

Causeway Pedestrian and Cyclist Bridges Project

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage



Overview

The Causeway Pedestrian and Cyclist Bridges Project will see two iconic cable-stayed bridges, comprising a 6-metre-wide shared path linking the Victoria Park foreshore from McCallum Park, with Heirisson Island and Perth's CBD at Point Fraser. Construction of the bridges is due to be complete by the end of 2024.

We recognise that the project site holds strong cultural significance to Aboriginal people. We acknowledge the importance of ensuring the cultural heritage values of the area are respected, protected, and celebrated. Through this unique project, the project team are working closely with Whadjuk elders via the Matagarup Elders Group (MEG).

The innovative design reflects and embeds Whadjuk Noongar culture and heritage. Knowledge and feedback received through extensive engagement with the MEG has informed the architectural and landscaping design of the bridge, including the s-shaped curves of the bridges representing the sinuous movement of the Waugyl (rainbow serpent). The cultural narrative developed by the project also guides the design of wayfinding and interpretative signage and the landscaping strategy.

Stakeholder Engagement

An advisory group comprising Whadjuk elders has been established especially for this project. The inaugural meeting was held in September 2021 with many further meetings to date. The group's name, Matagarup Elders Group (MEG), was selected by its members and is symbolic of the project footprint on the Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River) near Matagarup (Heirisson Island), which Aboriginal people refer to as "matagarup", meaning "a place where the river is only leg deep" (also known as "muddy knees").

Traditionally, the site of this project had specific areas for "women's" and "men's" business, therefore the MEG comprises of eighteen members, with equal male and female representation. Following advice from the former South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC), members were selected from each of the families recognised as having cultural connection to the project area.

In addition to the MEG providing valuable cultural input to inform the design elements, the Group is also being consulted on public art and visual design elements including signage. Communicating the cultural heritage values of the site is an important part of this development. Once complete, this project has the potential to be part of a healing and reconciliation process within the community.



History

The site of the existing Causeway traffic bridge has been a significant crossing point over the Swan River since well before the arrival of colonists in 1829. The shallow flats in the vicinity of what is now known as Matagarup (Heirisson Island) provided a natural junction to traverse between the northern and southern banks of the river.

60,000 BP
People of the Noongar nation occupied the South West of Australia for at least 60,000 years.

8,000 to 12,000 years ago
Nyittingy (Cold Times). The most recent Ice Age caused the sea levels to rise. Tasmania separated from the mainland, New Guinea from Cape York, and islands off the coast of Western Australia emerged, including Ngooloomayup (Carnac), Wadjemup (Rottnest) and Meeandip (Garden).

1616-1829
European exploration

1616
Dirk Hartog exploration of the WA coastline.

1801
The French (Baudin) explore up to and past Matagarup mapping the Claisebrook area. They name 'Iles Heirisson'.

1829
Colonisation and establishment of towns on the Derbal Yerrigan: the sea port at Walyalup (Fremantle), the administrative centre at Boorloo (Perth) and the inland port at Mandoon (Guildford).

1833
Yagan, Whadjuk warrior, is killed and his kaart (head) taken to Liverpool, England.

1840-1843
First Causeway bridge built across the islands. It remained the only bridge crossing the Swan River for 19 years.

1949-1952
Third Causeway Bridge built. Second Causeway Bridge demolished 1953.

1927-1954
Aboriginal people excluded from Perth city centre.

1905
The 1905 Act is introduced, allowing government control over every aspect of Aboriginal peoples' lives in WA, including forced removal of children.

1883
Major river reclamation projects. The Heirisson Islands were consolidated into a single land mass over the next two decades.

1867
Second Causeway Bridge built after the first was damaged in a flood.

1972
The Aboriginal Heritage Act (1972) is introduced. Heirisson Island becomes protected under this legislation.

1978; 1984
Protest camps on Heirisson Island led by activist Robert Bropho to highlight the social injustice experienced by Aboriginal people.

1984
A bronze statue of Yagan is erected on Heirisson Island. Vandals have removed the head from the statue on two separate occasions.

2012
A Noongar Tent Embassy is established on Heirisson Island, and a 'Working Congress Party' is staged at Kings Park to communicate the State Government's offer of settlement and extinguishment of Native Title claims in the South West.

1998
Five kangaroos introduced to the island.

1997
Yagan's head is repatriated from the UK, and arrives in Perth on 31 August.

1993
The Native Title Act is introduced. Noongar people lodge an application for determination of native title which is contested by the WA State Government.

2015
South West Native Title Settlement agreement.

2016
Federal Court findings affirm the City of Perth ban on the Aboriginal camp on Heirisson Island, stating native title right claims over the land should now be considered 'wholly extinguished'.

2021
Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act passed.

2022
Causeway Link Alliance formed and collaborating with the Matagarup Elders Group collaborate to deliver the Causeway Pedestrian and Cyclist Bridges Project.

Aboriginal influence on the project

Cultural narrative

In consultation with the MEG, a cultural narrative has been developed for the Project. Themes reflecting the significance of the area to Noongar people and the stories that have been passed from generation to generation. This cultural narrative is being used to inform all elements of the Project's design.

"Through interpretive architectural and landscape design and beautiful public art, this place will showcase Noongar culture to the world."

The cultural themes guiding the Project:

The River and the Spirit of the Water

Derbal Yerrigan is the Noongar name for the Swan River, which was formed by the Waugal.

Waugal is the sacred rainbow serpent, Noongar stories of creation state that it moved across the land and formed the hills and valleys, and would tunnel underground forming waterways.

Caring for country

Plants, animals and fish for sustenance were found year-round in abundance in the area where the bridges will cross the river.

The **koylie and wannas** are traditional tools. The koylie is a boomerang used by men and the wanna is a digging stick used by women to gather edible roots found through the mudflats. These tools have influenced the design of the bridge pylons.

A Crossing Place

Matagarup means leg-deep and is the name for the shallow crossing point of the river, on which reclaimed Heirisson Island now sits.

Building new crossings refers to the history of the Causeway being built across the river in 1862.

A Place of Resistance

Yagan was an iconic figure in the fight for Noongar rights and recognition, born c. 1795. A bronze statue of Yagan is located on Heirisson Island.

Balbuk has ancestral bonds to the surrounding area with her grandmother born on Heirisson Island. She is known for following her bidi (path) across Heirisson Island to Lake Kingsford through the Perth CBD, and to break down any fence or walk through any building that got in her way.

Protest camps have been held on Heirisson Island on several occasions, led by Noongar people. This includes in 1978 prior to the City of Perth's 150 year anniversary, 2012 as a Noongar Tent Embassy regarding the South West Native Title Agreement, then in 2015-2016 as a refugee protest camp.

A Living Culture

Community use refers to the amenity the new bridges and their surrounding landscaping will provide to the community, along the foreshores of the river. As well as the opportunity to share Noongar stories more broadly across the community.



As part of the Perth City Deal, this project is jointly funded by the Australian (\$50 million) and Western Australian (\$50 million) governments.

Visual design aspects

The Project is commissioning a series of public artworks, which includes sculptural totems, a patterned pathway design and a series of wall-based artworks for the bridge abutments.

The objectives of the artwork are to:

- Reflect the importance of the project area in Noongar culture with stories and themes relevant to the site
- Create engaging and educational moments for visitors who travel to and through the area
- Contribute to a sense of place
- Enhance the public recreational spaces and bridges through integrated designs
- Create markers and meeting points along the bridges.

The design of public art is a collaborative process where Noongar artists will engage with Whadjuk Elders, through the MEG.

This Project provides opportunity for early career Noongar creatives to be mentored and supported by the project team during the development and delivery of artworks. An approach to help build capacity amongst emerging artists.

Construction

In recognition of the cultural significance of the site, and respecting cultural protocols, smoking ceremonies have been held at each across the project site (McCallum Park, Heirisson Island and Point Fraser) prior to construction commencing.

Aboriginal Heritage Management

MEG members and nominated representatives also have the integral role as Aboriginal Cultural Monitors on Heirisson Island. This ensures the identification of any items of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, which may be uncovered during construction, are protected and managed. This could include places, sites, artefacts and human remains.

An Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Plan has been developed which outlines how the Alliance will identify, manage and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage. As part of this, archeological digging has been undertaken at specific sites on Heirisson Island in order to further investigate areas of significance.



Artist's impression of the foreshore path at the north of Matagarup (Heirisson Island, Perth side)



Artist's impression of the foreshore path at the south of Matagarup (Heirisson Island, Victoria Park side)

