

Western Highway Action Committee

Vision and Priorities 2026

The Western Highway will be a safe, efficient transport system linking Melbourne, Adelaide and the regional centres along the route, built to current standards and future-proofed for new opportunities and demands.

WHAC



Acknowledgement of Country

The Western Highway Action Committee acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and acknowledges their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past and present.



Advocacy Priorities for the Western Highway

These projects represent the Western Highway Action Committee’s highest investment priorities, identified through detailed analysis and engagement with member councils and stakeholders.

They address the most urgent safety, capacity and connectivity challenges along the corridor.

Highest Priority Projects	Advocacy Ask
Duplication between Buangor and Ararat	Duplicate the 12.5 km section between Buangor and Ararat to provide two lanes in each direction to freeway standards, new bridges and a grade-separated interchange at Hillside Road. This is the next critical section required to extend completed duplication works westward.
Construction of the Beaufort Bypass	Construction of an approximately 11-kilometre dual carriageway freeway standard section of the Western Highway to the north of Beaufort, connecting duplicated sections on either side of the township and replacing the existing two-lane alignment through the town centre.
Western Highway Upgrade between Melton and the Western Ring Road (M80)	Increased capacity, urbanisation and upgraded interchanges on the Western Highway including Bulmans, Ferris, Leakes, Hopkins, and Christies Roads and a new interchange at Mt Cottrell Road.
Construction of Bacchus Marsh Eastern Link Road connections to Western Fwy	Construction of a new north–south arterial link east of Bacchus Marsh to connect Geelong–Bacchus Marsh Road and surrounding growth areas directly to the Western Freeway via new or upgraded freeway access.
Upgrade between Woodmans Hill to Leigh Creek & Brewery Tap Rd Intersection Safety Upgrade	Upgrade approximately 5.2 km of highway between Woodmans Hill and Leigh Creek to a consistent freeway standard, removing remaining 80 km/h zones. The project includes upgrade of the Brewery Tap Road intersection to address known safety risks.
Duplication between Ararat and Stawell, and Great Western Bypass	Deliver full duplication between Ararat and Stawell, including a bypass north of Great Western and associated intersection upgrades.
Maintenance Program	Commit to an improved long-term maintenance program to strengthen pavement condition, improve drainage and enhance year-round network reliability.



The highest priority projects are identified throughout this document with this icon.

Our Advocacy Objectives

The 10 Local Governments that form the Western Highway Action Committee have identified a clear and coordinated set of advocacy objectives to guide investment in the Western Highway corridor.

These objectives are supported by a suite of priority projects that respond to current challenges and future growth.



Deliver a Continuous, High-Standard Western Highway.



Strengthen Connections and Support Regional Towns.



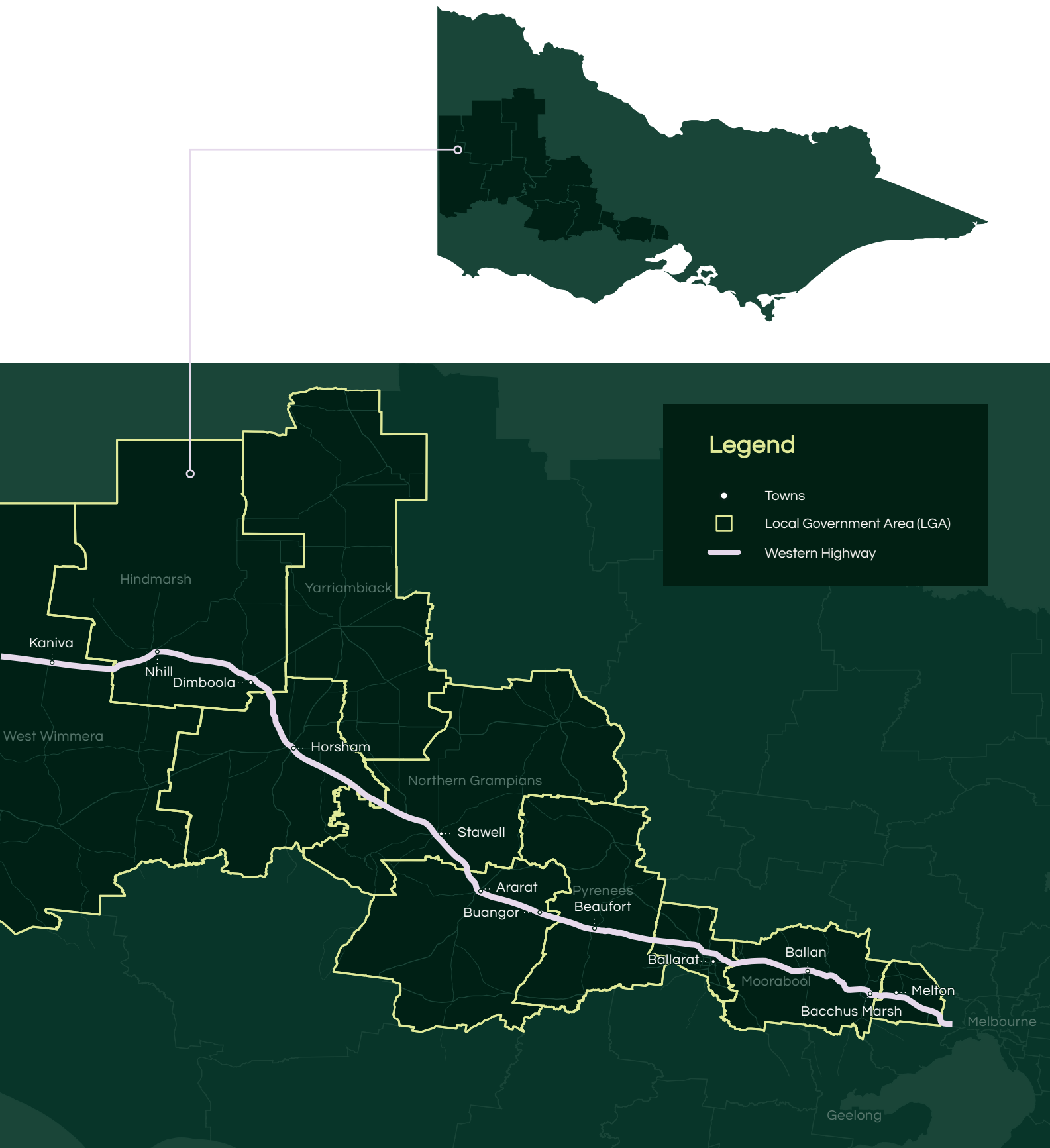
Ensure a Resilient and Reliable, Future Ready Corridor.



Provide a Safe and Accessible Western Highway for All Users.

The Western Highway At A Glance

The Western Highway spans growth areas in Melbourne’s West through regional and rural Victoria to the South Australian border.



654 people → The number of people killed or seriously injured on the Western Highway in the past 10 years.

30% → 30% of the Western Highway has a AusRAP safety rating of 2 stars (out of 5).

419 kilometres → The length of the Western Highway between Melbourne and the South Australian border.

770,000 → The number of residents that will be living within the municipalities along the Western Highway in Victoria by 2046. The number of residents will increase by over 430,000 between 2016 and 2046.

\$25.6 billion → The estimated value of freight transported on the Western Highway each year.

100,000 → Approximate number of vehicle trips made each day on the Western Highway.

Why Invest in the Western Highway?

The Western Highway is a nationally significant transport corridor linking Melbourne with Western Victoria and South Australia as part of the National Highway (A8/M8). It plays a critical role in supporting interstate freight, regional industries, tourism and daily travel, and serves as a key economic backbone for south-east Australia.

Growing Demand

Demand on the corridor is increasing rapidly. Communities along the route are experiencing sustained population growth, particularly in the west of Melbourne extending through Melton and Bacchus Marsh.

The City of Melton is Australia’s fastest growing municipality, with **the population projected to more than double over the next two decades**, placing significant pressure on transport connections between Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate markets.

This growth has already been substantial. Since the Melton Bypass opened in 1987, Melton’s population has increased from approximately 29,000 to more than 231,500 residents. More recently, since the Deer Park Bypass opened in 2009, the population has grown from approximately 100,000 to more than 231,500 residents.

At the same time, regional towns and agricultural industries across Western Victoria are expanding, boosted by the increased investment in renewable energy and mining, resulting in greater reliance on a safe, efficient and reliable highway for freight and local access.

Existing Constraints

The corridor is not performing consistently. Variations in road standard, unduplicated sections, interfaces with townships and rising traffic volumes, including a high proportion of heavier and larger heavy vehicles, are contributing to safety risks, reduced reliability and constraints on freight efficiency.

The Need for Investment

Targeted and sustained State and Federal Government investment is required to improve safety, strengthen freight performance, enhance network maintenance and ensure reliable year-round connectivity. Upgrades to road standards, intersections and town bypasses will also improve the amenity and liveability of communities along the corridor.

Over the past 10 years alone, the population of communities along the Western Highway has increased by more than 104,000 people to 442,000, with another 328,000 predicted by 2046, generating additional demand for passenger and freight movements. Despite this substantial growth, the capacity of the Western Highway has remained largely unchanged. It is now time to increase capacity to meet current needs and accommodate future growth

Action is needed now to ensure the Western Highway can support Victoria’s long-term growth and continue to function as a safe, efficient and nationally significant transport corridor.





Our Advocacy Asks



Deliver a Continuous, High-Standard Western Highway.

- 1 Buangor to Ararat Duplication
- 2 Ararat to Stawell Duplication, Great Western Bypass
- 3 Woodmans Hill to Leigh Creek & Brewery Tap Road Intersection Upgrade
- 4 Duplication to SA Border
- 5 New and Extended Overtaking Lanes between Stawell and SA border



Strengthen Connections and Support Regional Towns.

- 6 Beaufort Bypass
- 7 Upgrades between Melton and the Western Ring Road (M80)
- 8 Bacchus Marsh Eastern Link Road Connections
- 9 Gisborne Road Interchange Upgrade
- 10 Ararat Bypass
- 11 Horsham/Pimpinio Bypass
- 12 Nhill Bypass
- 13 Outer Metropolitan Ring (OMR) Road
- + Multi-Modal Freight and Passenger Rail Improvements



Ensure a Resilient and Reliable, Future Ready Corridor.

- + Improved Maintenance Program
- + Detour Routes
- + Bridge Upgrades
- + Wildlife Management
- + Digital Navigation



Provide a Safe and Accessible Western Highway for All Users.

- + Truck/Rest Area Projects
- + Local Intersection/Access Safety Upgrades
- + Township Safety Improvements
- 14 Pink Lake Parking Improvements
- 15 Highway Realignment & Hillside Road Railway Bridge Upgrade
- 16 Stawell Urban Design Framework
- 17 Active Transport Connections in PSP Growth Areas

* Denotes the Western Highway Action Committees highest priority projects

+ Denotes corridor wide and not shown on plan

Legend

Advocacy Asks

- Future Duplication
- Future Town Bypass
- . - . - Outer Metro Ring Road

Western Highway (Existing)

- Single Carriageway
- == Duplicated

Deliver a Continuous, High-Standard Western Highway



Advocacy Objective

Commit to a long-term, staged upgrade program to deliver a fully duplicated, freeway-standard Western Highway.

The Western Highway is a nationally significant interstate corridor connecting Melbourne and Adelaide. While duplication and upgrades have been delivered in sections, inconsistent cross-sections, unduplicated segments and varying intersection treatments continue to limit corridor continuity, safety and performance.

Why It’s Important

Ballarat to Stawell

Duplication of the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell has been progressing for more than a decade. Since 2013, approximately 55 kilometres between Ballarat and Buangor have been duplicated, delivering measurable safety and efficiency benefits.

Buangor to Ararat

It is critical that the remaining 12.5 km between Buangor and Ararat is upgraded to a consistent freeway standard. WHAC advocates for this section to proceed without delay, with approvals finalised and funding committed to save lives on this dangerous section of the highway.

WHAC acknowledges the complexities associated with this section, noting recent progress through the Cultural Heritage Management Plan approval, which is a significant step toward enabling construction to recommence and complete the duplication works from Beaufort to Ararat.

Ararat to Stawell

Planning investigations for duplication between Ararat and Stawell, including capacity upgrades and the Great Western bypass, have been initiated. However, this work has not yet translated into a defined delivery program, approvals pathway or committed construction funding.

Ararat and South Australian Border

Traffic volumes on the Western Highway between Ararat and the South Australian border are increasing, including a growing proportion of heavy vehicles supporting interstate freight and regional industry. In the past 10 years, 321 casualty crashes have been recorded on this section, including 29 fatalities and 189 serious injuries. These outcomes highlight the risks associated with remaining unduplicated sections.

A coordinated, staged upgrade program is required to progressively deliver a consistent, high-performing interstate corridor from Melbourne to the South Australian border. Without a long-term commitment, upgrades will continue to be delivered incrementally, creating inefficiencies, safety risks and prolonging corridor inconsistency.

Our Advocacy Asks

 Duplication between Buangor and Ararat	Duplicate the 12.5 km section between Buangor and Ararat to provide two lanes in each direction, new bridges and a grade-separated interchange at Hillside Road. This is the next critical section required to extend completed duplication works westward.
 Duplication between Ararat and Stawell, and Great Western Bypass	Deliver full duplication between Ararat and Stawell, including a bypass north of Great Western and associated intersection upgrades.
 Upgrade between Woodmans Hill to Leigh Creek and Brewery Tap Road Intersection Safety Upgrade	Upgrade approximately 5.2 km of highway between Woodmans Hill and Leigh Creek to a consistent freeway standard, removing remaining 80 km/h zones. The project includes upgrade of the Brewery Tap Road intersection to address known safety risks.
Duplication to SA Border	Commit to a long-term staged program for full duplication from Melbourne to the South Australian border.
Overtaking Lanes - Stawell to SA Border	Investigate opportunities for new and extended overtaking lanes along the Western Highway between Stawell and SA Border.

 Denotes the Western Highway Action Committee’s highest priority projects.

The Benefits

- Reduction in death and serious injury
- Improving liveability in regional Victoria
- More reliable journeys
- Improving efficiency of interstate freight movement
- Capacity to support future growth



Strengthen Connections and Support Regional Towns



Advocacy Objective

Fund priority access, bypass and multi-modal freight-connection projects that improve town amenity and productivity, unlock economic growth, and support Western Victoria’s industries.

The Western Highway underpins Western Victoria’s economy, connecting towns and industries to jobs, tourism, freight markets and investment.

Why It’s Important

The Western Highway is Australia’s second busiest freight corridor, with a high proportion of heavy vehicles travelling through township environments. Despite progressive duplication, freight and long-distance traffic still pass directly through town centres such as Beaufort and Ararat, where the highway functions as a 50 km/h two-lane road. This creates ongoing conflict between strategic freight movements and local activity, impacting safety, amenity, productivity and economic function.

The current arrangement requires interstate freight and through traffic to travel along township main streets. Bypass infrastructure is critical to separate strategic traffic from local movements and address remaining gaps in the corridor.

For example, the Beaufort Bypass is expected to remove approximately 60–70% of through traffic from the town centre. Without a bypass, traffic volumes were forecast to reach approximately 14,000 vehicles per day, including around 2,500 heavy vehicles. With a bypass, this reduces to approximately 7,500 vehicles per day, including around 500 heavy vehicles.

Closer to Melbourne, sections of the Western Highway between Melton and Caroline Springs already carry approximately 85,000 vehicles per day. This is projected to grow significantly as population and commuter demand increase. Without strategic infrastructure such as the Upgrades between Melton and the Western Ring Road and Bacchus Marsh Eastern Link Road, this growth will increase congestion, reduce freight reliability and impact safety outcomes.

The Outer Metropolitan Ring (Road and Rail) (OMR) is a strategic long-term project, providing a future connection across Melbourne’s north and west. In the context of growing demand in Melbourne’s west, it would support the Western Highway by providing an alternative route for freight and through traffic, reducing pressure on the Highway. WHAC is concerned that planning for the OMR may not be advanced early enough, noting congestion across Melbourne’s west is already significant. Planning must be accelerated to ensure timely delivery.

The retention of key rail crossovers at Sunshine is important infrastructure that plays a crucial role in keeping freight moving efficiently across the state. Located south of Sunshine Railway Station, the rail crossovers connect freight lines servicing northern Victoria with the Port of Melbourne. They allow trains to share tracks and switch lines quickly, helping to reduce delays, ease congestion and keep freight costs down. Without the crossovers, more freight could be diverted from rail onto roads, adding congestion, increasing maintenance costs and placing greater strain on the Western Highway.

Our Advocacy Asks

 Upgrades Between Melton and the Western Ring Road (M80)	Increased capacity, urbanisation and upgraded interchanges on the Western Highway including Bulmans, Ferris, Leakes, Hopkins, and Christies Roads and new interchange at Mt Cottrell Road.
 Construction of the Beaufort Bypass	Construction of an approximately 11-kilometre dual carriageway section of the Western Highway to the north of Beaufort, connecting duplicated sections on either side of the township and replacing the existing two-lane alignment through the town centre.
 Construction of Bacchus Marsh Eastern Link Road connections to Western Fwy	Construction of a new north–south arterial link east of Bacchus Marsh to connect Geelong–Bacchus Marsh Road and surrounding growth areas directly to the Western Freeway via new or upgraded freeway access.
Construction of the Ararat Bypass	Development and construction of a new highway alignment around Ararat to provide a continuous high-standard Western Highway corridor, including new interchanges, structures and connections to the local road network.
Investigate / Planning for Horsham and Pimpinio Bypass	Undertake strategic planning, corridor investigations and feasibility studies to identify and protect potential bypass alignments around Horsham and Pimpinio, including links to the Henty and Wimmera Highways that also pass through Horsham.
Gisborne Road - Interchange Upgrade	Upgrade of the Gisborne Road interchange with the Western Freeway, including ramp and intersection improvements to increase capacity and improve operational performance.
Investigate / planning for Nhill Bypass	Feasibility assessment and corridor planning for a potential Nhill bypass to inform long-term Western Highway network upgrades.
Construction of the Outer Metropolitan Ring/E6 Transport Corridor	Delivery of the planned 100 km long transport corridor in Melbourne’s north and west connecting major freight and road networks, including the Western Highway in Truganina.
Provide improved multi-modal freight and rail passenger services	Reinstating the Sunshine regional link crossovers as part of the Sunshine Station redevelopment, and investing in the Wimmera-Mallee Passenger and Freight Rail Revitalisation, providing alternatives to road based transport.

 Denotes the Western Highway Action Committee’s highest priority projects.

The Benefits

- Separating freight from local traffic
- More enjoyable and safer places in regional towns
- Less congestion, faster journeys
- Increasing safety for road users
- Improving freight efficiency
- Supports housing and population growth

Ensure a Resilient and Reliable, Future Ready Corridor



Advocacy Objective

Establish and fund a coordinated, corridor-wide resilience and maintenance program to minimise disruptions, strengthen infrastructure performance and ensure reliable year-round operation of the Western Highway.

A resilient Western Highway is critical to the economic and social stability of Western Victoria and the national freight network.

Why It's Important

The Western Highway is a nationally significant freight corridor and part of the National Land Transport Network, carrying more than 70 million tonnes of freight each year. Heavy vehicles account for approximately 20–30% of traffic along the corridor.

As the primary interstate connection between Melbourne and Adelaide, disruption to the Western Highway has impacts beyond regional Victoria, affecting national supply chains, freight efficiency and economic productivity.

Maintaining the corridor to a consistently high standard is essential. Sustained heavy vehicle volumes, combined with ageing pavement and drainage infrastructure in some sections, accelerate wear and increase the risk of failure if not addressed through proactive, long-term maintenance.

Recent closures have highlighted the corridor's vulnerability. Detours are often lengthy and indirect, diverting heavy vehicles onto local roads that are not designed for sustained freight use. This increases travel times, raises operational costs and places significant pressure on municipal infrastructure and local communities. Contraflow arrangements should be implemented where possible to mitigate this.

In some cases, detour routes pass through remote areas with limited or no mobile coverage, creating additional safety risks for road users and limiting the ability to respond effectively to incidents and emergencies.

Without a coordinated, corridor-wide approach to resilience and maintenance, these disruptions are likely to become more frequent as traffic volumes and freight demand continue to grow. The Western Highway must remain reliable and operational at all times to support interstate freight, regional industries and the communities that depend on it.



Our Advocacy Asks

 Improved Maintenance Program	Commit to an improved long-term maintenance program to strengthen pavement condition, improve drainage and enhance year-round network reliability.
Detour Routes	Identify and formalise suitable heavy-vehicle detour routes, supported by consistent signage, VMS messaging, opportunities for contraflow treatments and coordinated activation protocols.
Bridge Upgrades	Upgrade of bridge structures along the Western Highway to support increased vehicle mass.
Wildlife Management	Deliver targeted wildlife mitigation measures, including fencing, crossing treatments and vegetation management in high-risk rural sections.
Digital Navigation	Improve digital mapping accuracy, freight route visibility and connectivity, supported by upgraded telecommunications coverage and consistent wayfinding signage.

 Denotes the Western Highway Action Committee's highest priority projects.

The Benefits

- Reduction in unplanned closures
- Recovery after major disruptions
- Community satisfaction
- Resilient freight network
- Safer journeys



Provide a Safe and Accessible Western Highway for All Users



Advocacy Objective

Invest in targeted Safe System upgrades and freight-supporting infrastructure to reduce crash risk and deliver a safer, more accessible Western Highway for all users.

The Western Highway must operate safely for freight operators, local communities and all road users.

Why It’s Important

Safety outcomes along the Western Highway remain a significant concern. In the past decade, 654 fatalities and serious injuries have been recorded along the corridor.

Between Ballarat and Stawell alone, 174 crashes resulted in 16 fatalities and more than 100 serious injuries. These figures highlight the risks associated with a high-speed regional highway that carries substantial freight volumes while intersecting with local roads and township environments.

Many crashes occur at conflict points, including intersections, access locations and constrained alignments. In township sections, the highway must operate as both an interstate freight route and a local main street, increasing complexity and risk for all users.

Addressing these locations through targeted Safe System treatments is critical. This includes improving intersection design, managing speed environments and delivering safer crossing points for pedestrians and local traffic.

Heavy vehicle involvement in severe crashes further reinforces the need for appropriate truck parking and rest facilities. Well-designed and strategically located facilities reduce unsafe roadside stopping and support safer freight operations.

Targeted safety upgrades are essential to address the known crash profile of the corridor and reduce the likelihood and severity of future incidents.

Our Advocacy Asks

Truck Parking / Rest Area Projects	Implement a strategic truck parking and rest area program, including dedicated facilities in Horsham and Kaniva, rest area management in Northern Grampians, and improved freight access in Yarriambiack.
Local Intersection / Access Safety Upgrades	Upgrade high-risk intersections and access points across Moorabool, Ballarat, Horsham, West Wimmera and key sites including Churchill Crossing Road in Black Range, Geodetic/Curran/O’Brees Road and Wail Silo access points in Horsham, Tarara Roadhouse in Ararat and Davis Avenue in Nhill.
Township Safety Improvements	Deliver targeted safety treatments within township sections, including crossings, speed management and gateway treatments. Priority locations include Pimpinio, Dadswells Bridge, Horsham and Nhill.
Dimboola Pink Lake – Improved Parking Provision	Formalise and expand parking at Pink Lake to accommodate peak visitor parking demand.
Western Highway Alignment Safety Improvements and Hillside Road Railway Bridge Upgrade	Address the high-crash bend near Granite Sandpit Road in Buangor and upgrade the constrained railway bridge east of Hillside Road.
Implementation of Stawell Western Highway Urban Design Framework	Deliver safety and streetscape improvements identified in the Stawell Urban Design Framework.
Active Transport Connections in PSP Growth Areas	Provide active transport connections across the Western Highway in northern Ballarat, including investigation of a pedestrian and cycling bridge and key pathway links, as well as within growth areas between Melton and Ravenhall, and in Moorabool, to support safe and accessible movement.

The Benefits

- Reduced fatal and serious injury crashes
- Reduced burden on health and emergency services
- Improved community satisfaction and connectivity
- Safer, more alert drivers
- Supports sustainable travel



The Western Highway Action Committee

Why and How We Advocate

WHAC represents the collective interests of councils and communities along the Western Highway corridor. Its core role is to coordinate advocacy efforts and align local priorities into a unified, region-wide, strategic investment agenda.

Major projects such as duplication, bypasses and corridor-wide safety upgrades require State and Federal funding. WHAC ensures these priorities are

clearly articulated, evidence-based and consistently advanced through coordinated submissions, direct engagement with government and collaboration with industry stakeholders.

By presenting a single, strategic voice, WHAC strengthens the case for sustained investment in a safe, reliable and high-performing Western Highway corridor.

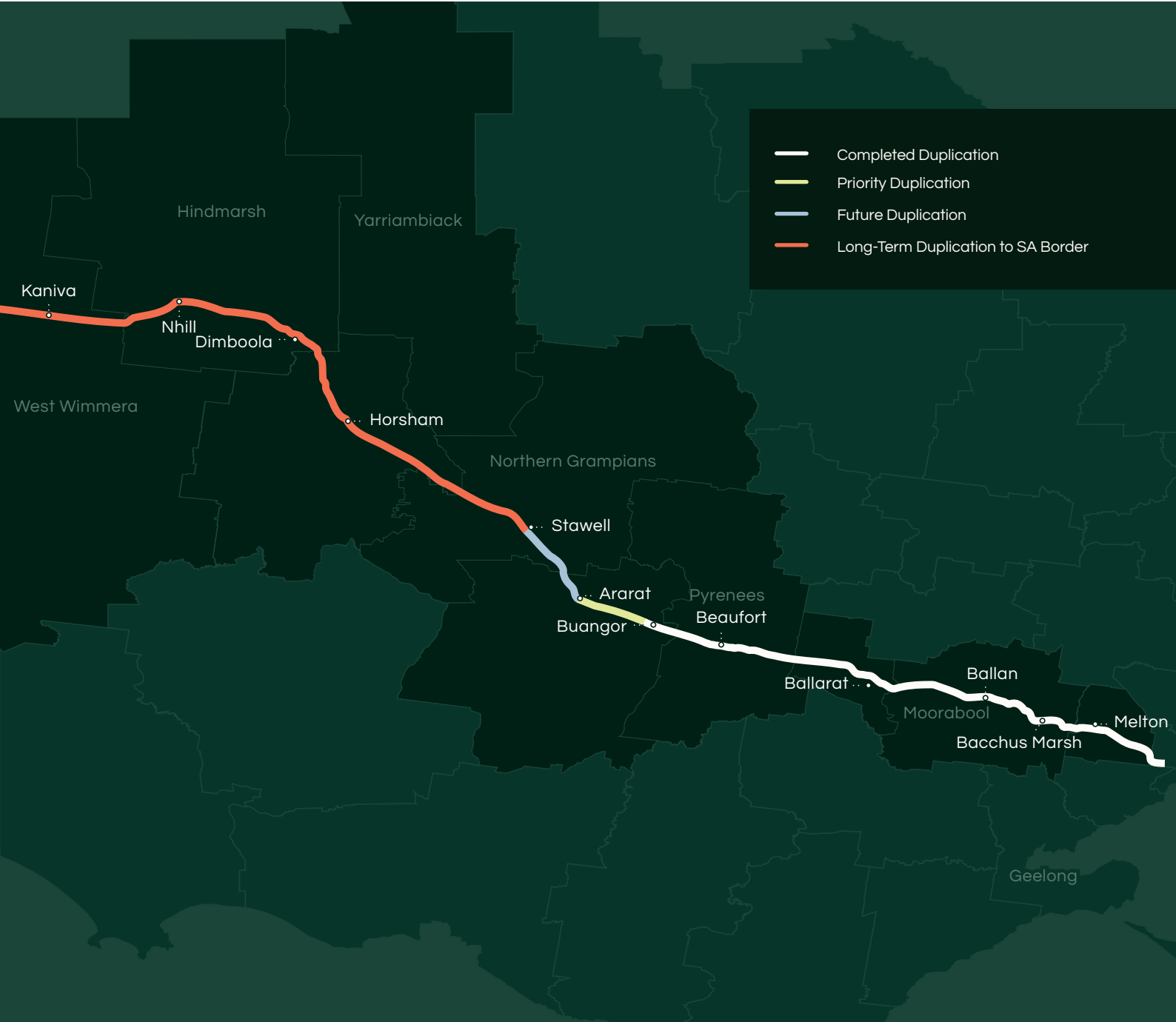
Our Vision

The WHAC’s vision for the Western Highway is that over the short to medium term it will:

- Have a reduced accident/fatality rate.
- Provide an efficient route for freight transport throughout the corridor, increasing productivity.
- Provide communities throughout the corridor with a safe, effective and accessible connection.

WHAC’s long-term shared aspiration is to achieve a fully duplicated, freeway-standard Western Highway from Melbourne to the South Australian border to allow for a 100-110 km/h speed limit.

This vision reinforces the Committee’s readiness to support ongoing planning, detailed design and staged investment to progressively deliver a consistent, high-performing interstate corridor.



Strategic Alignment

WHAC’s priorities align with established national, state and regional strategies, including:

National Land Transport Network

Recognises the Western Highway as a nationally significant interstate freight corridor connecting Melbourne and Adelaide.

Victorian Freight Plan

Supports targeted investment in key freight corridors to improve safety, productivity and supply chain resilience.

Victoria’s Road Safety Strategy

Seeks to reduce fatal and serious injury crashes through safer infrastructure and reduced conflict points.

Regional Growth Plans and Planning Frameworks

Acknowledge population and economic growth across Melton, Ballarat, Moorabool and Western Victoria, increasing demand on the corridor.

State and Federal Infrastructure Priorities

Emphasise the need for consistent, high-standard interstate connections to support national productivity.

Plan for Victoria

Supports integrated land use and transport planning to service growing communities in Melbourne’s west and regional Victoria.

The Road Ahead

WHAC encourages continued collaboration with State and Federal Governments to progress a staged, long-term investment program for the Western Highway, including advancing planning approvals and securing funding for priority projects.

Member councils are ready to work in partnership to align local priorities, support project development and assist in the timely delivery of upgrades across the corridor.

Sources:

Beaufort Bypass, Inquiry and Advisory Committee Report No.1 (12 October 2022)

Western Highway Upgrade, City of Melton – VITM Data <https://www.westvicbrologa.com.au/p/western-highway-ararat-fatalities>

Transport Victoria, Victoria road crash data <https://opendata.transport.vic.gov.au/dataset/victoria-road-crash-data?v=1#use_cases>

Transport Victoria, Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP) <<https://opendata.transport.vic.gov.au/dataset/australian-road-assessment-program-ausrap>>

ABS Census Data <<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>>



WHAC’s advocacy reinforces these strategic directions by advancing coordinated, staged investment across the Western Highway corridor.



WHAC

Contact

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