

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

The Western Highway (A8) in Victoria is the principal road link between Melbourne and Adelaide. The highway serves interstate trade between Victoria and South Australia, and is the key transport corridor through Victoria's west. It also supports the farming industry, grain production, regional tourism, and a range of manufacturing and service activities in Victoria's west. Currently, more than 5500 vehicles travel the highway west of Ballarat each day, including 1500 trucks. In terms of freight movements the Western Highway is one of the busiest highways in the country with the traffic expected to double by 2025.

VicRoads identified the need to upgrade the Western Highway in order to:

- Improve road safety at intersections
- Improve safety of access to adjoining properties
- Enhance road freight efficiency
- Reduce travel time
- Provide better access to local facilities
- Improve roadside facilities
- Complement future bypasses of Beaufort and Ararat

The Western Highway is part of the National Land Transport Network, the national network of strategically important land transport linkages. As part of the Nation Building Program (which assists national, regional economic and social development by the provision of funding aimed at improving the performance of land transport infrastructure) VicRoads was allocated funding from both the Commonwealth and State Governments to progressively upgrade the Western Highway into a four-lane divided highway. This Project, known as the Western Highway Project, extends for approximately 100 kilometres (km), commencing at the western edge of Ballarat and finishing at the south-eastern edge of Stawell.

The Western Highway Project (the Project) has been split into a series of sections for planning and delivery purposes:

- Ballarat to Beaufort (Section 1)
- Beaufort to Ararat (Section 2)
- Ararat to Stawell (Section 3).

Works on an initial 8km segment between Ballarat and Burrumbeet (Section 1a) commenced in April 2010 and will be completed in 2012. Works on a 23.5km segment between Burrumbeet and Trawalla (Section 1b) commenced in May 2012 with completion expected in 2014. Construction of a 3km segment from Trawalla to Beaufort commenced in November 2011 and is expected to be completed in 2012. Sections 2 and 3 are still in the planning phase of the Project, and are the subject of separate Environment Effects Statements (EESs). The full length of the duplication is expected to be completed and opened in stages through to 2016, subject to future funding. Town bypasses of Beaufort and Ararat are not included in the current proposals.

The Project sections are shown in Figure 1-1. A summary of each Project section and the current status of each section are provided in Table 1-1.

The Section 2 Project area is shown in Figure 1-2.



Buangor looking east along the Western Highway

Table 1-1 Western Highway Project stages

Section	Location	Length (approximate)	Status
1a	Ballarat to Burrumbeet	8km	Construction commenced in April 2010, and is expected to be completed in 2012
1b	Burrumbeet to Trawalla	23.5km	Construction commenced in 2012 and is expected to be completed in 2014
1c	Trawalla to Beaufort	3.2km	Construction commenced in late 2011 and be completed in 2012
2	Beaufort to Ararat	38km	Planning phase. Programed for construction between 2013 and 2016
3	Ararat to Stawell	24km	Planning phase. Programed for construction between 2014 and 2016, subject to future funding.

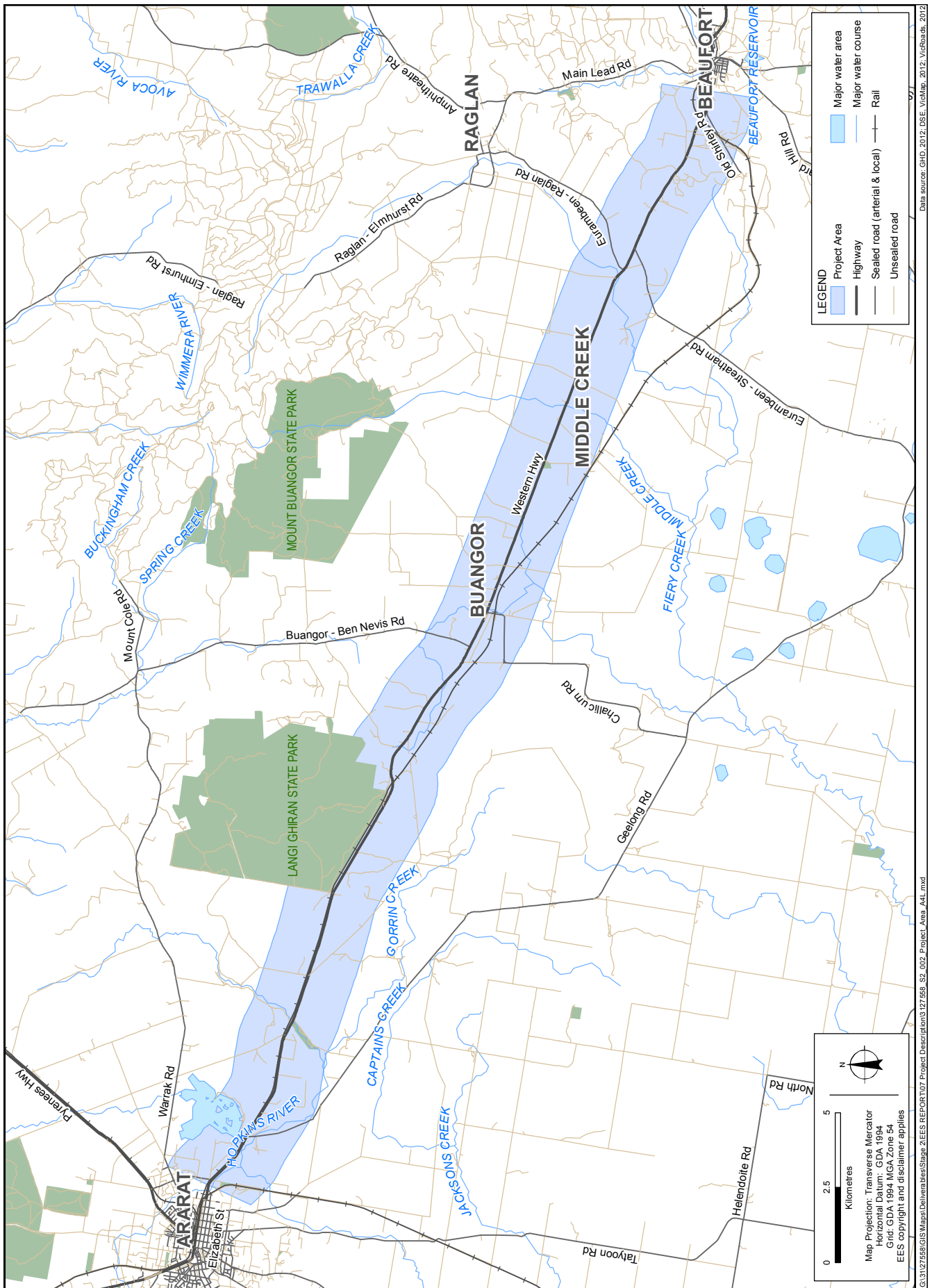


Figure 1-2 Western Highway Project – Section 2 Project Area

1.2 EES Project Summary

This EES is for Section 2 (Beaufort to Ararat) of the Western Highway Project. This Section commences at the railway crossing near Old Shirley Road west of the Beaufort township, and extends for a distance of approximately 38km west to Heath Street, Ararat.

The objectives of the Project are:

- To provide safer conditions for all road users by:
 - Reducing the incidence of head-on and run-off road crashes
 - Improving safety at intersections; and
 - Improving safety of access to adjoining properties
- To improve the efficiency of freight by designing for High Productivity Freight Vehicles.
- To provide adequate and improved rest areas.
- To locate the alignment to allow for possible future bypasses of Beaufort and Ararat.

1.2.1 Scope of Project

The Western Highway is currently supporting a large variety of vehicle types ranging from tourist traffic and commuter traffic to large B double trucks and some farm machinery. The numbers of vehicles on the highway is also increasing which means that there is an increasing problem of queuing behind slow moving vehicles.

The current configuration of the Western Highway is a two lane, single carriageway highway. The configuration of the highway has remained unchanged for almost a century in some locations.

In order to achieve the above Project objectives, VicRoads is proposing to duplicate the Western Highway between Beaufort and Ararat.

Section 2 of the Project assessed in this EES involves the construction of dual two-lane carriageways containing one rail crossing, six creek crossings and a bypass of the township of Buangor.

The town bypass of Buangor is included within the scope of the EES, but the bypasses of Beaufort and Ararat are not.

1.2.2 Requirements for an EES and Controlled Action

On 27 October 2010, the then Victorian Minister for Planning determined that an EES was required to document the likely environmental effects of the Project.

On the 17 December 2010, the delegate for the Commonwealth Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities determined the Project to be a controlled action that requires assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The EES process is to be applied as an accredited process under the

EPBC Act in accordance with the bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Victorian governments. This means that the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities will make a decision whether to approve the Project under the EPBC Act, based on the EES and not a separate assessment process.

1.2.3 EES Project Area

The Project area defines the area that was considered for alignment options and was studied to assess potential impacts and benefits for the EES. The Project area, for the purposes of the EES, is approximately 1.5km either side of the existing highway but excludes some areas of environmental and social sensitivity, being Langi Ghiran State Park and Green Hill Lake. This allowed for assessment of options where the alignments deviated from the existing highway.

Figure 1-1 shows the Project area boundary and Technical Appendix A contains map books that show the proposed alignment options. Some of the assessments undertaken to inform this EES have adopted larger study areas than the Project area for the purposes of characterising relevant effects. These are described in the assessment reports appended to this EES and the associated chapters.

1.3 Project Proponent

The proponent for the Project is the Roads Corporation (VicRoads). VicRoads is a statutory authority whose responsibilities are outlined in the *Transport Integration Act 2010*. It is one of several State Government agencies that assist the Government to achieve its integrated transport policy objectives. VicRoads also administers a number of other Acts and Regulations including the *Road Management Act 2004* and the *Road Safety Act 1986*. The VicRoads Chief Executive is accountable to the Minister for Roads, reporting through the Secretary of the Department of Transport.

VicRoads supports Victoria's liveability and economic prosperity by planning, developing and managing the arterial road network and delivering registration and licensing services. VicRoads manages over 52,000km of road lanes and 3,300 bridges, and processes more than 4 million transactions a year for 3.7 million licensed drivers and 4.9 million registered vehicles.

As the statutory authority for arterial roads (including highways and freeways), VicRoads is responsible for the duplication of the Western Highway and is the proponent for this Project.

1.4 Structure of Environment Effects Statement

The draft EES Scoping Requirements were placed on public exhibition in May 2011 and then issued by the Minister for Planning in their final form in September 2011.

The EES Scoping Requirements provide guidance on the range of environmental matters to be investigated and documented in the EES including Commonwealth requirements under the EPBC Act.

This EES is generally structured in accordance with these EES Scoping Requirements. Table 1-2 summarises the structure of the document and the content of each chapter.

Table 1-2 EES Structure

Chapter No.	Chapter title	Chapter summary
1	Introduction	Describes the Project and the proponent, and the objectives of the Project.
2	Project Rationale	Describes the rationale and policy context for the Project.
3	Legislation, Policy and Assessment Framework	Describes the approvals framework and the relevant legislation and policies to the Project.
4	Approach to the EES	Describes the methodology used to prepare this EES including selection of a preferred and alternate alignment option, assessment of environmental risks, assessment of potential impacts and development of measures to ameliorate or manage impacts.
5	Project Alternatives	Describes alternative proposals which may still allow the objectives of the Project to be met, and details reasons for the selection and rejection of particular options.
6	Project Description	Outlines the proposed development and its components for both construction and operation.
7	Stakeholder and Community Engagement	Describes the key stakeholders in the Project, the consultation undertaken by the proponent in relation to the Project, and the major issues identified by stakeholders and the community.
8	Planning and Land Use	Describes the physical, biological, cultural, social and economic environments that the Project would operate within, the potential risks and impacts of the Project upon the existing environment, the mitigation and management measures that would be undertaken to minimise these risks, and the estimated residual environmental effects of the Project.
9	Traffic and Transport	
10	Soils and Geology	
11	Groundwater	
12	Surface Water	
13	Biodiversity and Habitat	
14	Cultural Heritage	
15	Air Quality	
16	Noise and Vibration	
17	Visual and Landscape	
18	Social	
19	Economic	
20	Matters of National Environmental Significance	Summarises the assessment of matters of national environmental significance that are required to be addressed under the <i>Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> .
21	Environmental Management Framework	Outlines the VicRoads safety and environmental management process, describes the environmental management plan that would be used in the construction, operation and rehabilitation of the Project. It also outlines the monitoring programs, auditing and reporting that would be carried out for the Project, and any environmental offsets that VicRoads is committed to.
22	Planning Scheme Amendment	Describes the process that would be undertaken to achieve planning approvals for the Project.
22	Conclusion	Presents the conclusions of the EES.

To characterise the baseline conditions of the environment and assess the potential impacts from the Project, a number of specialist studies were completed. These are outlined in Table 1-3, along with the corresponding EES chapter. These technical reports have been attached as appendices to the EES.

Note that where the conditional tense is used throughout the EES (e.g. the use of the word 'would' rather than 'will'), this is in reference to the possibility that the Project may not be approved and may therefore not proceed.

Table 1-3 Studies completed for the Western Highway Project EES

Study	Organisation	Relevant EES Chapter	Relevant Technical Appendix
Planning and Land Use	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 8	Technical Appendix C
Traffic and Transport	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 9	Technical Appendix D
Soils and Geology	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 10	Technical Appendix E
Groundwater	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 11	Technical Appendix F
Surface Water	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 12	Technical Appendix G
Biodiversity and Habitat	Ecology & Heritage Partners Pty Ltd	Chapter 13	Technical Appendix H
Cultural Heritage	Andrew Long & Associates	Chapter 14	Technical Appendix I
Air Quality	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 15	Technical Appendix L
Noise and Vibration	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 16	Technical Appendix M
Visual and Landscape	ASPECT Pty Ltd	Chapter 17	Technical Appendix N
Social	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 18	Technical Appendix O
Economic	GHD Pty Ltd	Chapter 19	Technical Appendix P


Western Highway looking east from the Hopkins River