



West Tamar Highway: Launceston to Legana Corridor Study

RACT Submission to Department of State Growth

May 2020

The Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania

RACT enjoys a trusted position and extensive market penetration in the community. More than 200,000 Tasmanians are RACT members.

Formed in 1923, RACT is an apolitical and independent transport, infrastructure, road safety, tourism and mobility advocate.

It is committed to supporting and furthering the interests of Tasmanians and does this through a comprehensive program of consultation, education, awareness and public advocacy.

RACT is represented in a number of stakeholder reference organisations in Tasmania and undertakes liaison with government and other groups. It also has three regional advocacy committees which are made up of local volunteers and other relevant stakeholders.

RACT's advocacy activity is defined by a series of public policy documents developed and endorsed by RACT's Advocacy Committee and Board.

These policies have been informed by history, experience, statistical analysis, consultation, industry knowledge and, most importantly, our members.

Nationally, RACT is a constituent member of the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) which represents some 8 million Australian motorists.

Internationally, RACT has joined with other Australian motoring organisations as a member of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) to work on road safety and related issues at a global level.

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RACT's Mobility Strategy

The RACT Mobility Strategy contains three key pillars, which include road safety, future mobility and sustainability, with an underlying theme of representing Tasmanian road users. Within each key pillar sits RACT's vision statements. The statements most applicable to this corridor study include:

Road safety vision

- Reduce congestion on Tasmanian roads.
- Improve Tasmanian roads so that they are rated no less than three stars under the AusRAP scheme by 2030.

Future mobility vision

- Have a range of mobility options that are efficient, increase flexibility and keep the community safe.

- Provide for safe, separated infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians.

Sustainability vision

- To encourage multi-passenger options such as transit lanes with a defined minimum number of occupants.
- To have active transport options that encourage Tasmanians to undertake increased physical activity.

Background and Evidence

The study

The West Tamar Highway: Launceston to Legana Corridor Study will help to identify options to improve the safety and connectivity between West Tamar suburbs and Launceston for all transport modes.

It will consider the West Tamar Highway between the Launceston CBD and McEwans Road, north of Legana. The information gathered will help to prepare future plans for the identified options and itemise and prioritise them for funding approval.

This report will also help to inform the feasibility study for the new Tamar River crossing between the West Tamar Highway and Newnham in the east.

Growth

The West Tamar population is expected to increase from around 24,000 people in 2019 to approximately 27,000 by 2042, based on medium population projections. The West Tamar area also has a low density of 34 people per square kilometre.

According to the Tasmanian Government, the West Tamar Council is planning to cater for this growth through large residential subdivisions, which would put pressure on an increasingly congested road network.

If the West Tamar region's population continues to increase with low density, the municipal area will be faced with increased urban sprawl. When this is coupled with poor public and active transport options and access, commuters will be faced with increased traffic congestion.

A snapshot of the West Tamar Highway

The Legana to Launceston corridor of the West Tamar Highway caters for a significant number of vehicle movements from the suburbs of Trevallyn, Riverside and Legana. Riverside and Legana are also key growth pockets, with populations increasing in these suburbs.

There are already major congestion issues between Legana and Launceston during peak traffic periods, with around 29,000 vehicle movements per day along this section of the highway. Most of the traffic is between Riverside and Launceston.

According to the Department of State Growth, during the morning peak, 54% of traffic coming from north west Launceston (Trevallyn, Riverside and Legana) comes into the Launceston CBD, with 19% travelling to the north east and east (Invermay, Mowbray, Mayfield, Newnham and Rocherlea). A further 20% finish in southern or western Launceston.

Similarly, in the afternoon peak, 49% of traffic coming from the Launceston CBD travels to north west Launceston, with 17% coming from the north east and east. A further 22% come from southern or western Launceston.

Public transport

The average commute to work in Greater Launceston is around 9km, with 21% of the population living around 2.4km from work and 74% around 10 km. As a result, it is possible to travel from anywhere in the broader urban area to the CBD within 20 minutes.

These statistics highlight a significant opportunity to increase public transport uptake in Greater Launceston, with public transport only making up 2% of journey to work trips in the region.

Furthermore, RACT surveyed Greater Launceston residents in 2019 and found that less than 1% of respondents take public transport into Launceston.

Tasmania's public transport network has few bus priority measures, meaning buses are subject to the same congestion and delay issues experienced by other modes of transport. There are also concerns relating to a lack of park and ride connections to public transport, as well as first and last mile travel issues, where the nearest bus stop is beyond walking distance.

Furthermore, 60% of respondents to the 2017 Tasmanian Travel and Physical Activity Study lived within a five minute walk of a bus stop. However, more than half said they rarely used the bus during the week. Some concerns related to frequency, timetables, complicated trips and delays, inaccessibility, lack of regular stops, excessive costs and walking distance to stops.

In terms of the Launceston to Legana corridor, it is a concern that there are no public transport prioritisation measures, such as transit lanes, as well as a lack of park and ride options or first and last mile travel opportunities. This is a disincentive to bus uptake.

RACT research also shows there are also limited public transport options available between Riverside and Launceston's CBD.

West Tamar bus routes operate between Cormiston Road in north Riverside and the Launceston city interchange. From Cormiston Road to Pomona Road, buses operate and stop on both the West Tamar Highway, as well as suburban streets. South of Pomona Road, they only operate on suburban streets, rather than utilising the highway.

Buses along this West Tamar route also operate at a low frequency, with the waiting time at each stop ranging from 30-60 minutes.

As a result, any works should consider prioritisation measures for buses on the highway. Development of dedicated infrastructure could incentivise public transport and help to alleviate congestion, particularly if implemented between Riverside and Launceston, with high frequency services at stops based on density.

There is an abundance of on-street parking space on the West Tamar Highway that can easily be retrofitted to accommodate a transit lane for either buses or multiple-occupancy vehicles. The section of elevated road median between Trevallyn and Riverside could also be partially converted into additional road space to facilitate transit lanes.

Lastly, as mentioned, there are no park and ride options in the West Tamar area. While the free Tiger Bus operates in the inner Launceston area, RACT believes some form of park and ride option from the West Tamar region into the Launceston CBD is required in the medium term.

Park and ride would incentivise bus travel by enabling West Tamar residents to park in their municipal area and travel by bus to the Launceston CBD.

Active transport

As mentioned, the average commute to work in Greater Launceston is around 9km, with 21% of the population living around 2.4km of work and 74% around 10km. As a result, it is possible to travel from anywhere in the broader urban area to the CBD within 20 minutes.

This means there is a significant opportunity to increase active transport in Greater Launceston. However, walking and cycling make up just 6% of journey to work trips in the region.

Furthermore, RACT surveyed Greater Launceston residents in 2019 and found that just 2% of respondents walk or cycle into Launceston.

Bicycles are a more efficient use of road space, thereby reducing congestion. However, there is a lack of separated cycleways in Tasmania, which help to reduce the risk of rider injury. This infrastructure can alleviate safety concerns for cyclists, enticing more people to ride.

Furthermore, according to the Department of State Growth's Transport Access Strategy, there is evidence people will cycle around 6km to work and other destinations, and 3km to access high quality public transport, providing there are safe cycleways. It is also accepted that most people will walk around 3km to work and other destinations, and 400-800 metres to access quality bus services.

However, there is a lack of active transport options on the corridor, in the form of on-road, separated cycleways from Legana to Riverside and through to Launceston's CBD. This is a disincentive to cycling uptake and is also resulting in a number of safety and congestion-related concerns.

Cycling options between Riverside and Launceston are urgently required as cyclists are riding on a highway with limited room. This not only results in safety concerns but also causes additional congestion during peak periods as left lane traffic needs to merge into the right lane to avoid riders.

As mentioned, there is a large amount of on-street parking on the highway, which could be retrofitted to accommodate a separated cycleway. The section of elevated road median between Trevallyn and Riverside should also be partially converted into additional road space to facilitate cycleways.

While there is a shared pedestrian and cyclist path between Launceston and the Tailrace Centre at Riverside, this path does not continue north to the Tamar Island wetlands and Legana.

Furthermore, there are also safety concerns relating to cyclists riding in 100km/h sections of the highway between Legana and Riverside.

Pedestrian facilities also need reviewing at Legana, where there are no pedestrian crossings at the Freshwater Point Road roundabout. People are forced to walk across the highway to the shopping centre.

Riverside

In terms of Riverside specifically, congestion data shows around 29,000 vehicle movements on the West Tamar Highway each day, as recorded at Margaret Street (at the end of the highway).

Of these, there are 27,000 vehicles recorded at Pomona Road, 23,000 at Ecclestone Road and 16,000 at Cormiston Road.

RACT understands traffic congestion between the Cormiston Road and Pomona Road intersections is compounded by school drop-offs and pick-ups, with 2500 students attending four schools in this 2km section of highway. The schools include Launceston Christian School, Riverside Primary School, Riverside High School and St Anthony's Catholic School.

The road and lane design between Cormiston and Pomona roads needs to be improved to alleviate congestion during school drop-off and pick-up periods. This could include dedicated slip or turning lanes into the schools.

North-bound traffic from Launceston is also forced to merge from two lanes to one when travelling through Trevallyn, just south of Deans Lane. This creates a traffic bottleneck until the highway returns to two lanes at Allawah Street.

Furthermore, the West Tamar Highway's north and south-bound traffic is separated by an elevated median strip from Trevallyn through to the northern end of Riverside. This reduces road space.

Legana

Congestion data shows that there are around 17,000 vehicle movements per day at Acropolis Drive to the south of Legana, with 9500 at Bindaree Road to the north of Legana.

As a result, there are particular congestion concerns between the Freshwater Point Road roundabout and the Acropolis Drive roundabout.

There is a need to review traffic flow and efficiency through these two roundabout intersections, with a more efficient solution to be put in place that relieves congestion.

In terms of private residences, there are also concerns about the lack of dedicated turning lanes for vehicles turning into side streets and residential properties through Legana between the Freshwater Point Road roundabout and Bindaree Road. There are also no left-hand turning lanes into Muddy Creek Road and Bindaree Road.

Lastly, pedestrian safety is a significant concern at the Freshwater Point Road roundabout as residents are forced to walk across the busy highway to the Legana shopping centre without safety measures, such as pedestrian crossings with lights or pedestrian refuges.

RACT has also undertaken consultation with Legana residents, particularly in the vicinity of the Muddy Creek Road area, to understand the key issues facing the West Tamar Highway in this suburb. Key concerns included:

- Rapidly increasing residential and commercial development at Legana is increasing traffic on the highway and its connecting roads. This is impacting the capacity and efficiency of the highway due to a lack of road upgrades and management.
- Between Bindaree Road and Fulton Street, there are concerns relating to vehicles entering and exiting the highway from side streets or adjoining properties. There are no median turning lanes onto side streets or properties, as well as a poor line of sight.
 - The current speed limit and sight line impacts pedestrians attempting to cross the highway. There are no pedestrian crossings or refuges in place.
 - There are a number of older residents and children in this area, which exacerbates these issues.
- Residents also believe the Bindaree Road/Muddy Creek Road junction at the West Tamar Highway is too narrow. There is also no left-hand turning lane for vehicles entering Muddy Creek Road.

Position

RACT is well aware of the traffic congestion and road safety concerns along the West Tamar Highway through Trevallyn, Riverside and Legana.

As a result, RACT has been a long-time advocate for improvements along this corridor.

RACT believes the Launceston to Legana corridor study must consider options and incentives for public and active transport modes, as well as multiple-occupancy incentives.

This will help lower private and single occupant vehicle use and therefore congestion. Therefore, RACT suggests the study should consider the following:

1. Bus prioritisation measures between Riverside and Launceston. These should be complemented by high frequency bus services, with an increase in bus stops to be based on route density in order to improve first and last mile travel.
 - This can incentivise public transport, therefore assisting in the reduction of private vehicle-related congestion for people commuting to work and students travelling to school.
 - This could be facilitated by retrofitting on-street parking along the corridor, or converting a section of the elevated road median between Trevallyn and Riverside into additional road space.
2. Multiple-occupancy vehicle incentivisation by incorporating a T2 or T3 lane for car-pooling. This can minimise single occupancy vehicle use.
3. The development of a park and ride facility on in the West Tamar region to transport people to the Launceston CBD is required in the medium term. This can also incentivise public transport.
4. Active transport options along the corridor that incentivise cycling and walking uptake through improved safety and access. These options can also reduce congestion caused by a limited road space. These measures should include:
 - An on-road separated cycleway between Riverside and Launceston for commuter cyclists. This could also be facilitated by immediately retrofitting on-street parking along the corridor, or converting a section of the elevated road median between Trevallyn and Riverside into additional road space.
 - Extension of the shared cyclist and pedestrian path beyond the Riverside Tailrace Centre through to the Tamar Island wetlands and Legana.
 - Recreational cycling facilities should also be provided between Legana and Riverside as this is a high-speed corridor that is popular with riders.
 - Improved pedestrian safety measures through Legana, particularly at the Freshwater Point Road roundabout, that allow residents to cross the highway safely to reach the Legana shopping centre. This should include pedestrian crossings with lights or pedestrian refuges.
 - Maintenance to footpaths along the highway, where necessary.
5. Improvements to road and lane design between Cormiston and Pomona roads to alleviate congestion during school drop-off and pick-up periods. This could include dedicated slip or turning lanes into the schools.
6. A review of traffic flow and efficiency through the Freshwater Point Road and Acropolis Drive roundabout intersections, with a more efficient solution to be put in place that relieves congestion.

7. The installation of dedicated turning lanes for traffic entering residential properties through Legana between the Freshwater Point Road roundabout and Bindaree Road. Left-hand turning lanes are also required into Muddy Creek and Bindaree roads.
8. A review of the road environment at Legana in line with the concerns made by residents during RACT's consultation. These are outlined on page six of this document.
9. In terms of the proposal for a new Tamar bridge between the West Tamar Highway and Newnham, RACT will withhold final judgement until the project's feasibility study is completed.