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Smiths Road Community Submission to the ACT Budget 2026-27

Executive Summary

This proposal seeks funding through the ACT Budget to complete improvements and paving of the remaining 3km of the unsealed section of Smiths Road, as per the ACT Government's public and repeated commitment since 2011.

- The NSW Government has completed upgrades and improvements to 3.5km of the southern end of Smiths Road adjacent to the ACT border at a cost of \$3.3M.
- The remaining unsealed section of Smiths Road lies in the electorate of Brindabella and is the responsibility of the ACT Government.
- Under the ACT and NSW Government's Memorandum of Understanding for Regional Collaboration (2023) the ACT Government has a responsibility to take action to promote a borderless approach that optimises the best outcomes for communities of the Canberra region, including for the priority focus area of community resilience and health and wellbeing.
- The unsealed section of Smiths Road poses an unacceptable safety risk to local and ACT residents.
- The unsealed section prevents all-weather emergency response, including by the ACT Ambulance and ACT Fire and Rescue services. In the event of Monaro highway closure, it is the only access road to the Williamsdale battery and solar farms, and the Angle Crossing pumping station.
- Smiths Road residents have no choice but to drive on the dangerous pot-holed, corrugated, and narrow gravel road with blind corners and deep sides. Smiths Road provides the only all-weather access to the community.

Introduction

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

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).

Context

Smiths Road 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 being maintained by Snowy-Monaro Regional Council.

The SR Community is a small regional community, with a 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 rely on Smiths Road for access which provides the only all-weather access for community members, most of whom travel to the ACT for employment, health and retail services. 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, snow melt, releases of water upstream and sporadic maintenance.

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

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, pumping station at Angle Crossing and the Williamsdale solar and battery farms. Smiths Road provides a shortcut for people travelling from the ACT 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. 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 paving Smiths Road that adjoins the plantation and provides the sole access to the forest. This oversight significantly disadvantages road users and negatively increases road safety aspects for road users.

There are considerable risks to 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, and 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.

Joyriders and car thieves in the ACT use the gravel road for entertainment, and hazardous driving practices are frequently observed. Paving 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 volunteer lobbyists and government in managing aggravated residents. For example, in just the two months of 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.
- 2017-18 - 350m of road paving delivered 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 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 in 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).

- 2021, May – works commenced on paving 1.5kms. ACT Government advises road design of remaining unsealed portion is complete and ‘shovel ready’
- 2021, 2022 – SR community wrote to Minister Steel asking for remaining road to be sealed
- 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
- 2025 – Further advice received that the ACT Government were not prioritising the paving of the remaining unsealed portion but were looking for funding opportunities. Commonwealth advises no funding applications have been made for Smiths Road
- 2025 – Snowy Monaro Regional Council, with funding from the NSW Government, completes road improvement and paving of 3.5kms of Smiths Road adjacent to the ACT border

- 2026, April – Cross Border Commissioner advises that the ACT Government that there is no further planned or budgeted program to increase the length of seal on Smiths Road at this time.

Rationale

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. 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;
- match the contribution of the NSW Government in recognition of cross border issues that require NSW and the ACT to jointly take action under a borderless approach that optimises the best outcomes for communities of the Canberra region;
- free up future ACT road funds for other ACT projects and reduce the future burden of road maintenance and grading;
- reduce negative environment impacts, including sedimentation and runoff to the Murrumbidgee 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 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 and rescue services in the event of local bushfire risk;
- improve access for ambulance and other health services who often refuse to drive the full length of Smiths 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
- Clive Haggar on 0418 628 916.

A Journey on the Most Dangerous Road in the ACT

Unsealed section, North from Tharwa to the ACT/NSW Border



The Sign 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 rollovers.

Condition of road after rain. Necessitates many requests to ACT Government before remediation occurs.



Condition of road just two weeks after grading. Community members must lodge many 'fix my street' requests and write to the Minister to get the road re-graded. This is expensive and people must drive on these corrugations for a significant amount of time before road grading occurs.



A deadly narrow, sharp & blind corner, with deep drains at the edge (>1m deep).

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



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

Blind crest, and a very sharp turn to the right at the top of the crest. No warning of cattle grid.

