

President's Report 2022 - 23

Save the Snowy Rail Bridge Association Inc, 23 August 2023

The past 12 months have seen an enormous amount of progress on the Snowy Rail Bridge project, in spite of which there is yet to be a sod turned on site. There is good reason to be optimistic that we will soon see on the ground activity, but it has been quite a gruelling year which has placed significant time demands on committee members.

Milestones of the past 12 months:

- Design and costings for the Bridge restoration completed by Wood Research and Design, with a preliminary report provided in January 2023. With initial costings indicating the project would be over budget (an outcome that has always been anticipated) the PCG agreed on a preferred rescope that delivers repair of the substructure and partial decking, with further funding sought to complete the decking component.
- Tenders were opened for construction works in May, resulting in interviews with contractors in the first week of July
- Submission of a Planning Permit application to East Gippsland Shire Council in July with a planning consultant engaged to finalise and submit our application. The work required to get to this point was extensive, requiring
 - An archaeological assessment of potential cultural heritage impact for the Registered Aboriginal Party (GunaiKurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation - GLAWAC)
 - Heritage Impact Assessment, for which heritage architects were engaged to provide a report
 - Vegetation offset report – another specialist consultant
 - Full design work on proposed carparks at eastern and western ends of the bridge access.
- Community information session in May this year, well attended by locals.
- Landscape Master Plan completed by Ratio (landscape architects), to provide a visual overview of how the bridge construction works (State funded) would tie in with the landscaping and interpretive works (Federally funded)

Keeping these (and no doubt other key outcomes I've failed to include) has required constant meetings and communications with our Project Control Group (consisting of STSRB Inc members, external stakeholders and our Project Manager) in addition to which we have had subgroups working on further funding, developing interpretive information, communications and our executive who meet monthly. Innumerable other communications take place between everyone involved to deliver these milestones as well as the governance and admin machinery of the association ticking over.

Current Project Status

- Pending approval of a Variation to our grant agreement with the State Government, we have nominated a preferred tenderer to deliver a rescoped design that will include essential major repairs to the bridge substructure, and partial re-decking of the bridge from either end to a 'viewing platform'. This grant variation has to go to a statewide steering committee (TIPSC) and then the Minister before it is signed off.
- Works funded by the Federal Government Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grant (car parks, landscaping and interpretive info, sculptural eastern embankment walk, underbridge discovery trail, activation event) will commence as soon as possible in order to meet the required finishing timeline of March 2024.
- We are awaiting the result of an Expression of Interest to the Federal Growing Regions grant for funds to complete the decking.

I am so proud of what our committee has achieved this year. This is a massive project to be managed by a small group of volunteers in a little country town, and I believe we are rising to the occasion magnificently. My deepest thanks to all of you.

Thanks to our former committee member Garry Squires, who resigned due to a substantial increase in his responsibilities elsewhere. I'd also like to thank our Project Manager, Lloyd Murrell from GPM whose expertise and willingness to constantly field a layperson's question are valued equally. Thanks also to John Shaw, one of the authors of the report that kicked off this project in 2015 who is kindly donating his invaluable expertise to assist our Project Manager as we move closer to the construction phase.

I sincerely hope that in 12 months time we will be celebrating substantial progress and starting to see the benefits of the project flow through to our community.

- Liz Mitchell