

PROJECT OVERVIEW

WESTERN HIGHWAY UPGRADE

MARCH 2026



The Western Highway is the busiest national undivided highway in Australia.

With upgrades already complete between Ballarat and Buangor, we are now in planning for an upgrade to the 12 kilometres of Western Highway between Buangor and Ararat.

This stretch of busy highway is currently one lane in each direction, with few opportunities to safely overtake slower moving vehicles.

As the number of vehicles travelling along this section of the highway has significantly increased, so too has the crash rate, with more than 170 crashes and over 20 fatalities on the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell in recent years.

Upgrading this section of the Western Highway will make it safer for the many road users who rely on this highway including for freight, farming, grain production and tourism.

As part of these road upgrades, the upgrade between Buangor and Ararat will:

- add an extra lane in each direction to provide more safe overtaking opportunities and improve journey reliability
- add a centre median that will separate carriageways, reducing the likelihood of vehicles accidentally veering into oncoming traffic

- install barriers to reduce the risk of head-on collisions
- build a new interchange at Hillside Road to make it easier and safer for vehicles to enter and exit the Western Highway
- build new bridges over the railway line and the Hopkins River.

These road upgrades will vastly improve safety for people in Victoria's west.

Image above: Aerial view of the current Western Highway.



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Economic benefits

The regional economy is based primarily on agriculture and tourism.

An economic impact assessment, conducted as part of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) found that the upgrade would enhance connections for the agricultural industry with a large number of B-double trucks using the Western Highway to connect with the Port of Melbourne.

The duplication will also provide a safer and more efficient movement of people which is expected to create a positive outcome for the region's tourism industry.

Transport efficiency

The Western Highway currently supports a variety of vehicles, ranging from tourist traffic and commuter traffic to large B-double trucks.

Over the past 20 years, the total traffic volumes along the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell have continued to increase.

The combination of the rise in overall traffic, the increase in proportion of heavy vehicles and the reduction of speed limits in various locations (as a measure to improve road safety) means that journey reliability between Ballarat and Stawell has been impacted.

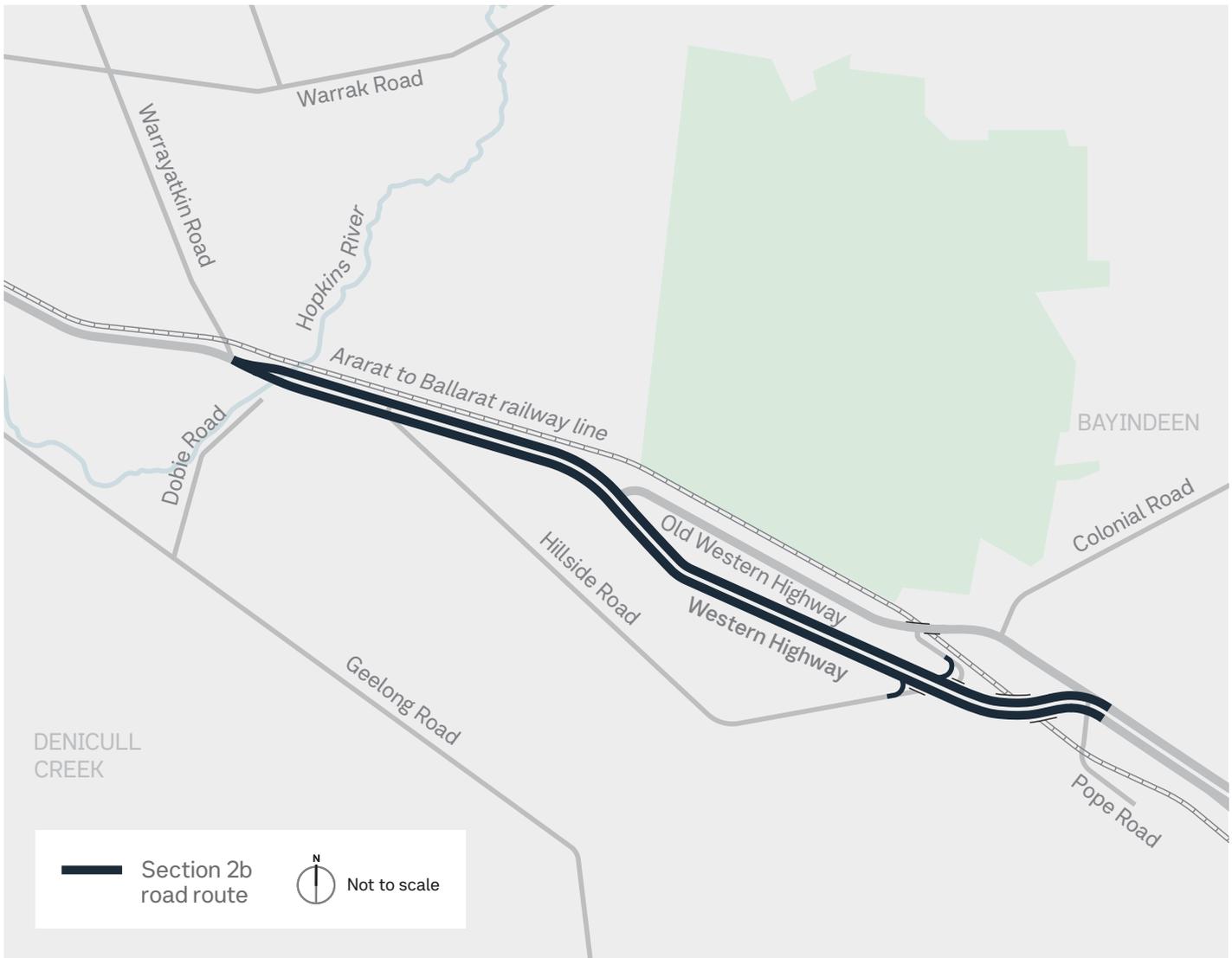
This impacts the operating cost and travel time reliability for the freight industry and other users of the highway.

By duplicating the Western Highway, journey reliability and travel safety will improve due to:

- continuous overtaking opportunities
- higher posted speed limit of 110km/h
- and addition of overpasses to remove dangerous intersections.

Improved efficiency will benefit all road users including freight, public transport and emergency services.





Design

The project design for the Upgrade between Buangor and Ararat has been informed by extensive community consultation since 2012.

An Environment Effects Statement (EES) was completed for the project which included extensive investigations into biodiversity, land use, Aboriginal cultural heritage, traffic, noise quality, economic and social impacts of duplicating the highway.

An EES is Victoria's most comprehensive and transparent planning and environmental assessment process.

Everyone had an opportunity to contribute to the EES process.

The EES identified a number of alignment options, and a preferred alignment that would have the least overall impact.

Since the EES, the project has continued to refine the design for the 12 kilometre duplication, with a focus on further reducing impacts to environmental and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

A key design change includes shifting the new highway alignment slightly south at Pope and Warrayatkin roads.

The refined design meets current road safety standards, and comes after extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including the relevant road authorities and the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP).

The project has worked extensively with the RAP to minimise impacts to areas and trees of significance.

Cultural heritage

A Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) for the upgrade between Buangor and Ararat was prepared in accordance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and approved in March 2026.

The approved CHMP includes measures for the protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage, before, during and after the project.

We'll continue to work closely with Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC) as the recognised Traditional Owner organisation that represents the Djab Wurrung people throughout construction.

Environment

Impacts on flora and fauna are managed in accordance with Victoria's multi-layered approach to Avoid, Minimise, and Offset.

The project includes design measures such as arboreal aerial rope bridges, fauna exclusion fencing and underpasses to assist the passive movement of native fauna.

Impacts will be further minimised during construction through the implementation of a project-specific Threatened Species Management Plan (TSMP), Native Vegetation Management Plan (NVMP) and a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP). Key management measures during construction include the establishment of "No-Go Zones" to protect native vegetation and habitat, salvage of timber for habitat, and the protection of waterways.

Landscaping will use native flora species indigenous to the local area and re-use salvaged timber.

For impacts that cannot be avoided, biodiversity offsets have been secured.



Next steps

We are working through our remaining planning and environmental approvals and are re-engaging with our contractor to develop detailed construction plans.

We'll keep the local community up-to-date as the project progresses, including when to expect construction to recommence.

Road safety changes

The Department of Transport and Planning has implemented a number of safety measures in response to a number of devastating serious injury crashes and lives lost.

These include:

- a speed reduction from 100km/h to 80km/h on a 1.2 kilometre stretch of road at the Langhi Ghiran rail overpass
- 'High Risk Area' signs
- additional curve alignment markers (signs) which guide drivers around bends, indicating the direction and severity of a curve.
- additional 'two-way road' signs and painted arrows.
- extending the solid line barrier linemarking to prevent overtaking.

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