

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS MET AT
ROCKY CAPE TAVERN MEETING ROOM, ROCKY CAPE ON MONDAY
5 DECEMBER 2005.**

BASS HIGHWAY - SISTERS HILL UPGRADE

CRAIGIE AND **JEAN ELPHINSTONE**, RESIDENTS OF BASS HIGHWAY, SISTERS CREEK; **HEIN POORTENAAR**, PROJECT MANAGER, DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, ENERGY AND RESOURCES; AND **BRIAN WILLIAMS**, CONSULTANT, PITT & SHERRY, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Harriss) - Welcome, everyone. Hein and Brian, please lead your evidence. Before you do, we appreciate the site visit we were able to undertake earlier today. It gives us a good appreciation of the scope of the project. It is always valuable for us to see the on-the-ground effect.

Mr POORTENAAR - I will go through the background of the project and the progress we have made, and then I will hand over to Brian Williams on the design aspects.

Following a number of high-profile road crashes in the Sisters Hills area and the public meeting in April 2003, DIER worked with Burnie, Wynyard-Waratah and Circular Head councils, the Cradle Coast Authority, the RACT and the community to develop a funding submission to upgrade approximately 15 kilometres of road through the Sisters Hills area on the Bass Highway to enhance road safety outcomes. The project focused strongly on safety improvements on the topographically-constrained Sisters Hills area. The submission was sent to the Deputy Prime Minister in August 2004, with the full support of the Bass Highway Working Group. The Australian Government approved funding for four specific road projects under the AusLink Roads to Recovery Strategic Regional Fund, which included the Bass Highway at Sisters Hills. These were a commitment that featured in the Coalition's election platform prior to the last election. The Australian Government commitment for Sisters Hills was up to \$15 million on a dollar-for-dollar basis. In its May 2005 Budget, the State Government matched the Australian Government's contribution, enabling the project to go ahead.

We first reviewed the estimates, and it was determined that the five major projects identified by the Bass Highway Working Group were high priority and could be completed for the available funding. The five projects extend from Myalla Road, over Sisters Hills, to a point just east of Rocky Cape Road - a distance of 12.8 kilometres. The upgrade improves the alignment, widens the road and provides overtaking lanes providing a safer road and improving travel times. There are a number of lower priority projects not being undertaken at either end of the subject area, however if it becomes apparent that there will be other expenditure on the five projects committed to, some of these projects will be added to the scope of the existing contracts. The design phase is

complete and the project is out to tender. The Australian Government transport department - DOTaRS - is currently considering the project proposal.

The development application for the Myalla to Rulla roads has been approved by the Waratah-Wynyard Council and the RPDC has approved the resumption of agricultural land for road works. We have a permit to remove some threatened species, which is a plant under the macrocarpas on Pollards Road. Circular Head is still considering the Dallas Hill development application. I understand their council meeting is due in December and they will be letting us know in early January.

Acquisition surveys are complete and valuations are under way. Accommodation works with the various owners have been agreed. The design is also under way on the more complex projects on the Sisters Hill summit and the Wilsons Creek bridge. These projects have longer lead times and it is desirable to define the preferred alignment so that the owners of two houses that are potentially affected are advised at an early stage whether their houses will need to be acquired. Developing the preliminary designs in parallel also enables cut-and-fill over the balance of the project to be optimised. It is anticipated that the project on the eastern side of the Sisters Hills will be tendered in April 2006, with construction commencing in July 2006. The project on the western side of the summit will commence six months later.

A public contact plan providing information to the community has been developed and will be implemented throughout the project. There are currently public displays at Burnie, Wynyard and Circular Head councils and a feature advert which was in the newspaper a few weeks ago. The minister has written to residents in the area and has distributed a brochure. The Bass Highway working group continues to be involved with the project and is a useful forum for input from the key stakeholders.

I have just listed the other projects and where they fit in: climbing lanes at Dallas Hills, which we are currently doing, \$5.4 million. The anticipated start is February next year and completion in June 2007. Extension of the climbing lanes at Rulla and Myalla roads and other alignment improvements: again, a February start next year and December completion, \$3.3 million. Extension of the climbing lanes from the summit of Sisters Hills on the eastern side: a July 2006 start with December 2007 completion for \$5.4 million. The realignment of the climbing lanes to the summit on the western side of Sisters Hills: a February 2007 start with a May 2009 completion for \$8.2 million. Replacement of Wilsons Creek bridge with a wider bridge and realignment of the approaches on both sides: a start in February 2007 with a June 2008 completion for \$3.5 million. Lastly, alignment improvements west of Montumana Road, the eastern junction: an October 2007 start with June 2009 completion for \$4.2 million.

I would like to hand over the Brian Williams. He will be dealing with the project description, project objectives, and the environmental and other issues.

Mr WILLIAMS - The objective of the design part of this project has been to provide a consistent alignment and consistent widths throughout the job and provide sight distance for both travelling along the road and from accesses and junctions. The prime aim of those changes is to improve the safety of operation of the road. We have done that while trying to minimise the impact on the adjoining landowners and the environment.

On Dallas Hills we are providing an overtaking lane and improving the alignment of the road. It is an east-bound overtaking lane and that will complement what is happening at Pollards Road where the two overtaking lanes are being converted to west-bound only.

At the back of Dallas Hills there are also improvements at Brakeys Road junction, mainly to improve the sight distance. It also will make it easier for farm-access vehicles, particularly semitrailers, to get in and out of Brakeys Road without interfacing onto extra lanes on the highway and provide a G-turn because at Brakeys Road the right turn into Brakeys Road will be from the overtaking lane. We are providing a G-turn so vehicles can exit the highway and then come back across and cut right across the highway rather than propping in the fast lane. The lanes are going from 3 metres wide to 3.5 metres wide, with a 1 metre sealed shoulder. Those are the main improvements there.

At Pollards Road it is using the existing alignment and there will be some pavement stencilling works at both the road junctions. That is, Pollards Road and Dallas Road will also be brought in at right angles rather than both coming in at an acute angle at the moment with, once again, the lanes being widened.

At the Myalla Road to Rulla Road junction it is very similar. The road is being straightened considerably to provide sight distance and acceptable alignment for travel speeds. The east-bound passing lane there is being extended instead of stopping just at the crest of the hill. It will be extended over and taken over the top of the crest so the slow-moving vehicles will have a chance to accelerate on the downgrade before they need to merge in with the rest of the traffic. Devils Elbow Road East is being maintained and being brought in at the right angles to the highway to improve sight distance and in a location with an adequate sight distance for the travel speed. Once again, the lanes are being widened from 3 to 3.5 metres with 1 metre sealed shoulders.

The environmental impacts of the project: some of the land is class 2 agricultural land and we have a permit from RPDC for conversion of that land to B reserve. The botanical values: there is a shade peppergrass and a showy willowherb and other little plants. They are both rare on the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act. We need to remove some of the shade peppergrass at Pollards Road and we have a permit from the Threatened Species Unit of DPIWE for that removal. There is no impact on the showy willowherb. There is also a patch of shade peppergrass that is being protected opposite Devils Elbow Road under the macrocarpas.

There is no real impact on zoological values or on Aboriginal heritage. The property at the corner of Brakeys Road and the Bass Highway from Dallas Hills is historic property on the Tasmanian Heritage Register and we have an exemption and a works permit from the Tasmanian Heritage Council to do the works in the front yard of that property. There is very little visual impact by the works.

There has been considerable consultation with the landowners and while not all landowners' requests have been met, the vast majority have where it has been economically feasible to do so.

Mr BEST - Mr Poortenaar, the project itself is \$30 million and you did mention the lifespan of the project. You are hoping to start in February next year, is that right?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, all the projects will be complete by June or July 2009.

Mr BEST - Just for interest's sake, that is \$30 million, what has been spent prior to that? Do you know roughly what has been spent on the road over, say, 10 years?

Mr POORTENAAR - There has been a considerable amount of planning and I believe it would be somewhere between \$100 000 and \$200 000 for the preliminary planning design and public consultation.

Mr BEST - Just in general, though, if you take this section of road that we are referring to - these areas have been highlighted - what would be the total expenditure?

Mr POORTENAAR - I am not able to answer that but Montumana eastern junction was upgraded a few years ago. There was some work done just west of Rocky Cape Road and the Montumana west junction was also graded.

Mr BEST - There has been a series of bridge works, too, hasn't there?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, that is slightly outside the scope of the Sisters Hills section as it starts at the Rocky Cape Road.

Mr BEST - Yes, I was interested because I am hoping that, in some ways, this starts to complete this corridor, I suppose you would call it - or the junction.

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, the original study was Somerset to Smithton and a lot of money has addressed a lot of those defects. However, the Sisters Hills section between Boat Harbour Road and Rocky Cape Road was left because it was beyond the scope of the State Government. It was not until the Federal Government money was available that it was suddenly able to be addressed. There have been a couple of junction improvements where they have had a particular accident rate, but generally the Sisters Hills section has been left.

Mr BEST - I thought something like \$40 million-odd had been spent but I don't know if that is true or not.

Mr POORTENAAR - That does sound a bit too high.

Mr BEST - Does it? I am interested anyway because this committee has looked at a few roads over the last term of government and we are always keen to make sure that the whole project fits into some overall planning aspect for the area.

Mr POORTENAAR - Currently there is real inconsistency, with the roads towards Wynyard being of very high standard and then it suddenly deteriorates at Sisters Hills. Then it improves from there on where it is nice and flat and straight. That is why the Sisters Hills topography has always been a bit of a black spot and was going to require a large amount of money. But now that money is available we are hoping to do as much upgrading as possible, mainly widening.

Mr BEST - You can always make something better, and that is something that obviously will be continued in the future, but do these upgrades start to address the road in a major sense?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, this will substantially improve the Sisters Hills sections. So, out of the 15 kilometres we are widening and realigning 12.8 kilometres. So we are doing the majority of the work. There will still be some junctions, for instance Bramichs Road and Brimwalls Road, that ideally should be done as well. There will still be some works left to do.

Mr BEST - I thought it might be appropriate to put on record how you intend to manage the construction. Even though it is only two lanes, it is quite a high volume road.

Mr POORTENAAR - Definitely, wherever you are realigning an existing road, a fairly narrow carriageway that follows the ridges, the contractors are very limited in how they manage the traffic without impacting on adjacent property. So there will be long lengths of road that will be gravel but they will generally have two lanes open for most of the time. It will only be for fairly short periods that they will have sections closed. We are a bit limited: we can only seal in the summer. So we cannot progressively do, say, 500 metres of a section, so there may be probably a kilometre of gravel that may remain gravel for a few months. But generally it is not uncommon for roadworks like this to be done over a year, and traffic management generally is quite adequate. People realise that there is something going on and they are reasonably patient. Generally, we are trying to limit the number of jobs we have at the same time. If they have three delays then they get annoyed, but if they just have one or two then they accept it.

Mr BEST - We are going to hear, a bit later on, about the stock underpass. Is there anything you could say about that in this point of time?

Mr POORTENAAR - We acknowledge that the stock underpass is a benefit to both road users in terms of safety and to the farm owners, who would obviously be able to more conveniently and better use their land because they will not have to really think about it when they cross the road. When I went to my manager and asked him what the general policy was he was quite insistent that on a category 2 road we generally wouldn't provide them. Recently, on the Ridgley main road the same issues were raised. There was a general feeling that it would create a precedent and we would end up providing a lot of stock underpasses. However, where the owner makes a substantial contribution then we feel that, if he values it enough, we are getting something back and then we are prepared to contribute the other half and put the works in.

At the moment we have had some quite frank discussions with the Elphinstones and the door is always open. We have put the stock underpass in the tender documents so we will have a price back on that. If it is a lot cheaper than we expected, which we would anticipate given that the road is already going to be constructed so there will not be any further costs, we may well be in a better position to go back to the Elphinstones and say, 'This is the latest thing and it's a provisional item, so we'll be able to make that decision after the price has come in'.

Mr BEST - I just noticed that the Elphinstone's letter is talking about compensation and acquisition et cetera, so that could go some way to -

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, I have not had the land valued so we don't know how much it is but it could be anything from \$2 000 to \$10 000, but I am not sure.

Mrs NAPIER - Of the 15 kilometres, we have 12.8 kilometres that is going to be upgraded. How many kilometres are actually passing lanes in that 15 kilometre section once these two sections are completed?

Mr POORTENAAR - I don't have that information. We did actually do that exercise but I, unfortunately, did not bring it with me. We have 1.2 kilometres at Dallas Road, 1.2 kilometres at Pollards Road, 1 kilometre on the western side of the summit, 1.5 kilometres on the eastern side, and then 1.2 kilometres at Rulla and Myalla roads, so that was a total of 6 kilometres.

Mrs NAPIER - Okay. Coming back to the stock underpass questions, when you put it in for the quote in relation to the underpass, does it look at the differential as to whether there would be an underpass or not? There seems to be some question being raised about the quote that was being provided to the Elphinstones about what it might cost relative to the price of the culverts themselves.

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, originally Pitt and Sherry advised that it would be of the order of \$100 000, just from past experience. I did an estimate after ringing up the suppliers and basically the actual crown units themselves are \$30 000 or so and the remainder of the cost, which is probably another \$80 000 for 2.4 by 2.4 is the head walls, the crane hire, the base slab et cetera, but that may well be different. What you tend to find is that the contractors will get the price from Humes over the phone, will go to Duggans or whoever and get a much more competitive price.

Mrs NAPIER - Presumably you wouldn't charge for fill and realignment if you are going to be building the road in the first place?

Mr POORTENAAR - No.

Mrs NAPIER - How expensive would it be to put stock underpasses later on?

Mr POORTENAAR - It would be more expensive but not hugely more expensive. It is mainly the inconvenience of having to close the road and get the crane platform there and that sort of thing. When you backfill it there is always the issue of the backfill settling, so it is cheaper while the contractor is on site to do it. There are no establishment costs, but it would probably add \$20 000 or \$30 000 if you came back to do it later, I would have thought.

Mrs NAPIER - This is a major freight route, isn't it?

Mr POORTENAAR - It is a category 2 freight route.

Mrs NAPIER - Where else in the State would we have cattle movements across a major freight route?

Mr POORTENAAR - I believe that in the works they have just done at Scottsdale they have provided a stock underpass for someone. I think it was to do with the realignment and the landing position and they also ended up building a dam for someone. I am not sure of the specifics.

Mrs NAPIER - Maybe we could build one, but not quite as expensive.

Mr POORTENAAR - There are a number of crossings on the Midland Highway and on the Bass Highway - the new section past Westbury. Apart from minor sheep ones, I am not aware of too many others.

Mrs NAPIER - What category is the Ridgley Road?

Mr POORTENAAR - That would probably be a category 2 now, given it is the main route to the west coast. That is only 3 metres wide, so I am not entirely sure.

Mrs NAPIER - How much wider, in effect, will the road be near the Elphinstone's? What will the difference be between what the width is now and what the width will be once it is built?

Mr WILLAMS - The shoulders on the road - that is outside the white line - are probably about half-a-metre wide, and there is nothing beyond that, so the new road will have half a metre extra in each lane, half a metre extra on the shoulder, so that is 2 metres in total. There will be half a metre of verge, that is just beyond the gravel shoulder, so the top will be about 3 metres wide.

Mrs NAPIER - It will be about 2 metres wide, then won't it, compared to what it currently is?

Mr WILLAMS - No, 3 metres wide. It will go from 7 metres to nearly 10 metres.

Mrs NAPIER - There were some interesting questions Mr Best was asking about the history of this section from Wynyard through to Smithton. Would it be possible for the department - not today obviously - to provide the committee with a list of projects that have been done on this section? I can remember looking at the bridge projects, and then there is the Wynyard section that was done fairly early on, wasn't it?

Mr WILLAMS - Yes.

Mrs NAPIER - How far back was that done?

Mr POORTENAAR - I am not too sure.

Mrs NAPIER - Could you give us a list of the projects for the last 15 years or something like that?

Mr WILLAMS - Fifteen would test us. The country upgrades were done about six years ago. That is things like Balls (?) road, both Montumanas and there are a few more out towards Smithton. It was basically a junction upgrade project. I think there were

10 sites between Somerset and Smithton. Before that, probably not much of any serious nature at all.

Mrs NAPIER - Yes, well whatever you think is a reasonable date from which we can look at the projects.

Mr WILLS - They came out of that Somerset-Smithton planning study -

Mrs NAPIER - What date was that done?

Mr WILLS - The early 1990s, I would reckon.

Mr POORTENAAR - I think it was 1993.

Mrs NAPIER - When you do these major projects it is interesting to see how it is implemented over time. I did not write down what the Dallas Hills, Pollards and Myalla times would be before it would actually be completed. Could you run me through those again?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes. The commencement that we have given is June 2007 for the completion of Dallas and Pollards roads and December 2006 for the Rulla to Myalla roads. In the actual contracts we have given the contractors much less time than that so we are hoping to finish Pollards Road this April and Dallas Hills before Christmas 2006 and the same with Rulla to Myalla road - December 2006.

Mrs NAPIER - So Dallas Hills you want done by 2006?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, mainly because we want to finish them so we do not have too many road projects running at the same time and there will be the two summit projects kicking off, or one already under way and one kicking off next summer.

Mrs NAPIER - Sometimes you tend to break a road up into projects so that you can give local Tasmanian companies a reasonable opportunity to compete for the projects. By collapsing that time frame for that \$8 million altogether, what is your anticipation in terms of whether one company would be able to do all the work? Might bring in a mainland company - what is your assessment?

Mr POORTENAAR - The contractors that are interested - Shaws, Van Ek and Hazells - are all very big and this would just be one of a number of projects they would be doing. They would want to finish it and be ready for the next stage of Penguin to Ulverstone. They want to do it quickly and we have not had any negative feedback about the time frame at the moment.

Mrs NAPIER - That was going to be in my next question: what consultation have you had with the potential tenderers to see whether there is any concern about collapsing the time frame on that?

Mr POORTENAAR - We have collapsed it because we have information about how much money they spend per month and the original political commitments we gave were probably a bit over cautious just in case there were unexpected delays but certainly, with

the length of road and the quantities et cetera, it does seem like a comfortable time frame and we have had feedback from contractors saying that they want the job tendered as soon as possible and they are ready to start. We want them not to drag it out too long.

Mrs NAPIER - So you are saying they would prefer it to collapse than spread out?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes.

Mrs NAPIER - Can I put it on the record to thank you very much for the tour. I think that was very valuable to be able to see it through and stop and look at the different sections. A lot of questions that I would have otherwise had from just reading this - such as over the six-year-old Bhutan cypress trees where I can see the argument for a better realignment rather than trying to take out the corner of the trees - have been answered. I have no more questions.

CHAIR - Can I start my area of questions with the matter that Mrs Napier has just raised - Brakeys Road, I think we are talking about in the vicinity of Dallas House - was it easier to realign the road if you had been able without much resistance to remove the cypress trees? Or is it easier to have realigned the road the way it is now being proposed, cutting into the Dallas House property?

Mr WILLIAMS - I am not quite sure what you mean by 'easier'.

CHAIR - Which would be preferred by the designers?

Mr WILLIAMS - The simpler solution is to leave open drains along the side of the highway, because it is easier to see whether the drains are blocked and therefore water might be getting into the pavement, which is an ongoing issue for the department with regard to maintaining the pavement. The solution we have relies on subsoil drains, so drains you cannot see, and so there is a bigger risk. The first solution would be open drains. That would take more space. So you either have to take it off one side or the other or both. The solution we have is not the normal solution in a rural area but it is a solution which the department is happy to live with. There is bits of kerb and gutter with subsoil drains in many locations in rural areas and usually for some properties it is reasonable.

CHAIR - The only reason I am asking is that we did mention out on site that whilst the Heritage Council have expressed a view that the trees be retained for some cultural value, there is a line of argument which suggests they have no jurisdiction over landscape matters, such as trees and hedges and the like, whereas they certainly do have jurisdiction over the built environment. That is the reason I asked that. I suppose the following question is: has the design in any way been compromised because of the Heritage Council's desire - and that is all it can be - to have the trees retained?

Mr WILLIAMS - The alignment of the road is not compromised. The alignment meets the required standards, the sight distance and lane widths and those sorts of issues. It is only the issue about how you drain the pavement layers that is an issue and that, as I say, is an often new solution.

CHAIR - Can I revisit the matter of the underpass. Hein, you addressed your mind to that a while ago. Remind me, please, whether it is two or three lanes in that area which will exist after the reconstruction?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes, it is two lanes and the merge taper is before you start going down to the Elphinstone's driveway. So it is two lanes.

CHAIR - Mrs Napier pursued that matter, quite rightly, at some length when you were talking about costs but can I ask you to address your mind to the safety issues. We are talking about reconstructing a whole section of highway here and we have three components of the project in front of us now. If stock movement across the highway is to continue, and one can only presume it reasonably will need to continue, given that the Elphinstones own substantial tracts of land on either side of the highway, then surely user safety on the road would be pre-eminent? My understanding, from reading Mr Elphinstone's submission, is that at the moment, to move stock across the highway is quite a logistical exercise in terms of signage and people appropriately dressed in coloured clothing and signs and the like and if there is stock on the road for any period of time, no matter how short, then traffic will come to screaming halt after travelling at 100 kilometres an hour and I guess there are safety issues associated with that. We are providing a much better highway in that vicinity. What is your view about the compromise to safety or the challenge to safety with stock continuing to cross the road, if indeed we can address it in another way by means of an underpass?

Mr POORTENAAR - Definitely stock crossing the road will mean that traffic will have to slow rapidly and anything that changes the drivers' patterns, which is basically just to put your blinkers on and drive from A to B without stopping, is going to be a safety issue. This section of road, I think people have to realise, is a prime agricultural area. At certain times of the year, not today but a couple of months ago, you would travel along and pass a mini-harvester and a tractor going at 20 kms an hour. There are lots of similar hazards where you come across unexpectedly slow-moving traffic or vehicles turning in and out of gates. I think people have to realise that it is an agricultural area and they need to drive appropriately. It depends on the category of the road. This section of road was obviously a fairly low-use rural road and is gradually becoming more and more busy with tourist and commuter traffic and a lot more freight traffic. At some point there will be a need to separate those agricultural activities from the highway activity. At the moment the department feels that these two different uses of the road - agricultural and high-speed - are not uncommon. That was my direction, that generally we would not provide safety-wise; it is something that people will just have to adjust their driving for.

CHAIR - You say the mixed use of the road is not uncommon and I understand that but I at least want to be on the record as suggesting to you that with a reconstruction program such as we have in front of us, if the opportunity arises, as it seems to with what is happening in the road construction area, to in fact install an underpass, I would have thought it would be just so fundamental that the department would pick up that proposition and proceed, given that there seems to be an acceptance by the Elphinstones that they would surrender a couple of other road access points that they have if there can be this addition to safety. It seems so fundamental to me that it is something you would pick up and move with.

Mr POORTENAAR - To some extent I agree. My directions were that that was DIER's accepted practice. I think they are wary of having in the past provided underpasses that are then never used and sections of land changing hands and the use appears for some period and then one section of land is sold and it is no longer required. I think when we get the price in I will be asking my managers and the traffic safety people to sit down - the minister is also interested in the issue - and give me some direction as to which way to proceed. We haven't said no and we haven't said yes; we would like a contribution but if none is forthcoming then we will have to ask, 'Do we proceed anyway?'

CHAIR - You would be aware, as Mrs Napier has indicated to you, that Mr and Mrs Elphinstone have suggested that they are quite prepared to make a contribution. It is a matter of you making a value judgment as to whether that contribution is sufficient. They have said in their submission to this committee, and I will quote:

'If a stock underpass was constructed, we would be agreeable to reduce the number of accesses to four. As a gesture, we have made an offer to the Roads Department to pay \$5 000, plus pay all received compensation money, including land acquisition, disturbance et cetera to go towards the cost of the underpass'.

And, in answer to a question from Mrs Napier, you indicated that at this stage you don't have a handle on what the compensation for the acquisition component of the land is so that can't be quantified at this stage, is that a fair assessment?

Mr POORTENAAR - I believe that the land value itself would be of the order of \$2 000 but then there is the other compensation for part of a poppy crop and maybe some other compensation.

CHAIR - Okay, so you do not have a complete total on that at this stage?

Mr POORTENAAR - I cannot really give you a figure but my feeling, from what John told me the other day, is that it would be of the order of \$5 000 or something.

CHAIR - Okay, you will be here when we hear from Mr and Mrs Elphinstone later. I do not want to labour the point but it just seems to me that there has been so much comment about this whole section of road, which will be embraced by the \$30 million expenditure ultimately, revolving around crashes and deaths and here we have an opportunity to mitigate that sort of possibility even further. So, my strongest encouragement would be for the department to consider that and probably move ahead with it.

Mr POORTENAAR - Another issue that the department is conscious of is that we have works that we want to do but cannot afford to do so the bit of money that we have to spend on other things just means less work we are able to do on some road.

CHAIR - Your submission suggests that there are other parts of the project at each end that you would like to attend to but in the scoping so far you may not be able to. However, if the costings come in favourably then you will attend to them. I would suggest that this be thrown into that mix as well.

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes.

CHAIR - Enough said on that, I think. So that I can be really certain as to what is happening around the Devils Elbow Road area, if we go to the east of Devils Elbow Road on the southern side of the highway there is the Pointons' property. Am I right in suggesting that if traffic heading towards Wynyard wishes to make a right turn into the Pointons' property that is in fact a G-turn that you have provided there to facilitate that?

Mr POORTENAAR - Yes.

CHAIR - Okay. I think, Mr Williams, you mentioned during your evidence that there was a G-turn provided at Brakeys Road.

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes.

CHAIR - So that is just another opportunity for safer access to a private property there.

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes, that is in a similar position where the right turn would be out of a fast overtaking lane.

CHAIR - Yes.

Mr POORTENAAR - One of the owners there operates a low-loader which is slow to manoeuvre in and out but we would have probably provided a G-turn whether there was one there or not.

CHAIR - Okay, because of the fast lane?

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes.

Mrs NAPIER - Is it national best practice to do that rather than put in a slip lane?

Mr WILLIAMS - Putting in a slip lane creates some other issues in the middle of a three-lane road - about exactly how it fits in. In this situation I think it is probably better to provide the G-turn off the road. There are a couple like that just this side of the Wynyard where there is a right turn lane next to the overtaking lane and you still have to come across a slow moving vehicle and it is still a bit of an issue about how you get to the right turn lane. If you are going along you have to go into the fast lane before you can go into the right turn lane.

Mrs NAPIER - If you are towing a tractor and a bailer or whatever it might be and you are trying to come out across three lanes, that is a fair ask for a slow-moving vehicle, isn't it? Whereas if you have a slip-lane in the middle of your three lanes, you have a better interim spot to move from?

Mr WILLIAMS - I think with the traffic flows on this road at present, it is not much of an issue. This morning, for instance, when the *Advocate* photographer was there, he had to wait a while to find a couple of vehicles to photograph. The traffic comes in twos -

Mrs NAPIER - It came along later, in a rush.

Mr WILLIAMS - Yes and you might have to wait. But if you wait a couple of minutes then there will be none. There is no traffic at the moment and then a lot of cars go through - it tends to move like that. So there is a fair time when the road is quiet, enough to make a turn across and you might just have to wait. We consider that the G-turn arrangement is probably the best - not have the vehicles propped in the centre of the road at all, but take them off the road completely to make the turn.

Mrs NAPIER - Could I ask a follow-up question too, back on the compensation issue. What proportion of a hectare or hectares are you acquiring from the Elphinstones with that realignment.

Mr POORTENAAR - I do not know. Do you know?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - There is a bit of a dispute about that at the moment too because the original survey showed that our southern boundary was approximately where the road fence is, which is where we thought it was. Those were the original plans that were shown to us. Several weeks ago we were shown the final plans and they showed that the southern boundary was 14 to 20 metres into our paddock. Therefore, the department is saying that they do not need to acquire as much land on the southern side because they already own it and in fact we can buy some of it back which we have been paying for the last 25 years because they will not require it at the top of the hill, with the roads being moved to the north at the top of the hill. But on our northern side, I think it is just under two acres or something they will be requiring - an acre and a half, I think.

Mrs NAPIER - What is the current valuation of acreage on that land?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - It would probably be in the vicinity of \$6 000 or \$7 000 market because it is prime agricultural land.

CHAIR - You giving it away?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - I am not really right up with the current value of the land but that is a rough value I would at least put on it.

Mrs NAPIER - So you are saying that there may be some opportunity for a land exchange as a consequence of the realignment?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - The department's policy is that any land, when they do a road realignment that is surplus to their requirement they will sell it back to the adjoining landowner which I fully support because there is no point in having those strips of land that are overgrown with rubbish and weeds and all the rest of it. So with land that is surplus to the requirements, we are quite prepared to buy that back, as long as an agreeable price can be agreed to. But our problem at the moment is that on our southern boundary, we were never aware that the actual road boundary was 14 to 20 metres inside where the road fence currently is. As a result of that we have decided to employ our own private surveyor to do check survey because it seems very odd to us. Once you go to our next neighbour, the boundary reverts back to where the road fence is and that exactly in line with where our road fence is. We have a shed there at the top of the hill. According to Mr Frank's survey, it shows that the road goes through the front of the shed wall. It seems very strange and very odd to us and that is why we decided we wanted a second

opinion on it. If their surveys are right, they will not need to acquire any land from us on the southern side because their surveys are showing they already own it. But if the boundary is where we think it is, they will have to acquire some land on the southern side as well as what they are acquiring on the northern side.

CHAIR - It is probably opportune now that we go to Mr Elphinstone and ask him to make his submission to us.

Thank you, Mr Elphinstone, for your written submission. It has been helpful for us to understand the background as to your position at the moment. Please, add to that in whichever way you feel is appropriate.

Mr ELPHINSTONE - I wish to speak on the Bass Highway upgrade and our endeavour to have a stock underpass incorporated into the construction. The highway is to have a major realignment and upgrade through our property and a couple of acres of our farmland will be acquired by the Government for this project. The supervising engineer of the project has agreed that there is an ideal location to install the stock underpass during construction and it could be easily accommodated in the highway upgrade. The road is to be moved south where the stock underpass is proposed and it will cause minimal disturbance to traffic during the road upgrade. At present we have two licensed accesses at this proposed site, which we will lose due to guardrailling being installed on the new highway. If we do not get an underpass, we will end up with three accesses side by side, which is a waste of time and it pushes the accesses closer to the proposed overtaking lanes extension.

We have offered to reduce our accesses from seven to four if we get a stock underpass. Putting stock across a highway has become a nightmare in recent times and will become an even bigger one once the upgrade is completed as traffic will be travelling even faster. We have offered to contribute about \$15 000 towards the cost of the stock underpass, which is made up of \$5 000 cash which we would pay first up, plus it was indicated to us that our compensation costs would be in the order of about \$10 000, which we considered to be a reasonable and significant contribution considering that the department cannot give us a definite cost of installing a stock underpass. We believe the department's rough costing to be inflated as our own inquiries from Humes has indicated a maximum cost of \$30 000 for the actual culverts.

We would appreciate support in our endeavour to get the department to install a stock underpass during the highway upgrade to alleviate future traffic disruption. We fully support the highway upgrade and believe that it is certainly not before time because we have attended many accidents that have happened in our area of property that is near the highway. However, we would like the new highway to be as safe as possible for all concerned.

Mrs NAPIER - How often do you cross the road with cattle?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - It depends; it can vary a lot. We might go for two or three weeks and not put anything across the road and then we might have to put a number across on the same day. It all depends on your stock husbandry and management.

Mrs NAPIER - It is our information that you have stockyards on both sides of the road.

Mr ELPHINSTONE - No. We have stockyards on our house side of the road, but on the other side of the road the stockyards are at the other end of the property, which is about three-quarters of a kilometre away.

Mrs NAPIER - When you use those far stockyards, do you use the direct road access that is currently there from the paddock or do you come back through another road?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - When we put stock across the highway, at the moment we have three double accesses so it depends on which paddocks we are wanting to put the stock in as to which accesses we use.

Mrs NAPIER - Right. You referred to the potential for an extension of the three-lane section. Can I redirect that question, if I may, to Hein. Is it likely that at some stage in the future there would be an extension of the three lanes coming down that hill and running across the intersection with the Elphinstone's property?

Mr POORTENAAR - I would not have thought so. You would not extend the overtaking lane further down the hill because you don't want it to conflict with the Myalla Road junction.

Mr WILLAMS - I think the possibility of extending the lane down the hill is remote in the extreme. It is not long since the department removed the downhill overtaking lane just north of Oatlands where the speeds at the merge got so fast that a couple of vehicles got out of control. So I couldn't see it being extended downhill.

Mrs NAPIER - I have asked the question about the value of the land. If the underpass was provided, what would be the anticipated configuration of your property with the highway? What would your accesses be?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - If the stock underpass was incorporated, it would be put where at the moment there are two existing accesses so that would assist. We would be doing away with the two accesses off the highway and using the underpass instead and we would also do away with one of our other accesses and we would just end up with two double accesses onto the highway.

Mrs NAPIER - If you have the underpass, would you only have then an access from the house side?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - No, we would still have an access -

Mrs NAPIER - You would still want the access from the other side?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - from the other side as well, yes. That is what I was saying, a double access. At the moment we have basically three-and-a-half double accesses. We have four accesses on one side and three on the other side and if the underpass was put in, we would have two accesses on one side and two accesses on the other side which would be opposite each other.

Mrs NAPIER - Okay, because you have an access further up the hill towards the shed.

Mr ELPHINSTONE - Yes.

Mrs NAPIER - My thoughts were that if you can reduce the number of accesses to a road from a particular property but still make them functional then there might be some added safety advantages not just to do with cattle crossing but also access points from the property. Could I ask that of Brian or Hein? If you did put in the underpass, what would you do in terms of access?

Mr WILLIAMS - I presume we would provide the four accesses that Mr Elphinstone has spoken about. It would reduce from his current seven to four.

Just a point of clarification, a stock underpass probably can't be built at the point where the gates are on Mr Elphinstone's submission.

Mr ELPHINSTONE - It is in that vicinity.

Mr WILLIAMS - We bored a hole to have a look at the foundations and it was a bit soft or a bit deep so it would have to be up the hill a bit further.

CHAIR - When you say, 'Up the hill a bit further', Brian, past where the new access is going to be?

Mr WILLIAMS - Probably directly in front of the house is as far as we would have to go.

CHAIR - Thanks.

Mrs NAPIER - So that is down the hill from where the current accesses are shown?

Mr WILLIAMS - The current house access, yes.

Mrs NAPIER - Okay.

CHAIR - Mr Elphinstone, I know the time taken to move stock across the highway will vary depending on the number of stock, what is an average time that you would need to have personnel manning each end of the stock crossing and getting the stock across the road?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - With the preparation and everything it is probably a fair bit of an hour but the actual putting of the stock across the highway we try to do as quickly as possible to minimise the disruption to traffic. In recent times we normally have tried to do it very early on a Sunday morning because we have found that is when there is the minimum amount of traffic; there are not the trucks on the road on a Sunday morning. That is the main issue we have really since the railway has closed. All the freight from Circular Head is going by road now.

CHAIR - Would it take five minutes?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - To put the stock across the road, probably 10 or 15 minutes, depending on the numbers.

Mrs NAPIER - And the time that the traffic would be stopped to prepare it?

Mr ELPHINSTONE - About 10 or 15 minutes.

CHAIR - Any further questions? Are there any further comments that you wish to make before we ask you to leave us to deliberate?

Mr POORTENAAR - No, just that we believe that the project has considerable merit. It is been a project that has been long overdue and has considerable merit. It has been a project that has been long overdue and has considerable community support. It has across-the-board political support from both sides, Federal as well as State, and local government. We believe we will end up with a very good, safe road and much-improved travel times and less driver frustration.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Hein. Thank you all for your contributions to this hearing. For the information of Mr and Mrs Elphinstone, because I think Hein and Brian and well aware, this committee's jurisdiction rests with considering the proposal before us. The committee does not have any legal authority to make an approval conditional. The committee does not have the flexibility to approve a project subject to fences being down, trees being knocked down or realignments. We either approve the project or we reject it. If the committee is of a mind, for any number of reasons, that the project ought be rejected and therefore force - if I can use that term - the department back to the drawing board to come up with other components to the design, that is the only option we have open. So we either approve as submitted or reject as submitted. I think it is important for you to understand that.

Mrs NAPIER - Can I just ask one more question before our experts leave. In reference to your table 9 on crash data, and the discussions we had at the site in relation to the safety implications of a three-lane road with passing lanes, I note that the incidence of two-car crashes appears to be higher in terms of the numbers of cars on that section. Is that a pattern shown around the rest of the State, that you get more two-car accidents with a passing lane with three lanes?

Mr POORTENAAR - The only thing I can think of is that it is unlikely that you would have a one-vehicle crash there because it is straight. Any accidents would be to do with merging and overtaking and perhaps taking risks when you see a straight bit of road and then you take your chances. I know anecdotally from the people who live on Pars Road that everyone travels at 120 kph because there are overtaking opportunities. It is a real problem for people to get out of driveways or school kids waiting for buses et cetera. That is a bit of road where everyone goes crazy, drives too fast and tries manoeuvres to take that one overtaking opportunity, whereas elsewhere they are so much more cautious.

Mrs NAPIER - So there is not a move towards a policy not to have three-lane roads?

Mr POORTENAAR - No.

Mrs NAPIER - I did have someone suggest to me that they were either going to move to a dual carriageway -

Mr POORTENAAR - They do prefer to have overtaking lanes as four-lane arrangements rather than three-lane arrangements. So on the Midland Highway, wherever you are planning to have one overtaking lane every 6 kilometres or so, you would try to coincide them at the same location.

Mrs NAPIER - Okay, but it is more for national highways?

Mr POORTENAAR - Generally these ones are climbing lanes. You would provide a climbing lane up the hill on one side. In Pollards Road we are taking advantage of the good visibility. It may well have been an opportunity to provide a four-lane highway but it was felt that it was not good value for money.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Hein.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.