regional roads victoria

1 Introduction

Authorised by the Victorian Government,
1 Treasury Place, Melbourne

VICTORIA'S BIG BUILD

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1.1 Overview

This Environment Effects Statement (EES) relates to the proposal by VicRoads, now Regional Roads Victoria (RRV), to develop a freeway-standard road bypass of Beaufort, located approximately 50 km west of Ballarat in the Pyrenees Shire Council, as part of the program to duplicate the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell. This document (EES) has been prepared by RRV as part of the impact assessment process under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* to enable a comprehensive evaluation of environmental, social and economic effects of the proposed Beaufort Bypass (the project).

The Western Highway is one of Victoria's busiest rural highways, with over 6,000 vehicles travelling on the road west of Ballarat each day. Of these vehicles, 1,500 are classified as heavy commercial vehicles (refer EES Appendix M: *Traffic and transport impact assessment*). As the principal road link between Melbourne and Adelaide, the Western Highway serves interstate trade between Victoria and South Australia. It is also the key transport corridor through Victoria's western districts, supporting farming, regional tourism, and a range of manufacturing and service activities. The highway currently passes through the town of Beaufort.

In 2008, the Commonwealth and State Governments announced a joint funding arrangement for the Western Highway duplication project, with a total of $505 million committed towards the duplication project. However, these commitments excluded construction of a bypass of Beaufort, which was to be subject to a separate needs assessment, consultation, planning and funding arrangements.

In 2011, VicRoads undertook a preliminary investigation of alignments around the towns of Ararat and Beaufort to determine the most appropriate start and end points for the Western Highway duplication from Ballarat to Stawell. This investigation allowed VicRoads to identify and document the approach and exit points of the Western Highway that could cater for a future bypass of Beaufort.

The Commonwealth and State Governments announced in mid-2014 that $4 million would be allocated to the Western Highway bypass planning for the townships of Beaufort and Ararat, with the aim to confirm a bypass alignment for each town. In December 2016, both Governments provided an additional $50 million in funding for the planning and pre-construction works for a bypass of Beaufort.

Between 2009 and 2015, VicRoads investigated 13 concept bypass alignment options for Beaufort, both to the north and south of the township, with a number of studies having examined alignment option development and assessment.

The project was submitted by VicRoads to the Minister for Planning in June 2015, and included the consideration of alternative alignments and selection of a preferred bypass alignment within an investigation corridor. On 22 July 2015, the Minister for Planning determined that an EES would be required for the project under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* to assess potential environmental and social impacts of the project. This EES has been prepared in response to this determination and the final *Scoping Requirements for Beaufort Bypass Project Environment Effects Statement* (scoping requirements) (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) 2016).

The bypass alignment options were refined, based on technical specialist input and community feedback, to avoid and minimise environmental, cultural heritage and social effects where possible. Following a concept design and feasibility workshop with VicRoads and technical specialists, four alignments were shortlisted for further assessment: A0, A1, C0 and C2 (Figure 1.1). These alignments are shown as a centre line within a 250 m wide investigation corridor.

Assessments of the four shortlisted feasible alignment options were undertaken as part of the EES process. The overall performance of each alignment option was evaluated, resulting in the identification of the C2 alignment as the preferred alignment option due to its lower impacts on native vegetation, ecology, heritage and community amenity (Figure 1.2). The process of the RRV options assessment is detailed in EES Attachment IV: *Options assessment*.

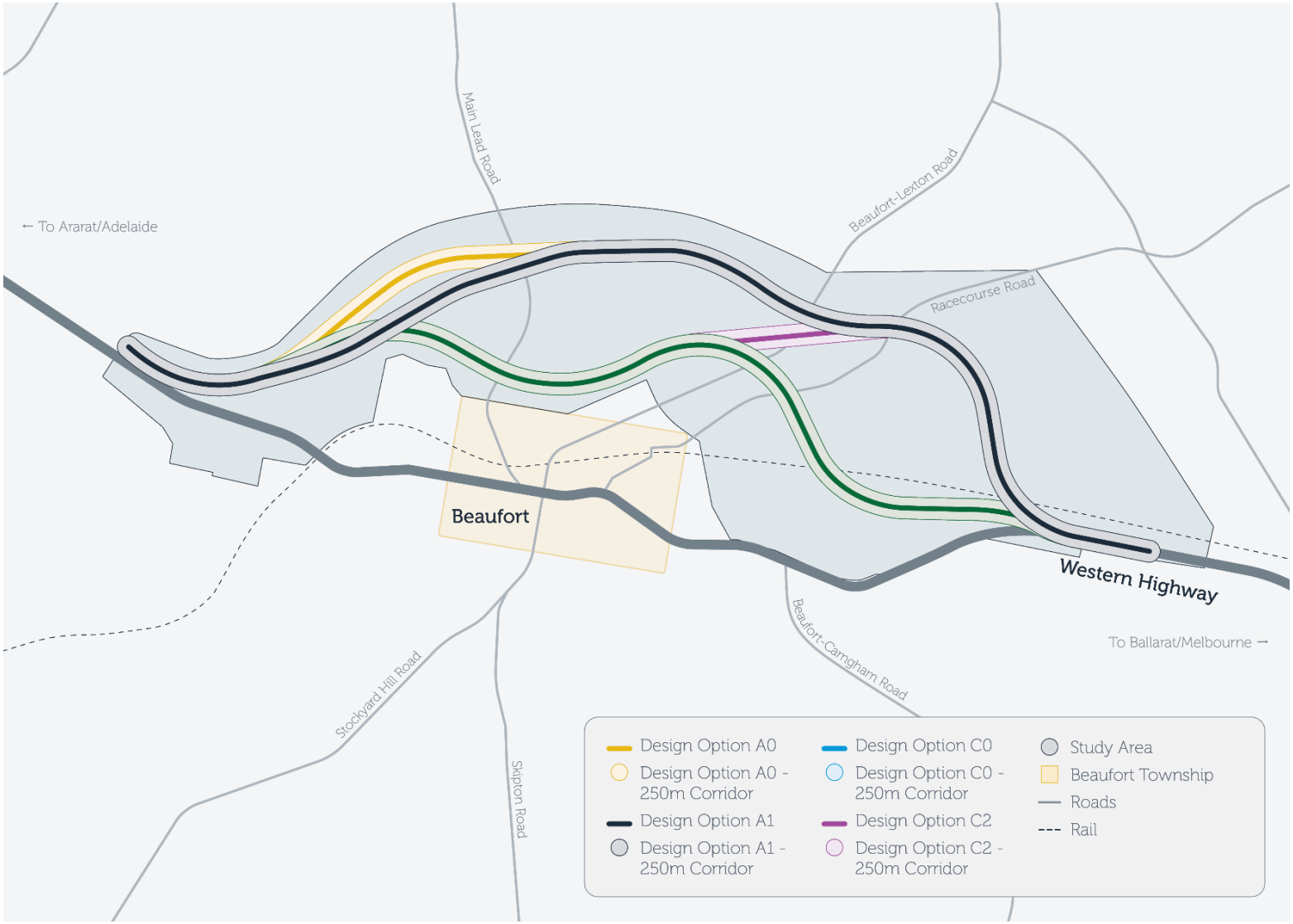

Figure 1.1 Beaufort Bypass alignment options and study area

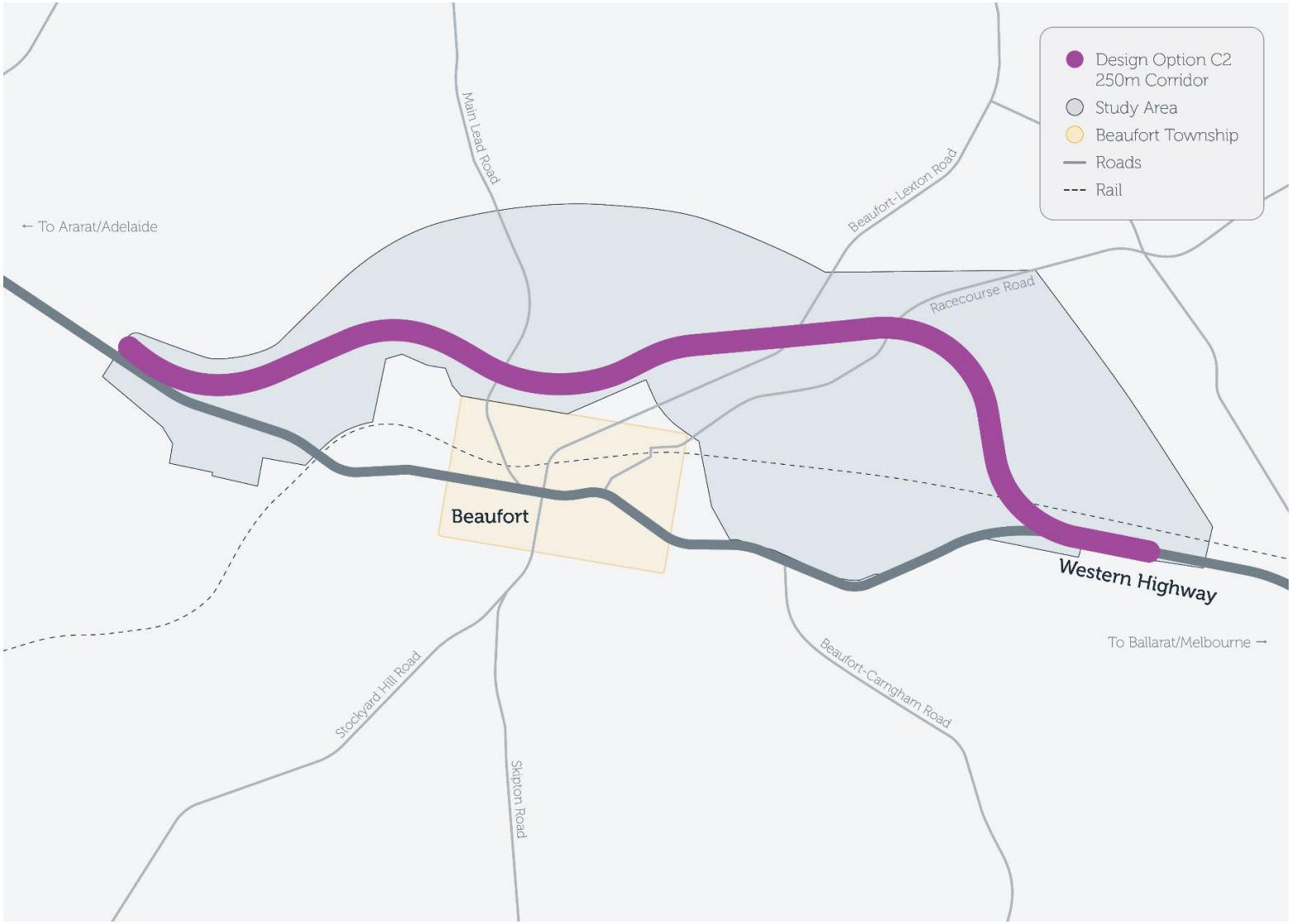

Figure 1.2 **Preferred Beaufort Bypass alignment option – C2 alignment**

1.2 Project objectives

The project has been developed to resolve the existing and future traffic and safety challenges faced in the township of Beaufort. As the key trade route between Melbourne and Adelaide and a link to interstate markets, the Western Highway is crucial in the safe and efficient transport of goods throughout Victoria and interstate. The township of Beaufort forms a constraint in the overall functionality of the Western Highway, and its route through the centre of town compromises the amenity and safety of the people in Beaufort.

RRV's primary objectives for the proposed bypass of Beaufort are to:

- improve freight movement and efficiency
- improve road safety within the township and arterial road network
- improve access to markets and the competitiveness of local industries
- improve amenity within the township by removing freight traffic, minimising noise and visual impacts of the new road and minimising impacts on key community facilities during construction and operation of the bypass
- reduce displacement and severance of communities, community facilities and agricultural land to the minimum extent
- avoid and minimise impacts on areas and features of ecological significance to the extent practicable
- avoid and minimise impacts on areas and features of heritage significance to the extent practicable
- avoid and minimise impacts on water quality, hydrology and floodplain to the extent practicable
- provide a balanced outcome giving consideration to environmental, economic and social factors.

1.3 Project benefits

The Western Highway currently passes through the centre of Beaufort, an urban environment with corresponding speed restrictions, road junctions and road user/pedestrian interactions. A bypass of Beaufort will:

- improve safety by reducing the number of heavy commercial vehicles travelling through the town centre
- improve freight efficiency across the transport network by providing trucks a smooth alternative with less interruptions
- increase future capacity for freight with an upgraded route that can handle increased truck volumes
- improve amenity of the town through improved air quality and noise conditions by removing heavy vehicles
- make the town centre more attractive for the local community and visitors.

Further detail on the project benefits is provided in EES Chapter 2: *Project rationale and benefits*.

1.4 Project scope

The preferred bypass would include the following key components:

- designed as a freeway standard bypass
- dual carriageway, approximately 11 km in length, on a new alignment around the town of Beaufort
- designed to 120 km per hour and sign posted to 110 km per hour for its entirety
- two interchanges (entry and exit ramps) to connect the township of Beaufort to Western Highway at the east and west tie-ins
- one road over rail bridge at the Melbourne – Ararat rail line
- waterway crossings
- treatment swales and bioretention systems at discharge points to protect downstream water quality
- noise attenuation barriers (as required)
- fill material to build up the road in certain areas
- cutting into hillsides to achieve adequate grades
- service and access roads
- diamond interchange to connect with the local road network
- three overpass bridge structures over the local road network (excluding the diamond interchange).

Diamond interchange

Interchange where the freeway passes over a minor road. The off-ramps diverge from the freeway to join the minor road. Crossing the minor road, the on-ramps then allow traffic to re-join the freeway.

The two carriageways would be separated by a central median. The right-of-way (or road reservation) would be approximately 80 m to 100 m wide for the dual carriageway, increasing to approximately 250 m wide at interchanges.

1.4.1 Ancillary components

Ancillary components for the project potentially include the planning for:

- utility service relocations
- service roads to provide access to properties and for emergency services
- intersection treatments with local roads (i.e. where entry and exit ramps join with the local roads) – this can include either a standard intersection, roundabout or traffic signals.

For any services that require relocation, it would be RRV's preference to locate them within the proposed right-of-way. Where this is not possible or preferable (for reasons other than RRV's preference) any impacts would be accounted for in the relevant assessments prior to construction and in line with the approval processes of the infrastructure agencies.

1.5 Project construction timeline

Subject to approvals and additional funding for next stages beyond this EES process, it is expected that the project, from award of the main contract to operation of the bypass, would be approximately two years.

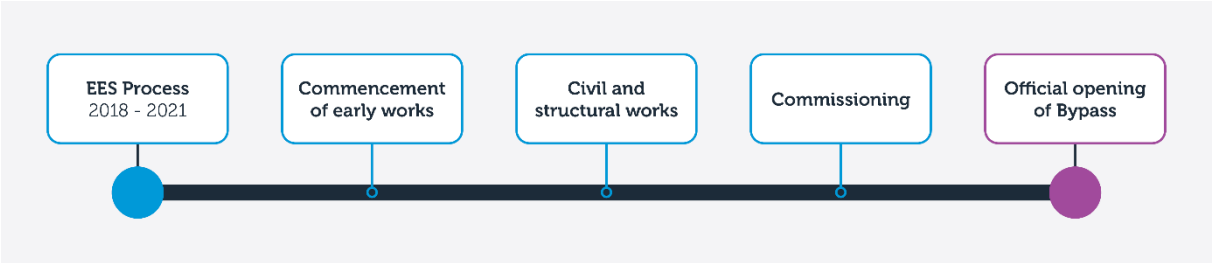

Figure 1.3 Indicative project timeline

1.6 Project proponent

RRV was established in 2018 as a body to manage and maintain roads in regional Victoria and is responsible for planning the Beaufort Bypass. RRV sits within the Victorian Department of Transport. Once the planning stage is complete the project will be handed to Major Road Projects Victoria (MRPV) for delivery. MRPV and RRV work closely together on transport projects under their relevant transport agencies to develop and maintain road transport infrastructure.

1.7.1 Requirement for an EES

On 20 May 2015, VicRoads referred the proposed Beaufort Bypass project to the Minister for Planning for a determination on whether an EES would be required. The referral was accepted on 16 June 2015. On 22 July 2015, the Minister for Planning determined under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* that an EES was required for the proposed Beaufort Bypass project.

The reasons stated for the Minister's decision were:

- the project has the potential to result in significant adverse effects on biodiversity, land use and community; and cultural heritage values
- the opportunity to avoid or minimise significant adverse effects through alignment selection and mitigation requires further investigation via an integrated assessment of environmental effects, prior to decision-making on a final alignment.

1.7.2 Purpose of the EES

The purpose of the EES is to provide a sufficiently detailed description of the project, assess the potential effects on the environment, including assessment of potential effects of alternative road alignments. The EES process will inform and seek feedback from the public and stakeholders and enable the Minister for Planning to issue an assessment of the proposed project under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. The Minister's assessment will inform statutory decision-makers' responsible for the proposed project's approvals.

While the scoping requirements are intended to cover all significant matters, the EES will need to address other issues relevant to key statutory decisions, including those that emerge during the EES investigations.

Environment Effects Statement

An EES is a detailed assessment of the potential environmental effects of a project, which helps the Minister for Planning, local government and statutory authorities decide if and how to proceed with a project.

1.7.3 Scoping requirements

The scoping requirements set out the specific matters to be investigated and documented in the EES for the project. DELWP published the draft scoping requirements in November 2016 and invited public comment on the draft document. After considering public submissions, the Minister for Planning finalised the requirements in December 2016 and published the final scoping requirements on 4 January 2017.

The final scoping requirements can be accessed at: https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/beaufort-bypass

This EES has been prepared in accordance with the final scoping requirements.

The purpose of the scoping requirements is to ensure that the EES:

- properly responds to the requirements of the Minister's determination
- appropriately identifies the environmental effects of the project
- provides sufficient information to allow the Minister for Planning to conduct an assessment of the environmental effects of the project
- provides an appropriate Environmental Management Framework to demonstrate how environmental effects will be managed.

While the scoping requirements are intended to cover all significant matters, this EES has addressed other important issues as they emerged throughout the EES investigations.

1.7.4 Evaluation objectives

As part of the EES scoping requirements, evaluation objectives were outlined to identify desired outcomes in the context of potential effects from the project. These evaluation objectives reflect the key subject matters to be investigated for the EES, relevant legislation and policies, the objectives and principles of ecologically sustainable development and environmental protection. The following are the evaluation objectives for identified key subject matters:

- **Road efficiency, capacity and Safety:** To provide for an effective Western Highway bypass of Beaufort, to improve travel efficiency, road safety, and capacity, as well as improve amenity and local transport network in Beaufort.
- **Biodiversity:** To avoid and minimise adverse effects on native vegetation, as well as habitat for threatened flora and fauna species and ecological communities, including those listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, and address offset requirements for predicted losses consistent with relevant policy.
- **Catchment values and hydrology:** To protect catchment values, surface water and ground water quality, stream flows and floodway capacity, and avoid impacts on protected beneficial uses.
- **Cultural heritage:** To avoid and minimise adverse effects on Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage values, and to identify best practice mitigation measures.
- **Social and community:** To minimise and manage adverse effects on the well-being of the local community, including potential impacts on cohesion and severance of community access to services, facilities and infrastructure.

- **Land use and economic:** To minimise and manage adverse effects on local business (including agriculture) and existing or planned land uses.
- **Amenity:** To minimise adverse air quality, noise or vibration effects on the amenity of residents and local communities, as far as practicable during construction and operation.
- **Landscape and visual:** To minimise adverse effects on visual and landscape values as far as practicable, during construction and operation.
- **Environmental management framework:** To provide a transparent framework with clear accountabilities for managing environmental effects and hazards associated with construction and operation phases of the proposed project, in order to achieve acceptable environmental outcomes.
- **Sustainable development:** Overall, to identify an alignment and conceptual design for the Western Highway bypass of Beaufort that would achieve a sustainable balance of environmental, economic and social outcomes and provide a net community benefit.

1.7.5 Subject matter of the EES

The EES process included the consideration of four alignment options (Figure 1.2) and selection of a preferred bypass alignment. The aim of the EES is to describe the project in sufficient detail to allow an understanding of all components, processes and development stages, and to enable assessment of their likely potential environmental effects (both adverse impacts and benefits). The project description canvasses the following:

- contextual information about the project, including its objectives and rationale, an analysis of the ability of the existing highway infrastructure to accommodate future road users' needs and the implications of the project not proceeding
- the relationship of the project to relevant statutory policies, plans and strategies (if relevant)
- details of all the project components including:
  - location of potential alignments and construction corridors
  - footprints and layouts
  - concept designs and specifications
  - methods of construction, expected timeframes and staging, and anticipated operational arrangements (to the extent relevant and practicable)
  - aspects of the operational phase of the proposed project that could give rise to environmental effects
- land use activities in the proposed project area and vicinity (defined in EES Chapter 4: *Project description*), supported by plans and maps where applicable
- other necessary works directly associated with the proposed project, such as road upgrades, infrastructure and services relocation or augmentation
- social, community and economic framework plans which address the impact of heavy vehicle removal from Beaufort
- special consideration regarding bridge construction across Yam Holes Creek, to reduce the potential for flooding Beaufort, and to allow movement for wildlife along the creek corridor.

The matters evaluated in this EES are:

- the functional design and alternative design options
- the footprint of the four alignment options
- the proposed construction methodology
- assessment of potential environmental impacts
- options assessment and preferred alignment mitigation measures.

Each of these matters have evolved throughout the EES process as the baseline investigations and technical assessments for the project have identified risks or issues that required refinement of options, the functional design, construction methodology or mitigation measures.

Environmental impact assessment

To ensure the EES addressed the scoping requirements, thirteen specialist technical assessments have evaluated the potential environmental effects of the concept alignment options and preferred alignment functional design. The specialists have assessed how the potential environmental effects of the project could be avoided and mitigated through design, pre-construction, construction, operation and maintenance phases.

The technical assessments applied a systems and risk-based approach to identify potential impacts before assessing potential environmental impacts in detail across each of these interrelated specialist studies.

The specialist impact assessments that support the EES are outlined in Table 1.2 and the approach is detailed in EES Chapter 6: *EES assessment framework and approach*. The technical assessment reports are provided in the appendices to this EES.

Environmental management requirements

Measures identified in this EES to avoid, minimise or offset environmental impacts have been incorporated into the Environmental Management Framework discussed in EES Chapter 17: *Environmental management framework*. The measures, adopted by RRV, as recommended by technical specialists through the EES impact assessment process are RRV's commitment to managing potential adverse impacts of the project. The approach for developing these measures and to assess environmental impacts is described in EES Chapter 6: *EES assessment framework and approach*. Specific requirements are discussed in the relevant sections of EES Technical Chapters 8 to 16.

The recommended mitigation measures would be implemented through the Environmental Management Framework (detailed in EES Chapter 17: *Environmental management framework*) and contractual agreements with contractors delivering the project. Under the proposed planning scheme controls, the Environmental Management Framework must be deemed as acceptable for managing the potential impacts of the project by the Minister for Planning.

1.7.6 EES process and project approvals

RRV must obtain a number of statutory approvals before project construction can proceed.

These approvals and the EES process are outlined below, with further details provided in EES Chapter 5: *Legislative framework and approval requirements*.

EES process

The EES process is a rigorous and transparent assessment of the project's potential environmental impacts, with opportunities for input from stakeholders and the wider community. As outlined in Section 1.7.1, the Minister for Planning first made a decision on the requirement for an EES in July 2015 and subsequently published the scoping requirements (discussed in Section 1.7.3).

The EES documents the findings from the technical reports in relation to the preferred alignment, which address the potential impacts of the project on the specific environmental matters set out in the scoping requirements. The Minister for Planning then authorised the release of the completed Beaufort Bypass EES for exhibition, providing members of the public opportunity to make formal written submission on the EES.

Following the public exhibition of the EES, an Inquiry and Advisory Committee, appointed by the Minister for Planning, will consider the EES and public submissions. The inquiry will make recommendations to assist the Minister's assessment of the environmental effects under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. The Minister for Planning's assessment makes recommendations about whether the environmental effects of the project are acceptable, including with any modifications or further management measures.

In preparing the Minister for Planning's assessment, the Minister considers all relevant information, including the EES documents, public submissions and the report from the Inquiry and Advisory Committee. The EES for the project is not an approval in itself, but will inform the Minister's assessment of the environmental effects of the project. Specifically, these relate to the following key approvals:

<u>Commonwealth approval requirements</u>

- Approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). A referral under this Act for the project was submitted to the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment in January 2021, who has deemed the project a 'controlled action' (i.e. significant impacts to an EPBC Act Matter(s) of National Environmental Significance are likely). The project is to be assessed under a State accredited assessment process (EES). Further detail on this approval requirement is outlined in EES Chapter 5: *Legislative framework and approval requirements*.

State approval requirements

- A Planning Scheme Amendment to the Pyrenees Planning Scheme in accordance with the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.
- An approved Cultural Heritage Management Plan in accordance with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. The Cultural Heritage Management Plan is being prepared in parallel to the EES.

A range of secondary approvals and consents may also be required for the project, as outlined in EES Chapter 5: *Legislative framework and approval requirements*.

1.7.7 Structure of the EES

The EES scoping requirements provide guidance on the range of environmental matters to be investigated and documented in the EES. This EES is generally structured in accordance with the scoping requirements.

The structure and content of the EES generally aligns with the evaluation objectives set out in the scoping requirements. The EES comprises a Summary Report and the main report, which is divided into three parts as illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 EES structure

Chapter No	Chapter title	Chapter summary
EES PART A		
1	Introduction	Describes the project, its proponent, objectives and EES.
2	Project Rationale and Benefits	Describes the rationale and policy context for the project.
3	Project Alternatives	Describes the project alternatives assessed by RRV.
4	Project Description	Describes the project design and its components for future construction and operation.
5	Legislative Framework and Approval Requirements	Describes the approvals framework and the relevant legislation and polices for the project.
6	EES Assessment Framework and Approach	Describes the methodology used to prepare the EES including environmental risk assessment, the scope of specialist studies and evaluation assessment.
7	Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement	Describes key stakeholders in the project, the consultation undertaken by the proponent, and major issues identified by stakeholders and the community.
EES PART B		
8	Traffic and Transport	Describes the discipline-specific environments that the project operates within, and the potential impacts associated with the construction and operation of the project. It explores mitigation and management measures to minimise these impacts, and the residual environmental effects of the project.
9	Biodiversity and Habitat	
10	Cultural Heritage	
11	Catchment Values and Hydrology	
12	Social Effects	
13	Land Use and Economics	
14	Amenity	
15	Landscape and Visual Amenity	
16	Soils, Geology and Contaminated Land	

Chapter No	Chapter title	Chapter summary
EES PART C		
17	Environmental Management Framework	Outlines the VicRoads/RRV safety and environmental management process, and describes the environmental management plan that would be used in the construction, operation and rehabilitation of the project. It also outlines the monitoring programs, auditing and reporting that would be carried out for the project and environmental offsets commitments.
18	Conclusion	Summarises the key findings of the EES.

Specialist technical assessments were undertaken for the project to accompany EES chapters and explore potential environmental impacts of the project. These assessments are outlined in Table 1.2, along with the corresponding EES chapter. These technical reports have been attached as appendices to the EES.

Table 1.2 Technical appendices to the EES

EES technical appendix	Study	Organisation	Relevant EES chapter
Appendix A	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment	Archaeology at Tardis	**Chapter 10:** Cultural Heritage
Appendix B	Air Quality Impact Assessment	Consulting Environmental Engineers	**Chapter 14:** Amenity
Appendix C	Flora and Fauna Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 9:** Biodiversity and Habitat
Appendix D	Groundwater Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 11:** Catchment Value and Hydrology
Appendix E	Historic Heritage Impact Assessment	Archaeology at Tardis	**Chapter 10:** Cultural Heritage
Appendix F	Landscape and Visual Amenity Impact Assessment	Aspect Studios	**Chapter 15:** Landscape and Visual Amenity
Appendix G	Planning and Land Use Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 13:** Land Use and Economics
Appendix H	Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 14:** Amenity
Appendix I	Regional Economy Impact Assessment	Ethos Urban	**Chapter 13:** Land use and Economics
Appendix J	Social Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 7:** Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement **Chapter 12:** Social Effects
Appendix K	Soils and Geology Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 16:** Soils, Geology and Contaminated Land
Appendix L	Surface Water Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 12:** Catchment Values and Hydrology
Appendix M	Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment	WSP	**Chapter 8:** Traffic and Transport

Attachments to the EES are outlined in Table 1.3. These attachments informed the selection of the preferred bypass alignment and support the draft Planning Scheme Amendment.

Table 1.3 Attachments to the EES

EES attachment	Report	Organisation	Relevant EES chapter
Attachment I	Consultation Report	RRV	**Chapter 7:** Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement
Attachment II	Environmental Risk Register	WSP	**Chapter 6:** EES Assessment Framework and Approach (risk methodology)
Attachment III	Design layout	WSP	**Chapter 4:** Project Description
Attachment IV	Options Assessment	RRV	**Chapter 3:** Project Alternatives
Attachment V	Draft Planning Scheme Amendment	RRV	**Chapter 6:** EES Assessment Framework and Approach **Chapter 13:** Land use and Economics