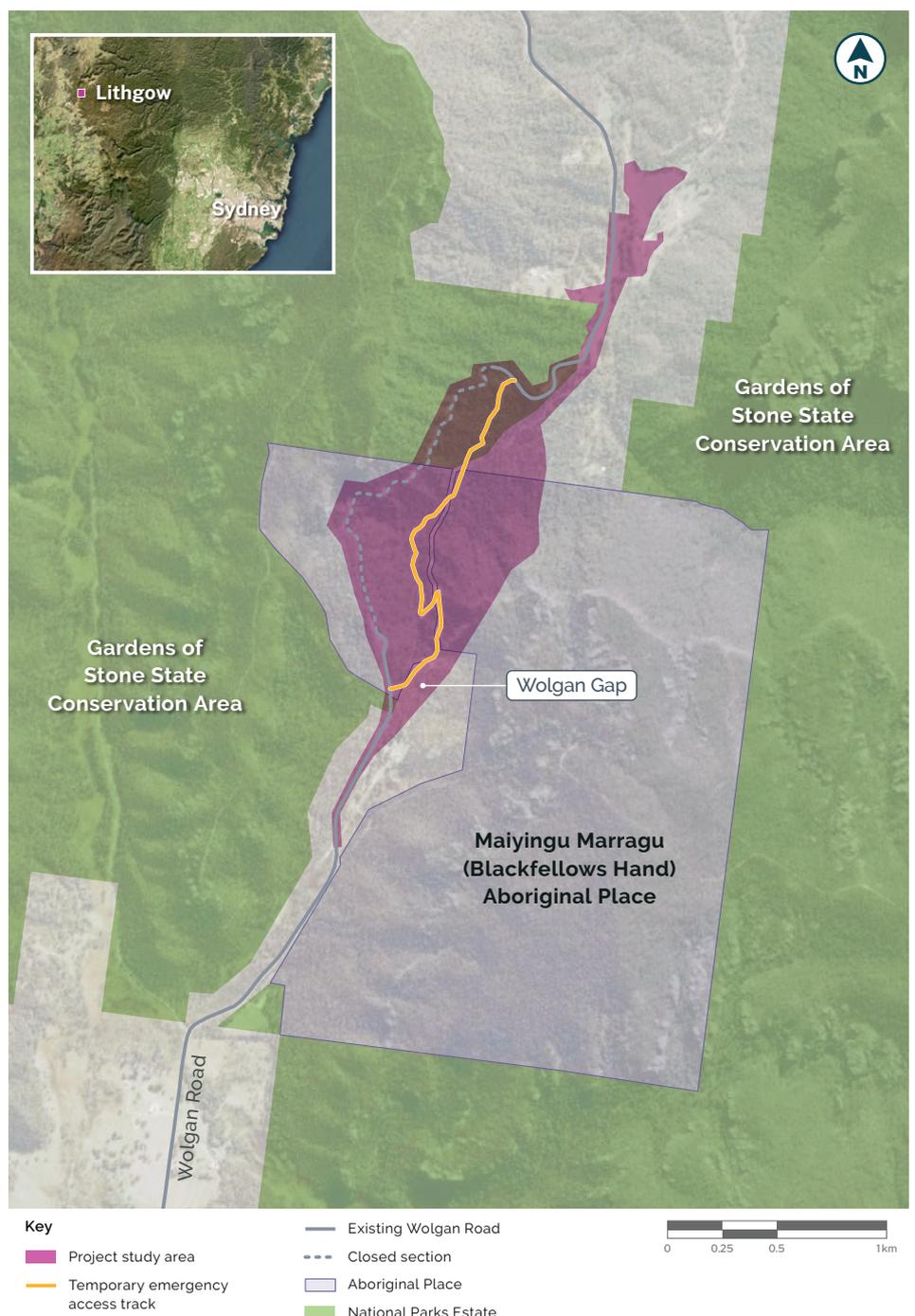


WOLGAN ROAD RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

On 9 November 2022, heavy rainfall caused landslides on sections of Wolgan Road at Wolgan Gap. Continued instability of the slopes led to a decision by Lithgow City Council to close the road two days later, limiting access to local businesses and residents.

In January 2023, Council opened a temporary access track, known locally as the 'donkey steps', which runs to the east of Wolgan Road. While this access route has provided some relief, the absence of a safe, permanent access means the community continues to be disconnected from employment, services, customers and social networks.

This update provides the community with an overview of progress to deliver a replacement access road for the Wolgan Valley.



Funding application

In June 2024, Council submitted its Essential Public Asset Reconstruction (EPAR) submission to the NSW Reconstruction Authority for disaster recovery funding to design and construct a new access road. The submission was made under the NSW Disaster Assistance Guidelines (DAG) and is partially supported by the Australian Government under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) which is a program partially funded by the Australian Government, administered by the NSW Government and delivered by local councils.

An independent technical reviewer has now been appointed and work is underway, including a site visit which was also attended by Council, to review the submission in line with DRFA criteria. This positive news provides the community greater certainty about plans for Wolgan Road's restoration.

The funding submission comprised a strategic alignment options report and a 'do nothing' scenario study. These reports concluded that the social and economic implications of not replacing Wolgan Road would be unacceptable and that the existing road could be prohibitively expensive to restore. Alternative route options were identified which will be used as the basis of further design development and assessment.

Project development update

While we wait for a decision on delivery funding, we have been able to progress early investigations through an funding agreement between Council, NSW Reconstruction Authority and Transport for NSW.

The funding agreement has enabled us to:

- **Seek early environmental approvals advice:** Working with our specialist advisors, we have consulted with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) on the planning approval pathway for the project. Council has formed the view that the Project will require an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and can be self-determined by Council under Division 5.1 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 (EP&A Act).

Major milestones achieved

An independent technical reviewer has been appointed to review Council's disaster funding application.

Council has awarded a contract to WSP Australia Pty Limited as a technical advisor to develop the concept design and environmental assessment for the project.

Achieving these two milestones means the project has taken a significant leap forward.

- **Appoint a technical advisor:** Council has awarded a contract to WSP Australia Pty Limited to provide Concept Design and Environmental Assessment (CD & EA) services. The technical advisor will undertake a route options assessment and prepare a concept design for the preferred option. The concept design will reflect design development work carried out since the preparation of the initial strategic design for the funding application. They will also prepare the EIS, subject to delivery funding being secured. The route options assessment will balance early strategic engineering considerations with detailed environmental investigations and social assessments.
- **Carry out biodiversity investigations:** We are currently undertaking season-specific threatened species biodiversity surveys to meet time periods specified by relevant biodiversity assessment requirements. Data gathered through these surveys will be used in future environmental assessments.
- **Start the planning approvals process:** We have submitted a Scoping Report for the project to the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI). This marks the start of the formal planning approvals process and has enabled us to request Secretary's environmental assessment requirements (SEARs) to identify what information needs to be included in the EIS.

Engagement

The Wolgan Road Reconstruction Project is of vital importance to the people who live and work in the Wolgan Valley. However, the development of a new road through such a culturally and environmentally significant site will require great sensitivity and respectful collaboration with all stakeholders. Council is committed to working with knowledge holders, community members, local businesses, landowners and stakeholders throughout the options assessment and design development process. To date, we have engaged:

- **Aboriginal knowledge holders:** Wolgan Valley is located on Wiradjuri country and is the site of many significant Aboriginal sacred sites, including Maiyingu Marragu, an ancient rock art site and meeting place for Aboriginal people. We have had a number of meetings with Mingaan Wiradjuri Aboriginal Corporation and Bathurst Local Aboriginal Land Council regarding the Project, including to seek their guidance on the targeted biodiversity surveys currently being undertaken.

Beyond these assessments, we will work with local knowledge holders in ways that materially shape our assessment and complement the work we already have in hand. We will shortly be issuing an Expression of Interest for Registered Aboriginal Parties and knowledge holders, seeking support to develop a cultural values assessment that will inform the project development process and cultural heritage assessment report required under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974*.
- **Community:** Council has provided regular project updates to community members via the Wolgan Valley Association and via Council's website and will continue to do so throughout the Project. We also intend to involve community representatives in the options assessment and design development process.
- **Property owners:** The Project's study area spans several freehold land parcels some of which are privately owned. We contacted these owners for the purposes of the targeted biodiversity surveys and will continue to keep them informed, including in relation to other investigations that may be required to support the design development process.

- **Government stakeholders:** We are working closely with Reconstruction Authority NSW, and Transport for NSW as part of a Project Control Group. We have also met with the Crown Lands and Approvals branches of DPHI, and various relevant branches of the Commonwealth and NSW Departments of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), including NSW Heritage and Biodiversity, Conservation and Science (BCS) branches.

Timeline

We are working to the following milestones. These are indicative only, but we will keep the community informed as more information becomes available.

Stage	Timing	Milestone
Design	Q1 2025	Estimated EPAR application outcome
	Q1/Q2 2025	Road alignment multi-criteria assessment
	Q3 2025	Concept design complete for preferred road option
Approvals	Late 2025	Public exhibition of the EIS
Delivery	Early Q1 2026	Detailed design and construction contract awarded
	Q1 2031	Completion of construction and commencement of operation

Further information

For further information about the Project, please contact:

Jonathon Edgecombe, Executive Director
Infrastructure and Economy
Lithgow City Council

T: 6354 9919

E: wolgan.reconstruction@lithgow.nsw.gov.au