ENVIRONMENT

Main Roads ignores its own low-cost option

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads
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AS WE reported in the June *Herald*, work is about to start on the major realignment of Toodyay Road in the vicinity of the intersections with Salt Valley Road and Sandplain Road.

This will be the largest reconstruction project in the 27km Wheatbelt segment of Toodyay Road.

Given the high cost of the project it is worth reviewing alternatives that were passed over in favour of the Main Roads (MRWA) option.

The table *(below right)* estimates the impact of road improvement strategies on the number of road users Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI), based on the predicted traffic density for WA in 2031 and on MRWA's own data.

MRWA figures also show that for about a third of the price, the low-cost option would have delivered almost the same reduction in KSI as the high-cost Optimised Austroad option deployed along the Wheatbelt section of Toodyay Road.

Our community should be asking Wheatbelt Main Roads why high-cost roadworks that destroy tens of hectares of vegetation, including trees used by endangered species, given priority over the lower-cost options?

Rising inflation means the actual cost of the roadworks will likely be higher than the $45 million budget figure announced in 2020.

Western Power last month moved power poles on Sandplain Road to allow for the admittedly improved road realignment.

However, in December 2015 the Wheatbelt Road Safety Review said "immediate responses can be progressed with minimal investment while longer term proposals will require a more considered approach".

These "minimal investments" include:

- Solid shoulders to replace gravel,
- White lines to mark roadway boundary and centre line,
- Rumble strips on side boundary,
- Tree clippings to improve line of sight,
- Guard rails where necessary on bends and other areas of risk,

The low-cost road improvements at Berry Road (above) and Bailup Road (below).

- Appropriate signage warning of intersections, bends and other hazards,
- Education campaigns,
- Police presence.

Around the same time as the review there was a significant road safety awareness campaign and, for a short time, a greater police presence on our roads.

As a consequence, during the five years from 2015 to 2019, the number of road users killed or seriously injured was nearly half that of the previous five-year period on the Wheatbelt section of Toodyay Road.

The Wheatbelt Road Safety Review also noted the poor condition of road edges in the Toodyay region, with run-off-road crashes making up well over 50 per cent of all incidents.

Some head-on crashes were the result of drivers overcorrecting after running off the left-hand side of the road.

At 100km/h, such incidents can likely cause death or serious injury, underlining the need to stop vehicles running off the road in the first place.

Main Roads WA (MRWA) has completed two major reconstruction works in the Wheatbelt region of Toodyay Road, with two more to come.

In the seven years since the Wheatbelt Road Safety Review recommended the relatively low-cost option of fixing road shoulders, this work has not been done.

In its defence, MRWA said it was fulfilling community requests from the 2017 community Road Safety Forum.

Around 130 people attended this forum, with some requesting more passing lanes.

In comparison, more than 1200 people who signed a written petition (and 5000 online, said they do not want the environmental destruction of five new passing lanes.

At the forum, the overwhelming desire was to increase the safety along Toodyay Road, not the speed.

The driving experience along the metropolitan region of Toodyay Road, west of Dryandra Road, has been noticeably improved without the large-scale engineering projects of the Wheatbelt section.

Modest, low-cost but effective improvements were made in this area despite increasing vehicle density.

This work, examples of which can be seen at the Bailup Road and Berry Road intersections, was achieved while retaining the speed limits and without realigning roads or clearing roadside vegetation.

STRATEGY	KSI	COST	SAVING
Low-cost option *eg. Metro section of Toodyay Rd*	**- 61%**	**$872m**	**$1.3m**
Austroad option *Wheatbelt section of Toodyay Rd*	**- 62%**	**$3148m**	**$237k**

Main Roads figures show a low-cost road improvement option would result in about the same safety outcome in terms of road users killed or seriously injured (KSI) in crashes.