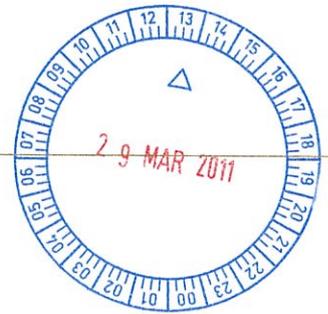


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Minister for Transport; Housing

Our Ref : 30-15787

Hon B Ellis MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr Ellis

I refer to your letter of 2 March 2011 concerning Petition 103 tabled by Hon Helen Bullock MLC, concerning the proposed Kununurra Heavy Vehicle Route and construction of a bridge over the Ord River.

The Kununurra Heavy Vehicle Route project involves the construction of a single carriageway heavy vehicle route from the Victoria Highway (west of the Kununurra Townsite) to Weaber Plain Road (north of the Kununurra Townsite, see Attachment 1). The project includes around 10 kilometres of new road alignment and a 480 metre bridge over the Ord River. The new link forms Stage One of the ultimate Kununurra Heavy Vehicle Route, which is planned to remove all heavy haulage permit vehicles and the majority of other vehicles from the existing crossing of the Ord River on the Kununurra Diversion Dam (managed by the Water Corporation).

A number of residents of Riverfarm Road, located near the Ord River north of Kununurra, have called on the State Government to reconsider the proposed alignment of the Kununurra Heavy Vehicle Route, in particular the location of the proposed bridge over the Ord River. They are seeking to move the alignment further away from their rural-residential properties to mitigate environmental, noise and visual impacts.

Planning for an alignment around Kununurra commenced in the early 1980s, in consultation with the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley. Planning for the current alignment progressed up until around 1999 when it was finalised and included in the current Town Planning Scheme (TPS). Main Roads understands that this TPS was advertised and finalised between 1999 and 2001 following a standard Local Government advertising and consultation process.

Planning for the project has been extensive and involved a significant number of considerations including land use, environmental issues, town planning, current and future development, community needs and potential impacts, as well as a number of other important issues. The alignment planning for the project undertaken over a 25 year period has considered all areas surrounding the Kununurra Townsite, including Riverfarm Road.

A significant amount of advertising has been completed for the proposed alignment over many years. These have included discussions in local newspapers, radio interviews on ABC Kimberley, information sheets and a manned stand at Broome Expo as well as at the Kununurra Agricultural Show. In addition, the proposed alignment has been included in extensive consultation processes related to the Ord Expansion project including the Ord Irrigation Road Network planning studies (2000-2002) and Kununurra Strategic Direction Study (2008-2010) reviewing planning requirements in the East Kimberley as a result of substantial funding provided for the Ord Expansion.

Further to this, consultation has been carried out for the Kununurra Heavy Vehicle Route project where further detail has been sought from interested parties. This is in accordance with the standard Main Roads process when proposing major infrastructure development. In addition, several residents of Riverfarm Road have shown an interest in the project and as a result, extensive consultation has progressed with these interested parties, in several cases on an almost daily basis.

In 2007 and 2008 desktop noise assessments for the entire Stage 1 project alignment were undertaken. These assessments confirmed that no residential properties would exceed the noise limits set by the State government as a result of the project.

In 2010 the noise assessment was updated following completion of the preliminary road and bridge designs. This assessment confirms that the noise limit set by the government will not be exceeded for all residential properties surrounding the project. Detailed assessments and plans around Riverfarm Road confirm that noise levels expected in that area will be significantly lower (around 16 decibels lower) than the Target Noise Level limit set by the government.

The updated noise assessment, a 3D image of the proposed Ord River Bridge as well as a covering letter was provided to all Riverfarm Road residents via Australia Post in December 2010 based on the Shire's rate payers' address records. Mrs Diana Oliver was the only resident to respond to this letter advising she was 'appalled' by the anticipated impacts. To date, no other response or feedback has been received from any Riverfarm Road residents as a result of the mail-out.

Main Roads has sought ongoing feedback on the project design throughout its development. In June 2010 when the most recent information sheet was released to the public, most of the project's preconstruction activities were complete. Significant community and stakeholder input had been provided over the preceding years as a result of previous consultation processes, and it should be noted that the majority of this feedback was in support of the project and current alignment.

It should be noted that a great deal of valuable information has been obtained from the community and key stakeholders as a result of the consultation process undertaken.

Main Roads has completed a detailed waterway assessment of the existing Ord River and proposed Ord River Bridge in consultation with the Department of Water. Other environmental assessments through the Department of Environment and Conservation, the Environmental Protection Authority and the Department of Water have confirmed that environmental impacts resulting from this project are manageable.

An Information Bay (parking area) on the northern side of the alignment nearer the proposed Ord River Bridge, has been included in the preliminary design of the project. This will cater for vehicles entering the Townsite and provide a safe location for tourist traffic to park near the river. The location, which is approximately 900 to 950 metres and separated by natural bushland from the closest Riverfarm Road property, has been chosen as it provides an easy and safe access for all traffic entering the Townsite area. No views are anticipated from the Information Bay to any Riverfarm Road property.

The 'left in' / 'left out' turning movement at the embayment is Main Roads' standard practice as it enhances safety for vehicles using the facility. It is intended the bay will be fenced to limit pedestrian access to the steep Ord River bank.

Main Roads has provided all community members in Kununurra a number of opportunities to provide feedback and to obtain further information regarding the project. Several Riverfarm Road residents provided feedback into the project between 2006 and 2010. In addition, given the level of interest shown, Main Roads has provided a significant volume of information to interested residents at Riverfarm Road since June 2010.

In 2010, Main Roads forwarded project information sheets to all PO Boxes in Kununurra and surrounding areas. Some members of the public chose not to receive this type of information and have placed a 'no junk mail' option on their PO Boxes. As a result, the project information sheets may not have been delivered to these addresses.

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In August 2010, Main Roads mailed all Riverfarm Road residents the latest information sheet and a personally addressed letter via Australia Post to their personal PO Boxes seeking project input. The list of residents was compiled using the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley's rate payers' address records. As previously mentioned, further information was sent to these same residents in December 2010 to ensure there is a clear understanding of the proposed project and potential impacts around Riverfarm Road.

While the interests of the community are always recognised, it needs to be understood that the proposed preferred alignment developed for the Kununurra Heavy Vehicle Route best meets the community's needs and project's objectives. It has the support of the Traditional Owners, the local government, the majority of the local community and key stakeholders. It is considered that environmental and social impacts have been addressed and consequently, Main Roads has no plans to review or alter the proposed alignment.

Further to the above, the Committee's requests for detailed comment on the alignment of the proposed route and the petitioners' dissatisfaction with the consultation process are noted. The attached document comprehensively addresses these specific issues. For your added information I have enclosed a locality plan of the proposed route (Attachment 1); a constraints and route option plan (Attachment 2); and an aerial photograph showing locations in relation to each other Attachment 3).

I trust the information provided has addressed the Committee's concerns.

Yours sincerely



Hon Troy Buswell MLA
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT

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