



Discussion Paper



Turtons Track Upgrade Options



TURTONS TRACK UPGRADE OPTIONS

1. Introduction

This document collates the available information on Turtons Track upgrade options to assist people to understand the range of issues and to facilitate informed discussions on the preferred option to best achieve desired environmental, social and economic outcomes. Summaries of the following Reports have been included:

- ⇒ *VicRoads Turtons Track Upgrade Investigation 2005*
- ⇒ *DSE Tourism Plan for Public Land in the Otway Hinterland January 2005*
- ⇒ *Great Ocean Road Region Land Use and Transport Strategy 2004*
- ⇒ *Tourism Victoria Great Ocean Road Tourism Development Plan 2004 – 2007*
- ⇒ *Geelong Otway Tourism Strategic Business Plan 2003 – 2007*
- ⇒ *VicRoads Turtons Track Tourism Strategy Issues Paper 2005*
- ⇒ *Environmental Assessment of Potential Road Upgrade to Turtons Track 2005*
- ⇒ *Turtons Track Cultural Heritage Assessment 2005*
- ⇒ *Economic Evaluation of Turtons Track Upgrade Options (Current) (Preliminary findings)*

2. Report Summaries

2.1 VicRoads Turtons Track Upgrade Investigation 2005

This Report explores potential upgrade options, the scope of required works and cost estimates of the options. The Report provides the following general physical description of Turtons Track:

Approximately 3.5 kms of the western end of Turtons Track is relatively wide (approximately 6 metres) with reasonable sight distances however the central and eastern ends have carriageway widths varying from 4-6 metres and sight distances that restrict the maximum safe vehicle speed to less than 40kms per hour.

In 2005 there have been over 30 landslips along Turtons Track, costing approximately \$1.4m to repair. The ongoing annual repair and maintenance cost has been estimated at \$645,000.

The Report explores five options:

1. No change to the Turtons Track (Status Quo)
2. 4.5 metre one-way sealed (#Only light vehicles)
3. 5 metre two-way sealed (#Only light vehicles)
4. 6 metre two-way sealed (#Only light vehicles)
5. 8.8 metres two-way sealed (included for illustrative purposes only – this option will not be adopted)

#(Light vehicles include cars, campervans and motorbikes but exclude trucks, caravans or commercial vehicles)

Summary of Findings from the VicRoads Turtions Track Upgrade Investigation 2005

Option	Cost	Environment Impact	Safety	Capacity
1. Status Quo (unsealed two-way)	\$645k annual maintenance cost	No widening and therefore no vegetation loss However continuing vegetation loss and land and water disturbance from land slips	Relatively higher risk of accidents including collisions	Low speed 2 way traffic Not well suited to current or increased tourist use. Many rental cars cannot use Turtions Track
2. Sealed one-way road (east to west)	\$3m-\$4.8m subject to pavement depth (includes pavement construction and improved drainage). Reduced annual maintenance costs.	Little or no road widening required and therefore minimal impact on flora and fauna Reduced land slips resulting in less vegetation loss and land and water disturbance	Improved safety resulting from road sealing (better traction and reduced stopping distances), and traffic moving in one direction May encourage speeding because of one-way traffic Emergency access issues	(Light vehicles) Low speed travel Traffic flow and volume limited by one-way movement (east to west) which does not maximize touring options and limits local traffic use
3. Sealed two-way 5m wide (where it can be achieved – otherwise passing areas provided)	Approximately \$4.2m (to be confirmed) (includes pavement construction and improved drainage). Reduced annual maintenance costs	Limited road widening needed beyond table drain, and therefore minimal soil disturbance and vegetation loss Reduced land slips resulting in less vegetation loss and land and water disturbance	Improved safety resulted from improved surface, better visibility and retaining low speed environment. Where widening cannot be achieved the proposal incorporates passing bays	(Light vehicles) Low speed travel Better tourism outcomes as it creates a two-way touring route – Restricted passing width may cause some bottlenecks More convenient for local traffic
4. Sealed two-way 6m wide (where it can be achieved – otherwise passing areas provided)	\$4.2m - \$7.7m subject to pavement depth (includes pavement construction and improved drainage). Reduced annual maintenance costs	Some road widening required beyond the table drain (particularly between Coutts Road and Forest-Apollo Bay Road – 8.4 kms of road at 1-1.5 metres uphill) which will cause soil disturbance and vegetation loss in that area Less land slips resulting in less vegetation loss and land and water disturbance	Improved safety resulted from improved surface, better visibility and retaining low speed environment. Where widening cannot be achieved the proposal incorporates passing bays	(Light vehicles) Low speed travel Better tourism outcomes as it creates a two-way touring route. Possibility of some bottlenecks, although possibly improved traffic flow More convenient for local traffic
5. Sealed two-way 8.8m wide (illustrative option only- this option will not be adopted)	\$16.5m - \$23m depending on numbers of bridges	Major realignment and substantial impact on flora and fauna Major visual obtrusion and loss of appeal of a low speed scenic drive Less land slips	Much better visibility and improved safety	(All traffic-capable of taking heavy vehicles) Can accommodate buses and trucks which other options cannot Loss of “experience”

2.2 Tourism Plan for Public Land in the Otway Hinterland January 2005

This Tourism Plan was prepared for DSE to guide the allocation of tourism funding under the New Future for the Otways Tourism Initiative. Turtons Track was identified as part of an Otways “Independent Zone” providing experiences for independent visitors, which requires access to sealed driving tracks.

The following dominant issues were identified in the Tourism Plan:

- ⇒ The core tourism experience on public land is dependent on roads and tracks provided and maintained by the public sector. The Otways lacks a suitable “flagship” tourism drive and there is a need for consolidation of the drive tour experience and the supporting road network.
- ⇒ Driving and touring are core experiences in the Otways, it is a natural extension to the Great Ocean Road (GOR) experience, it is easy to market and it is the most accessible way to experience the tourism offerings of the Otways in a time and cost effective manner.
- ⇒ Drives work best as loops which link nature based experiences, food and beverage stops and accommodation.
- ⇒ A priority strategy is to develop one main touring route (that includes Turtons Track). The objective is to condense the visitor experience into areas of highest appeal, consolidate the number of tracks and roads in use, and incorporate “spending points”.

The Tourism Plan recommends:

- ⇒ The development of an iconic touring route incorporating Turtons Track.
- ⇒ That Turtons Track provide for slow driving on a sealed surface for light vehicles, some pull over parking for 5 minute viewing, minimal track straightening and a design to minimize cut, fill and vegetation loss.

2.3 Great Ocean Road Region Land Use and Transport Strategy 2004

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Land Use and Transport Strategy aims to guide sustainable development of the region through balanced and managed growth of selected towns along the coast and inland. It recommends the development and promotion of inland routes with DSE to identify north-south and east-west touring routes through public land in the Otways with the objective to spread traffic load and introduce visitors to a variety of hinterland experiences.

The Strategy proposes the Otways region “be promoted as Australia’s premier touring destination” with the touring experience to be developed and promoted in the Otways hinterland, to link the region’s natural attractions, heritage and produce through establishment of a main touring route through the Otway Ranges, including the Turtons Track section.

2.4 Tourism Victoria’s Great Ocean Road Tourism Development Plan 2004 – 2007

The GOR Tourism Development Plan notes “ Victoria has the strongest reputation as a touring state in Australia”. As part of tourism product development the plan proposes the development of hinterland touring routes. Specifically the Plan highlights the need to develop hinterland touring routes and visitor experiences, and continuation of nature and

touring as a point of difference for the GOR (and hinterland) region. The overall Strategy objective is to increase visitor length of stay and yield.

2.5 Geelong Otway Tourism Strategic Business Plan 2003 – 2007

The GOT Strategic Business Plan provides: - (*Product Development*) - Encourage the development of tourism product and experiences that enhances the region's competitive strengths; (*Marketing*) - Undertake intrastate and interstate marketing of the region focusing on competitive advantages and addressing challenges of seasonality, length of stay and yield.

2.6 VicRoads Turtons Track Tourist Strategy - Issues Paper

The Turtons Track Tourism Strategy Issues Paper aimed to identify and evaluate options for future management/development of Turtons Track. The dominant identified issues include:

- ⇒ Turtons Track traverses forest that includes some rare flora and fauna species.
- ⇒ The cool temperate rainforest and wet forest ecosystems are a key attraction.
- ⇒ Although Turtons Track is primarily a tourist road it also provides local access to towns and attractions.
- ⇒ Due to the mountainous terrain and high rainfall, the area is subject to landslips, which can close the track for long periods.
- ⇒ Turtons Track's takes approximately 25 minutes to drive in favourable weather due to the curving alignment and narrow pavement width, with sight distances often limited to around 25 metres.
- ⇒ Prior to the opening of the Otway Fly in August 2003, Turtons Track carried an average of 30 vehicles per day.
- ⇒ Since the opening of the Otway Fly, traffic volumes have risen to approximately 70 vehicles per day in off peak periods and 220 vehicles per day in peak periods (2003-04 post Christmas holiday period).
- ⇒ Drainage is an ongoing issue along the entire length of Turtons Track.
- ⇒ Development of the road without a drainage upgrade is likely to increase the frequency of landslips.
- ⇒ Because of the unsealed nature of Turtons Track some visitors to the Otways avoid Turtons Track.

2.7 Environmental Assessment of a potential road upgrade of Turtons Track – Report for DSE

This preliminary assessment work aimed to identify flora and fauna values of the study area (refer below), provide advice on regeneration of vegetation on roadside batters and make recommendations to avoid or mitigate potential impacts on environmentally significant sites. This does *not* replace a comprehensive environmental assessment once/if an upgrade option is selected.

The study area was a corridor being 20 metres uphill from the road, 10 metres downhill from the road and 15 metres either side of the road where the surrounding land is flat. The Environmental Assessment Report identified significant biodiversity values along Turtons Track and recommended that potential impacts should be considered when determining the alignment and extent of works for any potential upgrade of Turtons Track. It recommended a number of mitigation measures that would limit these impacts (which can be found in the full Report). Following is a summary of the Report findings:

Flora

- ⇒ Two Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC's) were identified along Turtons Track (1) Wet Forest (2) Cool Temperate Rainforest.
- ⇒ The majority of Turtons Track adjoins the Wet Forest EVC, which is identified as being an EVC of least concern in the Otway Ranges bioregion.
- ⇒ The quality of Wet Forest was assessed as very high along approximately 6.5km of the eastern section of Turtons Track, supporting a number of rare and threatened plant species.
- ⇒ Along the western end of Turtons Track the vegetation is regenerating on previously cleared farmland, and is of lower quality.
- ⇒ The Cool Temperate Rainforest community is listed as threatened in Victoria and is also identified as being vulnerable within the Otway Ranges Bioregion.
- ⇒ Two sections of Cool Temperate Rainforest near the eastern end of Turtons Track are of very high quality, showing little or no disturbance.
- ⇒ A rainforest site of significance was identified at Olangolah Creek, in the vicinity of Turtons Track. This site was identified as one of only two rainforest sites in Victoria of National significance.
- ⇒ A total of 47 flora species were identified in the study area (41 native species, 6 exotic species), with the Slender Tree-fern (identified in 4 locations) listed as threatened under the FFG Act.
- ⇒ All indigenous species occurring within Cool Temperate Rainforest have some conservation significance.
- ⇒ Large numbers of Satinwood occur close to Turtons Track. This is listed as rare in Victoria. In the order of 100 individuals were located within 5-10m uphill from Turtons Track in high quality Wet Forest and Cool Temperate Rainforest.
- ⇒ Many large trees were identified in the study area, which provide potential habitat and roosting sites for fauna.
- ⇒ The study area contains some of the oldest stands of mature Wet Forest in the Otway Ranges, which have not been subjected to logging

Fauna

- ⇒ The high quality sections of Wet Forest and Cool Temperate Rainforest along Turtons Track provide high value habitat.
- ⇒ Nine rare or threatened animal species are recorded within 5km of the study area.

Threats to biodiversity

- ⇒ Soil disturbance resulting from landslips and subsequent roadworks has led to some minor weed establishment along high quality sections of Turtons Track.
- ⇒ Continuing landslips and subsequent road works to stabilise Turtons Track represent a significant and continuing threat to the vegetation of the study area.
- ⇒ Landslips and erosion at gullies crossed by Turtons Track have the potential to mobilise sediments, which could enter downstream water catchment areas.
- ⇒ The steep nature of the area uphill of Turtons Track is likely to limit the amount of regeneration that can occur in many areas.

2.8 Turtons Track Cultural Heritage Assessment 2005 – Report for DSE

The objective of this Study was to identify and record Aboriginal and historical cultural heritage sites specifically at risk from any potential upgrade of Turtons Track. It found:

- ⇒ No Aboriginal sites were identified during the field survey and the study area was identified as having a low archaeological potential.
- ⇒ Information on Aboriginal site distribution suggests only limited potential for very diffuse stone artifact scatters and isolated artifacts within the study area.

⇒ The low potential rating applies notwithstanding historical logging activities within the immediate vicinity of the study area and known routes of some historical tramways located alongside the present route of Turtons Track.

2.9 Economic Evaluation of Turtons Track Upgrade Options

The objective of this Study is to assess of the costs and benefits to the wider community of the various options (Status Quo and the upgrade options) and to identify the best option in terms of maximising the net benefits to the wider community. The Study has not been completed. Further details will be provided at the Community Workshops. Following is a summary of the preliminary findings of the Study. For environmental impacts refer to *VicRoads Turtons Track Upgrade Investigation 2005* (page 2 this Discussion Paper)

Option	Economic Impacts	Social Impacts
1. Status Quo (unsealed two-way)	<i>No major capital expenditure needed Cost of ongoing maintenance No improvement in tourism outcomes</i>	<i>Inconvenience and costs associated with road closure</i>
2. Sealed one-way road (east to west)	<i>Capital costs of \$3m-\$4.8m. Reduced annual maintenance costs Better accessibility for touring (although limited because of one-way nature of the track), providing better tourism experience; benefits to the local and State economy from additional tourist spending and opportunities for establishment of new businesses in the region. Savings in vehicle travel times and operating costs (for local residents) Reduced business costs through overcoming track closure</i>	<i>Greater convenience for travel and less disruption resulting from track closure Improved road safety Inconvenience of one-way traffic movement only Possible negative impacts of increased traffic</i>
3. Sealed two-way 5m wide (where it can be achieved – otherwise passing areas provided)	<i>Approximately \$4.2m (with some variation depending on pavement depth) Reduced annual maintenance costs Greater accessibility for touring (two-way which can be traveled east-west and west-east) providing better and more accessible tourism experience; benefits to the local and State economy from additional tourist spending and opportunities for establishment of new businesses in the region. Savings in vehicle travel times and operating costs (for local residents), with greater benefits from two-way access Reduced business costs through overcoming track closure</i>	<i>Greater convenience for travel and less disruption resulting from track closure Improved road safety Improved convenience of two-way traffic movement Retain low speed environment Possible negative impacts of increased traffic</i>
4. Sealed two-way 6m wide (where it can be achieved – otherwise passing areas provided)	<i>\$4.2m- \$7.7m subject to pavement depth Otherwise the same economic outcomes as option 3 above</i>	<i>The same impacts apply as in Option 3 above, with possible greater safety due to wider two-way option</i>
5. Sealed two-way 8.8m wide (illustrative option only- this option will not be adopted)	<i>\$16.5m - \$23m depending on numbers of bridges Costs and benefits similar to Options 2, 3 and 4 above with some change in magnitude Reduced touring amenity and tourism appeal</i>	<i>Much better visibility and improved safety Loss of amenity</i>