



THE RIDGELINE TRAIL



Community Vision

A background document capturing knowledge, ideas and opportunities

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION | MARCH 2023

A community vision designed to nudge and educate but not overwhelm.....



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Acknowledgements

This document is owned by the Surf Coast community, developed through the collaborative efforts of many.

The following people and groups have been predominantly responsible for navigating the process, riding the bumps along the way and arriving at this vision document destination:

- Shauna Burford, Jan Juc resident and Bellbrae Primary School parent on the school environment committee
- Graeme Stockton, Surf Coast Energy Group
- Perry Mills of Perry Mills and Associates Landscape Architecture
- Surf Coast Shire Council (Community Project Development Program)

The document summarises so much important information about this trail, with the aim of creating awareness, educating and influencing change.

We thank the Surf Coast Shire Council and Patagonia for their contributions in funding the work required to produce this vision.



The Ridgeline Trail spans the traditional lands of the Wadawurrung People.

We Acknowledge them as the Traditional Owners and Protectors of this place.

We Acknowledge their Ancestors who cared for the land, rivers and sea - and all of its creatures - for thousands of generations.

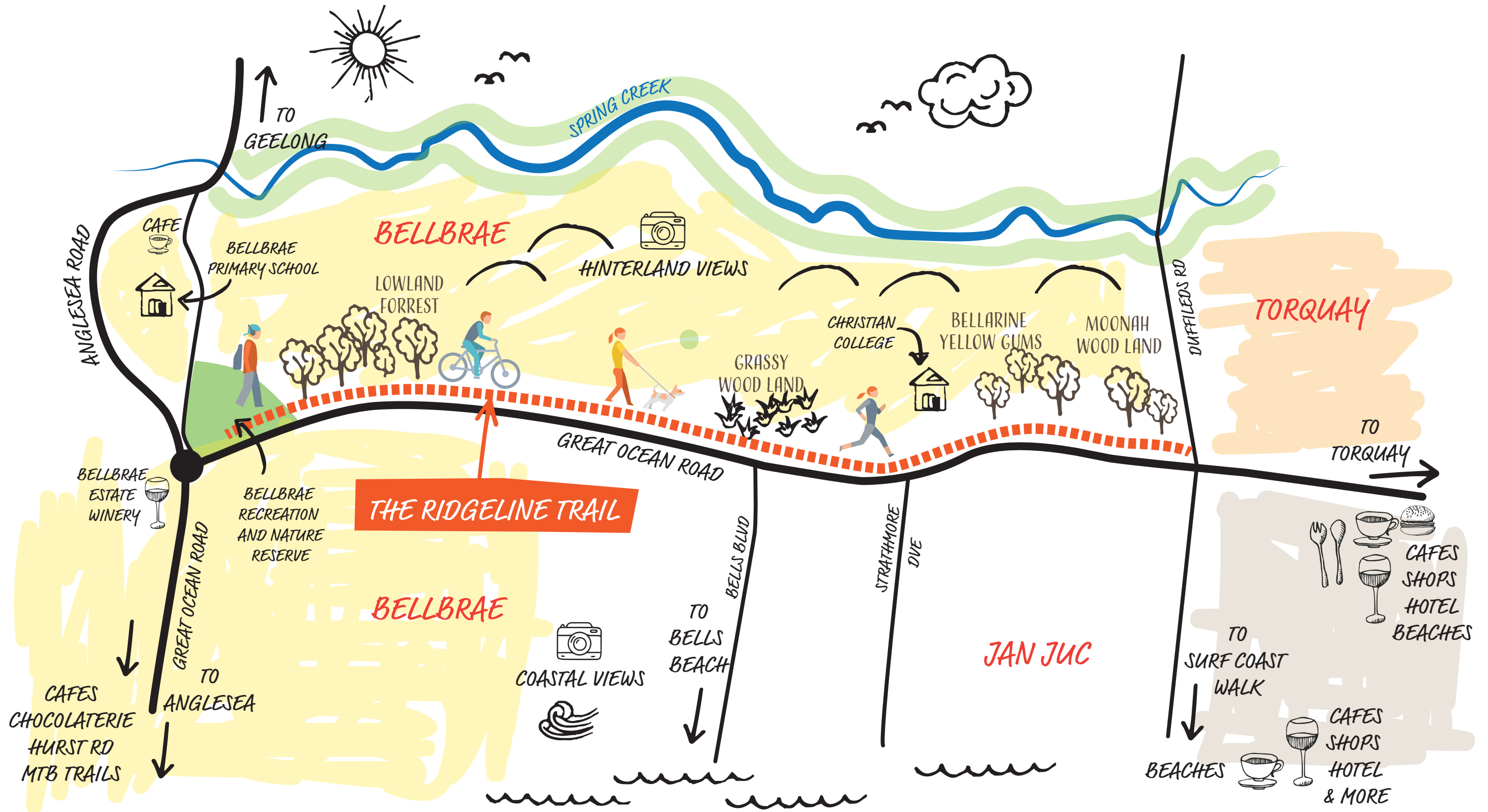
We pay our Respects to Elders past, present and future who continue on this path.



1. Vision



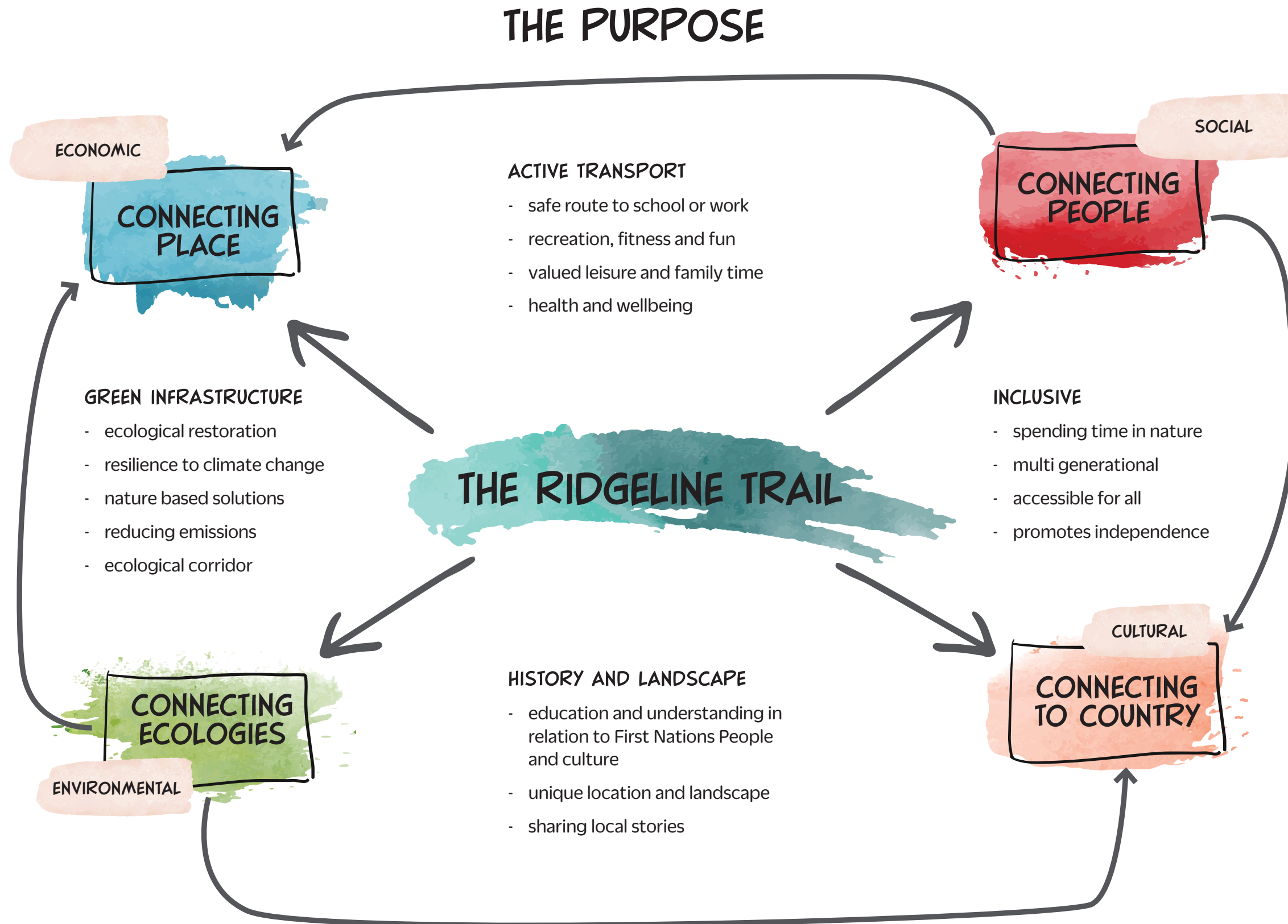
A holistic approach that changes the focus from a service road to a valued community trail connecting us to nature and place.



2. Purpose



A trail that connects us...



3. Expected outcomes



Development of the Ridgeline Trail will result in an upgraded and extended pathway, improvements to the natural environment via weed control and re-vegetation and additions to the trail experience through interpretative and wayfinding signage, seats at viewing points and playful pathway elements.

Project success for our community means.....

1. The Ridgeline Trail corridor is valued

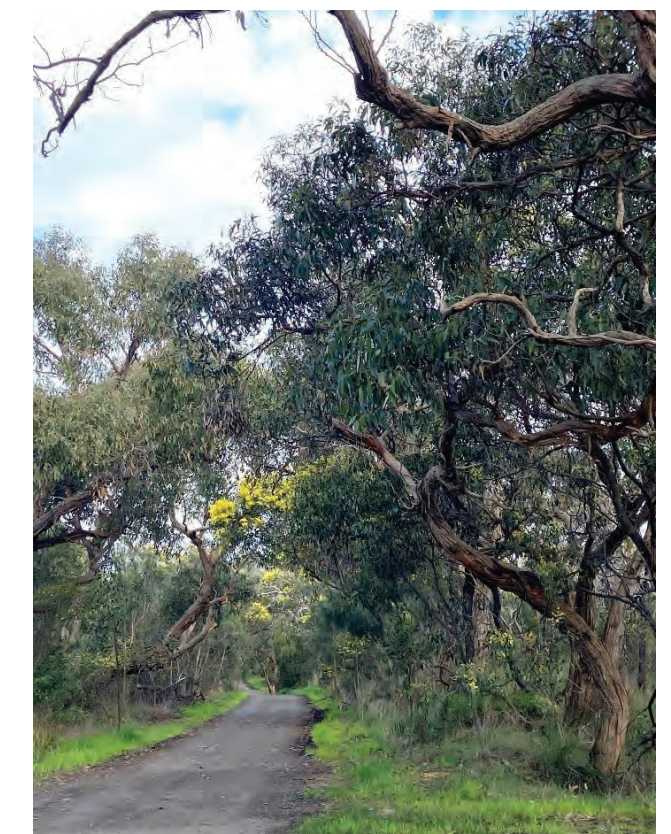
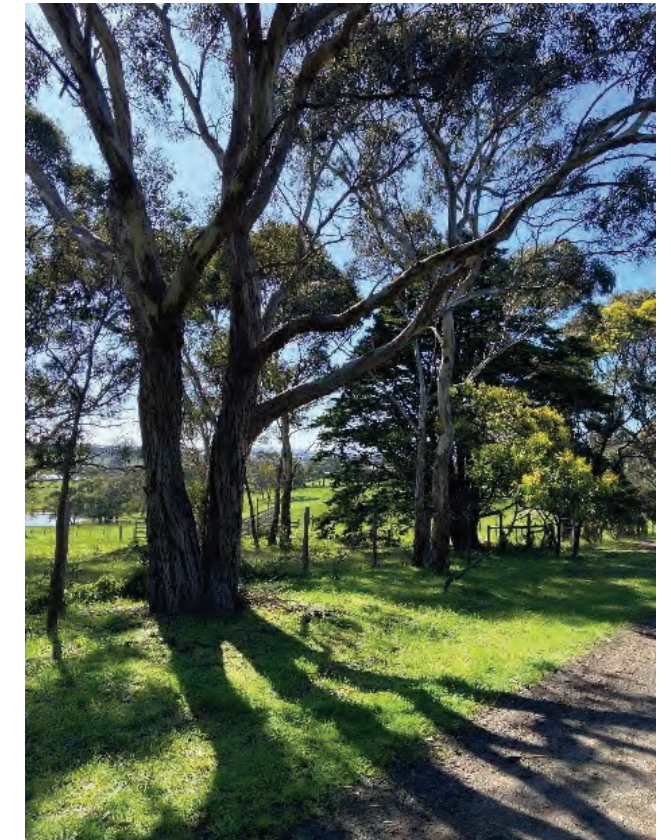
- A special piece of land that is highly valued (wellbeing, social, ecological, cultural and economic)
- It is within a significant landscape that is used and enjoyed by the community
- An active travel link that connects us to places we want to go and not just a service road
- Recognition of this value needs to be reflected in local and state government planning
- Valuing 'green infrastructure or assets' as much as capital assets (i.e. asphalt, street furniture etc.)
- Value can drive opportunity, involvement, prioritisation and funding

2. The Ridgeline Trail corridor is cared for

- The road reserve is maintained and service levels are appropriate and understood
- Regionally restricted and highly invasive weeds are controlled
- Existing biodiversity is conserved
- Community capacity is understood and community are enabled to be part of the solution
- A collective stewardship model is in place (state government agencies, Council and community)

3. The Ridgeline Trail corridor is revitalised

- Eradication of highly invasive weeds allows opportunities for an enhanced biodiversity corridor
- Playful elements enable perfect opportunity to experience the landscape's natural features
- Enhanced ridgeline views
- Awareness and appreciation of the area's past
- Making the place and the experience even more special



"Protection of the natural environment, elements of the natural environment, walking/jogging/bike paths that connect housing to community activity and the general condition of open space" are the top 4 place values identified as being important to the Surf Coast Community". (Surf Coast Shire People Place Future)

4. Background analysis



4.1 Where is it?



It is a significant location in more ways than one....

- start of the Great Ocean Road
- regional connection between Bellbrae, Jan Juc and Torquay
- servicing a local residential population of 24,031 (2021 census data)
- two schools with a forecast student population of 1000+

The 'old' Great Ocean Road (currently classified as a service road) is located parallel and to the north of the existing Great Ocean Road. Works from 2023 will upgrade the service road to a regional shared trail and with a further extension to the east, the route will form The Ridgeline Trail.



Views over Spring Creek Valley



Bellbrae Primary School P-6



Bellbrae Recreation and Nature Reserve



Private land owners



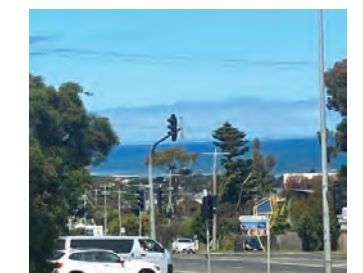
Bells Boulevard (to Bells Beach)



Christian College Surf Coast Campus K-9



Torquay (start of the Great Ocean Road)



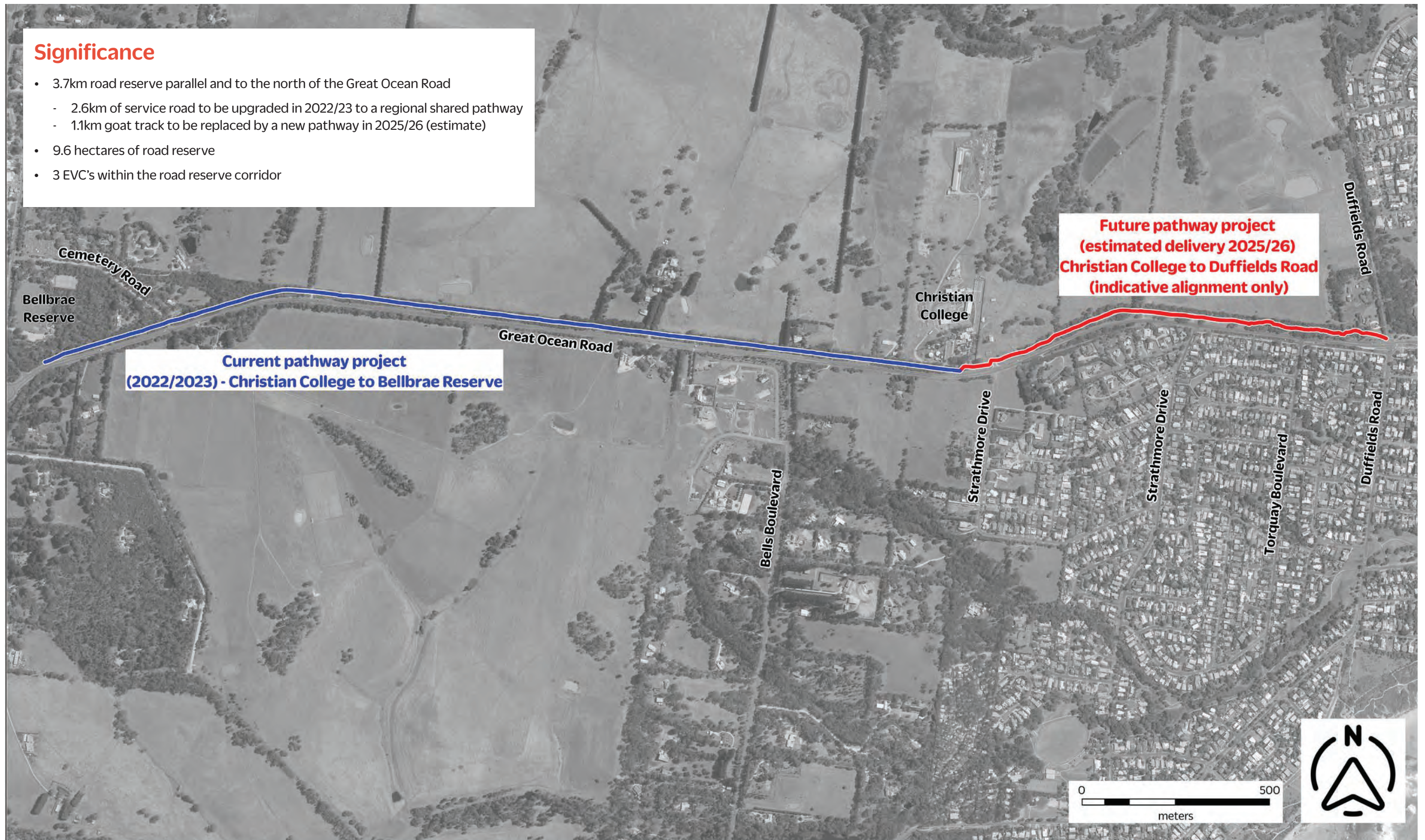
Intersection of Duffields Rd and Great Ocean Rd



4.2 What is it?

Significance

- 3.7km road reserve parallel and to the north of the Great Ocean Road
 - 2.6km of service road to be upgraded in 2022/23 to a regional shared pathway
 - 1.1km goat track to be replaced by a new pathway in 2025/26 (estimate)
- 9.6 hectares of road reserve
- 3 EVC's within the road reserve corridor





Asset and Values Description

ASSET / VALUE	CURRENT DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITY
Linear pathway through road reserve	<p>3.7km road reserve parallel and to the north of the Great Ocean Road is currently defined by two distinct sections</p> <p>SECTION 1 (BLUE)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.6km of road reserve with an asphalt service road along the entire length (from the entry to Christian College through to Bellbrae Reserve near School Road) vegetation on both sides of the service road for majority of the way used as a school cycling route, a recreational link, an access road to private properties and a utility provider service road (assets in road reserve) the service road (varying in width from 3.5 -5m) is the old Great Ocean Road, decommissioned in the late 1960s when the new Great Ocean Road was opened (original road width of 7m now has edges inundated with grass and other vegetation) <p>SECTION 2 (RED)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a 1.1km section of road reserve between Christian College and Duffields Road that is more open with less vegetation and no formal pathway link this section is still used as a transport link along an informal natural surface 'goat trail' and the section also features informal bike jumps 	<p>Section 1 to be upgraded in 2022/23 by Surf Coast Shire Council to a regional pathway standard (the path needs a bit of work but with a focus on surface consistency and good drainage)</p> <p>Section 2 – a new concrete pathway link to be constructed in 2025/26 (estimated) by Surf Coast Shire Council</p>
Road reserve vegetation	<p>9.6 hectares (96,600m²) of road reserve ranging in width from 18 to 42 metres wide</p> <p>The road reserve supports a mix of native vegetation species (76 varieties) of varying condition with affinities to Lowland Forest (EVC 16), Grassy Woodland (EVC 175) and Coastal Alkaline Scrub (EVC 858) and also areas dominated by introduced species (86 varieties). The state significant Bellarine Yellow Gum Eucalyptus leucoxylon subsp. bellarinensis are present in the corridor. Seven introduced plant species are listed as regionally controlled noxious weeds including African Boneseed, Flax-leaf Broom, African Box-thorn, Serrated Tussock, Sweet Briar, Blackberry and Gorse. Whilst eradication of these weeds is a high priority, a wide variety of other weeds are present in the road reserve and will required ongoing management.</p>	<p>Land managers (Council and Department of Transport) to clarify service levels for weed and trees and co-ordinate management. Community stakeholders have capacity and interest to assist via 'Adopt a Highway' type approach</p>
Planning Overlays	<p>The road reserve is located within Transport Zone (TR22) of the Surf Coast Shire Planning Scheme. The road reserve's western end is covered by a Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) and Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO1 – Significant Native Vegetation). The Australian Heritage Council found the Great Ocean Road and its scenic environs (from Torquay to Allansford) to be a place of outstanding national heritage significance and in 2011, the road was added to the National Heritage List. Scattered areas of Cultural Heritage Sensitivity are contained within the road reserve.</p>	<p>Vegetation significance to be better understood so that values are protected and enhanced. Signage to capture heritage values</p>
Trail connections and access points	<p>The 3.7km road reserve is used currently as an active travel route to school and as a recreational cycling and walking link. Planned upgrades of the 2.6km service road to a regional pathway and construction of the new 1.1km link between west of Duffields Road will highlight how this Ridgeline Trail will need to connect to existing pathway networks to the east, west, north and south and key destinations throughout the route.</p>	<p>Upgraded Duffields Rd lights crossing, Christian College crossing (Great Ocean Rd), connections to Torquay, Jan Juc, Bellbrae pathway networks</p>
Signage / way finding	<p>Vehicle related signage dominates the service road along the Great ocean Road. No pathway trail head, way finding, risk management or interpretation signage exists though the corridor.</p>	<p>A cohesive signage plan to be designed and implemented</p>
Safety considerations	<p>Key safety issues at present are the long grass along the trail edges (increases risk of snakes and makes users uncomfortable), illegal rubbish dumping along the service road is unsightly but may also contain contaminants and drainage issues in some sections.</p>	<p>Requires routine inspections and maintenance by land managers</p>
Property access	<p>Private properties require access across or along the trail, with one owner required to travel approximately 200m along the trail to access property.</p>	<p>Review and improve trail crossovers to minimise private property vehicle travel on the trail. Signage has a trail not road focus</p>
Utility providers assets	<p>Barwon Water, Telstra, Powercor and gas provider access along the service road to maintain utility assets.</p>	<p>Guidelines to protect path and vegetation assets, with controls on weight and speed of vehicles</p>



4.3 What makes the trail special?

Connection with nature

The landscape (not just the pathway) is valued by the community and is a key part of the trail experience

Special qualities:

- The nature within the road reserve is highly valued and is a significant feature.
- Connecting with nature facilitates community health and wellbeing.
- Trail users describe the sensory experience (how it makes them “feel”)... like a “bush track”, “uncrowded”, “sense of enclosure”, “I feel like my kids are safe”, “by the time my child gets to school they seem less anxious”, the “old trees providing shade and relief from the fiery northern sun”, there is an auditory and visual connection, “the bird sounds”, the “quality of the light”.

Opportunities:

1. View degraded sections as pockets of opportunity. Some of these sections are clear spaces and others provide shade and a natural amphitheatre – seating at high points and other suitable locations.
2. Create micro play opportunities along the trail that utilise the natural features (i.e. a climbing tree or hidden nook where kids can hide in the canopy and look out into the distance, a pile of logs or an undulating surface for balancing on, or series of bike berms or rollers).

“I like it because it’s nice and peaceful in the mornings, and like, you get to see it all in the sunlight. And I enjoy talking to mum.... it makes me feel calm and happy”

(Rosie, 9 years)

A diverse ecology

The landscape is of significant ecological value and it is important to protect and enhance it

Special qualities:

- Remnant vegetation from 3 ecological habitats (Lowland Forest EVC 175, Grassy Woodland EVC 175 and Coastal Alkaline Scrub EVC 858).
- The road reserve contains endangered habitats and species and there is a mix of “native vegetation of varying condition” and “modified vegetation dominated by introduced species” (Beacon Ecological).
- Key sites:
 - Lowland Forest habitat - the highest quality native vegetation is at the western end of the trail and the trail that feels old, dense and wild.
 - Grassy Woodland habitat - the middle and largest section of the trail has great views and large old trees.
 - Coastal Alkaline Scrub habitat - is at the east with a special ‘Moonah tunnel’ feature and patches of Bellarine Yellow Gums, a State Significant tree which is critically endangered.

Opportunities:

1. For a collective approach to protection / enhancement.
2. Focus restoration efforts in the highest value sections.
3. Informative signage and artwork to communicate the location of high value biodiversity assets.
4. Community can drive grant applications related to restoration of biodiversity, climate change, active travel, community health and wellbeing.

Hinterland views

The hinterland views differentiate the trail experience from other local pathways

Special qualities:

- The ridgeline is the highest point in Torquay / Jan Juc.
- The views across the valley and towards the ocean are a special part of the trail experience.
- Immediately in front of you, the trail stretches through tunnels of overhanging trees.
- The quality of the views is not widely known.
- In the open areas where views are great, controlling weeds will allow views of the hinterland from the road.

Opportunities:

1. Work to reveal the views (remove and control the weeds) between 410 and 320 GO Rd (Grassy Woodland with high-quality canopy and native understory).
2. Viewing or trail rest spots (with a seat) reflecting “light touch” design principles and utilising natural materials. A priority area is between 320 GORd and Christian College (Grassy Woodland with beautiful old large trees) – the understory is degraded and needs help and this would be a good accessible place for a meeting spot with some seats.
3. Incorporate adult play (i.e. a chair swing with a view).

“I love the view of the Spring Creek valley (open space). I also love the serenity”

(Miyo)

Topography

The natural topographical features of the trail contribute to the enjoyment of the trail experience

Special qualities:

- The land contours stretch into the distance.
- The trail ascends from Torquay towards Bellbrae.
- The hills and the gullies on the trail are like a roller coaster, making the trail interesting (visually and physically) and creating natural play opportunities.
- Running parallel to the Great Ocean Road, the trail dips and rises, above and below the Great Ocean Road.
- Embankments create a natural safety barrier from the road and a sense of being hidden from sight.
- The topography adds to the sensory nature of the trail. Fast vs. slow, steep vs. flat, hidden in the gullies vs. visible to the road, views vs. filtered views, riding in the open vs. riding through tree tunnels, cleared vs. wild, sheltered vs. exposed, shade vs. sun.

Opportunities:

1. The hills and gullies on the trail create playful on and off-trail element installation opportunities (bike rollers, bumps and berms, bridges, balance beams, a natural swing, tunnels, etc)

“So, I like the hills, but you could squish them down a little bit”

(Archie, 10 years)



Lowland Forest

Highest quality vegetation within the study area are adjacent to the Bellbrae Recreation Reserve. Vegetation Protection Overlay VP01 applies over the western portion of the site.

Habitat Zones LF3 and LF4

Lowland Forest zones that support a high diversity of native species and low introduced species cover, with Habitat Scores of 43-54%.

Biolink

Good quality roadside vegetation has the capacity to link isolated patches of vegetation and make them more ecologically stable.

Remnant Bellarine Yellow Gums

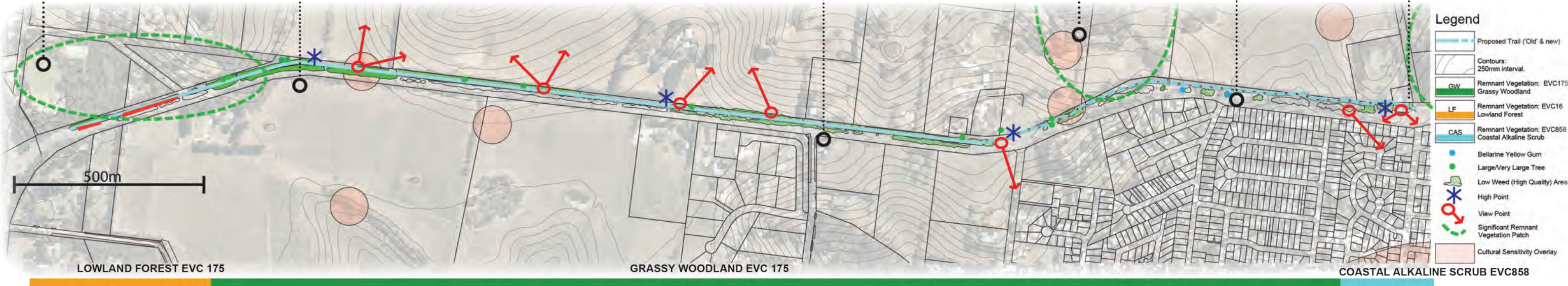
Patches of BYG woodland to the North, and scattered trees along the path alignment can be linked with additional roadside planting.

Scattered Trees, Weedy Understory

Remnant trees including Bellarine Yellow Gum, with ground layer dominated by kikuyu and other environmental weeds.

Coastal Alkaline Scrub

Small dense stands of mature Moonahs (CAS1, habitat Score 38%). A FFG Act permit from DELWP is required if impacted.



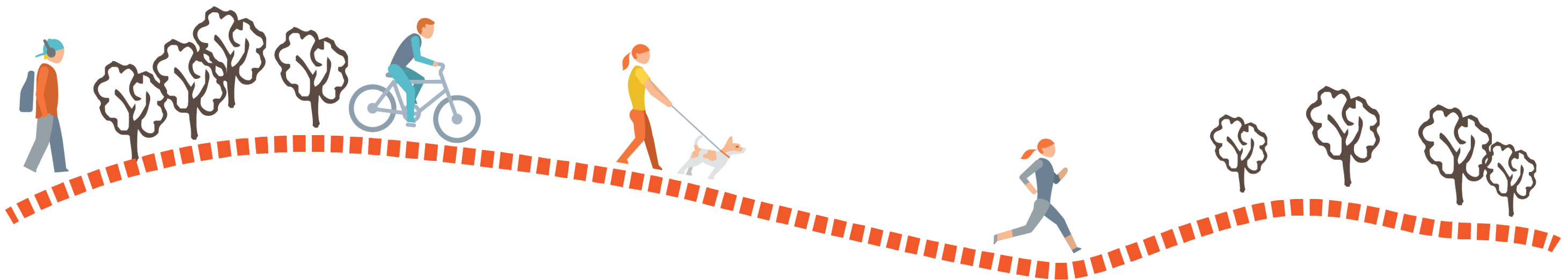
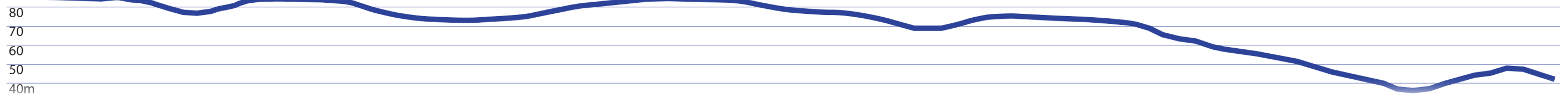
Legend

- Proposed Trail ('Old' & new)
- Contours: 250mm interval.
- Remnant Vegetation: EVC175 Grassy Woodland
- Remnant Vegetation: EVC16 Lowland Forest
- Remnant Vegetation: EVC858 Coastal Alkaline Scrub
- Bellarine Yellow Gum
- Large/Very Large Tree
- Low Weed (High Quality) Area
- High Point
- View Point
- Significant Remnant Vegetation Patch
- Cultural Sensitivity Overlay

Elevation profile

Bellbrae

Jan Juc





4.4 What is not so great about it?

Pathway quality and drainage

The trail quality is variable....

Issues:

- The quality of the pathway impacts safety and accessibility (all weather usage as well as type of usage).
- The trail surface quality varies - some sections are good (both sealed and unsealed), whilst others are corrugated, cracked, have potholes or poor drainage.
- Current visible width of service road varies from 3 to 5m with grass and vegetation encroaching on edges over time. Some sections have clearly defined gravel shoulders.
- There are a number of drainage culverts that intersect the pathway. Sections of the path are inaccessible in winter due to mud and water pooling in the dips.
- Weeds are worse in the valleys and where the track is lower than the Great Ocean Road. The asphalt service road in some places seems to be a barrier to weed movement from the south to the north side of the trail.
- An 80m section of the 'goat trail' path has bike jumps. They need some work but the kids are proud of their creation.

Opportunities:

1. The community welcome the 2 pathway projects:
 - a. upgrading the existing service road surface to a safe shared pathway standard
 - b. constructing a new 2.5-3m sealed path link from Duffields Rd to Christian College
2. Environmental management plans to eliminate any risk to high value ecological habitat loss through trail works.
3. On the service road section, a 'light' approach is favoured, patching the existing asphalt surface and retaining the line marking from the old road (nostalgia).
4. For the new section of trail to be an ecologically friendly surface (durable but permeable)
5. With the pathway acting as a type of weed barrier, identifying areas where drainage can be improved (via agi-drains or swales at the base of embankments on the southern side of the trail) – this is key to preventing spread of weeds to the north and into the valley and will help to protect the integrity of trail surface.
6. Small bridges over culverts at Duffields Road end of the trail are also likely to be a required design solution.
7. The kids would love to be involved in opportunities for community built bike jump features along the trail.

“There are some bits with cracks and like bits that have random potholes”. “Maybe, like dry it up a bit, because sometimes it’s muddy” (Bellbrae PS Grade 5 Students)



It is very weedy and not cared for

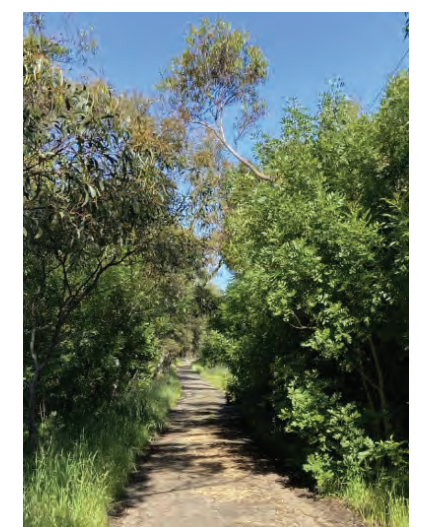
There is a hidden gem underneath....

Issues:

- The weeds are hiding the views and invading high value ecological habitat. If left unmanaged we will lose what is left of the remnant vegetation.
- 89 introduced weed species along the ridgeline including planted vegetation (shelter belts, fence lines, landscaping, garden escapees) and introduced grasses.
- Weed mapping identified 7 regionally controlled noxious weeds and 5 highly invasive weeds (a threat to biodiversity as they can displace native species). Kikuyu, is a serious threat to much of the length of the trail.
- The old DoT stack site has leftover aggregate piles covered in weeds along the old road edges and apart from being unsightly, there is risk of spread of highly invasive weeds into the Bellbrae Nature Reserve.
- Road reserve is used as tip by some community members (green waste, industrial waste, general rubbish).

Opportunities:

1. Collaborative planning for long term weed control and a proactive and consistent approach to grass and vegetation maintenance (Council, Department of Transport and community).
2. Poisoning of grassy weeds and removal of woody weeds by skilled contractors (or trained volunteers if permitted).
3. Priority area for weed control is on the southern side of the trail in the 80km per hour zone (DoT responsibility)
4. DoT work to remove the overburden / aggregate piles to the edges of the old stack site (near Bellbrae 1 Bus Stop).
5. Scheduled maintenance and monitoring for grass mowing and rubbish removal.
6. Community clean up days co-ordinated with assistance from Council, Department of Transport, Torquay Rubbish Rangers, Bellbrae Primary School and Christian College.
7. Investigate with DoT an “Adopt a Roadside” approach to enable community volunteers to work on road reserve improvements.
8. Install rubbish bins and dog bags at trail entrances.
9. Advocate to Barwon Water to complete rectification works in areas surrounding water and sewerage assets.
10. Trail signage (the trail vision, stories, natural features and ecology) – reminding all of the reason to care for the trail.
11. Screening utility infrastructure (natural or via artworks)





Sections where people feel unsafe

Fire safety and personal safety..

Issues:

- Surf Coast Shire is classified as a bushfire prone area.
- Western or Bellbrae end of the trail covered by a Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO).
- Modelled bushfire risk is level 1 (the lowest).
- Great Ocean Road classified as a major road and key dependency infrastructure asset and the land corridor is viewed as strategic (for emergency management).
- Fire management along the trail can be best achieved through weed eradication including removal of woody weeds, having regular and consistent mowing schedules to keep grass down along road and pathway shoulders and not overplanting to avoid heavy fuel loads or fuel dense canopies (having open areas is great for views aswell).
- The grass along the shoulders of the trail can often be over children's heads and invasive environmental weeds can spread quickly along path edges. Path users fear snakes.

Opportunities:

1. Community keen to avoid destruction of valuable remnant vegetation by high impact clearing and encourage a joint fuel management plan that recognises the ecological, recreational, and aesthetic value of this land corridor to the local community and also considers Traditional Owners active management of the ecosystem.
2. Proactive weed eradication plan including removal of woody weeds, maintaining open (fuel break) areas along the trail having and regular and consistent mowing schedules.
3. Keeping grass and weeds slashed or mown for at least 1.5m from the path edges helps a common fear of encountering a snake on the pathway.
4. Install a water bubbler along the trail in a shady spot, next to Barwon Water infrastructure or at viewing spots to reduce risk of dehydration.

“The grade 6’s were doing bike ed and there was a snake right in the middle of the track. This was in the section between Christian College and Duffields Road. So when the Grade 5’s did their bike ed we rode on the GOR.”

(Bellbrae Primary School Teacher)



Safe connections and shared use

How amazing would it be, if I could link up to..

Issues:

- Difficulty connecting to where you want to go with no defined or constructed access at trail ends.
- Fear of crossing Great Ocean Rd (high speed / volume) at Strathmore Dve West or at Bells Blvd (without a crossing)..
- The only signalised crossing is at the east end (Duffields Rd) and Jan Juc kids riding to schools don't want to ride backwards to the traffic lights and even then, the signalised crossings don't get them safely to the trail.
- Parents drive kids to Christian College car park to safely start their ride to school.
- Navigating Christian College entry road and across Cemetery Rd (traffic before and after school).
- Service road used by utility provider vehicles and residents accessing properties (as well as for 'driving lessons', postal services and delivery vehicles). Trail use by vehicles not managed by any signs or restrictions.
- Shared use brings rubbish dumping and contractors can also block path and impact on path surface/ surrounds.
- Mixture of formal and informal vehicle access points from the GO Rd and across or along the trail to access to housing, paddocks and utility infrastructure.
- Access to private land at 260 GO Rd means driving 230m along the trail from the Christian College driveway.

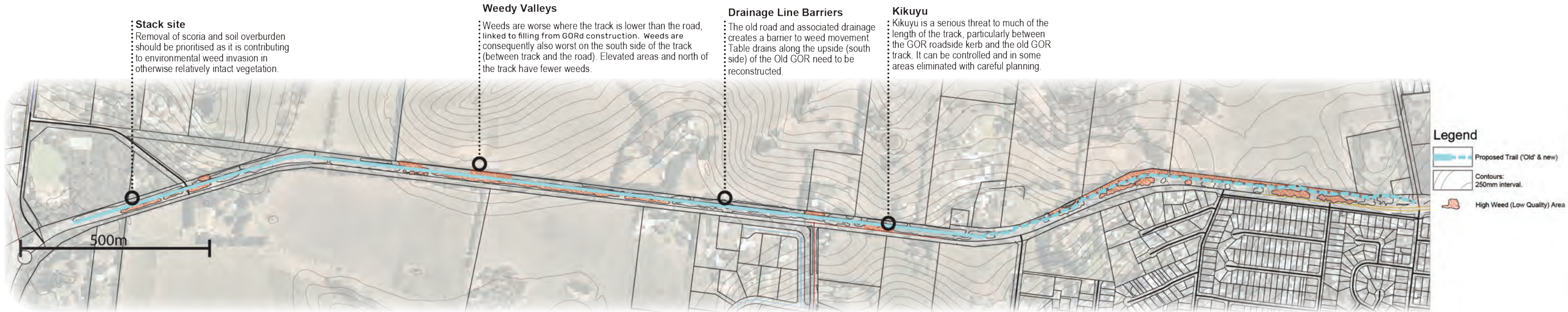
Opportunities:

1. Consider trail links to key community destinations (east to Torquay, south to Jan Juc, west to the Bellbrae bus stop and to the Bellbrae Primary School).
2. New section of trail to consider upgrade of Duffields Rd signalised pedestrian crossings (west and north sides of the intersection / traffic lights (not just east and south).
3. Design collaboration with Christian College to ensure safe movement of vehicles, bikes and pedestrians.
4. Advocate to DoT and Christian College for fast tracking of school crossing over the GO Rd (at Strathmore Dve West).
5. Create trail drop-off parking or meeting spots along trail.
6. Risk or warning signage and bollards restricting unauthorised vehicle access.
7. Better vehicle crossover access created for 260 GO Rd.





Some of the main issues with the current trail....



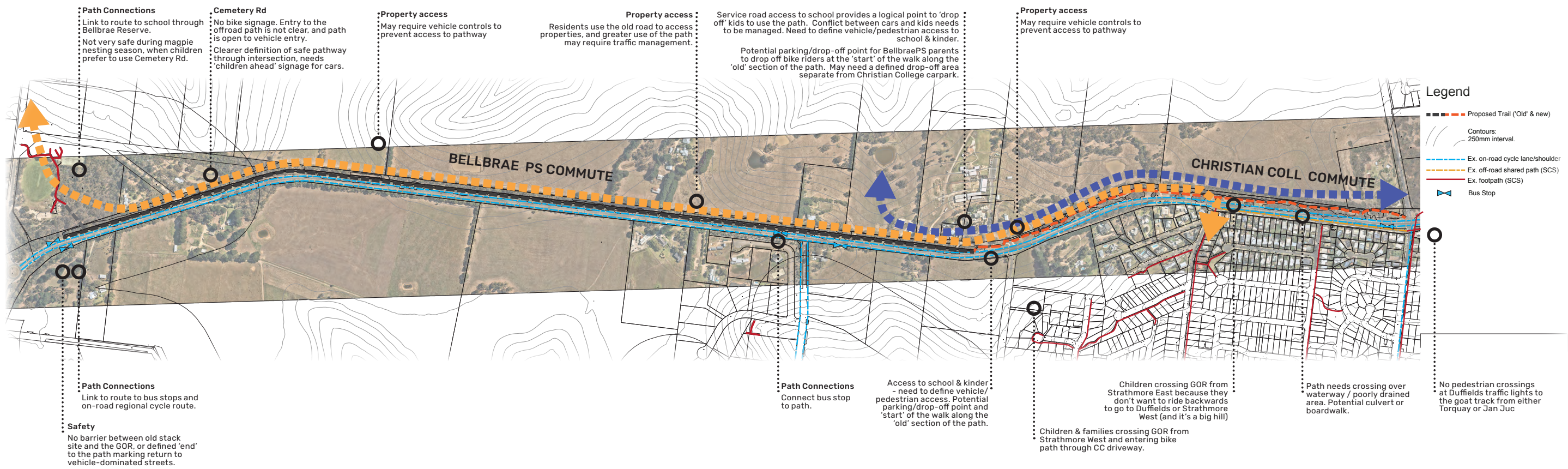
Examples of weed assessments showing 2 of the 6 trail sections (undertaken by West Coast Indigenous Nursery 19/08/22) to guide a collaborative approach to weed eradication

1. Bellbrae Reserve Track to Stack site gate (at Cemetery Road)					
North side of GOR track			South side of GOR track		
Botanical Name	Common Name	Priority	Bot. name	Comm. Name	Priority
Dactylis glomerata	Cocksfoot	2 - High	Pittosporum undulatum	Sweet Pittosporum	1 - URGENT
Grevillea sp.		4 - Low	Rubus sp.	Blackberry	1 - URGENT
Agapanthus praecox	Agapanthus	2 - High	Pennisetum clandestinum	Kikuyu	1 - URGENT
Fraxinus angustifolia	Desert Ash	2 - High	Grevillea sp.		2 - High
Melaleuca armillaris	Giant Bracelet Honey-myrtle	2 - High	Cupressus macrocarpa	Cypress	2 - High
Cupressus macrocarpa	Cypress	2 - High - Saplings only	Agapanthus praecox	Agapanthus	2 - High
Pinus radiata	Pine tree	2 - High - Saplings only	Fraxinus angustifolia	Desert Ash	2 - High
Pittosporum undulatum	Sweet Pittosporum	1 - URGENT	Prunus sp.		3 - Medium
			Westringia fruticosa	Westringia	4 - Low
			Dodonea viscosa		4 - Low
			Callistemon sp.		4 - Low One only

2. Cemetery Road east to LOT 410					
North side of GOR track			South side of GOR track		
Bot. Name	Comm. Name	Priority	Bot. Name	Comm. Name	Priority
Billardiera heterophylla	Bluebell creeper	1 - URGENT	Chrysanthemoides monilifera	Boneseed	1 - URGENT
Pittosporum undulatum	Sweet Pittosporum	1 - URGENT	Billardiera heterophylla	Bluebell Creeper	1 - URGENT
Rubus sp.	Blackberry	1 - URGENT	Pittosporum undulatum	Sweet Pittosporum	1 - URGENT
Vinca major	Blue Periwinkle	2 - High	Rubus sp.	Blackberry	1 - URGENT
Dodonea sp.		4 - Low	Leptospermum laevigatum	Coast Teatree	2 - High
			Paraserianthes lophantha	Cape Wattle	2 - High
			Watsonia bulbifera	Watsonia	2 - High - One only
			Acacia longifolia	Sallow Wattle	3 - Medium
			Dodonea sp.		4 - Low
			Dodonea viscosa	Giant Hopbush	4 - Low
			Hakea salicifolia	Willow-leaf Hake	4 - Low One only



Connectivity and shared use issues.....





4.5 Who uses the trail and for what?

The trail is more than “a service road” – it is a place for community.

Past use

The area and environment has been used by the community for a long time. The trail and the valley have a unique story. It is not widely known and is fascinating....

Cultural Heritage

The trail runs along the ridgeline of the Spring Creek valley. The Traditional Owner’s name of Spring Creek is Doorangwar.

The earliest evidence of Aboriginal occupation in the hinterland is dated to the mid to late Holocene, approximately 5000 years ago. Stone artefacts, shell middens and scar trees have been found throughout the Spring Creek valley. We understand that the first people who lived in this area were members of the Wadawurrung who are part of the Kulin nation that surrounds Port Phillip Bay.

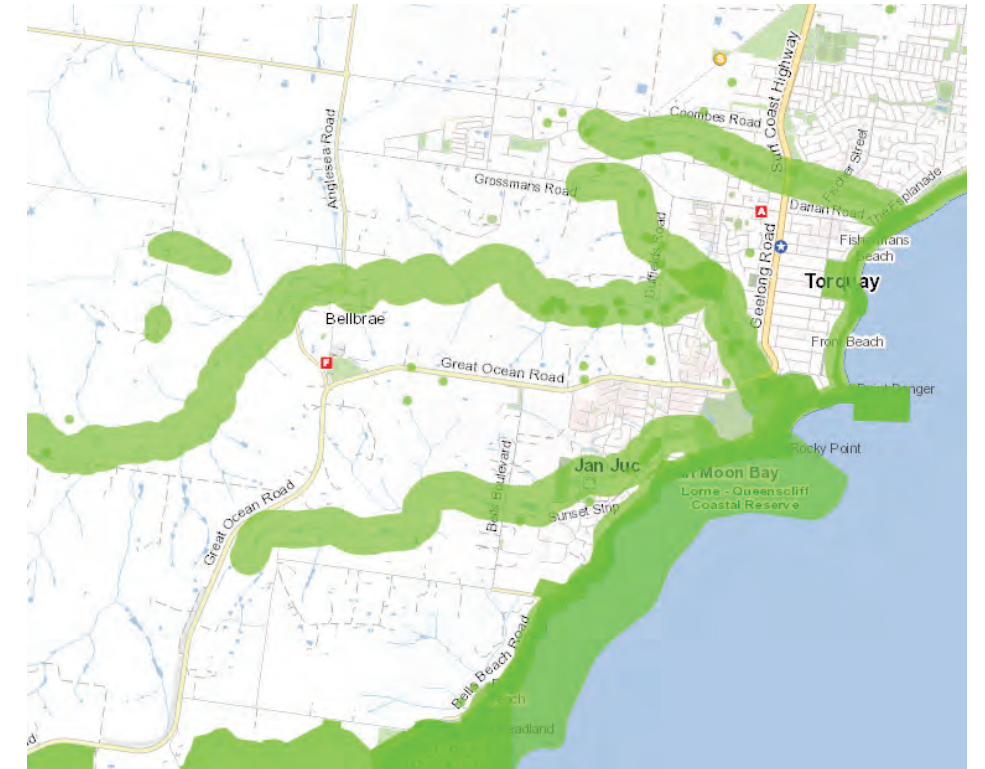
The valley was an important source of fresh water, and a transport corridor for the Wadawurrung, and provided places for camping, fishing and hunting. There are anecdotal stories from early settlers of indigenous camps along Spring Creek. Aboriginal groups used the resource rich areas on the coastal margins and wetlands, moving seasonally between the coast and the productive plains of the hinterland.

Before European settlement, the valley would have supported rich and diverse flora and fauna; water birds, fish, eels, turtles and platypus in the creek and billabongs; and

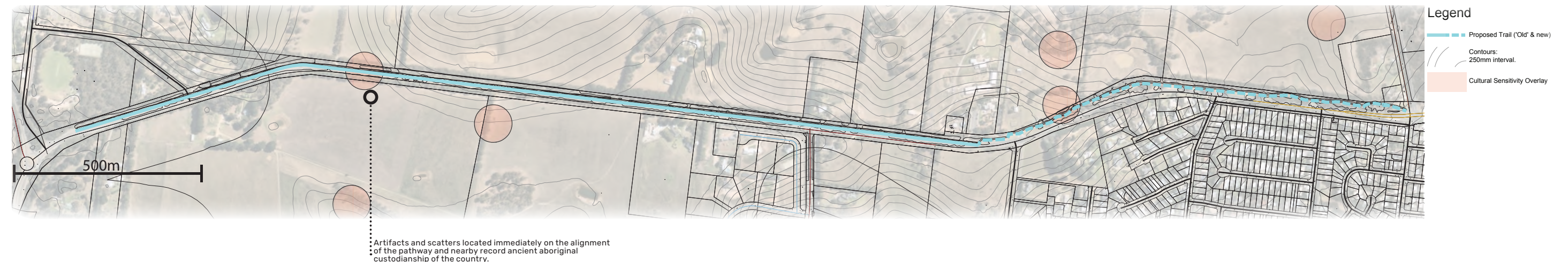
kangaroo, wallaby, and possibly emu. Natural materials from birds, marsupials, mammals and gum trees were used for tools, weapons, utensils, baskets, bags, clothes, house materials and ceremonial dress. Large animals were used for meat, skins, thread and bone.

The Wadawurrung believe that “Dja” (country) is more than a place. They believe our coast, hinterland and people were all formed by Bunjil and ancestor spirits, who continue to live in the land, water and sky. They believe it’s our shared responsibility to care for country, and to work together to make Wadawurrung Country strong.

References: Wadawurrung Cultural Heritage Summary 2020, SCS Cultural Overlay, Wadawurrung Country Plan, KWP Archaeology Cultural Heritage Advice, Surf Coast Energy Group Distinctive Areas Landscape Submission, Torquay & District Historical Society



Areas of Cultural Heritage sensitivity (shaded green and identified sites in orange) Reference - Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System (ACHRIS)





Post settlement

The first non-indigenous people to live in the valley were squatters and woodcutters.

In 1844 Joseph Gundry took up land west of old Jan Juc (Bellbrae). He called it Iron Bark Station. He opened up the area to pastoral settlement and established the Jan Juc Common School (Bellbrae Primary) in 1861 for his own and neighbouring children. The first settlers / squatters on the land along the ridgeline trail were Edward and Charles Gundry (the brothers of Joseph).

It is believed Robert Zeally purchased land along the trail in 1850.

In 1853, the land the trail is on was named the Parish of Jan Juc. The parish comprised of the southern slopes of the Spring Creek basin, the Spring Creek valley ridgeline and the Jan Juc Creek basin.

In 1919 construction started on the Great Ocean Road. Prior to this the south-west coast of Victoria was only accessible by sea or rough bush track. It was envisaged that the road would connect coastal settlements and be a vital transport link for tourism and the timber industry. The old road was a challenging drive and could only fit a single vehicle at a time.

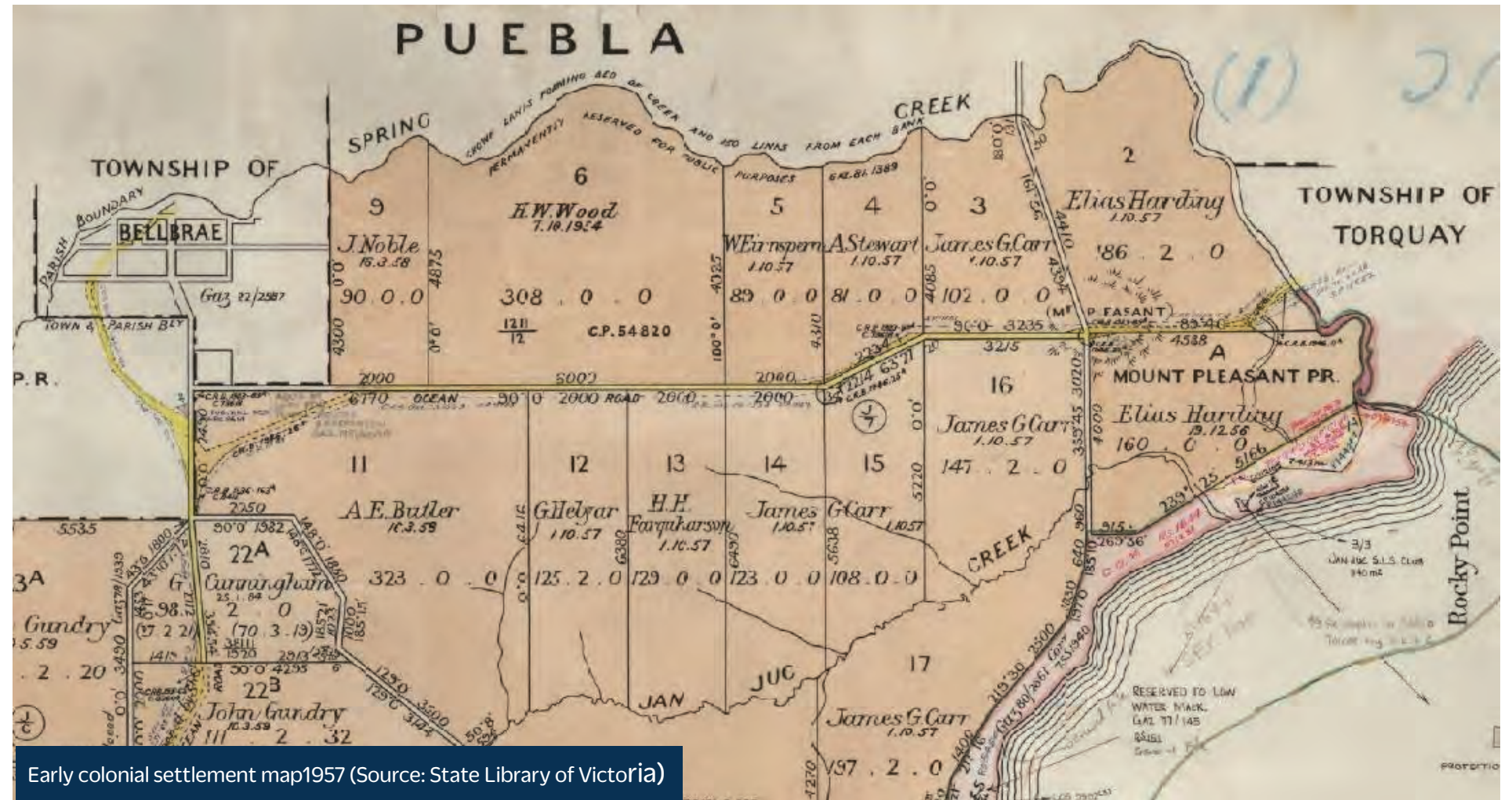
In 1962, the road was deemed by the Tourist Development Authority to be one of the world's great scenic roads.

A section of the Great Ocean Road was rebuilt in the 1960's and the "old road" became a 'service road'. You can still see part of the old Great Ocean Road in the section of trail between Christian College and the Bellbrae Reserve.

Locals tell stories about how in the 1940's-1950's, surfers would drive their old bombs along the 'old' Great Ocean Road to Jarosite Road, where they would walk through farmland carrying their surf boards to get to Bells Beach.

There are also stories of community members using the trail when they were children; jumping the fence to go yabbing in the dams, picking blackberries and learning to drive with their parents. "Kids have been building jumps in the section between Butterfield and Duffields Rd for 20-30 years – in fact I was one of the first!", Tony

References: *Trails & Trails - The Cobb & Co Story - History Matters, Torquay and District Historical Society*



Early tourists used the trail to visit Anglesea and Lorne (Source: Torquay and District Historical Society)



Current use

The trail is used by all age groups and using different modes of transport (pram, walking, dog walkers, running, horse riders, bikes, e-bikes & scooters, motorbikes, cars, trucks). It is used for commuting, recreation, tourism, access (utility & landowner).



I LIVE HERE

"I love walking out my front door into nature. It was great getting a letter in the mail and seeing the trees the students have planted." - Leslie



I COMMUTE HERE

"I ride in a group with my friends and I like talking to them" - Lillie

"I think it's really nice that I get to ride through the bush to school" - Hudson

"I use it to catch the bus to school in Geelong." - Mali



I PLAY HERE

"As a family we use the track several times per week. We love the outlook onto the farms, watching the lambs and ducklings grow." - Bridget

"I love speeding down the hills" - Jarvis



I HELP MY COMMUNITY HERE



"I'm more than happy to help. We all, and most importantly the environment, benefit from working together" - Lesley



"I'm looking forward to saying hello to my tree when I ride to school" - Archie



I EXERCISE HERE

"I use the track for exercising. It's pretty much the only path for Bellbrae Residents other than the Reserve, so over the years I have gotten to know it very well. Not seeing the traffic is lovely and being a safe distance from cars is also lovely." - Miyo

"I walk my dog on the track very early in the morning. I love the view of the Spring Creek valley (the open space). I love the serenity. I also love the bird sounds" - Georgina

"I walk from Jan Juc to Bellbrae. It is more overgrown.... than I remembered... and even more beautiful. The trees and bushes provide shade and relief from the northern sun." - Martin



I LEARN HERE

"Possum Pete led the students in an investigation and exploration of the biodiversity existing in our local environment. The students became scientists looking through the microscope at living things. They developed understanding by observing closely, the plants, animals, physical geography, and all the incredible interactions occurring. We are all amazed by what they found." - Luke

OPPORTUNITIES

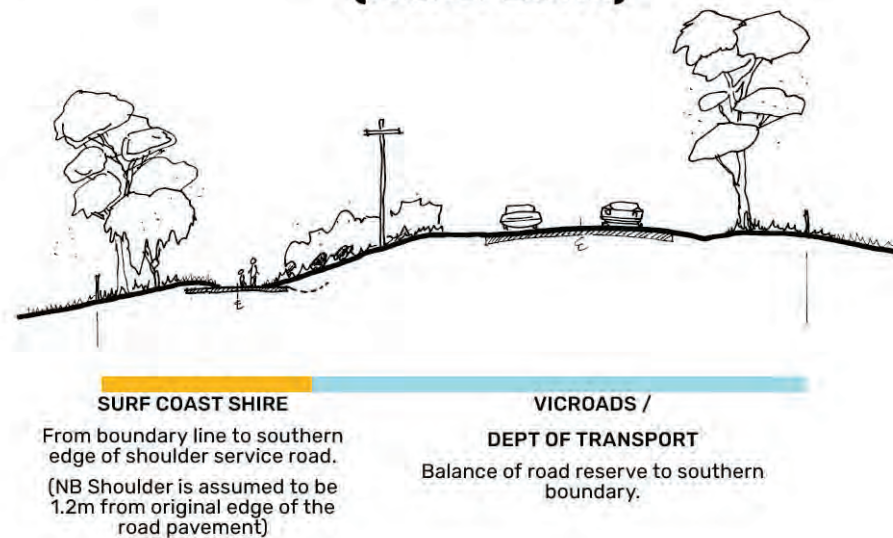
1. Whilst we have learnt a lot through reference documents, it is important that First Nations people tell their story – the community welcomes a collaboration with the Wadawurrung traditional owners to learn more about this area and its significance to First Nations people.
2. This collaboration could extend to the development of content for interpretation signage at suitable points along the Ridgeline Trail for education and reflection for all future path users.
3. We could apply for funding for consultations with Wadawurrung to better understand the presence of culturally significant and sensitive locations along the trail and in the valley.
4. Advocate for planning to prioritise regular community use (both local and tourists) over infrequent access to infrastructure assets (with potential to consider restricted vehicle size and access).
5. We have created a working title for this trail as "The Ridgeline Trail" but there is an opportunity to formalise and promote this name.
6. Incorporating a playful pathway design philosophy (for the 'valley side' of the trail - walkable, bikeable, shared use community pathway networks infused with "play pockets" that provide opportunities for playing along the way. Ideas include but not limited to:
 - nature play
 - "safe" climbing tree at a view or rest spot
 - "safe" fallen tree for balance or climbing
 - seating at viewing area (also a play opportunity)
 - "all ages" swing with a view
 - hidden swings, giant rope swings, ninja swings
 - small clearing near a tree for cubby building
 - small platform for "mornos" or picnics
 - retaining community built "berms, jumps and rollers" but make sure they don't damage remnant habitat
 - create small side 'off-shoot paths
 - art hidden in the trees showcasing fauna or connection to culture
7. Provide amenities for dog walkers (rubbish bags, bins at either end of the path, water).
8. Recognise that there are meeting spots / trail access points along the trail and that not all pathway users have the time or capacity to walk end to end.
9. Way finding and safety signage
10. Interpretative signage or artwork to communicate what's special about the biodiversity along the trail and to tell the trail's story.
11. Consider multi-modality commutes whereby community members ride to a bus stop. It would be great to have a connection to and a bike rail installed at the Bellbrae Bus Stop.
12. An easy crossing over to Christian College (for commuting to and from Jan Juc) would enable kids to be more independent.



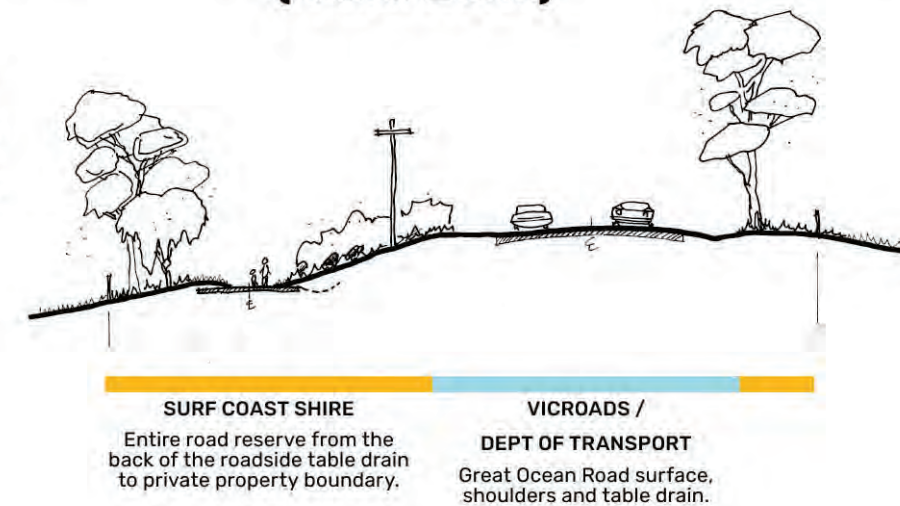
4.6 Who is responsible for it?

We are all responsible for this road reserve and trail which seems to have fallen off the radar – it is a shared, collective responsibility...

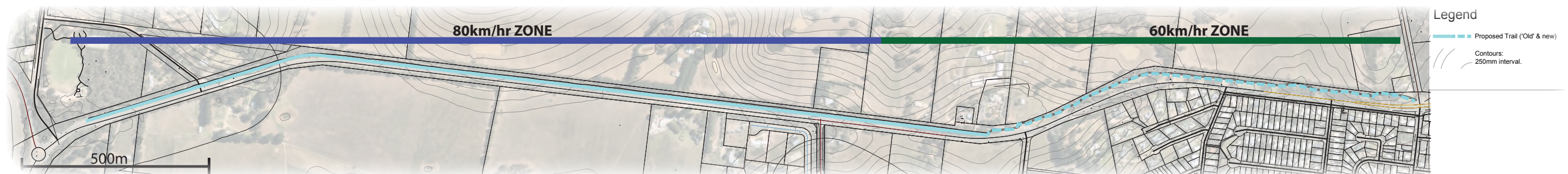
Management Responsibilities - 80km Roads (Rural Zone)



Management Responsibilities - 60km Roads (Rural Zone)



Approvals
Any works within areas of Surf Coast Shire responsibility would need SCS approval and also to inform VicRoads (as their approval may also be required)
Any works within areas of VicRoads responsibility would need approval from VicRoads.



OPPORTUNITIES

- As the Ridgeline Trail is upgraded, visibility of the Surf Coast Shire resource capacity and service levels associated with the maintenance of pathway and green infrastructure would be really helpful. It seems that Surf Coast Shire Council are responsible for a significant portion of the road reserve (as a gazetted responsibility, with Department of Transport also responsible for some). But it doesn't seem to be included in pro-active planning, on the ground priorities or annual operational budgets. We acknowledge Council can't do it on their own and there is a great opportunity for a holistic collaborative approach between State government, local government, private landowners and the community.
- Our priorities for discussions with Department of Transport are for the final complete clean up of the stack site and for weed eradication and management within the 80km / hr zone between the Great Ocean Road and the Ridgeline Trail.
- We need to liaise with Department of Transport and Surf Coast Shire to reduce the barriers to community volunteering / biodiversity restoration work (i.e. Department of Transport 'Adopt a Roadside' program <https://www.kvb.org.au/adopt-roadside/>).
 - Community desire to continuing to play a role in vegetation management of the Ridgeline corridor but having to apply for Works in Road Reserves Permits, a very 'contractor-based' process is not working for the community groups trying to do their best to help save and restore the high biodiversity values of this area.
 - A great step forward would be a joint meeting between representatives of SCEG, the Surf Coast Shire and DoT to develop a working 'fit for purpose' model for this land.
- Local action and drive is one of the keys to success:
 - there are key local community groups who have knowledge, experience and passion - who can lead ecological restoration (this could be Surf Coast Energy Group or Torquay Landcare).
 - Local business and local funding partners can sponsor projects and also provide hand on assistance.
 - Bellbrae Primary School and Christian College can play also play a hands on role in ongoing conservation and restoration via an environmental stewardship program.

5. Opportunities summary

Key improvement themes



Environment

Healthy and diverse ecology

The significant vegetation and biodiversity of the trail will be better understood so that values are protected and enhanced. Destructive weeds will be eradicated and other weeds controlled. Strategic planting will improve diversity. Drainage will be managed.

Planning

- Focus restoration efforts in the highest value sections.
- Environmental management plans to eliminate any risk to high value ecological habitat loss.

Works

- Informative signage and artwork to communicate location of high value biodiversity assets.
- Drainage improvements at the base of embankments on the southern side of the trail will help to prevent spread of weeds to the north and into the valley.
- Strategic tree planting where appropriate
- Priority area for weed control is in 80km/hr zone on southern side of the trail (DoT)
- DoT to remove aggregate piles to edges of the old stack site (near Bellbrae 1 Bus Stop).
- Install rubbish bag dispensers, rubbish bins and dog bags at trail entrances.



Culture

Authentic stories and experiences

The heritage of the trail and surrounds will be understood and where appropriate, will be made more tangible by creatively embedding stories into the landscape. Spaces that inspire and educate will respectfully celebrate heritage (Wadawurrung connection to this land and through our settler history).

Planning

- Whilst we have learnt a lot through reference documents, it is important that First Nations people tell their story – the community welcomes a collaboration with the Wadawurrung traditional owners.
- Formalise “The Ridgeline Trail” name.

Works

- ‘Light’ approach on ‘old Great Ocean Road’, patching existing asphalt surface and retaining line marking from old road.
- Interpretative trail signage (heritage, stories, natural features and ecology).
- Artwork to communicate what’s special about the trail (i.e. art hidden in the trees showcasing flora, fauna and connection to culture)
- Collaboration with First Nations people in the development of content for interpretation signage.



Place

Great places and spaces for people

The trail and spaces along the trail will provide opportunities for play and also rest and reflection. The trail will provide for and welcome everyone, ensuring diverse, interesting and safe places and experiences.

Planning

- Degraded sections provide opportunity.
- Incorporating a playful pathway design philosophy (for the ‘valley side’ of the trail).
- The kids would love to be involved in opportunities for community built bike jump and other play features.

Works

- Viewing or trail rest spots (with a seat) and utilising natural materials.
- New section of trail to be an ecologically friendly surface (durable but permeable).
- Trail meeting spots for parking a car or 2 and a seat to wait for others to arrive.
- Play opportunities for on and off trail elements using the natural features (i.e. nature play, a climbing tree or hidden nook or tunnel, a natural swing, a pile of logs for balancing on, or series of bike berms or rollers).
- Adult play (i.e. swing with a view).
- Screening utility assets (natural or via artworks)
- Water bubbler in a shady or viewing spot (Barwon Water could assist).



Connection

A safe, uninterrupted journey

Linking the trail to nearby areas will encourage physical activity, social connections and economic benefits. Safety and inclusivity will be prioritised.

Planning

- Design principles for extended and new pathway (light touch with focus on surface consistency, good drainage, bridges or culverts over low points, playful pathway philosophy, prioritisation as a trail).
- Cohesive signage plan designed.
- Co-design with Christian College to ensure safety (vehicles, bikes and pedestrians).
- Guidelines to protect path and vegetation assets and controls on vehicle weight / speed.
- Scheduled maintenance and monitoring, keep grass and weeds mown for at least 1.5m from path edge) and rubbish removal.

Works

- Way finding and safety / risk signage.
- Bollards restricting unauthorised access.
- Upgraded Duffields Rd lights crossing.
- New Christian College crossing (over GORd) and trail navigation through precinct.
- Trail links to key destinations (east to Torquay, south to Jan Juc, west to the Bellbrae bus stop and to Bellbrae Primary).
- Trail drop-off parking or meeting spots.
- Improve trail crossovers to minimise private property vehicle travel on the trail.

Collaboration

We are all in this together

A collective approach to the development, protection and enhancement of the trail and the trail corridor is the key to success. Future generations will be rewarded for our collaborative planning, consistent applications and shared value for both hardscape and greenscape.

Planning

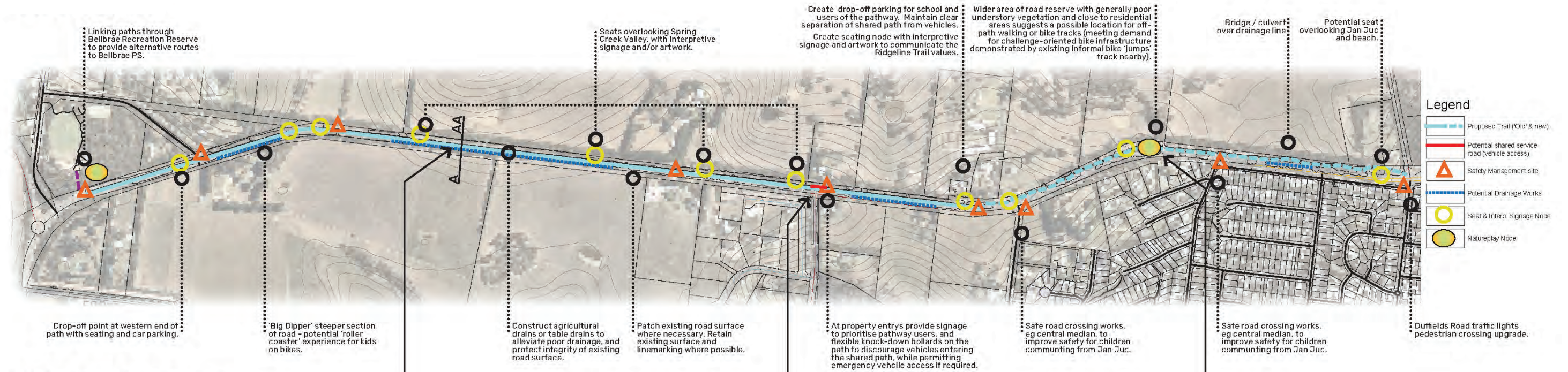
- Land managers (Council and DoT) to clarify service levels for weeds and trees.
- SCEG, keen to be at the table to help develop a working ‘fit for purpose’ model.
- Proactive weed eradication plan including removal of woody weeds, maintaining open areas, regular mowing schedules.
- Joint fuel management plan that recognises the ecological, recreational, and aesthetic value of this land corridor and also considers Traditional Owners active management of the ecosystem.
- Liaise with DoT on an ‘Adopt a Roadside’ type approach to enable community volunteers to work on road reserve.
- Community can drive grant applications (biodiversity, climate change, active travel, community wellbeing).

Works

- Contractors poisoning grassy weeds and removing woody weeds (experienced volunteers assisting where permitted).
- Community clean up days with assistance from Council, DoT, Bellbrae Primary School and Christian College.
- Co-ordinated multi-agency / stakeholder tree planting days in appropriate areas.
- Restoration works by private landowners.
- Barwon Water to complete rectification works in areas near water and sewerage assets.

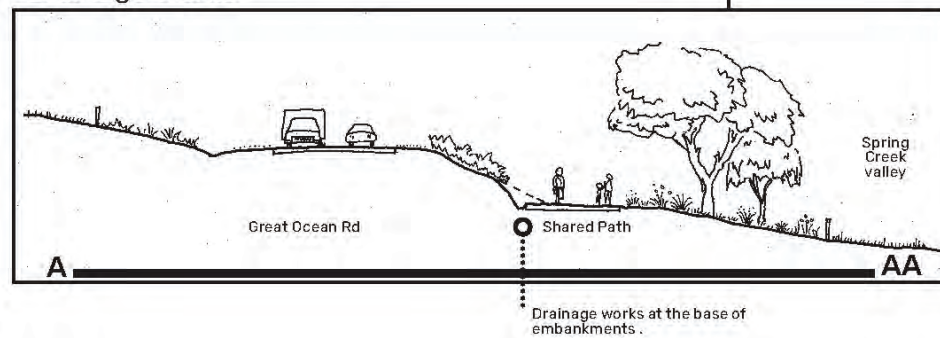


Opportunities

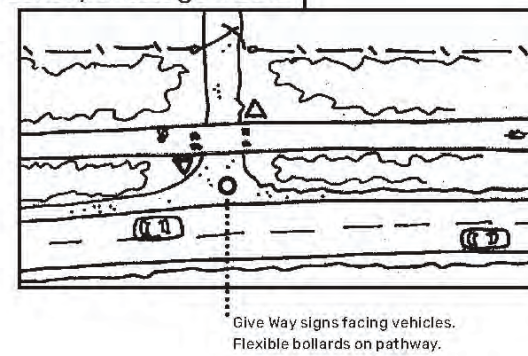


POTENTIAL TREATMENTS

Drainage works



Safety management



Off-path nature walk/bike track

