

Aboriginal Participation Bulletin

This bi-monthly newsletter features stories showcasing how the Transport and Major Infrastructure Portfolio collaborates with Aboriginal communities and businesses; and embraces culture to create sustainable jobs and engagement opportunities.

The Transport and Major Infrastructure Portfolio acknowledges the Traditional Custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

Tanami Road to Success

An important new program helping to strengthen the Halls Creek Community while developing a local workforce in the East Kimberley region is now underway.

The [Tanami Road Upgrade project](#), being constructed by Main Roads, has commissioned a joint venture comprising the Wunan Foundation, an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, and the Royal Life Saving Society of WA to deliver a socialising, pre-employment and employment program that is aimed at local Aboriginal people.

Road to Success, a 24-month program, offers participants employment first; training second as they move from casual to full-time employment.

Working in partnership with local Aboriginal businesses and Local Government, Road to Success is creating opportunities for Aboriginal people to start their employment journey through recreation employment.

If you can catch a ball, throw a ball, kick a ball, float – Road to Success has a job for you!

Road to Success participants will be supported to move into full-time employment through multiple avenues such as part-time jobs, school-based traineeships, TAFE and university scholarships. Job opportunities on the Tanami Road Upgrade project include earthworks, plant operation, hospitality and camp office functions.

By June 2028, the program is expected to have delivered a minimum of 70 jobs and 6,000 casual paid employment hours.

While strengthening local capacity to support Main Roads operations, the program will also increase Aboriginal participation in road construction, maintenance, and civil works—building regional workforce capability in areas prone to persistent labour shortages, and ensuring consistent, year-round employment



[Recently reconstructed section of Tanami Road](#)

Public Transport Authority launch Innovative RAP

In late February, the [Public Transport Authority](#) (PTA) marked a significant milestone in its reconciliation journey with the launch of its 2026–2028 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The [Innovate RAP](#) sets out a clear and ambitious roadmap to strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while piloting new strategies to deepen the organisation's commitment to reconciliation and empowerment.

To celebrate the launch, events were held across PTA offices and depots, bringing staff together to recognise the importance of reconciliation and their role in advancing it. The main launch event featured a Welcome to Country delivered by respected Whadjuk Noongar man Barry Winmar, setting a culturally significant tone for the occasion. Guests also enjoyed catering provided by Aboriginal-owned business Gather Foods, highlighting the PTA's commitment to supporting local Indigenous enterprises.

The release of the Innovate RAP marks an important step forward for the PTA, reinforcing its dedication to building respectful relationships and driving positive change.



Respected Whadjuk Noongar man Barry Winmar delivers Welcome to Country at the PTA Reconciliation Action Plan launch event

Main Roads strengthens Aboriginal voices through Diversity Reference Group

Main Roads is reinforcing its commitment to inclusion and cultural safety with the ongoing work of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Diversity Reference Group (DRG).

Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to face disadvantage and remain underrepresented across the Western Australian public sector, the DRG has been established to ensure a stronger, more representative voice within the organisation

The group plays a key role in shaping a workplace culture that is safe, respectful and inclusive—one that embraces and values the identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples without bias.

Comprised of members from across Main Roads' business areas, the DRG works collaboratively at a statewide level to identify challenges that impact Aboriginal inclusiveness and to drive meaningful change. This includes supporting initiatives that improve cultural understanding and remove barriers to participation within the workforce.

A central focus of the group is helping guide the implementation of Main Roads' Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), ensuring commitments to reconciliation are embedded across the organisation.

By bringing together diverse perspectives and lived experience, the DRG is helping to build a workplace that not only acknowledges cultural differences but actively supports and celebrates them.



Main Roads Diversity Reference Group. Pictured (L to R) Sharni Bennell, Matthew Paki, Dennis Kickett, Kendall Carter, Jade Evans, Gecko Chalker, Phil D'Souza, Jaleel Spry, Stephen Grech

Wearing culture with pride at Main Roads

For Gecko, Main Roads' Aboriginal Employment and Diversity Advisor, culture in the workplace has never been about symbolism alone. It has always been about people feeling seen, respected and safe. An Elder from the South-West of Australia and proud Ballardong woman who has spent her life working for her people, Gecko brings her experience in Aboriginal education and training, community development and relationship-building into everything she does. At Main Roads, that commitment has helped shape practical, visible changes that make a real difference to how people experience the organisation.

One of those changes began with a simple idea: lanyards featuring artwork created by non-

Aboriginal people within Main Roads. It was something that Gecko envisaged Aboriginal visitors could immediately recognise and then note that Main Roads was a culturally secure place. This recognition opens the door to conversation, making people feel more comfortable on both sides.

Now, this story has taken another important step forward. Main Roads polo shirts have been printed with the same design featured on the lanyards, extending the artwork from a symbol of welcome into the everyday fabric of the workplace. This is more than a design choice. It is a visible expression of cultural inclusion woven into the clothing people wear every day. The polo shirts bring culture and identity together in a way that is practical, respectful and proud.

Gecko often says that when things become too corporate, we lose the essence of people.

“When things become too corporate, we can lose the essence of people.”

That is why these visible details matter. The artwork on the lanyards and now on the polo shirts helps hold on to that human essence. It tells Aboriginal staff and community members that they are welcome. It gives non-Aboriginal staff a shared symbol to stand behind. These small but meaningful changes help build an environment where people can be themselves and where culture is recognised not as an extra, but as part of the organisation’s everyday life.



Main Roads new staff polo shirts

New Aboriginal Stakeholder Engagement Advisor – Pilbara

Please join us in welcoming Tracey Heimberger, Main Roads’ new Aboriginal Stakeholder Engagement Advisor (ASEA) in the Pilbara, who commenced in March.

The ASEA is responsible for developing and maintaining strong, mature relationships with regional Aboriginal communities and businesses, enabling ongoing engagement, participation in future works, and the provision of goods and services to Main Roads.

Tracey is Ballardong–Whadjuk and has lived and worked in the Pilbara for 23 years.

She brings a wealth of experience working with community organisations, government, and mining proponents to support and strengthen the capability of Aboriginal groups. Before commencing with Main Roads Tracey spent 12 years with Rio Tinto in the Communities and Social Performance division, where she worked with the Indigenous Business team, Community Partnerships, Heritage and Environment teams, as well as directly with mine sites.

We are very excited to welcome Tracey to the team.



New Aboriginal Stakeholder Engagement Advisor for the Pilbara, Tracey Heimberger.

Office of Major Infrastructure Delivery welcomes Aboriginal Engagement Team

During 2025, the [Office of Major Infrastructure Delivery](#) (OMID) was established to plan and

deliver major State infrastructure, managing complex social and non-residential projects worth more than \$100 million across sectors such as health, justice, culture, sport, emergency services and primary industries.

Last month, an Aboriginal Engagement team was embedded within OMID, to provide best practice guidance and support on:

- Aboriginal business engagement and procurement.
- Aboriginal workforce training and employment pathways.
- Culturally appropriate stakeholder engagement, communications, procedures and policies.

The team comprises Sam Xanthis, Connie McDonagh and Nate Stuart (pictured *below*) who can be contacted via email:

aboriginalengagement@omid.wa.gov.au



OMID Aboriginal Engagement Team (L-R) Sam Xanthis, Connie McDonagh and Nate Stuart

Celebrating culture in safety with new hi-vis shirts

Main Roads Wheatbelt celebrated a new initiative in November last year with the introduction of culturally representative Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - strengthening cultural visibility and inclusion across the workforce.

Due to strong interest and requests from staff for culturally representative PPE, Sammy Wyborn, Aboriginal Stakeholder and Engagement Advisor, engaged Jatu Clothing and PPE Pty Ltd to support delivery.

The initiative reflects a growing recognition that visual representation in the workplace carries

meaningful impact, fosters awareness, belonging, and respect, while opening space for conversation and understanding.

As shared during the rollout by Sammy:

“It is incredibly warming to see this come to fruition within a State Government agency. Visual representation carries a priceless tangibility, it brings awareness, a sense of belonging, and a sense of respect. It sparks conversation, and I could not be prouder to see this moment finally unfold. It has taken strength and resilience to advocate for this, but as many First Nations people know, obstacles are always present in many forms. We simply continue to push forward to advocate for change.”

This milestone represents not just the introduction of PPE, but a step toward embedding cultural recognition into everyday practice across Main Roads operations.



Wheatbelt staff in their new culturally representative Personal Protective Equipment

Busselton DTMI Service Centre first to receive Aboriginal name ‘Djooditj’

The Busselton [Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure](#) (DTMI) Service Centre became the first in Western Australia to receive an Aboriginal dual name under the Transport and Major Infrastructure Portfolio’s *Aboriginal Placenames Project* in April.

Officially dual-named Djooditj (pronounced Dj-ood-itch), which is the Noongar word for the Western Quoll. The name was shared by the Wardandi, Bibulmun/Piblemen and Kaneang people of the Noongar Nation, in collaboration with [Karri Karrak Aboriginal Corporation](#).

The project recognises Aboriginal living culture, language, and enduring connection to Country, while supporting reconciliation and cultural

awareness across the State. The story of the Djooditj is reflected in artwork by Noongar artist Melissa Spillman (Maarakool Art), which features on the exterior of the Busselton DTMI Service Centre.

After unveiling the artwork and cultural story in Busselton, Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport, Jessica Stojkovski, said the project acknowledged the significance of Aboriginal culture and heritage in communities where DTMI operates.

“This project provides an opportunity for visitors to our centres to learn about and engage with Aboriginal language and culture, which is vital for reconciliation. It fosters cultural awareness, strengthens identity for Aboriginal people, and promotes healing.”

Busselton is the first of 19 DTMI service centres set to receive a dual name, with work underway for the next locations in Kalgoorlie and Carnarvon.



DTMI Staff at the Busselton Office 'Djooditj'
Caption

Aboriginal Engagement – Mandurah Estuary Bridge Duplication

The Main Roads [Mandurah Estuary Duplication Bridge](#) project is a strong example of how infrastructure can be delivered in partnership *with* community, not just *for* community.

The project commenced in early 2024 and opened in February 2026. From the very beginning, it was grounded in a commitment to genuine engagement with Aboriginal people—particularly the Bindjareb peoples, Traditional

Owners of the Mandurah area within Noongar Boodja.

Rather than treating engagement as a requirement, the project team embedded co-design into the process. Aboriginal Elders and knowledge holders were actively involved, ensuring that cultural knowledge shaped the project in meaningful ways.

A key part of this approach was the establishment of the Bindjareb Reference Group. This group brought together Traditional Owners from the Mandurah region and met regularly throughout the project. The meetings created a consistent forum to share information, seek endorsement, and guide outcomes. The group influenced several aspects of the project, including design decisions, culturally appropriate placemaking, and opportunities for Aboriginal artwork to be incorporated.

This success did not happen by chance. Strong, visible leadership from both Main Roads and the contractor created the conditions for authentic engagement. That leadership built trust and ensured that Aboriginal voices were genuinely heard and reflected in decision-making.

The impact of this approach is evident not only culturally, but economically and socially.

In terms of Aboriginal business participation, the project significantly exceeded expectations. Against a target of 3.5%, the project achieved 9.1% Aboriginal business spend—amounting to \$9.1 million out of a total project contract spend of \$100.2 million. This investment supported a range of services, with major contributions in civil construction, electrical work, and traffic management.

Employment outcomes were equally strong. The project set a target of 10% Aboriginal employment and exceeded this, reaching 12.7%. This translated into over 40,000 Aboriginal work hours out of more than 315,000 total project hours. In real terms, that meant 27 full-time positions were created and 156 Aboriginal employees were engaged, both directly and indirectly.

Together, these outcomes tell a bigger story.



Yarning Circle Statues installed on the Mandurah Estuary Bridge

Aboriginal artwork progresses for first new Australind train

Progress continues on integrating Aboriginal artwork into the first of the new Australind railcars through the Public Transport Authority's [WA Railcar Program](#), marking an important cultural milestone for the project.

Following an earlier update shared in [Bulletin #24 \(September 2025\)](#), key stakeholders recently came together to view the train during its fit out.

In March 2026, artist Rhona Wallam and her husband Les visited Alstom's Bellevue railcar facility for a site tour hosted by Alstom's Aboriginal Engagement Lead Ashley Garlett and Train Architect Sandeep Nath. They were joined by Public Transport Authority representatives Sofia Felipe and Duncan McKay and Crystal Kutia from the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Engagement branch.

The visit provided an opportunity for attendees to see firsthand the progress of the new Australind train and to further strengthen collaboration between artists and project partners.

In a significant development, arrangements have now been finalised for the installation of the featured artwork. Artist Candy Riley has formally approved the production of her piece, *Country Colours*, which will be showcased on the first Australind railcar. The train is set to enter service on 29 June 2026.

The inclusion of *Country Colours* highlights the PTA's commitment to celebrating Aboriginal culture and embedding meaningful cultural representation within Western Australia's public transport network.



Candy Riley's piece '*Country Colours*' displayed on the luggage stack of the first Australind railcar.

International Women's Day - Sharing Stories

As part of International Women's Day at the [Office of Major Transport Infrastructure Delivery \(OMTID\)](#) Connie, a proud NSW Gomilaroi and Dhungetti woman was invited to share her story.

Connie's story is shaped by her Aboriginal identity, resilience, responsibility and a deep sense of purpose.

Growing up in country New South Wales as the youngest of twelve children in a small village of 120 people, her early life was defined by making do with what you had. Financial hardship required constant effort to maintain self-sufficiency.

The family grew their own vegetables and relied on harvested rainwater for drinking, while Connie's father and brothers dug a well and built a windmill to pump underground water for the garden, laundry, and bathing. Daily life included using a drop toilet and gathering firewood by splitting logs with a sledgehammer and wedges, then chopping them into stove-sized pieces to fuel cooking and hot water systems. Food was supplemented through fishing, collecting freshwater mussels, and trapping rabbits for both meat and fur, which also helped generate income. During school holidays, work on nearby farms—such as chipping weeds or removing rocks—provided additional support, while a two-hour daily commute to the nearest country town was necessary to complete secondary education, all endured amid the challenges of domestic violence.

Her memories of childhood and teenage years are rich and vivid - filled with the wide experience of life encompassing joy, financial hardships, working hard, contributing to the local community, looking after nieces and nephews, being proud of her Aboriginality and honouring the ancestors who walked the earth before her. Like many families,

hers navigated challenges that required resilience and unity. Connie spoke openly about these experiences, reflecting on the lessons they taught her about perseverance and responsibility she said, “Life goes on and we make the most of what comes our way.”

As she moved into young adulthood, these early experiences became the foundation for her voice and ultimately her confidence. Entering the workforce as an Aboriginal woman, Connie was determined to succeed and give to community while honouring her Aboriginal practices of looking after country and community and getting involved in wider society. She recognised the barriers that existed and chose to meet them with courage and clarity, advocating for inclusion and meaningful participation.

Today, Connie is deeply committed to making an impact in the Aboriginal business procurement space. She understands the importance of creating opportunities for Aboriginal businesses to grow, thrive and be visible in industries where they have historically been underrepresented. Her work is driven by a strong belief that representation matters—not just in numbers, but in influence, voice and decision-making.

Her story is one of resilience, cultural pride and unwavering determination—a reminder of the power of being seen, being heard, and creating space for others to do the same – Thanks Connie.



[Main Roads Connie McDonagh, Senior Advisor for Aboriginal Engagement shares stories from her youth as part of International Women’s Day](#)

Strong start in South West for Yonga Civil

Main Roads is pleased to celebrate the successful delivery of an 815m² temporary asphalt footpath upgrade on the [Forrest Highway Glen Iris](#) project, completed in April 2026, marking Yonga Civil’s first project in the South West region. While Yonga Civil is an established contractor with experience delivering civil works in other regions, this project represents a strong and positive start to their working relationship with Main Roads in the region.

The completed footpath demonstrated a high standard of workmanship, with a smooth, consistent asphalt finish and clear attention to detail along the full length (410m) of the works.

The final outcome reflects Main Roads’ ongoing commitment to quality infrastructure delivery and community safety, supporting improved accessibility for local residents.

Throughout construction, the Yonga Civil team displayed a professional, proactive, and collaborative approach. The crew worked efficiently, maintained clear communication, and demonstrated pride in their work from start to finish. Their approach aligned strongly with Main Roads’ expectations and contributed to the successful and timely completion of the project.

For Main Roads, projects like the Glen Iris footpath, highlight the value of building strong partnerships with capable contractors entering the South West region. For Yonga Civil, this delivery marks a successful introduction to the region and establishes a solid foundation for future collaboration and continued success working with Main Roads.

This project serves as a positive example of how strong relationships, shared standards, and a focus on quality outcomes delivered lasting benefits for the South West community, while reinforcing Main Roads’ role as a trusted leader in regional infrastructure delivery.



Yonga Civil and Main Roads team members on site at **Forrest Hwy Intersection & Access to Glen Iris** project, marking a strong start to Yonga Civil's work in the South West region.

Training boosts safety and capability of Kimberley Aboriginal workforce

Aboriginal business support and labour hire providers across the Kimberley recently received a valuable boost, with targeted training delivered in Kununurra, Derby and Broome to strengthen safety, compliance and workforce readiness.

Kimberley staff Safety Coordinator Lachie Wilkin, alongside Sammy Wyborn, Aboriginal Stakeholder and Engagement Advisor, led the sessions, focusing on Main Roads capability and compliance requirements. The training aimed to equip service providers with the knowledge and tools needed to better prepare workers for employment on Main Roads projects across the region.

Key areas covered included onboarding processes through the Main Roads Learning Hub, where contractors must upload essential documentation such as identification and safety certifications before commencing work.

Participants also received guidance on the Kimberley Regional Induction (KRI), which ensures workers understand safety expectations, cultural responsibilities and the realities of remote work. Emphasis was placed on the role of service providers in supporting candidates through induction and preparing them for camp life and new routines.

Safety reporting, communication pathways and escalation processes were also key focus areas, reinforcing the importance of early issue identification and collaboration between workers, agencies and project teams.

Importantly, the sessions addressed the management of Sorry Business, ensuring culturally respectful practices are understood and upheld. Guidance was provided on supporting Aboriginal workers during periods of mourning, while maintaining operational awareness and strengthening relationships with Kimberley communities.

The training initiative reflects a continued commitment to building a safer, more culturally informed and capable workforce across the region.



Lachie Wilkin and Sammy Wyborn with Aboriginal business support and labour hire providers at a recent Kimberley training session

Call out for stories

If you would like to share an achievement or update about Aboriginal business engagement or employment on a Transport and Major Infrastructure Portfolio project or operations, please contact TPAE Communications with a story or summary by emailing:

AboriginalEngagement@mainroads.wa.gov.au