

# Blackheath Joint Community Submission

1 March 2017

Mr Naveen Jayavarapu  
Project Manager  
Katoomba to Mount Victoria safety upgrade  
RMS  
PO Box 334  
PARKES NSW 2870

## **BY EMAIL**

Dear Naveen,

### **Supplementary Blackheath Joint Community Submission Katoomba to Mount Victoria safety upgrade**

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and representatives of your project team on Tuesday, 20 December 2016 and Wednesday, 18 January 2017 at Blackheath. We appreciate the open discussions we have had over the past several years in relation to the proposed safety improvements to the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Mount Victoria.

We, the undersigned, set out the following supplementary submission in relation to the Katoomba to Mount Victoria safety upgrade project. This supplementary submission, which represents the position of all of the major stakeholder groups in Blackheath (as listed below), is based upon our initial joint submission dated 12 March 2013, supplementary submission dated 16 June 2014 and further submission dated 30 March 2016 (copies attached) and ongoing discussions with you, Chris Barnett and the RMS project team.

Once again, we thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment and contribute to this very important project.

As previously noted, safety is a critical issue for local residents and business owners who are located between Katoomba and Mount Victoria. The Blackheath Highway Action Group ('BAG') has, along with the Blackheath community and the stakeholder groups named below, lobbied the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority ('RTA') and Roads and Maritime Services ('RMS') for safety improvements to the highway between Katoomba and Mount Victoria, particularly through Blackheath, since 2008. These efforts have been publicly supported by the Blue Mountains City Council ('BMCC').

The Blackheath community warmly welcomes the opportunity to work constructively with RMS and BMCC to positively address these issues for the benefit of both local residents and highway users. We believe community engagement throughout the life of this project is critical to its success.

We reiterate our strong belief that the priority for the Australian and NSW Governments in relation to the Great Western Highway west of Katoomba should be to make the highway safer for local residents and the many tourists who visit the Blue Mountains, as well as other motorists who use the Great Western Highway to travel further afield. Tourism is the economic base of Blackheath. Blackheath is also a key tourist destination on the Blue Mountains Grand Circular Tourist Drive. Highway safety is critical for tourism because a large proportion of visitors travel to Blackheath by car or tourist coach.

Whilst outside the scope of this project, we take the opportunity to remind both the Australian and NSW Governments of the need to address the movement of freight across the Blue Mountains and between Sydney, Newcastle and Port Kembla and the NSW Central West. The Blackheath community is very disappointed by the lack of action at all levels of government to address the ever-increasing numbers of trucks using the Great Western Highway for the transport of freight. A long term transport plan, which incorporates rail for the transport of freight across the Blue Mountains and between Sydney, Newcastle and Port Kembla and the NSW Central West is desperately needed. We take this opportunity to attach a copy of our submission to the Long Term Transport Masterplan for your information.

## **1. Background – Foundations for the Safety Upgrade**

### **1.1 Blackheath Highway Safety Management Plan**

The Blackheath community unanimously called on the NSW Government at the RTA convened public meeting held on 22 December 2008 to develop and implement, in conjunction with the local community, a Blackheath Highway Safety Management Plan. The Blackheath Highway Safety Management Plan is a comprehensive approach to making the highway safer through Blackheath for local residents. The concept of the plan is to stop the previous ad hoc approach to addressing highway safety through Blackheath. The idea of a Blackheath Highway Safety Management Plan was first raised by Councillor Terri Hamilton, former Ward 1 Councillor, Blue Mountains City Council, back in 2005. In September 2005 Blue Mountains City Council endorsed Councillor Hamilton's motion calling on the RTA to develop and implement such a plan.

Representatives from local community organizations, including BAG, again called on the RTA to develop and implement a Blackheath Highway Safety Management Plan at the RTA Community Consultation Meeting held on Wednesday, 18 March 2009.

Community representatives again raised the issue of the Blackheath Highway Safety Management Plan with representatives from the RTA at another RTA Community Consultation Meeting held on Thursday, 16 April 2009. Michael Paag, Chair of BAG, also

met with Diana Loges and Geoff Cahill from the RTA on Friday, 12 June 2009 to discuss the concept of a Blackheath Highway Safety Management Plan and the need for highway safety improvements through Blackheath.

A copy of the BAG submission to the RTA dated 6 June 2009 is also attached for your information.

## **1.2 Safer Access**

Our community's interrelationship with the Great Western Highway has major significance for local business, tourism, the public school and local residents.

As was mentioned to James Surprain from the RTA on Saturday, 27 June 2009, there are high levels of community concern regarding the current difficulties for westbound traffic in accessing the town from the highway via both the Govetts Leap Road and the Hat Hill Road intersections. These concerns have been reflected in community feedback to the RMS, as well as in our prior Blackheath Joint Community Submissions (as noted above).

Local residents are concerned about travelling around Blackheath which is intersected by a highway and a railway line, in particular moving from east to west and vice versa, and gaining access to and from the highway, particularly at intersections such as Abbott Street, Bundarra Street and the Station Street rail overpass.

## **1.3 Amenity / Trees**

The significant vegetation along the highway corridor through the town of Blackheath, especially the corridor of oak and plane trees, is vital to the amenity and village feel of Blackheath as well as its ongoing economic prosperity. Tourism is the key economic driver for Blackheath and it is vital that the highway corridor through the town precinct continues to retain its charm and attraction to visitors both domestic and international.

Local business relies on visitors wanting to stop and stay in Blackheath. The visual appeal of the town with its tree-lined highway and parks is very important in encouraging tourists to visit Blackheath. Therefore, any plans to remove some trees along the highway corridor raises, as you would understand, strong reactions from our local community.

### **1.3.1 Traffic Noise**

The high levels of noise, which these trucks create is a huge problem for business and residents in close proximity to the highway, affecting property values. Vegetation along the highway serves to reduce noise impacts as well as enhance visual amenity.

We also request the RMS to investigate whether there are road design techniques and/or other methods such as, for example, road surface types, that can dampen traffic

noise. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the RMS on the implementation of such measures as part of the final design.

#### 1.4 Speed

The community has very strong concerns about the perception of excessive speed through the town precinct, especially by large trucks. There is a belief held by many in our community that the proposed highway safety works as put forward by RMS will speed the highway traffic up through the town precinct rather than slowing it down.

The town precinct is an important tourism attraction; it is the last town in the Blue Mountains to retain its original character. The Blackheath community, through the stakeholder groups noted below, is very concerned about the lack of measures within the proposed highway safety works to address speed. Representatives from the local community strongly emphasised the importance of addressing excessive speed along the highway through the Blackheath town precinct at the RMS stakeholder meeting on 5 May 2014. As Michael Paag has subsequently mentioned to you and Chris Barnett, the issue of excessive speed is a major concern for our community. We wholeheartedly reject the findings of the speed assessment included in the RMS potential treatments report.

The community has also expressed strong views that the highway safety works must include physical and visual speed calming measures, including blisters around the school zone and narrow rather than wide shoulders to slow the traffic down along the highway through the town precinct. In essence and as Chris Barnett correctly pointed out, the focus of this project should be *'to improve safety and not increase capacity'*. Views expressed by officers of Blue Mountains City Council that the proposed highway safety works should increase capacity are not supported by the Blackheath community. The retention of the town amenity whilst improving safety for local residents and tourists must continue to be the foundation of this project.

## 2 Highway Safety Initiatives through Blackheath (Section D)

2.1 We once again call on the RMS to include the following safety initiatives in this project, which are notably absent, from the proposals put forward by the RMS in its December 2016 community update:

- i) Reduce the speed limit through the Blackheath town precinct from 60 km to 50 km;
- ii) Reduce the speed limit between the Mt Boyce Truck Checking Station and Ridgewell Road from 80 km to 60 km;
- iii) Install safety cameras at the two signalised pedestrian crossings on the highway in Blackheath, and at the Govetts Leap Road highway intersection;

As mentioned on several occasions and in prior Blackheath Joint Community Submissions, the local community wants a safety camera to be installed at the intersection of the Great Western Highway and Govetts Leap Road and Bundarra Street to address speed and the running of red lights, especially by heavy vehicles at night. We note that Bundarra Street crosses the Main West Rail line and that the level crossing signals are in close proximity to this highway intersection. Given the heightened safety risks of having a significant level crossing in close proximity to the major highway intersection in Blackheath, we strongly believe there are grounds within this project, given its safety focus, to depart from the RMS protocols for the installation of safety cameras and provide a safety camera as part of the proposed intersection treatment at this intersection. We take this opportunity to note that both BMCC and Trish Doyle MLA, Member for Blue Mountains fully support the installation of a safety camera at the intersection of the Great Western Highway and Govetts Leap Road and Bundarra Street.

- iv) Adopt speed calming measures on the highway between Evans Lookout Road and Abbott Street (Hill 33) in the final design to reduce the incidence of excessive speeding and noise along the westbound overtaking lane. This will improve safety for local traffic and pedestrians at the Abbott Street and Prince George Street highway intersections.
- v) **Widened sealed road shoulders:** The community rejects the need for widened sealed road shoulders through the township of Blackheath because widened sealed road shoulders generally result in increased driver speeds. The community's preference, based on information provided by the RMS and research undertaken by the Monash University Accident Research Centre, is for the retention of narrow shoulders as a speed calming measure.

The success of this project rests upon the RMS dealing with the community's concerns regarding the issue of excessive speed along the highway through the town precinct, especially by large trucks.

2.2 We are also concerned that the following initiatives are notably absent from the proposals put forward by the RMS in its December 2016 community update:

- i) Provision of footpaths along the highway;
  - a. Between Ridgewell Road and Radiance Avenue
  - b. Between Whitley Park and Sutton Park
- ii) Implement safety modifications at the Station Street rail overpass including but not limited to:
  - a. Allow enough room for buses and larger vehicles to turn right from the highway on to the rail overpass. Currently there is not enough room for

buses to use the right turn lane to turn right on to the overpass from the highway without blocking eastbound highway traffic.

- b. Allow enough room for buses and larger vehicles to turn left from the highway on to the rail overpass.
- c. Implement measures to stop traffic congestion at the intersection of the rail overpass and Station Street.

The location of the bus stops on either side of the highway at the Station Street rail overpass intersection must also be reviewed. Safe and easy access to bus stops at this location is very important for school children and local residents.

We believe the location of power poles at the Station Street rail overpass intersection must also be examined and modified to improve sight lines for traffic exiting the rail overpass on to the highway.

- iii) Reject BMCC's proposed alignment for the bike track between Blackheath and Mount Victoria on the basis that the proposed alignment is perceived to be unsafe. The community strongly prefers that a bike track be installed alongside the current main western railway alignment.

2.3 In addition to the items raised above we also request that the following measures be included as potential treatments as part of this project:

- Review traffic signaling arrangements to better protect pedestrians crossing the highway against traffic turning right on to the highway from Govetts Leap Road.
- Move the taxi rank that is currently located on the highway outside the railway station known as the 'rail rank' to the drop off zone (State Rail 'Kiss and Ride') and use the existing taxi rank for more parking spaces.
- Fund the implementation of the following landscaping projects
  - BMCC landscaping plan for the area adjacent to the highway in front of the Blackheath War Memorial
  - Fill in the gaps of the trees along the highway as per the BMCC Street Tree Masterplan
  - Landscaping in front of the cemetery to create an appropriate Blackheath town entrance

## 2.4 Proposed Intersection Treatments

We make the following comments in relation to the following RMS proposed intersection treatments as set out in the RMS December 2016 community update.

Brightlands Avenue	- signs only permit left in/left out <u>AGREED</u>
Chelmsford Avenue	- signs only permit left in/left out <u>AGREED</u>
Sutton Park	- dedicated right turn bay <u>AGREED</u> - possible removal of trees at entrance <u>NOT AGREED</u> (refer below)  - widened sealed road shoulders <u>NOT AGREED</u> (refer above) Note: The community does <u>not</u> support provision for a full seagull intersection at the park entrance because of the impact and possible tree removal. The community believes a full seagull intersection is not justified. As noted, the purpose of this upgrade is to improve safety, not increase capacity.
Jellicoe Street	- closing street access from the highway <u>AGREED</u>
Hargraves Street	- dedicated right turn bay <u>AGREED</u>
Prince George Street	- dedicated right turn bay <u>AGREED</u>
Abbott Street	- dedicated right turn and left turn bays <u>AGREED</u>
Leichhardt Street	- signs only permit left in/left out <u>AGREED</u>
Sutton Lane	- signs only permit left in/left out <u>AGREED</u>
Govetts Leap Road	- dedicated left turn and right turn bays, through lane in each direction. Eight on-street car parking spaces would be removed from the westbound side of the highway, west of the intersection. <u>AGREED</u> (refer below)
Gardiner Crescent	- dedicated right turn bay <u>AGREED</u>
Hat Hill Road	- dedicated right turn bay <u>AGREED</u> Note: The community does <u>not</u> support provision for a full seagull intersection at the park entrance because of the impact on possible tree removal. The community believes a full seagull intersection is not justified. As noted the purpose of this upgrade is to improve safety not increase capacity.
Sturt Street	- signs only permit left in/left out <u>AGREED</u>

## 2.5 Govetts Leap Road / Bundarra Street highway intersection

We support dedicated left and right turn lanes with one through lane in each direction. However, as noted above, we request that a safety camera be installed at this intersection as part of the intersection treatment.

We understand that eight on-street parking spaces will be removed from the westbound side of the highway, west of the intersection to achieve the proposed treatment of this intersection. However, as you can appreciate, the loss of eight on-street parking spaces will have a significant impact on local business.

Therefore we request that RMS support the Blackheath community in its negotiations with NSW Train Link (Sydney Trains) to achieve an expansion of the Blackheath Train Station car park on Station Street (on the southern side where large pine trees have been felled) to compensate for the loss of these parking spaces.

We also request RMS support for the installation of a pedestrian level crossing at the Blackheath Train Station for the western side of the rail line, to connect with the existing pedestrian level crossing on the eastern side.

We await the release of the expert arborists' report following the Air Spading that was conducted during the week of Monday, 6 February 2017. As Michael Paag, Adele Colman and Wayne Kelly have explained to you in their meeting with you on Tuesday, 20 December 2016, the large Plane Tree on the corner of Bundarra Street and the Great Western Highway is a tree of environmental and social significance. We reiterate the point that our community will work positively with the RMS to do whatever it takes to ensure this tree is retained.

We emphasise that pedestrian safety and amenity is vital at this intersection.

We request that the RMS investigate with BMCC whether the taxi rank outside the Ivanhoe Hotel can be relocated to facilitate more traffic turning left from Govetts Leap Road on to the highway. This may allow for a better configuration of the intersection on the Govetts Leap Road side to permit the simultaneous movement of traffic turning right from Govetts Leap Road onto the highway and traffic crossing the highway from Govetts Leap Road onto Bundarra Street.

We also request the RMS investigate what other measures and or alterations can be made at the Bundarra Street side of this intersection to increase the flow of traffic from Bundarra Street on to the highway and across on to Govetts Leap Road. However, the large Plane Tree must not be jeopardised by such a request. Neither must the Rotary Town Map on the railway side of the highway east of this intersection be placed in jeopardy.

We are requesting a meeting with NSW Train Link and the RMS in relation to the proposed treatments at this intersection and the related car parking issues (as noted above).

## **2.6 Tree Retention**

We welcome the decision by the RMS to retain the trees at the following locations:



- i. Between Evans Lookout Road and Chelmsford Avenue
- ii. Near cemetery access
- iii. Between Radiance Avenue and Sunbeam Avenue

We also request the RMS reconsider the removal of any trees around the entrance to Sutton Park.

## **2.7 Prince George and Abbott Street Highway Intersections**

### **2.7.1 Tree Removal**

Whilst the community is supportive of the proposed intersection treatments at Prince George and Abbott Street highway intersections, this support is based on the notion that such proposed intersection treatments will deliver safer access for local residents and tourists.

Where trees are to be removed as part of these proposed intersection treatments, we formally request that the Blackheath Streetscape Group be consulted in any landscape plan for the replacement of such trees. Further, any trees that are to be replaced should be replaced in accordance with the BMCC Street Tree Masterplan as developed by BMCC in consultation with the Blackheath Streetscape Group and the local community.

The Blackheath Streetscape Group should be included as a key stakeholder in any Tree Management Plan established by the RMS in connection with this project.

We also request that 'bunch cabling' be installed along the highway from Jellicoe Street to connect with the current bunch cabling that starts on the west bound side of the Abbott Street intersection. This will facilitate the planting of Red Oak trees (*Quercus Rubra*) along this stretch of the highway as per the BMCC Street Tree Masterplan.

The existing power pole on the highway outside The George Boutique Hotel (formerly St Mounts), not the corner pole, is to be relocated to the right hand (north western) side of the driveway on the slip road outside the guesthouse. We request that bunch cabling be maintained. This will allow for the planting of Plane Trees (*Platanus Acerifolia*) along the verge outside The George Boutique Hotel. We also request that the verge be completed and landscaped (including hardscaping) to a standard that is acceptable to the owners of The George Boutique Hotel and in keeping with the BMCC Street Tree Masterplan.

### **2.7.2 Traffic turning right from Abbott Street on to the highway**

Whilst there is general community consensus towards the proposed right turn bay at the Abbott Street highway intersection there is also concern in relation to the safety of traffic turning right from Abbott Street on to the highway. There is a view amongst some in our community that the proposed intersection treatment does not address these concerns. We request that the RMS investigate, as part of the process for the

formulation of the final design for the proposed treatments at this intersection, whether something more can be done to make it safer for traffic turning right on to the highway from Abbott Street, whilst retaining the proposed highway alignment at this intersection and keeping enough space to permit tree plantings in accordance with the Street Tree Masterplan.

We note there is some consideration on the part of the RMS with support from BMCC for a raised median to be installed to prevent the diagonal movement across the media from Abbott Street to Prince George Street and vice versa. However, consideration must be given, when deciding upon the design of such a raised median at this location, to the safety of traffic turning right from Abbott Street on to the highway.

## **2.8 Signage and Road Markings**

As part of the final design for this project, we request the RMS review existing signage along the highway, particularly in relation to tourist attractions such as the Rhododendron Garden and access to the western side of Blackheath via the Station Street rail overpass. We also request funding be set aside within this project for improved signage for key tourist attractions such as the Rhododendron Garden.

We also support the removal of broken barrier line between Hargraves Street and Evans Lookout Road and between Abbott Street and Govetts Leap Road and between Hat Hill Road and Radiance Avenue. A double unbroken barrier line should be installed on the highway at these sections to prevent overtaking.

## **2.9 Overtaking Lane at Hill 33**

We support the RMS in shortening the westbound overtaking lane on the highway at Hill 33. The current overtaking lane ends on a curve and on the crest of Hill 33 resulting in westbound traffic, particularly trucks, spending up as they come over Hill 33 and descend down into the town centre and into a school zone. We strongly believe the overtaking lane should end before the crest of Hill 33. The overtaking lane should not end on a curve. We also call for speed calming measures at the top of Hill 33 for westbound traffic as noted above. Slowing westbound traffic down as it descends Hill 33 into the town centre and Blackheath Public School traffic school zone is very important to our local community. Therefore speed calming measures should also be implemented along the highway for westbound traffic on the descent from Hill 33. Such measures will also improve safety at the Prince George Street and Abbott Street highway intersections.

The above suggested initiatives have come about as a result of extensive consultation between BAG and its supporters, community stakeholder groups noted below, local business owners and local residents.

## **3 Success of the project**

The community has two overarching concerns in relation to the project, which are:

- i) Maintaining the village character and amenity of Blackheath
- ii) Excessive speed, especially by large trucks through the town centre

The success of this project will greatly depend upon how the RMS can resolve these two overreaching concerns. On this point we note the willingness of the community to work with the RMS through BAG to address these concerns.

#### **4 Next Step in the Consultation Process for the Great Western Highway Safety Improvements Project of the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Mount Victoria**

As noted at the RMS Blackheath stakeholder meetings held on Thursday, 24 January 2013, Monday, 5 May 2014 and in subsequent discussions between Michael Paag and yourself, we would be pleased to meet with you and your team to review and discuss the RMS recommendations and design proposals for the Highway Safety Improvements Project of the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Mount Victoria.

A copy of this submission has been forwarded to all Blue Mountains City Council Ward 1 Councilors, Trish Doyle MLA, Member for Blue Mountains and the Hon Melinda Pavey MLA, Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight for their information.

Please do not hesitate to contact Michael Paag, Chair, Blackheath Highway Action Group on (m) 0423 596 240 or by email, [michaelpaag@gmail.com](mailto:michaelpaag@gmail.com) if you require further explanations and/or additional information in relation to our submission.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Paag  
Chair  
Blackheath Highway Action Group

On behalf of the Blackheath Area Community Alliance and following stakeholder groups, which are members of this Alliance.

Blackheath Area Community Alliance  
Blackheath & District Chamber of Commerce & Community Inc.  
Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre  
Blackheath Streetscape Group  
Blackheath-Mt Victoria RSL Sub-Branch  
Blackheath Rhododendron Festival Committee Inc.  
Blackheath Area Mens Shed  
Popes Glen Bush Care Group  
Blackheath Area Tourism & Adventure Group

Blackheath Community Centre 377 Management Committee  
1<sup>st</sup> Blackheath Scout Group  
Blackheath Conference – St Vincents de Paul Society of NSW  
Blue Mountains Rhododendron Society of NSW Inc.  
The Big Fix Inc.  
Blackheath/Mount Victoria Rural Fire Brigade  
Frog Hollow Bush Care Group  
Mount Victoria Community Association Inc.  
Medlow Bath Residents Association Inc.  
Probus Club of Blackheath Inc.  
CWA of NSW Blackheath Branch  
Blackheath & District Horticultural Society Inc.  
Blackheath Choir Festival  
Blackheath Public School Council  
Friends of Blackheath Pool & Memorial Park

- cc. Office of Trish Doyle MLA, State Member for Blue Mountains  
Office of Susan Templeman MP, Federal Member for Macquarie  
Councillor Kerry Brown, Ward 1 Councilor, Blue Mountains City Council  
Councillor Kevin Schreiber, Ward 1 Councilor, Blue Mountains City Council  
Councillor Don McGregor, Ward 1 Councilor, Blue Mountains City Council  
Councillor Mark Greenhill, Mayor, Blue Mountains City Council