

Timber Truss Road Bridge Strategy – Frequently asked questions

Why has there been a change to the list of timber truss bridges recognised by the Strategy?

The 2012 assessment identified 26 timber truss road bridges that met or could be upgraded to meet the operational needs of the communities they service. In 2019, based on the lessons from six years of implementation, seven of the originally identified bridges were removed from the list of bridges to be retained and replaced with eight newly assessed bridges. The bridges now listed in the Strategy reflect the history and diversity of timber truss styles while balancing the current and future transport needs and heritage conservation.

Since the Strategy was developed, considerable work has been done on better understanding the structural capabilities of the different truss types and various strengthening methods available which conserve heritage values while also providing adequate capacity and safety.

Due to this recent work, some bridges previously considered too complex and costly to retain can now be retained through applying strengthening techniques which are sympathetic to their heritage value to ensure they remain useable. These bridges have considerable heritage significance and many are valued by local communities.

The primary focus of the change has been to improve the overall heritage outcomes by ensuring all retained bridges have a continuing role and use within their communities, and to ensure they can fulfil network requirements.

How many timber truss road bridges are there currently in NSW?

Of more than 400 built between about 1860 and 1936, 48 remain. Of this, 39 are managed by Transport for NSW with the remaining bridges managed by local councils and others.

Why does the strategy now cover council managed timber truss bridges?

Timber truss bridges managed by local councils were not included in the original Strategy because these bridges sat outside Transport for NSW operational parameters defined by the Roads Act 1993. Their retention was not considered to be reliably resourced so they could be permanently conserved. When the Strategy was written there were fifteen timber truss bridges in council ownership. Since that time this has reduced to only five bridges still open to traffic.

In reconsidering the list of bridges to be retained across NSW, it was recognised there is now an important heritage benefit to be derived from ensuring two particular council-owned bridges are included in the Strategy as they are both excellent examples of their type.

Who has Transport for NSW spoken with when developing the new list?

Transport for NSW has developed the revised list as a submission to the NSW Heritage Council. The list has been discussed with the Heritage Branch of the Department of Premier and Cabinet heritage experts.

Consultation also occurred with the National Trust of Australia, Australia ICOMOS, Engineers Australia, the History Council of NSW, and the Royal Australian Historical Society.

Why do any of the Transport for NSW managed timber truss road bridges need to be replaced at all?

Not all timber truss bridges can be maintained into the future due to the increasing demands for freight routes and increasing traffic volumes.

Issues include narrow bridge width, poor access for large vehicles, potential exposure to structural damage and frequent and very expensive ongoing maintenance needs.

What criteria were used in deciding which bridges to retain?

Transport for NSW and heritage experts considered both operational and heritage criteria to identify which timber truss bridges provided the fewest operational constraints to heavy vehicles and local communities, and which bridges have the highest level of heritage significance.

Bridges were assessed against criteria of operability, technical rarity, technical representativeness, non-technical representativeness, community sentiment and financial viability.

When will the bridges identified for replacement be replaced?

Each bridge replacement requires an environmental assessment to be completed before final approval is provided. Only then can we proceed to replace and demolish a bridge. Any of the bridges identified for replacement which are currently on the State Heritage Register will need to be delisted; site specific planning processes then take place.

How will Transport for NSW decide on the order of bridges to be replaced?

The order of bridges to be replaced will be determined by the condition of the bridge and the road operation requirements. The community will be kept informed throughout the process.

Will Transport for NSW consider keeping trusses and other bridge components as tourist attractions?

This has been attempted numerous times in the past in various locations and found to be unsustainable. The retention of bridges outside normal use has operational and financial implications. These will need to be considered on a case by case basis. Transport for NSW will consider requests and suggestions by the community. However, as Transport for NSW no longer needs the truss bridge, it would look to transfer management to another body to take responsibility for its ongoing conservation.

If the bridge is bypassed can it be kept for pedestrians or bicycles?

A bridge carrying only pedestrians or bicycles still requires maintenance. Although it will no longer have the wear and tear of vehicle use, timber still deteriorates over time. The bridge will require the same level of maintenance, including closing it to dismantle and replace truss components.

Although this has been tried at a number of locations, it has been found not to be sustainable.

Could a local community have a timber truss bridge moved for use somewhere else?

It is technically feasible to relocate intact trusses to use as a crossing elsewhere. However as the timbers are already deteriorating, it is likely that they would need to be replaced.

Instead of the timber trusses, other bridge elements such as metal lift spans may prove to be more readily relocatable, robust and interpretable in new surroundings.

Is the location and history of bridges that are removed going to be recorded or marked in some way?

Transport for NSW will archive/record all of those bridges prior to their closure. We will work with the Heritage Council and local communities to make information about the bridges available, their history and significance. A Timber Truss Bridge Heritage Interpretation Guideline is being developed which will be adhered to in the preparation of interpretation information for each bridge. Transport for NSW has published a book on timber truss bridges which can be view at www.rms.nsw.gov.au/about/environment/protecting-heritage/timber-truss-bridge

What is the Fixing Country Bridges program?

The Fixing Country Bridges Program is part of the \$1 billion the NSW Government has committed to help clear the council roads maintenance backlog, repair NSW's worst timber bridges, and return up to 15,000 kilometres of council-administered Regional Roads to State control.

The Fixing Country Bridges Program will remove the worst timber bridges in regional and rural communities.

The delivery arrangements of the program are yet to be finalised. However, it will be administered through Transport for NSW, and priority will be given to those bridges in the worst condition. Councils will be able to nominate bridges that are in poor condition for inclusion in the fund.