

ENVIRONMENT

Main Roads slams door on further bid to save scenic route

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads

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MAIN ROADS WA has rejected our request for major changes to save scenic parts of Toodyay Road and says there will be no further public consultation via its Community Reference Group (CRG).

As reported in the July *Herald*, we had sought several major changes, particularly at the Fernie Road intersection where all trees are to be removed on both sides of Toodyay Road for about two kilometres on either side.

It means that this particularly scenic part of Toodyay Road will be scraped clear by bulldozers for a total of four kilometres.

Our group accepts that some trees will need to be removed for much-needed improvements at Fernie Road, including a right-turn lane from Toodyay Road for heavy trucks using the Opal Vale landfill site in Hoddys Well and nearby clay pits.

As always, it is the scale of what is planned with which we disagree.

This includes the questionable need for two new overtaking lanes at Fernie Road – one of them less than five kilometres from another overtaking lane going in the same direction at Jingaling Brook.

We acknowledge that some of our concerns are being considered, including saving a mature Powderbark tree near the Fernie Road junction and possible new scenic stopping areas along Toodyay Road.

However, these are only minor concessions compared with the large-scale clearing now gearing up to proceed.

If the Powderbark tree is saved, it will stand as a stark sentinel in a wasteland of environmental destruction.

State Freedom of Information laws have enabled us to finally obtain the Main Roads WA business case to support large-scale clearing.

One fact stands out immediately – Toodyay Road is earmarked to become a major 110km/h highway.

We highlight this because the justification cited by Main Roads for improving the road was always about safety – not faster traffic.

The WA Local Government Association's RoadWise advisory body – a customary champion of all road improvements regardless of environmental impact – is understood to oppose raising the speed limit to 110km/h.

Toodyay Road is no longer listed by the RAC as one of WA's 10 most dangerous regional roads after speed limits were reduced about 10 years ago.

However, it is clear that a key justification for spending close to \$100 million on large-scale clearing is so that vehicles can get to Toodyay four minutes faster at 110 km/h.

The State Government agency's own data shows that cheaper options such as sealed shoulders and rumble strips, as at the Perth end of Toodyay Road, are more cost-effective ways to improve road safety – the one goal on which we all agree.

Our campaign to expose flaws in plans for Toodyay Road will continue.

This may include a public forum to show what our community will lose in scenic and environmental value as we continue to highlight deficiencies in a State Government regional roads policy that neglects the environment.

We urge everyone to help stop further scenic damage by signing our petition online or at Toodyay's monthly Farmers Markets.

More information can be obtained by emailing info@sastr.com.au.



Mature Powderbark tree threatened by extensive roadworks on Toodyay Road. If saved, it will be surrounded by bare earth.