

Historic Nowra Bridge repurposing

Project update
September 2025



Australian Government

BUILDING AUSTRALIA



Silhouette of the historic bridge at dusk.

Work is progressing on the repair and repurposing of the historic Nowra Bridge, as this local landmark prepares for a new life as a dedicated pedestrian and cyclist path across the Shoalhaven River.

What's been happening

Since late last year, we have been focused on repairing the truss structure of the bridge. Work has included:

- removing damaged elements for repairs, including 1500 rivets by hand
- trialling new methods to remove the cantilever pedestrian walkway
- propping and removing end truss lattices
- beginning procurement for repainting, removing concrete barriers and other under bridge repairs.

What's coming up

Over the next few months, we'll be focusing on:

- continuing repairs to elements such as rebuilding the end truss lattices
- installing scaffolding to use during under bridge repairs and repainting
- repairing structural bridge elements from underneath the bridge
- removing and replacing services and utilities
- removing the cantilever pedestrian walkway.

Breaking down the program of work

The three-year program of work can be broken down into four main stages:

We are here

Stage one

During the first stage, we have established the site compound and completed early works, which included removing and repairing damaged truss elements and carrying out other minor repairs to the bridge.

Repairs to the truss elements are ongoing and are expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Stage two

From late this year, we'll begin work to prepare the bridge for repainting. Work will involve installing scaffolding and removing the attached cantilever pedestrian walkway.

This work is expected to take three to six months to complete, weather permitting.

Stage three

From around March 2026, we'll begin the process of repainting the bridge. Abrasive blasting will be carried out to remove existing paint and during this work, we'll wrap sections of the bridge to prevent any contaminants entering the river below. The sections will remain wrapped while we apply new paint to all the steel elements – in the classic colour of 'Bridge Grey' of course!

This is a lengthy process and involves strict environmental controls. It's expected to take 12 to 18 months to complete, weather permitting.

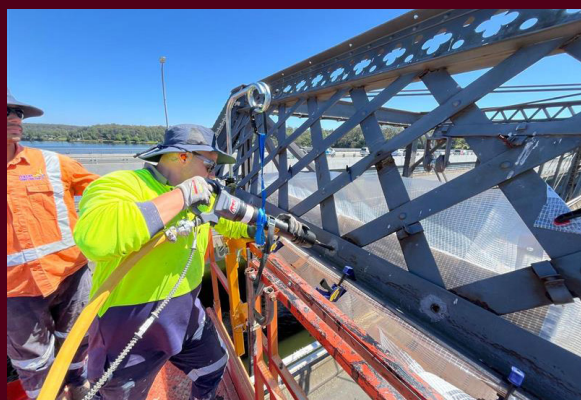
Stage four

Once the task of painting the bridge is complete, we'll begin other repair work including pier strengthening, applying corrosion protection to the bridge piers, and installing new lighting, new handrails, street furniture and other shared path features.

Project completion

Riveting removal work

Since March, the team has been removing and replacing corroded and damaged sections of the truss structure. This has involved removing over 1500 rivets, repairing the end truss lattices, truss repairs, removing the old handrail connections and replacing rosette style diagonal bracing washers.



Transport-ing you back in time

Phyllis the Elephant's seat with a view

In 1914, the Wirth Brothers' circus came to town bringing with it hours of family fun, lifelong memories and a performance that has lasted the ages.

When walking from the circus back to Bomaderry Station, Phyllis -one of the show's elephants -decided she needed a break right in the middle of the bridge. She stopped, sighed and down she sat. Traffic stopped, people gathered, children giggled. Phyllis didn't mind one bit, she quite liked the view.

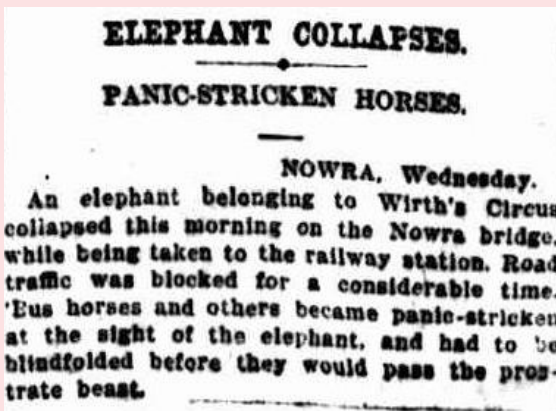
It took hours (and seven loaves of bread washed down with 60 litres of beer-flavoured hot ginger) and a little nudge from her fellow circus elephant, Jumbo, to get Phyllis up on her feet and moving again.

Her mid-bridge break made the history books, and to this day, folks still smile when they hear her story. Nothing says "the circus is in town" like an elephant who takes a seat where no one else would!



Phyllis and her companion, Jumbo. Provided by the Shoalhaven Historical Society.

As seen in the *Sydney Morning Herald*,
Thursday 14 May 1914:



Do you have a
local history story
about the bridge
you would like to
share?

Send us an email
with your story and
we might include it
in the next update!



Bridge bio

The life and legacy of the Historic Nowra Bridge

Build date: 1881

Retirement date: 2023

Bridge type: pin-jointed wrought
iron Whipple truss

Spans: 8

Width: 6 metres

Length: 342 metres

**Elephants that have stopped
traffic on the bridge:** 1

Did you know?

The historic Nowra Bridge was
manufactured in America and
transported to Australia via ship
and assembled locally.

The Whipple truss design was
patented in 1847 by its designer,
an American civil engineer
named Squire Whipple.

Whipple truss bridges are rare
in Australia, with only two in
NSW and two in Queensland.
The historic Nowra Bridge is
Australia's oldest Whipple truss
bridge, and the only example
built of wrought iron and as a
road bridge. The other Whipple
truss bridges in Australia were
built as railway bridges and are
no longer in use.



New technique proves to be a game changer

In May, we successfully trialled an innovative method to remove the cantilever pedestrian walkway which was added to the historic bridge in 1980.

Rather than using traditional methods involving barges and cranes on the water, the team tested a more efficient approach: a crane mounted on a truck carefully maneuvered massive sections of the walkway, each weighing over three tonnes, through the bridge's trusses.

The trial was a success, with crews removing segments from both the northern and southern ends of the bridge without incident. This breakthrough means the entire walkway can now be dismantled directly from the bridge deck, avoiding the need for complex marine operations and delivering significant cost savings to the project.

Crews will continue removing the remaining sections later this year after scaffolding is installed beneath the bridge.



The crew maneuvering a section of the walkway through the truss at the northern end of the bridge.

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