

Swan River Crossings



Low Level and High Level Bridge, c1907. (SLWA)

High Level Bridge 1866: the first Fremantle bridge was built out of timber by convict labour 1863-7, and was officially opened 2 October 1867. (Hitchcock: 52)

Celebrating heritage in design

An enhanced design for a new bridge is proposed to replace the Fremantle Traffic Bridge. Building on the existing alignment maintains the location (and heritage) of the crossing that dates back thousands of years, and creates a unique opportunity to celebrate this part of the river.

Through our Heritage Interpretation Strategy, the amenity and history of the Swan River (Derbarl Yerrigan) at Fremantle (Walyalup area) will be acknowledged through architecture, urban and landscape design.

Historical

Originally, geographical formations of limestone and sand provided a crossing closer to the river mouth that was used by the traditional custodians for thousands of years.

Engagement with Aboriginal Elders began in October 2020 to inform the design of the crossings and the heritage interpretation strategy. Through workshops the following feedback was captured:

- The bridge location was a place for safe crossing, and a point where many songlines and totems travel through.

- The importance of connections from the upper reaches of the Derbarl Yerrigan and other river systems through to offshore areas, historic land bridges and connections to Wadjemup (Rottnest Island).
- The uninterrupted flow of the river water at the crossing point is of great importance. To recognise this, consider minimising the number of piers (new bridge) in the water and ensure the old timber piles no longer obstruct the flow.

As the Swan River Colony was developed, bridges were built to cross at certain points of the river. The current Fremantle Traffic Bridge was built in 1939 and is the fourth bridge on this site. The site has a high level of integrity for its continuous use as the location for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic since 1866, when the first bridge was built. Evidence of this bridge still exists, with piles visible at low tide.

As a way of celebrating and recording the heritage of the bridge, we will be undertaking a 3D digital capture of the entire bridge and its surrounds and are currently exploring ways to make this readily available to the community, and for generations to come.

Heritage Values

The heritage values that relate specifically to the Swan River Crossings have been identified and developed in a Heritage Interpretation Strategy. This includes stories associated with the long history of the crossing – the importance of the use by Traditional Custodians, various iterations of bridges over time, the current heritage-listed bridge, and the Ferry Capstan Base (a structure demonstrating the function of hauling river vessels).

The surrounding area is also rich in history, with a number of listed heritage elements. These include the Artillery Barracks (formerly Victoria Barracks), the Fremantle Harbour Signal Station, the Swan River, Cantonment Hill (Dwerda Weelardinup) and Rocky Bay.



Fremantle Traffic

Heritage Interpretation

The Heritage Interpretation Strategy sets out the vision, key themes, stories, and opportunities for interpretation for the project, in the architecture, urban and landscape design. These include:

- Emphasise the significance and prominence of the landscape.

- Identify and recognise the historical sequence of crossings (including the ferry capstan) and the most recent bridge.
- Reflection and inspiration from the natural materials and patterns of the riverine and coastal environment.

Since 2019, we have worked with numerous stakeholders and community, including City of Fremantle, State Design Review Panel, Heritage Council of WA, and Whadjuk Elders, to capture feedback for consideration in the strategy.

Public Art

There are opportunities for public art to enhance the place themes and incorporate with the urban landscape and architectural design.

Interpretive signage opportunities that communicate the site's history and heritage, and cater for different audiences and user groups are being investigated.

This will allow the local community and visitors to continue to appreciate, experience and learn about their history and heritage, ensuring that the heritage value can be passed onto future generations.

Further information

If you would like further information, have any questions or concerns, you can contact us at 138 138 or email: enquiries@mainroads.wa.gov.au

You can also subscribe to receive updates directly to your inbox by registering your email on the project's webpage [here](#).



Opening of the Fremantle Traffic Bridge. L-R: E. Tindale (Commissioner of Main Roads), J.C. Willcock (Premier), H. Millington (Minister for Works). 15 December 1939. (SLWA 217587PD)