Wallaga Lake Bridge essential maintenance

Community consultation report

September 2023



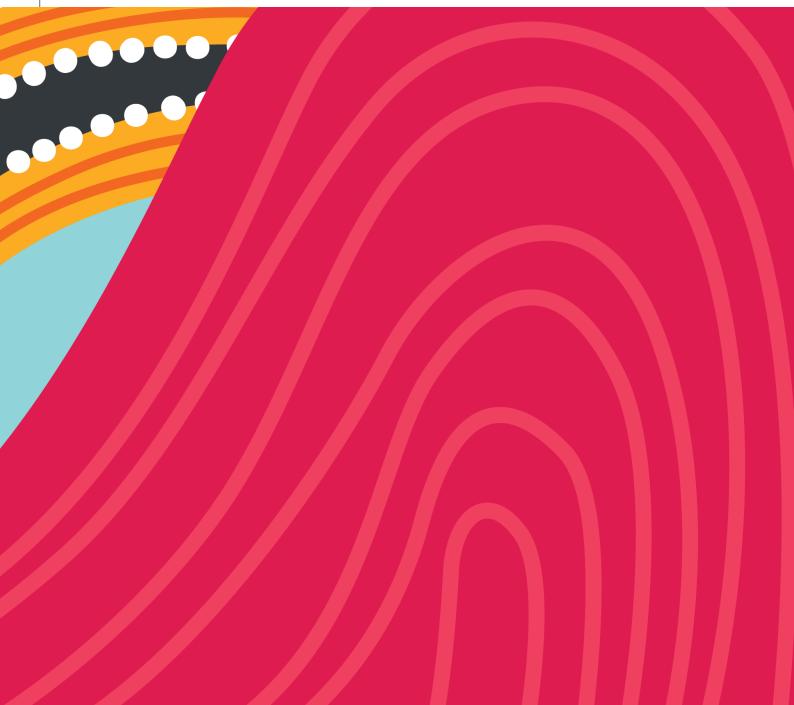
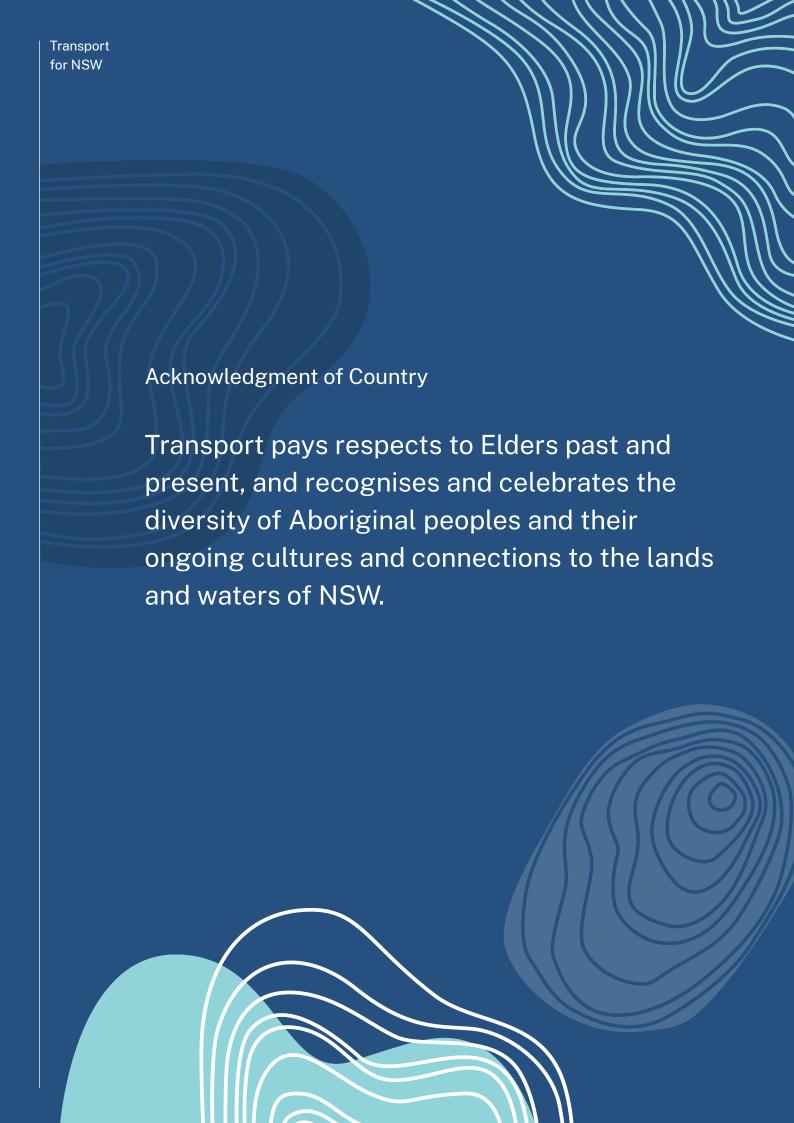


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Introduction

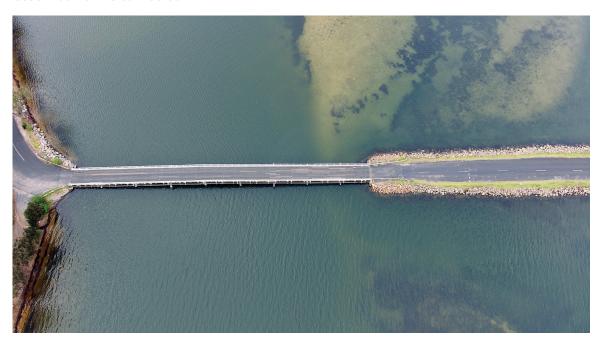
Wallaga Lake Bridge has been operating since the 1890s and this local icon requires major work to repair, upgrade and strengthen the structure to ensure its continued use into the future.

The bridge connects residents of Wallaga Lake and Bermagui to Narooma and the small community of Akolele, and forms a strong part of the area's history, spanning multiple generations. This essential maintenance work will make the bridge safer for the local community and everyone who uses it.

While the bridge is still safe, work is required to repair and strengthen the structure to ensure its continued use into the future. This includes replacing and strengthening the girders and piles, repairing the bridge deck and upgrading the connection between the road and the bridge on both sides (abutments).

Engineers will also investigate the best strategies for managing and maintaining the bridge into the future, with the overall goal of enhancing safety.

The community was consulted and invited to provide feedback on aspects of the work that will impact the local community. The feedback in this report will help plan the timing and duration of the work. The aim is to minimise disruption to the community as much as possible while the essential work is carried out.



Aerial view of Wallaga Lake Bridge. Picture taken April 2023.

Purpose of this summary report

Community consultation was carried out between Monday 29 May and Tuesday 25 July 2023 for upcoming essential maintenance work on Wallaga Lake Bridge.

The community was invited to provide feedback through an online survey between Monday 29 May and Friday 23 June 2023. Meetings with key community and business groups were also carried out in July 2023, including a community forum organised by the Member for Bega, Dr Michael Holland MP.

This report outlines communication and consultation activities carried out by Transport for NSW for the purpose of seeking community feedback and outlines the feedback received.

This report also provides a summary of the survey results, comments and ideas received during consultation. Feedback received from the community, stakeholders, visitors, and transport customers will help inform the best approach and timing of the work.

Summary of consultation

Objectives of consultation

Transport for NSW (Transport) consulted with the community on two proposed construction methods to carry out essential maintenance work on Wallaga Lake Bridge between Monday 29 May and Tuesday 25 July 2023.

The objectives of the consultation were to:

- Inform the community and stakeholders of the upcoming work and provide detailed information to allow for informed feedback
- Understand how the community and stakeholders felt about the two proposed options for carrying out the work
- Manage community expectations on what is feasible and not feasible for mitigating the impacts of the work
- Obtain specific feedback on the impacts a bridge closure would have on the community.

Target audience

Our target audience included:

- Communities and residents in Wallaga Lake, Beauty Point, Fairhaven, Cuttagee, Bermagui, Cobargo, Akolele, Central Tilba, Tilba Tilba, and Narooma
- Local businesses
- Transport customers
- Visitors and tourists to the area
- Community interest groups
- Eurobodalla Shire Council and Bega Valley Shire Council
- Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council and the local Aboriginal community
- Emergency services
- Schools
- Bus operators
- Other key stakeholder groups with an interest in the project.

Consultation method

An online survey was prepared to allow the community and stakeholders to easily provide feedback. This was the primary feedback tool and was available from Monday 29 May to Friday 23 June 2023.

The community and stakeholders were able to submit feedback via mail, email, phone and face-to-face. The survey was promoted in all communication materials about the project and via a media release. A link to the survey was featured on the project webpage, and participants were also able to access the survey via direct link in an email blast and Facebook post.

The survey was also accessible from printed material by scanning a QR code, such as the project notification which was distributed via mail.

In addition, hard copies of the survey were available at a face-to-face information session on Payne's Island, where interested community members were invited to come along and speak to the project team.

Transport also met with key community groups on Tuesday 25 July at Bermagui Country Club, and attended an open community forum that night where further feedback was received.

Engagement activities & participation

Transport for NSW received a total of 501 written responses from the community during the consultation period.

A range of communication tools and activities were used to encourage participation from a wide audience and enable the community and stakeholders to give informed feedback. Communication activities included media announcements, letterbox drops, social media and email campaigns, door knocking local businesses, information sessions and face-to-face engagements.

Details of the consultation and communication activities carried out are listed below. Examples of collateral distributed are available in the Appendix.

Community engagement

- Media announcement on Monday 29 May.
- Distribution of 7,561 project notifications to residents living in Wallaga Lake, Beauty Point, Fairhaven, Cuttagee, Bermagui, Cobargo, Akolele, Central Tilba, Tilba Tilba, and Narooma.
- New project webpage with project specific information including FAQs and a link to the online survey.
- Email campaign sent on Monday 29 May to registered stakeholders.
- Social media campaign ran from Monday 29 May to Sunday 4 June:
 - Engagement rate of 12.37 per cent which was above the industry standard of 4.4 per cent.
 - Click rate of 3.04 per cent which was above the industry standard of 0.9 per cent
- An online survey was the primary tool for collecting feedback between Monday 29 May and Friday 23 June. During this period, we received:
 - o 420 online survey responses
 - 68 email enquiries/submissions
 - o 13 written submissions via Member for Bega, Dr Michael Holland.

Face-to-face engagement

- Meeting with Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council on Wednesday 14 June.
- Door knocking local businesses on Thursday 15 and Friday 16 June.
- Face-to-face information session on Payne's Island Reserve at Wallaga Lake on Saturday 17 June between 10am – 2pm. Around 100 community members attended the session where Transport staff were available to answer questions and receive feedback.
- Meeting with Local Emergency Management Committee on Thursday 6 July hosted by Bega Valley Shire Council (Transport attended via MS Teams).
- Meetings with other key stakeholders.

Key community group meetings

Transport representatives met with several key community groups on Tuesday 25 July at Bermagui Country Club. This included:

Transport for NSW

- Bermagui Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Inc
- Local business owners
- Board member from Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Mayor and Acting General Manager from Bega Valley Shire Council
- Bermagui Historical Society and Montreal Goldfields
- Event organisers from Sculpture Bermagui and Four Winds Festivals
- Principal from Bermagui Public School.

Community forum

A community forum was held in Bermagui on Tuesday 25 July, hosted by Dr Michael Holland, Member for Bega and the Hon Kristy McBain, Member for Eden-Monaro.

Transport provided an overview of the project at the forum, listened to personal statements from community members, answered questions and recorded feedback.

All feedback received has been considered in this report.



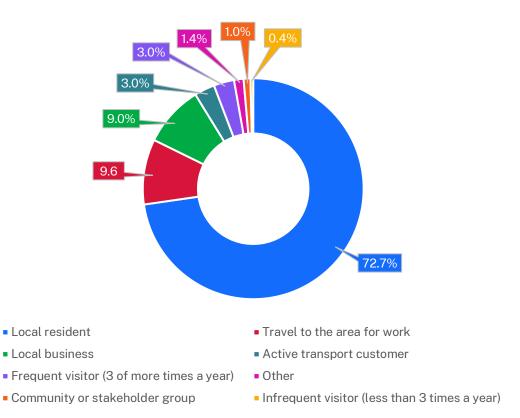
Looking west towards Wallaga Lake Bridge. Picture taken April 2023.

What we heard

The following pages cover a summary of community feedback to each question.



Question 1: Which best describes you?



72.7 per cent of people who completed the survey were local residents, followed by people who travel to the area for work (9.6 per cent) and local businesses (9 per cent).

Question 2: Which suburb are you in?



442 people completed the online survey. The above image provides a breakdown of the suburbs that they live in.

Question 3: Looking at the two construction options, which do you prefer?

Transport carried out a comprehensive options assessment before identifying two feasible options that were presented to the community. The two viable options would allow us to carry out the repairs in a way that is safe for our workers and minimises impacts to the community.

We asked for feedback on these two construction options. These options can change as we better understand views of the community in the assessment and determination of a final option.

Option 1:

The bridge will be closed for four and a half months allowing crews to work safely and efficiently by eliminating live traffic. This proposal includes two months of work under traffic control with a total construction duration of around eight months, weather permitting.



Key points:

- Bridge will be closed day and night for four and a half months, detour via Princes Highway, Cobargo (up to 45 minutes).
- Bridge will be under traffic control for two months, delays of up to five minutes.
- · No construction over Christmas and summer holiday period.
- · Safest option for workers
- Shortest period of disruption to the community with the project completed in around eight months, weather permitting.



Based on the feedback received, 80% of respondents preferred Option 2 over Option 1 (20%)

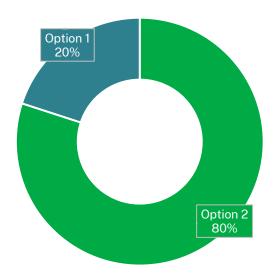
Option 2:

The bridge will operate under three different arrangements for a duration of around 11 months. The extended duration allows connectivity to schools to be maintained with a shorter full closure period, but will have a longer period of disruption to the community.



Key points

- Bridge will be closed between 9am and 3pm, Monday to Friday for around six months. Detour via Princes Highway, Cobargo (up to 45 minutes).
- Bridge will be closed day and night for two months, detour via Princes Highway Cobargo.
- Bridge will be under traffic control for one month, delays of up to five minutes.
- · No construction over Christmas and summer holiday period.
- Not as efficient.
- Longer period of disruption to the community with the project completed in around 11 months, weather permitting.



Question 4: Will the extended bridge closure affect any community programs?

A number of community programs were mentioned in response to this question. This included the below following themes:

- After school sport, e.g. AFL, cricket
- Community programs held at Umbarra Cultural Centre
- Homework club at Wallaga Lake Koori Village and PCYC activities.

A sample of comments received:

"Travel long distance and children won't get off school buses in time for after school activities."

"Children travel in the bus home from Bermagui Primary School to participate in the Wallaga Lake Homework Centre on Mondays after school and PCYC activities."

Question 5: Will the extended bridge closure affect any community events or festivals?

This question was specific to Option 1 with an extended bridge closure period. The community identified the following events as most likely to be affected by an extended bridge closure:

- Sculpture Bermagui (9 to 17 March 2024)
- Fishing competitions
- Four Winds Festival (Major festival over Easter, 29 to 3 March 2024)
- Tilba Festival (July 2024)
- Reboot (September/October long weekend)
- Markets
- Coast Dog Show
- Cobargo Folk Festival (March 2024)
- Wanderer Festival (September/October 2024)
- NAIDOC week events (July 2024)

Transport met with event organisers from Sculpture Bermagui and Four Winds Festivals on Tuesday 25 July. We are committed to working with all event organisers in the lead up to events, to identify opportunities to promote that a bridge closure at any time does not mean Bermagui is inaccessible or "closed for business". We will consider the timing of local events as we continue to explore the best approach and timing to complete the work.

Question 6: In the case of Option 2, how do you feel about us extending the daily closure times over the Spring (September/October) school holiday period?

Question 6 was specific to Option 2 which proposed a daily bridge closure from 9am to 3pm, Monday to Friday for a period of around six months. Respondents who voted negatively towards extending the daily closure times over the Spring school holidays generally felt:

- The bridge is used more in school holiday periods as it is an important time for businesses
- Extended hours would affect the community using the bridge to commute to work
- Changing the hours would cause confusion.

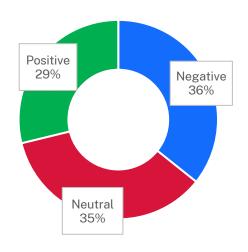
A sample of comments from respondents:

"Holiday period is when the bridge requires most use."

"People still need to work through school holidays."

"School holidays are always important for local businesses, like the September/October school holidays and October long weekend."

"I think it needs to be consistent, so people know what's going on."



Question 7: In the case of Option 2, how do you feel about daytime bridge closures on a Saturday?

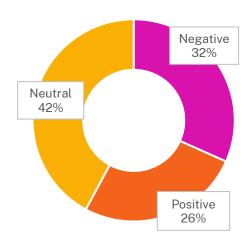
Question 7 was specific to Option 2 which proposes a daily bridge closure from 9am to 3pm, Monday to Friday for a period of around six months. The community was asked whether they would support Saturday closures of the bridge during this period.

A sample of quotes from respondents opposed to Saturday closures:

"Peak time for my business."

"Definitely not! The children will not be able to get to community sports on a Saturday, cricket in the summer months and footy over winter."

"People need to do their shopping out of town on Saturdays."



Question 8: On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'very much', how much will you be impacted by the extended bridge closure of Wallaga Lake Bridge on a daily basis?

Responses to Question 8 told us the following:

- Respondents who are affected daily by the bridge closure prefer Option 2.
- Respondents who aren't affected daily by the bridge closure prefer Option 2.
- 26 per cent of respondents said they would be highly affected by the bridge closure on a daily basis, responding 10 'very much'.

Question 9: Will you require assistance with transport as a result of the extended bridge closure?

24 respondents stated they would require assistance with transport as a result of the extended bridge closure. The theme throughout the responses was the additional cost of fuel incurred from the detour.

"Funds to cover the additional costs! I'm an early childhood educator, lowest paid 'essential' worker in Australia."

Question 10: Do you have any ideas and initiatives you would like to share with us?

A summary of the key themes that emerged from the community's feedback to this question have been considered in the 'Key Themes' section of this report. Where applicable, a response from Transport for NSW has been provided.

Themes included:

- Building a temporary bridge
- Building a new bridge
- Carrying out work at night
- Maintaining pedestrian and cyclist access
- Providing alternative transport options.

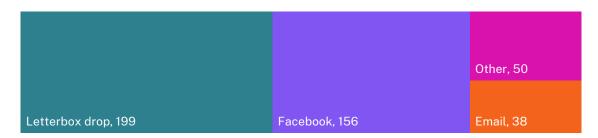
Question 11: Join our mailing list to keep up to date with the project.

225 community members subscribed to the email distribution list through the survey.

61 community members requested to be added to the distribution list at the community forum or by email.

Question 12: How did you hear about the survey?

45 per cent of the community heard about the survey via letterbox drop notification, followed by 35 per cent via Facebook advertising. Those that selected 'Other' said they heard via word of mouth.



Key themes

A summary of key themes raised by the community through this consultation process.



Build a temporary bridge

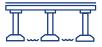
The community has suggested putting a temporary bridge in place while work on Wallaga Lake Bridge is carried out to alleviate the impacts of the closure.

Transport acknowledges the community would like a temporary bridge to limit construction impacts, however building a temporary bridge requires the same degree of planning and approval as a new structure, including environmental, heritage and geotechnical investigations.

This includes various types of temporary bridges, including a pontoon bridge which was suggested by the community. A pontoon bridge requires similar levels of engineering development and environmental approvals which would cause significant delays to the project and the required works.

Transport considered this option carefully but has determined this option is not feasible. The essential maintenance work needs to be delivered in a timeframe much shorter than a temporary bridge would be able to be developed and delivered.

We are exploring alternate approaches to deliver the work with the aim of reducing the partial and full closure periods, and the overall impacts on the community.



Build a new bridge

Some of the community is keen to see the current bridge replaced, with 12 per cent of survey respondents suggesting a new bridge be constructed. Transport has no plans to replace the bridge at this time. Transport will continue to monitor the bridge to ensure it remains safe and trafficable, and will continue to prioritise maintenance to ensure connectivity is maintained in the immediate future.

Transport will work with other government agencies to seek funds to investigate the future of the bridge connection. In the meantime, we can work with Eurobodalla Shire Council, Bega Valley Shire Council and the community on what this may look like.



Carry out work at night

The community suggested that maintenance work could be carried out at night, as seen on other bridge projects. Under the initial scope of work,

Transport investigated this option and due to the nature of the work, it was determined to be unsafe to carry out at night.

Wallaga Lake Bridge is a unique, low lying, single lane structure. The nature of the work is intricate and unsafe to be carried out under 'day maker' lighting due to the risk of shadowing and blinding from using lights strong enough to illuminate areas adequately for night works.

The majority of the maintenance work will be carried out from the water using barges, and from above the deck where possible. Divers will also work in the water to carry out work to the piles. Managing these risks is significantly greater at night.

We are committed to minimising impacts to the community where possible by continuing to explore alternate approaches that may allow us to safely incorporate night works into the delivery of some work.



Maintain pedestrian access

We heard the community is keen to stay connected. Transport is investigating opportunities where pedestrians and dismounted cyclists can safely cross the bridge during periods when the bridge is closed.



Provide alternative transport options

The community expressed interest in alternate transport options being offered during the period when the bridge will be closed.

Transport acknowledges it may be difficult for some community members to travel during this period. We are committed to working on ways to mitigate the impacts by exploring options like shuttle bus services and boats for school students and the broader community.

The community will be kept informed as we continue to plan for this project, and how we can keep the community connected during this time.



Travelling to school

During the consultation period, we heard travel to and from school and daycare arrangements are key priorities for the community. Community members expressed concern about the impacts additional travel time would have on children and the disruptions caused to before and after school arrangements.

Transport will work closely with bus operators to plan the best approach for travelling to and from school, and we will take into consideration feedback from schools and families when planning for a full closure.

We will explore opportunities for students with special circumstances to cross the bridge under supervision.



Emergency services access and response times

We heard the community is concerned about first responders' access and response times while the bridge is closed.

A full bridge closure is required to replace large structural elements of the bridge. While this work is being carried out, the bridge cannot be used as it will not safely hold the weight of vehicles with key structural elements removed.

Outside this period, access for first responders in an emergency will be maintained.

We will continue to investigate opportunities where access can be maintained during full closure periods. We are working closely with emergency service operators as we continue to plan for the work, and we will continue to liaise with them throughout the delivery of the project.



Loss of business/tourism

Local businesses and the Bermagui Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Inc. expressed concerns the bridge closure would impact local businesses.

Key concerns raised:

- Access from the north via Wallaga Lake Bridge is the main arterial link for tourists to enter the area. Businesses are concerned tourists will not follow the detour to visit Bermagui and surrounds
- Businesses will experience staff shortages due to the detour time and cost
- Peak season for business extends from October long weekend to Easter
- Businesses depend on tourism during peak season to survive
- Businesses are just getting back on track after bushfires and impacts from COVID-19
- The closure will impact deliveries
- Increase in operational costs for those businesses that service households/businesses on both sides of the bridge.

Transport met with the Bermagui Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Inc and key businesses to further understand these impacts on Tuesday 25 July. We are committed to working with businesses to minimise impacts by revisiting the timing of the full bridge closure period. Further, we are looking at alternative, innovative delivery methods to reduce the partial and full closure periods.



Protection of the bridge

We heard questions from the community regarding the current load limit and whether this would remain in place once the maintenance work is complete. Transport will reassess the structure's capacity following the works, along with the community and industry requirements, before determining if the 22.5 tonne weight restriction will remain.

In the meantime, we will continue ongoing monitoring and inspections of the bridge to ensure it remains safe for crossing. Transport is working with the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) on enforcement of the 22.5 tonne load limit to help prevent further deterioration of the bridge. If further deterioration is identified, urgent work may be required, which may include closures.



Road safety

Transport acknowledges there will be additional traffic volumes on the detour route and intersections of Cobargo Bermagui Road, Wallaga Lake Road, and the Princes Highway.

We are working on ways to improve safety along the detour route including short term improvements at key intersections and temporary speed limit reductions. We are also working with Bega Valley Shire Council and Eurobodalla Shire Council to ensure a collaborative response to other road safety concerns raised by the community.



Bushfires

We heard the community is concerned about bridge closures over the warmer months due to the potential impact of bushfires. Transport acknowledges this concern and will take this feedback into consideration as we continue to plan for this essential work.

Transport has been liaising with emergency services and will continue to do so throughout the planning and delivery of the project to ensure emergency situations are managed collaboratively.

A Natural Disaster Plan and Emergency Response Plan will be developed prior to work starting.



Wallaga Lake Causeway

We have heard the community is concerned about the Wallaga Lake causeway. Maintenance of the causeway is the responsibility of Bega Valley Shire Council. Council is aware of these concerns and will continue to monitor water levels and the entrance to the ocean.

Consultation outcomes and next steps

Community feedback on this project is helping to develop the preferred option for carrying out this essential maintenance work to Wallaga Lake Bridge.

With the information gathered in the survey and further consultation activities, we understand the views and concerns of the community. We heard that neither option was fitting for the community, and the community would like more time to plan for the closures.

Work will now start in 2024 as we continue to explore the best approach and timing to complete the work which is safe for our workers, minimises impacts and provides the community with sufficient advance notice.

In the meantime, we will continue ongoing monitoring and inspections of the bridge to ensure it remains safe for crossing. Enforcement of the 22.5 tonne load limit will also be ramped up to help prevent further deterioration of the bridge. If further deterioration is identified, urgent work may be required, which may include closures.

We are investigating:

- Alternative, innovative delivery approaches to reduce the partial and full closure periods
- Ways to keep community connected during a full closure period
- Maintaining pedestrian and cyclist access across the bridge during the partial bridge closure
- Ways to minimise impacts on students travelling to and from school
- Ways we can promote that a bridge closure does not mean a town closure
- Improving road safety along the detour route
- Maintaining emergency service access across the bridge during closures
- Ways we can protect the bridge into the future
- Long term future planning for Wallaga Lake Bridge.

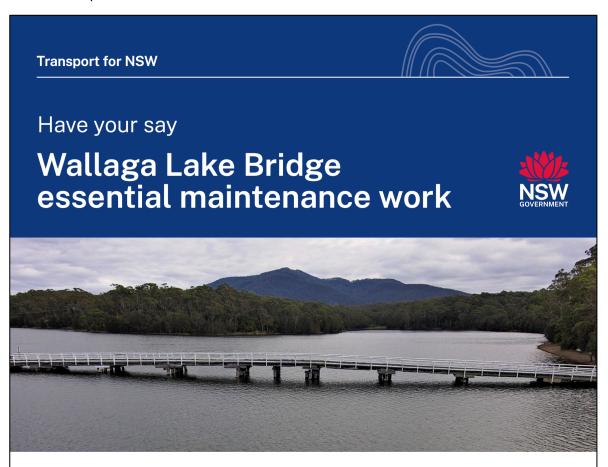
The community will be kept informed as the project progresses.

Transport for NSW is committed to ongoing engagement with the community, councils, transport customers and key stakeholders as the project planning progresses.

Appendix

Example of collateral distributed to community.

 Two-page notification distributed via letterbox drop, email and published on the Transport website.



Transport for NSW is seeking your feedback on upcoming Wallaga Lake Bridge essential maintenance work.

Transport for NSW is planning essential maintenance work to repair and strengthen Wallaga Lake Bridge. This work will ensure its continued use into the future.

As we plan for these essential works, we want to hear from the community, stakeholders, businesses, Transport customers and visitors to help inform the best approach and timing of the work.

What are we doing now?

Ongoing monitoring and a recent inspection of Wallaga Lake Bridge indicated deterioration of the timber structure.

A load limit of 22.5 tonnes was put in place to protect the structure, and now essential maintenance work on the bridge is required to improve its serviceability, longevity and durability.

While the crossing is still safe, this work will ensure the bridge remains safe and operational for the local community and travelling public well into the future. Engineers have investigated the best strategies for managing and maintaining the bridge, with the overall goal of enhancing safety. They have determined that essential work to maintain the bridge will include replacing and strengthening the girders and piles, repairing the bridge deck, and upgrading abutments.

In order to replace the girders and repair the piles and abutments, we will need to close the bridge while work is carried out to protect the safety of the community and our workers.

We understand the bridge is a vital connection for locals day to day and for summer tourism, and that there is no ideal time to close the bridge. We are committed to working with the community to help guide us on how we can minimise the impact while we deliver this essential work









transport.nsw.gov.au/wallaga-lake-bridge

Wallaga Lake Bridge

How will this affect you?

We have developed two proposals to carry out this essential work and we'd like feedback on which is preferable to the community.

Option 1:

The bridge will be closed for four and a half months allowing crews to work safely and efficiently by eliminating live traffic. This proposal includes two months of work under traffic control with a total construction duration of around eight months, weather permitting.



Key points:

- Bridge will be closed day and night for four and a half months, detour via Princes Highway, Cobargo (approximately 45 minutes).
- Bridge will be under traffic control for two months, delays of up to five minutes.
- No construction over Christmas and summer holiday period.
- Safest option for workers
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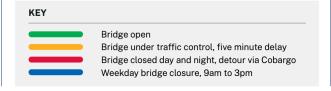
Option 2:

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Key points:

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- Bridge will be closed day and night for two months, detour via Princes Highway Cobargo.
- Bridge will be under traffic control for one month, delays of up to five minutes.
- No construction over Christmas and summer holiday period.
- Not as efficient.
- Longer period of disruption to the community with the project completed in around 11 months, weather permitting.



How to have your say

Complete the survey at yoursay.transport. nsw.gov.au/wallaga-lake-bridgeconsultation or scan the OR code below. You can also email or write to us on the contact details below.

Want to meet the team and ask questions?

Drop in to meet the team on Payne's Island on Saturday 17 June between 10am and 2pm.



Scan to provide feedback

Feedback closes 23 June 2023

How will a preferred option be selected?

Our preferred option will achieve the best overall outcome for the community while allowing us to complete the essential maintenance work with minimal impact.

A decision will be made by considering:

- Feedback received from community during this consultation process.
- Outcomes of further investigations on physical impacts of these options in relation to economic, environment, safety and community issues.

The community will be notified of the outcome prior to work starting.

If you would like to be notified directly and kept up to date with the project as it progresses, you can join our email distribution list by emailing: wallaga.lake. bridge@transport.nsw.gov.au

Contact us



\(\) 1800 015 379

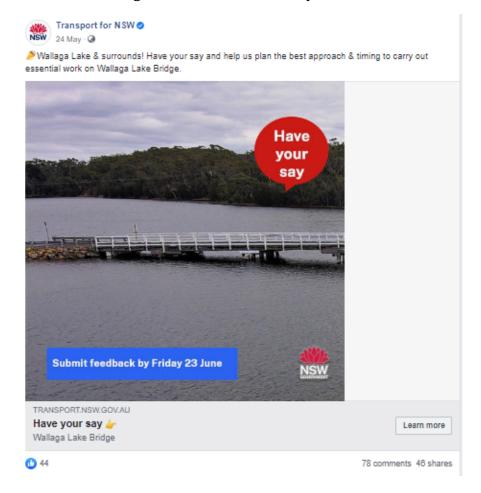
Wallaga.Lake.Bridge@transport.nsw.gov.au @ transport.nsw.gov.au/wallaga-lake-bridge

Wallaga Lake Bridge PO Box 477 Wollongong NSW 2520

If you need help understanding this information, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask them to call us on 1800 015 379.

Transport for NSW

2. Social media targeted to the local community.



How to have your say

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