

Western Highway Duplication – Rethinking Section 2B Buangor – Ararat

An Occasional Paper on Smarter Infrastructure

Paper No. 2 – Traveller Safety and Route Choice

2 March 2026



About KORS Inc and this Paper

KORS Inc. (Keep Original Route Supporters) is a community-based organisation of environmental advocates, locally concerned people and a landholder formed to promote a safer, lower-impact and more responsible alignment for the Western Highway Duplication between Buangor and Ararat. The group supports completing the safety improvements but argues that the approved southern deviation (“Option 1”) should be reconsidered. Since route selection in 2012-13, updated environmental and cultural heritage assessments have identified significantly greater impacts than originally understood on Option 1, including loss of native vegetation, threatened species habitat and Djab Wurrung cultural Heritage. KORS Inc proposes the Northern Option, an alignment that follows the existing highway corridor and delivers equivalent safety and transport outcomes with reduced construction risk, shorter build time, lower cost, and far less environmental and cultural heritage damage. The paper on road safety calls on Victorian MPs to support a short modern reassessment of the alignment choices. Other papers cover cultural heritage, environment, economics and engineering.

Introduction

Road safety is a “key driver”¹ for duplicating the Western Highway between Buangor and Ararat. KORS Inc. takes every crash and every loss of life seriously and supports improvements that make the road safer for all users.

This paper examines the available safety evidence, drawing largely on traffic planner William McDougall’s November 2025 analysis, which reviewed 25 years of crash data to December 2024.

¹ Environmental Effects Statement, Executive Summary, Page iii, paragraph 1

The evidence suggests that while safety improvements are warranted, the existing crash history does not mean that the approved alignment is the only safe option for duplication. A route refinement for duplication — the Northern Option — can deliver equivalent traveller safety more efficiently, reducing environmental, cultural and construction impacts.

KORS' Position on Safety

KORS supports:

- immediate **low-cost safety** measures,
- completion of **duplication**,
- a duplication **alignment that is equally safe for travellers** as the road authority's preferred alignment,
- solutions that **minimise environmental and cultural heritage damage**, and
- construction plans that **improve safety for workers**.

The Northern Option is proposed on this basis.

Recent Fatalities and Community Concern

The section of highway to be duplicated was fatality free for nearly 25 years from 2000 to November 2024. Then, between November 2024 and July 2025, three lives were lost on the section proposed for duplication. These tragedies deeply affect local communities, including members of KORS who personally knew one of those who died.

Community concern is heightened by the fact that even during periods when the project has been on hold, on the surface the road construction authorities appear not to have engaged constructively with an alternative alignment proposed more than a decade ago by community members.

Safety Performance in Context

Despite recent fatalities, long-term crash data indicates that:

- the Buangor–Ararat section “remains one of Victoria’s safer regional roads”²,

² McDougall, 2025, Western Highway Upgrade: Review of Economic Appraisal and Road Crash History – 2025 update, page 9, first dot point

- its crash rate is approximately 36% of the Victorian average³,
- and around 47% of the regional Victorian average⁴.

The route overall is significantly safer than the state-wide average crash rate.

This does not mean safety improvements are unnecessary — only that decisions about alignment should be made using accurate context rather than perceptions alone.

Media Reporting and Public Perception

Fatality figures are frequently presented without context in media reports about this section of highway.

For example, reports citing “21 deaths ... in ten years ... on the road”⁵ refer to:

- a much longer section of highway - in this case, Beaufort to Ararat and within Ararat township - and
- a longer timeframe - 25 years in this case.

These figures cited include:

- fatalities on already duplicated sections,
- fatalities on part of the Buangor-Ararat section not being duplicated, in 2002 and 2021 as in **Figure 1**, and
- crashes occurring within Ararat township — both areas unaffected by Section 2B duplication.

Only 15% of the deaths were on the relevant stretch. Accurate interpretation of safety data is essential when assessing infrastructure options.

³ Op. cit., page 9, fourth dot point

⁴ Op. cit., page 9, fourth dot point

⁵ Herald Sun, page 4, 22 January 2026, Second example:

A long-running project to upgrade a highway where 18 people have died over the past 10 years is facing further delays over Aboriginal heritage concerns, despite the route already being altered to save two "birthing" trees.



Patrick Hannaford Digital Reporter

🕒 2 min read March 12, 2024 - 1:40PM [slky news .com.au](#)

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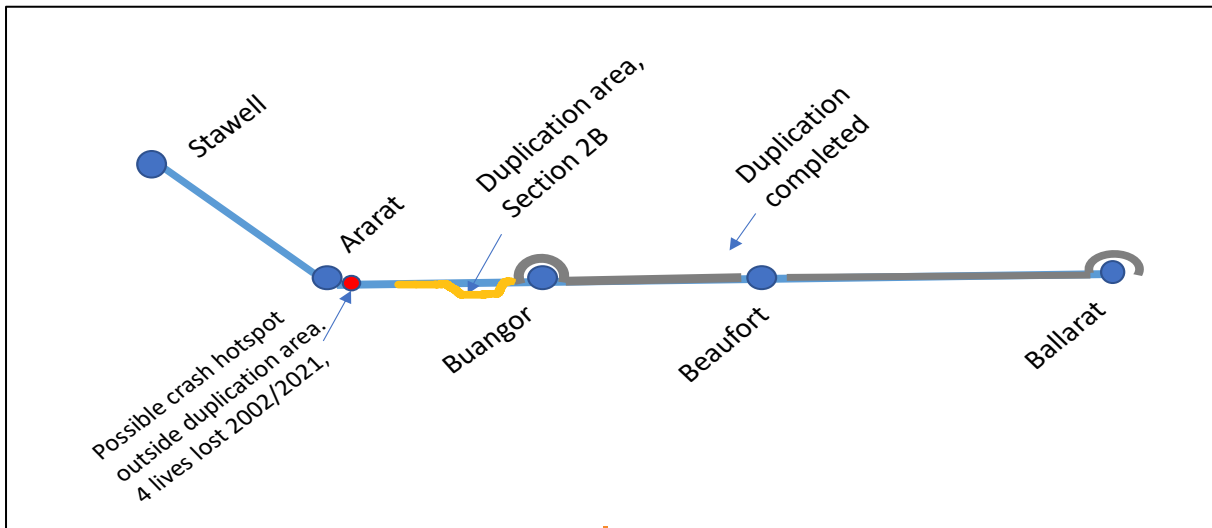


Figure 1. Shows the duplication area running most of the way between Buangor and Ararat. A significant percentage of Buangor-Ararat crashes happened outside this duplication area. Shows the sequence of adjacent highway sections.

Immediate Safety Improvements

McDougall identifies several low-cost measures that could substantially improve safety⁶ without waiting for full duplication:

- reduced speed limits,
- wire-rope barriers,
- improved road markings and hazard signs

KORS supports the existing **80 km/h limit**, introduced for a kilometre after the July 2025 fatality, and encourages further immediate interventions. KORS suggests that righthand turns from the highway at the railway bridge should be permanently disallowed.

Longer term, KORS supports increased rail freight investment to reduce the volume of heavy vehicle traffic on the highway.

Duplication and Safety Outcomes

Data from the recently duplicated Beaufort–Buangor section suggests:

- no clear reduction in crash rates in the nine years following duplication⁷.

⁶ Op cit, last paragraph page 9, first paragraph page 10.

⁷ Op cit, page 9, second dot point

Five-year rolling crash rates⁸:

Before duplication (2007–2015): average 0.065

After duplication (2016–2024): average 0.077

McDougall concludes that there is currently **no clear evidence** that duplication has improved safety outcomes on this comparable section⁹.

We note that duplication was combined on this section with a higher speed limit.

Public research shows that the higher speeds on duplicated roads can increase the chance of crashing due to longer stopping distances and can produce greater crash severity due to vehicles' greater kinetic energy during collisions¹⁰.

For this reason, KORS does not support increasing the speed limit beyond 100 km/h.

Traffic Volumes and Duplication Thresholds

Traffic engineering guidance often cites around **20,000 vehicles per day**¹¹ as a threshold where duplication may be considered.

Current traffic volumes near Buangor are approximately:

- **6,300 vehicles per day**¹²,
- with growth rates of around **1.4–1.6% per year**.

At this rate, traffic volumes are **unlikely to reach even 10,000 vehicles per day for at least 15 years**.

This raises questions about whether duplication is immediately necessary — and strengthens the case for refining the route to minimise impacts.

⁸ Op cit, page 14, Table 5

⁹ Op cit, page 9, second dot point

¹⁰ **Severity:** even small increases in speed can lead to significantly higher vehicle energy during a crash. Higher vehicle energy increases crash severity. **Chance of crashing:** Higher speeds result in longer stopping distances. This increases the likelihood of collisions, especially in emergency situations. See: Western Australian Centre for Road Safety Research at the University of Western Australia, <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/speed-and-how-it-influences-road-safety-0>

¹¹ duckduckgo.com/?q=What+volume+of+traffic+per+day+is+considered+to+warrant+duplication+on+Victorian+highways%3F&t=chromentp&ia=web

¹² Op cit, page 3, Table 1.

Crash and Fatality Data Summary

Key findings include:

- The Western Highway overall has a low crash rate of 0.06 personal injury accidents per million vehicle kilometres, compared with the Victorian average of 0.23¹³.
- Buangor–Ararat records 0.08 PIA/Mvkm¹⁴, slightly higher than adjacent sections but still well below regional averages. **Table 1** shows crash rates along the highway and beyond.
- Single-vehicle crashes account for 37% of crashes on this section, compared with 28% across the highway¹⁵.
- Variability of crash-rates and fatality rates on a section of highway reflects the random nature of crashes and the low volume of traffic on rural roads¹⁶.

Western Highway crash rate									
Personal Injury Accidents/Million vehicle kilometres (PIA/Mvkm.									
	Ararat to Stawell	Whole Western Highway*	Beaufort to Buangor	Stawell to SA Border	Buangor to Ararat	Through Ararat	Regional Victoria	Victoria	Greater Melb.
5-Year Rolling Av, Dec 2024	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.11	0.17	0.23	0.26
Single Vehicle crashes		28%			37%				

*Deer Park to Vic/S.A. border. Data from CrashStats

Table 1. The personal injury accident rate, including fatalities, on the Buangor to Ararat section compared with other stretches of the highway and other roads.

Note: AI gives an inaccurate answer when asked to rank crash rates on the Western Highway with other roads, and wrongly states that no detailed data is available

¹³ Op. cit., 2025, Page 19, 3.8.1, last sentence
¹⁴ Op cit, page 15, 1st paragraph
¹⁵ Op cit, page 9, dot point 7
¹⁶ Op cit, page 14, second last paragraph

Fatalities (2000–2025)

- The duplication area, within the Buangor-Ararat section, has the lowest fatality rate between Beaufort and Stawell.
- It was fatality free for nearly 25 years to November 2024, . Then three deaths occurred between November 2024 and July 2025. The first of these is represented in Table 7, reproduced from McDougall, 2025.
- Adjacent sections recorded higher fatality rates despite lower crash rates¹⁷.
- Some fatalities occurred on already duplicated highway sections (Beaufort to Buangor).

Table 7: Fatalities

Road	Summary sections	Fatalities																								25yr total	
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023		2024
Western Fwy	Deer Pk BP-Fwy end	1	4	5	1	5	3	3	1	1	1	2	0	1	4	1	2	4	1	2	4	2	1	4	0	3	56
Western Hwy	Fwy-Dual cway end	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	16
	Dual end-Beaufort	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Beaufort-Buangor	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
	Buangor-Ararat	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	5
	Through Ararat	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
	Ararat-Stawell	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	12
	Stawell-SA border	8	2	1	8	7	2	3	1	2	1	1	3	0	3	1	2	1	0	0	2	2	8	1	1	0	60
Total		13	9	13	10	14	5	7	4	3	2	7	7	1	10	2	5	9	3	3	8	5	11	6	1	5	163

Shows sections after duplication

- long-term crash data does not indicate that this section is unusually dangerous,
- duplication as planned does not guarantee improved safety outcomes,
- and lower-impact alternatives can deliver equivalent traveller safety.

Conclusion

The Northern Option offers an opportunity to:

¹⁷ Over the past 26 years, the 12.4-kilometre duplication area Buangor to Ararat had a lower fatality rate (three deaths to December 2025 (0.25 deaths per kilometre)), than the full 17 km from Buangor to Ararat (0.411 deaths per kilometre), where four more lives lost in this period on the outskirts of Ararat. Fifteen people lost their lives on the Ararat-Stawell section (0.63 lives lost per kilometre) over the same 26-year period despite this section's lower crash rate. This includes 3 lives in May 2025. Ten lives were lost on the Beaufort- Buangor section in this period (0.43 deaths per kilometre), including the four after duplication. The traffic flow on these three sections is similar.

- maintain or improve safety outcomes,
- reduce environmental and cultural damage,
- lower construction risks,
- and preserve public confidence in infrastructure decision-making.

Request

We respectfully ask you to consider safety evidence in full context and support a reassessment of alignment options before further irreversible impacts occur.