



WESTERN HIGHWAY DUPLICATION

CHOOSING THE PROJECT ALIGNMENT



The Victorian and Australian Government have invested \$672 million for the Western Highway Upgrade between Ballarat and Stawell to meet the demands of a growing population.

This project will significantly improve safety for more than 6000 vehicles travelling along the Western Highway west of Ballarat each day. With traffic numbers expected to double by 2025 and more than 100 crashes and 11 fatalities on the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell in recent years, the duplication of the highway will vastly improve safety for people in Victoria's west.

How we chose the current alignment

As part of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process, there was extensive investigations into the flora and fauna, land use, cultural heritage, traffic, noise quality, economic and social impacts of duplicating the highway.

This mandatory process was conducted over two years and was done to identify an alignment that would have the least overall impact.

The EES was then assessed by an Independent Panel appointed by Planning Panels Victoria. Public exhibition and consultation were a significant part of that process with the views of the community and the potential impacts of the different alignment options helping to shape the options for consideration and the subsequent recommendation of the Panel.

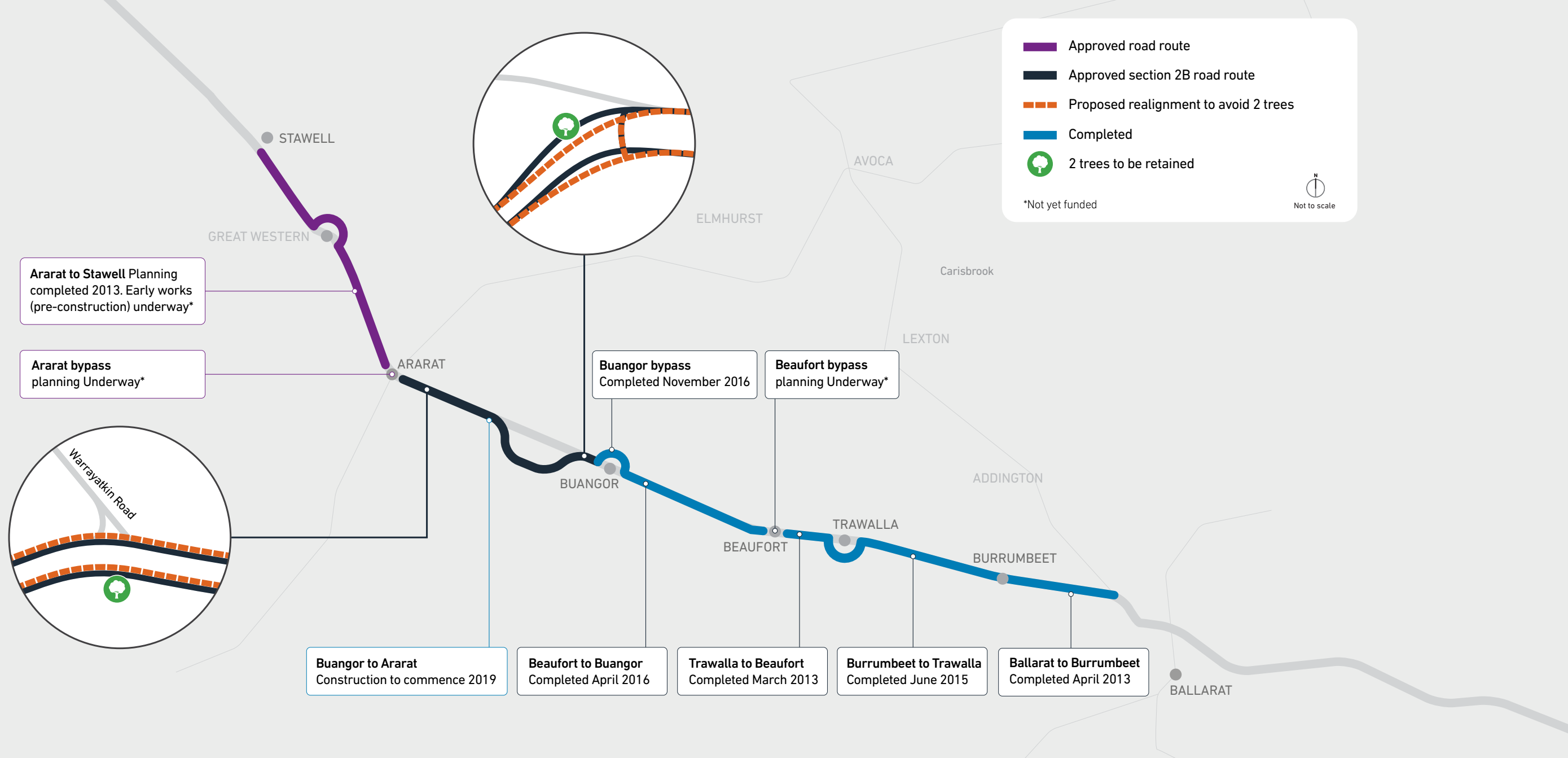
A Cultural Heritage Management Plan was approved in 2013 for the chosen alignment in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act (2006)*.

Refining the project alignment

Major Road Projects Victoria has been working with the Aboriginal community for several years, including Martang and Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, recognised Traditional Owner organisations that represent the interests of the Djab Wurrung people.

We've been working actively and consistently to address concerns raised by the community. In February 2019, we agreed to significantly alter the design of the project to avoid two trees identified by the Aboriginal community as being of significance. Additional design revisions made since will allow for a total of 16 trees which are of interest to members of the Aboriginal community to be retained.

We will continue to work with the local community and the Traditional Owner organisations as we deliver this important project.



Was another alignment investigated?

Another route which followed the existing Western Highway was dismissed early on during the independent environmental process because it would've cut through the foothills of Mt Langi Ghiran State Park. We estimate this route will affect about 8000 trees.

Has the 'northern option' been investigated?

A small group in the local community has campaigned for an alternative alignment that follows the existing Western Highway through the foothills of Mt Langi Ghiran State Park, which they call the 'northern option'. Our engineers have investigated this proposed route and it has been found that it would not meet current design standards, would not meet current safety standards, would provide inferior access, would cost more and importantly wouldn't be accepted by the State Environment Department because of the potential environmental impact to the nearby State Park.

If we were to build a freeway standard road which followed the existing Western Highway to meet the safety requirements, we'd impact about twice as many trees as the current alignment and have double the impact on the sensitive environment surrounding the Mt Langi Ghiran State Park foothills. This option also would require the use of the existing Western Highway and would require part of the highway to be closed during construction. Three quarters of our chosen alignment is through paddocks and will be safer to build with minimal disruption to traffic.

'Northern Option' – MythBusters

MYTH: Major Road Projects Victoria chose its preferred alignment for the duplication of the Western Highway, between Buangor and Ararat, without any consultation with the community.

FACT: As part of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process, Major Road Projects Victoria conducted extensive investigations into the flora and fauna, land use, cultural heritage, traffic, noise quality and economic and social impacts of duplicating the highway. This comprehensive process was conducted over two years and was done to identify an alignment that would have the least overall impact, taking into account social, environmental and economic considerations.

The EES was then assessed by an Independent Panel appointed by Planning Panels Victoria. In February 2013, the Panel made a recommendation of its preferred alignment to the Minister for Planning who approved the recommendation in May 2013.

MYTH: Supporters of a 'northern option' have a suitable road design to duplicate the highway along the foothills of the Mt Langi Ghiran State Park using the existing highway.

FACT: A duplicated road designed to current safety design standards could not be built along the existing highway without having a greater impact than claimed. In addition, the proposed 'northern option' makes no provision for access roads to provide safe access for local landowners onto the highway, nor does it allow for the relocation of powerlines to accommodate the road.

A new road built next to the existing highway would have a greater environmental impact than portrayed by proponents of the alternative alignment and would be greater than that being built on the approved alignment.



The existing highway alignment also includes unsafe curves and a below standard rail overpass. The re-alignment of the existing road would require significant tree and vegetation removal to construct the curves required for safe 110 km/h travel speeds.

MYTH: An alternative alignment for the Western Highway duplication between Buangor and Ararat, known as the 'northern option', being proposed by some members of the community is better for the environment.

FACT: This alignment, which uses the existing Western Highway through the foothills of Mt Langi Ghiran State Park, was investigated and dismissed by an Independent Panel appointed by Planning Panels Victoria.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (now DELWP) also made a submission to the Panel indicating it would not support a road that followed the existing highway because of the potential environmental impact to the State Park. The alternative alignment would also affect more federally and state listed species than the approved alignment.

MYTH: The Ararat and district community does not support the approved Major Road Projects Victoria alignment.

FACT: The approved alignment is supported by the majority of the community, several key environmentalists and Ararat Rural City Council.

MYTH: Major Road Projects Victoria is deciding between two alignments for the duplication of the Western Highway between Buangor and Ararat.

FACT: The alignment was selected by an Independent Panel appointed by Planning Panels Victoria. We do not have the power to decide a new route and has only one approved alignment. During the Environment Effects Statement (EES), Major Road Projects Victoria shortlisted from more than 20 alignments.

MYTH: The 'northern option' will be cheaper and quicker to build.

FACT: Major Road Projects Victoria has investigated and reviewed this alignment. It does not meet design and safety standards and could not be built for the suggested cheaper cost.

The 'northern option' also uses the existing Western Highway and requires part of the highway to be closed during construction. Three quarters of Major Road Projects Victoria's approved alignment is through empty paddocks and will be safer to build and with minimal disruption to traffic.

MYTH: The 'northern option' would have less impact on High Conservation and Very High Conservation habitat hectares.

FACT: A report produced by Practical Ecology, as commissioned by proponents of an alternative alignment, shows this to be 11.72 hectares for the 'northern option' versus 8.55 hectares for the approved alignment (comparing the entire 12.5km section).

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