

Smiths Road Community Submission to the ACT Budget 2018/19

Aim

To seek funding through the ACT Budget to complete improvements and pave the remaining 4.5km unsealed portion of Smiths Road, south of Tharwa, ACT.

Introduction

This proposal was developed by residents of Smiths Road and the associated roads—Hugs Lane, Contour Road, Applebox Road, Kullaroo Road and Yellowbox Road—who live in the localities of The Angle and Clear Range (the SR Community) in the Snowy-Monaro Regional Council (SMRC).

Firstly, members of the SR Community wish to acknowledge the effort of the ACT Government in improving and maintaining the ACT portion of Smiths road within their road maintenance budget. The government is responsive in grading the road when significant deterioration occurs, and the community is appreciative of the vastly superior bridge that now spans the Gudgenby River.

This submission complements the proposal to upgrade Angle Crossing that is being supported by the Smiths Road Rural Fire Service.

Context

Smiths Road is a windy, predominantly gravel road that follows the west side of the Murrumbidgee River, commencing from its junction with Boboyan Road for 8 kilometres to the NSW border. It ends in a private road approximately 30 kms south of Tharwa; the remaining portion being maintained by the SMRC.

The SR Community is a small cohesive community, with local activities centering around the local rural fire service and community hall. The Smiths Road rural fire service forms part of the southern defence of the ACT.

There are just under 200 holdings in the zone that forms the part of the SMRC that relies on Smiths Road for access. While several smaller roads provide links to other areas in the ACT and NSW, Smiths road provides the only all-weather access for community members, most of whom travel to the ACT for employment, health services, schooling and to access shops. Additional roads link Smiths Road to the Monaro highway (Angle Crossing Road) and Naas Road in the ACT (Sunshine Road), but access along these roads is restricted due to the presence of low level crossings that are frequently flooded due to rain events, snow melt and releases of water upstream.

While residents pay rates to the SMRC, most economic activity contributes to the local ACT economy and ACT Government. Cross border issues and geographical location have made it difficult for residents to influence policy decisions in either government area.

Currently comprising around 150 permanent residents and additional absent landholders, increased demand on the road has occurred with the establishment of the Murrumbidgee to Googong pumping station at Angle Crossing and more recently the Williamsdale solar farm. Extra traffic has resulted in residents lobbying the ACT Government more regularly for increased road grading, but in between grading events the road deteriorates to an unsafe level that was not previously observed by residents.

ACT residents also drive on Smiths Road for recreational purposes to access the Murrumbidgee River, particularly at Angle Crossing and the Gudgenby River, increasing as development has expanded in the southern part of the ACT. Recreational use includes regular use by Outward Bound Australia, whose national base is located in Tharwa. Recreational use is also expected to increase with the redevelopment of Tharwa village as is currently under consideration by the ACT Government.

The ACT Government began major works on Smiths Road prior to the major flood event in December 2010 that washed away the bridge spanning the Gudgenby River at the northern end of Smiths Road. This followed a commitment by Tony Gill, Director, ACT Roads on behalf of the ACT Government to improve or pave a portion of Smiths Road each year. The community requested that in the first few years the allocated budget be spent on road alignment and improving the visibility at the dangerous Sunshine Road intersection. Some upgrades occurred and then the promised yearly works were delayed while the new bridge was constructed over the Gudgenby River.

In 2015 the first 1km of road was sealed from the southern end of Smiths Road at the ACT/NSW border. No works to improve Smiths Road were undertaken (apart from maintenance grading) in 2016. A second portion of road improvement is set to occur in October/November this year. This will leave approximately 4.5km of unsealed road. At the present rate, and assuming no other priorities in the ACT roads budget arise, it will take another 8 years to fully pave the ACT section of Smiths Road.

In the meantime there are considerable risks to people commuting to the ACT. There are regular traffic accidents with two cars being rolled on the road in the past 2 months. Whilst the traffic load can be low at certain times, during peak commute times, including after nightfall, there is a steady stream of traffic travelling on the road. These risks also discourage visits from family and friends to the residents of Smiths Road and it is only a matter of time before the community experiences a tragic loss.

Joyriders and car thieves in the ACT use the gravel road for entertainment and hazardous driving practices are frequently observed. Additionally, the ACT section of Smiths Road has become a regular dumping ground for stolen vehicles which are frequently burned, adding to the hazard of a serious bushfire threat and requiring removal and cleanup by the ACT Government. The community believes that the sparsely populated, gravel, northern end of Smiths Road renders invisible the residents who live further south and sealing the road would reduce this activity.

Due to Smiths Road being the single all-weather access for residents and community, sealing the road would also improve access in the event of fire, and flooding which currently washes out potholes and sink holes.

Rationale

Funding would:

- deliver on the commitment of the ACT Government in a timely manner and provide certainty to Smiths Road residents;
- reduce the future burden of road maintenance and grading on the ACT Government;
- significantly improve the safety of Smiths Road residents who contribute economically to the ACT economy and Government;
- improve access and safety for the school children who are driven to schools at peak traffic times in the ACT (there are no schools provided by NSW in this area);
- improve access for emergency services, including fire, ambulance and health services, some of which will not currently drive on Smiths Road; and
- Improve access for recreation for ACT residents and community groups.

The SR community would welcome the opportunity to discuss this proposal further. The community can be contacted via:

- Paula Mance on 0434 704 222; or
- Clive Haggar on 0418 628 916.