

The Road to Regional Growth



WA's last important highway link

Q: What do these two roads have in common?

A: They are both designated State Highways – that is, they are considered to be roads of significant importance by the Government of Western Australia.



Great Northern Highway



*Goldfields Highway
Wiluna-Meekatharra*

The road on the left is the Great Northern Highway which links Perth with the Pilbara. The road on the right is the Goldfields Highway, which links the Goldfields with the Central Desert and Mid West. This 182km stretch of main road from Wiluna to Meekatharra is the last State Highway to remain unsealed in WA.

Frequently impassable during the wet season and always with at least one stretch in a poor state of repair, sealing the Goldfields Highway has been on the Main Roads agenda for over 10 years. Without it, the town of Wiluna remains an isolated community. With it, the town of Wiluna can become an important link between the resource rich areas of the Pilbara, the Mid West and the Goldfields.

Wiluna-Meekatharra the fastest way to deliver critical infrastructure

Recently, there has been a proposal that a new road should be developed, linking the Goldfields with the Great Northern Highway at Doolgunna. This would take precedence over sealing the last stretch of Goldfields Highway from Wiluna to Meekatharra.

compared to the cost of constructing a new road through a sensitive environmental and heritage area.

Federal, State and local government representatives, to the transport industry and the resources sector.

Essentially, the Shire of Wiluna seeks to achieve the same objective as the State Government – to create a link from the Goldfields to the Great Northern Highway. One route may be delayed by years, while the other, the Wiluna-Meekatharra Road, could go ahead virtually immediately.

Responses received showed solid support for this critical transport infrastructure. Generally, it was felt that sealing the road would help to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, provide a key link in the supply chain to Oakajee Port and underpin the future development and long-term economic prosperity of the Mid-West region.

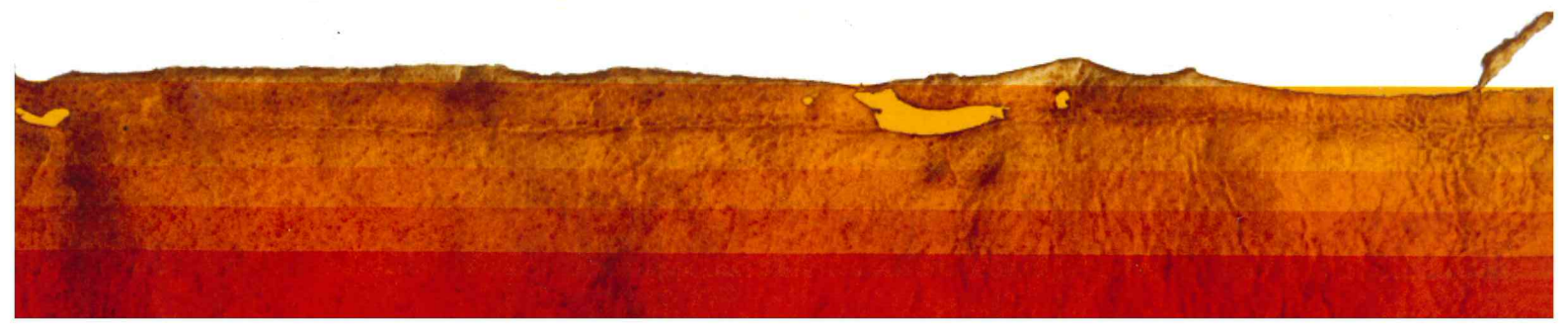
Support from industry and local government

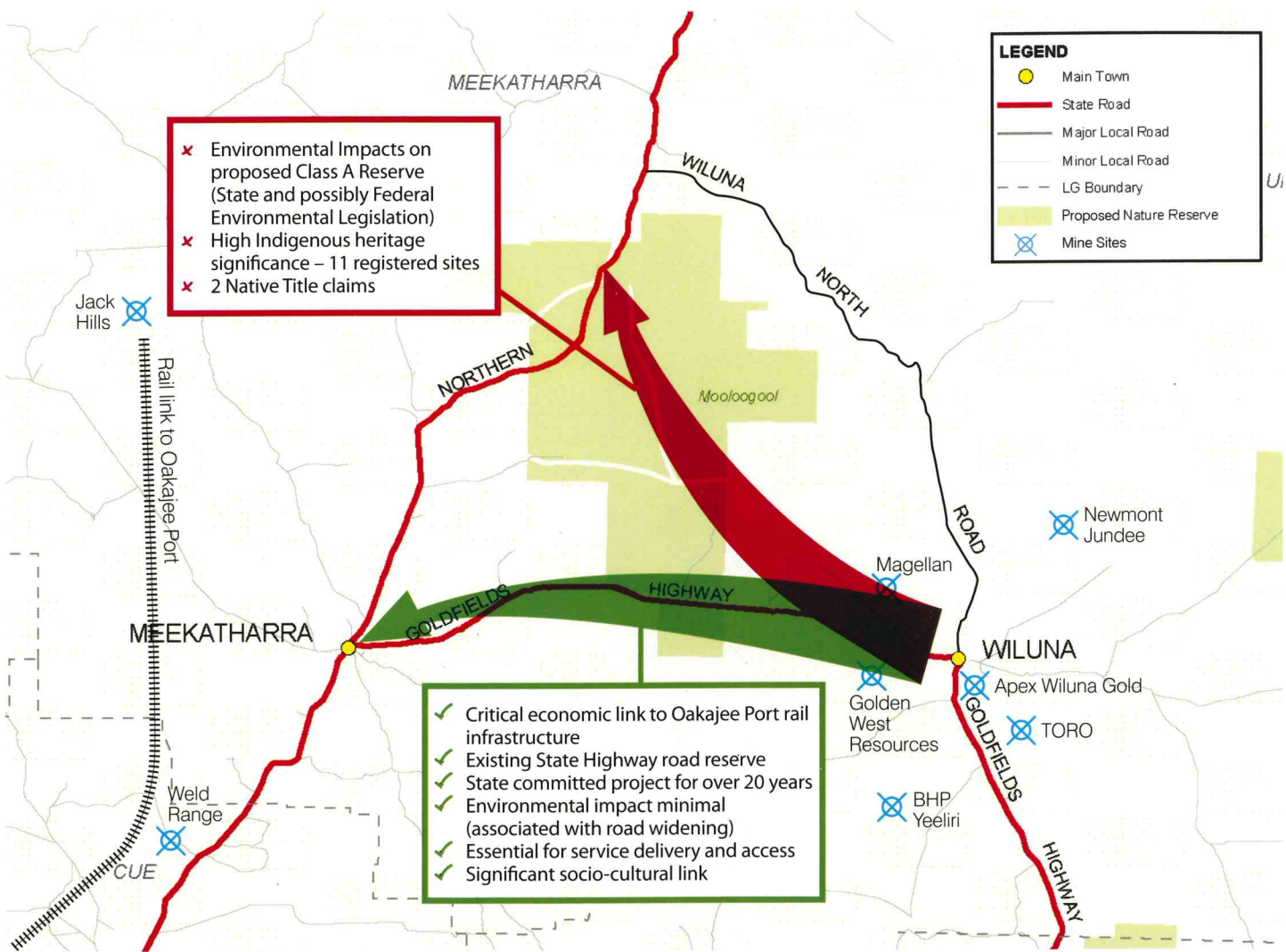
The Shire of Wiluna has evidence that industry and local government stakeholders are keen to see the State Government seal the last stretch of the Goldfields Highway.

An independent report prepared by Urbis "Closing the Gap and Making Connections – Win/Win for communities in the Central Desert" has been widely circulated to

At the March 2011 meeting of the Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils, a motion that the GVROC Council should support the sealing of the Wiluna to Meekatharra Road to provide a link between the Goldfields and Pilbara was carried unanimously. Industry and local government see the Wiluna-Meekatharra Road as a win/win for all.

A host of conservation, heritage and native title issues could hold up development of the Doolgunna route for years. Delayed construction would cause costs to blow out and hold up expansion and construction plans by the resources sector. The State Highway between Wiluna and Meekatharra, which would achieve exactly the same purpose, has none of those issues. It could be sealed immediately and cost-effectively, when





SHIRE OF WILUNA

The Road to Regional Growth





Funds allocated 12 years ago but road is still unsealed

Sealing the last stretch of the Goldfields Highway has been designated 'a priority' by successive State Governments over many years.

In 1998, National Party Minister Eric Charlton announced that cash had been allocated to seal the Wiluna-Meekatharra road.

As you know, the recently announced TransformWA program includes an allocation of \$70 million to seal the Wiluna to Meekatharra Road. You will be pleased to know that the latest advice from Main Roads is that the works will be completed to primerseal stage by late 2001.

Yours sincerely

Eric Charlton, MLC
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT

Main Roads says other options unsupportable

Main Roads WA (MRWA) has since investigated options for an alternative northern corridor. Their 2007 report concluded:

- The development of a more direct link between the Goldfields and Pilbara Regions cannot be supported, based on current and anticipated transport demands in the foreseeable future.
- The reconstruction and sealing of the Goldfields Highway Wiluna-Meekatharra section will provide a shorter and more efficient route between the Goldfields and southern Pilbara than the existing Mt Magnet – Leinster route. This will provide a more direct link between the Goldfields and Pilbara Regions without adding new links to the road network.

Department of Environment wants Doolgunna as Class A Reserve

The Doolgunna pastoral lease is managed by Department of Environment and Conservation and was intended to become a Class A Reserve. This area is believed to have high environmental significance at a State level and possibly at the Federal level (Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act requirements). It is a place of ancient landscape and pristine wilderness. From a conservation and management perspective it represents a significant area of intact rangelands that can be managed with minimum edge effect. The complex and rich geology supports a number of endemic species. Northern Doolgunna, in particular, is highly valued for its diversity.



Goldfields Highway offers more benefit for everyone

Remote communities with poor roads go without services that the majority of Australians regard as a right. Sealing the Wiluna-Meekatharra Road will improve access to health care, reduce social isolation, help government services to access the area, allow regular supplies to get through to the town and provide a safe means of travel.

Similarly, remote areas with poor roads are a disincentive to economic investment. Who wants to run a business in an area they can't access? Or get supplies through on time? Sealing the Wiluna-Meekatharra Road will open up the Goldfields to the Central Desert and Mid West, providing a critical link to the Oakajee rail infrastructure at Weld Range which will support mining operations in the Wiluna area.

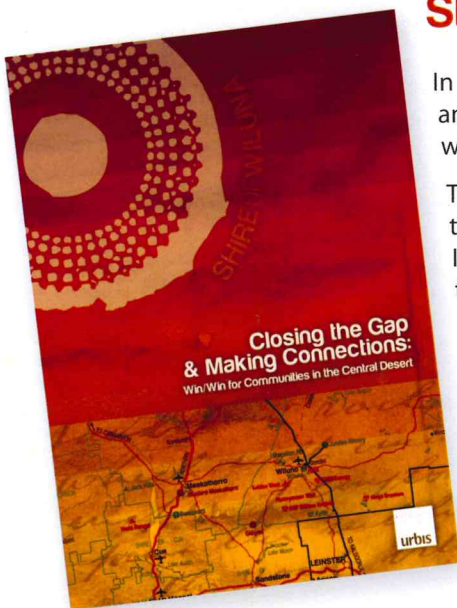
It will allow transport operators to move freely between the regions and cut 142km off the existing Mt Magnet – Leinster route.

Infrastructure Australia has acknowledged the strategic value of Oakajee and the need for interconnection between the major ports within the State and across Australia. Strategically, the Shire of Wiluna is ideally placed to become a major service centre for transport traversing regional Western Australia.

Wiluna is also a resource-rich area with the potential to contribute significant mining royalties to the State.

The completion of the Goldfields Highway is the best option for economic and community growth overall.

Study proves Highway is best way to go



In late 2010, independent consultants Urbis were engaged by the Shire of Wiluna to carry out an intensive investigation in the Wiluna area to identify the need for and benefits associated with the delivery of critical strategic transport infrastructure to the Central Desert region.

The report studied the social, economic and environmental factors which are contributing to a high level of disadvantage suffered by the community in this remote regional town. It identified mining and exploration companies with an interest in the area, looked at tourism opportunities and at the pastoral industry and concluded that a strategic transport network would deliver significant socio-economic benefits for all.

Urbis then considered the option of sealing the Wiluna-Meekatharra road versus the alternatives and finally, looked at the estimated cost versus the triple bottom line benefits.

It concluded that the most logical, cost effective and efficient way to deliver a strategic transport network to the Central Desert/Mid West region would be to take the road well travelled – to seal the existing Wiluna-Meekatharra Road.

Full copies of the Urbis Report are available by directly emailing Urbis at: lvthomas@urbis.com.au or can be downloaded from: www.wiluna.wa.gov.au

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