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Smiths Road Community Submission to the ACT Budget 2025/26

Aim

This proposal seeks funding through the ACT Budget to prioritise the improvement and paving of the remaining 3km unsealed portion of Smiths Road, south of Tharwa, ACT.

Introduction

This proposal was developed by the Smiths Road Community Association 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).

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 SR Community also wishes to acknowledge the improvement and paving of Smiths Road that has occurred to date.

Context

Smiths Road is a windy, predominantly gravel road that follows the west side of the Murrumbidgee River, commencing around 1km south of the township of Tharwa in the ACT. Around 8 kms of the road traverses the ACT to the NSW border, with most of the remaining portion of gravel public road being maintained by Snowy-Monaro Regional Council. Smiths Road ends in a private road approximately 30 kms south of Tharwa.

The SR Community is a small regional 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. It provides rural housing options for people seeking a country and sustainable lifestyle not available in the ACT.

There are just under 200 holdings that form the part of the Snowy-Monaro Regional Council area 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 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, releases of water upstream and sporadic maintenance.

While residents pay rates to the Snowy-Monaro Council, 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; nor should it be a small community's responsibility to do so.

Currently comprising around 150 permanent residents and additional absent landholders, growth in the community is occurring due to the high demand generated by its proximity to the ACT and the area's ability to provide rural housing choices not available in the ACT.

Increased demand on the road has also occurred with the establishment of the Ingledene forest plantation, Murrumbidgee to Googong pumping station at Angle Crossing and the Williamsdale solar farm. Smiths Road provides a shortcut for people travelling from southern ACT suburbs to the Monaro Highway. Extra traffic forces local residents to continuously lobby the ACT Government for increased road grading, but in between grading events the road deteriorates to an unsafe level that was not previously observed. ACT residents also drive on Smiths Road for recreational purposes to access the Murrumbidgee River, particularly at Angle Crossing and the Gudgenby River. Recreational users include Outward Bound Australia, whose national base is located in Tharwa.

When major investment was undertaken at Ingledene, there was no provision or consideration given to sealing Smiths Road that adjoins the plantation and provides the sole access to the forest. This oversight significantly disadvantages road users and increases road safety aspects for residents and ACT residents taking advantage of the planned recreational activities in that area.

There are considerable risks to SR people commuting to the ACT and ACT residents. The unsealed section is undoubtedly the most dangerous road in the ACT (see recent letters in the local press). There are regular traffic accidents, and during peak commute times, including after nightfall, there is a steady stream of traffic travelling on the road. Along with blind corners and crests, the dust makes oncoming traffic invisible. There have been previous fatalities on Smiths Road and it is only a matter of time before the community experiences another 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. The community believes that the 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 the ACT community, sealing the road would also improve access in the event of fire, and flooding which currently washes out potholes and sink holes.

Road maintenance causes significant ongoing impact on the ACT roads budget and wastes the resources of community lobbyists and government in managing aggravated residents. For example, in Jan -Feb 2025 the road was graded and resurfaced twice.

A decade of Smiths Road improvement:

- 2015-16 - 1km of road was sealed from the southern end at the ACT/NSW border.
- 2016-17 - No improvement works.
- 2017-18 - 350m of road paving of promised 1km from 2016/17 FY.
- 2018-19 - Community put in unsuccessful request for road funding, ACT Budget.
- 2018, Jul - Community invited the ACT Government (Roads ACT) to a consultation where the Directorate confirmed advice received from the Snowy-Monaro Regional Council Mayor, Mr John Rooney, that 1km of road paving would occur in 2018-19, and the ACT Government was committed to paving the remaining unpaved section with a yearly commitment to improvement works.
- 2019, Jun - Advice received that following further delays, only 500m of Smiths Road will be paved and this will not occur until September 2019.
- 2019, June – wrote to Minister Steel and the Chief Minister seeking confirmation of their commitment to pave Smiths Road (attached)
- 2019, Nov – Minister Steel replied

'The ACT Government has committed to upgrade a total of a half a kilometre of road per year each on Boboyan and Smiths Road. This takes the total upgrades on these two roads to one kilometre each year' (attached).
As such, the commitment of 2011 was reaffirmed, but the quantity of works was reduced.

- 2019-20 – no road improvements
- 2021, May – works commenced on paving 1.5kms
- 2021, Jan – wrote to Minister Steel asking for remaining road to be sealed (attached)
- 2022, May – wrote to Minister Steel asking for update on this year's road improvements (attached)
- 2022-24 – Community members and the association repeatedly wrote to the Minister, Chief Minister, Cross Border Commissioner, and local MLAs and Senators about the appalling state of Smiths Road
- 2024 – Advice received that the ACT Government would not be honouring their repeated commitment to seal Smiths Road. This is unethical and dishonest.

Submission Rationale

Bringing forward and prioritising the paving and associated improvement of Smiths Road would have a number of benefits. It would:

- significantly improve the safety of Smiths Road for all road users – it is regarded as the most dangerous road in the ACT. This would save lives and avoid serious injury to road users;
- honour the ACT Government's broken promise and deliver on their commitment in a timely manner and provide certainty to Smiths Road residents and road users;
- free up future ACT road funds for other ACT projects and reduce the future burden of road maintenance and grading;
- reduce sedimentation and runoff to the river from road resurfacing dust and gravel drains;
- significantly improve the safety of Smiths Road residents who contribute economically to the ACT economy;
- 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);
- provide safe and all-weather access for residents and fire services in the event of local bushfire risk;
- improve access for ambulance and other health services who currently refuse to drive the full length of the road; and
- Improve access for the recreational and transport activities of ACT residents.

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
- Phil Gouldson on 0411 484 253.

A Journey on the Most Dangerous Road in the ACT

From the Tharwa direction to the ACT/NSW Border



The Sign – it doesn't warn of the dangerous blind corners, narrowness of the road or sharp crests. Unsuspecting drivers risk their lives and the lives of others. The daily dangers for commuters include near head on collisions, having to veer off the road to avoid a collision and even rollovers.

A deadly narrow, sharp & blind corner, with deep drains at the . It is the most dangerous corner of all



No clear view of the road ahead, compounded by a very narrow section of the road.

A short straight section with a dangerous blind corner.





A deadly sloping road with no clear view of the dangerous curve ahead

A vicious crest with a sharp corner to the right – that is unseen by drivers. The spot where a roll over occurred.



Another crest ... and again it has a very sharp turn to the right at the top of the crest.



No clear view of the road ahead or warning of a cattle grate just round the bend.



The road has soft and gravel edges and consequently controlling a vehicle is extremely dangerous, particularly if having to avoid on coming vehicles.

THE END OF THE 3kms ... HOPEFULLY SAFELY!
Oh – and of course, be mindful of the kangaroos, wombats, etc