HERITAGE CITATION REPORT

Name Argo Street Bridge
Address Argo Street SOUTH YARRA **Significance Level** A2
Place Type Road Bridge
Citation Date 2013

Argo Street Bridge

Recommended Heritage Protection **VHR** No **HI** No **PS** Yes

History and Historical Context

Stonnington Railways
Rail travel was introduced to Victoria in the 1850s by private companies, including the Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company, who opened a line from the Finders Street to St Kilda in 1857. In 1859-60, this line was extended to Brighton by the St Kilda and Brighton Railway Company, via a loop line to a Windsor (originally known as Chapel Street Station). The loop line was conveyed across St Kilda Road on a timber bridge.[1]

In 1858, the Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company began work on a line from Princes Bridge Railway Station to Windsor. The first stage from Princes Bridge to a temporary station at Punt Road, Richmond opened for public traffic in February 1859.[2] An extension to Cremorne, on the north bank of the Yarra, was opened in December 1859.[3]

In 1860. the railway line was carried across the Yarra on an iron bridge to stations at Gardiner's Creek Road (now South Yarra station), Greville Street (now Prahran station) and Chapel Street (now Windsor station). Substantial engineering

works altered the landscape for this line, including an embankment constructed across the swamp south of the Yarra River, and a deep cutting through Forrest Hill.

Melbourne's rail network at this time was disjointed, with various private companies operating from three separate city terminals, at Princes Bridge, Flinders Street and Spencer Street. Some of the smaller companies were also becoming financially unviable. In 1862, the Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company bought out the St Kilda and Brighton Railway Company, closed the loop line from St Kilda and ran their trains directly to Brighton through Windsor. The Melbourne and Suburban Railway was in turn absorbed into the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company in 1865 to form the Melbourne & Hobson's Bay United Railway Company. This company operated the Melbourne to Brighton railway until it was taken over by the Victorian government in 1878. The Brighton line was extended to Sandringham in 1887.

Argo Street Bridge
Grade separation was an important factor in the first decade of railway construction in Victoria, so bridges were generally constructed as part of the initial overall contracts for the lines.[4] When the Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company excavated a railway cutting through South Yarra in 1860, road bridges were built across it, including one at Argo Street.[5] This bridge was originally constructed with bluestone abutments and iron girders. [6]

The Argo Street bridge had to be raised to accommodate overhead wires when the railway line to Sandringham was electrified in 1919. Plans to raise the Argo Street bridge were put forward by the Railway Commissioners as early as 1914 but were opposed by Prahran City Council on the grounds that it would create a dangerous 1 foot high hump in the middle of the bridge.[7] Council's protests were to no avail and the bridge raising was completed by July 1916[8], creating a distinctive hump backed profile. The Railways Commissioners did, however, concede to a Council request to have the bluestone parapets on the east side of the bridge replaced with chain wire fencing.[9]

[1] Context Pty Ltd, *Stonnington Thematic Environmental History*, p.65.
[2] Stonnington Local History Catalogue Reg. No. 17756.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Gary Vines/Biosis Research Pty. Ltd *National Trust Study of Victoria's Rail and Masonry Bridges (Masonry, Metal and Concrete Rail Bridges and Masonry Road Bridges)*, Funded by VicRoads, VicTrack and Heritage Victoria.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Argus*, 3 February, 1914, p. 8.
[8] *Malvern Standard*, 1 July, 1916, p. 2.
[9] *Malvern Standard*, 8 April, 1916, p. 2.

Description

Physical Description

The Argo Street Bridge is a single-span, two-lane road bridge over the Sandringham railway line. It has abutments of rock-face regular coursed bluestone with pilasters on each side. Smooth faced stone is used for string courses and parapet wall coping. The abutments appear substantially intact but the original iron girders have been replaced with a modern concrete structure. The bluestone parapet walls on the east side of bridge have been replaced with steel pipe and chain wire fences.

Comparative Analysis

In the City of Stonnington, there is little built form remaining from first era of private company controlled railway development. The only surviving station building in Stonnington associated with a private railway company is a former entry vestibule to the South Yarra railway station, which was built for the Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company c1862 (the station is included on the Victorian Heritage Register - H1068). The Argo Street Bridge is understood to have been built in 1860, making it the oldest known extant railway structure in Stonnington. If the 1860 construction date is correct, the Argo Street Bridge may also be the municipality's earliest surviving bridge (road or rail).

Statement of Significance

Relevant themes from the City of Stonnington Environmental History are indicated by TEH.

What is Significant?
The Argo Street, South Yarra is understood to have been built in 1860 when the Melbourne and Suburban Railway Company extended its line from Cremorne to Windsor, to link up with the St Kilda to Brighton Railway. It is a single-span two-lane road bridge retaining its original bluestone abutments in a relatively intact state. The original wrought iron girders have been replaced with reinforced concrete and there is with chain wire fencing on the eastern side of the bridge in place of the original bluestone parapet walls. The road deck was raised in height in 1916 in anticipation of the electrification of the suburban rail network.

Elements that contribute to the significance of the place include (but are not limited to):

- The bridge's early form, materials and detailing.
- The unpainted state of the stonework.
- Unimpeded views to the sides of the bridge abutments and to the bridge parapet walls from the street.
- The absence of signage on the bridge and its immediate environs other than traffic signs.

Modern fabric, including the road deck and metal balustrades, are not significant.

How is it significant?
The Argo Street Bridge is of local historical and architectural significance to the City of Stonnington.

Why is it significant?
The Argo Street Bridge is historically significant as rare surviving evidence of the early development of Melbourne's railway system by private companies (TEH 4.4.1 Early private railways Criterion A & B). The bridge may also be the oldest extant railway structure in the municipality. The Argo Street Bridge is of additional historical interest for its associations with the electrification of the suburban rail network, having been raised in height to provide clearance for electric trains (TEH 4.4.3 Twentieth century improvements).

The Argo Street Bridge is architecturally significant as a representative example of a bridge from the first era of railway construction in Victoria (Criterion D).

Recommendations 2013

External Paint Controls	No
Internal Alteration Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Fences & Outbuildings	No
Prohibited Uses May Be Permitted	No
Incorporated Plan	-
Aboriginal Heritage Place	No

Other Recommendations

It is recommended that the Argo Street Bridge be added to the schedule of the Heritage Overlay under the City of Stonnington Planning Scheme. It is further recommend that the extent of the heritage overlay provide a curtilage of 5 metres on both sides of the bridge.