

PLANNING OUR FUTURE

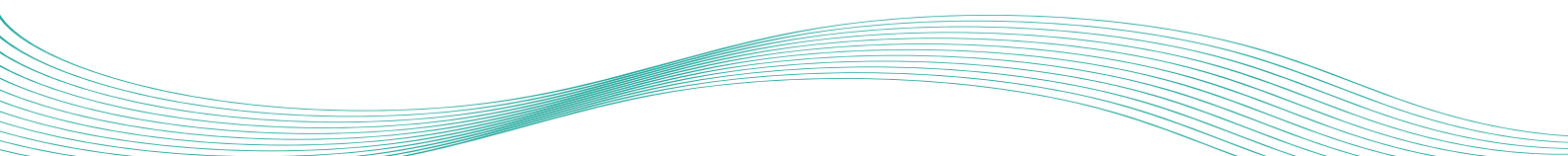
The Gympie Region Planning Scheme

Gympie Regional Council
New Planning Scheme Project

Council Endorsed

**Bruce Highway Upgrade
Response Strategy
Policy Position Paper**

January 2024



Introduction

The State Government is in the final stages of completing the Bruce Highway upgrade Section D: Woondum to Curra. This part of the project will result in some significant changes to how traffic and visitors move through the region, and in particular, access the Gympie urban area. In response to the highway upgrade, an analysis has been undertaken of the proposed new routes into the town centre, and associated land use, urban design and landscape character opportunities.

The realignment will have benefits in time-saving for trips along the Bruce Highway to points north and south of the town, along with a projected reduction in peak hour traffic volumes on the existing highway through the centre of town of between 31 per cent and 34 per cent. Traffic seeking to access the town centre will now do so via new routes impacting upon the existing road networks and pedestrian environments.

The highway upgrade will present both challenges and opportunities for Gympie. Bruce Highway “through” traffic will no longer be required to drive through the centre of town, improving amenity and safety but at the same time, potentially reducing business and tourism opportunities.

The new routes into the Gympie urban area will change movement patterns and may require engineering responses including road and intersection upgrades, car parking changes and management of overflow traffic into local streets. Opportunities to improve transport conditions for local road users and pedestrians, including active transport opportunities, should be explored in the design of the local engineering responses to the highway upgrade.

This paper discusses:

- the issues relevant to the access routes into Gympie Town Centre and Curra,
- options to facilitate pedestrian access,
- desired outcomes in relation to landscape character, and
- potential policy positions to address the identified issues.

The position paper is one of 11 position papers addressing key aspects of the future land use and development policy for Gympie Regional Council. The paper has been prepared as part of Stage 2 of the Gympie Regional Council Planning Scheme project and is intended to inform the drafting process to occur in Stage 3.

Other position papers to be prepared as Stage 2 are as follows:

- Housing
- Retail and Commercial Development
- Industrial Land
- Rural Land
- Open Space and Recreation
- Heritage
- Biodiversity Conservation
- Flooding
- Bushfire
- Coastal Hazards

Background

Bruce Highway Bypass – new alignment and interchanges

The highway upgrade is a joint venture between the Queensland State Government and the Australian Federal Government. The overall project involves a 62km realignment and upgrade of the Bruce Highway to four lanes between Cooroy and Curra. The new design aims to meet strategic transport needs of the Sunshine Coast and Gympie regions while improving safety, flood resilience, and capacity.

For construction purposes the project was split into the four sections (A, B, C and D). Sections A to C have been completed over the past 10 years. Section D includes the area between Woondum and Curra and is currently undergoing completion. The final design will result in a new alignment that will bypass Gympie and establish three new interchanges in addition to the current Woondum interchange. A summary of the new design is provided below.

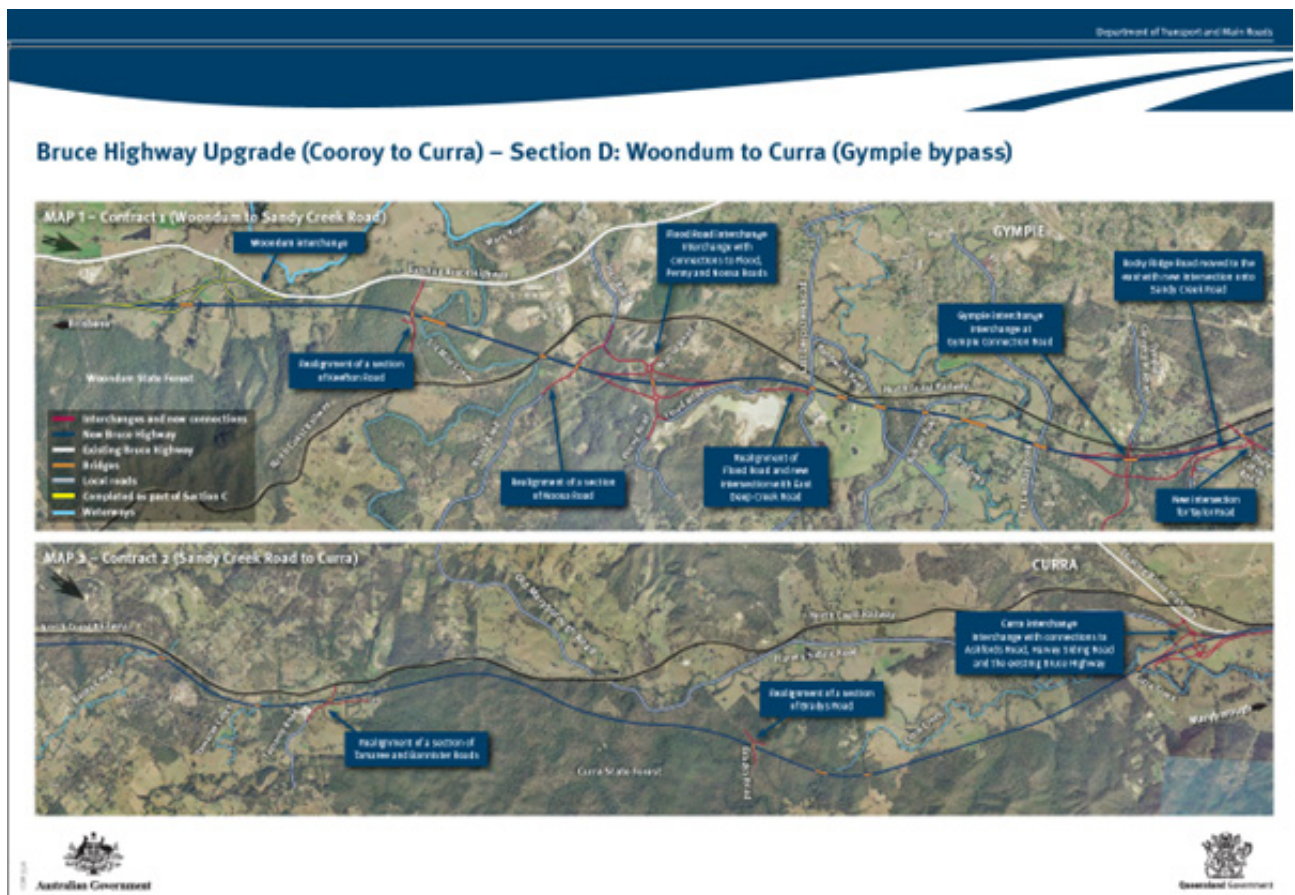


Figure 1: Section D of the new Bruce Highway Upgrade showing the new alignment to bypass Gympie

Woondum Interchange

The first of the new interchanges is located at Woondum and is constructed at the northern end of the current extent of the upgraded highway. The Woondum Interchange will be the southern-most Bruce Highway exit to enter Gympie and is likely to retain a high volume of local traffic, particularly for visitors, local residents, workers and freight accessing the southern parts of Gympie, including the Monkland/Glanmire industrial area.



Figure 2: Woondum Interchange design and locality plan

Flood Road Interchange

The new Flood Road interchange will aid movements at Flood Road to cater for local and industrial traffic, enabling heavy vehicles to access commercial and industrial areas east and west of the new highway (refer Figure 3). The interchange will act as a key entry point for the East Deep Creek industrial area to aid the movements of businesses such as Nolan Meats and for residents in the East Deep Creek and Cedar Pocket localities.



Figure 3: Flood Interchange aerial view of completed work as at December 2022. Image courtesy of tmr.qld.gov.au: Flood Road Interchange design and locality plan

Gympie Interchange

The new Gympie interchange will be constructed at Gympie Connection Road to cater for commuters travelling to Gympie or the Coolooloa Coast from the new highway. Traffic signals will be located at each exit ramp and entry ramp intersection with Gympie Connection Road to manage the flow of traffic between the new highway and the local road network. The Gympie interchange will create a new entry to the Gympie CBD to the west, and to Tin Can Bay and coastal settlements to the east, refer to Figure 4.

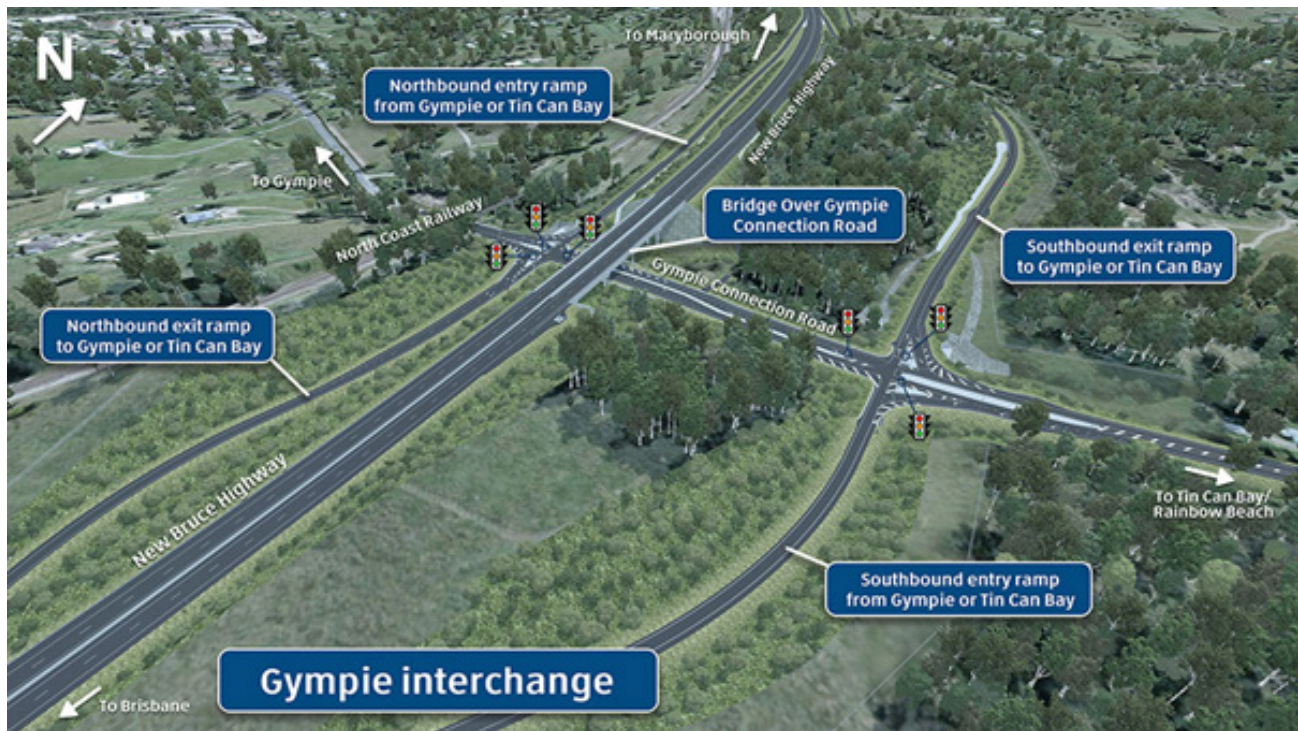


Figure 4: Gympie Interchange

Curra Interchange

The new Curra interchange will be constructed just north of Curra to connect the new four-lane highway with the existing two-lane Bruce Highway, adjacent to the North Coast Railway Line. The interchange will be to the north of the existing Harvey Siding Road and Bruce Highway intersection. Connections will be made back to Harvey Siding and Ashford Roads for local traffic, refer to Figure 5.

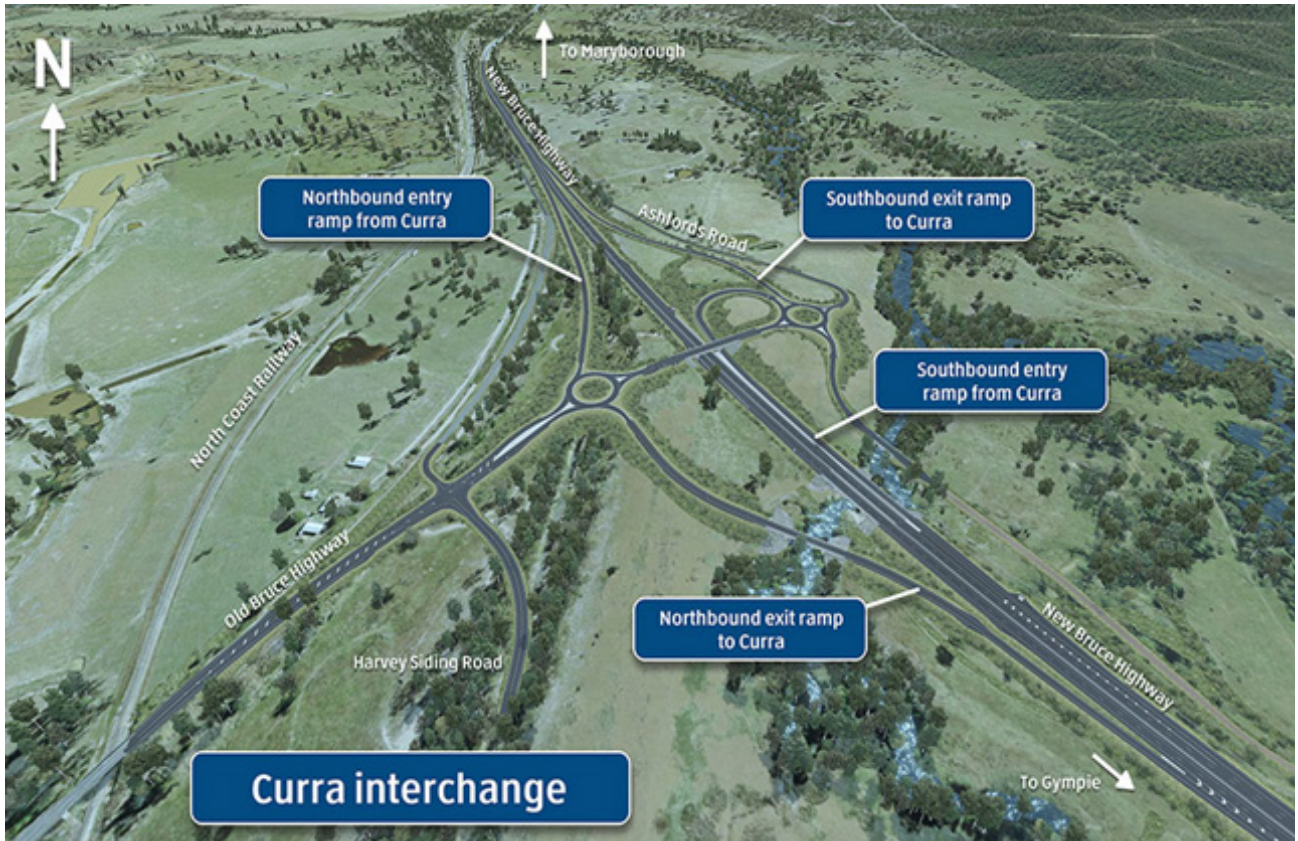


Figure 5: Curra Interchange

Issue 1: The Flood Road Interchange

Discussion

The new Flood Road Interchange will provide access into the Gympie town centre via Noosa Road and access to the East Deep Creek and Monkland industrial areas via Flood Road and Hall Road, refer Figure 6.

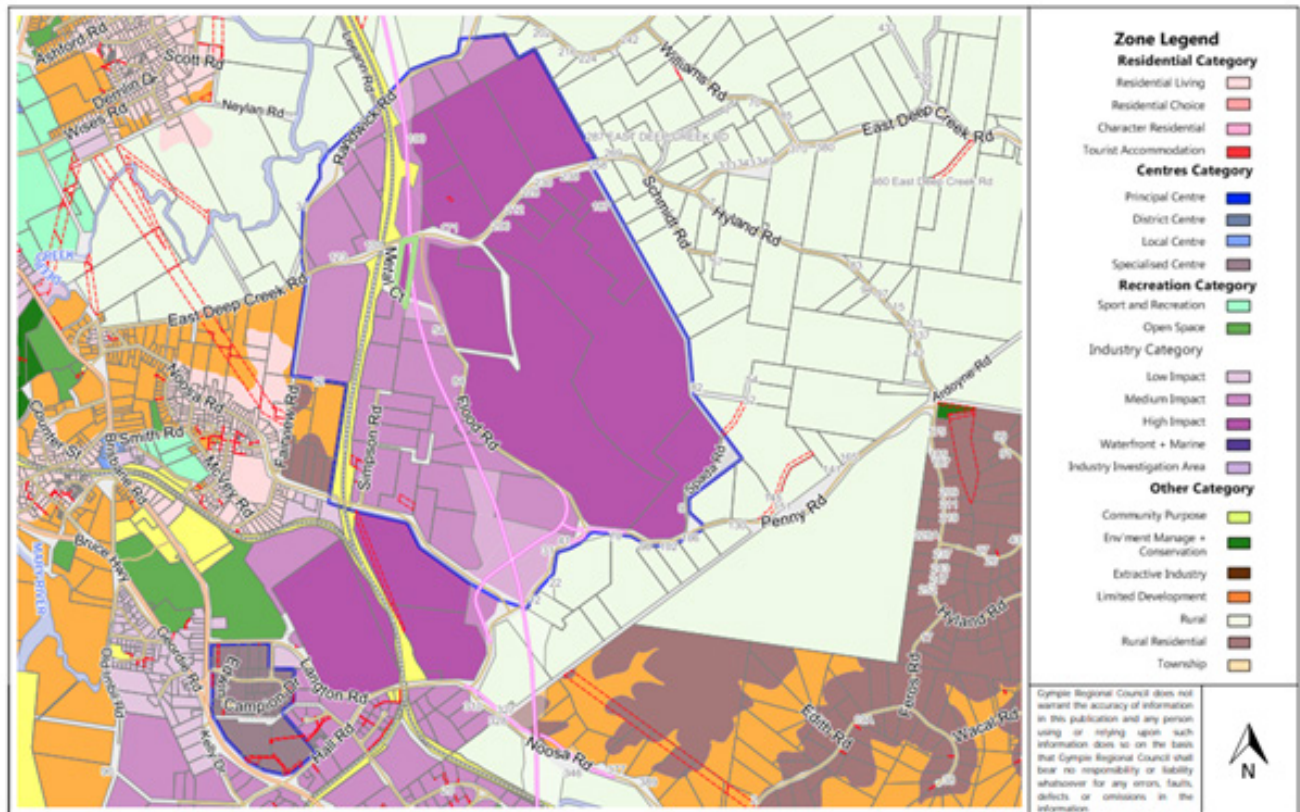


Figure 6: Zoning Around the Flood Road Interchange

The new interchange gives rise to a number of issues:

Flood Road

Flood Road is of a lower standard construction yet forms the key connection from the new highway alignment to the East Deep Creek industrial area, including the abattoir. The current formation includes a single sealed centre lane with gravel shoulders. It is not considered suitable to accommodate frequent use by heavy vehicles for industrial or stock transport purposes. Once the interchange is in operation Flood Road will need to be upgraded to a sub-arterial road standard. At this stage there is no commitment from the State government to meet this cost.

Hall Road Railway Overpass

There is an existing single lane railway crossing overpass located at the intersection of Hall Road and the railway line. Use of this bridge as part of a new access route to the Monkland industrial area is likely to be problematic as the bridge is already a “pinch point” and is not constructed to a standard appropriate to carry heavy vehicle industrial traffic. Once the interchange connection to the new highway is completed Hall Road will provide flood free access to Monkland (up to the one per cent AEP flood event), generating further pressure for the bridge to be upgraded.

Noosa Road/Brisbane Road Intersection

It is anticipated that the Flood Road interchange will add additional traffic volumes to Noosa Road at its intersection with Brisbane Road. Driver sight distance to the north of this intersection is compromised by both the horizontal and vertical alignment of this section of Brisbane Road. Upgrading of this intersection to address this issue is required.

Desired outcomes

- Flood Road is upgraded to reflect its new function as a heavy vehicle route and key access to the East Deep Creek industrial area.
- The Hall Road railway overpass bridge is upgraded to accommodate two-way and heavy vehicle usage and to provide a safe alternate access to the Monkland/Glanmire area during flood events.
- Sight distances for the Noosa Road/Brisbane Road intersection are improved to ensure adequate visibility for safe turning movements.
- Safe pedestrian movement is facilitated by the provision of footpaths on Noosa Road.

Policy position

All works identified road and traffic improvement needs arising from the operation of the Flood Road interchange are met by the State government.

Actions

- Council engages with the Minister for Transport and Main Roads with a view to securing State Government commitment to the delivery of the road improvements discussed above, noting that council's order of priority is Hall Rd Bridge, Flood Road upgrade followed by Brisbane Road.
- The signalisation of the Graham Street/Brisbane Road is investigated with a view to improve the safety and function of the Noosa Road/Brisbane Road intersection.

Issue 2: The Gympie Interchange

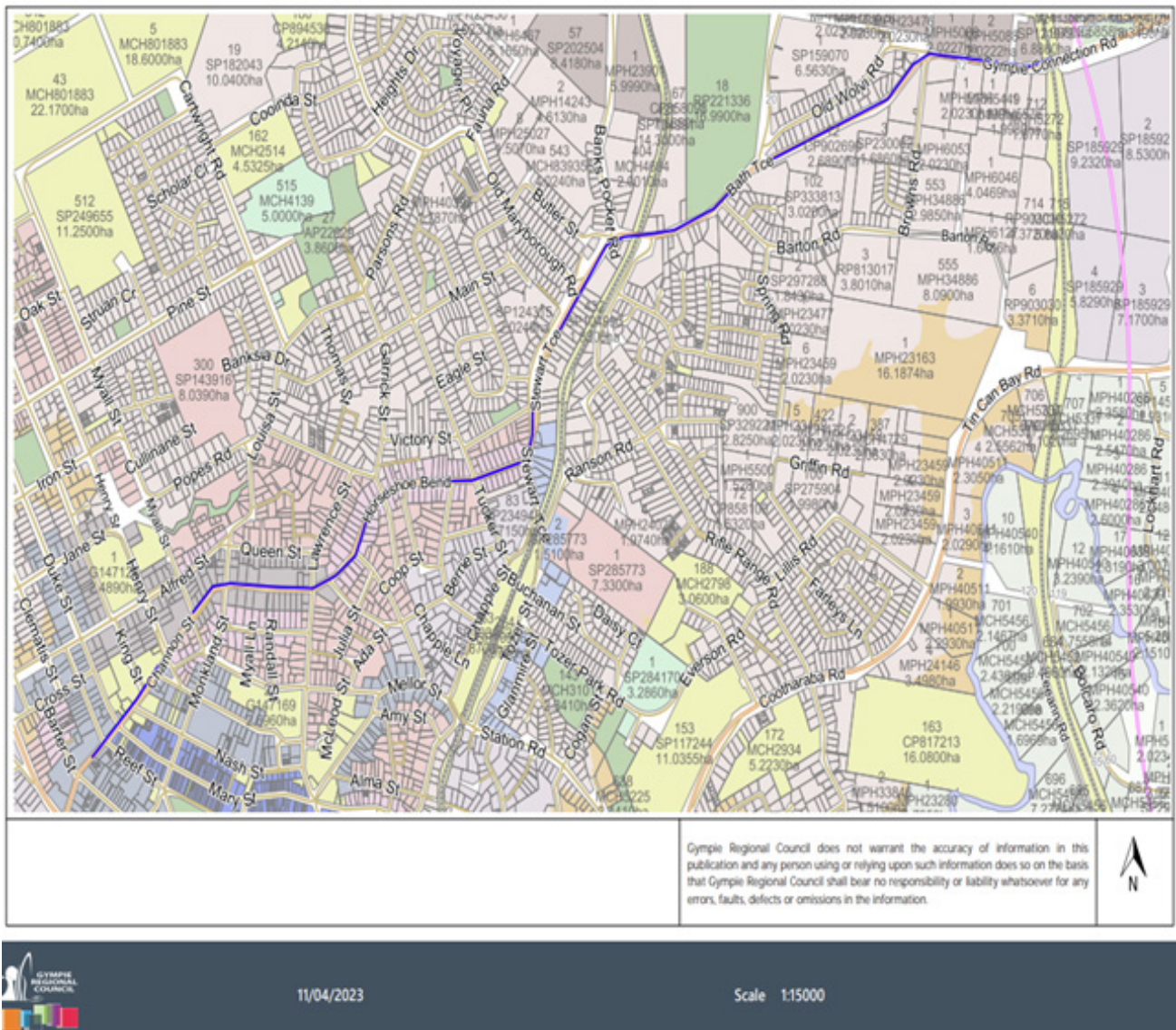


Figure 7: Entry route to Gympie CBD from Gympie Connection Road exit

Discussion

A new entry point is provided to Gympie at the Gympie Connection Road interchange. The route into town will take vehicles along Bath Terrace and Stewart Terrace, refer to Figure 7. The driver will then have a choice to continue to Tozer Street or turn right onto Horseshoe Bend and onto to Channon Street, Mary Street, and the former highway. This section of the route will also provide the most direct path to Southside, the Chatsworth area and out to the Wide Bay Highway.

The DTMR traffic modelling undertaken to date suggests that there are minimal changes in traffic resulting from the new interchange. However, it is highly likely that this route will become the main entrance to Gympie for highway traffic from the north. It is also possible that some drivers from the south will elect to use this interchange to access Gympie rather than the Woondum or Flood Road interchanges as this interchange provides a simpler path of travel.

Currently, heavy transport vehicles and tourist traffic (including caravans) travelling from the south of Gympie to the eastern forestry areas or to the Cooloola Coast use Brisbane, Crescent and Cootharaba Roads to access Tin Can Bay Road. With the highway realignment this traffic will likely use the new Gympie interchange and the Gympie Connection Road to travel east. This is expected to impact upon the operation of the Gympie Connection Road/Tin Can Bay Road intersection. The intersection will need to be reconfigured to reflect this change in traffic movement.

Horseshoe Bend and Channon Street will provide a higher order function with the introduction of the Gympie Interchange, similar to the current function of Tin Can Bay Road and will need to be upgraded accordingly.

As constructed, the roads that constitute this route do not meet the desired standards in terms of alignment, geometry, carriage way width, shoulder width or intersection design to reflect the demands expected to be placed upon it.

Identified issues along the route include:

- Several intersections along Gympie Connection Road through to Channon Street are insufficient for the current traffic situation, being difficult to use at times with limited visibility. The new interchange will only compound these issues.
- The shoulder width along Horseshoe Bend is tight in its existing formation and the route is meandering. The verge is limited in its ability to provide safe pedestrian pathways, property access and car parking on the road.
- Most of the residential properties that have frontage to Horseshoe Bend are included within the Character Residential zone under the council's current planning scheme. This residential strip contains several historical dwellings that are significant to the established character of the area. Further widening of this section of road may impact upon heritage values, pedestrian pathways, landscaping, building setbacks and the alignment of overhead powerlines.
- Alternative access routes might be possible, but are not without challenges arising from topography, current road design, land tenure and the need to ensure legibility (ease of wayfinding).

Desired outcomes

- The access route from the new Gympie interchange to the town centre and on to the current Bruce Highway is direct, safe, and fit for purpose.
- Impacts on private property and heritage values resulting from any upgrade works are minimised.
- Active transport and pedestrian movement is supported and preserved where possible.
- Landscaping and street tree opportunities are optimised.
- Gympie Connection Road, including the intersection with Tin Can Bay Road, is adequate to cater for a significant increase in heavy transport and tourist traffic.

Policy position

The need to upgrade the road corridors from the new Gympie interchange to the existing Bruce Highway and Tin Can Bay Road should be recognised as a priority by the State Government.

Actions

- Council engage with the Minister for Transport and Main Roads with a view to reaching agreement on the design and delivery of upgrades to these corridors.
- The intersections at Old Maryborough Road/Stewart Terrace and Gympie Connection Road/Tin Can Bay Road be the subject of reports to council regarding the options for engineering solutions and a works program.

Issue 3: Curra Interchange

Discussion

The development of a new interchange in the Curra region in close proximity to the North Coast rail line was a factor in council's decision to investigate the opportunity to deliver a new industrial precinct at this location. Preliminary planning investigations have confirmed that the interchange represents an opportunity to establish a consolidated industrial precinct ensuring a regionally significant and long term supply of land for business and employment generation.

The development of the industrial precinct will also facilitate the management of significant landscape areas along the highway adjacent to Curra Creek to retain scenic and ecological values.

As the interchange could develop to become the access to a transport modal change hub incorporating a range of land uses, clear directional signage will be crucial. Wayfinding to the Wide Bay Highway to connect to western townships including Kilkivan and Goomeri will also be important to users of this interchange.

Desired outcome

The proposed Curra industrial area is developed to take full advantage of the connectivity provided by the new highway interchange.

Policy position

The proposed Curra industrial precinct will constitute the long-term supply of industrial/employment land for the region.

Action

Council continues to progress the planning investigations with respect to the Curra industrial precinct.

Issue 4: Walkability, Pedestrian and Active Transport Connections

Discussion

The “old highway” alignment includes the current Bruce Highway route through Gympie along the northern side of the Mary River and northwards to the Wide Bay Highway.

The current highway provides frontage or access to a number of destinations with the town:

- shopping centres
- fast food outlets
- various retail and service providers
- ‘The Sands Park’ trail head access to the River to Rail Trail
- netball courts in Rose Street
- Albert Park, Lake Alford, Gympie Gold Mining and Historical Museum precinct
- large format retailers, service providers and industrial operators
- motels.

The highway is currently being regularly used as a pedestrian linkage with consistent pedestrian usage observed along much of the corridor. A reduction of through-traffic, particularly heavy vehicle traffic, will present some opportunities for improved walkability and active transport outcomes. Consultation with the Department of Transport and Main Roads should be undertaken about future ownership/maintenance/improvement (e.g. revegetation) of their surplus but flood prone land.

Despite relatively high levels of usage the current pedestrian environment along the Bruce Highway offers little in the way of amenity, shade or pedestrian refuges. There is a piecemeal approach to pathways and no pedestrian paths from Aldi down to ‘The Sands’ and south to Lake Alford. This section of the road is narrow and bounded on either side by steep embankments. The shoulder of the road is also tight to the guard rails. No refuge or alternative thoroughfare options are provided for pedestrians. Notwithstanding the road being a dangerous option for pedestrians, pedestrian use is regularly observed along this section. It is noted that alternative pedestrian routes are not apparent, and the current highway forms a clear desire line for access, despite the obvious safety issues.

The DTMR is currently in the design phase for a pedestrian footbridge adjacent to the Normanby Bridge. If delivered the footbridge will present an opportunity to complete a pedestrian linkage through to the Gympie Central shopping centre via Hughes Terrace or Watts Street, noting that the gradients along parts of this route will discourage many pedestrians.

The pedestrian situation is somewhat better in the section from Excelsior Road to Monkland Street, but the footpath provision is inconsistent (as Albert Park is approached from the south the footpaths cease to exist) and little or no shade is on offer to pedestrians. A key opportunity to be capitalised on is strengthening the connection and relationship of Gympie with the Mary River. In this regard the transfer of DTMR land between Rose Street and Albert Park to council for parking, open space, revegetation and beautification would be beneficial.

To the north of Channon Street provision remains inconsistent and seems to alternate from one side of the road to the other in an arbitrary fashion. Again, little or no shade is available to pedestrians.

From the number of pedestrians seen to be using the current highway corridor, it is clear the corridor reflects a strong desire line. It is also clear that the current situation presents an opportunity to provide improvements with respect to:

- the continuity of pedestrian paths
- safe bicycle paths
- shade and seating
- safe crossing points at intersections.

Desired outcomes

- Accessible and logical pedestrian connections to points of interest and local services.
- Safe routes that prioritise and implement 'Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design' (CPTED) principles in design outcomes.
- Resilient and locationally appropriate landscaping.
- Pedestrian shelter and shade.
- Adequate lighting for evening use in key locations.

Policy position

Safe walking and active transport options should be consistently available along the urban extent of the existing Bruce Highway corridor.

Actions

- Opportunities for pedestrian and active transport outcomes along the existing Bruce Highway corridor are to be investigated as part of the next review of the Gympie Region Walk and Cycle Strategy.
- Council consults with the Department of Transport and Main Roads in the review of the Gympie Region Walk and Cycle Strategy as it relates to State roads.
- Council negotiate with the DTMR for the transfer of land between Rose Street and Albert Park to council for the purposes of parking, open space, revegetation and beautification works.

Issue 5: Entry Points, Wayfinding and Landscaping

Discussion

The signage and wayfinding interventions currently in use on the existing approaches to Gympie may not create a consistent sense of arrival. This may be in part due to the somewhat dispersed nature of Gympie's urban frame which has historically been dictated by flooding and/or topography.

The existing welcome to Gympie landmarks are located at Six Mile Creek rest stop when entering from the south and Chatworth rest stop from the north. In both instances the "entry statement" is followed by a tract of underutilised or vacant land before the traveller encounters the urban area proper diminishing the sense of "arrival" the entry features are intended to promote.

There are opportunities at other locations (i.e. at Lake Alford or between the Sands carpark and the Aldi supermarket when arriving from the south) that might be better positioned to create a sense of arrival. The approach from the north on the current highway alignment might be expected to carry less traffic but will likely remain the desired travel path from the Wide Bay Highway to Gympie and perhaps even some points south of Gympie. An entry statement near the golf course might generate a more immediate sense of arrival than the current location at Chatsworth.

New strategically located, signage and wayfinding interventions in the vicinity of the new highway interchanges will be important, particularly in the context of the new Gympie interchange. Changes will see an increase in local traffic entering the Gympie CBD and will also be the new key exit point for vehicles accessing coastal settlements including Tin Can Bay, Cooloola Cove and Rainbow Beach.

On-highway wayfinding signage will also be important for the approaches to all highway interchanges to allow the travelling public to select the most convenient route to their destinations in and around Gympie and locations farther afield such as the Cooloola Coast or the Wide Bay Highway. Wayfinding will also be required within Gympie itself to allow traffic to flow smoothly. Some wayfinding signage is already in place; however, this will need to be reviewed for currency and for consistency with whatever stylistic cues are adopted for the new wayfinding signage.

As almost all of the roads where either entry statements or wayfinding will be required are state roads engagement with the DTMR with respect to the design and content of the signs/entry statements should be a priority.

Landscaping treatments along the existing urban Bruce Highway corridors are many and varied or, in several locations, non-existent. Establishing a consistent and sustainable (from a maintenance perspective) landscaping palette would create a sense of place, enhance the experience of visitors, support active transport (particularly pedestrian movements), simplify maintenance and promote Gympie as a place to visit, live and invest. The landscaping of the highway corridor also presents an opportunity to visually integrate the private and public domain further adding to the character and identity of the town.

It is noted that landscaping along this corridor is regularly impacted by flooding events of varying magnitudes. Landscape design will therefore need to be robust and highly resilient to inundation.

Desired outcomes

- A sustainable and unifying landscape palette is developed and applied to the urban extent of the current highway corridor.
- Wayfinding and entry statements are integral components of the corridor's landscape design
- Residents and visitors are easily able to navigate to their desired destinations.

Policy positions

- Landscaping and wayfinding treatments will be used within urban areas along the current Bruce Highway corridor to enhance the amenity of the town.
- On-highway wayfinding should be provided in a manner consistent with that provided elsewhere in support of the highway by-pass.

Actions

- Engage with the DTMR to develop a landscaping, signage and wayfinding palette for the new highway corridor, the new highway interchanges, new routes into town and the urban extent of the current highway corridor.
- Work with the DTMR to implement the recommendations of the Bruce Highway Upgrade Response Strategy (PSA Consulting May 2023).
- Review the landscaping provisions included in the planning scheme with a view to establishing a consistent approach between the public and private domains along the new routes into town and the urban extent of the current highway corridor.

Issue 6: Lot Configuration of Surplus Land

Discussion

In the preparing for the project, the state government acquired an extensive corridor of land, most of which will be physically required for the construction of the road or retained as environmental offsets. There will be some land that, at the completion of the project, will be surplus to requirements. This land will be, depending on location, available access, physical constraints or geometric characteristics be useful to varying degrees for a range of land uses.

In some instances, the land parcels may only be reasonably reincorporated to the properties from which they were originally acquired or amalgamated with adjoining lots.

Upon completion of the construction and handover phases of the highway upgrade project an audit of the remaining parcels will identify the most appropriate future disposition of these sites, both in terms of land tenure and future zoning.

Desired outcome

The completion of the highway upgrade project avoids the creation of unsuitable parcels of land where the future use is uncertain.

Policy position

The disposal of residual highway land by the DTMR should only occur after the future land use zoning and subdivision arrangements have been agreed with council.

Actions

- Consult with DTMR to understand what remaining land will be surplus to the needs of the project.
- Assist the DTMR with a strategy for amalgamation and/or consolidation of land parcels to ensure they are reasonable in size for the intended development purposes.
- Review zoning under the planning scheme review to assess and resolve the most appropriate zone for the ultimate lot configuration for both individual parcels and/or group of lots.

Issue 7: Land Use and Zoning Along the Old Highway

Discussion

The current highway corridor will still carry a substantial volume of traffic following the opening of the upgraded section. Gympie itself will remain a significant traffic generator, as will other destinations such as Southside and points further west along the Wide Bay Highway. It is expected that a significant proportion of the heavy vehicle traffic that currently passes through the Gympie urban area will bypass the town and improve the overall amenity of the town.

There is scope to review of the land use zoning of some sites along the current highway corridor to improve business opportunities and realise community benefit outcomes where constraints such as flooding can be overcome. Tactically, this review will be better undertaken with the experience of actual traffic flows as opposed to the flows forecast by traffic models.

It is not proposed to review the zoning of the non-urban component of the existing highway corridor. However, it will be important to ensure that land use, landscaping and signage on these lands continues to be managed to avoid adverse amenity impacts.

Desired outcome

Land use, landscaping (where included in development applications) and signage controls be maintained along the "by-passed" road corridor.

Policy position

Land use within the urban extent of the by-passed road corridor be reviewed considering actual, rather than forecast, traffic flow information.

Action

No action with respect to zoning required at this time.