



The Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads booth attracted many visitors.

Show display sparks outrage over planned roadworks destruction

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads
Andrew St John

A MAJOR complaint of the Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads campaign has been the lack of detail and clarity provided by Main Roads WA about the impact of the planned improvements on the vegetation along the road and the resulting scenery.

The Toodyay Show provided us with the opportunity to again address this problem and provide clearer community information about what will happen along Toodyay Road.

Large panels at our booth compared pictures of the road now with what it will look like after the improvements.

The 'after' shots are from a video simulation available on the Main Roads website.

The display, which prompted a lot of interest, sparked outrage in most.

Many in the community saw for the first time the level of environmental destruction that will take place from the Dryandra Road turnoff through to the junction with Clackline Road.

As well as showing in stark detail how Toodyay Road will look before and after the improvements, SASTR provided information on alternative, safety-related improvements that would retain natural vegetation.

Toodyay Road can be upgraded sustainably without the current proposal's large-scale habitat loss and environmental destruction.

The SASTR display was extremely well received, prompted a lot of discussion and questions and most importantly, resulted in another 160 people signing our petition.

Prior to the show, Main Roads published an update on the Toodyay Road project in the October *Herald*, which included a helpful timetable of likely roadworks at each section of the improvements along the road.

The update also listed a recent series of design enhancements which Main Roads say came from community consultation.

At first glance such changes might seem significant, as is the likely intent of the document's authors.

Given that all of these so-called enhancements have largely come from the activities of the Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads Campaign, albeit on behalf of the community, we would like to feel as enthused as Main Roads WA are about their significance.

Grateful though SASTR is that some design concessions have been allowed, the magnitude of these late changes is dwarfed by the clearing and environmental destruction that will still take place.

To make up for all this damage to the environment, Main Roads lists all its measures that will compensate for these losses.

Superficially this may look as if the organisation is living up to its much-hyped green credentials, thereby allowing vegetation clearing for roads to proceed apace without any concerns.

But none of these proposed measures adequately compensate for the loss of the type of mature vegetation that contributes to the scenic and environmental values along Toodyay Road, and certainly not the type of vegetation that exists in a reserve 20 kilometres away in Clackline.

None of the macrozamia or grass trees removed before previous roadworks have been replanted along the new Toodyay Road.

So-called offsets are now widely regarded as a flawed concept in the preservation of the environment, with regular articles in the media about how they do not live up to their claims.

SASTR has always accepted some clearing needs to take place to improve the road, but the starting position for such improvements should be that clearing of mature vegetation needs to be minimal because full compensation is not remotely possible.

No amount of revegetation can replace the loss of the large number of old-growth trees, often a hundred years old or more, that will be felled under the current proposal.

Our scepticism about the value of these compensatory measures is further enhanced by the following statement, and to quote from the Main Roads document: "...Main Roads has also developed a revegetation plan contributing to *ecological connectivity* (our italics) while preserving the look and feel of the roadside".

On the assumption that "roadside" refers to how Toodyay Road looked before the improvements, SASTR would defy anyone to believe that the current vista along the recently improved Jingaling Brook section of the road looks anything like how the roadside looked before.

It is now a dry, barren corridor where nothing is likely to grow for the foreseeable future.

Phrases like "ecological connectivity" are in modern parlance called "greenwashing" or in other words, a communications strategy used by organisations to foster an ecologically responsible public image.

The response by the many visitors to the SASTR booth at the Toodyay Show and the still-growing numbers of people signing our two petitions indicates many in the community are not convinced by such greenwashing and want Main Roads WA to carry out road improvement activities that are truly sustainable and responsible with the environment.