



barwon heads pedestrian bridge

location barwon heads bellarine peninsula victoria australia

status completed july 2011

client vicroads

photography sean mcphillips, aerial image by aerial impressions

Barwon Heads is a picturesque coastal town located at the mouth of the Barwon River on the Bellarine Peninsula. The original 300 metre long timber road bridge was built in 1927 and much loved by the local community. It had been adapted and repaired so many times that by 2006 it was rapidly reaching the end of its operational life. The original bridge was beyond repair and so began the difficult process of designing its replacement. The local community mounted a campaign to save the Bridge but when no clear outcome could be reached the State Government appointed an independent "Barwon Heads Advisory Committee" to advise on its future. The final report from January 2007 recommended that the existing bridge be widened and upgraded subject to heritage approval. Subsequently heritage approval could not be obtained and so the second recommendation was adopted being a two bridge solution, a reconstructed road bridge and a new contemporary pedestrian & cycling bridge located downstream of the road bridge.

The new pedestrian/cycling bridge is clearly differentiated as a contemporary concrete/timber/stainless steel structure which is fully clad in timber with a boat hull-like cross section. The design intent was to construct a pair of parallel causeway bridges as companion structures, parallel for their full length with the same underside clearance for boating. The pedestrian bridge has the same rhythm of piers as the road bridge but with longer spans (18m

to match every second road bridge pier alignment of 9m). The width of the pedestrian bridge at 4.5 metres provides a generous circulation space for pedestrians, cyclists and fishing.

As a causeway bridge it sits very low relative to the tidal water level (with a 2 metre tidal range) and the shifting sands on both banks. The bridge has two very distinct spatial experiences, one from the top deck crossing over the estuary with distant coastal views, and the other from underneath either on the beach or in the water where the structure silhouettes against the sky and the surrounding landscape.

The bridge expresses the beautiful tactile and aesthetic qualities of timber in an extraordinary coastal setting. The underside of the bridge has a complex warping geometry where the timber battens rake and interlock to create visual interest and shadowing detail as it stretches across the Barwon river.

"This is a beautiful piece of civic architecture, fully considered and skilfully resolved...and provides a distinctive sense of occasion, giving delight in its variety of uses." AIA Joseph Reed Award jury 2012

"There is jewel-like quality and understated charm in this bridge...age and weathering will serve to make it more beautiful" Joe Rollo, The Age, 26 August 2011

