

ENVIRONMENT

Alternative suggestion to save more trees from chainsaw

Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads
Andrew St John

WITH the Toodyay Road improvements on hold, Safe and Scenic Toodyay Roads has been taking the opportunity to present to the government and Main Roads WA some alternative designs.

Like everyone else in the community we want road improvements and believe these are possible with less clearing of vegetation than is proposed by Main Roads WA.

Our plans describe alternative designs at varying points along Toodyay Road including at the junction of Sandplain and Salt Valley Roads, at the crossover of Jimperding Brook and at the Fernie Road junction.

At Sandplain and Salt Valley Roads our designs retain overtaking lanes either side of the hill but require less clearing and excavation while leaving the side roads intact.

At Jimperding Brook much more of the precious waterway could be retained by using a longer, higher bridge span.

At Fernie Road the planned improvements will lead to clearing on both sides of the road for 2 kms either side of the junction.

Many mature trees will be casualties of this clearing in one of the most scenic stretches of Toodyay Road.

Our suggested alternatives include construction of dual carriageways, using already cleared land, to the west and east of Fernie Road leaving islands of trees.



Approach to Fernie Road where all the vegetation is to be cleared on both sides for 2km either side of the junction.

This would have a far less damaging environmental impact with the loss of fewer trees and with the protection of important waterways.

Main Roads will no doubt argue our alternatives will cost more since they will likely require purchase of more land and undermine their business case which apparently persuaded the Federal Government to cough up the funding.

We have two responses to this argument. Firstly, the business case is already flawed since it is based on economic benefits that accrue from a speed limit of 110 km/h whereas the improved road will be limited to 100 km/h.

Secondly, Main Roads does not ascribe any value, economic or aesthetic, to the mature vegetation it clears as part of its road building program.

Instead, it relies on generous clearing regulations provided by the increasingly emasculated Department of Water and Environmental Regulation.

Main Roads also uses biodiversity offsets to claim it is saving vegetation, a concept discredited in the science and environmental community.

Meanwhile land clearing, including by Main Roads, continues apace with 200,000 trees bulldozed every day in Australia.

Road building might be a relatively small fraction of these numbers but we now know that vegetation loss leads to increased ground temperatures.

Surely, when we have just had the hottest summer on record, it is time for government agencies, including Main Roads, to face this situation and use road improvement designs which are sparing of the remaining vegetation rather than ever more clearing?

Perhaps the debate now taking place in city communities including Perth about the loss of tree canopy will heighten awareness of the importance of trees more generally? Meanwhile we await a response from government to our alternative designs.

After six weeks the Assistant Minister for Transport provided acknowledgment by forwarding our submission to the Minister, Ms Safiotti.

We remain hopeful for a reply but the wheels of government turn slowly especially when we feel respect and concern for the environment is not high on the agenda.

Wildlife visit in silent electric bus

Toodyay Naturalists' Club
Desraé Clarke

THE NATS' Club fundraiser last month was a success with the club now on the way to pay members' insurance cover.

It was great to have so many chats with the community on many topics from the growing of native plants to sightings of 'not often seen' fauna and flora.

The weekend visit to Naremben was an April highlight for members and included a night visit to the 400ha Wadderin Wildlife Sanctuary.

This land has never been cleared for agriculture.

It has a number of soil types and rock formations that provide habitat for different fauna species including the Phascogale, Brush-tail Possum, the Brown Bandicoot, the Echidna, the Banded Wallaby and the Woylie, and a variety of reptiles and birds including the photographed Tawney



Tawney Frogmouth. Photo Wendy Giaino.

