

1. Road Safety Improvement Proposal – Bowers Road, Winton

SF/1674

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

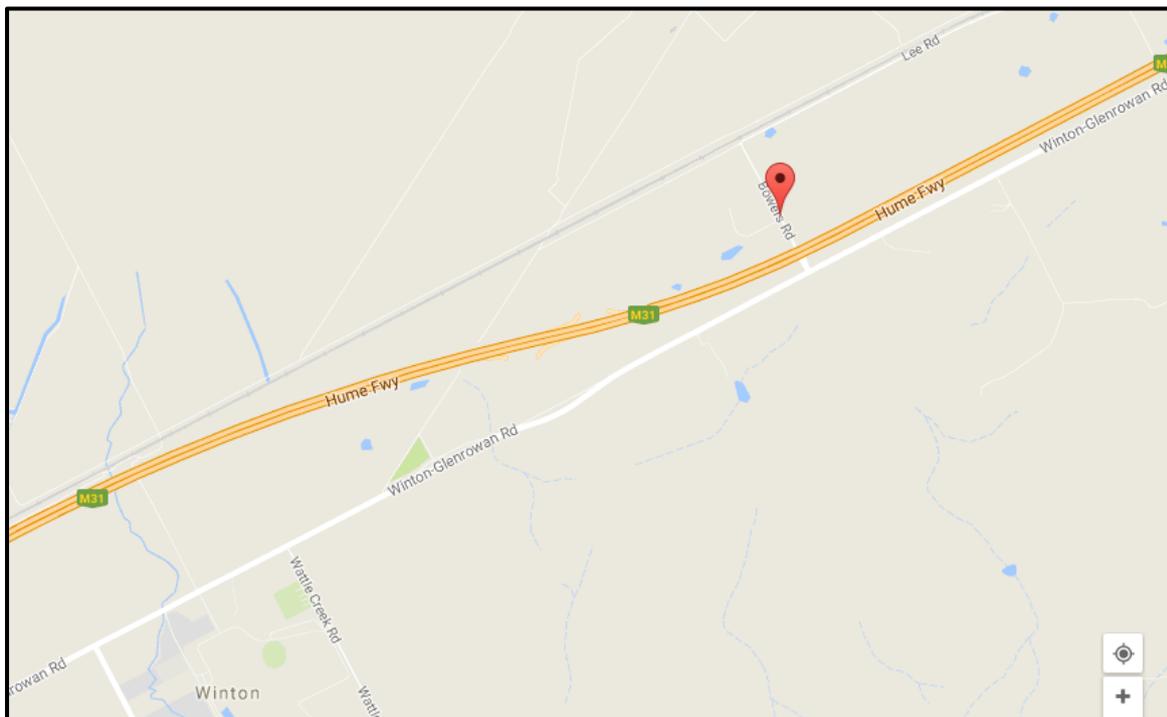
The report outlines a proposal to change the use of Bowers Road at Winton.

BACKGROUND

Following a double fatality at the Bowers Road intersection with the Hume Freeway at Winton on Sunday 28 May 2017, Council Officers have been working with Victoria Police and VicRoads to improve the safety of this intersection and minimise the likelihood of further loss of life.

The intersection is located north of the Winton Motor Raceway and provides access for vehicles travelling southbound to both this regional tourist hub, as well as the Lurg, Greta and Glenrowan West areas.

Bowers Road also extends northward across the freeway to access the Winton Wetlands, Chesneyvale and surrounding localities.



DISCUSSION

Representatives of Victoria Police, VicRoads and Council met first onsite on 7 June 2017 and again at the Council offices on 29 August 2017. At the first meeting options canvassed to improve the safety of the intersection include:

- Permanent closure of the intersection on one or both sides
- Making the intersection a 'left in/left out' arrangement on the southern side
- Closure of the intersection for major events at the Motor Raceway sending all vehicles through either the Benalla or Glenrowan interchanges to access the Hume Freeway
- Leaving the site unchanged

Of note from the inspection was a sign at the intersection that pre-empted future closure of the access. This sign is believed to be more than 25 years old based on the corporate logo referring to the Roads Construction Authority and the age of the Freeway.



The Winton Glenrowan Road has a 20 tonne gross load limit from Bowers Road until the beginning of the Glenrowan hill. It is believed the culverts on the Winton Glenrowan Road are substandard. This impacts on vehicles travelling east bound.

It was agreed at the meeting that before any preferred change was proposed that the following data would be collected:

- Impact of any closure on travel times for surrounding properties and establish extent of likely households affected
- Collect traffic counts to establish frequency of use of Bowers Road on both sides of the Hume Freeway
- Investigate the possible use of the Side Traffic Activated Rural Speeds (STARS) system for alerting Freeway drivers to vehicles on side roads and implementing an

automated speed reduction

These measures formed the basis of the discussions on 29 August. Specifically:

- It was noted that alternative access to the freeway on the southern side (Winton Glenrowan Road) is either west to the roundabout near Benalla (approximately four minutes) or east to Glenrowan township (approximately seven minutes). These routes are all sealed roads
- Alternative access to the freeway on the northern side is via Lee, Gould, Ashmead and Glenrowan Boweya Roads. At the Ashmead Road intersection of Glenrowan Boweya Road you can either turn right into Glenrowan or left and go to Benalla via Lake Mokoan and Benalla Yarrawonga Roads. From Bowers Road to Glenrowan is approximately 12 minutes. From Bowers Road to Sydney Road is approximately 29 mins. These routes are a combination of sealed and unsealed roads adding to the travel time.
- There are approximately 12 dwellings in the area which may be affected by the closure.
- Business affected by the closure are not limited to but possibly include Winton Motor Raceway, AusNet, garbage trucks, postal deliveries and school buses.
- Traffic counts were consistent on most days except for Fridays when there was significantly greater use of the Winton arm of Bowers Road.
- Preliminary discussions with Winton Motor Raceway did not identify any significant impact on operations if the access was closed either permanently or on an event basis
- Potential driver disobedience was noted as a risk if the closure was limited to event days only causing a further hazard to other road users
- The STARS system is expensive at this time; though expected to become more affordable as implementation and application increases. Its use is currently in the 'pilot' stage at three sites in the Hume Region. The vehicle numbers on the southern side of Bowers Road to Winton would make the use of a speed reduction system highly problematic on the busier days – dropping the freeway speed southbound to 80kph on 500 occasions on a Friday was considered likely to frustrate other road users and reduce the compliance of the safety treatment.
- Cross movements across the Freeway lanes and limited use of the northern leg of Bowers Road did not present the same challenges.

Consequently it was proposed that the Council be asked to consider:

1. The permanent closure of Bowers Road on the Winton leg, in a manner that allowed the road to be used for emergency or diversion needs (ie gates like those used elsewhere along the Hume); and
2. The retention of the northern leg and central freeway lane connections for the northern leg of Bowers Road.

If this request is supported it will need to be the subject of a community consultation process similar to that used for the change in speed around the Health Precinct. Direct engagement of all property owners in the immediate area, as well as input from emergency services, Ausnet, Winton Motor Raceway and nearby localities such

as Lurg, Upper Lurg and Greta West, as well as Glenrowan residents and the Rural City of Wangaratta would need to be involved.

Social media promotion through Facebook to complement traditional newspaper, radio and other coverage would be advantageous.

Given the scale of this affected area there would be some lead time proposed to prepare a range of different media information packs for various individuals, groups and communities.

Whilst the single accident might not seem sufficient to trigger such a substantial change, the aged signage at the site shows that the closure was always envisaged at some future date. The traffic levels on the Winton side now exceed the thresholds for use of the intersection on peak days and this is a valid consideration. Furthermore the upgraded Benalla-Winton interchange has changed the safety landscape and the few minutes travelling in the 'wrong' direction to use this roundabout is a much safer choice than the previous road manoeuvre here.

COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2021 IMPLICATIONS

Connected and Vibrant Community

- *Encourage community members to be healthy, safe and active.*

Engaging and Accessible Places and Spaces

- *Develop and maintain infrastructure so that it meets community need.*

Thriving and Progressive Economy

- *Attract, support and strengthen local business.*

High Performing Organisation

- *Strengthen community and stakeholder engagement in planning and decision making.*
- *Provide good governance and responsible management and planning.*
- *Demonstrate strong leadership and advocacy on key local issues on behalf of our community.*
- *We are compliant with our legislative and risk management responsibilities.*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs of advertising and seeking community comment can be met from the 2017/18 Council Budget.

If the closure is supported then the proposed gates or other treatment would be expected to be a shared project funded by the Council and VicRoads.

Recommendation:

That the Council seek community input on the proposal to close the Bowers Road connection between the Hume Freeway and Winton Glenrowan Road to address safety concerns through a broad engagement process that includes:

- **Winton, Glenrowan West, Lurg and Upper Lurg residents**
- **emergency services**
- **Rural City of Wangaratta**
- **Winton Motor Raceway**
- **Ausnet Services.**

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Councillor Firth / Councillor Alexander:

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- **emergency services**
- **Rural City of Wangaratta**
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Carried