



WHITE PAPER

The Barton Highway Duplication

What it is, why it's important and how it will impact
our towns (and your property value)

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The Barton Highway Duplication



It spans more than 50 kilometres and connects to our country's capital. The Barton Highway is a critically important piece of road infrastructure for the suburbs of the Canberra district and the regional centres and rural towns that border the highway.

The upgrade of The Barton has been a long time coming and with stage one completed in February 2024, more and more speculation is arising around what it could mean for the economic state of the area.

The Barton has existed for decades - close to a century, in fact. So how can a seemingly simple road duplication have the potential to impact entire regions either positively or negatively? With the Barton corridor stretching from Yass in New South Wales and crossing the border into the ACT, it provides access to the communities along all 52 kilometres of the highway. And when the road becomes more efficient, it promises to bring opportunity to the region.

This paper is designed to provide clear insight into the development and the economic growth drivers that it could influence, drawing on the knowledge of property experts, economists and regional thought leaders.

The origins of the upgrade



Back in 2017, the Federal and NSW Governments committed a combined \$200 million for the Barton Highway upgrade - \$150 million was federal level funding and \$50 million came from the state purse.

The planning of the upgrade determined that a road duplication would best deliver on the needs of the community, notably:

- ✓ enhance driving conditions, increase driver safety and improve travel times
- ✓ meet future traffic demands
- ✓ support economic growth and connectivity in the region.

In simple terms, the duplication will transform the highway into a continuous two-lane carriageway both north and south, increasing the highway's capacity for cars, eliminating the need for merging and providing overtaking space - all of which enhances travel efficiency and commuter access to and from Canberra.

The five stages of the project:

Stage two - in planning *(construction anticipated to start in 2025)*

Deliver the Kaveney's Road intersection and road duplication towards Murrumbateman.

Stage four

Deliver the Murrumbateman bypass from Vallencia Drive to the Gounyan Curves realignment.

1.

Stage one - complete

Deliver seven kilometres of duplicated lanes, resulting in two-lane carriageways from north of the ACT border to south of Kaveney's Road.

2.

3.

Stage three

Deliver two new carriageways and realigning to improve road curves from Gooda Creek Road to Vallencia Drive.

4.

5.

Stage five

Duplicate the road from the Murrumbateman bypass to the existing dual carriageways south of the Hume Highway.

The Barton Highway connects the surrounding farming areas to Yass and Canberra, and takes travellers on the popular Sydney to Melbourne thoroughfare.

POPULATION FORECAST

29% ↑ BY 2033

LIVING WITHIN 1HR OF CANBERRA

77% ↑ BY 2036

LIVING IN YASS VALLEY LGA

Transport demand on the Barton is growing steadily and is forecast to continue its growth in the next decade. The Department of Planning and Environment expects the population living within one hour of Canberra to grow 29% by 2033 and the Yass Valley Council estimates the population in its LGA to increase by around 77% by 2036.

Since COVID, and with cost of living pressures, the shift of city dwellers to regional towns is here to stay. We are seeing an increase in new housing in both Murrumbateman and Yass, and if we compare the number of property inspections and enquiries that our offices are seeing today, compared to three years ago, we're seeing around 50% more activity. Needless to say, the road duplication is an imperative for the growing population in the region.

Road safety

Communities along the Barton corridor have long called for an upgrade of the highway. Local Members have petitioned for improvements for years, citing residents' concerns of difficult intersections, lack of overtaking opportunities, poor driver behaviour and difficulty turning on and off the highway as urgent safety issues to address.

*With the anticipated population growth in the area, it's predicted that by 2037 the **Barton Highway will take 21,000 vehicles a day** (increasing from around 13,000 road users today).*

The highway duplication will improve conditions and address safety concerns, particularly along the sections of road that are accident hotspots, near Vallencia Drive and Kaveney's Road. It will also lift road capacity to ensure the uptick in vehicles travelling along the highway doesn't impact commute times.



Connectivity

The small towns that pepper the Barton Highway rely on it to access work, school and healthcare services. It's a vital road in the connectivity of Yass Valley and Hilltops LGAs, suburban ACT suburbs and the south west Riverina and Murray regions in NSW and northern Victoria. The highway duplication promises to enhance access for these towns and regions, ease congestion and positively impact commute times.

Stage four of the planned development stands to drive the greatest efficiency in connectivity with the introduction of the Murrumbateman bypass.

Today, the Barton Highway cuts through Murrumbateman, slowing traffic and increasing hazard risks as drivers navigate residential areas.

The bypass would see traffic diverted to the east of Murrumbateman, optimising driving conditions and enhancing safety for both drivers and Murrumbateman residents. Early planning shows the bypass stretching from Vallencia Drive through to the Gunyan Curves realignment. However, until stage four is formally underway, details of the exact route, design and timeline for completion may change.

What we do know is that with the elimination of through-traffic in Murrumbateman, road users will see improved driving conditions, in particular freight carriers, and it will also have a positive impact on the town, driving house price growth and enhancing liveability. We delve into these factors below.

Economic growth drivers

Aside from the road enhancements, the Barton Highway upgrade stands to have a positive economic impact to the surrounding regions. In this paper we focus on four key areas that are predicted to benefit as a result of the road upgrade.



Freight efficiency

Commercial traffic relies on the Barton Highway. Grain, wine, dairy, horticulture, forestry, construction and manufacturing are all vital economic drivers for the communities surrounding Canberra as well as the Riverina region to the southwest. These industries move freight along the Barton to access domestic markets and international trade markets via Canberra airport.

Canberra airport has a long history of moving airfreight and has the ability to operate over a 24 hour period, which metropolitan airports, like Sydney, can't do due to flight curfews. This coupled with road connections, both north and south, positions Canberra airport as a prime asset for moving freight along the eastern seaboard. The Barton Highway upgrade stands to deliver efficiencies for road freight, allowing for increased truck capacity and reduced commute times, not to mention regional job creation as Canberra airport builds its capability as a freight hub for NSW and Victoria.



Tourism

A vital road for tourism, the Barton Highway connects Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, providing access to attractive regional areas for short stays and generating consistent holiday traffic year-round.

As the Barton expands its capacity to accommodate more vehicles, improves driving conditions and reduces travel time, it's anticipated that more city-dwellers will choose to access the areas connected by the highway for short getaways, with the appeal of local wine districts, and easier connections to the Snowy, Riverina and Murray regions.

Domestic tourism in the areas surrounding the Barton Highway is a crucial factor in the health of the local economy. Farm stays are growing in popularity among city residents, and Canberra is increasingly becoming an attractive weekend destination, with a booming food and wine scene.



Housing Development

And, with population growth comes new development opportunities. With better access and faster, safer commutes to business centres, more people will decide to make the move regionally and settle in suburbs that surround the arterial roads. As more residents enter the region, more housing will be required. Projections show Murrumbateman and Yass districts are expected to see an extra 4,700 people move to the area by 2036.

*To cater for population growth in the Yass Valley, the number of households is forecast to grow to 9,771, with an increase of over **823 households alone by 2026.***

We are already seeing housing development increase in Murrumbateman and Yass, and this can be expected to continue as the highway upgrade attracts even more people to live in the region.



Liveability

The culmination of all the factors discussed in this paper is the creation of more liveable towns. Road infrastructure plays a critical role in the liveability of a region, with connectivity and congestion having a considerable impact on quality of life.

In many ways liveability sits at the heart of economic growth; the more liveable a region becomes, the more people it will attract - both permanent residents and short-term visitors, which in turn makes local businesses, property markets and industries more prosperous.

*Statistics from the Regional Australia Institute show around **one in five city dwellers think about leaving the metropolitan area, in favour of regional living, suggesting that population growth in regional areas will continue long-term.***





Locations set to benefit

While there are an abundance of small towns that border the Barton Highway and stand to benefit from its upgrade, there are three areas flagged as high potential for drawing in long-term economic value, particularly in the local property markets.

Yass Valley



Yass Valley is a region on the rise, comprising eight towns: Binalong, Bookham, Bowning, Gundaroo, Murrumbateman, Sutton, Wee Jasper, and Yass. Located just 60 kilometres north of Canberra – less than an hour’s drive – its strategic location offers residents a regional lifestyle with city services and employment opportunities within a commutable distance.

Home to nearly 18,000 residents (and growing rapidly), Yass Valley has a significant proportion of locals commuting to Canberra on a daily basis. The planned highway upgrade promises safer and more efficient travel for locals, which in turn makes it a more attractive place to live, driving property growth within the area.

Looking at house prices in Yass, it tells an interesting story. The 10 years from 2006 to 2016 saw marginal growth, with median house prices moving from just above \$200,000 to around \$400,000. From there, we have seen property values almost double, with the median house price today sitting over \$730,000.

Population growth predictions support our view that the Yass Valley will continue to see its house price trajectory trend upwards.

*Over the next 10 years, it’s expected that permanent residents in the area will **grow more than 70%.***

This can only have a positive impact on property markets. And, being 280 kilometres southwest of Sydney and 600 kilometres northeast of Melbourne, Yass Valley is a short stay hotspot for many looking to get out of the city and into nature. As the region enjoys a boost in short-term visitors, it supports a thriving local economy, which fuels local jobs and liveability of the region.

Murrumbateman



Once a row of homes along a highway north-west of Canberra, Murrumbateman is fast becoming a thriving town. You only need to look at the increasing number of new housing developments and residential blocks being sold in the area and the steep increase in property values over recent years.

In 2010, Murrumbateman's median house price crept above \$400,000 for the first time. This year, it surpassed \$900,000.

The COVID effect really took Murrumbateman's house prices to new heights. Between 2020 and 2024, we saw the median house price jump more than \$300,000, and the trajectory is showing that the million dollar median price is not far away. The Murrumbateman bypass will support this growth acceleration.

As the fastest-growing region in the Yass Valley, boasting a population of approximately 4,000, expected to reach 6,000 by 2031,

Murrumbateman is poised to be one of the first suburbs to realise the comprehensive benefits of the highway duplication.

The diversion of heavy highway traffic away from Murrumbateman is anticipated to support a more stable real estate market. With less traffic on the roads, residents can expect reduced noise, pollution, and congestion, while reaping the rewards of improved safety, accessibility, and aesthetic appeal. As a tourism hub situated in the heart of the popular cool climate wine country, the region is an area ripe for further growth and development.

These factors will enhance the attraction of Murrumbateman for both long-term residents and short-term visitors, all of which leads to a stronger demand for housing. While there is likely to be some short term pain, during the construction of the bypass, the long-term value it will bring to the suburb is exciting for the community. We are confident in our position that property values in the area will grow significantly in the next five years.

Canberra and the capital region



Having completed stage one of the Barton Highway corridor upgrade in February 2024, residents of Canberra and the surrounding suburbs are set to benefit from safer, more efficient and more reliable commutes.

At the time of completion, Transport for NSW spokesperson, Cassandra French reiterated that the project centred on road safety for regular commuters and properties in the area, saying: “The seven kilometres of duplicated lanes and upgrades to the existing highway have delivered a two-lane southbound carriageway from north of the NSW/ ACT border to south of Kaveney’s Road. Included in this stage of the project is a central median separating the two carriageways, upgraded intersections and property access roads to the highway.”

With North Canberra, Molonglo and Gungahlin the top growth areas in 2021-22, Canberra’s growing population of more than 456,000 continues to push outwards. Improved connectivity and faster commutes brings greater attraction for new residents to the outer Canberra suburbs. Those seeking more affordable housing with long-term capital growth prospects, can achieve their dreams of property ownership without the cost of additional commuter time.

*Overall, the Canberra market is seeing more balance post Covid, which saw **ACT house prices skyrocket over the past five years by 62%**. For the 12 months to May 2024, house prices have seen 7% growth, and sit at a median of \$1.12 million. With a strong public service sector and enviable lifestyle benefits, **Canberra and outer suburbs are expected to have a healthy property outlook for years to come.***



Case studies

Up and down the eastern seaboard, there is evidence of the economic benefits of major road upgrades to regional communities. Two of the most significant transformations are covered in the following case studies.



Toowoomba Second Range Crossing: Unlocking a thriving region

Improving commuter safety, reducing transport congestion and bolstering economic growth through greater regional connectivity were the key benefits driving the \$1.6 billion Toowoomba Second Range Crossing project (TSRC); the largest Australian Government funding commitment to a single road project in Queensland's history.

The four-year project, completed in September 2019, is a 43 kilometre road bypass route to the north of Toowoomba. It connects the Warrego Highway at Helidon Spa in the east to the Gore Highway at Athol in the west via Charlton.

Key features of the TSRC Project include:

- Four-lane stretch from Warrego Highway East to West Interchange
- Grade-separated interchanges at Warrego Highway West, Toowoomba-Cecil Plains Road, and Gore Highway
- Grade-separated connections to Mort Street and Boundary Street
- Approximately 30m deep cutting atop Toowoomba Range
- 800m viaduct east of New England Highway, crossing Queensland Rail line
- Continuity of New England Highway via new bridge over TSRC cutting.

The TSRC provides a more direct and efficient route for approximately 3,500 heavy vehicles across the range each day. This rerouting diverts almost 80% of heavy and super heavy commercial vehicles away from Toowoomba's central business district. Additionally, by avoiding up to 18 sets of traffic lights, the project has reduced travel times and operational expenses for businesses transporting goods through the region by approximately 25%.

Forecast to inject \$2.4 billion into the Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley economy over the next 30 years, the second range crossing has enabled the inland city to unlock its diverse economic potential.

With the Bypass and Wellcamp airport now fully operational, and the Inland Rail Project beginning early works, the region is not only competitive, but emerging as the transport and logistics hub of choice for producers, growers and exporters.



Liveability

Widely regarded as one of Australia's most liveable regions, Toowoomba is supported by one of the nation's most diverse economies.

Situated just 90 minutes from Brisbane, Toowoomba boasts a plethora of advantages for residents. From affordable housing options to job opportunities, quality education, green spaces, and a variety of sports and cultural activities, the city provides a comprehensive lifestyle experience. Additionally, its healthcare system, comprising three major hospitals and a wide range of specialists, ensures residents have access to world-class medical services.

The recent Bypass upgrade has further enhanced the region's appeal by rerouting heavy vehicle traffic away from suburban roads, markedly improving safety for pedestrians and drivers alike.

These combined factors have established Toowoomba as a magnet for more people. Beyond its thriving industries and proximity to Brisbane, the city's inviting climate and enviable lifestyle has attracted a new population looking to put down roots in a vibrant - and safe - community.

As a result, the property market continues to thrive, signalling increased interest and confidence in Toowoomba's future.

The five year growth saw Toowoomba house and unit prices soar a staggering 72% and 55% respectively, with city median house prices now sitting at around \$615,500 and units at \$453,300.

Entering the Toowoomba market is relatively affordable compared to Brisbane and other regional locations, and with strong growth projections, the city is positioned as a standout regional market nationally.

Jugiong: from highway stopover to a titan of tourism.

Jugiong, a quaint river-side village, is just a 90-minute drive from Canberra. The village appeared destined for a gradual decline following the construction of the Hume Highway duplication in the mid-1990s, which included a town bypass.

The highway upgrade aimed to reconstruct the crucial transportation artery spanning from Sydney to Melbourne. The extensive construction project took 30 years to duplicate 808 kilometres of highway, with work commencing in the mid-1970s and concluding in 2013. The Hume Highway traverses 514 kilometres in New South Wales and 294 kilometres in Victoria. As part of this project, significant milestones were reached with the completion of key bypasses and deviations. The Yass bypass, which provided a connection to the Barton Highway, was completed in 1994, followed by the Jugiong bypass in 1995.

As the highway upgrade diverted traffic away from the village, Jugiong's general store closed and the post office moved due to the greatly reduced flow of visitors. However, though initially challenging for the community, the bypass provided Jugiong with an opportunity for reinvention. By diverting heavy vehicles and improving travel time to Canberra and Sydney for east coast commuters, Jugiong developed a new kind of appeal.

Small artisanal suppliers, like The Long Track Pantry and Gino's Fruit and Veg shop, changed Jugiong's trajectory, transforming it into a sought-after spot for day-trippers and campers. Visitors now flock to the town to immerse in nature and enjoy the outdoors, with the Murrumbidgee River the centrepiece of the suburb.

With a permanent population of 255 (2021 census), Jugiong hasn't lost its small-village character while it has positioned itself as a town on the rise. No longer merely a pit stop along the Hume Highway, the remarkable change has led to significant investment into the community, particularly in the last five years. An extensive upgrade of the local park, establishment of its popular Art Exhibition and Writer's Festival (attracting an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 visitors each year), coupled with a resilient community spirit has propelled Jugiong's growing tourism industry.

The residents have evolved over time as well. Jugiong is now drawing in new inhabitants seeking a more relaxed pace of life, with scenic views, who desire proximity to larger centres like Canberra, Wagga Wagga, and Sydney.

With vacant land selling for around \$200,000, house prices well under \$600,000 and affordable riverside acreage on the Murrumbidgee, the Jugiong lifestyle opportunities have never been more appealing.



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