

Omeo District Recovery Update

MAY 2021

Omeo Mountain Bike Destination Project update

Implementation of the Omeo Mountain Bike Destination Project has been gaining momentum in recent months, with East Gippsland Shire Council approving the project's planning permit and awarding a contract for the construction of trails – both significant milestones.

The planning approval processes however, are not yet complete as the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) has recently notified Council of an objection to the planning permit being lodged.

This notification means that trail construction cannot commence until the VCAT matter has been resolved.

The VCAT process has nominated a final hearing date of 18 November 2021.

Council is progressing with background works, with the hope that the VCAT matter can be resolved. This includes the MTB Operational Plan, Emergency Management Plan and Maintenance Management Plan being initiated. Stakeholders such as Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, SES, Omeo Regional Hospital, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and community are in the process of being consulted for input.

Particular attention is being placed on rider safety; this is not just wearing helmets! Good trail design and maintenance will help minimise injuries and the need for the extraction of patients. Stakeholders and adjoining landholders are invited to contact Council's project manager Ian Cameron to discuss how we can ensure good emergency access to the trails.

In anticipation of a positive VCAT outcome, a road safety assessment has also been carried out on Connleys Road, with recommendations anticipated to

be progressively implemented as trail user numbers increase.

Work on the proposed Omeo MTB website and marketing also continue. A recent article in Flow Mountain Bike featured the project and successful tenderer Common Ground Trails, highlighting the recently constructed Omeo Pump and Skills Track and the project vision.

Other related project investments within Omeo are being progressed by Council with funding support from Bushfire Recovery Victoria and Council's own funds. Improvements to Livingstone Park are currently in design with works planned for the 2021-22 financial year. The design will include elements from the Livingstone Park Master Plan such as improved playground and picnic area facilities, access and safety improvements to the swimming area, vehicle parking and a pedestrian / bike bridge linking the caravan park trail. The Livingstone Park upgrade complements the recently completed Pump and Skills Track, which has proven to be a great success for the young and young at heart and for those who take in the park ambience. The pump track is a popular place to be for locals and tourists on or off a bike!

Open for business

We would like residents and visitors alike to know that our Visitor Information Centres (VICs) are open across East Gippsland, including weekends, to help inform and guide you on all the wonderful places, activities and accommodation our region has to offer. To learn more about exploring your own backyard, or to showcase our beautiful area to visitors, pop into one of our VICs, visit our website eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/leisure/tourism, or the Visit East Gippsland website visiteastgippsland.com.au

Visit Victoria has also recently launched the new 'All Kinds of Wonder' magazine, aimed at driving tourism in Gippsland.

Developed from bushfire recovery initiatives, the magazine has a heavy focus on East Gippsland, with a nod to the other three parts of Gippsland across its 16 pages.

The aim of the magazine is to drive awareness of our beautiful part of the world and allow for planning and visitation for autumn and into early winter.

Over 330,000 copies of the magazine being distributed across Victoria, including Gippsland as an insert, and are available at all East Gippsland VICs.

Rebuild Support Service

The Rebuild Support Service can support any landowner who lost a dwelling or sheds in the 2019/2020 fires, particularly in navigating the approvals that may be needed for rebuilding. In many cases, registering with the RSS can also inform eligibility for financial rebuild support.

For more information about the RSS there are several options:

- Contact the team directly at BRSS@egipps.vic.gov.au
- Make contact through your bushfire recovery support worker
- Through your local Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) Hub
- On our Bushfire Rebuilding web page <https://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/community/bushfire-rebuilding>

The RSS can meet with residents one-on-one in BRV hubs or Council's Omeo Customer Service Centre, or provide support by phone or video conference depending on your accessibility or preference.

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Councillors visit

Councillors and senior officers were in the High Country for two days at the start of May, having many discussions with individuals and community groups and committees around recovery, preparedness, maintenance requests, support for facilities and funding opportunities. Visits included Tambo Crossing, Swifts Creek, Benambra and Omeo, with a Council Meeting in Swifts Creek.



Tambo Crossing residents discuss their plans for improved resilience during emergency incidents. Pictured are, from left Cr Kirsten Van Diggele, Cr Jane Greacen, Brad Smith, Andrew 'Rambo' Travis, Fiona Angus, Jamie Johnson and Cr Tom Crook.



Current and former East Gippsland Shire Councillors were happy to share stories at Benambra. Pictured are Cr Trevor Stow, former councillor Ben Buckley who served for more than 25 years, Cr Tom Crooke and Trudy Anderson, also a former councillor.

Cr Jane Greacen (right) caught up with friend Mrs Sharon Firebrace-Sinnott at the community catch-up in Benambra earlier this month.



Plans for a major upgrade at Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve are well underway. Pictured are, from left Cr John White, Cr Arthur Allen, Rod Walker, Cr Tom Crook, Mick Batty, Cr Kirsten Van Diggele, Robert Reid, Jeremiah Topperwein, Keren Walker, Raymond Gallagher, Crs Trevor Stow, Sonia Buckley and Jane Greacen, Anne Richardson, Jane Rowe, Kath Smith, Cr Mark Reeves and Mayor Cr Mandy Urie.



Jodie Pitkin, General Manager Place and Community talks to community members at Benambra.



General Manager Assets and Environment Fiona Weigall met Graeme and Elijah Sinnott at the Benambra community gathering.

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National Emergency Medal opportunity

The National Emergency Medal is an award available to persons who provided either significant or sustained service (or both) during a nationally significant emergency.

The bushfires of 2019/2020 were declared a nationally significant emergency for the purpose of the National Emergency Medal on 2 December 2020.

The Medal is managed by the Office of the Governor General and is open to members of the community, volunteers or agency staff that have provided sustained service being:

- Service in the protection of lives and property; or in the service of interests, that are not their own;
- In direct response to the emergency (including support that enables or facilitates the emergency response).
- In East Gippsland (or other fire impacted municipalities).
- Between 21 November 2019 and 20 February 2020
- The minimum duration of service of 5 days

To learn more about the Medal and its history, eligibility criteria, or to apply, visit the Governor-General's website <https://www.gg.gov.au/australian-honours-and-awards/national-emergency-medal/bushfires-2019-20>

Telecommunications update

We have worked alongside Telstra and Alpine Shire Council to submit a now successful application for the Federal Government's Regional Connectivity Program to improve telecommunications across East Gippsland.

The focal point of the application was the installation of a 42-kilometre fibre optic link through the Tambo Valley

between Tambo Crossing and Swifts Creek. This link intends to create a transmission ring between Bairnsdale, Melbourne and Wangaratta and provide new and better coverage in several areas, including Omeo, Ensay, Tambo Crossing, Dinner Plain and Mount Hotham.

The installation of this link is the crux of a much larger mobile network project - the High Country Transmission Upgrade. The \$6.4 million project is jointly co-funded by Telstra, and the Victorian and Federal governments, and is focused on improving telecommunications coverage, resiliency, and connectivity in high fire danger areas, and future-proofing telecommunications for the region.

Other key upgrades within the High Country Transmission Upgrade are:

- Upgrades to existing sites at Tambo Crossing, Ensay and Mt. Hotham Airport
- Capacity and 5G upgrades to two sites in Mt Hotham and Dinner Plain
- New transmission system installations at 12 exchanges including Dinner Plain, Hotham Village, Harrietville, Omeo, Swifts Creek, Wangaratta, Morwell, Bright, Everton, Myrtleford, Ensay and Tambo Crossing

Telstra has announced that the detailed planning work for the project is now being finalised, and work is expected to commence before the end of 2021.

Telstra and NBN Co have increased their capacity with mobile/relocatable telecommunications units that can be used to reinstate telecommunications following a disaster (e.g. mobile NBN, Skymuster trucks, etc.).

The Commonwealth Government's STAND program is piloting the installation of satellite communication systems in relief centres and similar facilities. Omeo Recreation Reserve is one of eight locations at which a

satellite system has been installed in East Gippsland. Together with the solar system or a generator, this provides a safety net communication system for the Omeo Recreation Reserve if the mobile telecommunication network fails. Council has applied for further STAND satellite units to be installed at other facilities.

We have engaged a consultant to help identify and consolidate the priorities for digital connectivity improvement (resilience, coverage, literacy, etc.) across East Gippsland. This work and upcoming engagement and data collection strategies will inform Council to produce a consolidated list of priorities for advocacy and planning with telecommunication providers and State and Federal governments.

To learn more about the Regional Connectivity Program, Mobile Blackspot Program, funded projects and future funding opportunities, visit the Federal Government's Communications Department website.

Did you know?

We have a new grant application portal called Grant Guru. Check it out at eastgippsland.grantguru.com.au

Last road bridge reopened

On Friday 30 April we officially marked the successful completion of our bushfire-impacted timber road bridge replacement program. During the fires we had 13 timber road bridges and two heritage listed pedestrian bridges destroyed or damaged beyond repair. Our first bridge replacement – the Waterholes Creek bridge in Deptford – was replaced within six weeks of the fire impacting the area. The remaining 12 bridges have been completed over the past 12 months, with works totalling more than \$4.5 million.