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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan - Final Stage

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

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council	House of Assembly
Ms *Rattray* (Deputy Chair)	Ms *Butler*
Mr *Valentine (Chair)*	Mr *Ellis*
	Mr *Tucker*

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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 -

Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan - Final Stage

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 This reference recommended the Committee approve works in the three remaining sections of the Midland Highway yet to be upgraded, to complete the package of works under the Midland Highway 10-year Action Plan.

2.2 The Australian and Tasmanian Governments have committed $565 million in funding to the Midland Highway 10-year Action Plan to upgrade the highway to the Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP) 3-star safety rating. AusRAP is part of the International Road Assessment Program (iRAP) that uses star ratings to measure the safety of a road's infrastructure. Each road is assigned a star rating which indicates how safe the road is and allows road safety improvements to be identified and costed. The AusRAP rating for the highway prior to the commencement of the Action Plan was predominantly 2-star, with some sections only achieving a 1-star rating.

2.3 The majority of the highway has been completed, with approximately 52km remaining in the Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan - Final Stage sections. Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan - Final Stage is split into three different packages. The Oatlands section is approximately 16.8 km long, bounded by Jericho and south of York Plains. The Ross section is 14.3 km long, starting at Mona Vale Road up to the southern entrance to Campbell Town. The Campbell Town section is the longest of the three at approximately 20.8 km, beginning at the northern entrance to Campbell Town and ending at Epping Forest.

2.4 The project aims to improve road safety and driver amenity by providing a safer road with more dedicated overtaking opportunities. This will be achieved through the provision of a flexible safety barrier within a central median, widened sealed shoulders and regular use of a "2+1" lane arrangement, to provide protected overtaking opportunities. This will reduce the likelihood of head-on collisions, while maintaining a speed environment of 110 km/h. The design has aimed to use the existing pavement where feasible to deliver the most cost-effective solution, ensuring the project delivers a good use of public funds while maximising the safety benefits of the road upgrades.

3 PROJECT COSTS

3.1 Pursuant to the Message from Her Excellency the Governor-in-Council, the estimated cost of the work is $152 million.

The following project cost estimates have been prepared based on Concept Designs. The total project outturn cost for the proposed upgrades to the Midland Highway Final Stage project areas is $166 million for the P50 case and $185 million for the P90 case. These costs are broken down in the table below, where the base cost estimate includes design development which is underway and ongoing.

	P50	**P90**
Base Cost Estimate	$127 million	$127 million
Contingency	$35 million	$53 million
Total Project Cost Estimate	$162 million	$180 million
Escalation	$4 million	$4 million
Total Outturn Cost Estimate	$166 million	$185 million

4 EVIDENCE

4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry at the Epping Forest Hall on Monday, 26 July last with a video presentation of the proposed works. The Committee then commenced the formal hearing, whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

- Vanessa King, Project Management Team Leader, Department of State Growth;
- Simon Brown, Project Manager, Department of State Growth; and
- Trevor Gibson, Project Manager, Department of State Growth.

The following Committee Members were present:

- Hon Rob Valentine MLC (Chair);
- Hon Tania Rattray MLC;
- Ms Jen Butler MP;
- Mr Felix Ellis MP; and
- Mr John Tucker MP.

Overview

4.2 Ms King provided an overview of the proposed works:

> ***Ms KING*** *- ……Today, we are seeking approval for the final stages of the Midland Highway 10 Year Upgrade. These final stages comprise around 50 kilometres of highway across three sections: Oatlands; Jericho to south of York Plains; Ross, which is Mona Vale Road to Campbell Town; and north of Campbell Town, Campbell Town to Epping Forrest.*
>
> *The Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan is a safety upgrade. The crash which occurred only a week ago was in the Ross section that we'll be talking about today, south of Campbell Town. There was another major crash in this section in October 2020.*
>
> *……The Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan is making this highway safer through upgrading the identified sections to a three-star AusRAP rating. The works improve safety, specifically decreasing head-on crashes and reducing the severity of loss-of-control crashes through a flexible safety barrier in the centre median plus barriers on road edges, as required; widened sealed shoulders and protected overtaking opportunities, which are locations where road users can overtake while they're still being protected from oncoming traffic.*
>
> *Around 60 per cent of fatalities on the Midland Highway are the result of a head-on crash. The flexible safety barriers catch out-of-control vehicles and absorb the energy of the impact, reducing the physical trauma for vehicle occupants.*
>
> *We know this program's working. We know there are vehicle strikes to the barriers in the completed sections. Some of our colleagues have stopped on the highway at the scene of a minor crash and had people say to them, 'That barrier saved my life'. Of the vehicle strikes that we're recording, we don't and we can't know how many of those strikes would have resulted in a fatality if the barrier wasn't there. It depends who else is coming the other way. We do know we are preventing people from crossing onto the wrong side or running off the edge.*
>
> *Saving lives is the reason for this program and for these projects that we're discussing today.*

It's important to note that these projects do impact the people who live and work along the highway. The most obvious impacts are impacts of convenience. It is more convenient to turn right out of an access or a driveway onto the highway than to turn left and travel to a safer crossing location before heading in your original direction. It is more convenient, we know that.

People who live and work along the highway can use this road every day, multiple times a day. We don't want this usage to be deeply frustrating. We do want it to be safe.

The project team works with people who live and work along the highway to achieve the best possible outcome for them; however, we don't always make everyone happy in doing it. We do our best. We have to prioritise safety.

In terms of cost, these sections of the Midland Highway are forecast to cost approximately the same per kilometre as the completed similar sections. As stated in the report, we're looking at the total for these 150 kilometres to be in the order of $166 million to $185 million. That's a lot of money.

Road users, all of us, are getting a lot of highway upgraded for that money. We are getting over 50 kilometres of highway. We are getting around 69 kilometres of flexible safety barrier and 14 kilometres of W-beam barrier. We are getting 74 hectares of new seal and we are getting over 21 000 cubic metres of topsoil, on the batters which will then be grass.

We have done a lot of work over the last couple of years on these sections with our designers. We have used a contract model called Early Contractor Involvement, where we have civil contractors engaged with us, in the room with our designers, working through the design. How would you build it? How do you build it like this? What if we did that? Would this be a bit better? How about this to improve the design, to make it safe to construct, and to make it efficient to construct, and to get the right quality outcome for the long term. So, that's a piece of work we have been doing on those jobs, this Early Contractor Involvement model. Those contractors are not signed up for construction yet. We can't do that before a series of approvals including the pro-performance committee.

These works do involve trade-offs between construction efficiency and impact on the travelling public too, during construction. So, there is a construction cost: number of months on road and the delays to the travelling public. The trade-offs are between being held up a lot for a fewer number of months, or not being delayed as much but the project goes on a long time.

We do try to get this balance right. We do quite a bit of work to try to get that impact duration balance right. Overall, we submit that these projects are part of an important safety upgrade to the key highway in Tasmania. The upgrades will prevent head-on crashes and reduce the impact of loss of control events. The upgrades will save lives and reduce long-term injuries, both physical and psychological.

We have worked with the stakeholders to reduce the inconvenience impact of the projects both during and after construction. We are seeking other legislative approvals, as appropriate, for the projects. The costs are appropriate and we have done those comparisons on a per kilometre basis to other similar projects.

In conclusion, we submit that these projects are a good and appropriate use of taxpayers' money.

What Impact has the Midland Highway 10-Year Action Plan had on Driver Safety?

4.3 The Committee sought further evidence from the witnesses on the safety impact of the projects already completed under the Midland Highway 10-Year Action Plan:

> ***Mr ELLIS*** *- … … given this is the Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan … … maybe it would be helpful if you could give the committee a sense of where we were when we first started, where we're going, and how far along we are?*

Ms KING - *Sure. The first projects commenced construction in the beginning of the 2013-14 year, I think?**……**I think we were first on-road in the spring of 2014. We've completed around 100 kilometres so far, and we have about 50 kilometres to go, which are these projects. I would love to have some very concrete data on the lives saved. It's extraordinarily difficult because, as I said earlier, when we get strikes to the barrier, we know about the strikes and we get the data. We can sometimes tell whether it was a big strike or just a glancing blow; somebody may have self-corrected anyway. What we never know is how many and what sort of vehicles were coming the other way -*

CHAIR - *What the circumstances were at the time. It could have been dodging an animal. It could have been any number of things.*

Ms KING - *Yes, but it's not only the cause; it's also what would have been the impact. For the head-ons, it does depend who is coming the other way, and where they are when a vehicle crosses onto the wrong side. With the Midland Highway having around 4000 to 5000 vehicles a day - up to 6500 in these sections - luckily, there are not very high numbers of fatalities, so it takes a while to get enough data to be clear on exactly how many lives are saved.*

Mr BROWN - *Because a good performance indicator is going to be that you finish the 10-Year Action Plan, all the works are complete, then you wait 5 to 10 years and see what reports you get from the police in terms of crashes and so on, and then you have some solid data. Now it might take more than five years to really feel like you've got a good grip on the crash patterns on the highway. It's a bit hard to refute that the safety barrier in the middle isn't going to make a difference to what we've experienced on this highway before this action plan began.*

Ms KING - *We know it does; I just can't quantify it yet.*

4.4 The Committee also sought further information on the differences between an AusRAP 1 or 2 Star rated road compared to the AusRAP 3 star rating the Midland Highway would meet once the Midland Highway 10-Year Action plan was completed:

Mr ELLIS *- Ms King, prior to 2014 can you give us a sense of what the typical 1-star safety stretch of the Midland Highway would look like and maybe a 2-star as well?.....what does a one look like, what does a two look like, and now we're getting three across the whole structure.*

Mr BROWN *- Yes, so to get the 3-star you definitely need the flexible safety barrier in the median down the centre of the road. So, yes, it would have been those sections without a central flexible safety barrier. The difference between AusRAP 1 and AusRAP 2 would be something along the lines of what sort of lane width you've got that's actually sealed and what sort of shoulder-width you have sealed. I don't know the exact answers to that but the narrower you go then you're closer to AusRAP 1-star.*

Mr ELLIS *- So, we're essentially talking prior to 2014 a narrow one and highway with nothing in-between?*

Mr BROWN *- Yes.*

Mr ELLIS *- In a 1-star section on the Midland Highway.*

Mr BROWN *- Yes, 1 or 2-star…. ….It's in that range, that's right. To get the 3-star we need the flexible safety barrier down the middle. We also need a more consistent wider cross-section and also at least one metre of sealed shoulders. In some cases we do have that in some parts of the highway but some other parts of the highway, we don't.*

Ms KING *- We've looked at a bit of curve, the horizontal curves and the vertical curves too. That's part of the assessment of the design, how tight is this? I'm not across the detail of exactly how that feeds into the star rating. The other thing on the star rating is the number of accesses and intersections, I think.*

Mr ELLIS *- The other thing I was going to ask, this is part of Highway 1 nationally. How will the completed project compare to the rest of Highway 1 around the country? Is this a reasonably high star rating for the total of Highway 1?*

Ms KING *- The star ratings, the appropriateness of a star rating for a road is partly a function of - so, upgrading the Midland Highway to a five-star rating for the traffic volumes we've got would not be an appropriate expenditure. Whereas some of the rest of Highway 1, and I'm not across the volumes, but conceptually in your head driving the Princes Freeway, driving the Hume, the volumes are massive and their targets may be more appropriate to be a 4-star for those and perhaps 5-star in the more urban areas.*

So, there is a real connection between matching the expenditure to the need, and part of the need is the number of people using the road.

Highway Access for Adjacent Properties

4.5 The Committee acknowledges that, for safety reasons, many property accesses had been modified along the Highway to provide left-in left-out access only, which had an impact on drivers exiting adjacent properties. This means that drivers exiting from these properties who wanted to turn and drive to the right, actually had to make a left turn, travel some distance and use a designated turning facility to turnaround and travel in their intended direction. The Committee also recognises that left turns and appropriately placed turning facilities are inherently safer than turning right out of a property across traffic lanes on the Highway with a speed limit of 110km/h. The Committee sought to understand the inconvenience that drivers encountered and the extra distances they might be expected to travel:

CHAIR *- ……Some landowners need to come out, do a left, and then travel up the road, and then turn back. Is there are a specific or maximum distance that you allow that to happen, in terms of how far a landowner is to travel before they have the opportunity to go in the opposite direction?*

Ms KING *- Looking at four to five k's for turns.*

Mr GIBSON *- The department's desired guidelines for a Category 1 road says approximately 3 to 4 kilometres, it should be provided. But, it really depends on who is around and the frequency. The guidelines are approximately 3 to 4 kilometres.*

CHAIR *- The reason I ask that is on one of them, and members may remember, but it was near Antill Ponds. There is a heritage house that was looking at putting in a B&B operation. Of course it can be all the difference between having a customer and not having a customer if they have to travel too far. They just think, 'Oh, I won't bother going back'. That is the reason I ask that question. It can actually be quite a game-changer for those who are trying to run a business and attract customers.*

I don't know that there are any on these stretches, but there might be. That is why I asked that question about minimum distance. Do you take that sort of thing into account?

Ms KING *- We do. It is a bit challenging for us to make major accommodations for intended businesses, but we do work carefully with landowners, particularly where there are established businesses. There are examples where farm businesses are moving to a model where they attract more of the general public to their farm, and we have had conversations with businesses around those issues. Yes.*

4.6 The Committee sought to understand how the access needs of adjacent landowners are incorporated into the design process and what measures the Department takes to minimise adverse impacts on adjacent landowners where property accesses are likely to be affected:

CHAIR - *Access issues?*

Ms KING - *There are the inevitable concerns because people don't like having to turn left in the future, having to turn left only out of an access where they are currently turning left and right. That is a consistent and reasonable concern by people. We work with all the landowners. The members of the project team meet with the landowners on site, talk through their issues. Talk it through looking at the issues, not close to the highway, but looking at the locations.*

We do our best to address the concerns from the people who live and work alongside the highway. For example, we have relocated turn facilities from where we thought the turn should go. We've moved those in response to landowner feedback and that can ameliorate or at least mitigate the access concerns. Sometimes we have an access off the back of a turn facility and that can help manage the vehicle movements for those as landowners too. So, we prioritise safety. We can't give everybody everything but we do try to get a really good outcome for the people who live and work along the highway.

4.7 The Committee also sought to understand how actual or proposed changes to land use on adjacent properties are managed by the Department both during the design of the proposed works and during, or after, completion of the works:

Mr TUCKER - *I'm thinking back to the property at Symmons Plains, actually. That changed ownership after the design was done and some of the building of the road was done, I think. That business substantially changed what it was doing on that farming property, and now, is probably one of the biggest truck moving properties along that piece of road.*

Does any planning come into anything that like, into the future, with changes? With the use of properties and the amount of truck movements coming out of a property?

Ms KING *- Where landowners have 5- and 10-year plans for their businesses, we listen to those plans. It is hard for us to make substantial changes on the basis of intention by landowners, so it can really depend how well developed the plans are at the time we are speaking to them.*

Changes in markets, and access to markets, and those sorts of things make a huge difference to how quickly a particular farming business is able to implement the long-term plans for the business. It is somewhat case by case, in the sense of, it depends a bit how big a change, how soon, some assessment of how likely those changes are.

In terms of major changes after a project has gone through, often major changes to land use require a planning permit. Not always. It depends how the change works. But if you are thinking about a farming business which might branch into a tourism-type business, there would often be a planning permit required to get the building permit for the tourism buildings., whether they be day use, or day and night use.

The planning permit process that runs through council: we are a referral agency, so council will receive a planning permit for a new tourism business. The access is onto the Midland Highway. That is our highway. They will refer that planning permit to us, and we have an opportunity to make a submission to provide information on the traffic impacts associated with a substantial change of use in the business.

A farming to a tourism change is a change that really does affect the traffic at that location. If you think about if it was just growing grapes, and now it is a winery with tasting, well that really changes the vehicles, and we may, in some cases, condition a planning permit to say the new development needs to fund a turn lane.

Mr TUCKER *- With this particular case it was just a farming operation change where it was. There had been a substantial increase in truck movements out of that driveway, and it is the only driveway that hasn't even been sealed right to the entrance off the highway. That is a concern. Just something that has happened in the past but it is hard to predict what is going to happen in the future.*

***Ms KING** - And the tricky ones are the ones where there is a change during the design, or during the construction of the project, because we get to a point where we really can't reinvent something. They are quite tricky those ones.*

***CHAIR** - Do you go back to the local council for an amendment of some sort, or not, when you do this? When you have to change something, and it is a minor change?*

***Ms KING** - There have been multiple projects across our network when we go back to the planning permit and consider. We ask ourselves, initially, do we think this is a minor change? Planning permits in my experience usually lead with condition No. 1, which is: construct substantially in accordance with the design.*

There is a discussion about what 'substantially' means. We review that internally. We have town planners on staff, we have consultant town planners and we often will have a conversation with council too to understand their interpretation.

***CHAIR -** Depending on how many people are impacted by whatever it is, the changes, I suppose.*

***Ms KING -** And whether it is something that is a change to the fundamental intent of the project or whether it is fine-tuning an element, and if we are changing the design in an area that was particularly sensitive in the council, I suspect. As I said, we assess it internally and we liaise with council to get their interpretation.*

Overtaking Opportunities

4.8 The Committee sought further information from the witnesses on the overtaking opportunities that would be provided in the 3 projects:

***Ms RATTRAY** - ……I know that there has been some criticism in the community around that we are actually losing overtaking opportunities. I am interested for the public record, if you could explain, or put it on the record what the community will gain and whether there are any losses in those overtaking opportunities.*

***Ms KING** - The overtaking opportunities that we are providing through this program are protected overtaking opportunities. They enable people in faster moving vehicles to overtake slow-moving vehicles without the risk of a head-on crash.*

There are some sections where we appreciate that the community may perceive a loss of what appears to be an appropriate overtaking opportunity at the moment, but the current overtaking opportunities are not protected in the way that the future ones will be. There are some convenience losses, but people will get home.

***Ms RATTRAY** - But there are some that are being moved further up.*

***Ms KING** - We are relocating some. There's an overtaking opportunity on the lead into a town and we are relocating that overtaking opportunity to the exit to the town because once everybody's slowed down for the 60 or the 80 for the town, it's when they're leaving the town that the slower vehicles are taking longer to come up to speed. We've provided overtaking opportunities on the exits from the town so that the vehicles which can accelerate faster can get around those slower-moving ones.*

***Ms RATTRAY** - So, overall there is no net loss or was it minus one?*

***Mr GIBSON** - So overall, within the project limits of the Campbell Town north project, there's four right now and there will be four in the future, but when you factor in the overall Midland Highway there will actually be one more within Campbell Town north than there is currently.*

***Ms KING** - Because of the Epping Forest.*

***Mr GIBSON** - Because the work that's already been done north of Epping Forest, yes.*

Safety Barriers

4.9 The Committee understood that the use of a flexible safety barrier was the most common safety treatment along the Midland Highway, however, noted that W-Beam barriers would also be used within these projects. The Committee sought to understand which type of barrier is considered the safest and why different types of barriers might be used:

> ***Mr TUCKER -*** *We have heard you talk a lot about safety within the highway system. You also mentioned that you are using two different distinct types of barrier: the W-Beam and the wire rope. Around the state there's a number of different barriers. Which is the safer and why?*
>
> ***Ms KING -*** *One the great advantages of the flexible safety barrier, colloquially known as the wire rope, is that it absorbs the energy of the impact so it slows vehicles down. However, you cannot put flexible safety barrier in every location. Sometimes where the distances are short or the curves are a bit tight, it is not suitable for the flexible safety barrier. We tend to use the W-Beam in those locations, and the W-Beam also has an impact-absorbing role to play. There are other barriers around; sometimes they are what was used 30 or 40 years ago and sometimes there are other reasons, especially in constrained locations where there is not a lot of room. We are confident that the flexible safety barrier, which is the dominant barrier on the Midland Highway, is the right engineering solution for this environment.*

4.10 The Committee recognised the longstanding concerns the motor cycling community held with the use of the flexible wire-rope safety barriers. The Committee sought further information from the witnesses on whether these concerns are translating to an actual adverse impact for motor cyclists:

> ***CHAIR -*** *A question on flexible barriers. We raised this a few times, about motorcycles absolutely hating them. They call them cheese graters. They're anathema to motorcyclists and yet they do prevent accidents. From what you're saying, the evidence seems to be there that they're preventing accidents. Do you have any upgraded statistics on the number of motorcycle accidents that might be happening that are adverse serious accidents as a result of flexible barriers?*
>
> ***Ms KING*** *- No, not that I'm aware of. I do know on some sections - Trevor - I think in the north we are putting some motorcycle attenuators on some of the curves. We are conscious of that motorcycle issue. We've looked at some higher risk locations and we're looking at some work on the barriers there. We tend to know in our head about the fatalities on the Midland Highway and I don't think we have motorcycle crashes.*
>
> ***CHAIR*** *- Serious accidents?*
>
> ***Mr BROWN*** *- I couldn't say about their seriousness, but they're not generally the fatality crashes.*
>
> ***Ms KING*** *- The fatalities we tend to hold in our heads and there's not a motorcycle one.*
>
> ***CHAIR*** *- I just wanted to ask the question. We're continually getting emails - I am and I'm sure other members probably do - from motorcycle groups saying, 'Let's get rid of this, let's get of these.' I wanted to ask the question to be able to go back and say, 'Well, this is the reality'. I'd certainly be interested in as a member in anything you have on motorcycles.*
>
> ***Mr ELLIS*** *- Do we have a sense of what the impact is on motorcyclists who hit a wire rope versus a W-barrier?*
>
> ***Ms KING*** *- I think the flexible safety barrier for someone on a motorbike when they hit it at high speed is distressing.*
>
> ***CHAIR*** *- It's not pretty.*

***Ms KING** - Yes. The flexible safety barrier does prevent vehicles on the other side of the road crossing in the motorcyclist's path. As well, the protective nature of the barrier works for all vehicle types. That motorcycle question has been around for a while.*

Consultation with Stakeholders to ensure Appropriate Highway Design

4.11 Noting the Midland Highway is adjacent to primarily agricultural land, the Committee sought to understand the level of engagement with the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association and landowners, to discern whether the design was compatible with the movement of large agricultural machinery:

***Ms RATTRAY** - In regard to the consultation, earlier today there was some reference to engagement with agriculture contractors who use heavy machinery going from farm to farm. I note that the TFGA have been part of the stakeholder consultation process. I am wondering if you know whether they drilled down into agriculture consultants and contractors as well in their needs for big machinery on roads.*

***Ms KING -** The TFGA were not as involved in these projects as they had been in some previous ones so we made sure that we reached out to them. We did not get a strong engagement from them on these jobs as we have had in the past. I could not tell you what their - several of the landowners we are dealing with on these projects are landowners that we have worked with in the past on previous projects so they know us, they know the issues, they know the routines, and some of it is not new to them.*

***Ms RATTRAY** - I was interested in how far that consultation drills down into individual areas of agriculture uses.*

***Mr TUCKER** - We did talk about the shoulder widths being 2 to 3 metres whereas previously in discussions we have only talked about 2 metres on the shoulder width. Can you go into a little more depth where you would go out to 3 metres from the 2 metres? That is a big thing with what Tania is saying in regards to the machinery moving past. If a truck is broken down, it just gives you that extra metre of width to get past that oversize machine.*

***Ms KING** - Yes. As a result of the early contractor involvement process, some sections have a slightly wider highway cross-section than others, because of the advice from the contractors about construction efficiency. So, that extra width makes it a bit more efficient for them to get in and build it. We've looked at where we distribute that extra width. Some of it is in making the medians a little wider; some of it making the shoulders a little wider in those sections. It's not everywhere.*

Prioritisation of projects

4.12 The Committee sought further information from the witnesses on which of the 3 projects would be prioritised for construction:

***Ms BUTLER** - So, to clarify for the record, the project itself will be divvied up to be Ross/Oatlands and north of Campbell Town.*

***Ms KING** - They're two contracts.*

***Ms BUTLER** - Two contracts.*

***Ms KING** - Yes.*

***Ms BUTLER** - So, is there a priority for which one will be completed first, or which one will be started first?*

***Ms KING** - We'll be starting on both the Ross and Oatlands sections, all going well, in the late spring. So, part of Ross and part of Oatlands for this summer and then the subsequent approximate halves the second summer. The north of Campbell Town section will be starting*

later into the summer. We have some environmental constraints north of the Campbell Town section for which we need to seek federal environmental approvals and that can take some time to be processed and approved.

Pavement Quality

4.13 The Committee noted there had been some quality and durability issues encountered with the pavement seals for previous projects. The Committee sought to understand how such issues were managed and if this had changed as a result of the problems that had been experienced:

> ***CHAIR*** *- ……I will go first with one question, which I think would be classed as an overview question, and that is the quality of pavement. It is something that we are aware of, and it needs to go on the record, that over the last few years pavements haven't seemed to be very well lasting pavements. The aggregate seems to strip from the bitumen, et cetera. Could you address what the department may be doing to improve that situation so that when money is spent putting roads together that we are indeed getting good value and a serviceable product?*
>
> ***Ms KING*** *- There are a number of things the department has recognised that it would like to see done better in the future. Some of those have included reviewing our designs and the way that we specify the seals, particularly in reference to the sealing of the highway. When I say 'specifying' them, I am talking about the section of the document that is the technical description of what contractors need to do.*
>
> *On the highway, we have reviewed our specifications, and we are making changes. We had made changes partly in consultation with the Civil Contractors Federation in that area.*
>
> *We are reviewing the way we also audit the implementation of the construction contracts. In other words, what the contractors are doing on ground. There is also some work around managing the timing of the projects. It is challenging to get a high-quality seal down in Tasmania in certain months, in the colder months. In order to have the sealing occur in the summer sealing season, we need to get prep work done earlier. To get prep work done earlier, you need to get on road at the right time. To get on road at the right time, you need to go to tender at the right time. You need to finish your design at the right time, you need to get your approvals in place.*
>
> *It is quite a juggernaut in these projects, and if we get some slippages in the early stages we can end up, if we are not careful, with the construction not quite fine-tuned for the climate.*
>
> *There are a number of fronts on which the department is reviewing and making changes to the way we work too, to make sure that we are delivering the best quality possible.*

Staging of Projects and Traffic Management

4.14 The Committee noted there could be driver frustration during construction, and often it may seem to the general travelling public that the travel interruptions encountered were not necessarily warranted. The Committee sought to understand the nature of how work was staged and how this could impact on traffic management:

> ***Ms RATTRAY*** *- …… Around the three stages in this project there has been some criticism, and I am responsible for some of that from time to time, where we see a section of the road and they make a start and then nothing happens for a while but then they go onto another section, 10 or 15 or 20 kilometres, and then it seems to be a hotchpotch of a bit here and a bit there. You are inconvenienced more often than what it feels like you should be as a motorist. Can you give me some indication if that is going to be the same arrangement for these three stages in this project? Or is there a reason why it has to be like that?*

Ms KING - *It can be. Just for clarity, from our perspective from the Australian Government's perspective these are three separate projects: Ross, Oatlands, north of Campbell Town. We are running Ross and Oatlands as one construction contract and north of Campbell Town as a separate contract.*

……*Within each of the three zones, let's say, the three sections, we are approximately splitting each of them in half for a section to start to work on this summer and then a section for the following summer. So, we're trying to manage the length of road that we've got open at any one time because that does create challenges for everybody.*

Ms RATTRAY *- And frustration.*

Ms KING *- Yes. In terms of staging the work within, say, the first summer, we don't define too tightly exactly what the contractor must do or when. We are defining traffic management performance standards so that it is the contractor's responsibility how they set up the site. They're the specialists at setting up the site and working through the details of the staging.*

There are times when different work activities are required in one location, for example, they might come through and do the drainage work ahead of another package of bulk earthworks or of road reshaping; they want to get a productive length ready and the right shape before they seal it. There's a number of interplays and, as in any project, for one sub-unit the timing may not work from an outsider's perspective.

We and the contractors are very conscious of the traffic management impact that we have during construction and we do work very hard to balance the impact on the travelling public against getting the jobs done as quickly as we can so that we can get off highway in a reasonable time frame.

4.15 The Committee also noted that speed limits in place across work sites could also increase driver frustration. The Committee sought to understand why speed limits would be in place, especially out of work hours when construction is not occurring:

CHAIR - *……Speed limits that are put up by contractors are often 80, 60, 40. We all know why the 40 is there, because it's to protect the workers but not at 6 o'clock at night 'til 4 o'clock in the morning. It is the most frustrating thing when you're doing 40 kilometres an hour, there's not a worker in sight. It is a simple thing of changing those signs to a more appropriate speed. I'm not saying it would be 110 but when you're talking about a stretch of road that could be like any country road where you're travelling at 80, there ought to be some way of being able to handle that and giving instructions to those contractors.*

……I don't know about other members, I'm pretty sure, you get frustrated and sometimes that can actually breed accidents too.

……Can you cover that?

Ms KING *- ……That's very legitimate feedback. We do work with our contractors to remind them and to reinforce that speed limits when they're not working need to be returned to appropriate limits. Yes, I agree completely.*

Sometimes it would be unusual to be 40 but there are sometimes 60 speeds out of work hours which may be managing a risk that's not apparent to people in vehicles. Those can be things that are out of sight but are close off the edge of the road, drop-offs to culverts, that sort of thing. It's a mix of things. There are times when we need to do a better job of making sure the sites are returned to the appropriate speed at the end of the day, especially before weekends. There are also times when the speed is reduced for a safety reason which is not apparent to the traffic. So it's a balance of those things but, yes, I accept your feedback. I think it's legitimate, absolutely.

Completion of 10-year Action Plan

4.16 The Committee understood the 3 projects would complete the package of works committee under the Midland Highway 10-Year Action Plan. The Committee sought further information on what might occur should there be an under- or over-spend on the committed budget:

> ***Ms BUTLER*** *- And once this project is complete, that is it for the Midland Highway -overall, the whole thing?*
>
> ***Ms KING*** *- That's the end of the sections. If we have some money left over within our 565 we might go back and do a little bit of fine-tuning in a few locations but I'm unable to commit to that at this point because we really need to see how these substantial projects come in.*
>
> ***Ms BUTLER*** *- There could be surplus but if there are insufficient funds and that is the windup of the project is there a contingency plan for that?*
>
> ***Ms KING -*** *There are contingencies in these estimates. We always have contingencies in our estimates, and those contingencies are documented in the reports you have here. Those contingencies are informed by risk analysis of the project. Yes, we make them on estimates, but they are informed estimates, so they are good judgments on how much contingency is needed.*
>
> *Having said that, projects are projects and things happen. If there is a significant overrun, I'm in terrible trouble. We are really clear this is taxpayers' money. We are conscious that additional funding has already been provided to this program; there are reasons for that. Our job as a delivery team is to bring them in on budget.*

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

4.17 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 Committee questioned Ms King who confirmed that the works would meet an identified need and solve a recognised problem on the Midland Highway and was a good use of public funds:

> ***CHAIR -*** *…..Does the proposed works meet an identified need, or needs, or solve a recognised problem?*
>
> ***Ms KING -*** *Yes.*
>
> ***CHAIR -*** *Are the proposed works the best solution to meet identified needs or solve a recognised problem within the allocated budget?*
>
> ***Ms KING -*** *Yes.*
>
> ***CHAIR -*** *Are the proposed works fit for purpose?*
>
> ***Ms KING -*** *Yes.*
>
> ***CHAIR -*** *Do the proposed words provide value for money?*
>
> ***Ms KING -*** *Yes.*
>
> ***CHAIR -*** *Are the proposed works a good use of public funds?*
>
> ***Ms KING -*** *Yes.*

5 DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

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

- *Midland Highway 10 year Action Plan – Midland Highway Final Stages: Oatlands, Ross and North of Campbell Town*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Department of State Growth, March 2021.

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 complete the safety upgrade commenced under the Midland Highway 10-year Action plan.

6.2 The proposed works will result in the provision of a consistent and safer travel environment on the Midland Highway. The works will help to reduce the crash risk along the highway, in particular the risk of fatal crashes and serious injuries caused by head-on collisions, by separating opposing lanes of traffic via a flexible safety barrier, in conjunction with regular, protected overtaking opportunities. The works will also provide safe turning opportunities for general traffic, heavy vehicles and emergency services, with breaks in the central median barrier provided at intersections, as well as the installation of dedicated on and off highway turn facilities.

6.3 Accordingly, the Committee recommends Midland Highway 10 Year Action Plan - Final Stage, at an estimated cost of $152 million, in accordance with the documentation submitted.

Parliament House
Hobart
15 September 2021

Hon Rob Valentine MLC
Chair