

PHILLIP ISLAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC



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Dear Monique

As part of Regional Roads Victoria community consultation, thank you for the opportunity to input into the proposed upgrade of the road at Newhaven. While the Phillip Island Conservation Society (PICS) understands the Government's desire to improve the Phillip Island road in light of the expected increase in tourism in coming years, this must be done carefully and collaboratively in order to preserve the natural environment on which the Island's economy and tourism depends.

Phillip Island is a unique tourist destination largely because of its wonderful wildlife and environment. There are predetermined limits to the amount of vehicle traffic that is sustainable without destroying its environmental value. Urban "off the rack" traffic solutions do not fit with this environment without full and proper consideration of unintended impacts.

Integrated Transport Island Road Corridor Planning Study with an Environmental Effects Statement

PICS members have decades of experience in major road planning in Victoria together with detailed involvement in the PIITS strategy development committee and in the development of the Phillip Island and San Remo Visitor Economy Strategy 2035.

We consider that rather than an ad hoc piecemeal approach to road upgrades, an overall Integrated Transport Island Road Corridor Planning Study (*the Planning Study*) should be developed from the bridge to Cowes before any further corridor works are planned.

PICS consider that *the Planning Study* should be subject to an Environmental Effects Statement (EES). This process will enable an independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee

to be established by the State Minister for Planning under the Environment Effects Act 1978 and as an Advisory Committee under the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

Such an inquiry would transparently assess issues including any proposal to widen the roads, introduce roundabouts or duplicate the bridge based on evidence provided by RRV and other transport specialists.

We believe such an independent process would unite the community in establishing a vision of what is required for sustainable transport and stop ad hoc works occurring that are not cost effective and do not meet the needs and aspirations of residents' visitors and local businesses. The EES inquiry would seek to provide recommendations on integrated transport solutions including the Island's unique visitations patterns whilst preserving the Island's unique and prized environment on which the economy depends.

The scope of the EES Inquiry could consider key issues including:

- Any proposals to widen the roads or duplicate the bridge;
- Any adverse environmental impacts of road improvement proposals;
- Integrated transport options including pedestrians, cyclists, buses and park and ride; and
- Demand management during peak holiday times including traffic limitations; user pays suggestions, signage for estimated travel times on South Gippsland highway.

Strategic Transport Planning and Demand Management

PIITS is the current transport strategy development committee within the local community that has representatives from the community and various stakeholders and has dedicated many hours to considering and discussing transport issues on Phillip Island.

Strategic documents have repeated the theme that traffic on Phillip Island is increasing and there is an urgency to introduce demand management solutions to reduce the impact of private cars. The main studies include: PIITS – Phillip Island Integrated Traffic Strategy, VES – Visitor Economy Strategy, CACP – Cowes Activity Centre Plan.

A key theme is that every decision should be based around reducing the domination of private cars and improving access for visitors while retaining the natural environment.

Current Newhaven Purpose and Justification

The justification for duplicating a section of the road at Newhaven is not evident. There are no tangible benefits provided by RRV to justify the current proposal. The Phillip Island road capacity is limited by the two lane bridge and two lanes along the whole of the corridor. Upgrading the capacity of this limited section of road at Newhaven serves no apparent purpose and is not consistent with the capacity of adjoining sections, one of which (the bridge) will be significantly constrained for many years to come. Because the proposed works will have a significant impact on local visual and social amenity, particularly on the mature golden cypress plantation, it cannot be justified unless it is in the context of an

overall Intergrated Transport Island Road Corridor Planning Study from the bridge to Cowes that has been through the EES process.

The current plans are a road design over-kill. They are not cost effective, and they would have a very significant impact on the Newhaven character and the gateway to Phillip Island. The provision of a wide, paved outer-separator on the north side of the road is totally out of character, and the provision of the large parking areas on the southern service road is totally inappropriate. Other options should be examined to meet parking needs for the adjoining commercial premises.

Other Options

Improvements to through traffic flow are justified, but this does not require a four lane treatment. Judicious provision of slip lanes and turning lanes would be far more appropriate.

Traffic flow data and modelling are required to explain the intended purpose and identify other options that could be considered to better achieve this.

Cost Benefit analysis has not been provided. This must be undertaken to consider any expected benefits against the costs to the environment, amenity, road safety and other road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, bus stop users, as well as loss of trees and impact on wildlife roadkill.

Specific Issues with the Newhaven Proposal

PICS is committed to sustainable, environmental visitation and does not support the Newhaven proposal to increase a small section of the road for no apparent benefit, whilst imposing considerable amenity, environmental and road safety concerns.

The duplication of the road at Newhaven is inconsistent with the environmental and conservation significance of Phillip Island.

It is noted that the RRV community engagement survey is flawed and forces respondents to rank the top 3 benefits with no provision for listing issues and adverse impacts.

Trees

PICS support the concerns of the National Trust regarding the classified significant cypress trees as well as the impact on visual amenity. The destruction of mature canopy trees, including the iconic cypress, is of major concern. Together with the loss of the edge of the Newhaven park this will significantly change the environmental character of the Island entry inconsistent with conservation and its image of being a natural attraction.

With most of the island cleared for agriculture and housing developments, there are few mature canopy trees remaining, with most rows of trees along the roadsides of existing

roads. Road widening negatively impacts on roadside vegetation, which provides the last remaining wildlife corridors and habitat for native birds and wildlife.

Planting “offsets” does not achieve the same function because they take many decades to grow to the same size. It is important that significant roadside vegetation be preserved. Please refer to Greg Moore OAM’s extensive writing on the cost of destroying trees and incorporate these costs in you cost/benefit analysis.

PICS are currently working on a Significant Tree Register for Phillip Island together with the National Trust. Bass Coast Shire Council has also been working on identifying and preserving significant roadside vegetation on Council controlled roads on Phillip Island. We believe RRV should do the same on main arterial roads and particularly on the Phillip Island corridor.

Road Safety issues

Dangerous proposed mergers

The duplicated lanes at Newhaven will encourage drivers to try to overtake to get ahead in traffic. This is likely to cause road safety issues when lanes merge again (particularly considering boats, caravans and long vehicles).

Merger of lanes will cause congestion that will make it difficult for residents, to enter from local roads.

Other Road Users

The current design is very car centric. More provisions are needed for integrated transport and to ensure the safety of all road users. The safety and needs of pedestrians and cyclists must be taken into account. It is well documented in traffic engineering and road safety research that roundabouts assist traffic flow for cars but do not cater for pedestrians trying to cross nor cyclists trying to negotiate through.

Pedestrians accessing bus stops will be problematic, particularly for children catching the school bus. One pedestrian crossing for the whole stretch is inadequate.

Wildlife Roadkill

The impact on wildlife must be considered. Roadkill is already a significant issue of concern on this stretch of road from Newhaven to Cape Woolamai that runs through a narrow stretch of land with wildlife on both sides that crosses for food and water. It is envisaged that inevitably roadkill will be exacerbated by the proposal because it will be impossible for wildlife to cross 4 busy lanes of traffic without being hit. This road carnage causes much anguish for locals, visitors, and overseas tourists, and does immense, permanent damage to the Island’s reputation of providing a caring and safe environment for wildlife. It also causes a road safety hazard. Avoidance of wildlife collisions results in unpredictable driving behaviour such sudden braking or swerving which lead to collisions or loss of control, either off the road or into adjacent lanes.

Speed Reduction

It is considered that traffic could be better managed in other ways, particularly the reduction of the speed limit. It is well documented that speed reduction is a very cost effective strategy and as well as improving safety, reduced speed helps to maintain a constant flow of traffic rather than the stop/start that will result from the proposed duplications and mergers. A Speed Review of is being undertaken by Bass Coast Shire Council on roads under Council control. This should also be considered on the main roads of Phillip Island by RRV.

Beach Cres Newhaven

It is concerning that the closing of the side road Beach Cres Newhaven will change the traffic flow at Newhaven and will funnel traffic through Forrest Ave, including heavy vehicles and boats trying to access the public boat ramp and Newhaven Yacht Squadron boat ramp. As well as affecting residents it poses safety issues for people crossing Forrest Ave eg from the car parking to the Newhaven shops.

Churchill Island

It is considered that the Churchill Island intersection also needs to be addressed as part of corridor planning.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, PICS does not consider the proposed road duplication at Newhaven to be justified. While it serves little apparent benefit, it will have considerable costs, not only financial but indirect costs and issues associated with compromised road safety, amenity, and the environment, including significant roadside flora like the cypress trees and impact on resident native fauna (roadkill).

PICS urges RRV to develop a Intergrated Transport Island Road Corridor Planning Study from the bridge to Cowes that considers integrated transport and the safety and needs of all road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and bus users. The *Planning Study* should include an independent and comprehensive Environmental Effects Statement to properly consider all transport needs and environmental, social and economic impacts of road duplication or widening proposals.

Yours Sincerely



Jeff Nottle

President