

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.

Fremantle College NAIDOC Week Careers Fair

In early August 2025, the Main Roads [Tonkin Highway Extension and Thomas Road Upgrade Project](#) team joined over 200 Fremantle College students to celebrate NAIDOC Week.

The day began with a moving Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremony and a series of vibrant cultural dances by the students.

Following the celebrations, the school hosted a careers fair for Aboriginal students, providing an opportunity to explore career pathways, connect with local employers, and understand how they can build skills for the future.



Students marked the start of the event with a moving smoking ceremony.

The project team participation proved highly valuable, allowing them to engage directly with Year 11 and 12 students, encourage expressions of interest and promote potential job opportunities and career pathways within the project. Team members also met with key school staff responsible for career development, traineeships and internships, fostering connections for future collaboration.



Project team members shared information about career pathways and answered students' questions.

Parents and school staff councillors were provided with a QR code to supply to any students interested in opportunities on the project. The team looks forward to continuing to work with Fremantle College to communicate potential traineeships or work experience opportunities.

Celebration of \$1 billion work delivered by Aboriginal businesses

An historic milestone for Aboriginal economic participation was recently celebrated, with Aboriginal owned businesses delivering more than \$1 billion of work across the Transport and Major Infrastructure Portfolio agencies.



[Professor Len Collard delivers the Welcome to Country at the Aboriginal business engagement celebration.](#)

Initiatives contributing to this success included:

- Implementation of meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal organisations.
- Provision of direct contracting opportunities for Aboriginal businesses.
- Removal of barriers to purchase through Aboriginal businesses.
- Capacity and capability development opportunities for Aboriginal businesses.
- Collaboration with Aboriginal industry stakeholders and representatives.

Reaching this \$1 billion milestone reflects the commitment of staff across the Portfolio and demonstrates the wide range of capable and qualified Aboriginal businesses available to undertake work all across the state.



[Celebration of the milestone by staff and stakeholders.](#)

National recognition for METRONET Noongar Place Names Initiative

The METRONET [Noongar Place Names Initiative](#) was recognised as a highly commended entry in the Community Development Project Award category at the 2025 Engagement Institute's Core Values Awards.

These annual awards celebrate projects from across Australia and New Zealand which embody the principles of meaningful, inclusive and effective engagement.



[METRONET Noongar Reference Group member Lera Bennell \(left\) accepting a 2025 Core Values Award on behalf of METRONET.](#)

Smoking Ceremony marks milestone for Reid Highway Interchanges Project

In early October, the Main Roads [Reid Highway Interchanges Project](#) team marked a milestone in the project's journey with a Smoking Ceremony held on Whadjuk Country, at the location of the site compound off Drumpellier Road.

The ceremony was led by Whadjuk Elder, Uncle Nick Abraham from Warrang-Bridil, who extended a warm Welcome to Country to all attendees, ahead of commencing major construction activities.

The event brought together all project team members in a meaningful moment of reflection and connection, acknowledging the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land. Through the cleansing smoke and shared experience, participants were reminded of the importance of walking together in partnership with Aboriginal communities and strengthening their collective commitment to reconciliation.

The ceremony served as a powerful and moving expression of cultural respect and unity, reinforcing the project team's ongoing dedication to honouring Aboriginal heritage and fostering meaningful relationships with Traditional Custodians.



Whadjuk Elder, Uncle Nick Abraham leading the smoking ceremony on site.

PTA Railcar Program team celebrates NAIDOC Week

The Public Transport Authority (PTA) [WA Railcar Program](#) team celebrated NAIDOC Week 2025, which marked a powerful milestone: 50 years of honouring and elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, culture, and resilience.

The 2025 theme, "The Next Generation: Strength, Vision & Legacy," celebrates the achievements of the past, and the bright future ahead, empowered by the strength of our young leaders, the vision of our communities, and the legacy of our ancestors.

Together, the team is eager to walk forward, honouring where they've come from and looking to the next generation who will boldly carry NAIDOC and their communities into the future.



PTA WA Railway Program's project team and TPAE staff at the project's NAIDOC Week event.

Celebrating NAIDOC Week through partnered events like the one held at Bellevue with team Alstom in July this year, is a testament to the collaborative work done within the rail industry to better support First Nations communities where we live and operate.

Ashley Garlett, Alstom's Aboriginal Engagement Lead, opened the event where he spoke to the importance of this year's theme and why it reflects the work they do, where it came from and who it will be passed on to.

The Binar Dance Group then performed, before inviting the team up to join in with the wetj (emu) dance. The celebration concluded with a selection of refreshments provided by a local Aboriginal supplier.

TPAE walks for reconciliation

Staff from the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Engagement (TPAE) branch participated in the 'Walk for Reconciliation' hosted by Reconciliation WA in late October.



TPAE staff walk for reconciliation with community members at Galup (Lake Monger).

The event, held at Galup (Lake Monger), began with a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony followed by cultural storytelling and song before community members walked together in reflection, truth and unity.

"This event provided a valuable opportunity to walk in solidarity with Aboriginal Elders and community members, to learn and reflect on the true history of Galup and to connect with teams across the Transport Portfolio in a deeply moving space," said Sam Xanthis, TPAE Communications Manager.

Celebrating culture in safety with new hi-vis shirts

Main Roads South West Region celebrated a new initiative that brings culture and safety together through the design of hi-vis shirts featuring artwork by Maarakool Art.

The shirts, which have already received overwhelmingly positive feedback, showcase vibrant artwork designed by Aboriginal artist Mel Spillman (Woods), while maintaining the high visibility required for safety on-site.

Feedback from staff across the region has been enthusiastic:

- "What a great initiative."
- "Love the artwork and shirts."
- "OMG, too deadly—I love it!"
- "It's so good to finally see Aboriginal artwork on something like hi-vis."
- "Love that Main Roads is showcasing local art in such a visible way."
- "The colours really stand out—they look amazing on site."
- "That's such a great way to share culture and keep people safe at the same time."
- "These are the best hi-vis shirts I've ever seen."
- "It makes me proud to see our culture represented at work."
- "They're not just work shirts, they tell a story."
- "Even the kids think they're cool!"

The positive response has gone beyond the South-West, with other Main Roads Regions arranging their own culturally inclusive hi-vis shirts.

This initiative demonstrates how safety gear can also be a vehicle for recognition, respect, and pride in Aboriginal culture.



L-R: David Mills, Ben Payne, Ty Bellino & Remy Lavis.

Waalitj Hub Business Builder

Representatives from the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Engagement (TPAE) branch and agencies across the Transport and Major Infrastructure Portfolio were recently invited to attend and present at the Waalitj Hub Regional Business Builder event.



Representatives from Westport, Main Roads, PTA, DTMI and TP AE at the Waalitj Hub Business Builder event.

Aboriginal businesses and industry leaders gathered at the event in Kwinana to explore potential partnerships and procurement opportunities with attendees spending the session listening, sharing and building connections.

Attendees heard presentations from the Transport and Major Infrastructure Portfolio, Alcoa, CBH Group and AusIndustry, learning about upcoming procurement opportunities in the area and how to navigate their tender processes.

Presenting on behalf of TP AE, Tish Moloney, Business Interface Manager, walked Aboriginal business owners and representatives through how they can connect with TP AE and were directed to where they could find the pipeline of work and upcoming opportunities for the Portfolio's transport agencies. She also highlighted some key tips and reminders for businesses when submitting tenders.

Regina Glover, Aboriginal Opportunities Strategies Manager, Westport provided an overview of the types of future works planned for Westport. Attendees were also directed to where they can register to receive updates from Westport about the [upcoming procurement opportunities and industry briefing events](#).

Airstrip upgrade supports safe landings and jobs in remote Kimberley

In October, an upgrade to Bidyadanga Airstrip in the Kimberley was completed as part of the [Aboriginal Community Airstrips Renewal Program](#) (ACARP), managed by the Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure's (DTMI) Aviation Infrastructure team and delivered by Main Roads.

The airstrip is vital to support flights that deliver goods, services and medical care to the community, which is located around 180 kilometres south of Broome on the Kimberley coast and is the largest remote Aboriginal community in the State.

Main Roads worked in consultation with Traditional Owners, Karajarri Traditional Lands Association and Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community La Grange, to deliver the project and provide training and upskilling opportunities for six local Aboriginal peoples who were part of the 10-person on-site team.

Improvements included corrective earth works to repair and smooth the runway shoulders and improve drainage, allowing the airstrip to support safe, year-round aviation access.



Bidyadanga Airstrip pre-start crew. L-R: Darell Kayle (Local), Trevor Sibasodo (Local), Mark Donnes (Local), Steven Anderon, Torsten Feuerreiter (Local), Kelvin Mallard (Local), Greg Coumbe (Local).

ACARP aims to ensure airstrips at remote Aboriginal communities are maintained and can safely support flights connecting people to critical services including essential health care. As well as upgrading aviation infrastructure, the program also aims to employ and empower local Aboriginal peoples.

Journey at Main Roads from traineeship to leadership scholarship

Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Engagement (TPAE) branch Business Manager and Noongar woman Danielle Hefferon was recently selected for a scholarship development program to complete the LEAD LAB leadership training delivered by Incredible People.

“This has been a great opportunity provided to me as part of my development as a leader,” said Danielle Hefferon, TP AE Business Manager.

Danielle started her journey with Main Roads in June 2017 on a 12-month Clerical Traineeship in the Infrastructure Delivery Directorate via the Public Sector Commission and was offered a full-time permanent level 1 Business Support Officer (BSO) role following completion of her traineeship.

Over the following years, Danielle’s skills and abilities continued to be acknowledged which lead to several acting opportunities before being promoted to level 3 BSO in 2019.

Danielle relocated to OMTID when it was established in 2021 as the Executive Assistant to Leo Coci, OMTID Managing Director.

Upon the establishment of TP AE in early 2022, Danielle received an acting opportunity as Level 5 Business Manager for TP AE, and was appointed to the role in a permanent capacity in April 2023.

“It has been a pleasure to watch Dani evolve into a management position within the function and now undertaking an opportunity for professional leadership development,” shared Danielle’s line manager, Natalee Charlesworth, Business and Systems Manager, TP AE. “I’m looking forward to seeing her new attributes applied.”

During her time at Main Roads and TP AE, Danielle has been involved in a number of meetings with stakeholders and Aboriginal business owners including the Main Roads Aboriginal Advisory Group (now known as the Transport Portfolio Aboriginal Business and Employment Advisory Group) since its inception in 2019.

Westport Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training

[Westport](#) staff recently took part in Aboriginal Cultural Awareness workshops with Kambarang Services director and facilitator Danny Ford.

The workshops gave staff an understanding of Australian history and the continued impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples. Danny also demonstrated the pervasiveness and harm of stereotypes and how staff can combat these by being part of truth telling as allies.

“We received fantastic feedback from staff about how much they learned through the training, and several people spoke about the deep emotional impact it had on them. For some, this was the first time they had heard the history told in such detail, and that truth-telling is powerful,” said Westport Lead Aboriginal Engagement, Gemma Collard.

“It was inspiring to see everyone leaning in, asking questions and engaging with the conversation, even when the topics were confronting. That willingness to listen and learn is what drives real change.”

Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training is a significant part of Westport’s commitment to engaging with Aboriginal peoples, ensuring staff have a deeper understanding of culture when working with Aboriginal businesses, consultants and staff members.



Westport staff listen and learn at a recent Aboriginal cultural awareness workshop.

Triple triumph for Main Roads at the Engagement Institute Awards

Main Roads took home three awards at this year's Engagement Institute Core Values Awards for Boorloo Bridge (Main Roads [Causeway Pedestrian and Cyclist Bridges Project](#)) and the Wilman Wadandi Highway (Main Roads [Bunbury Outer Ring Road Project](#)).

Celebrating excellence in engagement across Australasia, the awards were held in October in Melbourne as part of the Engagement Institute's Annual Conference.

Boorloo Bridge, delivered by the Causeway Link Alliance, won the overall Australasia Project of the Year Award and were also announced as the winner in the Indigenous – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander category, with Wilman Wadandi Highway, delivered by the South West Gateway Alliance, winning the Infrastructure (Construction) category.



[Australasia Project of the Year awarded to the Causeway Link Alliance for the Boorloo Bridge project.](#)

The Core Values Awards honour outstanding projects and engagement practitioners who exemplify the principles of meaningful, inclusive and effective engagement. The annual awards showcase innovation, integrity and impact - recognising the individuals, teams and organisations who are setting the standard in community and stakeholder engagement.

Westport staff join the Walk for Reconciliation event

Westport staff were honoured to join Reconciliation WA for the Walk for Reconciliation at Galup (Lake Monger), a powerful opportunity to walk alongside Elders, Aboriginal organisations and community members in the spirit of truth and healing.

"Walking at Galup for Reconciliation was deeply personal for me. This is my ancestral land, and hearing Elders share stories about its cultural and historical significance was a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of our people," said Gemma Collard, Lead Aboriginal Engagement at Westport. "Reconciliation begins with truth-telling and respect, and at Westport we are committed to walking this journey together, ensuring Aboriginal voices and knowledge are embedded in everything we do."

Karni Walbirniny Koorliny, or Walk of Truth and Healing, offered a deeply moving space to hear stories from Aboriginal Elders about the cultural and historical significance Galup has for the Whadjuk Noongar people.

Engaging with the knowledge and stories from traditional owners is an important part of Westport's commitment to working respectfully and meaningfully with Aboriginal communities.



[Staff from Westport at the 'Walk for Reconciliation'.](#)

Stage 1 of the Tanami Road Upgrade project is now complete!

After a steady and determined 3 year effort, the Main Roads [Tanami Road Upgrade Project](#) team, have successfully sealed the first 40 kilometres of Tanami Road.



The first stage, located in Jaru Country, winds through steep hilly terrain with many watercourses, which required significant earthworks and drainage to achieve the 110 km/h design standards.

The scale of the achievement is remarkable. The works included the construction of 35 km of side tracks, the installation of 80 culverts and 8 floodways, including six large watercourses, all designed to make the road more resilient during the wet season.

The final hurdle required the lowering of two large hills, which involved controlled blasting, excavation, and carting to remove 50,000 m³ rock from the site to a nearby quarry.



Project Manager, Neville Walters, site supervisor Stephen Tully and site engineer, Pearce Javat debrief on the fresh seal at SLK 33.

A massive 67% of all work completed on Stage 1 was undertaken by local East Kimberley businesses with over 35% worth of works completed by Aboriginal businesses. This is a major win for community participation and economic growth in the Kimberley region.

The Tanami Road Upgrade has achieved a mainly local workforce with around 120 people being employed on the project since it commenced.

Around 60% of all hours worked on Stage 1 were by local Aboriginal peoples from the East Kimberley region.



In 2025 work commenced on stage 2 of the project, which involves sealing a further 32 km of road.



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

