

ENVIRONMENT

Toodyay Road improvements – but at what cost?

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Road

THE ANNOUNCEMENT that the planned upgrades to Toodyay Road have been funded by the Federal Government will be seen as good news by some in the community.

Details of the funding are accompanied by all the usual claims of safety and reduced travel times etc.. What's not good about that one might ask?

The Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads (SASTR) campaign does indeed agree with these benefits and that is why we advocate for a safe and also scenic road.

We also see some considerable downsides to the upcoming road works, not least in the form of excessive vegetation destruction which of itself is distressing but it will also diminish the value of Toodyay as a destination.

Last week representatives of SASTR met with senior managers of Main Roads WA to voice some of our concerns and we requested some relatively small but important changes to very specific areas.

These relate to 400-year-old trees in the Salt Valley Road area, beautiful orchids in the Dryandra to Morangup Road section and a wetland, of which there are few in the hills area, located close to Fernie Road.

All of these are under threat of being destroyed or are at risk of being adversely impacted by the present plans.

It's fair to say that we did not come away with any sense that our concerns were understood let alone would even be considered.

Our scepticism about Main Roads' attitude to the environment is based on responses such as claiming that an extensive environmental audit of the work-affected areas is available to the public when, despite our best efforts, it is stubbornly unavailable.

Main Roads' response to our highlighting the orchids which exist along parts of the road was to say that they can be transplanted, a claim that would be refuted by several botanist members of SASTR and indeed by a recognised expert in the area when commenting on a similar road building exercise at Coffs Harbour highlighted on the ABC.

You can witness the failure of transplantation locally by going to see all the grass trees that were moved to the paddock adjacent to Jingaling Brook Road as part of the clearing program – approximately one third are still alive.

Our group has maintained that the environment along Toodyay Road is not dissimilar to that of Caves Road in the Margaret River Area, which the local community has managed to protect.

While they have the majestic Karri trees, Toodyay Road has equally stunning Wandooos some of which are very old and inherently valuable as nesting sites and invertebrate fauna habitat.

In putting this argument to Main Roads, it was not to stop much-needed improvements to the road but to modify (just slightly) their engineering solutions to have greater respect for the environment.

While many who read this will remain supportive of the road works, we are heartened from the initial results of our survey on the SASTR website which indicates there are also equally many of you who share our concerns, and we will keep fighting on your behalf.

If you have not completed our survey, please do so at sastr.com.au.