

Frequently asked questions about planning for a new bridge over the Murray River at Swan Hill

Q. Why is a future bridge being planned?

A. Transport for NSW, in collaboration with the Victorian Department of Transport (formerly VicRoads), has been investigating options to provide a safe, reliable and fit for purpose crossing into the future.

Between 2007 and 2011, early planning studies were carried out in consultation with Swan Hill Rural City Council and the former Wakool Shire Council to determine a suitable location for a replacement bridge. These planning studies found the condition of the existing bridge is deteriorating at a faster rate than originally expected and a new crossing is required to meet the demands of future regional growth.

While planning is under way, we are continuing to carry out regular maintenance work to ensure the bridge remains safe and accessible.

Q. Hasn't a preferred option for a future crossing over the Murray River at Swan Hill been endorsed?

A. Yes. Following a comprehensive planning process and extensive community consultation, the NSW and Victorian governments endorsed Option 9a as the preferred route for a future bridge in 2012. Option 9a involves building an intermediate level bridge upstream of the existing bridge.

However changes to the heritage status of the existing bridge mean the existing bridge can now be removed. Its removal means that consideration could be given to building a future bridge on the existing alignment at McCallum Street. This option is being referred to as the McCallum Street Option.

Q. Are any other options for the location of the future bridge being considered?

A. During planning studies and extensive community consultation led by the Victorian Department of Transport (formerly VicRoads) between 2007 and 2011 an exhaustive list of alternative options for the future bridge location were investigated.

Based on environmental studies and impacts, community feedback and the benefits that would be achieved, these options were subsequently ruled out and will not be reconsidered during this review of the preferred option. The only two options being looked at as part of this consultation process are Option 9a and the McCallum Street Option.

Q. Why does the current bridge need to be removed when a future bridge is built?

A. In 2012, the NSW Government published *Timber Truss Road Bridges - A Strategic Approach to Conservation*. This document identified 26 timber truss bridges constructed in NSW between 1860 and 1936 that met, or could be upgraded to meet, the operational needs of the communities they service. This assessment included removing 22 bridges. As part of this strategy, Swan Hill Bridge was to be retained and the nearby Tooleybuc Bridge was identified for removal.

In 2019, based on the lessons from six years of implementation, seven of the originally identified bridges were removed from the list of bridges to be retained and replaced with eight newly assessed bridges.

The updated assessment identified Swan Hill Bridge to be removed and Tooleybuc Bridge to be retained.

The bridges to be retained reflect the history and diversity of timber truss styles while balancing the current and future transport needs and heritage conservation.

Q. Why did the list of timber truss road bridges to be retained change?

A. Since the timber truss road bridges strategy was developed, considerable work has been done on better understanding the structural capabilities of the different truss types and various strengthening methods available which conserve heritage values while also providing adequate capacity and safety.

Due to this recent work, some bridges previously considered too complex and costly to retain can now be retained through applying strengthening techniques which are sympathetic to their heritage value to ensure they remain useable. These bridges have considerable heritage significance and many are valued by local communities.

The primary focus of the change has been to improve the overall heritage outcomes by ensuring all retained bridges have a continuing role and use within their communities, and to ensure they can fulfil network requirements.

Q. Will the existing bridge stay open until a future bridge is built?

A. While planning for a future crossing over the Murray River continues, the existing bridge will stay open and safe for all road users as long as required.

Q. Why is maintenance work still being carried out if the bridge is going to be removed?

A. Bridge strengthening and maintenance work is essential to maintain motorist safety and ensure the bridge remains open and accessible while planning for a future bridge continues.

The planning process may take several years and, if the project receives funding for construction, the build can also take one to two (or more) years depending on the complexity of the project and whether temporary infrastructure is needed. We need to ensure motorists can safely cross the Murray River while this work takes place.

Q. What bridge maintenance work has been completed?

A. Since 2016, several stages of maintenance have been carried out including:

- Strengthening work and installation of new temporary piers
- Installation of external support structure and removal of width restriction
- Removal of trees that posed a risk of falling onto the bridge and reduced visibility
- Improvements to the road surface.

Q. Is more maintenance work planned for Swan Hill Bridge?

A. Work to replace the scaffold walkway will occur next year after a detailed design assessment is complete. We will let the community know before this work begins.

Q. When will a future bridge be built?

A. The *Murray River Crossings Investment Priority Assessment (2018)* recognises the construction of a future Swan Hill Bridge as the top short term priority for investment for both NSW and Victorian governments following completion of a second crossing between Echuca in Victoria and Moama in NSW.

Currently, the future crossing project is in very early stages of planning and the NSW and Victorian governments have not yet committed funding for construction. As planning progresses we will seek funding for the project.

We will keep you informed throughout this process and, if funding is secured, we will provide more information about the timing for start of construction.

Q. I understand the Australian Government has committed \$60 million towards a future Swan Hill Bridge. Why haven't you used this money yet?

A. In 2019-20, the Australian Government committed \$60 million towards the Swan Hill project under the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative.

As the future crossing is still in the early planning stages, it is not yet known how much it would cost to build a future structure. At this stage, the NSW and Victorian governments are yet to commit funding for construction. The NSW and Victorian governments will work with the Australian Government to confirm funding for this project

Q. Is there any way that Swan Hill Bridge can be retained?

A. No, the existing bridge has been identified for removal in the updated timber truss strategy. It will be removed as part of the project to construct a future bridge over the Murray River at Swan Hill, regardless of which option is selected.

Q. When is the existing bridge going to be removed?

A. Before Swan Hill Bridge can be removed the heritage status of the bridge must be amended. Transport for NSW is working with the NSW and Victorian heritage councils to fulfil these requirements.

As part of the process to remove the bridge from the NSW and Victoria heritage registers, we will work with the community to develop an appropriate way to recognise the history of the bridge, and its many years of service to the community.

Q. What will happen to the old bridge and how can I get involved?

A. We are committed to working with the community to develop an appropriate way to recognise the history of the bridge and its importance to the region.

We hope to start these discussions early in 2021 and will let you know when this is happening so you can get involved.

Q If a new bridge is planned to be built on the existing alignment at McCallum Street, how will we cross the river when the existing bridge is removed?

A. If building the future bridge on the existing McCallum Street alignment is strongly preferred by community and supported by both NSW and Victorian governments, a temporary bridge may be required during construction.

A temporary bridge will be investigated further during detailed design. Early design thinking would suggest the temporary bridge could provide single-lane access for vehicles and a pedestrian walkway across the river. It would be installed well before the existing bridge is removed and would ensure traffic movements across the river are largely unaffected while the new bridge is being built. The temporary bridge would be removed once the future bridge is open to traffic.

Q. What would a future crossing look like?

A. Planning for a future crossing is still in the early stages, but it is anticipated that a future bridge would have two lanes, be suitable for wider vehicles and machinery, cater for higher mass limit (HML) vehicles and have a shared path for pedestrians and cyclists. Lift span requirements will be further investigated during the planning process.

Q. Will there be a lift span in the future bridge?

A. Once the preferred option has been endorsed, the project will investigate whether it is possible to achieve the required bridge height without requiring a lift span.

The bridge must still provide clearance for the existing active railway in Swan Hill without being too steep for agricultural and other freight vehicles. Our design team would look at the options and provide more information during the detailed design phase.

Q. How will planning for a future bridge impact the Swan Hill Riverfront Masterplan?

A. Transport for NSW will work with Swan Hill Rural City Council to support the existing masterplan for the riverfront area.

Both concept design options may potentially impact the outdoor swimming pool and further discussions are required to better understand what these means for existing community facilities.

We will share more information as it becomes available.

Q. What is happening with Tooleybuc Bridge?

A. The 2012 *Timber Truss Road Bridges - A Strategic Approach to Conservation* document identified Tooleybuc Bridge for removal. This decision was reversed in the 2019 timber truss strategy review, however, and Tooleybuc Bridge must now be retained. This means plans to build a future Murray River Bridge on the Mallee Highway at Tooleybuc have been put on hold.

It does not mean that a new crossing will not be required at Tooleybuc at some stage, nor that we are categorically closing the door on building a new bridge in the future. Instead, in line with the timber truss review, our priority is to maintain the bridge to ensure its vital role as a transport link within the community and the state is assured.

Q. Wasn't a preferred option announced for a future crossing at Tooleybuc?

A. Yes. In 2016, the NSW and Victorian governments announced the yellow option, a high level bridge downstream of the existing bridge, as the preferred option for a future crossing. The announcement followed significant planning and strategic investigations.

Q. What is planned for Tooleybuc Bridge now that it is going to be retained?

A. The State Heritage-listed Allan timber truss bridge will be maintained and upgraded to meet the demands of the current and future freight network. Transport for NSW has established a project

team to progress planning for the repair and upgrade of Tooleybuc Bridge. This will include the installation of a temporary crossing for the period of the work.

Timing for this work is subject to funding from NSW and Victorian governments and current border restrictions.

We will keep the community informed as planning for this work progresses.

Q. Why is community consultation being carried out online?

A. The current COVID-19 restrictions, including border closures, have meant we have had to change the way we consult with our communities. We are still committed to the principles of community consultation and are looking forward to hearing your feedback on the two options – Option 9a and McCallum Street Option. This online format will enable us to gauge public sentiment while keeping our communities and our staff healthy and safe.

Q. How will the information session operate?

A. The event is an opportunity to learn more about the two options. Our project team will provide an overview of the project over the years, as well as information on the two options that are currently being revisited. Members of the public will then be able to ask questions and get real-time answers from the project team.

Q. I am unable to make the information session. Have I missed out on my opportunity to ask questions?

A. Absolutely not. A recording of the online session will be made available for viewing on the project website after the event so people can listen to questions and answers at their leisure.

Any community member seeking further information is encouraged to contact our Senior Project Manager, Jonathan Tasker, on 02 6923 6550.

Q. How can I have my say?

Submissions can be made by accessing the link on the web page at nswroads.work/hysswanhill, emailing south.west.projects@transport.nsw.gov.au or writing to us at Swan Hill Bridge, PO Box 484, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650.

We understand this topic is of great interest to the Swan Hill and Murray Downs communities so we have extended the submission period until 5pm on Friday 30 October.

Q. What happens after this community consultation has been completed?

A. We will consider your feedback on the preferred option and prepare a community feedback summary report. It is anticipated the report will be released publicly before the end of the year.

If feedback strongly favours the McCallum Street Option over Option 9a, we will seek endorsement from the NSW and Victorian governments.

We will share more information as it becomes available.

