

6.5 Landscape character and visual impacts

The potential landscape character and visual impacts during construction and operation of the proposal have been assessed as part of the *Urban Design, Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment* (Spackman Mossop Michaels, 2022), provided in Appendix G.

6.5.1 Methodology

The landscape character and visual impact assessment (LCVIA) was carried out in accordance with the *Practice Note: Guideline for landscape character and visual impact assessment* (EIA-N04).

The assessment included:

- a landscape character assessment, which assessed the overall impact of a project on an area's character and sense of place
- a visual impact assessment, which assessed the proposal's impacts on views.

The assessment of landscape character involved identifying landscape character zones (LCZ) near the proposal area and assessing the sensitivity and magnitude of the proposal for each zone. This involved analysing aerial imagery to distinguish distinct vegetation communities and growth patterns as well as topography, geology, water and infrastructure. A site visit confirmed the boundary of each zone by experiencing the landscape on foot and in a car.

The assessment of visual impact required the selection of viewpoints overlooking the proposal area. A collection of viewpoints was selected from different locations, distances and directions within the visual catchment of the proposal area. This involved a desktop assessment of the Visual Envelope Map for the proposal and adjustment of each viewpoint to fall within a likely area of observation, including roadways, residential housing, a walking track or lookouts. These viewpoints were verified during the site visit.

The LCVIA identified the sensitivity of individual LCZ and viewpoints and the magnitude of change at each associated with the proposal. Sensitivity refers to how susceptible the environment is to the proposed change. Magnitude refers to the type of proposal and its compatibility with existing landscape character, including scale, form and material composition of elements, as well as their location or setting. Impacts were determined by assessing sensitivity and magnitude using the matrix shown in Table 6-23.

Table 6-23: Landscape character and visual impact rating matrix

Sensitivity		Magnitude			
		High	Moderate	Low	Negligible
High		High	High-moderate	Moderate	Negligible
Moderate		High-moderate	Moderate	Moderate-low	Negligible
Low		Moderate	Moderate-low	Low	Negligible
Negligible		Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible




6.5.2 Existing environment

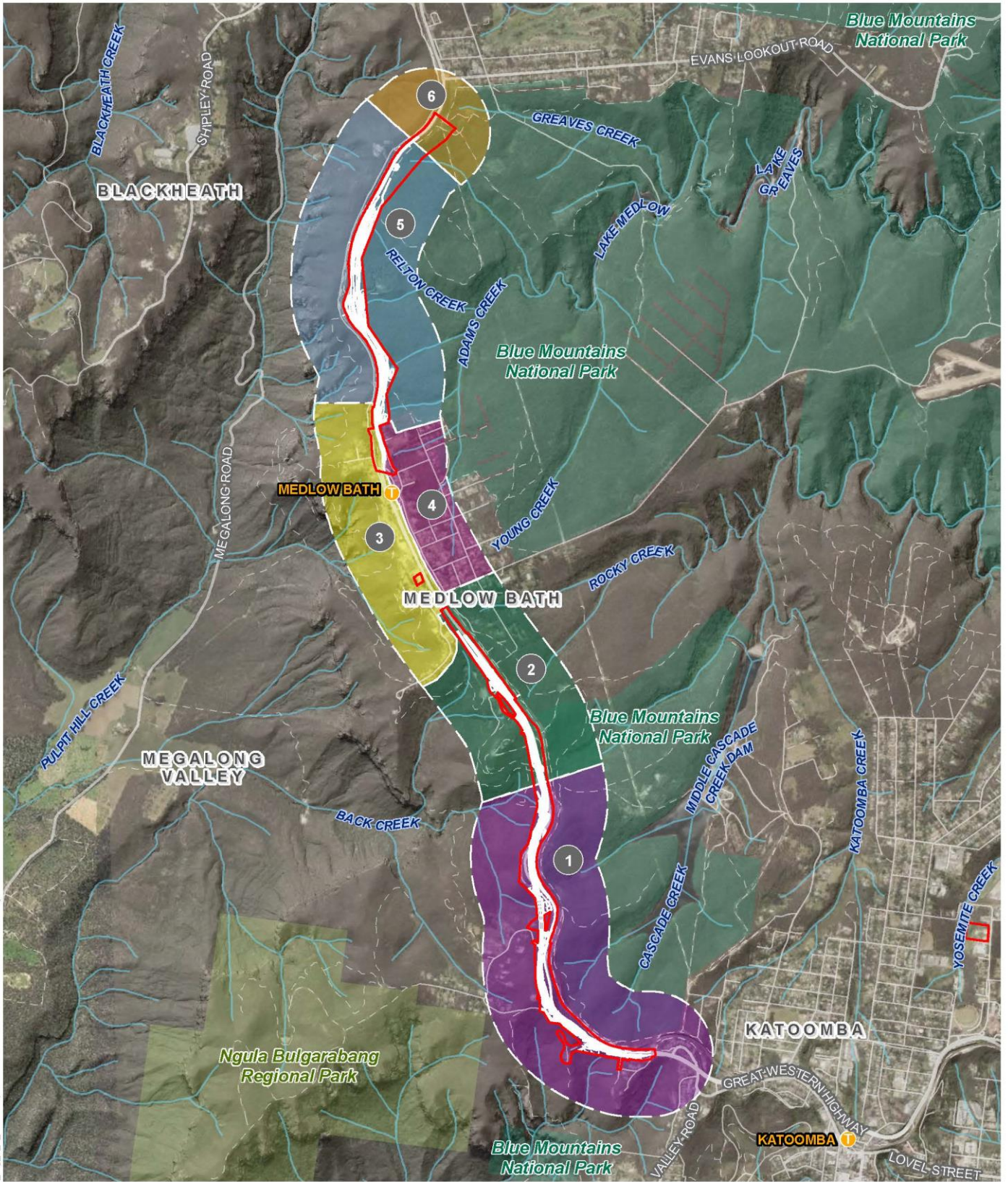
The proposal area contains mostly environmental landscapes. The Katoomba to Medlow Bath section follows undulating topography and is dominated by dense vegetation along the road corridor. As such, most of the Great Western Highway in this section does not have views over the adjoining rail corridor. However, the rail corridor is more visible within the Medlow Bath to Blackheath section. This section is relatively flat, with the Blue Mountains National Park directly to the east of the road corridor in this section.

There are six distinct LCZ for the proposal that are outlined in Table 6-24 and are shown in Figure 6-5. Due to their location, LCZ 3 and 4 are considered across both sections of the proposal. This assessment included the town of Medlow Bath due to its proximity to the two sections of the proposal. The proposal area has been shaped by natural and cultural elements over time. Landscape character has been shaped by landforms, vegetation, views, settlement patterns, and built structures within and adjacent to the proposal area.

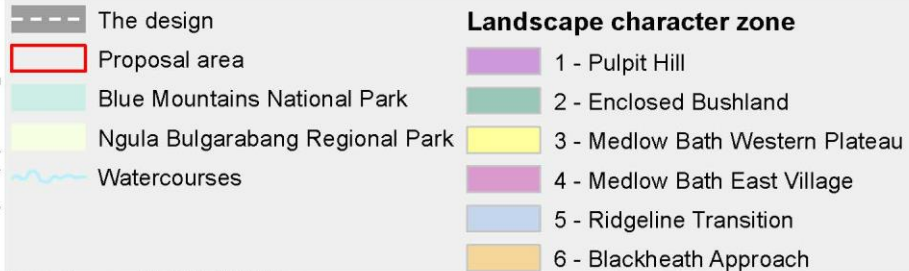
Table 6-24: Landscape character zone description

Zone	Description	Landscape view
LCZ 1 – Pulpit Hill (Katoomba to Medlow Bath section)	High landform with densely established indigenous open forest bushland vegetation, dissected by the Great Western Highway.	
LCZ 2 – Enclosed Bushland (Katoomba to Medlow Bath section)	High quality plant communities, densely vegetated enclosed bushland with prominent rock cuttings, edged by roadside vegetation.	
LCZ 3 – Medlow Bath Western Plateau (Katoomba to Medlow Bath and Medlow Bath to Blackheath sections)	Plateau adjacent to the Megalong Valley escarpment, rich in high visual and scenic qualities.	

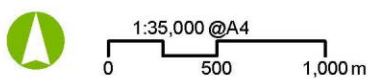
Zone	Description	Landscape view
<p>LCZ 4 – Medlow Bath East Village (Katoomba to Medlow Bath and Medlow Bath to Blackheath sections)</p>	<p>Flat to gently undulating topography, predominantly low-density housing surrounded by remnant stands of woodland vegetation and mature planted exotics.</p>	
<p>LCZ 5 – Ridgeline Transition (Medlow Bath to Blackheath section)</p>	<p>Native forest, natural bushland sitting high atop the ridgeline. Man-made elements including powerlines detract from the natural landscape in the east, whilst open views over the Megalong Valley exist in the west.</p>	
<p>LCZ 6 – Blackheath Approach (Medlow Bath to Blackheath section)</p>	<p>A mix of natural bushland to the west with steep slopes toward the Megalong Valley and single storey dwellings in the east with planted exotics.</p>	



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Source: Aurecon, LPI, DPIE, BoM, Niche





Projection: GDA2020 MGA Zone 56



Great Western Highway East **Review of Environmental Factors**

FIGURE 6-5: Landscape Character Zones

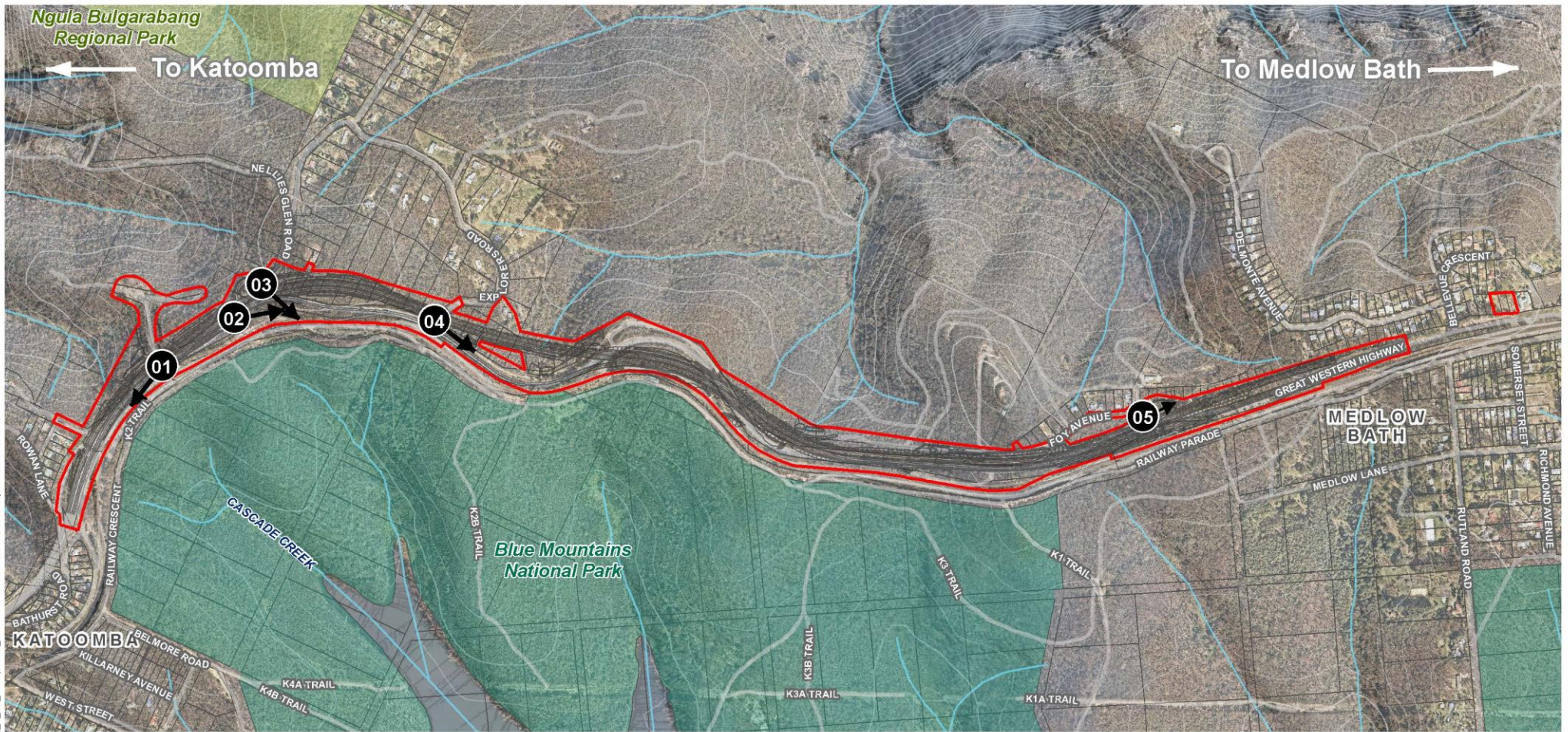
Eight viewpoints were selected to represent receivers or sites that have potential to be visually impacted by the proposal. There are five viewpoints (VP 1, VP 3, VP 4 and VP 5) within the Katoomba to Medlow Bath section and three viewpoints (VP 6, VP 7 and VP 8) within the Medlow Bath to Blackheath section. The receivers in these viewpoints include residents, tourists, recreational and park users, pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. The eight viewpoints are shown in Table 6-25 and Figure 6-6a-b.






Table 6-25: Summary description associated with viewpoints

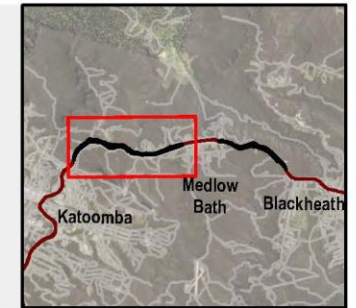
Viewpoint	Description
 <p data-bbox="108 887 1007 943">VP 1: Entry into Bonnie Doon Reserve along the Great Blue Mountains Trail, looking south east.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 456 1485 607">The existing road infrastructure makes up an even proportion of the existing view for motorists and recreational users of the adjacent trail.</p>
 <p data-bbox="108 1391 963 1447">VP 2: Heritage Interpretation Area along Nellies Glen Road, looking north toward the Great Western Highway.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 956 1477 1106">The existing vegetation and exposed rock makes up a large proportion of the existing view for motorists travelling along the Great Western Highway.</p>
 <p data-bbox="108 1899 963 1955">VP 3: Heritage Interpretation Area along Nellies Glen Road, looking north toward the Great Western Highway.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 1464 1485 1951">The existing road infrastructure is in the background of this view, with Nellies Glen Road in the mid-ground. The existing view is dominated by vegetation along the fringes of the existing Heritage Interpretation Area, Nellies Glen Road and the existing Great Western Highway. This view is typical for motorists travelling along Nellies Glen Road, pedestrians and cyclists using the Great Blue Mountains Trail or Six Foot Track, and visitors to the Pulpit Hill heritage interpretation area and adjoining informal carpark.</p>

Viewpoint	Description
 <p data-bbox="108 645 991 705">VP 4: Multi use access track on the corner of Explorers Road and the Great Western Highway, looking north.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 203 1485 416">An even proportion of the view comprises of the existing road corridor and existing vegetation for pedestrians and cyclists using the Great Blue Mountains Trail and motorists travelling along Explorers Road.</p>
 <p data-bbox="108 1137 1031 1227">VP 5: The corner of Foy Avenue and the Great Western Highway looking north toward the proposal. The viewpoint is representative of a number of views from residences along this portion of Foy Avenue.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 712 1485 958">The existing road infrastructure makes up an even proportion of the existing view for residents, motorists and recreational users of the adjacent trail. The existing Great Blue Mountains Trail is buffered by existing vegetation between the roadway.</p>
 <p data-bbox="108 1682 1010 1744">VP 6: Existing Great Blue Mountains Trail along Station Street, looking east toward the proposal.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 1234 1477 1420">The existing road and rail corridors are seen in the background of this viewpoint by motorists travelling along Station Street and pedestrians and cyclists using the Great Blue Mountains Trail.</p> <p data-bbox="1054 1429 1406 1520">This existing infrastructure is partially screened by existing established vegetation.</p>

Viewpoint	Description
 <p data-bbox="108 658 1031 748">VP 7: The Gatekeepers Cottage along Station Street, looking Southeast across the Main Western Railway Line toward the Great Western Highway.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 203 1497 421">The viewpoint is representative of a number of views experienced by residents on Station Street, rail commuters and pedestrians and cyclists. The existing road and rail infrastructure are dominant features within this view.</p>
 <p data-bbox="108 1218 1031 1276">VP 8: Coachhouse Lane looking north toward the proposal and rail corridor in the background.</p>	<p data-bbox="1054 754 1497 972">The view is made up of both transport infrastructure and mature tree and larger shrub vegetation along the road verge and the background. This is representative of the views of residents of Coachhouse Lane and pedestrians.</p>

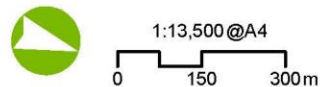


-  The design
-  Proposal area
-  Blue Mountains National Park
-  Ngula Bulgarabang Regional Park
-  Viewpoints

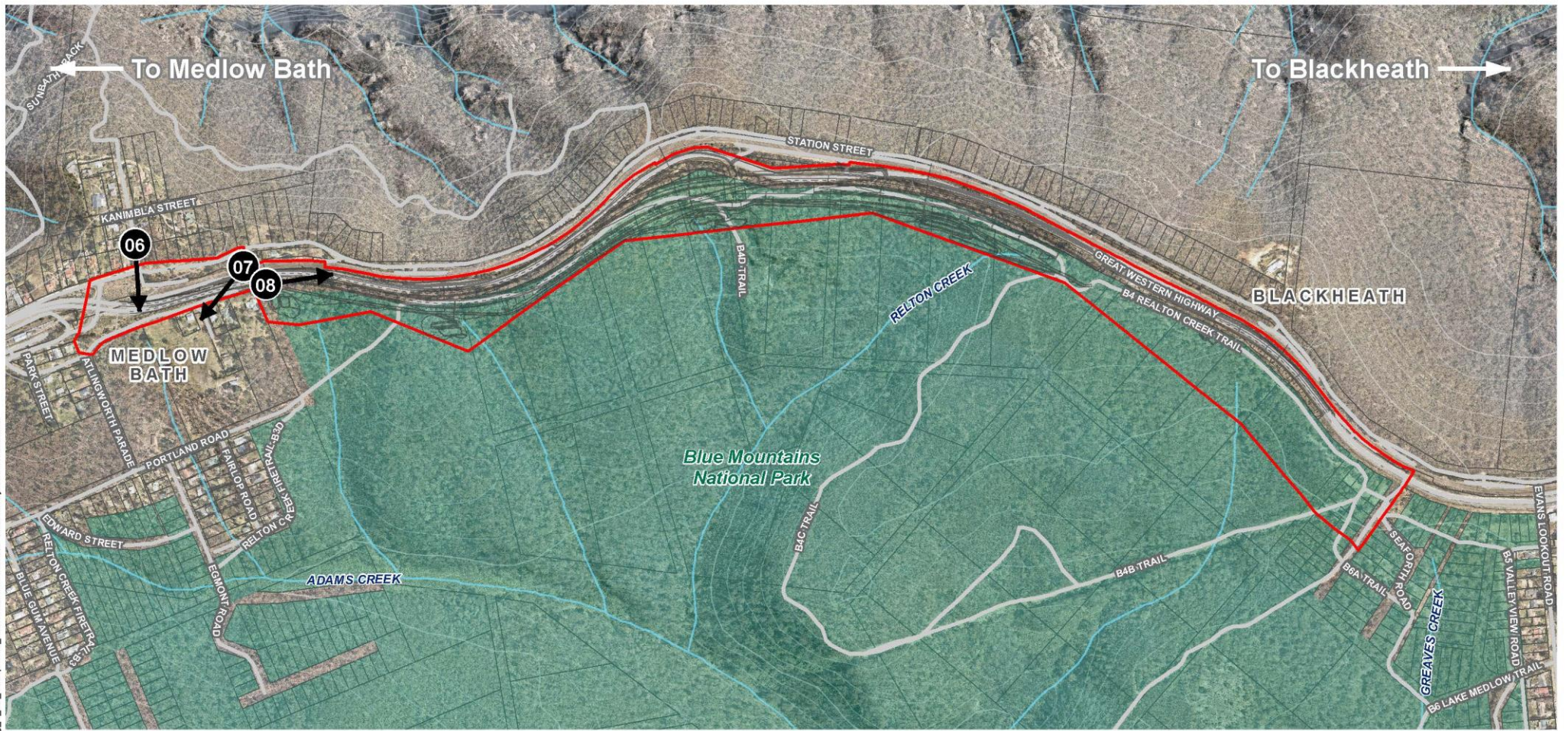


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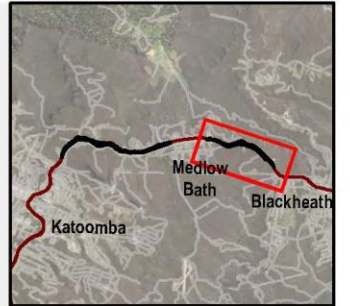
Source: Aurecon, Mott MacDonald, LPI, Nearmap



Projection: GDA2020 MGA Zone 56

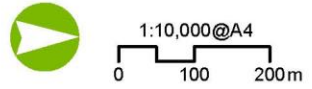


- The design
- Proposal area
- Blue Mountains National Park
- 01 → Viewpoints



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Source: Aurecon, Mott MacDonald, LPI, Nearmap, RFS



Projection: GDA2020 MGA Zone 56

6.5.3 Potential impacts

Construction

General construction activities would result in temporary visual impacts on views near the work for the duration of construction. These include the movement and operation of machinery, light and heavy vehicles, and the erection of temporary structures such as fencing, lighting and construction ancillary facilities. Visual impacts would be experienced due to clearance of vegetation, excavations and earthworks and the presence of construction areas including ancillary facilities and plant and equipment. The visual impacts would be seen by motorists, recreational walkers and cyclists.

However, the greatest visual impacts would be experienced by residents that overlook the construction sites due to their proximity to the proposed work sites. Within the Katoomba to Medlow Bath section, this would include residents on Rowan Lane, Katoomba; Foy Avenue and Delmonte Avenue, Medlow Bath. There would be major visual impacts experienced at residences on Explorers Road, especially those down the valley due to their proximity to the construction of the twin bridges. The incremental construction of the twin bridges would involve construction work at a greater elevation than the current Great Western Highway. Within the Medlow Bath to Blackheath section, visual impacts experienced by residents would be limited to those who live on Coachhouse Lane and Station Street, Medlow Bath near the southern end of the section.

There are no anticipated residual landscape or visual impacts resulting from the construction phase of the proposal. Contractors would be required to rehabilitate all work sites prior to and at the end of the construction period. Landscape and visual impacts may arise from rehabilitation work and would be most evident during the first year of operation. Visual impacts may vary depending on final construction methods and staging identified in detailed design.

Operation

Landscape character impacts

The six landscape character zones have been assessed as part of the landscape character study and consider areas both within and beyond the proposal area. A summary of the landscape character impact assessment is presented in Table 6-26.

Table 6-26: Landscape character impacts during operation of the proposal



Zone	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
LCZ 1 – Pulpit Hill	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well established indigenous open forest bushland. Bushland plays an important role as a visual backdrop. This LCZ is highly sensitive to change and would not be easily able to absorb changes. 	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would increase the amount of the road-related infrastructure in this LCZ. It would require clearing of mature bushland vegetation. Changes to the natural landform. 	High
LCZ 2 – Enclosed Bushland	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Densely vegetated LCZ has a strong relationship with the surrounding National Park, road and rail corridor. Undulating topography and windy nature of the Great Western Highway contributes to the character. Bushland is important as a visual backdrop to the Great Western Highway. This LCZ is highly sensitive to change and would not be easily able to absorb changes. 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would increase the amount of the road-related infrastructure in this LCZ. It would require clearing of mature bushland vegetation and changes to the natural landform. 	High – Moderate
LCZ 3 – Medlow Bath Western Plateau	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature of the Western Plateau is one of both high visual amenity, overlooking the Megalong Valley and also contributing to the neighbourhood feel of Medlow Bath. Existing proximity to the road and rail corridor allows for this LCZ to absorb change more successfully. 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would increase road related infrastructure in the northern portion of the Medlow Bath Western Plateau LCZ. The majority of work within this LCZ would be within the existing road corridor. At the tie-in with the Medlow Bath Upgrade, spatial character of the LCZ would be maintained, with the proposal following the existing alignment of the Great Western Highway. 	Moderate – Low
LCZ 4 – Medlow Bath East Village	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medlow Bath East Village LCZ predominantly consists of low-density residential housing. This LCZ has a reasonable ability to absorb change near Coachhouse Lane due to an existing retaining wall between the proposal and residences along Coachhouse Lane and the existing proximity of these residences to the road and rail corridor. 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would increase pedestrian and cyclist access along Coachhouse Lane. Existing bushland along the north-eastern fringe of this LCZ within the proposal area is likely to be cleared. 	Moderate – Low

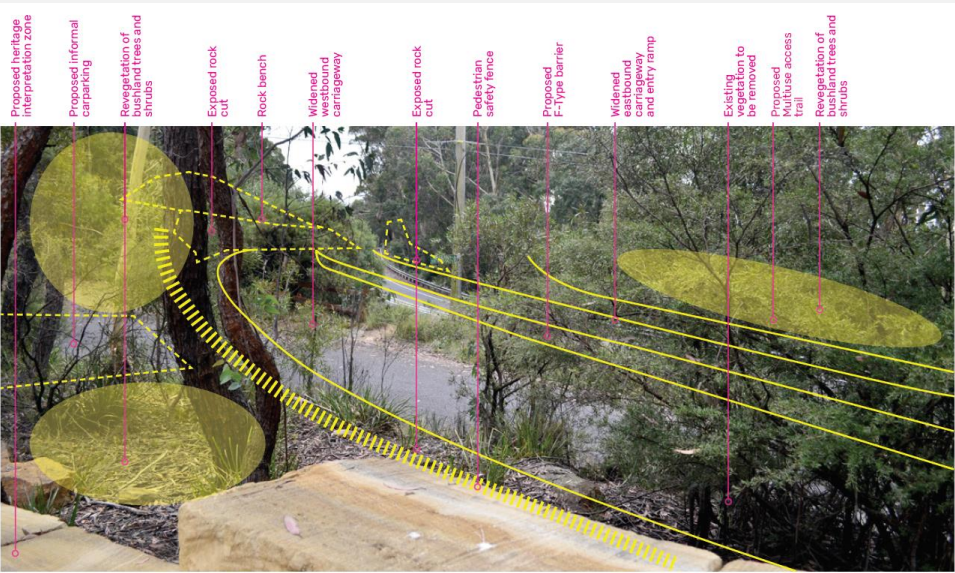
Zone	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
LCZ 5 – Ridgeline Transition	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well established natural bushland that sits high atop the ridgeline, overlooking the Megalong escarpment to the west. Combination of mature bushland along the fringes of the road corridor to the east and the rail corridor and associated infrastructure to the west. This LCZ would find it difficult to absorb changes. 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would increase the hard surface to the east of the existing Great Western Highway. Existing vegetation removal to accommodate the expansion of the roadway and adjacent multi use access path. The changes would only slightly impact the spatial character given the existing conditions along the Great Western Highway. 	Moderate
LCZ 6 – Blackheath Approach	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consists of a mix of natural bushland with steep slopes away from the transport corridor in the west and single-storey dwellings to the east. This LCZ would find it difficult to absorb changes. 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would slightly increase the hard surface to the east of the existing Great Western Highway. Existing vegetation removal to accommodate the expansion of the roadway and adjacent multi use access path. The changes would only slightly impact the spatial character given the existing conditions along the Great Western Highway. 	Moderate


Visual impacts


Assessment of the visual impacts at eight viewpoints within or near the proposal area and are summarised in Table 6-27.



Table 6-27: Viewpoint impact assessment summary


Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
<p>VP 1</p> 	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing road infrastructure makes up an even proportion of the existing view. The experiential quality of the meandering roadway enclosed by bushland is highly sensitive to change given any work that would remove vegetation and alter the perceived curvature of the roadway would affect the road user experience. 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening of pavement in the foreground of this viewpoint. Vegetation along the southbound carriageway will require clearing. Vegetation installed as part of the proposal landscape design would somewhat reduce the visual effect of change over time and mitigate increased light spill at night. 	<p>High – Moderate</p>
<p>VP 2</p> 	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing vegetation and exposed rock make up a large proportion of the existing view. The experiential quality of the meandering roadway enclosed by bushland is highly sensitive to change and changes to this spatial quality via the removal of vegetation and increase in hardstand would substantially affect the road user experience. 	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large benched cutting directly adjacent to the widened northbound carriageway. Vegetation clearing and the widening of the roadway would result in a substantial change to the visual composition of this viewpoint. Vegetation installed as part of the proposal landscape design would only provide minor mitigation over time. 	<p>High</p>

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
<p>VP 3</p> 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing view is dominated by vegetation along the fringes of the existing Heritage Interpretation Area This viewpoint would be sensitive to change as changes to the vegetation would result in limited ability to absorb changes. 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would relocate the existing Nellies Glen Road behind the location of this viewpoint. Introduction of a large rock cutting along the northbound carriageway to enable a realignment of the road corridor. Vegetation clearing and the widening of the roadway will result in a substantial change to the visual composition of this viewpoint. Vegetation installed as part of the Proposal landscape design would reduce the visual effect of change over time. 	<p>Moderate</p>

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
<p data-bbox="107 180 174 212">VP 4</p> 	<p data-bbox="1093 180 1227 212">Moderate</p> <ul data-bbox="1093 223 1456 542" style="list-style-type: none"> • An even proportion of the view comprises of the existing road corridor and existing vegetation. • This viewpoint would be sensitive to change given alterations to dense vegetation would result in limited ability to absorb changes. 	<p data-bbox="1480 180 1556 212">High</p> <ul data-bbox="1480 223 1993 909" style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal would provide a bridge crossing over Explorers Road, increasing light spill. • Removal of existing bushland vegetation. • Existing Highway would remain as an access way onto the Great Western Highway, from Explorers Road. • Substantial changes to the enclosed character of this portion of the proposal would result in a high magnitude of change. • Revegetation strategies installed as part of the proposal landscape design would reduce the visual effect of change over time and further mitigate light spill. • Given the required bridge infrastructure and setbacks the experience of users is unlikely to be regained 	<p data-bbox="2011 180 2139 244">High – Moderate</p>

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
<p>VP 5</p> 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existing road infrastructure makes up an even proportion of the existing view. The existing Great Blue Mountains Trail is buffered by existing vegetation between the roadway. The experiential quality of the roadway upon entering Medlow Bath is enclosed by mature vegetation and as such is sensitive to change given any work that would remove vegetation and alter road user experience 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would introduce the raising and widening of the. Vegetation along the northbound carriageway will require clearing with fill batters proposed on either side of the carriageway. Vegetation installed as part of the proposal landscape design would reduce the visual effect of change over time and light spill. 	<p>Moderate</p>

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
<p>VP 6</p> 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existing road infrastructure is seen in the background of this view, partially screened by existing established vegetation. The foreground of the existing view is dominated by vegetation along the fringes of the existing rail corridor, the highway and rail infrastructure are seen as dominant existing features in the background. As a result, this viewpoint would be able to absorb changes given the existing screen planting, as well as existing built elements 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would relocate the existing retaining wall along the rail corridor and relocate the associated rail infrastructure. As a result of this widening, there would not be a substantial change to the visual composition of this viewpoint. Vegetation installed as part of the proposal landscape design would assist in further reducing the visual effect of change over time. 	<p>Low</p>
<p>VP 7</p> 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existing road and rail infrastructure are dominant features within this view. As a result of extensive infrastructure in the foreground, this viewpoint would be able to successfully absorb changes. 	<p>Moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposal would relocate the existing retaining wall along the rail corridor and relocate the associated rail infrastructure. The proposal would not be a significant change to the visual composition of this viewpoint. There would likely be increased traffic travelling past this viewpoint and light spill at night from the proposal. 	<p>Moderate – Low</p>

Viewpoint	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Impact
<p data-bbox="107 183 168 207">VP 8</p> 	<p data-bbox="1097 183 1164 207">High</p> <ul data-bbox="1097 223 1467 973" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1097 223 1467 438">• The view is made up of an even ratio of transport infrastructure and mature tree and larger shrub plantings along the road verge and the background. <li data-bbox="1097 446 1467 694">• The sensitivity of this view to change is high given the limited ability of this view to absorb changes to the removal of existing established vegetation along the fringe of the road corridor. <li data-bbox="1097 702 1467 973">• The view is sensitive given the existing residential properties along Coachhouse Lane, which would be impacted by changes to this view, in the form of partial screening of incoming traffic from this viewpoint. 	<p data-bbox="1489 183 1612 207">Moderate</p> <ul data-bbox="1489 223 1982 742" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1489 223 1982 311">• The proposal would introduce the widening of pavement in the foreground of this viewpoint. <li data-bbox="1489 319 1982 414">• Introduction of a multi-use access trail, where previous access was restricted. <li data-bbox="1489 422 1982 582">• Vegetation along the southbound carriageway would require clearing with a retaining wall and batter proposed along the edge of the roadway and access path. <li data-bbox="1489 590 1982 742">• Vegetation installed as part of the proposal landscape design along the batter would somewhat reduce the visual effect of change over time and reduce increased light spill. 	<p data-bbox="2016 183 2139 239">High – Moderate</p>

6.5.4 Safeguards and management measures

Safeguards and management measures for landscape and visual impacts are presented in Table 6-28.

Table 6-28: Safeguard and management measures – landscape character and visual impact

Impact	Environmental safeguards	Responsibility	Timing	Reference
Landscape character and visual impact	<p>An Urban Design Plan will be prepared to support the final detailed project design and implemented as part of the CEMP.</p> <p>The Urban Design Plan will present an integrated urban design for the project, providing practical detail on the application of design principles and objectives identified in the environmental assessment. The Plan will include design treatments for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> location and identification of existing vegetation and proposed landscaped areas, including species to be used built elements including retaining walls, bridges and noise walls pedestrian and cyclist elements including footpath location, paving types and pedestrian crossings fixtures such as seating, lighting, fencing and signs details of the staging of landscape work taking account of related environmental controls such as erosion and sedimentation controls and drainage procedures for monitoring and maintaining landscaped or rehabilitated areas. 	Contractor	Detailed design/pre-construction	Standard safeguard
Proposal design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rail infrastructure will be screened using shrubs and trees, where possible Cut and fill batters will be rounded to help integrate into the existing landform and create a more naturalised appearance. Opportunities to reduce the proposal footprint will be explored during detailed design Connectivity and access to the existing and proposed heritage interpretation area will be enhanced. Exposed rock faces will be retained in the rock cuttings 	Transport	Detailed design	Additional safeguard
Bridges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The bridge design and the design of peripheral elements will be refined to reduce its visual impact. 	Transport	Detailed design	Additional safeguard
Bicycle and pedestrian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyclist and pedestrian access will be improved through new and upgraded, multi-use access tracks Visibility of proposed multi-use access tracks and adjoining residential properties will be improved. 	Transport	Detailed design	Additional safeguard
Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design of new retaining walls will have finishes of a high standard and quality that is in keeping with the Great Western Highway character. 	Transport	Detailed design	Additional safeguard
Landscape implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fill batters will be screened where possible using seeding, shrubs and trees, as well as bushland reconstruction techniques. 	Transport	Detailed design	Additional safeguard

Impact	Environmental safeguards	Responsibility	Timing	Reference
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffer planting will be introduced in front of the retaining wall at the southern entry into Medlow Bath to minimise visual impacts. • Bushland reconstruction and bushland seeding will be maximised where possible. • Native and endemic plantings will be used along the highway outside of the village. • Revegetation with appropriate species will be maximised along the highway to reduce perceived corridor width. • The selection of plant species will complement and integrate with the existing environment. • Opportunities for additional tree plantings along the proposal corridor will be investigated. 			
Construction visual impact	<p>The layout of ancillary facility sites will be designed to limit impact. The design will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • screening of boundaries facing sensitive receivers or views • careful placement of structures and buildings to maintain viewpoints or provide additional screening of site activities. 	Contractor	Pre-construction / Construction	Additional safeguard
Construction visual impact	Ancillary facilities will be maintained, kept tidy and well-presented including sorting regular removal of excess materials to reduce visual impact.	Contractor	Construction	Additional safeguard
Construction visual impact	Ancillary facility sites and temporary construction areas will be progressively restored to at least their pre-construction conditions when no longer required.	Contractor	Construction	Additional safeguard