Submission on Ridgley Highway upgrade

May 2022

RACT enjoys a trusted position and extensive market penetration in the community.

More than 209,000 Tasmanians are RACT members. We are the largest and strongest member organisation in Tasmania.

Formed in 1923, RACT is an apolitical and independent transport infrastructure, road safety and mobility advocate. We are committed to supporting and furthering the interests of Tasmanians and we do this through a comprehensive program of consultation, education, awareness and public advocacy.

RACT is represented by senior staff in a number of stakeholder reference organisations in Tasmania and undertakes structured liaison with government and other stakeholder groups.

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

RACT is a regular contributor to the committees and forums of the AAA.

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.

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

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

The efficient movement of road freight is vital to the Tasmanian economy, but the cost of building and maintaining our major road infrastructure to a safe and efficient standard to meet that demand is high.

Heavy vehicles comprise just 8% of Tasmania's registered vehicles but clock up about 45% of vehicle kilometres travelled each year.

To manage the impact of this vital sector of the economy, Tasmania has to invest heavily in our key freight routes, and in road safety initiatives to protect all road users.

To achieve that we have strongly advocated for our key freight routes to be upgraded to a 3-star AusRAP rating by 2030.

As a category 2 road under the state's road hierarchy, Ridgley Highway is a key freight route.

Ridgley Highway strategy

Submission on a strategy to upgrade 50 kilometres of the Ridgley Highway from Burnie through to the intersection with the Murchison Highway at Guilford.

The RACT notes that the strategy for the highway "will examine the current road environment and look at what is needed to make it safer for road users and expected increases in heavy vehicle traffic."

It will examine the impact of increased mining freight from new mining projects, including the Rogetta iron ore project near Hampshire and the Riley iron ore mine near Rosebery.

The State Government notes that the Ridgley Highway is a key link for freight between mining sites at Hampshire and a woodchip mill, to the Burnie Port.

The RACT recognises the importance of this transport corridor and how it can meet community and industry needs without compromising safety.

There are three key considerations in the plan to upgrade the Ridgley Highway from Burnie to Guildford:

- Safety of all road users.
- The safety and amenity of people who live on or near the highway.
- The highway as a key freight route with predicted increased growth.

RACT long-held policy position is that the state and national highway network is rated and maintained at no less than three stars under the AusRAP scheme by 2030.

It also advocates for newly constructed sections of highway to achieve a safety rating of no less than four stars.

And it supports the position of the Australian Automobile Association that road design should meet those safety standards before any federal funding flows to state road projects.

A four-star rated highway should include:

- Multiple lanes.
- Improved lane widths.
- Sealed shoulders (particularly on cyclist routes).
- Visual cues and delineation.
- Highly visible signage, including electronic signage to give real-time information to road users.
- Highly visible line markings.
- Audible edge lines, medians.
- Flexible wire rope barriers to reduce the incidence of run-off-road and head-on crashes.
- Safe overtaking opportunities no more than 7-8 minutes apart.
- Turning, stopping and rest bays.

The particular characteristics of the Ridgley Highway offer a series of challenges.

It runs through an agricultural zone, so there is farm machinery movement to consider, numerous private farm and residential entrances, and the movement of heavy vehicles already servicing agricultural enterprises and existing service businesses. It is also an alternative route to the West Coast, joining the Murchison Highway at Guilford.

It passes through several small towns so there are significant safety challenges with an increase in heavy vehicle movements.

Those challenges are already well documented in the community contribution to the consultation on the future of the highway.

In the case of the township of Ridgley, the RACT believes there is a community case for the township to be bypassed. This would deliver not just a safety benefit but an amenity benefit with reduced noise.

As the community consultation via Social Pinpoint shows, residents are already dealing with these challenges and are seeking solutions through road design on this project.

We note that the Ridgley Highway is approved for use by PBS 2B A-Double vehicles of 30 metres in length and at a maximum speed of 90 kmh.

Increased use of heavy vehicles in this category – which deliver greater safety, lower noise, and lower emissions – will require passing lanes.

As the project will be a staged reconstruction there will also need to be speed limit management along the corridor. We note community concerns outlined in the Social Pinpoint on speed limits around residential zones.

The RACT recommends:

- Road widening and sealed shoulders in the short term.
- The construction of passing lanes in accordance with Austroads standards.
- Construction of heavy-vehicle rest areas.
- The bypassing of Ridgeley township with associated noise reduction infrastructure.
- Upgrading of road junctions to improve safety.
- Highly visible signage, including electronic signage to give real-time information to road users.
- Highly visible line markings.
- Audible edge lines, medians.
- Flexible wire rope barriers to reduce the incidence of run-off-road and head-on crashes.
- Ensuring that speed limits reflect the quality of the road. This should be determined be considering roadside access points to property, road width and construction, and a lack of edgelines and sealed shoulders.

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