

ENVIRONMENT

State softens hard line on Toodyay roadworks

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Road

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IT IS customary in this column for us to take Main Roads WA to task with brickbats for damaging the environment with roadworks.

But let's start the New Year with some bouquets instead.

We welcome the State agency's full-page advertisement in the December *Herald* about the resumption of road safety improvements along Toodyay Road.

We may dispute some of what they said but communicating in this way is a big improvement on what happened just prior to the Jingaling Brook roadworks when nothing was done to prepare the community for the massive clearing that occurred.

We also gratefully acknowledge several positive changes to the agency's plans which they attribute to improved community consultation – in fact due to discussions and pressure from us, but let's not quibble about it.

A key change is less damage in a proposed cutting where Toodyay Road meets Sandplain Road and Salt Valley Road.

It was planned to be 12m deep with total clearing of up to 100m of beautiful wandoo woodland.

Road safety engineers said major earthworks were needed to increase the line of sight for motorists at the two turn-offs.

Their "final" design followed various



Main Roads WA's "final" plan to upgrade Toodyay Road at Salt Valley Road was changed after ongoing community concern over large-scale environmental damage, as occurred previously at Jingaling Brook.

options presented to the agency's Community Reference Group.

Lo and behold, 18 months later and after steady public campaigning, we now have a new design where the line of sight will still be significantly improved but with a cutting only six metres deep – 50 per cent less than in the original design.

It will mean significantly less clearing at the junction, though we have yet to be told the final width at the widest point.

Also waiting to be confirmed is whether retaining walls can be used to reduce clearing rather than bare banks called "batters" which so disfigured the landscape at Jingaling Brook.

Retaining walls were discussed informally with Main Roads WA and while we readily accept that they may cost more, they cause less environmental destruction.

The agency likes to champion that it builds roads to what it calls 'Australian Standards'.

We presume the line of sight produced by a 12m cutting was one of those standards.

The fact that a six-metre alternative was found suggests that these standards are only guidelines that contain latitude to protect the natural environment.

One can only speculate whether a more balanced discussion at the Community Reference Group when roadworks were first discussed might have led to a better, more environmentally sensitive design.

Make no mistake, the level of destruction to come will still be significant with hundreds of mature wandoo trees and vegetation to be felled and mulched.

Many will shed tears later this year when the next round of roadworks starts where Toodyay Road meets Sandplain Road and nearby Salt Valley Road.

December's advertisement that consultation is still open provides the impetus for us to keep campaigning.

We will maintain our information stall at the Toodyay Farmers Markets, plan other events and thank *Herald* readers for their continuing support to help preserve as much of Toodyay's precious natural environment as possible while improving local road safety.

For more information, please email infor@sastr.com.au or you can visit www.sastr.com.au.

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