

The Roads and Road Reserves



Merricks Beach is one of the few remaining coastal villages in the Greater Melbourne Metropolitan Area that has retained the charm of a seaside holiday village from earlier times. There are no bitumen roads, concrete curbs and footpaths or shops. Pedestrians, bike riders, koalas and cars share the roads. Though the fibro cement holiday houses are now being replaced, there is strong resolve within the community to keep the status quo with regards to the roads and roadside reserves.

In 1980 the Merricks Beach Residents Association received a petition from Palmers Hill Road Residents requesting a narrower and more sinuous road. This petition became the catalyst for the present approach to roads within the coastal village summarized as:

- use of natural contours to ensure adequate drainage
- undulation of roads as a natural traffic control
- serpentine to encourage the meandering nature of our roads to minimise speeding, and
- enhancing the character of the area by suitable, strategic planting of native trees and shrubs, to restore bird life, minimize effects of wind, assist in moisture conservation and with shade and shadow soften road lines.

As a result there are no footpaths, only shared roadways, no concrete gutters and a restricted speed limit of 25 kilometres per hour.

In *An Appraisal of the Streets of Merricks* by Paul Thompson, Landscape Designer, Plant Design Limited wrote:

'Roads are important for the huge area of land they consume. As public land they are owned by the community as a whole and should reflect the community and regional qualities and standards. All roads should have a unified character. When roads of a similar type are linked together they become the strong frame that holds together a local character giving visual cohesion and restfulness of the space'

The Merricks Beach Residents Association, in keeping to these views deliberately chose light brown/beige road material from Hillview Quarries to blend in with the environment and took over the construction and upkeep of the roads from the then Hastings Shire Council. They also offered residents the services of local indigenous and native plant expert John Hodgson in planting their road reserves.

Environmental Significance Overlay ESO27 was subsequently passed by the Mornington Peninsula Shire to protect the area and is now part of the Victorian Planning Act. More recently the Shire has again assumed maintenance of the roads using their own contractors. The MBRA works with the Shire to ensure the original aims are achieved.



This photo shows preferred crossovers

By resisting the intrusion of bitumen roads, concrete kerbing and footpaths and shops, the Village retains the ambience of a coastal holiday village. The ambience and the built landscape environment provided by the evolving road reserves and the gravel roads provide and will continue to provide a snapshot of the past, evoking many memories of past seaside holidays.

The strong community involvement in the retention and improvement of the built landscape is important; some believe this feeling of community will disappear if people retire behind high fences.

The nature strips or road reserves are the responsibility of each householder. Many have deliberately planted theirs with indigenous plants as havens for local fauna and forming part of the fauna corridor. Others have planted a mixture of indigenous and native plants.

The road reserves are built landscapes that are always in transition. Plants grow, die and are replaced. As every year passes, more residents are actively planting their strips as they realise the important part the roads and the roadside reserves play in preserving the ambience of the village.