

For Public Notice via Internet

REASONS FOR DECISION UNDER *ENVIRONMENT EFFECTS ACT 1978*

Title of Proposal: **Second Murray River Crossing at Echuca-Moama (Mid-West Corridor)**

Proponent: VicRoads (with the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA))

Description of Project:

The project involves the construction of a second Murray River crossing at Echuca-Moama on an alignment termed the 'Mid-West Corridor'. The proposal includes crossings across both the Murray and Campaspe Rivers, together with a new 'Link Road' across the Murray and Campaspe River floodplains and improvements to existing approach roads in Victoria and New South Wales (NSW).

VicRoads intends to stage construction with the initial phase planned as a two-lane two-directional 'Link Road' and a single bridge across each waterway, with a further stage to be completed once the first stage reaches capacity (likely to be upwards of 30 years) to bring the project to its ultimate form of a 4 lane divided 'Link Road' with two one-way bridges across each waterway.

Decision:

The Minister for Planning has decided that an Environment Effects Statement is not required for the proposed Murray River Crossing at Echuca-Moama (Mid-West Corridor), as described in the referral accepted on 22 December 2009, subject to the following conditions:

- (1) An Environment Report is to be prepared, to the satisfaction of the Department of Planning and Community Development, which documents the likely environmental effects of both the proposed Mid-West Corridor alignment and any relevant siting or design variations that may offer significantly better environmental outcomes.

In examining the preferred alignment and relevant design variations, this report is to document (with respect to Victorian interests):

- (i) A consolidated assessment (either drawing on or augmenting available technical studies) of both the likely effects of the project on the following environmental assets, and associated implications for project siting and design:
 - a. geotechnical risks, including in relation to groundwater, river bed and bank stability and land contamination;
 - b. threatened terrestrial and aquatic flora and fauna species as well as ecological communities, including as a result of habitat clearance and fragmentation;
 - c. floodplain function and ecology, including aggregate effects associated with the crossing of two waterways;
 - d. Aboriginal cultural heritage;
 - e. non-Aboriginal cultural heritage, including that related to the Echuca Historic Precinct;
 - f. residential amenity (including visual, traffic and noise aspects) and residential land requirements;
 - g. the accessibility and availability of social and recreational infrastructure in Victoria Park, as well as on the proposed Murray River Regional Park and vistas along the Murray River and its environs.

- (ii) A comparative evaluation of the likely effects and merits of the Mid-West Corridor alignment relative to other alignment options or variations either assessed through the previous EES process or subsequently identified.
- (iii) An outline of the intended approach to project design as well as environmental management during both construction and operation of the project, including:
 - a. an outline of potential project staging;
 - b. an overarching environmental protection strategy (or equivalent) to guide the preparation of environmental management plans for project construction and operation;
 - c. details of any further studies or investigations to be undertaken during the detailed design phase;
 - d. provisions and commitments for the implementation of appropriate environmental management measures;
 - e. the availability of suitable ecological offsets for unavoidable losses of native vegetation;
 - f. procedures for monitoring, reporting and auditing of environmental performance.
- (2) When completed to the satisfaction of the Department of Planning and Community Development, the Environment Report is to be exhibited for public comment for a period of 30 business days.
- (3) Before determining the suitability of the proposed Mid-West Corridor alignment and design, an expert advisory committee is to be appointed by the Minister for Planning to review the Environment Report and any public submissions received in response to it, as well as to conduct consultation as directed, before providing written advice to the Minister.

Reasons for decision:

- The strategic need for a second Murray River crossing has been established through the previous EES process and does not need further public review in the context of associated environmental effects of the new proposal.
- While the project may give rise to a range of potential adverse effects, including on native vegetation and terrestrial habitats, residential amenity, recreational assets and cultural heritage, these are effects are likely to be of largely local significance (having regard to opportunities for avoidance, mitigation and offsetting).
- The potential effects of the project have generally been well characterised in the technical investigations undertaken by the proponent to date and are not so complex as to warrant major new studies.
- Further, while a documented comparison of the effects of the Mid-West Corridor proposal with the effects of other available alignments or design variations (including those assessed through the previous assessment process under the EE Act) is needed, this can be achieved without requiring an EES.
- Consequently, a consolidated assessment report, largely drawing upon existing environmental studies, and followed by an appropriate opportunity for public comment and review, would provide a suitable basis for decision-making on the final location of the proposed bridge and associated road infrastructure.

Date of Decision:

– 1 APR 2010