Identification and location

Name of Place: **Maribyrnong Rail Bridge**

Other Name Saltwater River Bridge

Address Newell's Paddock
Footscray

Place Identifier **20228**

Heritage Significance *state*

Creation date(s): 1859 c. **Map (Melway)** 42 G4

Boundary description The bridge, abutments and approach embankment

Local Government Area: Cities of Maribyrnong and Melbourne

Ownership Type State (PTC)

Description

Site Type: transport

Physical Description

Bluestone and steel bridge spanning the Maribyrnong River with a clear span of over 164 ft. As originally built the bridge had a lattice girder between piers of rusticated bluestone masonry with a string course. The 1911 modifications replaced the lattice with the current triangulated bow truss, extended and modified the abutments and added curved wing walls. Further modifications involved improvements to the abutments. A concrete and steel railway bridge was built immediately upstream to provide two additional tracks in the 1970s.

Condition

In good condition and well maintained, although the upstream view has been compromised by the duplication.

Integrity

Generally intact to its rebuilt condition but the adjacent modern bridge detracts

Context

Set amidst the industrial remnants of the Footscray/Kensington area, with parkland now replacing noxious industry sites.

Threats

none known

History

The first bridge on this site, a double track bluestone and iron lattice girder, was constructed as part of the Melbourne and Mt.Alexander Railway in 1857, then the major railway route into inland Victoria. In 1856 the Victorian Railways Department was established to take over the failed Melbourne and Mount Alexander Railway Co, which had been formed to build a railway between Melbourne and the Murray River, including a branch line to Williamstown.

The first government line to be built was the Melbourne to Williamstown line, which crossed the Saltwater River, passing through Footscray on its way to Williamstown. The line also branched northwards from Footscray to constitute the first section of the Bendigo line. Tenders for the construction of the line were called in May 1856 (Harrigan 1962:13-16).

One of the major challenges of the work was the bridging for the Saltwater River and the swamps of the Yarra delta. The bluestone abutments were built on 600 piles driven to a depth of 60 feet. The superstructure consisted of three iron tubular girders, with a clear span of 200 feet, being the longest railway bridge span in Victoria at the time. The designer was G.C. Darbyshire, Chief Engineer of the Victorian Railways Department, with the eminent British engineer I.K. Brunel as Inspecting Engineer. The abutments are considered to be a good example of the Brunel design style. The local contractors were Pearce and Dalziel, with W. Fairbairn & Sons of Manchester providing the steel work. The bridge was completed in December 1858 and the Williamstown line was officially opened on 13 January 1859. This bridge carried all rail traffic from Melbourne to the northern and western parts of Victoria Harrigan; *Argus* 10/11/1857, National Trust file 4397.

The introduction of heavier locomotives in the twentieth century necessitated the strengthening of the bridge. In 1911 the girders were replaced with two riveted steel trusses made by Mephan Ferguson. This work was carried out without disrupting rail services. The original abutments have been modified. In 1974 the crossing was duplicated with a concrete and steel bridges immediately upstream to reduce traffic on the suburban lines and provide for an express bypass (Vines 1989).

Thematic context

Australian Principal Theme	Moving goods and people		
PAHT Subtheme:	Moving goods and people by rail	**Local Theme**	Railways - freight

Cultural Significance

Of state significance for its historical association with the beginnings of rail travel and architectural and technical significance as the outstanding engineering work of its day. (Criterion A4) While substantially modified from the original Melbourne and Mt. Alexander Railway bridge, this structure exemplifies the engineering methods of the 19th century bridge builders. (Criterion F1) The bluestone abutments are both decorative and practical, reflecting their designed strength in solid forms and rusticated blocks of stone. While designed for steam trains, the bridge relates to a time when trains revolutionised travel. The more artistic forms of classic bridge design are rarely seen to day. (Criterion B2) The alterations over time are related to changes in use of the bridge and the requirement for heavier loads as engine and train weight increased. This is a phenomena which can also be seen in the extra iron piers added to the Tarradale viaduct and the strengthening of the Malmsbury and Sunbury viaducts on the same line.

Comparative Examples

Abutments relate to similar engineered works along the Geelong and Bendigo lines, while the girder trusses compare with the slightly later bridge at Bunbury Street.

Recommendations

Heritage Victoria Register	Yes
Register of the National Estate	Recommended
National Trust Register	Yes
Other Heritage Listings	WRIHS
Planning Scheme Protection	Yes
External Paint Controls Apply?	Yes
Internal Alteration Controls Apply?	No
Tree Controls Apply?	No
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Act	Yes
Are there Outbuildings or Fences not Exempt?	No
Prohibited Uses may be Permitted?	No

Recommendations

Significance and the cited fabric or contributory elements.
To conserve and enhance the significant elements of the place.
To conserve and enhance the public view of these elements.
To conserve and enhance the visual relationships between the contributory elements.
To ensure that new or altered elements within the place are visually recessive and related to the contributory elements.
To encourage continuation of the original use of the place.

Australian Heritage Commission Criteria

A4 Importance for their association with events, developments or cultural phases which have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, state, region or community.

As part of the first railways developed in Australia, the bridge contributes to the historical understanding of transport and development.

B2 Importance in demonstrating a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function or design no longer practised, in danger of being lost, or of exceptional interest.

While designed for steam trains, the bridge relates to a time when trains revolutionised travel. The more artistic forms of classic bridge design are rarely seen to day.

F1 Importance for their technical, creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation or achievement.

When built this was one of the greatest engineering achievements in the colony

Documentation

References

Harrigan, L., *Victorian Railways to 1962,* Victorian Railways Commissioners, 1962, p.13-16.
Argus, 10 November 1857; National Trust Classification Report Saltwater River Bridge, 1986, File 4397 .
Vines, G., *Western Region Industrial Heritage Study,* Living Museum of the West, 1989;
National Trust File.
Elphinstone 1983.
Footscray's First Hundred Years
Footscray's First Fifty Years

Data recording

Assessed By	Gary Vines
Assessed Date:	28/2/2000