

Hartley Highway Action Group

The General Manager
Mt Victoria to Lithgow alliance
Reply Paid 164
St Leonards NSW 1590

26th October 2012

Dear Sir

Re: Mt Victoria to Lithgow Highway Upgrade - Concept Design and Road
Boundaries report **and** October 2012 Safety Upgrade Announcements

The Hartley Highway Action Group was formed at a public meeting held in May 2008 to protect the Hartley Valley against the adverse impacts of the Great Western Highway, Mt Victoria to Lithgow upgrade proposal. Since its inception the group has maintained a publicly accessible website, distributed fourteen newsletters to the four hundred families in the Hartley Valley and held nine well-attended public meetings to seek direction from the community.

As stated on many occasions, the Hartley Valley is a landscape of enormous heritage significance to European and Indigenous Australians alike. It is a landscape that still shows the marks of first settlement by Europeans, a valley dotted with buildings that are relics of early settlement in a landscape where the earliest land grants are still visible, marked by tree lines and boundary trees. It is a place where history is tangible, the more so for the relatively intact nature of the context in which such history has unfolded. This essence is felt deeply by its residents and visitors who are committed to its preservation as a treasure house of heritage.

At all of its public meeting the Hartley community has endorsed a clear strategy to protect the historic qualities of the Hartley Valley during any upgrade of the Great Western Highway. Minimization of impacts on the valley, the enhancement of rail freight capacity and the identification of more appropriate strategic routes for heavy road freight are the three principle strategy planks supported by the community. In addition a key element of strategy has been a recognition of the need to improve safety on the existing road through the valley.

In the last month we have held two public meetings primarily to consider the Concept Design. The first was significantly distracted by a proposal tabled at that meeting that a significant change in approach be adopted. At a subsequent meeting last weekend, of which proper notice of the change proposal had been given, our existing strategy was overwhelmingly reconfirmed in a ~~4~~standing room5only meeting.

Both these meetings overwhelmingly rejected the concept design. In the first, such result could have been the result of confusion caused by the tabled counter proposal, in the second it was clearly the considered view of the community.

One resolution passed unanimously called for an extension of two months in the period allowed for the consideration and the submission of comments, on the proposed safety enhancements. We now seek this extension to enable the community breathing space to properly consider and discuss the elements of the upgrade. It is totally unreasonable to have expected the community to respond by the end of this week to information only provided this month in your October brochure at a time when it was still in shock and grappling with the challenge of the Concept Design. A similar extension of time should be considered in respect of the Concept design in light of the disquiet currently prevailing

At last Saturdays meeting a further resolution was passed

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This resolution was expressed in identical terms to one passed at a prior public meeting held in September to consider issues with the Concept Design. At no stage was it possible to consider individual elements of the Concept Design, the meeting was of a single mind such that total rejection was its determined response.

The key elements of concern that have fed this level of disquiet can be summarised as follows;

Concept design 1

To be extending the inadequate road over the mountains with a super highway through the valley and creating a whole parallel road system is a hugely over engineered proposal. Its proposed overpasses, bridges and viaducts would be a visual blight on this heritage landscape. Based on the statistics the current road with safety enhancements is adequate to accommodate traffic for many years into the future, we do not need a dedicated super highway between Mt Victoria and Lithgow.

The Blue Mountains topography is such that the existing Great Western Highway can never be an adequate highway for moving freight across the Blue Mountains. Little wonder that so much freight from the Central west already reaches the coast by the Hume and Golden Highways despite the alluring shorter distance via Katoomba. Freight transport on both the Hume and Golden highways in both directions, should be encouraged and facilitated, as should the use of rail.

If highways are going to be the way for moving freight post 2030, and the Inland Railway is not properly committed by then, the Great Western Highway will be inadequate for obvious reasons. It seems madness to propose to spend some \$2billion on this eighteen kilometres extension of an already inadequate freight road, when for much less you could build an upgraded road via one of the Newnes options a road that could ultimately be the Western end of an future upgrade of Bells Line of Road when post 2030 such upgrade will be essential. In the meantime development of a Newnes route would result in huge fuel savings.

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Truck parking-

This valley is a heritage precinct, to be creating any truck park in it would be a travesty. Truck parking could easily be accommodated up around Mt Boyce or to the west in pine forest country, both in situations where neither neighbours or heritage values would be compromised.

Heritage Precincts-

The proposal to run a service road right through the two defined heritage villages Little Hartley and Hartley is quite objectionable and causes huge concern. Within these sites are buildings that need special preservation and protection, but more importantly their context needs preservation. These are places that need to be reserved for quiet enjoyment as places of reflection on where we have come from and the future that we rush to. They also represent a powerful promise in a future economy where the story of our past can build wealth in the valley. To desecrate them by making them a transit lane is not acceptable and we object to their use in that way in the strongest terms.

Community-

The Concept Design will have a huge impact on the valley community. No longer will it be easy to slip across to visit friends or do business on the other side of the highway. This issue will divide our community in the valley, resulting in one community north of the road corridor and one south.

Safety enhancements-

We have reviewed the safety enhancements outlined in your October 2012 community update and as outlined in the displays held in the area last week. We commend the RMS for the good work being done. Regardless as outlined above we seek an extension of time for comment on these enhancements.

Broadly our community is in agreement with all of the proposals that have been tabled except the proposal for the Mt Victoria railway bridge and the Forty Bends upgrade. Widening road margins adjacent to the various commercial premises is the only enhancement we would propose. We will watch with interest the rollout of further detail, appreciating that items like the management of roadside tree risk in the middle of the valley are yet to be fully fleshed out.

We will not comment specifically on any of the Mt Victoria upgrades other than to say we support them all. We do have concern however regarding the Mt Victoria railway crossing and the bend that leads into it from the west. The slight improvement proposed is inadequate. Unless this bridge is widened and better angled this will continue to be a danger blackspot.

The Forty Bends upgrade seems premature at best, and a flagrant waste of taxpayers money. Since the last round of enhancement, this stretch of road has been relatively free from cold weather incidents and its performance could still be enhanced by use of technology for the management of inclement weather risk. The upgrade proposed seems excessive in the extreme, particularly the White Creek Bridge. We believe this money could be spent for much better effect in the valley or for enhancements between Katoomba and Mt Victoria.

We note that at the time of the Evans and Peck report the forty bends work had a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of .2 at a time when the works were costed at \$100million. We note they are now costed at \$120 million and will clearly have a much lower BCR. Would you please provide us as soon as possible the revised BCR and an insight into the factors of that calculation. We are surprised that any government claiming to be fiscally constrained could contemplate a spend of this size against a project that has a BCR of .2 or less.

We are conscious of the increased risk associated with the Fernbank corner. We appreciate that the point to point speed control may alleviate this risk. If that facility does not control car speeds then additional enhancements of this bend will be required.

The recent announcement of the intention to install point to point speed control across the valley is a great decision. We thank the RMS for proposing this long sought enhancement and the government needs to be congratulated on agreeing to proceed to implement this recommendation. We look forward to reviewing the detail of this installation in due course. We believe this facility should be used to control the speed of both cars and trucks and recognise that this facility, coupled with the revised speed limit through the valley, has the capacity to make this road really safe.

We note that the work on Victoria Pass is not yet complete and that further enhancements, previously proposed for the bottom bend, still need to be implemented.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment and look forward to your early response on the various questions posed.

Yours Faithfully
Hartley Highway Action Group

(Original Signed)

Ramsay Moodie
Chairman

C Paul Toole
John Cobb
Maree Statham
Colin Hunter
Roger Bailey