

# Executive summary

Victoria Road is one of three major direct routes between Parramatta and the Sydney central business district. The Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (RTA) proposes to upgrade Victoria Road to provide bus lanes over a distance of about 3.5 kilometres between Westbourne Street, Drummoyne and The Crescent, Rozelle. The project includes building a new bridge over Iron Cove, to the west of the existing bridge.

## Project objectives

The project objectives are to:

- Improve the efficiency of bus services on Victoria Road through Drummoyne and Rozelle as defined by peak period bus travel times.
- Improve the reliability of bus services on Victoria Road through Drummoyne and Rozelle as defined by reduced variability in peak period bus travel times.
- Maintain peak direction traffic flow as defined by travel times.

## Overview of the project

The project would involve upgrading a section of Victoria Road to introduce dedicated bus lanes during peak travel periods. This would be achieved by:

- Implementing a tidal flow scheme through Drummoyne to allow for a citybound bus lane that would operate during the AM and PM peak periods.
- Reallocating road space through Rozelle to allow the operation of a citybound bus lane during the AM peak period. This part of the project would involve changing lane configurations, turning arrangements and median widths.
- Building a bridge over Iron Cove, to the west of the existing bridge, to carry outbound traffic. The new bridge would have three general traffic lanes, with one becoming a bus lane for the AM peak, and a shared-use pedestrian and cyclist path on its western side.
- Using the existing bridge to carry citybound traffic. The existing bridge would have three general traffic lanes and a 24-hour bus lane. The clip-on lane on the existing bridge would be closed to the public. The existing footpath would be retained.
- Carrying out ancillary works. These would include rationalising bus stops, modifying intersections and existing bus bays, providing a shared-use connection to the new bridge and re-installing general road features such as traffic signals, pavement markings and signage.

As a separate project, the RTA is proposing to implement a priority cycleway through Drummoyne and Rozelle, to provide a safe and continuous route for cyclists. This cycleway would be the subject of separate environmental assessment and is therefore not covered by this report. However, it is part of an integrated approach to improving the cycling amenity of the area.

## The need and justification for the project

The project has been proposed for a number of strategic and operational reasons, as outlined below.

### **Strategic planning and policy**

A number of major strategic planning and policy documents have provided direction and established priorities for the project, and guided its development.

In particular, the project is specifically recognised as a key priority project in the *Urban Transport Statement*. By emphasising improvements to bus reliability and efficiency, the project is consistent with relevant State Government plans, strategies and policy documents.

### **Bus usage is increasing**

Surveys of bus usage along Victoria Road between Lyons Road and The Crescent have shown that in the AM peak the number of bus passengers has increased by about 22 per cent between 1998 and 2008, while the number of car occupants has decreased by about 22 per cent, and the number of buses has increased by about 36 per cent.

These trends suggest that a growing number of people would benefit from a project aimed at improving the reliability and efficiency of bus services.

### **Congestion is affecting bus reliability and efficiency**

Traffic congestion along Victoria Road leads to longer than necessary travel times and reduces the ability of bus services to keep to a timetable. This results in bus service efficiency and reliability issues, reducing the attractiveness of this form of transport. Illegal use of the existing T3 lane also reduces bus service reliability.

The project responds to these issues by providing a bus lane that separates buses from general traffic. This would allow buses to operate with greater efficiency and reliability during peak periods when congested conditions are common.

### **A new bridge and tidal flow**

To deliver a citybound bus lane, the project would provide tidal flow arrangements in Drummoyne, an additional bridge over Iron Cove, and reallocated road space in Rozelle.

These initiatives would enable the provision of a citybound bus lane in the AM and PM peak periods but would not reduce available road space for citybound general traffic.

## Alternatives considered

The RTA considered a range of alternatives during its investigations and as a result of stakeholder consultations, before adopting the project as the preferred alternative.

### **Phase I — Alternatives to the project**

The RTA identified and evaluated a range of alternative projects to determine the extent to which they could meet the objectives of improving the reliability and efficiency of bus services and maintaining peak direction traffic flow on Victoria Road, while minimising environmental, social and economic impacts.

These alternatives included 'do nothing', tidal flow arrangements, a bus lane through Rozelle, converting the citybound T3 lane to an AM and PM peak bus lane, road widening, tunnels and interchanges, road viaducts, a new multi-lane bridge over Iron Cove, a single citybound bus-only lane over Iron Cove, widening Iron Cove bridge, replacing the bridge with a wider bridge, light rail, levying tolls on citybound traffic to influence demand for vehicle use, and extending and enforcing the transit lane.

The RTA's evaluation confirmed a preference for a solution that includes a new multi-lane bridge over Iron Cove.

### **Phase 2 — Consideration of east and west options**

The RTA's next step was to consider more specific bridge options, together with road improvements for Drummoyne and Rozelle. An important part of this process was to identify whether it would be preferable to build the bridge to the east or to the west of the existing bridge.

The eastern and western options were found to be similar in terms of impacts on air quality, contamination, and pedestrian and bicycle movements. However, it was found that a western bridge would have lower impacts on the community, lower noise impacts, and fewer heritage impacts than an eastern bridge. It would also be safer through better geometry, and less expensive than a bridge on the eastern side which would cost about 15 per cent more. While the assessment recognised that the western option would have a greater impact on Drummoyne Swim Centre, The Cove at Drummoyne café, and King George Park, it concluded that a bridge to the west would be the better option and hence was adopted for the preferred project. A box girder bridge was selected as the preferred bridge type.

## Main benefits expected

Currently, traffic congestion is adversely affecting bus services. The project would:

- Improve the reliability and efficiency of bus services on Victoria Road.
- Reduce travel time for buses by up to 18 minutes in the AM peak.
- Enable the provision of bus priority measures.

It would also improve road safety in the local area, provide better facilities and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists, and enable major maintenance and refurbishment of the existing Iron Cove Bridge while minimising impacts on traffic.

## Key issues

The construction of the project would be a major undertaking lasting about 24 months, and could not be built without some impact on the environment. To minimise environmental impact, the RTA has:

- Carefully considered and selected a project alternative that would meet the project objectives while having the least possible impact.
- Formulated a list of best-practice mitigation and management measures, which are incorporated in a draft statement of commitments.

The main impacts that are expected during construction and operation of the project are summarised below.

### **Transport**

The project would result in temporary disruptions to traffic, access, waterway use and parking during construction. It would require some lane closures. The majority of these would be at night to minimise impacts.

During construction, pedestrian and cyclist access would be maintained where possible. However, temporary diversions in the vicinity of King George Park would be required due to the location of bridge construction areas and the site compound.

Disruptions to waterway users would be minimised through consultation and planning to maintain reasonable access beneath the bridge at all times.

During operation, the project is not expected to induce traffic. There would be some change to access to and from Victoria Road, but overall impacts on accessibility are expected to be minor. No substantial change to traffic signal timings are expected as a result of the project. Consequently, traffic flows, particularly on side roads, would experience little change from the current situation.

### **Contamination**

During construction of the bridge, the project has the potential to disturb and expose acid sulfate soils and potential acid sulfate soils, as well as contaminated soils and sediment.

There is also potential to intercept contaminated groundwater, or to cause groundwater to become contaminated when exposed to contaminated soils.

The risks associated with interacting with known and potentially occurring types of contamination during construction would be minimised through the implementation of best practice management and mitigation measures.

### **Noise and vibration**

A number of locations would be affected by noise and vibration during the construction. These would include residences near the bridge works, schools, recreation areas and places of worship. The RTA would implement feasible and reasonable best practice management and mitigation measures to minimise impacts at all locations.

The new bridge over Iron Cove would result in a minor noise increase at some properties to the west of the existing bridge in Drummoyne and Rozelle. The tidal flow system in Drummoyne would also introduce an additional noise source during the operation of the system at the beginning and end of the AM peak period. Increases in operational noise along Victoria Road as a result of the completed project are not expected to be noticeable.

### **Visual amenity and urban design**

A new bridge would introduce a considerable new visual element to the Iron Cove catchment. Generally, eastern views of the existing bridge (which retains much of the original fabric) would be maintained and the visual impact of the new bridge from the east is considered to be low. Western views of the new bridge, especially from areas near the bridge, would be highly or very highly impacted.

There would be permanent impacts on public places. These include partial shadowing of the Drummoyne Swim Centre for additional periods, and loss of about 15 per cent of the canopy of the fig tree adjacent to the new bridge (but the long-term health of the tree would be maintained). Some landscape vegetation would also be lost along the approaches to the new bridge. In addition, 23 palm trees would be removed from the median in Rozelle.

There would also be temporary visual impacts associated with the construction of the project.

### **Social and economic**

During construction, The Cove at Drummoyne café would be affected by reduced parking and amenity impacts (such as visual amenity and noise). There would also be a temporary loss of open space in King George Park due to construction site and compound requirements.

During operation, there would be a reduction in on-street parking on Victoria Road, Drummoyne, during peak hours, which may have some impact on adjoining businesses. In addition, there would be permanent loss of a small amount of open space adjacent to King George Park.

### **Non-Aboriginal heritage**

The project would have a range of physical and visual impacts on non-Aboriginal heritage items. In total, about 30 heritage items and conservation areas would be affected. Impacts would largely be visual, and the physical impacts are not regarded as major. Potential impacts would be addressed through a number of management and mitigation measures.

It has been identified that there is potential for undiscovered items of archaeological interest buried along Victoria Road. Measures would be implemented during construction to avoid or minimise any impacts on any items discovered during construction.

## Other issues

There would also be some minor impacts resulting from the construction and operation of the project. These minor impacts could be managed using best practice management and mitigation measures so that the impact would be negligible.

During construction there would be potential for dust generation (from activities such as excavation) to create visual impact, settle on property and cause general discomfort. Areas of excavation may also create a risk of erosion. These potential impacts would be managed through measures to minimise the risk. They would be minor and temporary in nature.

Marine construction activities would have the potential to affect the water quality of Iron Cove, however management and mitigation measures would minimise the risk of impact. Marine works would also have a minor and temporary impact on riparian biota, aquatic habitats and species. No threatened species or habitat suitable for threatened species was identified during investigations.

No known Aboriginal objects or places would be directly or indirectly affected by the project.

During the operation of the project, predicted air quality would be similar to that at present, though there would be some minor changes both positive and negative along the route.

As the project would not increase traffic, the quantity of pollutants deposited at the road surface is expected to remain unchanged.

## Management of likely impacts

The RTA has drawn up a draft statement of commitments to avoid, manage, mitigate, offset and/or monitor environmental impacts during pre-construction, construction and operation of the project.

The draft statement of commitments clearly outlines the actions that the RTA will undertake to achieve the stated environmental outcome and is in a format that is transparent and readily auditable.

If the project is approved, the design, construction and operation of the project would be required to undertake all work in accordance with these commitments.

## Community consultation

The RTA has implemented an extensive communications strategy for the Victoria Road upgrade to give the community the opportunity to comment on the project, express their opinions, and raise any issues that may affect them, their neighbourhood, or business.

Consultation began before the start of the environmental assessment process, to inform the community of the project and allow people to register their interest in future consultation during project development. During the December to March consultation period the RTA received 1382 submissions from non-government stakeholders. The majority of submissions were made using the feedback sheet contained in the December 2007 community update.

Consultation has included project update newsletters, advertising, stakeholder meetings, community information sessions, surveys, a business forum, and website.

The main issues raised during consultation are related to: a preference for no new bridge, public transport options, traffic congestion, bus improvements, impacts on Drummoyne Swim Centre, and impacts on parks and the natural environment.

Consultation would continue throughout the project, until construction is complete.

## Process for assessing the project

The Minister for Planning has declared that the Victoria Road upgrade is a project to which Part 3A of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* applies. It therefore requires the Minister's approval.

This document presents the environmental assessment of the project and has been prepared in accordance with the process and requirements of Part 3A of the Act. All potential environmental issues identified during the planning and assessment of the project are addressed in the document, including the environmental assessment requirements issued by the Director-General of the Department of Planning.

During the public exhibition of this environmental assessment, any person (including a public authority) may make a written submission to the Department of Planning.

Following public exhibition, the Director-General will consider the submissions received. The Minister for Planning will determine whether or not to approve the project, and the conditions to be attached to any approval.