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architecture+
urban design

deer park by-pass

location western highway caroline springs to the western ring road m80 sunshine west

status completed april 2009

client vicroads

photography john gollings, michael mcleod

The 9.3km Deer Park Bypass is a new four lane freeway which connects the Western Highway at Caroline Springs to the Western Ring Road at Sunshine West. The Western Highway is the principal road link from Melbourne to Ballarat and onto Adelaide carrying over 70,000 vehicles a day at Deer Park. The Bypass will avoid 20 intersections with many traffic signals and reduce peak journey times by up to 15 minutes. The project was delivered as a design construct contract with VicRoads and Leighton Contractors establishing a 'one team' collaborative working relationship.

The Bypass, now known as the M8 Western Freeway is located on the sparse flat volcanic plains of western Melbourne. The area is characterised by basalt rock outcrops, open grasslands, remnant dry stone walls and planted wind breaks of cypress and sugar gum. This is a rapidly changing urban landscape of new residential and industrial estates which is transforming the ever expanding fringe of Melbourne. The motorist is afforded striking views back to the city across a gritty foreground of factory walls and suburban roofs. The M8 setting is quintessentially western suburbs and bears little resemblance to the vast majority of Melbourne's freeway system, which has good landscape and topographic qualities.

A fundamental aim of the design has been to create a distinct visual identity for the Bypass that integrates freeway architecture into the local landscape – a marking of the land. The road corridor unfolds as a gently undulating serpentine form connecting two established freeways. The M8 freeway is a relatively short connection joining the M80 ring road to Caroline Springs - a five minute interlude in a longer travelling experience.

Noise walls have been designed as sculptural elements of ambiguous scale embedded into the landform. The walls are constructed of a single material, a deep ribbed profiled steel section in contrasting horizontal ribbons or

upright standing ribs. The ribbed profile produces strong shadowed reptilian forms which sit with ease in a big landscape.

Noise wall materials are typically raw galvanised steel with sections of strong colour to punctuate the freeway where it intersects with the local road system. The noise walls have very distinct end panels that overlap, fold back into the ground or rear into the sky. The inclusion of the end panels changes an otherwise thin ribbon like wall into a substantial sculptural form with great tectonic presence.

In addition to the noise walls the other principle architectural elements are concrete retaining walls and bridge abutments. They have been designed as vertical folded planes of strong colour to mark the manmade landscape. The effect is striking as flashes of orange colour highlight the various bridge and wall locations as part of the unfolding road journey.

This is freeway architecture on a big scale that uses a simple but bold material palette with the strong use of colour to striking effect. It is hard not to see something of this vacuous hard terrain in the freeway paintings of Geoffrey Smart.

"Thoughtfully composed, and punctuated by the bright orange flyovers abutments, the result is a durable and muscular gesture with a scale and texture that successfully mixes the factory wall and high art." AIA Urban Design jury 2010

"In contrast to its function as a noise wall the Deer park Bypass' appeal is in its confident silence, like a serpent sunning itself in the sun." AIA Colorbond Award jury 2010

