

Advocacy Priority:

Kirwans Bridge Restoration



Overview

Strathbogie Shire Council is seeking \$7.5 million in funding to restore the iconic Kirwans Bridge, which has remained closed since the October 2022 floods. The project proposes two viable future options: building a new replica bridge with pedestrian and cycling access or undertaking extensive structural repairs and strengthening works on the existing bridge.

Council has committed \$500,000 towards the project, subject to the receipt of external funding, and continues to explore both state and federal grant opportunities, including the Bridges and Drainage Infrastructure Renewal Program and Heritage Victoria's Living Heritage Grant.

This project aligns with Council Plan Objective 2 – Sustain, specifically Initiative 2.1, which prioritises investment in essential infrastructure such as roads, telecommunications, transport, and water services to build a stronger, more connected and resilient region.

The Problem

Kirwans Bridge, a heritage-listed timber bridge and vital local connector, was significantly damaged in the 2022 floods and remains closed. This ongoing closure has disrupted daily life for residents, delayed emergency response times, and negatively affected local tourism and agribusiness.

The bridge acts as a critical link for both the local community and the broader region; supporting tourism, agricultural supply chains, and emergency access. Its closure is more than an inconvenience; it severs economic, social and cultural ties.

Despite strong community advocacy and Council's continued efforts, funding to fully repair or rebuild the bridge has not yet been secured. The absence of a clear commitment from all levels of government has left this vital infrastructure in limbo.

The Solution

Strathbogie Shire Council is advocating for \$7.5 million in funding to deliver the following:

- Major structural repairs and upgrades to the existing bridge that restore functionality while increasing flood resilience and reducing long-term maintenance.

This solution would ensure the bridge can once again support local traffic, active transport, and emergency and service vehicles.

Council has already invested \$500,000 and secured a further \$140,000 to advance planning and design. With engineering reports, concept plans, and specialist heritage assessments now complete, this project is ready to move forward – subject only to final approvals.



The Benefit

Restoring Kirwans Bridge will deliver significant economic benefits to the region. The bridge is a key link in local transport and tourism routes, supporting businesses in the Nagambie wine region, farmgate producers, and regional accommodation providers. Reopening the bridge will improve connectivity for residents, visitors, and freight operators, helping to strengthen local supply chains and unlock future tourism growth. It also adds value to the regional visitor economy by preserving a unique heritage asset that sets the Strathbogie Shire apart.

The bridge holds deep cultural and historical importance for the local community, serving as both a physical and symbolic connection across the region. Its restoration would help restore community pride and support social cohesion, particularly in smaller, more isolated settlements that have been directly affected by its closure.

This project also responds to long-standing community advocacy, ensuring that residents are heard and their history respected. A restored Kirwans Bridge would once again serve as a shared space, bringing people together and reinforcing the Shire's identity.

There is a clear opportunity to incorporate improved environmental outcomes through the bridge's restoration. Design enhancements can improve flood resilience and reduce future maintenance demands, helping to future-proof the asset. Incorporating pedestrian and cycling infrastructure promotes active transport and reduces reliance on car travel for local trips. With careful planning and modern materials, the project can meet current sustainability standards while preserving the character of the original bridge.

Conclusion

Strathbogie Shire is *Investing in Tomorrow*; but to make that happen we need strong, resilient infrastructure.

The restoration of Kirwans Bridge is not only about preserving a treasured historical asset; it is about reconnecting a region, supporting industries, and future-proofing a community. We welcome the Coalition's \$6.3 million commitment and now call on all parties to match this support and help deliver a bipartisan solution for a project that transcends politics.

Council is ready to work in partnership with state and federal governments to bring Kirwans Bridge back to life. The community has waited long enough. Let us honour their advocacy and invest in a solution that delivers regional benefit, economic value, and long-term resilience.