removed if required to meet the available budget:

Ms CORDELL - As they go into the detail, the projects will be honed down. There is no budget blowout because we have been given a budget we have to work within, which is why with the program you will look at individual projects and see how the prices go, and adjust accordingly. If there was some massive red flag, then you have discussions. But we have been given a budget we achieve the best we can value for money and safety-wise.

CHAIR - If it blows out to a significant extent, you will not be trying to reduce the safety side of things with the projects there. You will be taking whole components out.

Ms CORDELL - That would be something to be considered in the program.

CHAIR - Does this mean when you look at cutting back the projects if you have one that blows out or need to stick within budget, you might be taking 29 and 30 off, but retaining number 1?

Mr BOURNE - That is possible.

Mr CONFORTI - That is a possibility but as we are continuously updating this list it could be that 29 takes the place of something else a bit above that for some reason. I am just speculating here a landowner does not want to see that work done and it may go down the priority. Those priorities are there at this stage.

Mr BOURNE - If we are running short on funding and need to decide which one not to do I would think we would want to drop off ones not a high priority, rather than do the ones close together because of economies of scale, if they are not a high priority.

Works Proposed from St Helens to Diana's Basin

4.5 The Committee noted the scope of the works to be undertaken between St Helens and Diana's Basin, consisting of 2 south-bound overtaking lanes (T5 and T7) on the southern, or St Helens, end and 1 northbound overtaking lane (T4) at the northern, or Diana's Basin, end. The Committee sought further information on the scope of road widening and realignment that would be undertaken in this section:

Ms RATTRAY - Are you going to straighten any of the Basin Creek Road to St Helens Point Road. It has a real snake section. Or are you just going to bang out the sides?

Mr CONFORTI - Some of the bends currently signposted to be a 50-kilometre-designated speed will be improved.

Ms RATTRAY - They will be lifted to 80 k?

Mr CONFORTI - Yes.

Ms CORDELL - My understanding is that when we are doing the road widening, we will have the 3-metre and the 1-metre sealed shoulder and the 0.5 metre verge. Then, where we are doing some overtaking facilities, there might be a little bit of widening, but we won't be doing any major realignments. If we do that then the money won't give a consistent outcome.

Ms RATTRAY - While you are doing the work, why wouldn't you take the opportunity to straighten up that snaky bend through there? I expect that is probably one of the windiest sections from Basin Creek bridge to St Helens Point Road. Was this considered in any of the discussions?

Ms CORDELL - I think price because the election commitment is for overtaking opportunities and general road improvements. They have gone down the path of trying to have a more consistent feel by generally widening for all traffic, including cyclists, and then putting in a couple of overtaking opportunities.

CHAIR - So you are saying it is not a general reconstruction?

Ms CORDELL - Yes, because that would take far more money, like what is happening on the Midland Highway and other areas. It would not be ruled out in the future. This is what the election commitment is, it improves the safety.

Mrs PETRUSMA - ... On this map - and there are no page numbers - it shows kerb realignments through this section, and this section.

Ms CORDELL - That was looked at initially and all the costings were large.

Mrs PETRUSMA - So that is not what is happening now?

Ms CORDELL - No, not any major realignments. That would have been from the initial investigations where you look at every single factor. You can do the highway, then take a step back and say what is going to give us safety outcomes, value for money within the budget that has been set and with the expected outcomes.

4.6 The Committee sought further clarification on the extent of any road widening that would be carried out:

Ms RATTRAY - In regard to the road widening right through, we need to get some understanding. Is that road widening right through the whole T7/T5 and the issues that were raised?

Ms BUTLER - From St Helens to Diana's Basin.

Mrs PETRUSMA - It is not the whole length from St Helens to Diana's Basin.

Ms CORDELL - No, it is not the whole length of the Great Eastern Drive, it is purely from St Helen's Point Road where the project starts up to Basin Creek Road.

Mrs PETRUSMA - It's not just T5 and T7, it is the -

Ms CORDELL - No. We're going for consistency. The widening of the road is important in that area because it is just growing south of St Helens. So it is factoring all that in. It's making it wider as well as the overtaking opportunities.

CHAIR - To clarify, it's the whole link - T5 and T7 combined?

Ms CORDELL - In that northern section.

CHAIR - That's going to be widened?

Ms CORDELL - T5 and T7 stand alone as overtaking. Then the cross-section between will be the 3 metres and 1 metre all sealed and then 0.5, which is gravel.

Mrs PETRUSMA - ... Is the widening happening according to the proposed works map? Is it happening from that point through to that point?

Mr BOURNE - Yes, that's what we're saying, yes.

Mrs PETRUSMA - For Hansard, on the proposed works submission attachment, there is a point where it starts from St Helens Point Road and it describes it through to Basin Creek Bridge - CH9510 - and that is where the widening will occur - from that section to that section.

CHAIR - All the way through?

Ms CORDELL - Yes.

4.7 Mr Dudley raised some concerns in his submission with the proposed overtaking lanes between Diana's Basin and St Helens. At the hearing, Mr Dudley relayed

safety and environmental concerns with respect to the northbound overtaking lane and suggested moving and combining the 2 southbound overtaking lanes (T5 and T7) into 1 overtaking lane:

Mr DUDLEY -The main one I am a bit concerned about is the northbound proposal which is referred to as T4. With all of those things, a significant cost is involved in this case. The overtaking lane is only about three kilometres from St Helens. If you combine the fact that it is short distance from St Helens, you have a reduction in the speed limit from 100 kilometres to 80 kilometres an hour. Also, a mountain bike access is proposed at the intersection of St Helens Point Road and Tasman Highway. That will require reducing the speed limit further south on the Tasman Highway to make that a safe crossing point.

I can't imagine that they are going to have hordes of people going across there. They are going to have 60 kilometres an hour speed limit there. I don't think it will be safe. I am just questioning whether that is really good value for money to build an overtaking lane which is so close to St Helens. It doesn't seem like it is really going to take much time off people's travel time - a few seconds maybe, but is that worth a million dollars or however much it is going to cost?

CHAIR - That's the northbound overtaking lane.

Mr DUDLEY - Yes, I also mentioned that. In the proposed area if you are heading north on the left-hand side of the road or the western side of the road, there is an avenue of some really quite large eucalypts which is parrot habitat

Ms RATTRAY - You gave us photos of that.

Mr DUDLEY - Our first recommendation is that it shouldn't really proceed. If it does, then at least the widening should be on the other side of the road so those large trees don't have to be removed.

Ms RATTRAY - Would there be any cause for concern around the age of those trees and their falling? A bit later on you have to take them out anyway.

Mr DUDLEY - No, they are still pretty healthy. I think there's a long time before they get to that stage. Some of them occasionally need maintenance pruning or the removal of the odd branch but they are in good health. I don't see them having to be removed anytime soon, unlike just up the road a little bit further where there are large dead pine trees, which are a hazard.

CHAIR - Can you clarify where the widening is you are talking about?

Mr DUDLEY - This is the northbound overtaking lane. It would probably be helpful if I could refer to a map. I guess it is pretty obvious there are two southbound lanes and only one northbound lane. As far as the other two, the southbound ones, we have suggested rather than having two separate southbound ones you combine them into one longer overtaking lane.

Ms RATTRAY - T7 and T5?

Mr DUDLEY - Yes. The one that is the closest to St Helens will require a massive amount of earth-moving to build it. So, if you went further up the road and combined the existing one with the -

Ms RATTRAY - Or extended it.

Mr DUDLEY - Yes, it wouldn't require anywhere as much earth-moving because the shoulder there is only fairly small. At the St Helens end it would require a huge amount more work to establish the extra room for overtaking lane.

Ms RATTRAY - So extend T5 and don't do T7.

Mr DUDLEY - Yes, I also thought that as the intersection at St Helens Point Road and Tasman Highway is going to get much more congested, it might be better if it is a traffic calming

place rather than an overtaking area. The overtaking lane might be in the other direction but we all know what people do if there is an extra lane. I was driving up there only last night and somebody overtook on double lines going the other way.

- 4.8 The Committee questioned the Department's witnesses on the possibility of combining the 2 southbound overtaking lanes (T5 and T7). The witnesses noted that it was useful having Mr Dudley's input as he had specific local knowledge, and committed to further consider his suggestion:

CHAIR - The point that was being raised was why not extend T5 to T7?

Ms CORDELL - Potentially that could be looked at. As I say, we have done the high-level thing and it is when you get onto the ground and start doing further work that you maybe do some amendments.

CHAIR - With two overtaking lanes - I think what has been suggested is that one of them is fairly close to St Helens -

Ms RATTRAY - And doesn't need to happen.

CHAIR - It doesn't really add a lot of benefit. The T5 one does, and wouldn't it be better to extend that. That is my reading of it.

Ms RATTRAY - And not do T7, full stop. Is that something that you will go away and have a look at?

Mr CONFORTI - Definitely. As a general comment all the points that Todd made are extremely good for us because he has a local knowledge, he knows facts and is specific and positive in his comments. All of those will be taken onboard and will be looked into. I think he was extremely good. At times people complain about something when the job is finished and there isn't any benefit in that. But I think all the comments are valid. We will look into them. I'm not sure whether all of them will be taken onboard -

Ms RATTRAY - It might be a better outcome.

Mr CONFORTI - Absolutely.

CHAIR - Anyway, you've taken that onboard and you will consider that. Thank you for that. Any other questions that members wish to ask of the Department?

- 4.9 The Committee also questioned the Department's witnesses about Mr Dudley's concerns with the northbound overtaking lane (T4). The witnesses noted that the scoping of these works was still at a high level, and as they were developed further the type of issues raised by Mr Dudley would definitely be considered:

CHAIR - There was one comment made in relation to the northbound overtaking lane 3 kilometres from St Helens - and I think this is right - that the widening should be on the other side of the road and not take out significant trees.

Ms CORDELL - That's fine because we are working at the really high level and we lay something down and then all those factors like trees and everything would be put into it, and in that case, potentially, it could go the other way. You have to look at all your constraints and then prioritise them and see which is the better way to go. So we don't just lay it and say, 'There goes the trees'. We say, 'Right, these are here, let's do a bit of a realignment over here and we can avoid those'.

We also have to think about safety of the road environment and how close those trees are to the road itself. So potentially if we move the road over, it may be moved over further to have that safety zone from the tree, or a barrier might be put alongside the tree so that they don't become a danger themselves.

CHAIR - A few things to consider, but you have heard the concern?

Ms CORDELL - Absolutely. We always try to avoid environmental issues. As Todd said, it's a tourist route and we want to try to keep it that way.

- 4.10 Mr Dudley also noted that his property was located within the Diana's Basin to St Helens project site. He indicated that numerous vehicles had run off the road into his property and suggested that realignment works may help reduce these incidents:

Mr DUDLEY - On Tania's point about the curve realignment, my property has had in the last two years three cars go over the bank and into our revegetating area. That is a particularly sharp corner where -

CHAIR - For the record, can you describe where this property is?

Mr DUDLEY - My address is 24751 Tasman Highway. Close to the southern boundary of our block, it is quite a regular occurrence for cars to go over the side of the embankment and down into our land and be towed out by the local RACT person.

CHAIR - That is near one of the projects being considered?

Mr DUDLEY - It is in the middle of the Diana's Basin area.

A curve realignment in that area would actually be a very good idea. It mainly occurs because it is a really sharp corner and especially quite slippery in the winter time. Doing works there would not cause too much environmental impact because the curve coincides with an area with a whole heap of very large, dead pine trees on it, which are a really major safety concern as well. We might deal with two problems in the one, but it does not sound like that is going to be addressed in the works proposed. Maybe, that might be a lost opportunity.

Other Safety Improvements – Turn Treatments and Pull-over Bays

- 4.11 Mr Dudley raised concerns about how the turn treatments and pull-over bay works had been identified and prioritised. Mr Dudley commented that the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation seemed to have significant influence over the 30 sites that were put forward as priorities. In response to this, it was emphasised that the Government had made an election commitment to upgrade the Great Eastern Drive to enhance the visitor experience for tourists and improve safety for all road users, and that the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation was just one of a number of stakeholders providing input on the proposed works:

Mr DUDLEY - On the issue of consultation, just consulting with the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation or the council is not community consultation. It does seem that the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation has a fairly significant influence, considering the size of the organisation. It is of some concern to us.

Mr DUDLEY - I wanted to raise the issue that the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation seems to have a disproportionate influence on how the areas are prioritised and what is supported or not supported.

CHAIR - In this case, to be fair, it is largely a tourism-based project, with the amount of money that is being allocated here as an election promise. I am not trying to defend the Government. I am saying that is the nature of what the project is about and possibly why it might appear like that. I will let the Department answer that when I ask that question again, as to the proportionality of their input.

CHAIR - There was a comment made about the East Coast tourism organisation seeming to have a major input and influence, rather than the general public. Do you wish to make any comment on that?

Mr CONFORTI - That is one of our stakeholders but it is not limited to them. For example, as I did talk to Todd previously, I indicated to our consultant to put Todd as a stakeholder and he would be consulted just as much as any other.

CHAIR - The comment was that it seemed the tourism organisation had an overt say in things. But is it because it's largely a tourist project that they are being consulted more, or not, or is that something else?

Mr CONFORTI - Perhaps the tourist association, or maybe Todd or the stakeholders have different interests, but there is not one that they prioritise over the other.

- 4.12 In his submission Mr Dudley also highlighted a concern that providing pull-over bays would provide additional sites for people to dump rubbish. Mr Dudley expanded on this point at the hearing:

Mr DUDLEY -Onto the pull overs for views issue -

Ms RATTRAY - That is an interesting point you made there, it creates more sites to dump.

Mr DUDLEY - It is an issue that needs to be thought about, because it is a reality when you create pullovers, you do create areas where there is going to be more rubbish deposited. Somebody has to deal with it. It is another issue that needs to be considered, it is not a straightforward decision of creating a pullover and then you just walk away from it.

Consultation

- 4.13 The Committee was interested to hear from the Department's witnesses how consultation with landowners had been conducted. The witnesses noted that, with respect to the 30 turn treatments and pull-over bays, direct contact had been made with the landowners where these works were proposed, and that the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation and local councils had also been consulted:

CHAIR - How have you dealt with acceptance by landowners directly affected? Did you have one-on-one meetings with them? If it is desktop, that may not be the case. Is it simply that there aren't too many acquisitions? It is the first point; the key criteria used on the assessment and prioritisation of the turn treatments and pull-over bays included acceptance by landowners directly affected.

Mr CONFORTI - We had the conversation with the landowners where the access or junction -

CHAIR - For each of them?

Mr CONFORTI - Yes, to understand what they experience and what they think about undertaking an improvement in their particular area. We have feedback that is at least some of the feedback we had. After that, we also talked to the East Coast Regional Tourism Organisation. We substantiated that they might want to talk to their local councils as well, which gave us comments on the suggestions we had.

CHAIR - Did the councils have any public discussion on this?

Mr CONFORTI - We talked to the general managers only at this stage but there will be extensive stakeholder engagement and communication from now on.

- 4.14 The Committee was also interested to understand how adjacent landowners impacted by the St Helens to Diana's Basin works would be consulted. The Department's witnesses noted that a specialist consultant would be engaged to

undertake consultation based on a stakeholder community engagement plan, and direct contact with affected landowners would be a key part of this:

Ms RATTRAY - In 3.8, the one-on-one meetings with adjacent landowners. That will be undertaken by a community consultation engagement officer, is that correct?

Mr CONFORTI - Yes.

Ms CORDELL - Consultants do that, don't they?

Mr CONFORTI - Yes.

Ms CORDELL - They put together a SCEP - a stakeholder community engagement plan, is put together for every project we do. All of that will be detailed in there, showing exactly how we will approach each project. They all vary depending on the type of project that is rolling out.

Ms RATTRAY - Do we know how many adjacent landowners we are likely to be having engagement with through this, or not yet?

Mr CONFORTI - We will have a direct contact with all of those impacted. So, we will be looking for them to talk to. I am not quite sure at this stage how we will spread the message around the community, but it will probably be a series of initiatives.

4.15 The Committee noted that Social Pinpoint was used by the Department to seek feedback from the community on the Great Eastern Drive. The Committee was keen to understand what feedback had been received:

CHAIR - You talk about Social Pinpoint, which is an online engagement platform. It was utilised to obtain feedback, ideas and concerns from the wider community along the Great Eastern Drive Road corridor. Can you tell us how many users commented? Do we have any understanding there of use of that website?

Mr CONFORTI - Yes. We have a consultation and feedback report dated July 2019 and at that stage we had 91 comments on Social Pinpoint, just referring to the project with the 30 sites.

CHAIR - Do you have any understanding of how many people were involved in those 91 comments? It's not one person that's frenetic?

Mr CONFORTI - One person had 28 comments and the total people involved in the discussion was 44. There were also 48 comments on Facebook.

CHAIR - That gives me an understanding. I wanted to know how much interest there was and how many people were involved. Thank you for that.

Mr BOURNE - They can be positive and negative comments; they are not all negative.

CHAIR - Do you want to go down a bit further and tell me how many of them were very negative? Or negative compared to positive? Were there any positive? They may have all been negative. Is there an indication of that? It's a good point.

Mr CONFORTI - No, there is no indication. There is the indication of the area discussed but it doesn't seem to talk about positive or negative. It may be neutral as well, I suppose.

CHAIR - As long as that information was used to inform you, that is the important thing.

Mr CONFORTI - Definitely, yes.

CHAIR - As to whether they were dire issues or problems is another thing, and you would have taken that into account if there were. I can only assume.

Mr CONFORTI - I can give you a summary. There were some interesting points: maintain the natural aesthetic value; more better pullover areas; request for speed limit reduction - those were the themes - timing disruption of roadworks; cycling and motorbikes; improved

signage; design for locals, not just tourists; please don't use wire barriers, 'cheese cutters', which are dangerous for motorcyclists -

- 4.16 Mr Dudley, as a landowner adjacent to the works between St Helens and Diana's Basin, raised concerns about the lack of consultation that had been undertaken for these works:

Mr DUDLEY -Also with consultation about the overtaking lanes between Diana's Basin and St Helens, it would be reasonable to consult with all the landowners in that area because there is not a huge number of titles through there. It is fairly sparsely populated. Most of the landowners along there would want to know about plans for overtaking lanes and road widening before the roadworks machinery turns up, which may well be what happens otherwise. It may well impact on their properties in some different ways. For some people it might be their accesses.

Ms RATTRAY -As an adjacent or adjoining landowner have you had a one-on-one visit, a knock on the door, or any contact?

Mr DUDLEY - No.

CHAIR - Is there anything encroaching on your land? That is the question.

Mr DUDLEY - If the road is being widened yes, it would potentially. As I have said before, when I first moved to where I live now about 28 years ago, the whole road side was covered in Spanish heath. Over the years we have systematically completely removed this and I do regular removal of rubbish along the road as well. We take quite a lot of pride in our roadside area and so we do not want it to be impacted if it is possible.

- 4.17 Mr Manning also noted that a clear and accessible consultation process was important to the community:

Mr MANNING -But what I want to talk about is consultation and whether or not the parliamentary standing committee has a definition of consultation and what should occur in relation to the community, whether it is this Department proposing this, or whether it's forestry, or whoever it is.

The need for the community to understand the avenues they can take to be heard is really important... ..

- 4.18 Noting the concerns that Mr Dudley, as an adjacent landowner, had raised, the Committee sought further information from the Department's witnesses on what consultation had been undertaken for the St Helens to Diana's Basin works. The witnesses noted that no consultation had been undertaken with landowners affected by these works as yet, as it was still in the very early stages of the design process:

CHAIR -Consultation with landowners near Diana's Basin was raised. You said that you had some consultation. Do you feel that you have covered that territory or not?

Ms CORDELL - No, because we were at the early stages and so the next step, as part of this stakeholder community engagement plan, which would include going out and talking to all of the stakeholders and landowners, et cetera, in the area.

CHAIR - So they're not going to get a surprise when a grader turns up to do some work?

Ms CORDELL - No.

CHAIR - I think that was one of the main concerns.

Ms CORDELL - I think it's because we often work at the very high level and get some sort of idea before we go out to communities so that we have something to work with.

Mr BOURNE - There may have been some confusion with what we said earlier in terms of the 30 sites project versus the Diana's Basin project. On the 30 sites, there has been some high-level discussions with landowners, but on St Helens and Diana's Basin, there hasn't.

4.19 The Committee also sought to understand what consultation had been, or would be, undertaken with respect to the potential impacts on local flora and fauna:

Ms RATTRAY - In regard to threatened flora and fauna, what communication has there been with the local group, if you like, in this case the North East Bioregional Network, who have a really good understanding of the flora and fauna species in the area? Will there be some engagement?

Mr CONFORTI - Definitely, we will have a stakeholder list and they will definitely be involved in the process. Anyone who can lend their experience and knowledge, we make them fit.

CHAIR - Okay. It is a desktop that you have done at this stage with regard to impact on threatened flora and fauna species, but there will be further consultation with relevant groups as each of the projects take place.

Mr CONFORTI - Yes.

Impacts on Threatened Species

4.20 The Committee was interested to understand how the potential impacts of the project on threatened species were assessed and mitigated. The Department's witnesses noted that generally works were designed so that impacts on threatened species was avoided. However, where this was not possible, there was a statutory process undertaken by the regulator, the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), to determine what actions must be taken:

CHAIR - I have a question under 3.3, the second last paragraph, the last sentence says -

The full extent of the potential impact and implications for these threatened species will be determined during the next design stage.

What is likely to be your process if you find a threatened species? How are you going to handle that? Obviously, we do not have the report in front of us because it has not gone to tender yet and we don't know what we don't know. Can you, for the record, give us an understanding as to how you are going to handle the threatened species or fauna?

Mr CONFORTI - We may be able to talk about past experience if there is a threatened species. We try to avoid flora, fauna and heritage altogether.

Mr BOURNE - Slight design changes may be enough to change the alignment and avoid the specific threatened flora, but not always.

CHAIR - Do you ever transplant flora to other locations if it is a really threatened species?

Mr BOURNE - Not usually transplant, but sometimes offset. It really depends on the particular species, where they are and how easy it is to re-establish. We would be led by the specialist in those areas, depending on exactly what species we are talking about.

CHAIR - I ask that question because, quite clearly, it is something you do not know until you do the full on-ground assessment. That is the difficulty with the way these reports are coming through. We can talk about that later, I guess.

Mr BOURNE - I will also add there is a regulatory approval from DPIPWE for any impacts on threatened flora and fauna, so we have to go through it and will be led by their approval.

Ms RATTRAY - We have also been advised that it is a conservation area on the eastern side of the road. Is that an additional consideration? I expect it would be.

Ms CORDELL - Yes, it would be. When you are doing this study all these areas are highlighted. Then you try to do your alignment through there to do the least impact. Then if there is any impact, as Kevin said, there is a process you follow with all the statutory approvals. We try to minimise.

- 4.21 Mr Dudley highlighted his view that there seemed to be a tendency by DPIPW to favour the grant of permits to take threatened species that do not require the proponent to provide offsets to mitigate the adverse impacts on the threatened species:

Mr DUDLEY -You mentioned offsets and permits to destroy from DPIPW. Our experience is that it is very rare with roadside works these days that there are offsets associated with it, even when there probably should be. Some of those offsets might not necessarily be related to protecting other bits of vegetation. They might also include providing funding to the proper rehabilitation of sites and even re-establish threatened species in areas where they are potentially going to be lost, which is feasible in some cases if there are grasses, for example. Our experience is that getting permits to destroy threatened species is pretty easy and there doesn't seem to be a threshold with a lot of species in terms of how many can be taken from a site. It seems, with a lot of species, that permits are issued continually. The whole point of having the Threatened Species Act is to maintain or hopefully improve the status of threatened species. Issuing permits to destroy all the time can only mean one thing, and that means that their status is becoming more in peril.

Aligned with that is that there are a few consultancies, such as ECOtas and North Barker Ecosystem Services, which do the vast majority of surveys for these kinds of larger public works and larger developments on private land. There is a tendency with their reports not to recommend offsets either. That gives the department a bit of an out as well. There should be more requirements for offsets and closer scrutiny of permits to destroy threatened species.

- 4.22 Having raised the issue of offsets to mitigate impacts on threatened species, the Committee sought further information from Mr Dudley about his experience and views on how offsets should work:

Ms RATTRAY - For the record, can you give me a couple of examples of good offsets you have seen in the past? Or have I put you on the spot?

Mr DUDLEY - It is very difficult because with offsets there is a problem because generally, it leads to a net loss so it is something you only want to do as a last resort, whereas it seems to be becoming more of a first resort, if that is the right terminology now. I did have one example a few years ago where there was some roadside widening on the Esk Highway between Fingal and Avoca. We put in a submission on a development application suggesting an offset should be required because it involved clearing some threatened vegetation and that was not taken up. The general principle with offsets is that if you impact on a threatened species or a habitat -

Ms RATTRAY - Then you put it somewhere else.

Mr DUDLEY - Yes, there are two options: for example, a supermarket needs to be built and you clear 2 hectares of a rare forest type. In theory that should be an area with similar species and in similar conditions should be protected. Ideally, it should be more than just that, it should be an additional area established as well, because if it is just substituting what is lost with something that is already there, it is a negative.

.....As far as off sets, my view is it should require not only trying to protect similar habitat with roadsides, it could also include mandating restoration of the roadsides disturbed

afterwards. In some cases, it would be feasible to re-establish some threaten species - especially threatened grasses - as part of the restoration process.

- 4.23 In light of the matters raised by Mr Dudley, the Committee sought further detail from the Department's witnesses on the statutory requirements related to a project's impacts on threatened species:

Mrs PETRUSMA - With regard to endangered species, can you roughly outline what the process is with DPIPWE in regards to getting approvals for tree removals, especially if the swift parrot is in that area? Are you able to comment on that?

Mr BOURNE - We have done desktop surveys so far. Further to that, we would need to do some field surveys to identify on ground truth of that desktop information. That would be done by an external consultant specialist in this area. Then we would need to put in an application for a permit to take to DPIPWE depending on whether it was threatened flora, threatened fauna or threatened vegetation community. Todd's submission referred to each of those separately.

DPIPWE is the regulator in this regard. They would be the ones that would grant that permit to take. They would put conditions on it, such as how the works would need to be undertaken, but also whether there were any offsets required. Depending on the species, as I said earlier, whether offsets would be appropriate and also what ratio the offsets would be. It is not always one to one. Sometimes it is one to four, one to ten even in terms of the number of specimens or even area. It really is a matter of the survival rates of revegetation with offsets. That would be all as a condition on the permit from DPIPWE. We are bound to follow what conditions they put on the permit.

Mrs PETRUSMA - It is a statutory requirement. If they outline the conditions you must follow those conditions?

Mr BOURNE - Yes.

- 4.24 Mr Dudley also discussed his concerns with respect to the management of roadside vegetation. His opinion was that the standard of roadside vegetation management had worsened over recent years. Mr Dudley was of the view that greater focus should be placed on the importance of roadside vegetation management, especially when a key attraction for the Great Eastern Drive is experiencing the East Coast's natural scenery and landscapes:

Mr DUDLEY -My background is in conservation and land management. I am pretty frustrated that in Tasmania, from my point of view, the roadside vegetation management has probably gone backward in the last 20 years. There was significantly greater importance placed on it and resourcing allocated for it quite a while ago than there is now. It seems that over time road construction has become just an engineering and construction focus and the environmental aspects of it have gradually slipped off the back of the truck, so to speak.

It is important, especially with the Great Eastern Drive, in that the concept of it is supposed to be showcasing natural beauty and attractions. Part of that isn't just what you are looking at, it is also having good standards of land management, too, because that is part of the whole process. You should have high standards of revegetation and, as much possible, avoid impacting on areas that have significant natural values because that is what it is supposed to be all about.

I brought this book along, which was written 25 years ago, on best practice roadside vegetation, which I sent an extract of in an email. I can pass it over, if you like. It has all the practical, obvious steps that anybody should take when they are doing roadside vegetation management but it doesn't seem that it is occurring a lot of the time any more. One recommendation we are making is that there should be a code of practice, or a basic book like that, that is available to all, whether it is onground workers, managers or contractors. In

a lot of cases, those basic principles aren't being followed at the moment. There seems to be a lack of awareness of them.

CHAIR - So, that's VicRoads.

Mr DUDLEY - Yes. There's one extract from it. It's not that complicated, it's all fairly commonsense but it is not always happening, unfortunately.

I will not go through all the different recommendations. One thing of particular note, I am mainly referring to roadsides that have reasonable natural values. The importance of stripping topsoil and reusing it for revegetation is really important because it's the most efficient way to stabilise and revegetate areas and it's also the cheapest. Rather than doing a lot of planting, you can just respread topsoil. It's got a seed bank in it and it will regrow on the site. It is a sensible thing to do from a value-for-money point of view as much as anything else.

- 4.25 In response to the issues raised by Mr Dudley, the Department noted that any contractor engaged for the works would be required to follow the Department's specifications, which are modelled on the Vic Roads specifications. The witnesses also noted that they would consider Mr Dudley's suggestion regarding the reuse of topsoil for revegetation:

Mr BOURNE - The Department will engage contractors to work within its standard specifications which are based very closely on Vic Roads specifications including environmental management, all of those things. I am not certain whether it refers to that publication directly, but we were referring to the current specifications.

CHAIR - The observation that was being made is that it does not seem to be done very well and maybe there is an opportunity to reconsider some of those things. Knowing that the booklet is around, maybe it is something you might care to look at in the future. You might even modify the guidelines occasionally, depending on whether it has some good suggestions. We hear what you say; you have to do it according to some standards, but there is always an opportunity to improve.

Mr BOURNE - We also have external superintendents that monitor the compliance of the contractor against those specifications.

CHAIR - Thank you for that.

Mr CONFORTI - I think our specification would be extensive on this subject. We have all the guidelines and directions to follow.

CHAIR - The stripping of top soil and reusing it is a sensible value for money issue. It already has seeds in it. Do you have a comment on that statement? Is that something that can be considered, that the top soil taken off one area can be reused to revegetate in another area?

Ms CONFORTI - It will definitely be taken onboard. I am not exactly sure of the specification on how to do it but we will listen to all of this and find the best way to tackle the revegetation.

Aboriginal Heritage

- 4.26 The Committee questioned the Department's witnesses on their process for communicating with the Aboriginal community and identifying any sites of significance:

Ms BUTLER - I wanted to have a quick discussion about the impacts on sites of Aboriginal or European heritage significance. I want you to run us through, also for the record, about communication you may have had with a local Aboriginal community about their particular area and whether you might be able to provide some evidence to the committee about that communication.

Mr CONFORTI - We have not had any communication at this stage. It was described in one of the reports that there are known sites especially between Diana's Basin to St Helens. This project is using the existing alignment and we do not expect the margin of land we have to take will encounter relevant problems, but we will do the investigations and everything that is necessary, including communication to the communities as necessary.

Ms BUTLER - Heading south from St Helens, when you get to the bottom of the site closer to Diana's Basin itself, there is a water area, a lagoon area of sorts. It is my understanding that there could be some Aboriginal significance in that area.

Ms CORDELL - When we do our desktops at the high-level investigations, our environmental group does desk tops of all the environmental considerations and everything. They also write to the Aboriginal group to ask them if there is anything in particular we need to be aware of and they let us know. Like the instance you mention, they recommend that we have to do an in-field survey for any works to take place in that area, so that would all be covered. When any works do happen and have that unanticipated discovery, that kicks in if you find something and there is a process to follow if nobody was aware there was something there.

CHAIR - A corollary to that is, which group do you write to when you write?

Mr BOURNE - Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania.

Ms BUTLER - There are quite a few elders in the area, too. There can be breakdowns in communication between different groups. I would hate it to compromise any places of historical value or significance to the indigenous community.

Ms CORDELL - Absolutely.

Traffic Management during Construction

4.27 The Committee noted that the proposed works had the potential to cause significant inconvenience to the traveling public, and sought further information on what traffic management requirements would be in place during construction:

Ms BUTLER - I have an overall question with the 30 different projects. As part of the negotiation process, with whoever is successful in winning that tender, will there be a program to graduate each bit of construction as it goes? Over 18 months you could have 30 different projects going with stop-starting of traffic. Would that be part of the contract?

Mr CONFORTI - We will definitely look into the traffic management aspect. Traffic management is very much part of each of our projects. We have not done that exercise yet but we will try to spread them around or maybe group them, depending on how the traffic can be managed.

Ms BUTLER - Then that's quite a normal expectation with contracts? I know at one stage with the Midland Highway it was stop-start, stop-start. That was quite hard for the community after a while. A lot of east coast people are really dependent on that road, getting children to and from school and to work, and so forth. I wanted to clarify that there would be an agreement.

Ms CORDELL - With the Midland Highway, the ideal was that it would roll out from either end and come towards the middle. When they started looking at individual projects and what were the priorities, that is when it started to have those problems. They realised it could not be a neat line. They had to deal with the priorities and that meant they were in different locations.

Mr BOURNE - Also, the Midland Highway had separate contractors; they each had their own bit to do. Whereas this will be one contractor and part of the requirements in their contract will be to minimise impacts on traffic and stakeholders and to coordinate when they do certain works to minimise the impacts.

Does the Project Meet Identified Needs and Provide Value for Money?

4.28 In assessing any proposed public work, the Committee seeks assurance that each project is a good use of public funds and meets identified needs. The Chair sought and received an assurance from the witnesses that the proposed works were addressing an identified need in a cost effective manner and were a good use of public funds:

CHAIR -Does the proposed works meet an identified need or needs or solve a recognised problem?

Mr BOURNE - Yes, we believe so.

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

Mr BOURNE - Yes, we believe so.

CHAIR - Are the proposed works fit for purpose?

Mr BOURNE - Yes.

CHAIR - Do the proposed works provide value for money?

Mr BOURNE - Yes, we believe so.

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

Mr BOURNE - Yes.

5 DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

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

- *Great Eastern Drive Orford to St Helens*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, State Roads, Department of State Growth, 6 August 2019;
- *List of Proposed Safety Treatments at Popular Tourism Experiences* - Department of State Growth;
- *Proposed Works Between St Helens and Diana's Basin* - Department of State Growth;
- Submission from Mr Todd Dudley, President, North East Bioregional Network, 9 August 2019; and
- Supplementary Submission from Mr Todd Dudley, President, North East Bioregional Network, 14 August 2019.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 The Committee is satisfied that the need for the proposed works has been established. Once completed the proposed works will result in a safer road environment for all users and enhance the experience for the growing number of visitors to the area.
- 6.2 The proposed works will improve traffic flow and reduce driver frustration by providing additional safe overtaking opportunities, safe turn treatments at popular tourist locations and additional pull-over areas.
- 6.3 Accordingly, the Committee recommends the Tasman Highway and Great Eastern Drive Improvements, at an estimated cost of \$22.88 million, in accordance with the documentation submitted.

**Parliament House
Hobart
29 October 2019**

**Hon. Rob Valentine MLC
Chair**