



7 Community consultation and stakeholder engagement

7.1	Overview	7.1
7.2	EES scoping requirements	7.1
7.3	Consultation prior to the EES process	7.2
7.4	Engagement principles	7.2
7.5	Engagement objectives	7.3
7.6	Consultation during the EES	7.4
7.6.1	Stakeholders	7.4
7.6.2	Consultation approach	7.5
7.6.3	Technical Reference Group	7.6
7.6.4	Public Engagement Group	7.6
7.6.5	Overview of activities	7.7
7.6.6	Issues raised and consultation outcomes	7.10
7.7	Ongoing community and stakeholder engagement	7.13

Tables

Table 7.1	Summary of consultation for the broader Western Highway duplication project, prior to the Beaufort Bypass EES process	7.2
Table 7.2	International Association of Public Participation Spectrum of Public Participation adapted to the project	7.3
Table 7.3	Stakeholder groups	7.4
Table 7.4	Summary of EES consultation activities to date	7.7

Figures

Figure 7.1	Consultation activity timeline	7.6
Figure 7.2	EES consultation timeline	7.9

7.1 Overview

Stakeholder engagement and consultation is critical to ensuring that the design, development and delivery of the project reflect community expectations and meets the needs of commuters, businesses and other users. It is an integral component of any RRV project, and an essential part of project planning and decision making.

RRV engaged with the Beaufort community and wider stakeholders to understand how their needs could be incorporated into the bypass planning and operations, and how RRV could provide opportunities for people to be involved in decisions that impact them.

RRV developed and implemented a targeted Beaufort Bypass Consultation Plan (published on the RRV project website) to engage with key stakeholders, including local council, government agencies and departments, special interest and community groups, and the broader Beaufort community. RRV has provided project information and consulted on the proposed bypass alignment design options and the proposed measures to manage the potential project impacts. The engagement processes undertaken for the project included:

- face-to-face engagement, including public information sessions and meetings with individual landowners potentially directly impacted by land acquisition
- online engagement (via the project webpage, social media and the *EngageVicRoads* online platform)
- provision of communication materials (e.g. letters, flyers and project updates).

The EES consultation process aimed to create a forum where the Beaufort community could participate in discussions about key issues and potential solutions. The engagement program continued through the EES process to keep the community informed about project progress, seek input into the project's functional design, and respond to stakeholder and community concerns.

This chapter describes the stakeholder engagement and consultation activities conducted prior to and during preparation of this EES. It also outlines the overarching principles and consultation approach adopted, and identifies the stakeholder participation, community feedback received, and how this feedback has been responded to through the project design and impact assessment.

7.2 EES scoping requirements

As outlined in the project EES scoping requirements (DELWP 2016):

“VicRoads (now RRV) is responsible for completing technical studies, undertaking stakeholder consultation and preparing the EES documentation. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is responsible for managing the EES process (...) The proponent is responsible for informing and consulting with the public and stakeholders throughout the preparation and exhibition of the EES, in accordance with a suitable EES consultation plan (Section 2.2). The EES should document the process and results of the consultation undertaken by the proponent during the preparation of the EES, including:

- *issues raised and suggestions made by stakeholders or members of the public; and*
- *the responses then made by the proponent in the context of the EES studies or the associated consideration of mitigation measures.*

The EES should also outline a program for accessible community consultation, stakeholder engagement and communications proposed for implementation of the proposed project, including opportunities for local stakeholders to engage with the proponent to seek responses to issues that might arise during construction of the proposed project.

To address these scoping requirements, RRV undertook the following activities:

- identified stakeholders, including their interests, concerns, consultation needs, and opportunities to provide local knowledge and inputs
- prepared a stakeholder engagement and consultation plan outlining consultation activities and tools
- developed communication and issues management protocols to outline how public and stakeholder inputs would be recorded, considered and/or addressed in the preparation of the EES.

The consultation process focused on enhancing understanding of the EES process, and ensured the stakeholders and community were aware of opportunities for input. The stakeholder engagement and consultation plan was continually updated and improved throughout the EES process.

7.3 Consultation prior to the EES process

Public and stakeholder consultation has been ongoing as part of the broader Western Highway duplication project. While focused on the highway upgrade, this consultation also raised public awareness about the potential for a Beaufort Bypass and identified potential issues and concerns relevant to the Beaufort Bypass.

The highway duplication projects east and west of Beaufort required bypass tie-in points to be identified to determine where construction would start and finish at either side of Beaufort.

Engagement for the Beaufort Bypass planning and EES process has built on previous consultation activities and drawn on the information and feedback gathered through the Western Highway duplication projects between 2009 and 2013.

Consultation activities undertaken from 2011 to 2016, prior to the EES process, are summarised in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Summary of consultation for the broader Western Highway duplication project, prior to the Beaufort Bypass EES process

Consultation overview	Consultation activity description
2011: Investigations to identify tie-in points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion with Pyrenees Shire Council and targeted stakeholders • Public information session, attended by almost 100 people.
2014: Project objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted stakeholder workshop • Undertook workshops and meetings with government agencies, technical stakeholders, Project partners (ongoing).
2014: Issues and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertook meetings with landowners, residents, businesses in the study area (ongoing) • Undertook site investigations.
2015: Funding announcement and update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public information session attended by more than 150 people • Distributed emails, letters to landowners, newsletters, website updates • Established project enquiry email address and phone number • Western Highway duplication consultation events.
2016: Western Highway updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five public information sessions about the Western Highway duplication.

7.4 Engagement principles

The project engagement principles were prepared to align with the VicRoads Engagement Standards (February 2016) and were developed with guidance from the following government legislation and community engagement policies:

- the **Transport Integration Act 2010**, which includes the principles of stakeholder engagement and community participation in decision-making
- the **Victorian Government Accessible Communications Guidelines 2014**, which ensures activities and communications by State Government entities are well managed, effective, responsive to the community's diverse needs and presented in ways that provide access to information for all Victorians
- the **Victorian Auditor-General Office's Public Participation in Government Decision-Making Guide 2015**, which provides a framework to use when deciding how best to involve the public in government decision-making.

The stakeholder consultation approach for the project also reflects the core values of the International Association of Public Participation. Consultation has followed the 'inform', 'consult' and 'involve' levels of participation as described in the International Association of Public Participation's *Spectrum of Public Participation*. The public participation goals of these levels are outlined in Table 7.2 below.

Table 7.2 International Association of Public Participation Spectrum of Public Participation adapted to the project

	Inform	Consult	Involve
Definition	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
Objective	To provide balanced and objective information to support understanding by the public.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.
Commitment	To keep the public informed.	To listen to and acknowledge the public's concerns.	To work with the public to exchange information, ideas and concerns.
Stakeholders	General public and stakeholders that have an interest in Western Highway upgrades and bypass planning, including decision makers, Commonwealth Government, Victorian Government, project partners, Technical Reference Group, technical stakeholders, directly and indirectly affected stakeholders, the broader public and media.	Project partners, directly and indirectly affected stakeholders, Technical Reference Group, technical stakeholders and the broader public.	Project partners, Technical Reference Group, technical stakeholders, directly impacted landowners and stakeholders, indirectly impacted landowners and stakeholders and the broader public.
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters • Media releases and reports, advertising • Social media, project website, emails • Fact sheets and information bulletins • Information displays • Maps, montages and video animation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sessions, briefings • Workshops, feedback forms • Meetings/conversations, presentations • Online engagement project reports • Reports following community engagement • Public exhibition (written submissions). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public engagement/ advisory groups, feedback forms • Information sessions, workshops • Online engagement • Public exhibition (written submissions) • Meetings/conversations.

7.5 Engagement objectives

The following engagement objectives were developed by RRV:

- inform stakeholders and the community about the project and EES process, to raise awareness of the project's purpose, benefits, and relationship to the broader project
- inform public and stakeholders about the opportunities for input to the EES studies/impact assessment
- consult with stakeholders to expand on feedback received through previous consultation activities and gather further information from community and stakeholders that will be used to identify issues and potential impacts - using local knowledge to inform the EES process, design, specialist studies and assessment of alignment options
- to respond to stakeholder feedback including concerns about possible issues and describe how these have been considered in the design process.

7.6 Consultation during the EES

7.6.1 Stakeholders

Table 7.3 below provides a broad list of stakeholder types that were identified for the project. Stakeholders were identified with input from various sources including:

- RRV's existing information from RRV's regional office and Western Highway duplication project
- consultation with local government to determine individuals and groups affected
- input from the community at public information sessions and in response to other forms of communication.

Table 7.3 Stakeholder groups

Stakeholder type	Stakeholder
Government representatives/ departments/agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment • Infrastructure Australia • Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications • Department of Premier and Cabinet • Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions • DELWP • Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority • Cabinet/Policy Strategy Budget Committee/ Expenditure Review Sub-Committee • Minister for Planning • Aboriginal Victoria (now First Peoples – State Relations) • Heritage Victoria • V-Line • Emergency Services (Police, Ambulance, Fire Rescue Victoria, State Emergency Service) • Central Highlands Water • Parks Victoria • Environment Protection Authority Victoria • Public Transport Victoria • VicTrack • State and Federal Members of Parliament.
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pyrenees Shire Council.
Local residents, businesses and community interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landowners • Business owners • Residents • Special interest groups • Registered Aboriginal Party (Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation) representatives • Transport network users • Freight transport operators.
Broader public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beaufort Bypass Public Engagement Group • Environmental Consultation Group • Western Highway Community Consultation Group • Social service providers • Local chamber of commerce • Environment and Landcare groups • Industry and tourism groups • Resident associations and other public groups • Local sporting associations • Local schools • Local service clubs, faith organisations and sporting clubs • Victorian Farmers Federation • Media.

Stakeholder type	Stakeholder
Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telecommunication carriers • Energy networks • Water networks.

7.6.2 Consultation approach

The consultation approach was developed to provide stakeholders and the community with opportunities to share local knowledge, provide input on key issues and concerns, and to stay informed about design progress and outcomes. The engagement approach aimed to ensure that the expectations of the public and stakeholders were managed regarding the level of influence and involvement they have throughout the EES process.

RRV worked with council to identify the need for information to be targeted to culturally and linguistically diverse communities and hard to reach groups. Materials and interpretation services were available as required to meet the needs of stakeholders with special requirements.

During the early stages of planning, the project identified and engaged with stakeholders who reside, own land or own businesses in the Beaufort community. The project sought to expand stakeholder participation during project development to encourage and gather input and feedback from a range of stakeholders including residents, business owners/operators, special interest groups, transport groups, commuters, emergency services and industry groups. The EES-related consultation included seven public information sessions, and meetings with local landowners, council, stakeholders and community organisations.

The consultation program aimed to utilise existing stakeholder networks to raise awareness of bypass planning, project status and encourage participation in the EES engagement program to understand individual and group interests. Engagement with government decision-makers was undertaken throughout all project phases.

The consultation program for the EES was designed in four phases to reflect the EES process and project milestones (refer to Figure 7.1).

Phase 1 consultation activities

Phase 1 included early engagement to raise awareness about the project, the possible assessment and planning processes, and opportunities to provide input and feedback throughout the progress of the early phase project considerations.

Phase 2 consultation activities

This phase was the most intensive engagement period as investigations were undertaken to inform the preliminary design options and study area, and to identify issues, impacts and opportunities.

The consultation program in Phase 2 was critical to the identification, assessment and development of mitigation measures as part of the social impact assessment (EES Appendix J: *Social impact assessment*), which have informed the EES.

Phase 2 included four rounds of public consultation managed by RRV. Each of these four rounds of consultation included project updates and advertising to notify the local community of upcoming information sessions.

Phase 3 and 4 consultation activities

In Phase 3 (the current phase), the EES is exhibited for public comment at which time the public can make written submissions about the project. Additional engagement activities will take place during this time, and RRV will continue to assist stakeholders during these phases to understand the EES findings and navigate the public submission process. During Phase 4, decisions on the EES and Planning Scheme Amendment will be made. The Minister's assessment of environmental effects of the project will be issued to RRV and statutory decision makers, as well as made publicly available on DELWP's website. RRV will update the Beaufort Bypass project webpage at this stage.

Phases 3 and 4 will follow a statutory consultation process with prescribed structures and activities including advertisements, exhibition, public submissions, directions and public hearings.



Figure 7.1 Consultation activity timeline

7.6.3 Technical Reference Group

In accordance with the requirements of the *Environment Effects Act 1978*, a Technical Reference Group was established and chaired by DELWP on behalf of the Minister for Planning. The Technical Reference Group advised DELWP and RRV throughout the EES process, particularly on the scoping requirements and preparation of the EES.

The Technical Reference Group comprised representatives from the following government departments, local council and other organisations:

- Pyrenees Shire Council
- Department of Transport (formerly Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources)
- Parks Victoria
- Heritage Victoria
- Fire Rescue Victoria
- Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority
- Southern Rural Water
- Central Highlands Water
- Aboriginal Victoria (now First Peoples – State Relations).

The Technical Reference Group was consulted at key points during the EES process including at project initiation, during alignment options development and following public engagement on the draft bypass routes. The Technical Reference Group were provided the proposed specialist studies methodologies, and reviewed existing conditions and impact assessments prepared for the project.

The Technical Reference Group met thirteen times during the EES process, between 13 October 2015 and March 2021. Separate meetings with individual Technical Reference Group members were also held where necessary to discuss specific matters relevant to their discipline of interest.

7.6.4 Public Engagement Group

A Public Engagement Group was convened from September 2016 to represent local interests in Beaufort and provide a further avenue for feedback to the EES process.

The group comprised 12 members, with the Chair nominated by the Pyrenees Shire Council. RRV consulted with Pyrenees Shire Council on the format and membership of the group, which comprises a range of community representatives including:

- community representatives, including representatives from:
 - residents
 - schools
 - community groups
 - business groups
 - environmental groups
- Council
- Registered Aboriginal Party.

The group has shared the community's views and ideas, provided local knowledge and experience, and raised project awareness to assist the principal consultant's work when undertaking investigations.

Nominations were invited through the project website and promoted through council's networks. Nominations closed in July 2016, and the group was appointed in August 2016. Terms of Reference for the Public Engagement Group were jointly signed-off at the group's first meeting.

The Public Engagement Group held six meetings over 2016 to 2019. Throughout the engagement with the Public Engagement Group, it was noted that the bypass was considered as inevitable and that being involved in the EES was an opportunity for the community to advocate for the most beneficial community outcomes.

Further information on the Public Engagement Group is outlined in EES Attachment I: *Consultation report*.

7.6.5 Overview of activities

Between 2016 and 2019, the community has provided input to the EES process including through one-on-one meetings, online consultation via the EngageVicRoads platform, public information sessions and engagement with the Public Engagement Group (summarised in Table 7.4 and Figure 7.2).

Table 7.4 Summary of EES consultation activities to date

EES consultation (to 2019)	Consultation summary
December 2016: Draft scoping requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders and the community were invited to make a submission to DELWP during the draft scoping requirements public exhibition period led by DELWP • Public information session attended by more than 70 people • Discussions with Pyrenees Shire Council • First meeting of the Public Engagement Group • Distribution of project emails, community newsletters and letters to landowners within the 'Area of Interest' • Door knocks of businesses in the Beaufort town centre • Five submissions received to the draft scoping requirements • Feedback provided by the Public Engagement Group relating to technical assessments, potential project impacts and bypass design options • Feedback provided by Pyrenees Shire Council and local residents relating to project impacts, proposed alignments and technical investigations identified in the scoping document.
April/May 2017: Draft bypass route options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two community feedback sessions attended by approximately 150 people • Online consultation via EngageVicRoads for public feedback on route options (received 72 feedback responses from the community) • Discussion with Pyrenees Shire Council and targeted stakeholders • Targeted discussions with more than 20 landowners potentially directly affected by land acquisition (ongoing) • Meetings with the Public Engagement Group • Distribution of project email, community newsletters, and letters to landowners within the Area of Interest study area • Door knocks of businesses in the Beaufort town centre • Online engagement via EngageVicRoads • Key issues raised by residents and businesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintaining access to the main north-south roads - access for large vehicles such as agricultural machinery - access for emergency services during construction and operation - possible opportunities to improve recreational cycling trails through the area - importance of Beaufort's rural landscape and character - important to minimise environmental impacts.
February/March 2018: Refined bypass route options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three public community/feedback sessions attended by approximately 150 people • Online engagement via EngageVicRoads platform (over 1,500 visitors to the page) • Received approximately 200 responses from the public community regarding the bypass route options • Update of RRV webpage with new maps and route option information • Discussions with Pyrenees Shire Council and stakeholders • Continuation of discussions with more than 30 landowners potentially directly affected by land acquisition • Meetings with the Public Engagement Group • Business door knocks, community newsletter, fact sheet and flyer mail outs, project email and media releases.

EES consultation (to 2019)	Consultation summary
<p>Mid 2019: Project update RRV identification of preferred alignment (C2) and next steps</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 2019 drop in sessions – Two drop-in sessions to update community on project status • Online engagement including web update, landowner letter dated 10 July and Facebook campaign 26 July to 10 August • Phone-calls and one-on-one meetings with landowners held between 10 July and 26 July 2019 regarding preferred option C2 • Stakeholder briefings – Technical Reference Group, Pyrenees Shire Council, Public Engagement Group and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation • Promotional activities/collateral, animation/fly through – preferred option.
<p>2019: Targeted consultation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one meetings with landowners directly affected by land acquisition • Meetings with key stakeholders including Registered Aboriginal Party, Pyrenees Shire Council and Public Engagement Group • Distribution of project email, letters to landowners, newsletters, website update and media release • Three community information sessions held on 5, 9 and 10 August attended by more than 150 people.

Western Highway Beaufort Bypass Environment Effects Statement (EES) Consultation Timeline

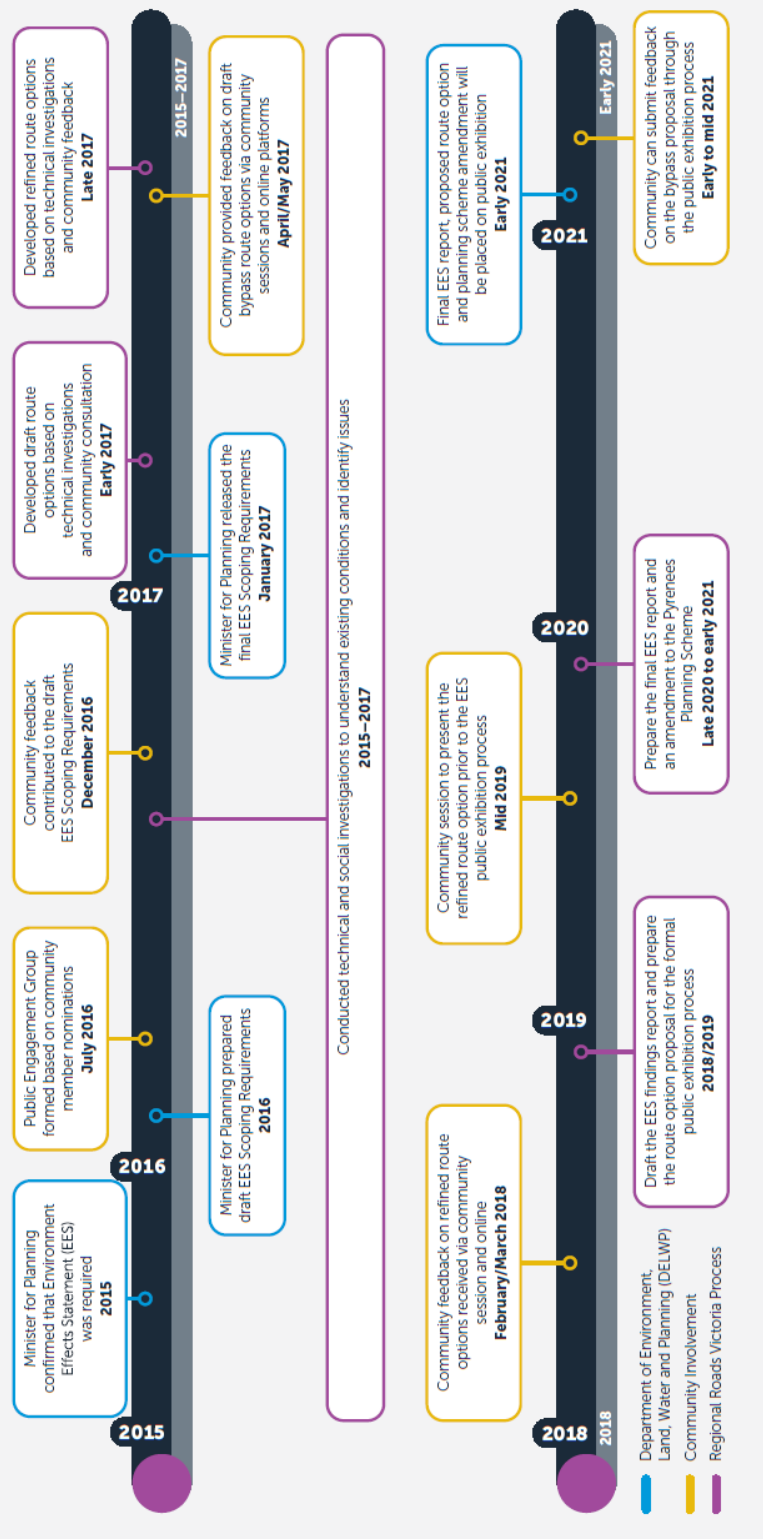


Figure 7.2 EES consultation timeline

7.6.6 Issues raised and consultation outcomes

RRV has maintained regular contact and continual involvement with State Government departments and agencies, Pyrenees Shire Council and affected landowners since the start of the project's planning studies.

Consultation feedback helped RRV identify what changes could be made to the project, specialist studies and potential alignments, and what mitigation measures or improvements could be developed. The feedback from community consultation events has played an important role in highlighting concerns and informing the selection of the preferred alignment, summarised below and detailed in Attachment IV: *Options assessment*. Concerns raised, and inputs provided through the community consultation process have been used to inform the design process.

The following summarises the feedback collected through EES engagement activities regarding the project and the central themes for this assessment: displacement and severance, access and connectivity, and amenity and community wellbeing. The Beaufort Bypass Consultation Report is appended to the EES document (Attachment I: *Consultation report*), and provides an overview of key themes raised during consultation. The key issues raised during the community consultation process and how the options were refined to address key community concerns are outlined in the sections below.

Community sentiment

The upgrade of the Western Highway between Ballarat and Ararat has been a prominent project within the region. Residents and businesses in Beaufort and surrounding areas were aware of the bypass through previous investigations from the broader Western Highway duplication program and in particular the tie-in points provided at each end of the township. Many community members and stakeholders within Beaufort have expressed concerns regarding the proposed bypass due to their experiences of the previous projects and works within the Western Highway corridor. Legacy issues include construction impacts, ongoing maintenance, timeframes and the perception issues around the removal of trees.

Overall, based on community consultation feedback received during the engagement activities, there is support for the bypass or a willingness to accept that the project would proceed eventually. While the community noted the environmental impacts, many accepted that something is needed to address the issues of safety and congestion within the township, and that this would result in change.

Although some sectors of the community were resistant to change, others, such as the Public Engagement Group, noted that the bypass was inevitable and that being involved in the EES was an opportunity for the community to advocate for the most beneficial community outcomes.

The strongest opposition towards the bypass came from some directly affected landowners and environmental interest groups seeking to minimise vegetation and habitat loss. Impacts to these values were minimised through the options refinement process, with one of the factors influencing the selection of the preferred alignment, C2, being that it has the least amount of native vegetation and large old tree removal, as well as the least impact on endangered vegetation communities, when compared to the alternative alignments.

Dislocation and severance

Residents and landowners with properties within the project area were predominantly concerned about the acquisition of their homes, businesses and properties. Some properties will require full acquisition, while partial acquisition will be required for other properties. Concerns regarding acquisition typically related to being displaced from homes, lifestyles and communities to which they had a strong attachment, and possible financial hardship from the loss of agricultural land. Some residents also expressed concern that if acquisition did not result in acquisition of the whole property, changes to the local environment would impact on their current amenity and quality of life. The length of the EES process has resulted in ongoing uncertainty for the community including some landowners who are unsure if they will be impacted by acquisition.

Throughout the consultation program RRV has met with directly affected landowners to provide information about impacts to their properties and to discuss the acquisition process and compensation, or to investigate opportunities to modify alignment options to reduce impacts. Where possible, the design was refined to minimise the acquisition of private property.

Access and connectivity

Local access and connectivity were a prominent issue raised during all stages of consultation. Access issues focussed predominantly on maintaining appropriate access points for private properties along with convenient access to the Beaufort township for the local community and visitors. Maintaining access for emergency services throughout construction and operation was frequently raised as an issue of importance.

Residents reiterated that maintaining access to the main north-south roads for local and regional residents and businesses is very important, including Main Lead Road, Back Raglan Road, Racecourse Road, Martins Lane and Smiths Lane. As well as ensuring regional and local access for private vehicles, freight and school buses, access to private properties must also make provision for movement of agricultural machinery and seasonal fluctuation in traffic movement. The design was refined to ensure access to the north-south roads for local and regional traffic was maintained. Alternative access will be provided where access is removed as a result of the project.

In addition to vehicle transport, the anticipated improvements to pedestrian safety and access in the town centre were broadly recognised by stakeholders and the Beaufort community as a beneficial outcome of diverting trucks and traffic from the town centre. Some participants also noted opportunities to enhance cycling connectivity along King Street (Main Lead Road) and the Camp Hill recreational trail network.

Some participants indicated that a bypass would not change their behaviour with respect to visiting Beaufort for daily retail, local services and community networks.

Property severance and access is further discussed in EES Chapter 13: *Land use and economics*.

Community wellbeing and amenity

Concerns relating to the potential changes to Beaufort's character were raised by residents and business owners.

Some residents expressed concerns about amenity issues including light, noise and dust during both construction and operation activities. These residents asked that noise barriers and landscaping be considered to reduce noise and visual impacts on private properties near the alignment options, as well as the new houses in the north of the township.

Some community members and residents felt that a bypass further from town would have the least impact on township amenity and local character, particularly regarding protecting the appearance of Camp Hill from the township.

The preferred alignment, C2, is considered to have the least impact on residential property amenity as it has the smallest number of dwellings within 100 m, 200 m and 300 m of the alignment corridor. This was one of a range of elements that contributed to the selection of the preferred alignment through the options assessment process, discussed in EES Chapter 3: *Project alternatives*. Noise barriers have also been proposed to minimise traffic noise and light impacts (further discussed in EES Chapter 14: *Amenity*), as well as the planting of trees and vegetation to screen the elevated carriageway from key viewpoints in the landscape (further discussed in EES Chapter 15: *Landscape and visual amenity*).

Environmental and heritage concerns

Environmental concerns were prevalent among some community groups. They noted that alignment options pass through private and public bushland that is home to an array of native plants and animals, and sought to minimise the loss of large old trees. Impacts on native animals and habitat should be reduced and the design should consider ways to protect wildlife corridors.

Concerns were also raised about the need to be aware of sites of local heritage significance and to protect these.

The preferred alignment, C2, has the least amount of native vegetation and large old tree removal required compared with the shortlisted alternative alignments assessed, as well as the least impact on endangered vegetation communities. The preferred alignment also has the lowest potential impacts on known or registered sites of Aboriginal and historic heritage significance, when compared to the alternative alignments. These outcomes of the impact assessments were contributing elements to the selection of the preferred alignment through the options assessment process, discussed in EES Chapter 3: *Project alternatives*.

Biodiversity and habitat impacts and cultural heritage values are further discussed in EES Chapter 9: *Biodiversity and habitat* and EES Chapter 10: *Cultural heritage*.

Economic impacts

The prospect of significant change resulting from the bypass was concerning for many within the community, with some participants sharing their fears that the town would suffer economic impacts after the construction of the bypass. Concern was expressed that the bypass would result in a loss of passing trade for local businesses.

Some community feedback suggested that bypass alignments closer to town would encourage more people to visit the town as they would not have to divert as far from their path and the town would still be visible on approach. Having clear signage to promote the town was frequently suggested to retain visitor traffic.

Some residents and local business owners saw opportunities for improvement through enhancing amenity in the township and promoting other attractions in Beaufort such as historical and recreational sites.

In response to these concerns, prior to project construction the Department of Transport, in partnership with Council, will develop transitional initiatives to reposition Beaufort from a highway town to a bypassed town. This includes attracting new and diverse businesses and employment opportunities to Beaufort, and identifying infrastructure improvements that support tourism, investment and the liveability of Beaufort.

Legacy

The upgrade of the Western Highway between Ballarat and Ararat has been a prominent project within the region. Many community members and stakeholders within Beaufort have expressed concerns regarding the proposed bypass as a result of their experiences with VicRoads on previous projects within the Western Highway corridor. Legacy issues include construction impacts, ongoing maintenance, timeframes and the removal of trees.

One of the factors that influenced the selection of the preferred alignment, C2, was that it has the least impact on native vegetation and large old trees in comparison to the alignment alternatives assessed. During project construction, the Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan will set out the processes to engage with the local community and other stakeholders, providing a means for the community to submit enquiries and complaints throughout the construction and operation of the bypass.

Property values

Concerns were raised about impacts on property values, particularly relating to properties in proximity to the bypass, but not directly affected.

The bypass alignment avoids the land south of the township, which has been identified for future residential growth. An assessment of the alignment alternatives to the north and south of Beaufort is included in EES Chapter 3: *Project alternatives*.

Improving cycling trails and connections

Some community members queried about potential opportunities for constructing new cycling trails and connections.

The design has responded to this issue through the provision of 3 m-wide sealed shoulders along the length of the bypass for cyclists. In addition, the reduction of freight and through traffic travelling along the Beaufort town centre main street and in-town amenity improvements will increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

7.7 Ongoing community and stakeholder engagement

During the public exhibition of the EES, the community and stakeholders will have an opportunity to provide formal feedback on RRV's preferred alignment, C2.

Additional engagement activities continue to occur throughout the formal exhibition of EES and the assessment process during Phase 3 engagement. The process to lodge submissions will be detailed on the RRV and DELWP websites, RRV Facebook page, and in local, State and National newspapers.

Exhibition of the EES provides the community and stakeholders with the opportunity to review the complete documents that explain the methodology, technical results and analysis of a future Beaufort Bypass, and submit formal feedback about the EES. The Minister for Planning will then consider the project based on EES documents, public submissions, RRV's response to submissions and any inquiry reports before providing an assessment on whether the likely environmental effects of the project are acceptable. If considered acceptable, following the release of the Minister's assessment RRV will formally submit an amendment to apply the Public Acquisition Overlay in the Pyrenees Planning Scheme.

During Phase 4, engagement, the Minister's assessment of environmental effects of the project will be issued to RRV and statutory decision makers, as well as made publicly available on the DELWP website. RRV will update the Beaufort Bypass project webpage at this stage.

Consultation activities beyond Phase 4 will be subject to planning and environmental approval conditions and project funding. Continued engagement with the Registered Aboriginal Party through the finalisation of the Cultural Heritage Management Plan and other relevant agencies would occur through this phase to ensure compliance with secondary consents and approval conditions. RRV acknowledge the importance of construction phase communications and engagement. Recommendations for construction phase communications and engagement in the EES are detailed further in EES Chapter 8: *Traffic and transport*, EES Chapter 12: *Social effects*, EES Chapter 14: *Amenity* and EES Chapter 17: *Environmental management framework*.