



Public Access Presentation

9 September 2025

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I make this presentation in the public interest in my capacity as the public officer of the Congo Community Association (the CCA).

I would like to thank council staff and the General Manager for their constructive engagement since the last public access presentation.

Negotiations with the Landowner

We welcome the advice that Council is negotiating with the landowner regarding a land swap.

This has always been the CCA preferred option: direct negotiation with the Landowner so that we can find a solution that is amenable to all.

In the CCA's view, the simplest most cost-effective option to reopen the road is for a direct land swap.

Width of the paper road vs current road standards

We understand that there may be some concern that a land swap for the paper road means that the swapped land may not be sufficiently wide to allow for the road to be reopened to vehicle traffic.

We acknowledge that the paper road is 10m wide, whereas current tarmacked road standards generally dictate a wider road reserve.

However, the length of any likely new route (which would traverse the property roughly east to west) will likely be considerably shorter than the length paper road (which traverses the property north to south).

As such a direct swap for the paper road, could allow a new road reserve that is shorter but wider than the paper road.

It is also important to recall that the existing track in use is roughly 5m wide. So, even a 10m road reserve would be twice the width of the road that the community has been driving on for decades.

Vehicle access is a must

The CCA welcomes the presentation at the last public forum from the Eurobodalla Bicycle Users Group, calling for Congo to be reopened.

They suggested a bike track as an interim measure. We support opening of a bike track, as gesture of good faith to restore some form of public access.

But this should be a rough track, not something that requires engineering or funding.

We know council funds are limited, and any funding should be directed towards reopening the road to vehicle traffic.

While bike access would be welcome, it will not alleviate safety concerns. Bike access will not help in an emergency, nor will it relieve the social isolation or economic costs.

The only thing that will address these legitimate concerns is reopening the road.

We don't need a gold standard road

That said, we are not asking for a gold standard road.

- We do not need a tarmacked road
- We do not need the road to be 20m wide
- We do not need a road with an excessive speed limit

The community would be happy with a 5m wide gravel track, with a 60 km speed limit.

What we are asking for, is actually *less fancy* than some of the bike track in the region.

We just want a gravel track, that is designated as a public road.

State Funding

Even still we recognise that building a new gravel track will come with a price tag.

We understand that the Council's budget is tight and thinly spread.

Last week, CCA met again with Dr Michael Holland MP.

We are prepared to work with him and Council to secure state funding - if this is needed.

Compulsory Acquisition

We are heartened that advice that negotiations are progressing.

That said, the 25 year history of this issue, has taught us to be cautious in our optimism.

Whilst our preference is direct negotiation. Compulsory acquisition remains a second option.

We understand there is concern that compulsory acquisition come with a huge price tag because of the extractive Industry Development Approval over the land.

In CCA's view the DA does not extend to the northern portion of the property.

We understand others may have strong views that it does.

I have empathy for council's position here. Some does the DA does apply. Some say it doesn't. And Council has a limited budget.

My suggestion here is that Council should seek independent advice.

We have received quotes. An independent valuation to determine how much it could cost to acquire the land under compulsory acquisition would be around \$5000.

The CCA request that Counsellors to direct council staff to obtain such an independent valuation.

That way, if – at some point in the future – Councillors need to decide about compulsory acquisition, Councillors can base your decision on independent advice, not speculation.

That would seem to me to be \$5000 well spent.

There are lots of one-road in/one road out communities in the shire

Why is Congo different or special? This is a question I've lately.

- To start with, Congo is not a one-road in / one-road out community.
- We are a two-road in / two road-out community, and we have been for as long as living memory recalls, and as long as written records go back (1850s).
- We acknowledge that there are other one-road-in / one-road-out communities, but all of them would welcome the second road if it were a possibility.
- In Congo's case, it is not just a possibility, it is a legal right.
- We understand there are many instances, people come to council claiming "but it has always been this way"
 - o But in the case of Congo road, it is not just habitual use – or LORE
 - o The public has a legal right access the public road - at LAW, not LORE.
- If Council takes no action, or takes action that does not restore public vehicle access, Councillors will be **deciding** to turn Congo into one road out one road in community.
- Do you, Counsellors, want to be the ones that are making the decision, post black summer fires, to turn a community from a two-road-in/ two-road-out community into a one-road out / one-road-in community?

It is also important to note that the existing one-road-in / one-road-out communities in the Eurobodalla LGA receive “Special Fire Protection” under current bushfire management plans. That special treatment and funding is not given to Congo because, under these plans, Congo is described as a two-road in/out community.

In closing

- The public has a **legal right** of access via the paper road (albeit we can't current use access it)
- This is **not about trees** – we understand some trees may need to be removed.
- That new **road does not need to be gold plated**: we are asking for a gravel track, that cars can drive on, slowly.
- The CCA is happy for the **sand quarry to continue** operating.
- We bear the landowner **no animosity**. We want solutions that work for all.
- That solution must be a road – or a track – that **cars** can use.

Let's re-open Congo road.

Thank you.