



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

Katoomba to Lithgow Highway Duplication Statement by Blue Mountains Conservation Society

During the most recent NSW state election campaign, in March 2019, ministers of the NSW Government promised to expedite construction of a four-lane highway between Katoomba and Lithgow.

In the later months of 2019, the State Government released some information which could initiate the detailed planning of such a road upgrade, although State Government ministers have yet to attend any public meetings in the Blue Mountains to answer the public's questions.

The complete processes of detailed planning and construction will take quite a number of years. It currently appears to be a non-negotiable element of the proposal that B-double trucks and some trucks larger than B-doubles will be able to use the entire Great Western Highway from the western end of the M4 Motorway at Emu Plains to Lithgow.

Literature the State Government has circulated suggests they wish to plan this road on the basis of large population increases in Central Western NSW. Their projections appear to take no account of constraints on population and economic expansion in the Central Western region arising from drought susceptibility, bushfire susceptibility and underlying shortage of water, as well as other factors.

The State Government's concept involves creating a wider corridor through the bush-fringed existing highway route from Katoomba to Hartley. They have posited four different options through and around the Blackheath township including two tunnel routes, one alienating substantial areas of bushland and landforms in the Centennial Glen area and one involving demolition of multiple buildings in and around Station Street on the Kanimbla Valley side of the railway at Blackheath.

Implementation of the highway upgrade proposal could be contrary to multiple objectives of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society, including those related to nature conservation, sustainability and land use.

From the broad perspective of the Blue Mountains community, the threats from the proposal include:

- Under-utilisation of the existing railway which could carry increased volumes of freight at a lower cost than the proposed road upgrade.
- Loss of many hectares of bushland along the highway corridor, almost all of which is in fair to good condition in comparison to large areas further away from the highway in the upper mountains which may require intervention to aid their regeneration following the summer of bushfires.
- Introduction of larger, more numerous and faster travelling trucks along the whole of the Great Western Highway from Emu Plains to Lithgow. There is absolutely no evidence that the changes would be accompanied by any measures to rationalise truck use, increase law enforcement or encourage more sustainable and locally based economic practices. On the contrary, the proposal is likely to create a series of black spots for truck incidents on the most trafficked sections of existing highway especially between Katoomba and Emu Plains. These incidents are likely to include more frequent and impactful spillages of loads into the natural environment.
- Disruption to existing land use and character of urban environments, especially in Medlow Bath, Blackheath, Mount Victoria and Hartley.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society is currently considering our response to the highway duplication proposal.

Don Morison
Second Vice President
Blue Mountains Conservation Society

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