

# UPDATE: Engineers report finds Kirwans Bridge structurally compromised and unsafe for vehicles

**Kirwans Bridge will remain closed after an engineers' report found it was structurally compromised and not safe for use by vehicles.**

**The structural assessment was completed after a major flood in October 2022. The bridge has been closed since the flood, while we waited for the comprehensive assessment by our insurance company.**

**While the assessment was completed in late December, Council received the report on Friday, March 10 and was given permission for public release on Thursday, March 23.**

**It was essential Council waited for the outcome of this assessment by our insurers.**

**We needed to ensure the bridge was safe to open to traffic, and this report has found it is not. It states extensive structural repairs and strengthening works must be completed before the bridge is safe to reopen.**

We understand the impact of this news to the Kirwans Bridge community. We know how important access across the bridge is to residents and visitors.

In the meantime, Council will consider a variation to raise and seal Weir Rd, to ensure this access route is safe and assessable to all traffic.

An Extraordinary Council Meeting has been called for Tuesday, April 11 to consider the approval of the variation to design and cost.

***We want to reassure our community our goal is for a sustainable, long term, future for Kirwans Bridge.***

Through our work with the Kirwans Bridge Community Panel, the following two options have been identified for the future of the bridge, these being:

- A new replica bridge (with pedestrian and cycling access), or
- Extensive structural repairs and strengthening works to the current bridge.

The tender for the work to design and cost the options developed by the community panel has been awarded and work is underway.

When we understand the costs, there will be further community consultation to determine the best option – to ensure the bridge remains open and is safe for the next 50 plus years. We will need to advocate strongly for Victorian and Federal government funding to complete the works.

The following FAQs have been developed to provide the community with further information.

## **When will Kirwans Bridge reopen?**

The bridge will remain closed until funding is secured and works are complete. We want to ensure the bridge meets the need of the community for many, many years to come.

With the community panel we have identified two options that will ensure the bridge remains open and is safe for the next 50 plus years. These

being a new replica bridge or extensive structural repairs and strengthening works to the current bridge.

The work on the design and costing of these options is underway.

Council will need funding from the Victorian and Federal governments to complete works to Kirwans Bridge. It means we will need to advocate strongly to government to share the importance of this bridge to the community and secure funding.

Community support in our advocacy will help strengthen our efforts, meaning greater chance of success.

### **What did the insurance assessors report say?**

The report has found the bridge should remain closed to traffic until extensive structural repairs and strengthening works are carried out. The report can be read in full on our website (link), and the recommendations are below:

1. Based on FMG Engineering's inspection and observations of the extensive rot and decay of structural timber members, surface corrosion to structural steel elements, and broken/damaged timber deck members, it is FMG's opinion that the subject bridge structure is structurally compromised and is not safe for use by vehicular traffic.
2. However, it is FMG's opinion that the observed structural damage to the subject bridge is not a result of a one-off flood event such as the Victorian floods in October 2022. In FMG's opinion, based on the observations of advanced timber rot and surface corrosion, the damage has occurred over a long period of time.
3. Whilst in FMG's opinion, the observed damage to the subject bridge has not been caused by the flood event, it is FMG's opinion that the flood event has exacerbated the damage.
4. FMG recommend that the subject bridge should remain closed to vehicular traffic until

such time that extensive structural repairs/strengthening works are carried out. Furthermore, FMG recommend that the extremely decayed timber beams of the disused lane structure are removed to reduce the risk of the potential of timber beams falling into the water and causing potential injury to person travelling by boat underneath.

### **Can I read the report?**

Absolutely. The full report can be found on our website at [www.strathbogjie.vic.gov.au](http://www.strathbogjie.vic.gov.au).

### **Does this mean insurance will cover the cost of the works needed to reopen the bridge?**

We know we will need funding from the Victorian and Federal governments to complete the extensive structural repairs and strengthening works needed to reopen the bridge, or to build a new one.

The bridge is insured against physical loss, destruction or damage, which includes by flood for \$4.5 million, but we need to be **REALLY** clear the payment received by Council is still being negotiated.

The engineer's report found the damage to the bridge was not caused by the flood event, but the flood event exacerbated the damage. Like all insurance claims, we're negotiating this payment now.

### **What is the insurance claim for and what's its status?**

We've been working with assessors to determine the impacts of the October 2022 flood on the bridge and progress a payment outcome. With the engineers report now complete, we are negotiating the amount Council will receive. This will be based on a determination of the impact of the flood on the bridge.

Any payment received will be used to fund part of the upgrade works to the bridge. However, we can't say strongly enough, it is unlikely we will

receive the full \$4.5 million, and it will not cover the works needed to ensure the bridge is safe to reopen to vehicles and/or pedestrians.

Works will be reliant on securing funding from government.

**Is this the second engineers report completed on Kirwans Bridge since the floods?**

Council commissioned a report to ensure the waterway was safe to reopen. This report was commissioned for the purpose of opening the waterway, not the bridge to traffic.

It has no impact on the decision to reopen the bridge. This decision is made solely on the report commissioned by our insurers, that was commissioned for the purpose of opening the bridge to traffic.

Council cannot reopen the bridge without the insurer's approval.

**When will the upgrade works on Weir Rd be completed?**

The redesign (which will ensure access is not impacted during floods like in October 2022) will go to an Extraordinary Council Meeting on Tuesday, April 11 for Council's consideration.

This is not the ideal time to be completing road works, which could be delayed by rain. The works are programmed to be completed by June 2023; however, this will be weather dependent.

We're keen to understand the level of risk the community is prepared to accept, understanding weather delays could mean the road is inaccessible.

Alternatively, we could wait until September/October when weather conditions are better, understanding this may not meet community expectation.

**If the bridge is closed and the Weir Rd works are delayed how will Council ensure safe access?**

Weir Rd was graded on March 8, and we are conducting fortnightly inspections. Our works team has put Weir Rd at the top of its priority list!

We encourage anyone wanting to report any issues to visit our website at [www.strathbogie.vic.gov.au](http://www.strathbogie.vic.gov.au) and click on the 'Submit a Request' button.

Alternatively give us a call on 1800 065 993.

**Can the redesign be funded?**

If Council endorses the variation at the April 11 meeting the current financial budget allocation (22/23) is \$1,063,117.

The uncommitted budget available is \$246,196.91, and a variation of \$1,084,800.08 is required to complete works.

This means the additional budget required is \$838,603.17, which, if approved, can be accommodated within the current capital works budget utilising funding Council has allocated to flood recovery funding.

There is no link between closing the bridge and funding becoming available for the Weir Rd upgrade.

**How can we help Council secure funding for upgrade works to Kirwans Bridge?**

We need your help, and we need to work together.

We know the future of the bridge will need State and Federal government financial assistance and lobbying together will be far more successful.

We ask you to work with us to lobby for this important funding.