

# Stephenson Avenue Extension Phase 2

## Public Art – Yaakin Bidi

### Public Art

Main Roads regularly commissions public art and urban design on its transport infrastructure projects. These artworks contribute to Western Australia's unique culture and environment, improve way finding and enhance the travel experience for all road users. An overview of public art on the Main Roads' network can be viewed at <https://www.mainroads.wa.gov.au/community-environment/public-art/>

The Stephenson Avenue Extension Phase 2 project has identified several locations where public art can be installed. This includes displaying artworks on bridge walls and underpasses, providing a unique opportunity to present Noongar culture in various locations.

### Yaakin Bidi

Our journey begins by understanding Whadjuk Noongar ways, of *knowing, doing, and being*. This is relational with key elements of the lived experience of the Whadjuk Noongar Elders. In the words of one Noongar Elder, *"Perth is our backyard, we played all over it"*.

The cultural narrative for the Public Art Program is drawn from several Whadjuk Noongar Elders whose families have lived in the area since time immemorial. Their stories give voice to Whadjuk Noongar people, and the project provides public exhibition space to interpret, present and represent Noongar culture that is informed by Whadjuk Noongar Elders.

Working closely with Whadjuk Noongar Elders, the project has been able to gather stories that have been passed from generation to generation to create a compelling and culturally appropriate narrative.

The cultural narrative has many themes, with key elements such as:

**Traditional Ownership** – The project area is located within a network of interlinked lake systems that extend from Dog Swamp, Herdsman Lake, Lake Monger, Perry Lakes and Star Swamp. The area is recognised and acknowledged as a campsite of Yellagonga and his family. The area's connections to Country is ongoing and continues to be maintained as an important site for Noongar people today.

**Water** – For the Whadjuk Noongar people the waterways and lake systems that traverse the Swan Coastal Plain are interconnected and linked to the project location. This cultural significance aligns with the story of the Waugyl and a cultural connection that links land, sea and waterways.

**Dreaming** – The Waugyl is the Whadjuk Noongar word for the Creation Serpent. The lake systems sit upon underground waterways that connect to other places throughout Noongar boodjar (land) and forms part of a larger story linked to the Swan Coastal Plain. Whadjuk Noongar people believe that this system of lakes, below and above ground, is created by the Waugyl. The Elders consider the Waugyl to be sacred and still living in the lakes within the area – it is invisible yet visible, seen yet unseen, known and unknown, however exists within the waterways it continues to travel through.

**Reading Country** – there are many different species of frogs surrounding the lake systems, however the green frog with the yellow markings is the one that the Elders identified as significant - “*when you see the tree frog, you know the water in the lake is clean*”.

Turtles were hunted in all the lakes and figure prominently in the conversations with Elders. Yaakin is the Noongar name for the long-necked turtle and the Elders use the name Yaakin today when discussing their turtle hunting activities. The project has adopted the name at the suggestion of the Elders’ and it is also suggested that the Public Art Program uses the name Yaakin Bidi (turtle track) when referring to the cultural narrative.

**Kinship System** – Elders place significant importance on relationships with family and the concept of kinship with all living creatures that inhabit the swamp lands of the Perth metropolitan area - linking all to each other and to the concept of connection to Country. Inter-relationships are key to understanding the Whadjuk Noongar view that connects all things to each other, while maintaining autonomy.

**Plants and Animals** – The lakes have an abundance of plants and animals that were a part of the traditional diet of the Whadjuk Noongar people. The public art will incorporate elements of bush tucker that was foraged and hunted around the lakes and surrounding areas.

## Design Process

The design of public art is a collaborative process where Aboriginal artists engage with Elders, under the guidance of the projects Whadjuk Noongar Cultural Advisors. The technical specifications of the bridge walls and underpasses are determined by the project’s engineers in consultation with the owners of the new infrastructure, including the City of Stirling, Main Roads and the Public Transport Authority.

## Engagement

The extensive engagement with Elders, under the leadership of experienced Whadjuk Noongar Cultural Advisors, is ongoing and the wider community is invited to provide their feedback via a short survey on the MySay Transport webpage at <https://www.mysaytransport.wa.gov.au/stephenson-avenue-extension-phase-2>.