

ENVIRONMENT

Trees not valued in road costings

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Road

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PLANNED changes to Toodyay Road have been in the pipeline for more than 20 years.

In the view of a resident who lives close to the road, the current changes represent the third major planning exercise.

A thick file of correspondence with politicians, advisers and engineers shows what a costly and time-consuming exercise this has all been.

Now that Main Roads WA has officially shut down all further public consultation and announced that plans are finalised, the next stage of 'improvements' is due to start soon.

Everyone welcomes improvements, per se, but the concerns of the Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads (SASTR) campaign and our many supporters relate to their scale, cost and the consequent environmental destruction.

As we reported last month, the major justification for spending more than \$100 million is the supposed benefits that accrue from allowing traffic to travel at 110 km/hr.

Unofficial reports claim that the Toodyay Road speed limit will stay at 100km/h which, if confirmed, immediately undermines an already dubious economic case for such extensive improvements.

There are several other obvious deficiencies associated with the business case and the sorts of economic modelling used to justify the cost.

In the economics presentation that was made to the Community Reference Group some years ago, absolutely no mention was made of Toodyay Road's scenic beauty and environmental value, and its potential impact on tourism.

Instead, it was all about the benefit of trucks and commercial traffic being allowed to travel faster.

That of course is a testament to the lobbying power of the trucking industry.

But surely the future of Toodyay as a viable community is going to rely to some extent on tourism, and part of the value of Toodyay as a destination is associated with the attractive journey to get there.

We hear this time and again from the many people who have often travelled up to



Long stretches of Toodyay Road will have all vegetation removed on both sides instead of being routed through already cleared areas.

Toodyay for the first time and visit our stall at the monthly Toodyay Farmers Markets.

The compromise to be had here is one between safe, efficient travel and that of scenic beauty and environmental value.

We accept that some clearing has to take place and that Toodyay Road needs major realignments for lasting improvements.

But we see no compromise in the way that Main Roads WA engineers and policy makers seek a new route for the road that involves clearing mature trees and vegetation on both sides of the road when improvements could be obtained by clearing on one side and using already cleared paddock areas for road widening.

There is another serious and much more fundamental problem with the economic justification for road building and other activities that destroy the natural environment.

Despite various attempts, scientists have yet to come up with a workable formula that allows trees and other mature growth to have an amenity or dollar value.

Until this value is incorporated into business cases behind the justification of road building and the like, we will continue to see major environmental damage.

Our group will continue to campaign on

all of these issues despite Main Roads WA closing the door on consultation.

Come and see us and sign our petition at the Toodyay Agricultural Show on Saturday October 8 where we will have more to reveal about the level of destruction that is about to start with the next stage of improvements.

We are now approaching 1000 signatures and close to giving it to local MP Darren West to present to State Parliament.

They join more than 4000 online signatures from people who want improvements but with the compromise outlined previously.

We suggest that this is a more representative view of local community desires than the relatively small number of people who met in Toodyay 2015 and asked for "more passing lanes".

Toodyay Road has deteriorated to such a shocking condition in many places over the past 20 years that the need for improvements cannot be denied.

It remains a mystery why the Perth end of Toodyay Road has undergone more timely and – it should be said – far less costly upgrades compared with the Toodyay side which has had to wait much longer for grand and expensive engineering.