

A combined Great Western Highway/Mid Western Highway/Mitchell Highway bypass of Bathurst.

Despite a number of recent realignment and bridge replacement projects on the Mid Western Highway between Bathurst and Blayney, major faults remain in the road that are unlikely to be solved using the present route. Also, since the Great Western, Mid Western and Mitchell Highways are major inter-regional traffic routes, there is an increasing need for an alternative that avoids the expanding urban area of Bathurst. Future highway planning could consider more efficient and safer options.

Faults in the Mid Western Highway include:

- Dangerous substandard curves and grades of Mt.Fitzgerald.
- Excessive height changes caused by repeated climbing in and out of the Evans Plains Creek valley.
- The need to travel through the full length of the recently extended 13 km restricted speed zone of Bathurst, Kelso and Raglan.
- Numerous remaining substandard curves that despite improvement projects, still remain in the present route.

Users of the Mitchell Highway experience similar problems with the urban area of Bathurst. There are also avoidable curve and grade situations in the section between West Bathurst and Dunkeld.

Topographic data of the Rocks Hill area on the Mitchell Highway shows an average grade of 5%. The grade of the Mid Western Highway at Mt.Fitzgerald is 10%. Because both the Mitchell and Mid Western Highways run virtually parallel for a considerable distance, extending the Mid Western Highway along the Guyong road north of Blayney to meet the Mitchell Highway at Vittoria could fully avoid the Mt.Fitzgerald problem. This alignment would provide considerable improvements to safety and efficiency for Bathurst/Blayney traffic. A minor distance increase of about one kilometre would result. This would be offset by a reduction in hill climbing of about 30%.

Furthermore, by combining the traffic of the Mid Western and Mitchell Highways and crossing the Macquarie River at Dunkeld where the flood plain is narrow, then passing north of Eglinton and rejoining the Great Western Highway in the vicinity of the airport, an efficient full bypass of Bathurst could be built. Topographic data suggests that any attempt to build a bypass south of Bathurst would encounter considerable problems with the hilly terrain of that area. Combining the highway traffic with such a route would also be difficult.

Federal government funding responsibility under AusLink could now assist these projects.