

# Incorporating Heritage Considerations Into The Design Of The Western Highway - Ballarat Avenue of Honour Overpass

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**Abstract:** The Ballarat Avenue of Honour is a memorial to local service personnel who served in World War I and extends 22 kilometres from the iconic Ballarat Arch of Victory to Weatherboard Road.

When the Ballarat Bypass was constructed in the early 1990s, some trees were removed and Avenue Road was closed at the Melbourne-Ararat railway line, splitting the Avenue of Honour into two sections.

In 2009, VicRoads began work to duplicate the Western Highway and recognised that the new grade-separated interchange at Remembrance Drive was a unique opportunity to reconnect the Avenue. Working closely with expert landscape architects OCULUS, the Ballarat Arch of Victory/Avenue of Honour Committee and Heritage Victoria, VicRoads developed a design that balanced the functional aspects of a freeway interchange with respectful elements to highlight the Avenue's significance, commemorate servicemen and servicewomen and to ensure the historical integrity of the Avenue.

The new overpass was designed to emphasise the sweeping vista along the Avenue and also to allow new avenue trees to grow underneath. Other design elements of significance were employed, including customised reinforced earth abutment walls that incorporate aspects of the avenue elm trees as well as remember World War I battlefields and service units; and parapet screens to commemorate the 3801 local service personnel.

The new interchange features landscaped fields, designed to bloom with red native wildflowers around ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day to reflect the red poppies that grow in the World War I battlefield of Flanders Fields in Europe.

The overpass was officially opened on 12 April 2015, re-connecting the Ballarat Avenue of Honour for the first time in 22 years. The overpass has become a place for reflection for those wishing to remember the many service personnel who served their country.

## 1. Overview

When the Ballarat Bypass opened in 1992, it was a celebration of a major milestone for the Western Highway.

However, the creation of the Bypass included the closure of the Avenue of Honour at the Melbourne-Ararat railway line, which meant the northern 5 kilometres was severed from the other 17 kilometres of avenue.

After the Federal and State Governments approved the duplication of the Western Highway in 2008, VicRoads saw an opportunity to reconnect the Avenue and reinstate it to its former glory.

The vision was to create modern infrastructure that met transport needs yet respected the past and the existing environment.

The objective was to leave a legacy for the community and have the Overpass ready for the ANZAC Centenary in 2015.

## 2. History

The Ballarat Avenue of Honour is the longest of its kind in Australia and one of the earliest known memorial avenues to have been planted in Victoria.

Today there are 3801 trees dedicated to the 3744 servicemen and 57 servicewomen from the district who enlisted. Each tree is accompanied by a plaque, originally manufactured from gunmetal, recording the name, tree number and unit of those servicemen and servicewomen.

The Ballarat Avenue of Honour is believed to be the longest of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

**Picture 1: Western Highway under re-construction between Ballarat and Lake Burrumbeet. 1963**



## 3. Ballarat Bypass and Western Highway duplication

When the Ballarat Bypass was constructed in the early 1990s, some trees were removed and Avenue Road was closed at the railway line. The project split the Ballarat Avenue of Honour into two sections; Ballarat-Burrumbeet Road (old Western Highway) to the south and Avenue Road to the north.

Work commenced on the duplication of the Western Highway in 2012. Provision of a grade-separated interchange was incorporated into the project, thus allowing the reconnection of the Avenue, subject to re-establishment of the railway level crossing.

Once construction had commenced, the City of Ballarat and Ballarat Arch of Victory/Avenue of Honour Committee lobbied the Federal Government to secure funding to re-open the level crossing. This was successful and in conjunction with V/Line approvals the installation of a new level crossing was achieved in time for Project completion.

#### **4. Stakeholder engagement and community support**

One of the main challenges in planning improvement works for the heritage listed Avenue was to ensure that the appropriate people were engaged and consulted and that any work was undertaken sensitively.

VicRoads enlisted the help of the Arch of Victory/Avenue of Honour Committee: a diverse and passionate group dedicated to the Ballarat historic landmark who also campaigned for the reopening of the rail crossing. President Bruce Price, headed up a committee consisting of representatives from the RSL, the National Trust, the City of Ballarat, former servicemen, Lucas Girls and descendants of servicemen and servicewomen.

This relationship was a key to the success of the project, with the committee involved in the design development and consulted during the construction phase through regular updates, site visits and meetings.

The planning, development and construction was also widely publicised in the community.

Local media helped promote the construction, as the ANZAC centenary approached, giving the community an increased focus and an awareness of the contribution of Ballarat and western Victorian communities to the war effort.

Media coverage across the local newspapers The Courier and the Miner, radio ABC Ballarat, and television station WIN News helped raise the profile of the project leading up to the opening.

#### **5. Innovation in design**

The Ballarat Avenue of Honour Overpass was designed with a focus on commemoration.

The VicRoads Western Highway Project Team saw the construction as a unique opportunity for a road project to add value to the community beyond safety improvements.

It is hoped the project will inspire other road managers to think beyond the functional scope of works and build infrastructure and design landscaping which is sympathetic to the historical context of a local area.

The Ballarat Avenue of Honour Overpass was constructed in line with the planning approvals for the Western Highway Project – Ballarat to Beaufort section.

##### **5.1. Landscaping**

The landscaped fields on either side of the Overpass have been inspired by the battlefields of World War I which became known as Flanders Fields.

The landscaping incorporates crushed red brick and concrete which provides a vibrant colour and requires little maintenance.

The formation batters alongside the Overpass are mulched with vivid red coloured wood mulch.

Native wildflowers provide a blaze of colour, with flowers specifically chosen to bloom red around Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

Timber seats in the rest area are made from reclaimed wood of Avenue trees that were removed for the Overpass construction. They are imprinted with the ANZAC qualities of 'endurance, courage, mateship and sacrifice'.

The use of the wood from old trees presented an occupational health and safety challenge, because over the years visitors had embedded metal into the trees, including bullets, medals and other foreign objects.

Interpretive signage has been provided in the rest area, to inform travellers on the significance of the design elements and how they relate to the Avenue.

### 5.2. *Bridge screens*

The most striking features of the new Overpass are architecturally-designed parapet screens patterned with a repeating grey leaf cut into perforated aluminium sheet.

There are 3801 leaves, each representative of a serviceman or servicewoman from the Ballarat district who served in World War I. Attached to 774 of the leaves are red coloured folded leaves, commemorating those who lost their lives during the war.

### 5.3. *Bridge walls*

The precast reinforced concrete abutment walls are dyed red to complement the landscaping of the interchange and to create a pleasant contrast against the surrounding farmland. Technical challenges were encountered in achieving the design consultant's specified colour consistently through each of the 139 panels. In addition, a custom pattern was created for the surface of the panels, consisting a woodgrain texture beset with oak leaves, similar to the type of Turkey Oak trees that grow along the Avenue.

Concrete letter and number tiles were affixed to recesses in the eastern abutment panels, to display the names of key World War I battles and the military units in which the local men and women served.

**Picture 2: Reinforced panels in the walls display the names of places where battles were fought.**





#### 5.4. Commemorative features

A steel gate in the northern end of the eastern abutment wall contains the Rising Sun badge of the Australian Commonwealth Military Forces. This badge was its third iteration and was in use from 1904 to 1949. The current badge is the seventh iteration and is similar to the third, with the words The Australian Arm in the scroll.

**Picture 3: Rising Sun gate**



### 5.5. Engineering modifications

Open graded asphalt was employed across the bridge and for a short distance beyond to reduce tyre noise as a cue for Western Highway motorists to experience a momentary quiet period to reflect on the avenue while driving over it.

Structural soil was used for Remembrance Drive verges to support avenue tree growth as well as being structurally sound for vehicles to drive on.

The bridge soffit was designed at a great height than standard to to improve sight lines along the Avenue (7.1m compared with the standard 5.4m).

**Picture 4: Western Highway under construction between Ballarat and Burrumbeet - Ballarat Avenue of Honour Remembrance Drive. 2014**





**Picture 5: Western Highway at completion between Ballarat and Burrumbeet - Ballarat Avenue of Honour Remembrance Drive. 2015**



## **6. Official Opening**

The Minister for Veterans Affairs, Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson, and Minister for Roads and Road Safety, the Hon Luke Donnellan, MP, officially opened the Ballarat Avenue of Honour Overpass on 12 April 2015.

The opening event was a partnership between VicRoads, the City of Ballarat, and the Arch of Victory/Avenue of Honour Committee.

The Overpass opened two weeks before ANZAC Day, as part of Ballarat's ANZAC Centenary commemorations, with hundreds of people – young, old, local and from across the state, attending the event.

Titled 'Honouring the Avenue,' the moving event, included military proceedings with a minute's silence and bugler, official ribbon cutting - using the same pair of scissors that cut the original Avenue of Honour opening ribbon, bus tours through the newly-opened section, a choir performing songs from the war era and local community musical bands.

The historic event reconnected the Ballarat Avenue of Honour for the first time in 22 years.

Once more the public could access all 22 kilometers of continuous tree-lined, heritage-listed landmark that is the Ballarat Avenue of Honour.

### 6.1. Feedback

The feedback from the community has been overwhelmingly positive.

VicRoads received this note from a local community member after the opening.

“I attended the ‘Honouring the Avenue ceremony’ and afternoon activities yesterday and I just wanted to congratulate you personally with your team, for the vision to have such a wonderful day and the professional, community and inclusive way VicRoads went about it.

“Thank you to VicRoads for ‘bringing home the 800 lost veterans and their trees from World War I with their mates’ as Catherine King said in her speech, by reconnecting the Avenue. Very emotional day...felt so right and fitting.

“It was a proud day for Ballarat and one when I drive through the whole Avenue again or pass over the Overpass my attention and awareness will be once again remembering and honouring World War 1 veterans.

“Thank you for a great day I won't forget.”

**Picture 6: The official opening of the Ballarat Avenue of Honour. 2015**





## **7. Sustainable outcomes**

The reconnection of the Ballarat Avenue of Honour with a commemorative Overpass has reinvigorated and improved the community sense of place and pride in the Avenue.

The area gives recognition of the history of the servicemen and servicewomen and the contribution of the Ballarat and Western Victorian communities to the war effort.

Road safety is also a strong element with a rest area encouraging drivers to take a break to avoid fatigue; providing an interesting and attractive location to break a journey.

Since opening, the Overpass and rest area have provided the local community with a landmark of which they can be proud.

VicRoads hopes the Ballarat City Council will run events at the interchange in future around ANZAC Day to reinforce the importance of the Overpass to the city's heritage.

## **8. Conclusions**

The Ballarat Avenue of Honour Overpass is modern infrastructure that complements a historic landmark.

Constructed as part of the Federal and State funded \$663 million Western Highway duplication, this Overpass is a modern tribute to a historic landmark that commemorates the 3801 Ballarat locals who enlisted in World War I.

It is a unique and iconic entry point to Ballarat – connecting the Arch of Victory and the Overpass.

Drivers who stop and rest at the interchange can view the landscaped red fields which mimic Flanders Fields, and remember those who went to war, their battalions and where they fought.

Years of design, consultation and construction culminated in the opening and for the first time in 22 years, this historic Avenue was reconnected.

## **9. References**

The Ballarat Arch of Victory and Avenue of Honour Committee. City of Ballarat.

Federation University Australia.