6.10 Socio-economic, property and land use

A socio-economic impact assessment (SEIA) has been prepared by RPS (2021c) for the proposal. The assessment is provided in Appendix L and is summarised in the following sections.

6.10.1 Methodology

The SEIA was prepared in accordance with the *SEIA Practice Note Guidelines* (January 2020) and *Assessing significance: socio-economic impacts* (Roads and Maritime Services, 2019). This included the incorporation of the following methodology:

- determining the study area based on the likely geographical extent of the impacts during both construction and operation
- reviewing the existing conditions including demographics, socio-economic status, income, employment, land use, business activity and social infrastructure using publicly available sources such as data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and relevant planning and policy documents
- assessing the likely social and economic impacts during construction, which may include but not be limited to, property acquisition, amenity impacts and disruption to trade
- assessing the level of significance of potential impacts by considering the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of the proposed work
- consideration of cumulative social or economic impacts by considering other existing or planned proposals likely to interact with the proposal. For example, cumulative impacts related to nearby projects/proposals such as the Richmond Road Upgrade, Bandon Road Upgrade, etc
- identifying recommended mitigation measures to manage the extent of impacts.

The SEIA is also informed by the outcomes of various other technical reports prepared for the proposal, including the assessment of impacts to heritage, traffic and transport, noise and vibration, urban design, landscape character and visual amenity.

The study area for the assessment is shown in Figure 6-38. It comprises the Katoomba – Leura Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2 #124011452, 2016). The study area was chosen because it comprises areas that are most likely to be directly impacted during both construction and operation of the proposal.

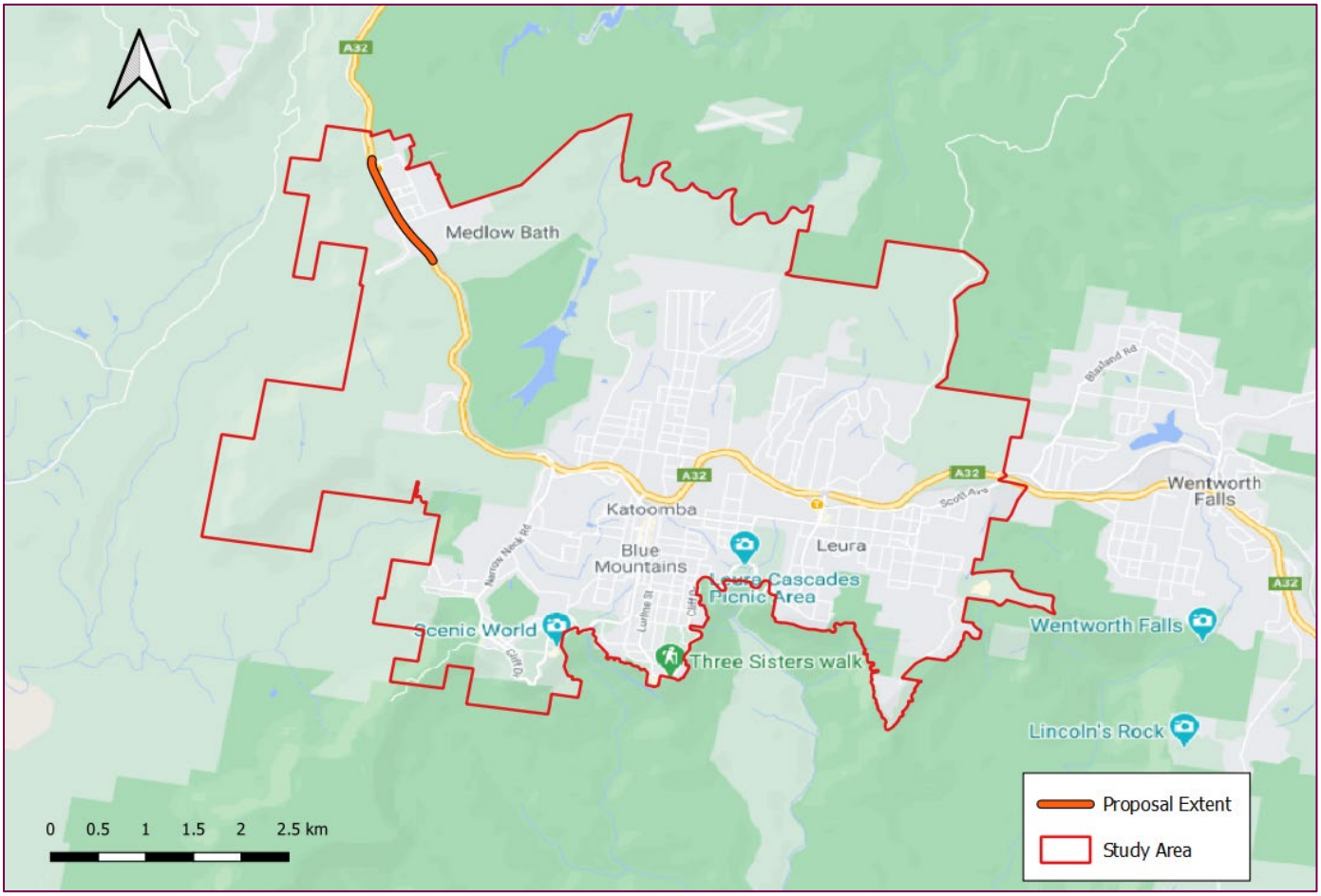

Figure 6-38: Study area and proposal corridor extent (RPS, 2021c)

6.10.2 Existing environment

Population and demographics

The proposal area is located in the Blue Mountains LGA. The population of the study area, Blue Mountains LGA, and the Western City District region in 2016 was 1,024,444 of which 13,222 lived in the study area. The study area and Blue Mountains LGA has a greater number of Australian born and English-speaking households than in the Western City District. The study area has a greater proportion of separate detached dwellings than in the Blue Mountains LGA or Western City District, reflecting an older established community. The study area had a labour force of 10,551 persons as of the 2016 census. Labour force participation and unemployment rates are broadly consistent across the study area, Blue Mountains LGA, and Western Sydney District, with the study area demonstrating marginally higher workforce participation and employment.

Local business and industry

The largest sector in the Blue Mountains LGA is Health Care and Social Assistance accounting for 3,442 jobs and 17.6 per cent of total employment. Tourism is the second largest sector in the Blue Mountains LGA, accounting for 2,430 jobs and 12.5 per cent of total employment in the region. Comparatively, approximately 4.2 per cent of jobs in Greater Western Sydney, 6.1 per cent in NSW and 6.3 per cent in Australia more broadly are supported by tourism, demonstrating the importance of this sector for the Blue Mountains LGA in supporting jobs.

Key attractions for the Blue Mountains LGA include the Three Sisters, Jenolan Caves, Blackheath Gardens, Blue Mountains Explorer Bus, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, Scenic World and various restaurants, waterfalls, scenic bushwalking tracks, museums, and wineries.

The Hydro Majestic Hotel is a key landmark and destination for visitors to the Medlow Bath area. It also houses a range of other accommodation options such as bed and breakfasts with close access to walking trails and picturesque views. Other businesses include retail, a service station, and a car dealership. Some of these businesses cater for the needs of the local community. The Katoomba Airport is located nearby, outside the proposal area, but within the village of Medlow Bath.

Social infrastructure and community facilities

Near the study area, there are parks, reserves, trails, and creeks that provide key recreation, cultural and other public services to support the local community and tourism. Social infrastructure, nature and recreational facilities near the study area includes:

- recreation and leisure facilities such as:
    - Medlow Bath Park on Railway Parade
    - Blackheath Glen Reserve on Megalong Road
    - Coachwood Glen Nature Trail on Megalong Road
    - Pulpit Hill Creek on Megalong Road
    - Lake Medlow Dam / Adams Creek on Portland Road
- public services, such as:
    - Medlow Bath Station at the intersection of Station Street and Railway Parade
    - bus stops at Medlow Bath Station
    - rail customer car park on Railway Parade.

There are relatively few shops and services within the project corridor. As a result, residents must travel elsewhere in the Blue Mountains LGA for many of the shops, services, and facilities that support the day-to-day needs of the wider communities, in particular the Katoomba-Leura and Blackheath and Wentworth Falls townships, which are closest to the study area. These include education facilities, health and medical services, sports, recreation and leisure facilities, and community and cultural facilities.

Community values

Medlow Bath and the surrounding area predominantly has a land use that reflects its links to the environment. Much of Medlow Bath is currently zoned as Environmental Living (E4) and made up of low-density residential development that has a prominent rural character. Many heritage items are located within and adjacent to the proposal area and contribute to the village character of Medlow Bath.

In addition to the Environmental living zones, Medlow Bath Park, along Railway Parade provides public amenity in the form of local outdoor space, with consideration required to ensure pedestrian linkages to the railway station and proposed pedestrian bridge across the Great Western Highway.

Roadways, public and active transport

Roadways

The Great Western Highway and the Main West Line are two important transport infrastructure assets that pass-through Medlow Bath. This road and rail corridor not only links the local and regional centres but provides access to Sydney and the Orana regions. As a result, it plays a critical role in supporting the livelihood of the community.

The proposal is accessible via two intersections: one at Bellevue Crescent and another at Railway Parade westbound. The corridor provides access to a service station, Hydro Majestic Hotel, a Mazda dealership, and Medlow Bath Station. The Blue Mountains and the Medlow Bath area attracts significant weekend traffic and is a popular tourism destination for weekend travellers.

Public transport

Medlow Bath is served by a rail station located at the northern extent of the study area at the intersection of Station Street, Railway Avenue, and the Great Western Highway. The station is serviced by the Blue Mountains Line providing services between Central Station and Bathurst. Additionally, the proposal area is served by bus routes that connect the Blue Mountains villages along the highway. Currently there is one westbound and eastbound bus stop location in Medlow Bath in proximity to the school bus facilities located on Railway Parade.

Active transport

The existing pedestrian connections within the proposal area are minimal. Footpaths along the Great Western Highway are visually exposed with little to no shade or protection from noise and high levels of traffic along the highway.

Pedestrian access to the existing rail customer car park and bus stop is via Railway Parade, however, there are non-compliant footpaths onto the station platform and no footpaths between the northern access and the accessible entry in the south along Railway Parade.

Existing cycling and pedestrian links are located along the corridor in the form of the Great Blue Mountains Trail, which provides recreational links to the Greater Blue Mountains Area. Although pedestrian access is well patronised in the form of bushwalkers and recreational walkers, safe pedestrian amenity is lacking around Railway Parade and local roads to the east; with accessible links to the existing Medlow Bath Station platform only exist via a level crossing at the southern end of the platform.

6.10.3 Potential impacts

To support an assessment of the potential socio-economic impacts during the construction and operation phases, detailed layouts of the proposal are provided in Figure 6-39 (southern section), Figure 6-40 (middle section) and Figure 6-41 (northern section).

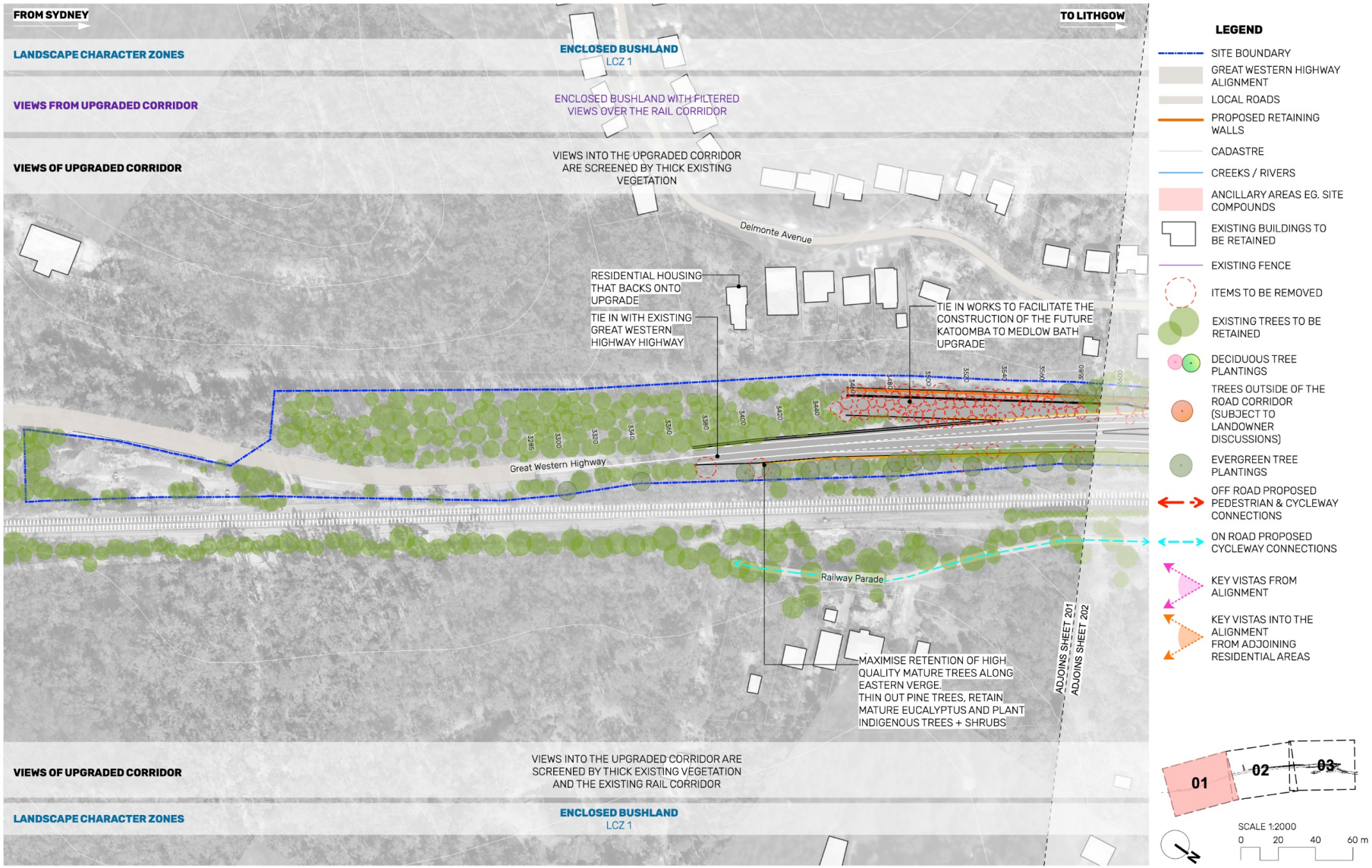

Figure 6-39: The proposal (southern section)

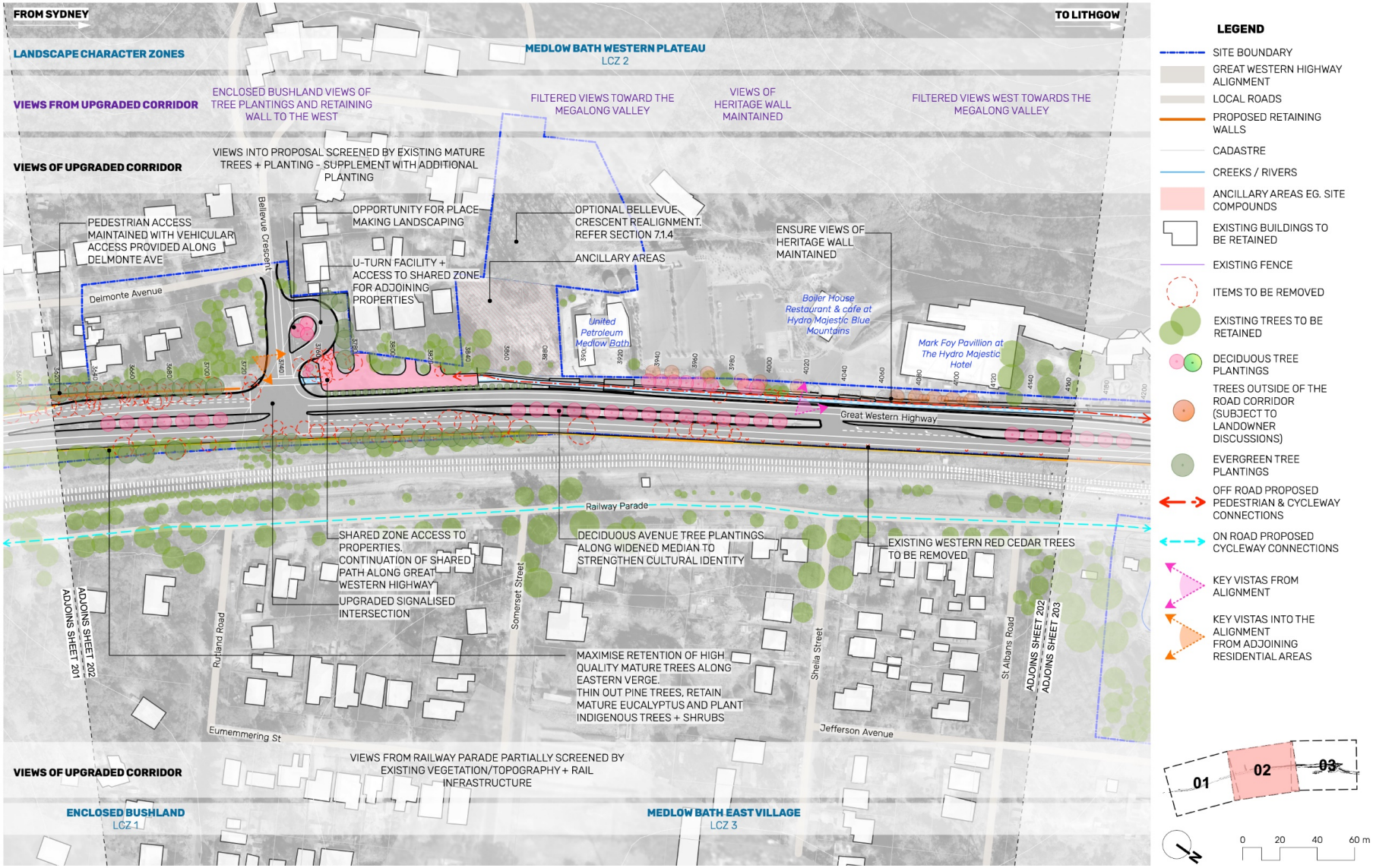

Figure 6-40: The proposal (middle section)

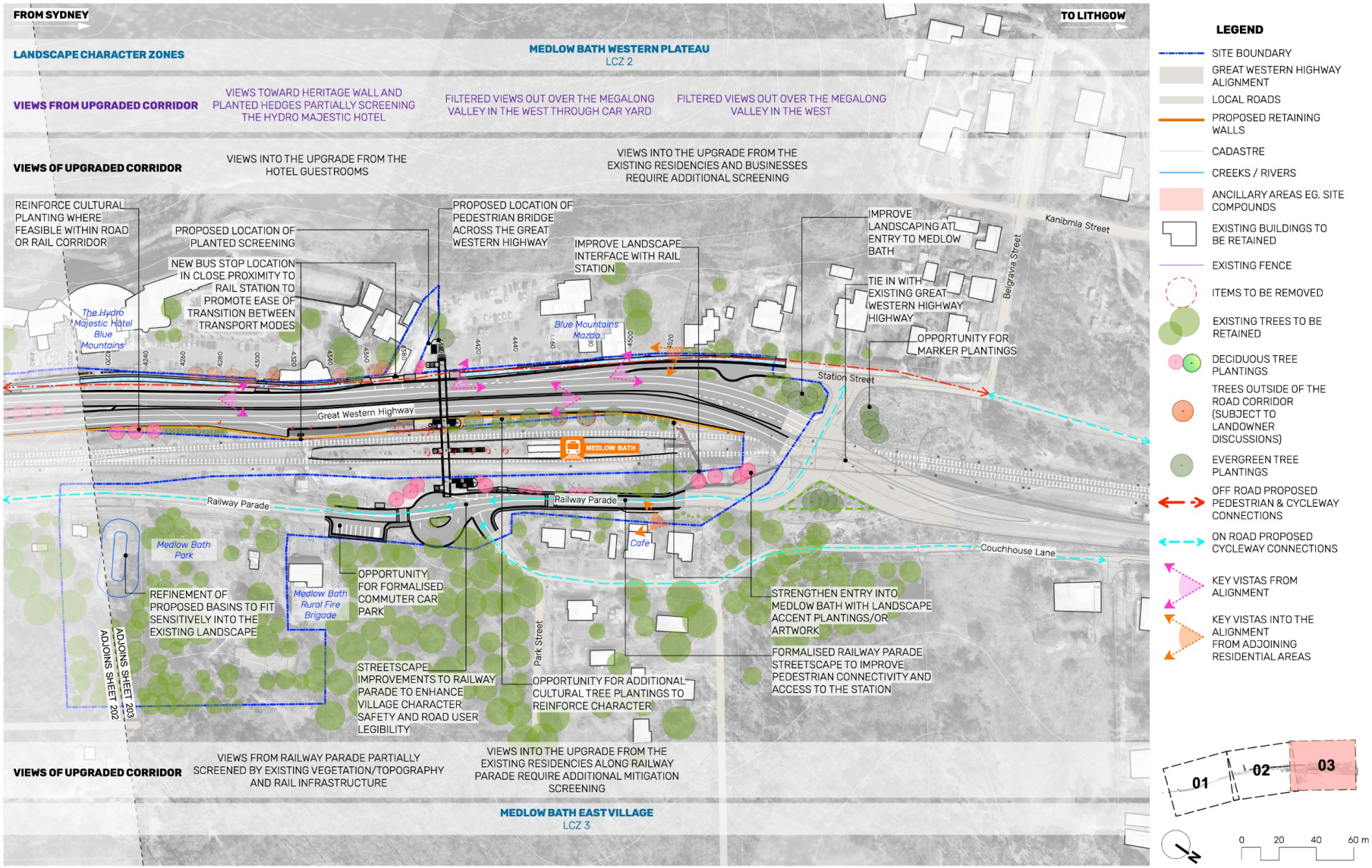

Figure 6-41: The proposal (northern section)

Construction

Access and connectivity

The main impact to residents and businesses would likely result from traffic movements of light and heavy construction vehicles. Construction would occasionally require altered traffic operations at times (one hour road shut down to allow for crane operations to install the new pedestrian bridge, temporary realignment of traffic etc). However, high traffic activities would be encouraged to be held during off peak hours to minimise delays and congestion.

The removal of 40 perpendicular parking spaces is required during construction to facilitate works to widen the highway. While the removal also reflects a permanent impact, the parking has already been compensated for through additional parking for the Hydro Majestic Hotel southern car park works. The rail customer car park would not be impacted during the construction phase.

Several properties with direct access to the road network within the proposal area would experience some impacts with respect to ease of access. Access to affected properties would be maintained throughout, and temporary changes to property access would be provided where required. TfNSW would work with Blue Mountains City Council to ensure local road connectivity is maintained for users during construction.

Given the relatively rural and low-density character of the area, negative impacts are expected to be temporary and relatively minor provided effective construction staging is implemented.

Social infrastructure

During construction, there would be temporary disruptions to some footpaths and cycling infrastructure, which would obstruct access to some of the rural recreational and historic assets and public transport facilities and may result in increased walking distances and safety risks as conditions change.

Community values and amenity

Noise and vibration from construction activities have the potential to disrupt amenity for occupants of some residencies and businesses in proximity to the proposal area. Due to the small offset distance between the proposal and sensitive receivers, there would be exceedances of the noise management levels during construction works. A small number of receivers would be highly affected at some point during the works with levels likely to exceed 75 dBA. The noisiest stage is predicted to be vegetation clearing due to the operation of equipment like chainsaws, but which would last only two weeks.

It is unlikely that vibration generating equipment would be in use within 10 metres of buildings and as such it is unlikely that there would be vibration with potential to cause damage to buildings or disturb human comfort.

Further community values and amenity impacts during construction are likely to be:

- removal of some established trees during construction. Areas impacted by construction would be rehabilitated, including planting of new trees and vegetation alongside the road and on the median
- visual impacts during construction would be minimal, and over time, the planting of new trees and vegetation would provide visual and amenity benefits.

Business impacts

Access to businesses on affected roads would be maintained during construction. There would be some disruption to parking access to parking spaces located at the Hydro Majestic Hotel and along Railway Avenue. Additionally, the presence of construction vehicles and workers is expected to increase demand for parking along Railway Parade, although where possible contractors would park in compound areas. The overall impact to businesses is expected to be minimal given the low-density nature of the area and potential for alterative parking spots.

A number of noise sensitive receivers within the community, including the Hydro Majestic Hotel have been identified as being potentially adversely impacted by noise levels. Predicted noise levels are considered to be typical of road infrastructure projects and the implementation of suitable noise mitigation measures would help manage and mitigate the impacts of noise on the community.

Given the relatively few businesses within the proposal area, the anticipated negative impacts from construction are expected to be minimal. There may be some positive impacts for some small businesses in the retail/hospitality sector as contractors purchase local goods and services.

Impacts to property

It may be necessary for some properties to be to be partially or fully acquired by TfNSW to facilitate the proposal (refer Section 3.5). The details for property acquisition would be determined during detailed design and any property acquisition would be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the NSW *Property Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*. Consultation would be conducted with property owners prior to the relocation of this infrastructure. TfNSW has commenced consultation with potentially affected property owners and would continue to engage with them through the detailed design phase about specific property impacts, including the acquisition process.

Operation

Access and connectivity impacts

At present traffic flows are generally good at the intersection of Station Street, Railway Parade, and the Great Western Highway. However, the level of service at Bellevue Crescent is currently moderate and would benefit from the proposed enhancements. Over the long term, residents and businesses in the proposal area would benefit from improved access and connectivity, especially with respect to pedestrian safety and amenity (for example the new pedestrian bridge would allow pedestrians/cyclists to safely cross the highway and access public transport facilities).

In addition to benefiting local traffic, the proposal would improve safety and travel times for tourists, freight and other regionally-based traffic. The highway would be able to support longer, heavier vehicles that are able to transport more freight per vehicle. This would provide improvements to safety and sustainability as well as improvements in productivity. This is expected to increase the volume of freight, but reduce the number of vehicles required to transport the freight along the highway.

Impacts to social infrastructure

Over the long term the proposal would have a positive impact and provide improved footpaths and pavement within the proposal area, including the formalisation of a shared path which would promote cycling and walking which are known to promote better health. The shared path would provide an important link to nearby walking trails which are popular with tourists.

It would also enhance connections to public transport assets by providing a safe and accessible path of travel including for those with a disability, carers with prams or customers with luggage both across the corridor and to the station and bus stops. The addition of canopies at lift waiting areas would provide weather protection while indented bus bays, kiss and ride and the new pedestrian bridge would help to reduce potential interactions with moving vehicles.

In addition, following completion of the proposal, a positive visual and amenity impact is expected due to replanting of trees and vegetation.

Community values and amenity

The proposal would increase the amount of the road-related infrastructure within the zone and would require some additional clearing of mature bushland vegetation. This would result in changes to the natural landform to accommodate the necessary road design requirements.

However, the proposal is located within an existing corridor meaning that it would result in minimal new negative impacts. Further, the proposal would have beneficial outcomes in terms of the reduction of congestion and improvements to connectivity, which help moderate the proposal's overall impact.

The SEIA concluded that over the long term the proposal would result in improved safety, access, and connectivity within the area once complete. Replanting of trees and vegetation would have positive visual and amenity impact on the area.

Business impacts

Over the long term, the operation of the proposal is not expected to negatively impact business operations within the proposal area. Where property might be negatively impacted, mitigation measures have been outlined in the next section. Additionally, businesses would likely benefit indirectly as travel through the corridor becomes easier, making it a more attractive destination.

Impacts to property

Key operational impacts of the proposal to local properties are related to noise and water.

Based on modelling of operational noise levels, owners of properties adjacent to the new U-turn bay proposed for Bellevue Crescent should not be significantly adversely affected by vehicle movements. In other areas, modelling has identified a number of receivers where the design noise criteria may be exceeded and would be eligible for consideration of additional noise mitigation during detailed design.

Changes to the proposal area by the increase in hardstand area needs to consider potential issues associated with the management of water. Upstream flooding impacts from increased impervious surfaces would be mitigated by additional stormwater systems to mitigate localised flooding. To alleviate pressure in the downstream areas, flooding impacts are to be mitigated through the use of flow control structures including the addition of detention basins. These impacts are generally considered minor, given the minimal vertical alignment changes, maintenance of flow discharge splits to downstream receivers, and general increase in available stormwater storage will also mitigate localised flooding.

Over the long term, the operation of the proposal is not expected to marginally increase noise for businesses and residents significantly beyond what is currently experienced within the proposal area. Where property might be negatively impacted, mitigation measures have been outlined in the next section.

Alternative Bellevue Crescent option

The alternative design for Bellevue Crescent would require some property acquisition to facilitate construction of the left turning lane from the Great Western Highway to the new corridor connecting to Bellevue Crescent. Potentially affected properties are not residential properties but vacant land, and the impact to property owners whose land would be fully or partially acquired would be minimal. Construction would also result in the removal of some trees on these vacant lots, the impact of which would be minimal.

Operation of the new corridor connecting the Great Western Highway to Bellevue Crescent would result in noise impacts to three residential receivers on Bellevue Crescent (17, 18 & 22 Bellevue Crescent). These residents would be impacted by an increase in vehicle movements along their property as a result of the alternative design. It is noted that these vehicle movements would mainly be by other residents in that part of Medlow Bath, which has a very small population, and the overall impact will be minimal when operational. If the alternative design proposal were to proceed, these residents would need to be considered for additional noise mitigation measures, such as architectural treatment.

6.10.4 Safeguards and management measures

Traffic, noise and vibration, visual and biodiversity management measures are addressed in the relevant sections of this REF. Additional management measures to address socio-economic impacts are included in Table 6-41.

Table 6-41: Safeguards and management measures – Socio-economic

Impact	Environmental safeguards	Responsibility	Timing	Reference
Property	A Property Acquisition Plan will be prepared and implemented in accordance with the requirements of the *Property Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991.*	TfNSW	Pre-construction	Standard safeguard
Community	A Communications Plan will be prepared and implemented as part of the CEMP to help provide timely and accurate information to the community during construction. The plan will include (as a minimum): • identification of key stakeholders such as the Hydro Majestic Hotel, private residences and business, Blue Mountains City Council • mechanisms to provide details and timing of proposed activities to affected residents, including changed traffic and access conditions • contact name and number for complaints • the plan will be prepared in accordance with the *Community Involvement and Communications Resource Manual* (RTA, 2008).	Contractor	Detailed design / Pre-construction	Standard safeguard
Construction	Access to private residential properties, businesses and the Hydro Majestic Hotel would be maintained throughout the construction period.	Contractor	Construction	Appendix L