

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

(or email to:  
information@MV2L.com.au)

?? October 2012

Dear ,

### **Re Mt Victoria to South Bowenfels Highway Concept Design 2012**

It was in July 2012 when the Hartley community was first informed of the enormity of the plan to cross the Hartley Valley with a super highway, but not necessarily within our lifetimes.

It's more than three months since the Highway concept plan between Soldiers Pinch and South Bowenfels was released but I still feel shocked and unable to fully express my anger and disappointment at the realisation that the people who formulated this design don't seem to be the same as those who have been in consultation about this road business with residents of this valley for at least four years now. Whoever devised this plan doesn't seem to have taken in any thing we have said, many times and in many different ways, about all the reasons why anything bigger than an access and tourist road through the valley would be not only destructive to the historic, social and economic value of this valley (particularly its tourist potential), but wasteful of taxpayers' money, while not providing a fast and safe corridor for through traffic, particularly large trucks that need to link the coastal plain with the central west of NSW and beyond. Nor have they taken the advice of the most recent of many and costly consultants reports. The Evans & Peck Report stated that money should be spent on improving Bells Line of Road rather than the 20 km between Mt Victoria and South Bowenfels other than for safety upgrades.

The viaducts and tunnels are reminiscent of Walt Disney's Fantasyland; the cost is prohibitive now, and expected to be even more so in the future. If this plan was implemented there would no

longer be the possibility of Little Hartley becoming a business and social hub within the valley, as was promised in October 2010. The valley will be covered in more tar and concrete than pasture with historic sites isolated or lost behind great walls of concrete should this plan be adopted. And the thought of two large truck stops (designed to accommodate 10 large B-Double trucks each) between the historic Hartley Village and the historic Hartley Cemetery, with one almost outside the Historic Hartley School mocks our very claim at both being a community and steeped in the history of the land.

Other parts of the plan like running traffic (including trucks) through the Historic Village, and completely isolating the residents of Baaners Lane and making them fend for themselves accessing the superhighway's 100kph traffic flow without even a running start indicates that the RMS designers have neither sensitivity nor common sense. They'll be creating more problems than they claim to be resolving.

The reasons cited for not following the community's recommendation that the truck road follow the ridges around the Darling Causeway and across the Newnes Plateau to rejoin the Great Western Highway near the Mudgee Road turnoff past Marrangaroo and not come down the escarpment into the valley and back up the other side to end up in Lithgow's suburban streets are hard to understand or accept as being sincere.

The Cardno Report in 2008 said that the Newnes Plateau option was quite possible from an engineering point of view, but was costly - more costly than the original budget for the Hartley Road, as did the SKM study of 2004. That was before the introduction of tunnels and viaducts into the Hartley scheme. With all the added expense anticipated by this new plan, the Newnes option is by far the more cost effective, a matter that carries a lot of weight in this world of economic rationalism.

The second objection to the Newnes Plateau option was that it would take an extra six minutes to travel from Mt Victoria to the Mudgee turnoff and that the truck companies would not accept this extra time constraint.

With three sets of traffic lights about to be installed on the GWH at South Bowenfels to accommodate the increasing suburban traffic in this region, that six minute differentiation is no longer an acceptable excuse. The Hartley/Lithgow route will be longer by at least that with

accompanying breaking and acceleration at each traffic light creating more wear and tear (and cost) to truck operators.

The third is the Defence land excuse, which I am sure can be overcome should the will be there. This is, after all, in the National interest.

Better still, rather than have all this heavy transport travelling through the Blue Mountains, either by the GWH or Bells Line of Road, crossing World Heritage Areas and impinging on many thriving communities, there is another way across the Great Divide that is so innocuous that one hardly notices one is crossing the dividing range at all. It is the Golden Highway that connects the Hunter Valley from between Branxton & Singleton to Dubbo via Merriwa and Dunedoo.

At present it is only two lanes wide, with very few overtaking lanes. The population in that region is not large, so fewer people would be inconvenienced by wider roads or more traffic. The mining industry has already destroyed much of the beauty and agricultural value of the land, and Dubbo is a large centre that would really welcome a faster and more accessible road to the coast. It would also directly benefit Mudgee and be very useful to the traffic heading further west and north (Broken Hill, Darwin). The costs would be minimal compared with the challenges of the Victoria Pass viaducts and tunnels and the engineering relatively simple.

The best thing the RTA/RMS has done between Mt Victoria and South Bowenfels is to reduce the speed limit to 80 kph! For that I am particularly grateful - and for the bright yellow police car that diligently reinforces this speed limit. Having to access the Highway via Mid Hartley Road is a challenge to life and limb that is much less of a risk now that the traffic is moving more slowly. I'm still waiting for the safe dedicated right hand turn lane from the Highway into Mid Hartley Road that was promised to us over twelve months ago!

Safety upgrades within the valley are needed far more than yet more work on the Forty Bends section of the road. There has been recent improvement to this section that was previously so dangerous, but since those improvements there have been no major accidents on that stretch. How many more human sacrifices are deemed necessary before the stretch of highway between Jenolan Caves Road and Cox's

River Road and Ambermere Place are given adequate shoulders and dedicated turning lanes?

I know that it is the politicians who make these crazy, impractical decisions about where a road will go and how much is to be spent on its construction and it is up to us to lobby them to make the changes of plan that we are seeking.

I also know that improving the rail system to take more of the freight load is vital to reducing the amount of truck traffic on the road. Better passenger services would also help, particularly west of Katoomba!

A route across the Newnes Plateau is not without its own difficulties and constraints but certainly will make more sense than the current Victoria Pass and Hartley Valley route.

Sincerely