

Daintree Gateway Master Plan

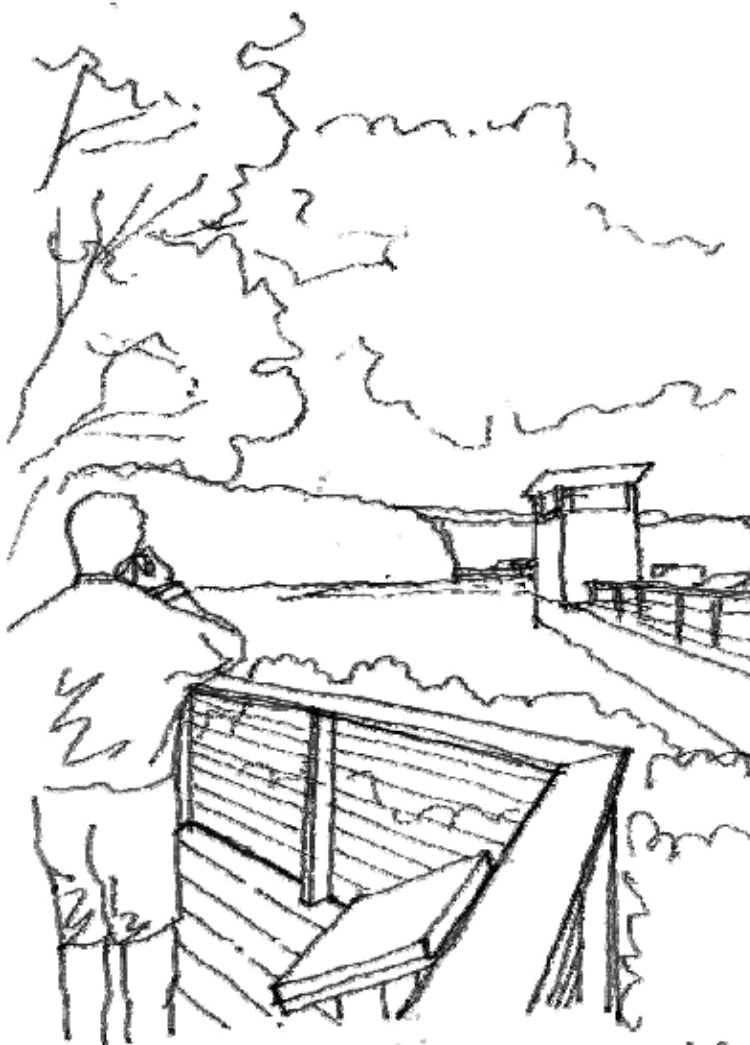


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Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Executive Summary

The Daintree Gateway Master Plan project is an initiative of the Cairns Regional Council to improve the user experience and visual appearance of the Daintree Gateway precinct.

The Daintree is one of the star attractions in Tropical North Queensland and an important part of the traditional lands of the KuKu Yalanji people. However, the approaches and access to the Daintree are visually unattractive and facilities are poorly developed.

Council has a long term vision to develop a world-class gateway befitting of the world heritage values of the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area. This master plan is the first step towards that vision. The master plan prioritises a suite of foundation projects for the transformation of the gateway precinct.

Arup was engaged by Cairns Regional Council (Council) to develop a master plan for the Daintree Gateway precinct. The work has been undertaken in consultation with community, business and government and stakeholders. This report presents the final recommended options for development of the Gateway.

The primary study area considered by Arup is shown in the image to the right and the key nodes where works are proposed are noted in green. These works are described in brief below.

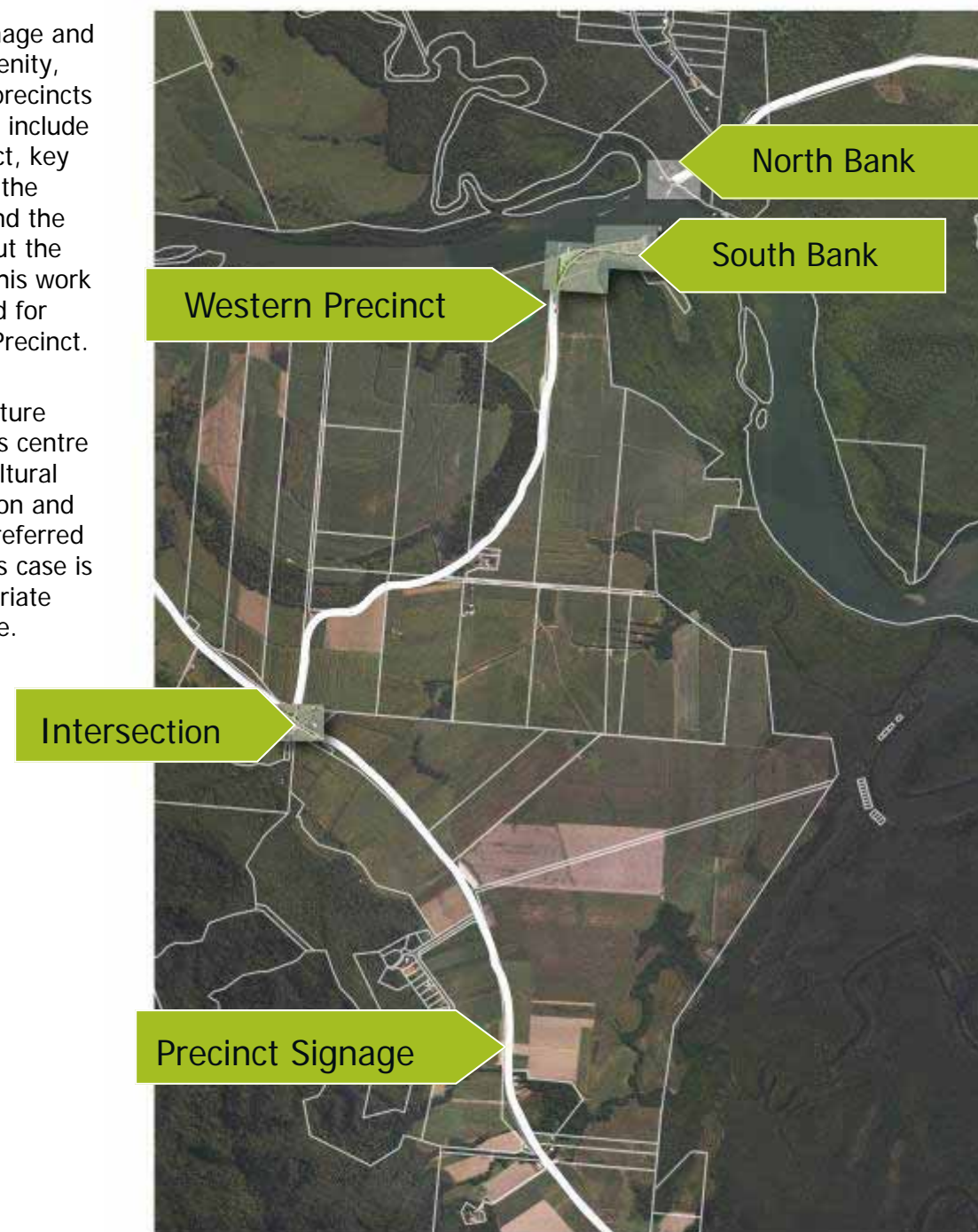
- Improved **precinct signage** which commences to the south of the intersection and ferry turn-off.
- Landscape and signage upgrades at the **intersection**, with the option for a visitor centre in the future.
- Substantial upgrades to improve facilities and visual amenity in the **Western Precinct**.
- Landscape, signage and minor circulation upgrades in the **South Bank**.
- Landscape and signage upgrades and new amenities initially in the **North Bank**, with a longer term option to develop a new bus parking area.

This report includes plans, images and design strategies for the proposed works. The report also includes an implementation strategy for the works based on two stages of development.

The initial stage is landscaping, signage and small building works to improve amenity, wayfinding and accessibility in key precincts within the gateway area. The works include development of the Western Precinct, key information provided at nodes near the intersection and western precinct and the use of directional signage throughout the precinct. Council could commence this work scope in the near future with a need for additional funding for the Western Precinct.

The second stage is the potential future development of a visitor centre. This centre may include interpretation of the cultural heritage values of the Daintree region and Daintree lowlands rainforest. The preferred site is at the intersection. A business case is recommended to identify an appropriate and sustainable scope for this centre.

This master plan is intended to provide an affordable and realistic framework for renewal of tourism infrastructure at the gateway to the Daintree, the world's oldest living rainforest.



Location Plan of Gateway Precinct

Introduction



The Daintree Gateway Master Plan covers the area located between the intersection of the Mossman-Daintree and Cape Tribulation Roads and the north bank of the Daintree River. This includes the Western Precinct where the boat ramp and tourist boat pontoon are located and the North and South Banks of the ferry landing. Some consideration has also been given to potential works slightly to the south of the intersection and in Daintree Village to the west.

For the Kuku Yalanji people, the Daintree has long been an important source of resources and significant part of the cultural landscape.

Over the past three decades the high biodiversity values and the refugial nature of the rainforest ecology have gained broader recognition and the Daintree region has earned a national and global reputation, helped along by some conflict and notoriety.

Today, the significant natural and cultural values of the region attract a steady flow of local, interstate and international visitors. Whilst twenty years ago the Daintree had the allure of an exotic and somewhat inaccessible destination, today it is an easy daytrip by conventional vehicle from Port Douglas and Cairns.

Infrastructure in the Daintree has not kept pace with the increasing visitor numbers and changing visitor demographics and expectations. As the photos on this page show, the infrastructure in the study area is visually unattractive, in poor condition and not fit for purpose. In short, the area is an inadequate gateway for an environment with the significance of the Daintree.

Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Purpose, Vision and Principles

Purpose

The Daintree Gateway has two distinct purposes:

1. Improve the experience for visitors to the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area.
2. Increase economic benefit for local communities and businesses from greater visitation.

Vision

The Gateway is an enticing landmark that welcomes visitors to the magical wilderness and cultural landscape of the Daintree River and the world's oldest rainforest.

The Gateway enhances the prosperity of the Daintree area by inspiring visitors to take more time to get to know the values and stories of this outstanding natural environment, its traditional owners and the resident communities.





Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles have been adopted for the project:

Sustainability

Sustainability will be a fundamental consideration in the development of the Daintree Gateway, clearly expressed in the design of built and natural environments. Project outcomes will demonstrate a balance between community needs, economic growth, cultural practices, environmental protection and efficient use of resources.

Cultural Association

The Daintree Gateway will celebrate the rich cultural fabric of the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area and provide opportunities for visitors to learn and interact with cultural history and contemporary practices through interpretive displays, materials, design and art. The precinct will honour the Eastern Kuku Yalanji as the traditional owners of the land and will also acknowledge the non-Indigenous history and association with the Daintree area.

Planning

A successful Daintree Gateway project will be delivered by an integrated and collaborative planning process.

Character

The Gateway will reflect the tropical and natural character of the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area. The built form will be a high quality design that reflects and respects the natural areas and character of the local area. Planning of the project will enhance vistas and degraded areas and retain and increase vegetation.

Access and Mobility

The Daintree Gateway will transform the way in which people move through the entire Daintree region and the choices they make about journeys and destinations. In the immediate development area, the Gateway will rationalise the road network, parking areas and river access, creating a safe, legible and accessible environment that meets the needs of all users.

Local Economy

The Daintree Gateway will enhance the prosperity of local businesses and communities. It will contribute to greater awareness of the experiences available in the region and will promote and complement existing businesses and attractions.

Environmental Protection

The Daintree Gateway will be a celebration of the significance and natural wonder of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and Daintree National Park. Development and land uses associated with the Gateway will improve degraded areas, enhance vistas and scenic amenity and do no harm to the coastal and riverine processes of the Daintree River, endemic habitats and eco systems, or the cultural landscape.

Sense of Place

The Daintree Gateway will clearly mark the journey from rural landscape to wilderness environment and pay homage to the natural and cultural character of the Daintree-Cape Tribulation area. The Gateway will create a strong sense of arrival, welcome and anticipation and provide a visitor experience befitting the world class values of the area.

Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Context

The Daintree region is at risk of being loved to death, largely through high visitor numbers and poor quality infrastructure that affords little environmental protection. Contemporary development and approval practices take a more precautionary approach and seek to optimise outcomes across environmental, community and economic considerations. The following section outlines the challenges and constraints across these areas that have informed this project.

This Master Plan report is the further and final stage in the master plan project. It is preceded by a Strategic and Contextual Frameworks paper, an Options paper and a draft Master Plan that was issued for community consultation and feedback. The other reports and outputs provide background data pertaining to environmental, regulatory, tenure, economic and physical constraints and opportunities that are described below.

Gateway User Numbers

The tourism industry estimates that approximately 400,000 people visit the Daintree each year. (Note: these figures are not independently verified). A review of ferry traffic undertaken for this project suggested that annual visitor numbers in 2009 were in the order of 350,000, so a range of 350,000—400,000 is assumed for this project. Numbers are unavailable for visitors to Daintree Village, although anecdotal evidence suggests these are a relatively small portion of the total number that cross the river.

The above estimates exclude local residents who also use the River precincts. Almost 12,000 people live in the Douglas region and residents in the Daintree area are estimated at about

1700 people; including approximately 800 people living north of the river, 900 in Wonga and 100 residents in Daintree Village.

Tourism Market

The Far North Queensland region has experienced a general decline in tourism numbers over the past 5 years, and the Daintree has lost market share.

However, the market is changing and the Daintree is well placed to regain its market share. Increasingly visitors are seeking independent travel options, such as hire cars and holiday houses and units in preference to tour buses and hotel rooms. Research indicates that independent travellers are looking for authentic interactions with local residents, traditional owners and the natural environment. The bird-watching, adventure tourism and ecological volunteerism sectors are also identified as a growing opportunity for North Queensland, and the Daintree.

Another rapid change is the use of internet to research and plan holidays. Many visitors arrive in the region already knowing what they want to do and see. The competition for market share therefore commences with the worldwide web.

Stakeholders

The Daintree Gateway project has many stakeholders, including the Daintree-Cape Tribulation communities, tourism operators, landholders, traditional owners, State Government and Cairns Regional Council. The project has included a robust stakeholder engagement process, including workshop meetings with stakeholder groups and direct

meetings with specific interest groups. Although there are some divergent views and interests amongst stakeholders they do have the following common objectives which have informed the project.

- Protect, enhance and better promote the natural values of the area.
- Increase local benefit from tourism.
- Maintain quality of life for residents in custodial communities.

Tenure

The Gateway precinct incorporates a number of land parcels with an array of tenure including freehold, reserve, national park, unallocated state land, road, permit to occupy, road leases and land leases. Particular issues requiring resolution or presenting a constraint to the project include:

- the large area of road reserve in the western precinct and the status of permits to occupy on this reserve;
- constraints arising from the presence of coastal esplanade; and
- the location of the southbound ferry lanes on freehold land and land granted under the Kuku Yalanji ILUA.

Regulatory Framework

The environmental significance of the Daintree area means that any development will be heavily constrained by regulatory and legislative requirements. The following regulation and legislation applies over the study area. The implications in these in terms of approvals and development constraints are outlined in the accompanying project reports.

- Wet Tropics World Heritage Protection and Management Act 1993 and Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998
- Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)
- Nature Conservation Act 1992
- Sustainable Planning Act 2009.
- State Planning Policies
- Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031
- Douglas Shire Planning Scheme
- Vegetation Management Act 1999
- Wet Tropical Coast Regional Coastal Management Plan, Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995 and Queensland Coastal Plan (draft)
- Queensland Coastal Plan 2011 (soon to be in force)
- Fisheries Act 1994
- Native Title Act 1993
- Iconic Queensland Places Act 2008 (IQPA)
- Transport Infrastructure Act 1994
- Transport Planning and Coordination Act 1994
- Cairns Regional Council Corporate Sustainability Policy.

Environmental Values

The lowland rainforests found north of the Daintree River are recognised as Australia's oldest coastal rainforest and are amongst the most bio-diverse areas in the world. The area has been protected by creation of the Daintree National Park in 1981 and the 1988 declaration of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. It includes species-rich mangrove forests, wet sclerophyll forests and tall open forests. It is home to more than 3000 plant species, including at least 25 species of vertebrate animals which are very rare, found only in small areas or in danger of extinction.

The Daintree River is recognised as an important fish habitat and accordingly the river and mangrove system are protected areas.

Physical Characteristics

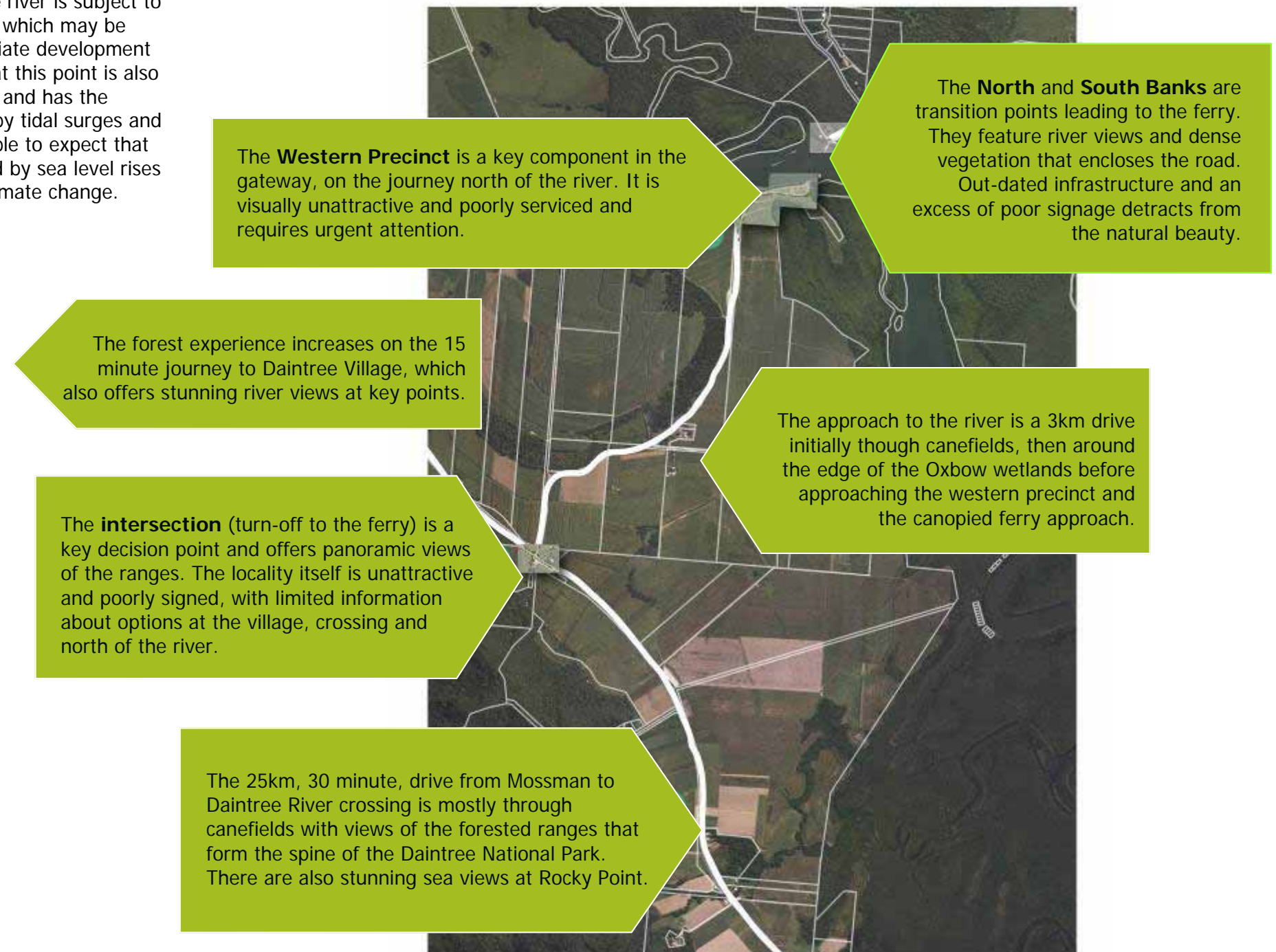
There is insufficient infrastructure throughout the study area, and that which does exist is dated, in poor condition and /or poorly planned.

The study area is predominately flat land sited on the Daintree floodplain. Land to the south of the river is dominated by cane farms, whereas the north bank of the study area is largely lowland rainforest with some cleared area.

The diagram on this page describes the visual amenity and physical character of the area in terms of the journey.

The southern part of the study area is subject to flooding in extreme rain events and the south bank of the river is subject to natural erosion processes which may be exacerbated by inappropriate development and land uses. The river at this point is also subject to tidal influences and has the potential to be impacted by tidal surges and storm tides. It is reasonable to expect that the area could be affected by sea level rises predicted to arise from climate change.

The Journey to the Gateway...



Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Proposed works: Intersection

The Intersection of the Mossman-Daintree and Cape Tribulation Roads is located amongst cane fields with dramatic long range views to the Mountains of the Daintree National Park. However, the roadside treatment does not have high visual amenity and thus there is no sense of arrival despite this being a key decision point on the journey to the Daintree and Cape Tribulation.

The key priority for this area is to provide a stronger visual identity at the intersection that identifies the beginning of the gateway experience. As a minimum, the proposed works in this area shall improve visual amenity and provide greater clarity about the direction of travel to each location, and distances and travel times to significant destinations within the region.



Proposed view

*New eye-catching information signage,
designed by local artist.*

*Display will entice and inform with
highlights, features and destinations,
travel times and distances*

The initial proposed works to achieve these priorities are described below and shown in the following plan.

- Feature landscaping using endemic tropical tree species planted in copses with low grassy species between, at the intersection and within 200m of it. This will have the effect of marking the beginning of the rainforest experience, creating some enclosure whilst maintaining the views to the mountains and surrounding farmland.
- Access and parking to the cafe and private properties behind will be formalised via a defined 4-way intersection.
- The existing pull over bay will provide visitors with themed orientation information, including maps, distances and travel times to key destinations. Advertising will be removed. It is recommended that a local artist be engaged to design this display using local materials and imagery and best-practice interpretive methods.
- Themed signage, continued throughout the precinct and north of the river will improve way-finding.



Daintree Gateway Master Plan

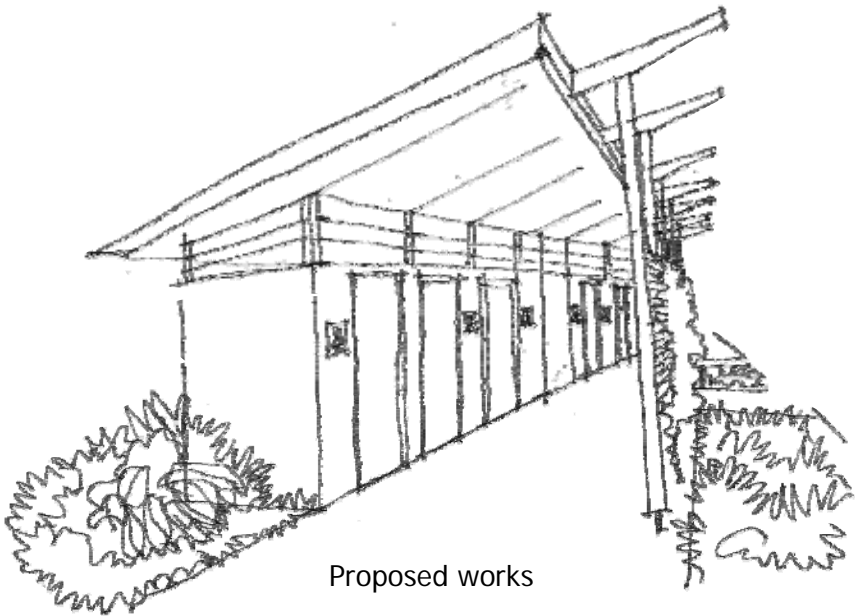


Proposed Works: Western Precinct

The western precinct comprises areas of road reserve and marine esplanade on which informal development has occurred. Some of the existing occupants have short-term leases and others have no formal tenure at this location. The area is unattractive; infrastructure is generally in poor condition and is inappropriate to the natural values of the area. Poor definition of circulation areas also poses safety problems for users.



Existing view



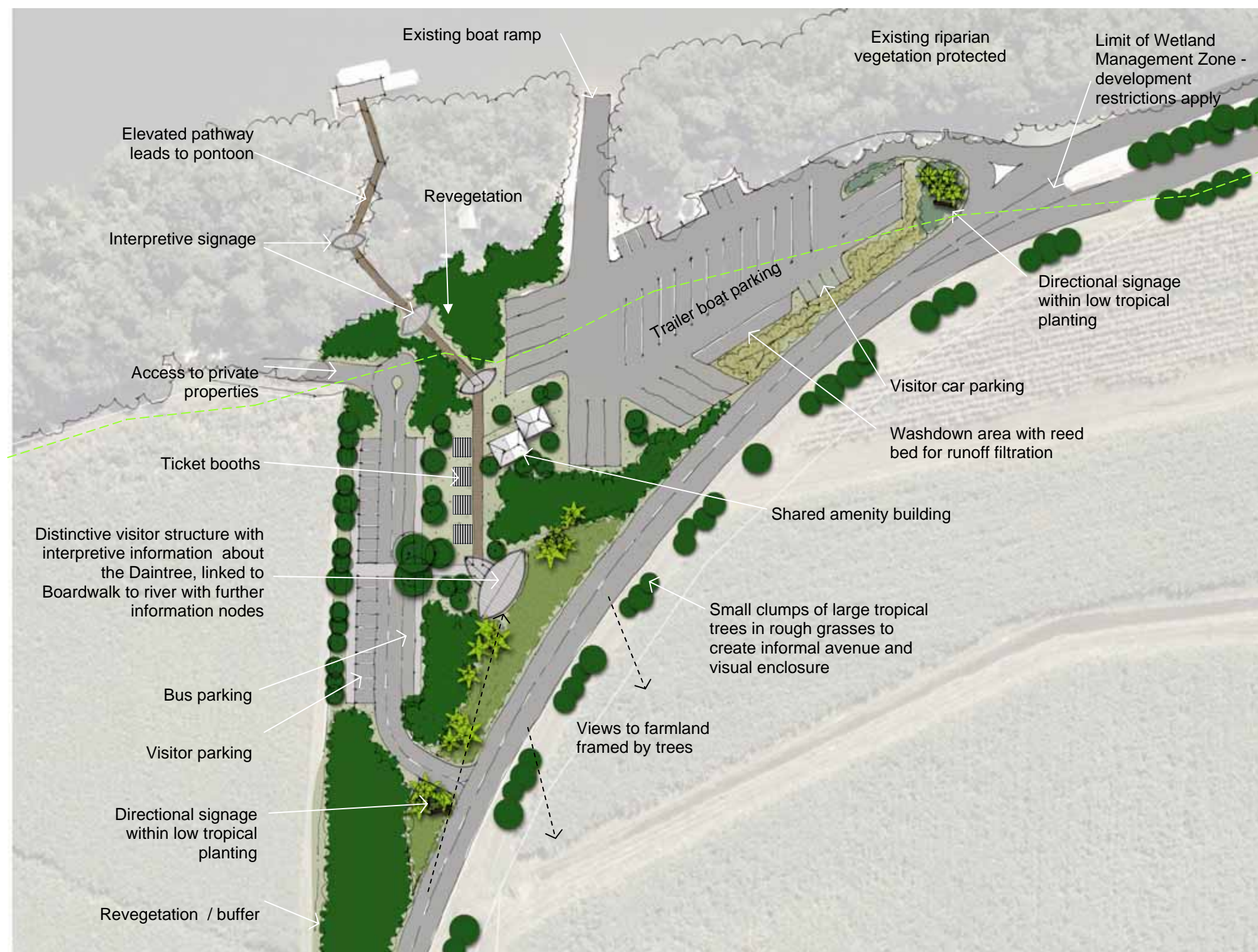
Proposed works

New amenity building to be shared between users of the western precinct.



Proposed view

An elevated pathway leads to the existing pontoon. Sheltered rest stops are provided along the way with signs interpreting the surrounding riparian landscape. Revegetation creates a sense of enclosure and transition to the natural river environment.



Priorities for this area include: clearly defining activity zones, improving the experience for tourists including visual amenity and shade, and improving safety and amenity for public boat ramp users. The initial proposed works required to achieve these priorities are described below and shown in the figure opposite.

- Feature landscape treatments using endemic tropical species to screen the parking areas and provide shade and visual amenity for users. On the southern approach the landscape treatment will evolve from trees in copses to a more continual planting providing a canopy to the road.
- Dedicated vehicle access and parking to the River Cruise access area, including bus parking, and separate access and parking for boat ramp users.
- Distinctive visitor information structure comprising a large roof and deck and information/ interpretation displays
- Formalised board walk (to meet access standards) with interpretive signage connects to pontoon.
- Area allocated along the boardwalk for tour booking booths
- Shared amenities (toilets and picnic areas) between this facility and the boat ramp.
- Extensive revegetation around the new works.
- Revegetate dredge spoil pile and relocate dredge spoil to new location.

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Proposed Works: South Bank

The south bank of the ferry landing was previously the main stopping area for traffic to and from the areas north of the river. Facilities included a cafe and toilet block. Changes to traffic management in this area removed this activity. The cafe has now closed and the toilets are rarely used. There is a river cruise tour operator with a permit to operate from this area, however this is only semi-operational.

This area suffers from visual clutter in the form of domestic style landscaping with exotic species, an array of signage, the ticket booths, a model cassowary, ferry equipment, unformed parking and hard waste. The approach to the area is framed by an overarching tree canopy and could be easily beautified if the visual clutter were diminished.

It is not intended that vehicles stop in this area other than waiting for the ferry. The proposed works are therefore limited to landscape works to beautify the area and a rationalisation of signage.





Existing view



Proposed view

It is proposed that railings be provided near the ferry launch to deter public access to the river. However, a small viewing platform could be provided in this location to allow for safe public viewing and photographing the river. A footpath is proposed along the road to provide access to this platform.

A small car parking area should also be formalised adjacent to the existing toilet block to improve the legibility and amenity of this area.

Clumps of endemic tropical trees are proposed along the southern road, continuing the informal boulevard treatment established throughout the gateway and framing views to adjacent farmland and mountains on the southward journey from the river.



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Proposed Works: North Bank

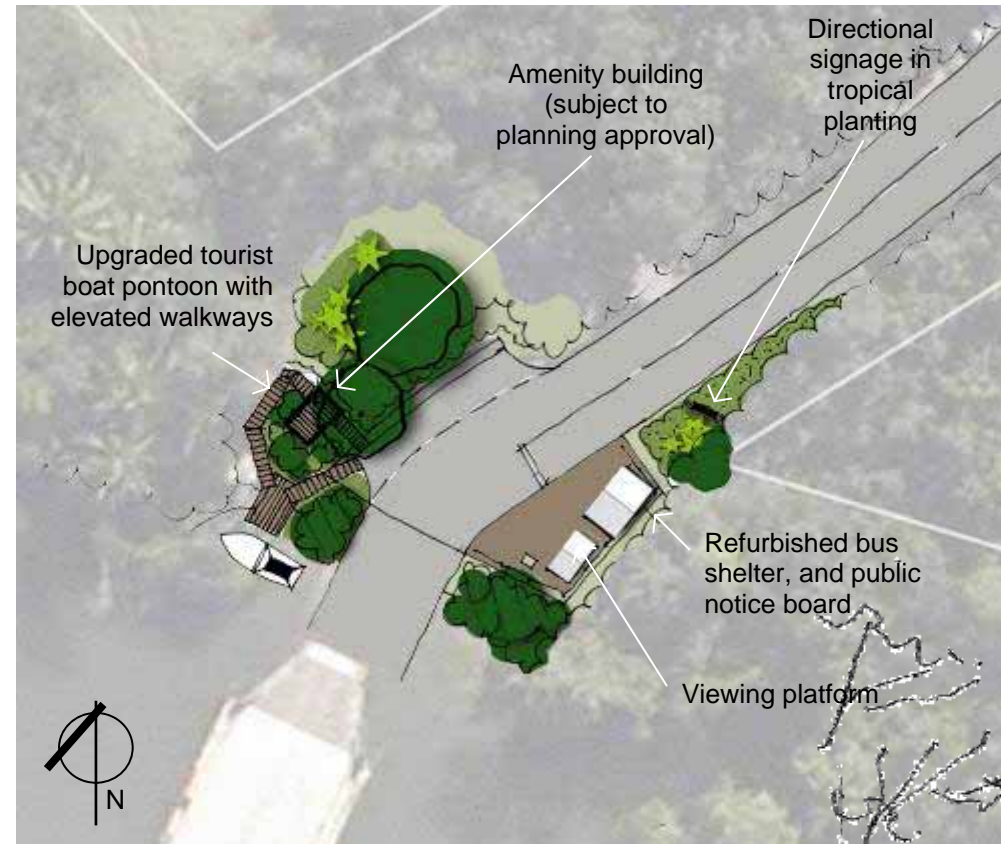
The north bank of the ferry landing is a transitional space where most users are waiting in their vehicles to use the ferry on the journey home. The immediate area for works is relatively small. There is also a bus stop at the landing and parking for buses picking up or dropping off tour boat passengers. This latter function is not well managed from a traffic and pedestrian safety perspective and is a priority for improvement.

As with the south bank it is not intended that vehicles stop in this area other than to wait for the ferry. The proposed works involve overall landscape improvement treatments to beautify the area and a rationalisation of signage. A small toilet facility is also required and a walking track/boardwalk to facilitate boat access is recommended.

The optimum development in this area would include development of a parking area within an existing cleared area of the adjoining lot. This area would be used for tour boat passengers, primarily for buses but also private vehicles. Access to this bus parking area would be approximately 200m north of the ferry landing, thus limiting the need for unsafe bus movements that currently occur within the vicinity of the ferry.

These works would free up space at the ferry stop, enabling the reintroduction of a fresh fruit seller as was popular in the past.

A large pontoon is not proposed in order to protect the integrity of mangroves in this area, instead a small narrow jetty type landing would be appropriate.



Initial Scope of Improvements

Existing view



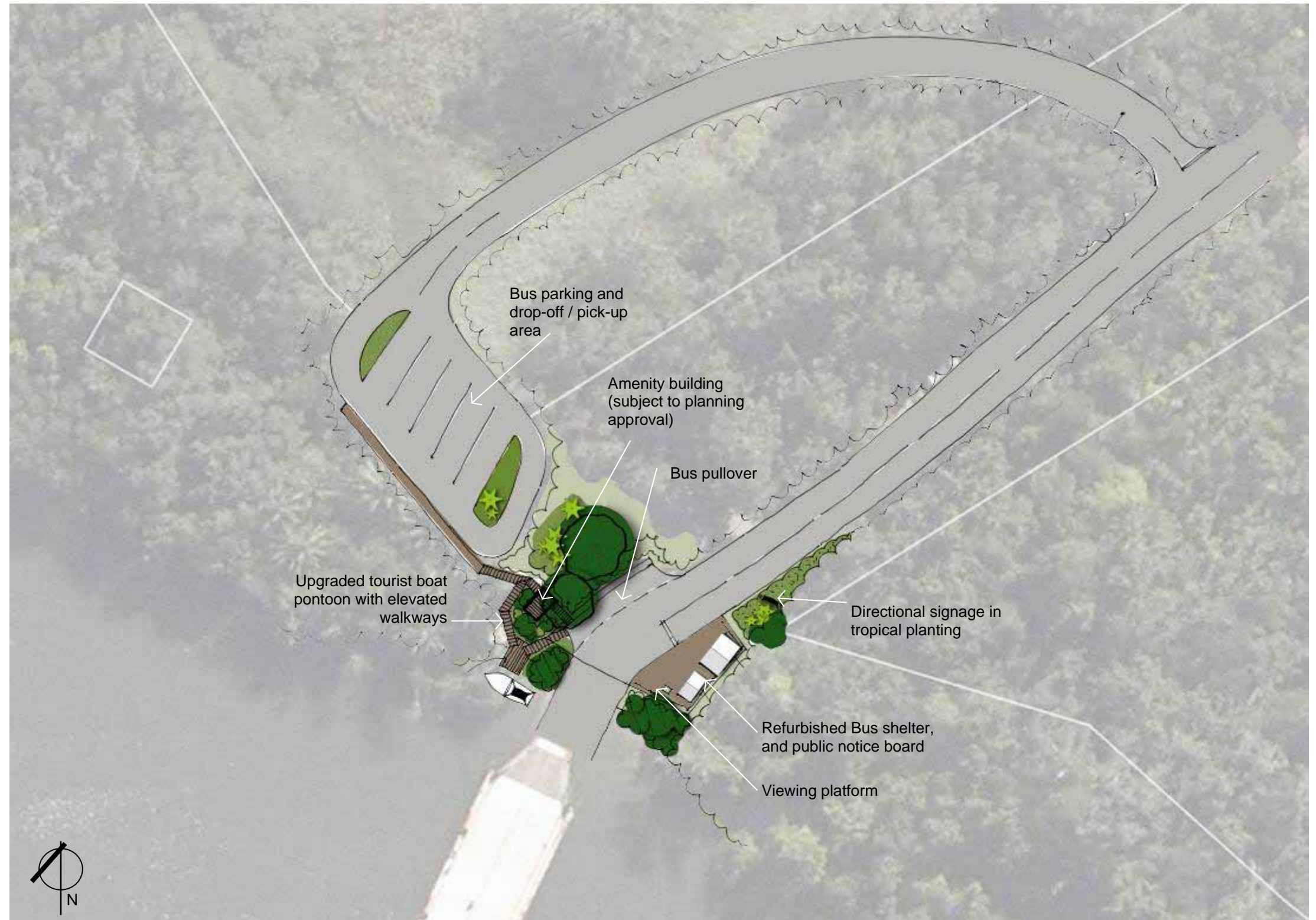
Sketch of viewing platform



Optimum (Long Term) Scope



Character images



Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Traffic, Access and Parking

The Daintree Gateway is dominated by car, bus and light vehicle traffic. There is no provision for cycle or pedestrian traffic within the circulation network, and the poor amenity of the sites at present mean that vehicles are not enticed to stop.

The master plan will improve safety, legibility and amenity for all users and encourage more pedestrian activity at key sites. A schematic representation of the movement network is presented on this page.

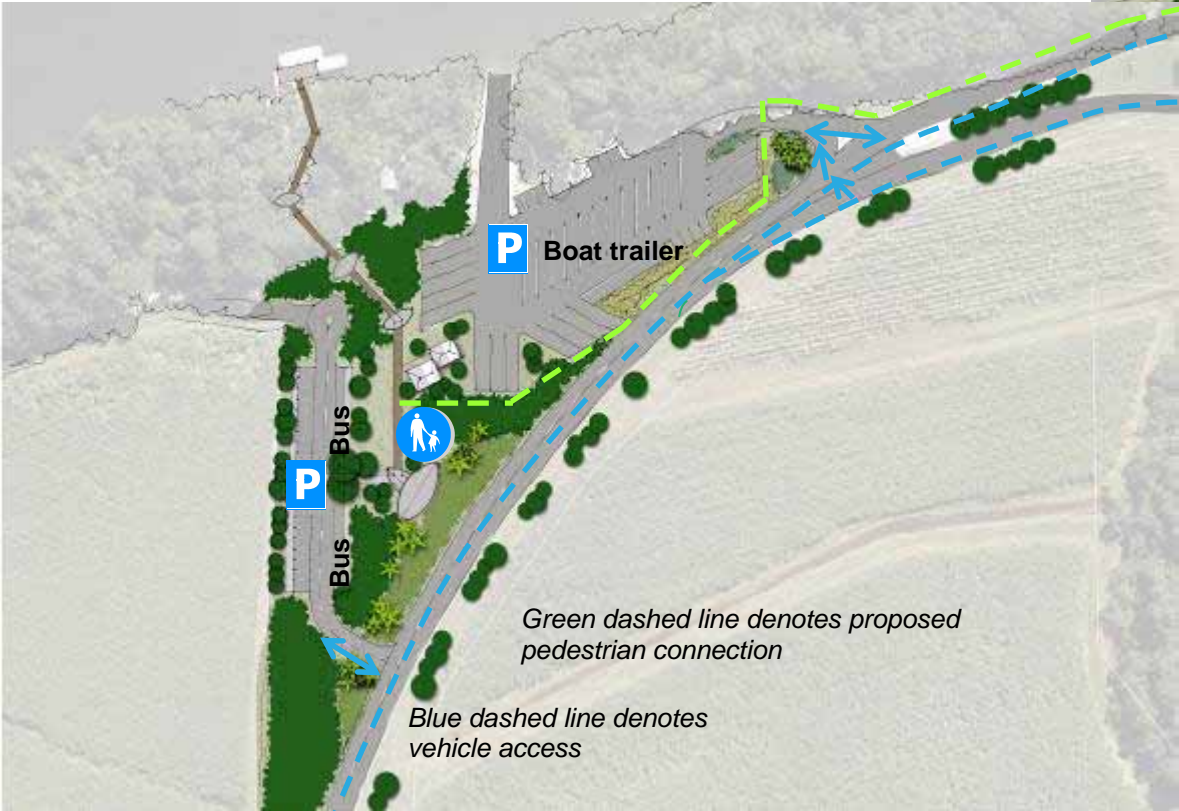
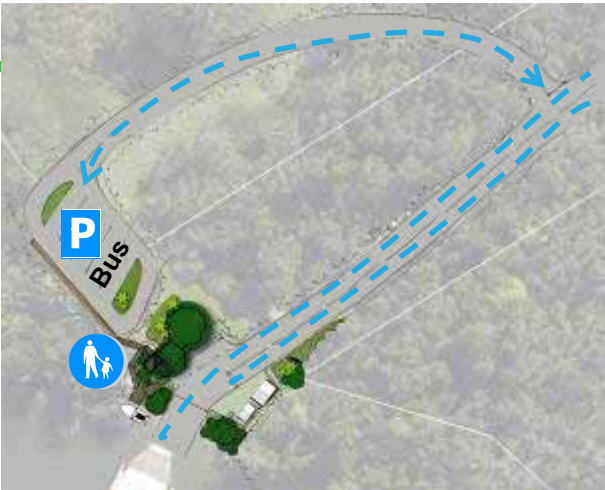
The work scope includes minor road works to develop new turn-offs, improve road safety and manage traffic speed. This includes pavement treatments at intersection, realignment of existing turn-offs,

formalisation of existing parking areas and speed control devices. The scope also includes the provision of formalised parking at the keys sites around the river where unformed parking now exists.

A pedestrian pathway should be developed to provide a safe connection between the day use facilities at the western precinct and the viewing platform adjacent to the ferry.

This pathway with railings would provide glimpses to the River whilst deterring unsafe access to the river edge.

Given the rapid uptake in recreational and tour cycling, it would be ultimately desirable to include a cycle lane providing safe cycle access from Mossman to Cape Tribulation.



Green dashed line denotes proposed pedestrian connection

Blue dashed line denotes vehicle access



Parking Provision

There has been a steady decline in tour coach numbers over recent years with a corresponding decline in coach parking needs at the river. The large increase in free and independent travellers, on the other hand, translates to an increased demand for car parking in the Western Precinct. However, there is a reasonable likelihood these trends may change as the region accesses new inexperienced visitor markets who prefer group travel in the initial stages of market development. For this reason a mix of car and bus parking remains the appropriate response.

The preferred character for roads and parking areas is bitumen with edge strips and landscape swales rather than kerb and channel. Drainage works around roads and parking shall incorporate water sensitive urban design principles.



Landscape Strategy

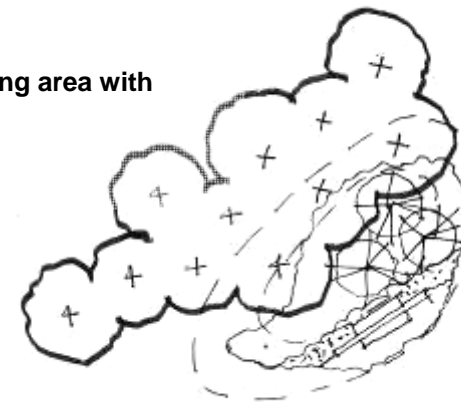
The intent of the landscape strategy is to transition visitors between the open canefields and the enclosed canopy of the Daintree, it should also highlight key areas as a visual cue to visitors.

Firstly, the transition will commence south of the intersection with the introduction of stands (copses) of rainforest species. The copses will introduce the plants, colours and textures of the Daintree rainforest whilst maintaining the wide vistas of canefields and mountain ranges that are the experience south of the river.

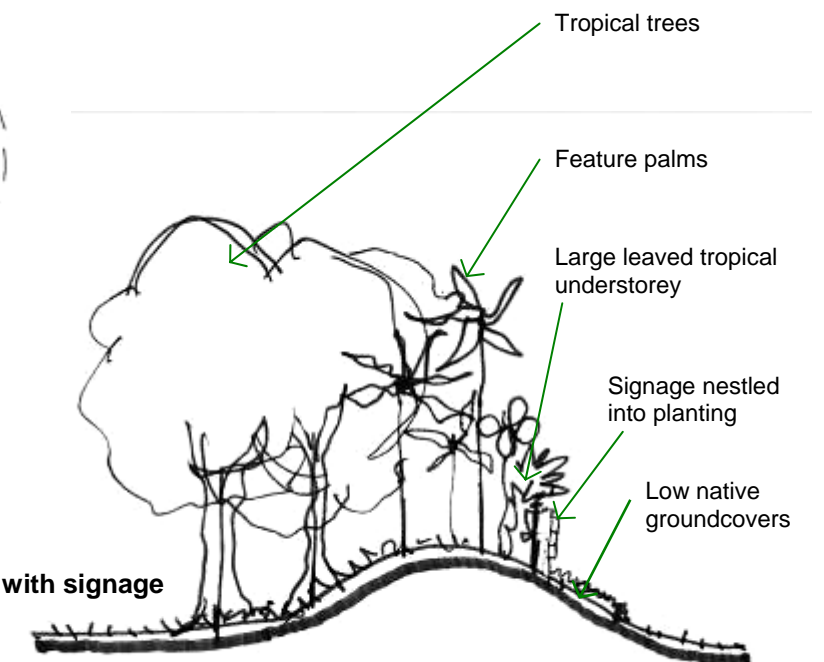
The copses will be continued along the road towards the ferry and the spacing will be reduced as the road turns north and heads towards the Western precinct, beginning to evoke a sense of enclosure within the canopy. The planting will open up a little at the Western Precinct to provide views of the information display and lower level feature landscaping.

East of the western precinct the existing canopy will be retained. Additional copses will be planted on the one way road heading south-west from the ferry to manage the transition back to cane-fields from the

Plan:
Detail of planting area with signage



Section:
Detail of planting area with signage



Suggested Species

The landscape treatments will rely upon endemic species and take inspiration from the layers of green, the array of textures, and the play of light and shade that characterises the Daintree rainforest. Species may include:

Shrubs and Palms:

Adiantum diaphanum **Filmy Maidenhair Fern**
Archontophoenix alexandreae **Alexandra Palm**
Bowenia spectabilis **Zamia Fern**
Cyathea cooperi **Treefern**
Asplenium australasicum **Crows Nest Fern**
Alpinia arctiflora **Pleated ginger**
Alpinia caerulea **Ginger**
Alpinia modesta **Ginger**
Dianella caerulea **Flax Lily**
Ixora biflora **Ixora**
Licuala ramsayi **Fan Palm**
Normanbya normanbyi **Black Palm**
Tapeinochilos ananassae **Ginger**

Tropical Trees:

Acmena hemilampra **Blush Satinash**
Arytera divaricata **Rose Tamarind**
Arytera pauciflora **Pink tamarind**
Barringtonia asiatica **Beach Barringtonia**
Calophyllum calaba var. *australianum* **Blush Touriga**
Castanospermum australe **Black Bean**
Cerbera floribunda **Cassowary Plum**
Cupaniopsis flagelliformis **Brown Tuckeroo**
Cupaniopsis faveolata **White Tamarind**
Davidsonia pruriens **Davidson's Plum**
Diploglottis smithii **Wild Tamarind**
Eleocarpus grandis **Blue Quandong**
Ficus congesta **Cluster Fig**
Flindersia schottiana **Ash**
Harpullia pendula **Tulipwood**
Lindsayomyrtus racemoides **Daintree Penda**
Macaranga tanarius **Macaranga**
Toona ciliata **Red Cedar**

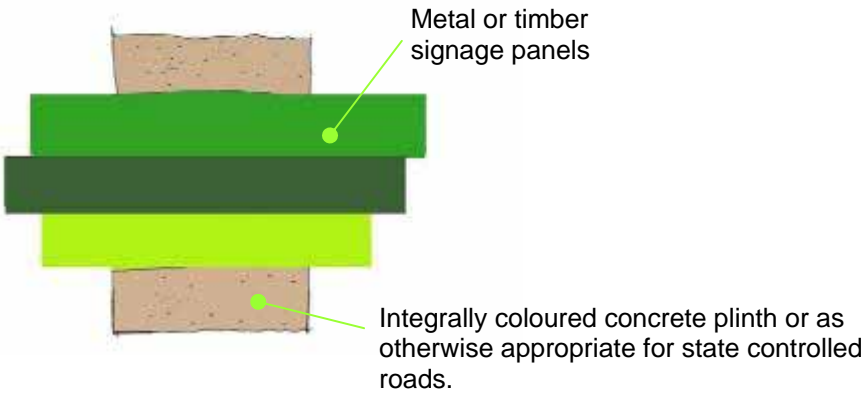


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Signage

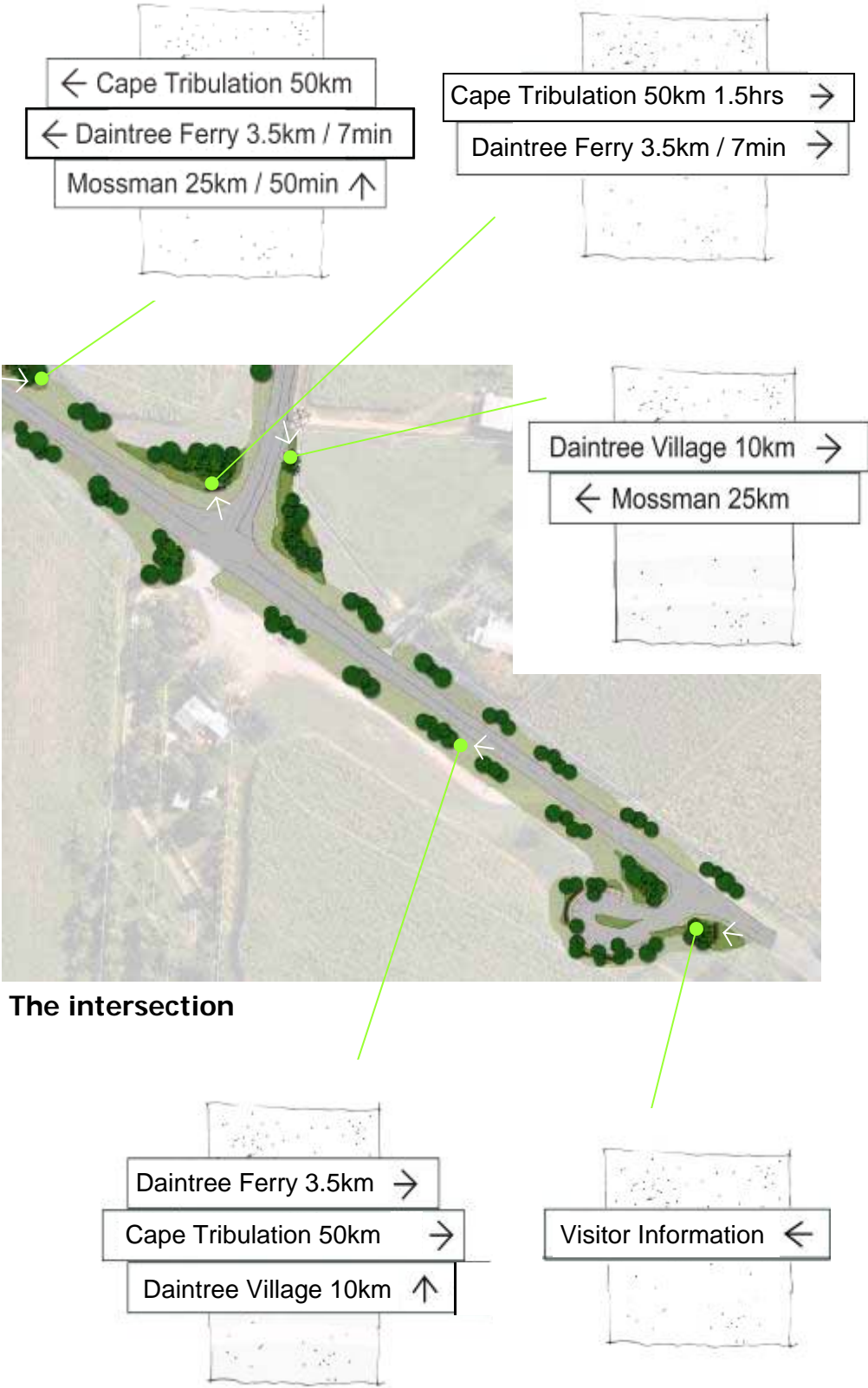
A consistent signage style will be developed and used throughout the Gateway. A priority for signage will be to provide clear information about distances and travel times in the Daintree precinct.

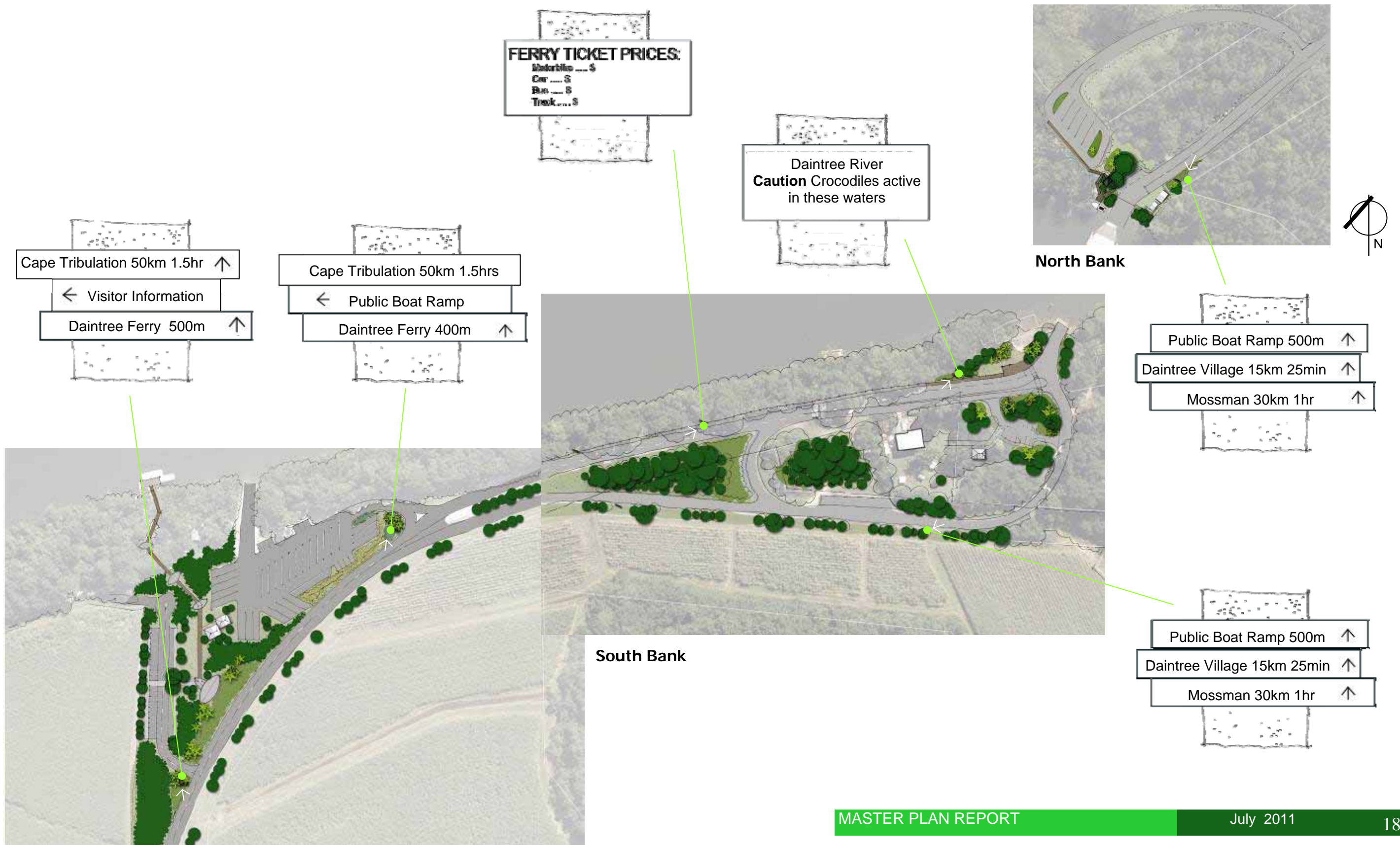
This signage will be introduced south of the intersection and continued to the village and north of the river. The proposed style is a raw finished coloured concrete vertical element with large timber planks and engraved painted, or cut-out metal letters.



Signage Style—
Indicative materials
and colour

Note: Suitability of signage to be negotiated with the Queensland Department of Main Roads and Transport along state controlled roads as it is non standard precinct signage





Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Furniture and Built Form

Colour and Pattern

The theming of the proposed works for the Daintree Gateway is inspired by the layers and shades of green found in the surrounding rainforest. Highlight colours include olives, emerald and cobalt green. Complementing these greens would be shades of brown, such as umber, ochre and raw sienna, reflecting the colours achieved through the natural mangrove dyes of the traditional owners. Plays of light and shadow, texture and pattern will also be used throughout. This will include the textures of the woven dilly bags and the patterns of significant tree species, such as the black palm fronds.

Style and Form

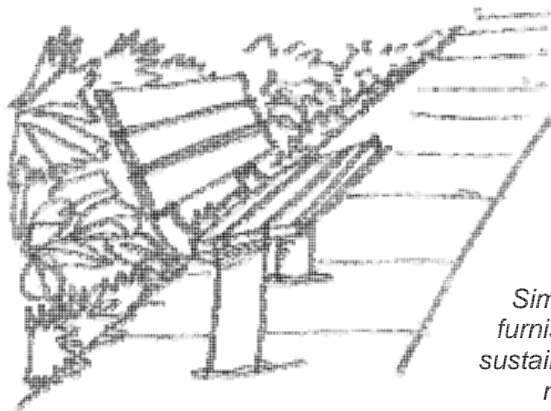
Furniture and built form, including the boardwalks, signage and information displays, must have a distinct style and natural, rainforest character. It is envisaged they will be built of timber and recycled composite timber products, as well as steel and iron detailing and limited use of concrete. Built structures should use naturally coloured timber and dark colours that recede against the forest, with the exception of the two information shelters that should include lighter and brighter colours that should stand out.

Public Art

It is strongly recommended that local artists be commissioned to design aspects of the Daintree Gateway works. A significant opportunity is to commission refined art installations along the ferry approaches where vehicles are waiting.

Other opportunities include:

- detailed design of signage, seating and other furniture elements,
- Information displays at the intersection and western precinct,
- key components of the boardwalks (eg signage, handrail or feature posts).



Simple, robust furnishings using sustainably sourced materials



Sustainability

Sustainable development is one of the guiding principles for the project. New works will be assessed using Council's Sustainability Assessment tool with a target of an overall positive outcome.

Priority sustainability elements for the project will include:

- Low energy design and use of solar PV to supplement grid supply
- Water efficient fixtures and onsite rainwater harvesting and collection
- Use of recycled materials and new materials that are locally sourced wherever possible
- Use of water sensitive urban design to manage and collect stormwater
- Use of endemic species and revegetation of denuded areas
- Design to improve accessibility for all users
- Use of local staff in the construction and operation of works
- Collaboration with existing local businesses
- Staged development plan aligned with budget capacity and priorities
- Opportunities for cycle movement



Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Future Visitor Centre

This report proposes an initial phase of work that will provide visitors with greater access to information through signage and small information nodes at the intersection and western precincts. It is envisaged this will be supplemented through improved web based information and potentially a smart phone application to provide live information.

However, in time, development of an iconic Visitor Centre may be appropriate for the Daintree Gateway. This has the potential to provide a higher level of information and interpretation, particularly about cultural heritage values which are currently under-represented for the visitor experience.

The Visitor Centre is not intended as a 'destination attraction' such as a museum or interpretive centre. The Visitor centre is also not intended as a certified information centre. This would be more appropriate in Port Douglas or Mossman.

The desired outcome from a visitor centre is greater patronage of existing attractions and businesses, as well as higher levels of visitor satisfaction contributing to repeat visitation and word of mouth promotion. Therefore a proposed Visitor centre would need to complement, not compete with, existing attractions, including the new Visitor centre at Mossman Gorge which is currently under construction.

Determination of the ideal scope for the visitor centre will be subject to further investigations and consultation with community and stakeholders. Research undertaken during development of the master plan identified that

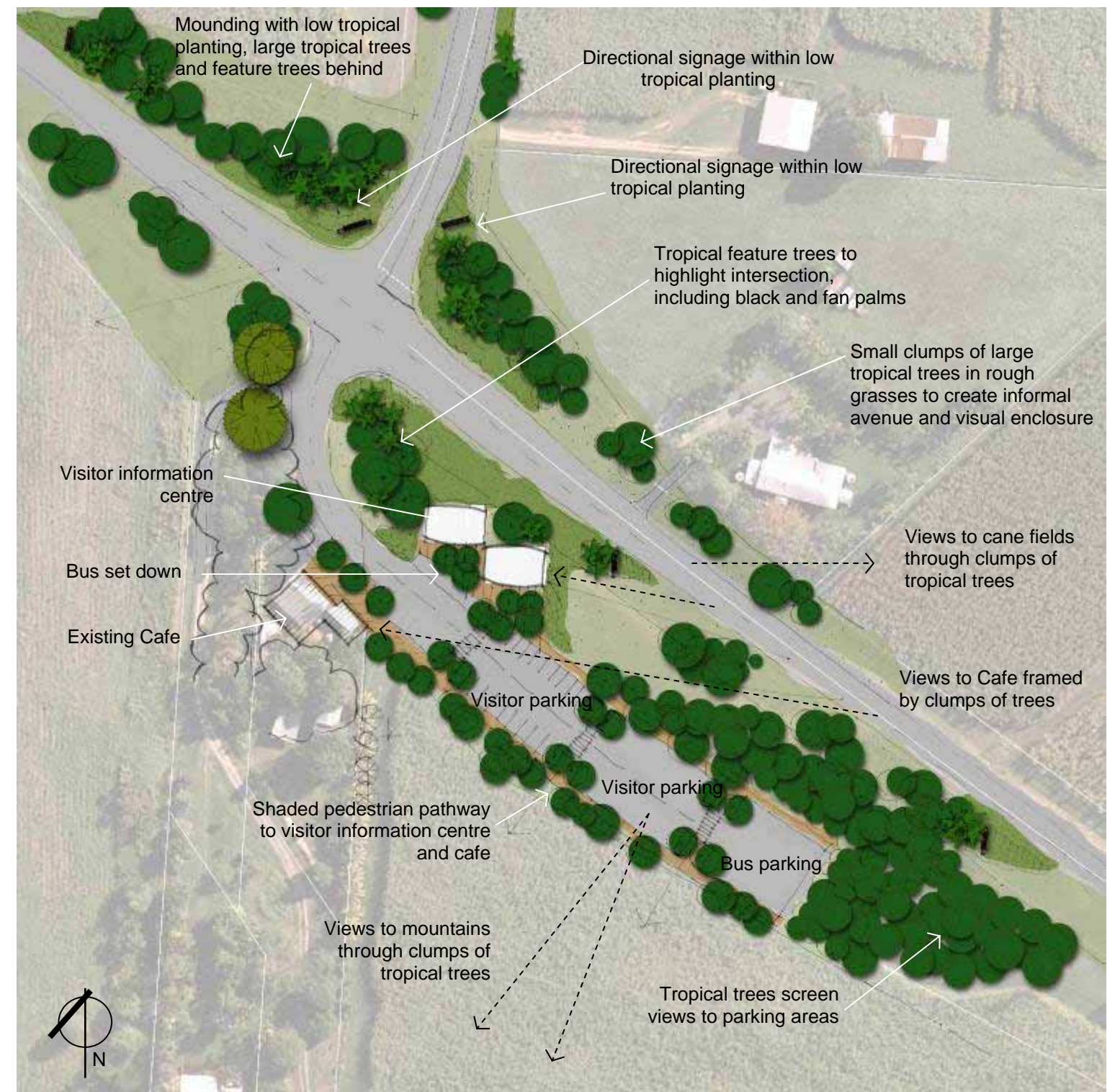
visitor centres are typically revenue negative. We therefore recommend that Council commission a Business Case Study prior to committing to delivery of a visitor centre in order to more clearly understand the cost benefit of such an investment.

Community consultation undertaken for this project indicated that the preferred site for the Visitor Centre would be the intersection. A Visitor Centre could be constructed on the reserve land adjacent to the highway. A conceptual layout is shown here.

The Visitor Centre could be sited so that it will be framed by the new landscape work and highly visible from the Highway. It would also relate to the existing cafe to encourage visitors to use both facilities. Parking would be provided for cars and buses and the development will include landscaped outdoor sitting areas.

The visitor centre is envisaged as an elevated, mostly open timber structure crowned with a large shady roof. It would include elevated walkways where possible and sit lightly upon the landscape. Views to surrounding landscape and environmental features will be celebrated through the built form and landscape design, creating a space where the Daintree character is truly embraced and celebrated.

The design will allow for planting to flow around, under and through these buildings and their associated spaces. The centre will utilise the established planting, colour and materials palette and incorporate art and interpretive materials in the built form.



Other Suggested Works

Virtual Gateway

Our world is becoming increasingly reliant on the internet and social media being used to find information, make decisions and plan our time. Visitors to the Daintree are no exception. The rapid uptake of netbooks, wireless tablet computers, pads and smart phones mean that tourists are connected to this information whenever they are within range of a mobile network.

A Gateway of the future must therefore move beyond the signage and physical displays and consider the way that the Daintree is communicated to visitors long before they arrive in the vicinity. In fact, 'connected' travellers may well arrive in the precinct having decided what they are going to see and with maps and directions already downloaded. For these travellers the signage and information is almost superfluous.

The following initiatives are recommended:

- Create a single Daintree Gateway web portal that is themed to match the physical gateway precinct and provides information about what will be found in the gateway.
- Create links from this page to all other relevant websites.
- Create an identity for the Daintree on Facebook and other social media sites.
- Develop a downloadable phone app
- Upload live information, such as ferry times, weather conditions, tour/attraction opening times, tides and fauna sightings on the website/ social media identities.

Daintree Village

There is anecdotal evidence that a significant number of visitors to Daintree Village go there by accident rather than choice, mistakenly believing the Village is the way to go north of the river. A risk of investing in the gateway project is that fewer visitors will make this mistake and the Daintree Village will suffer from a loss of visitation.

During the master planning project consideration was given to projects that could be undertaken in the village to improve the appeal of the village as a destination to counteract the potential decline in numbers. As an initial work stage, landscaping, signage and general amenity upgrades are recommended to improve the overall visual appeal of the village. It is recommended that a signage master plan and built form master plan be developed for the village.

Other recommended options include:

- development of walking track options, including a heritage walk in the village, a river walk along the river bend and potentially an elevated boardwalk and lookout at the reach; and
- access to Martin Creek Falls.

Other options, which would be subject to private investment or public-private partnerships might include:

- a Daintree Heritage Museum
- birdhides and birdwatching tours
- dinner attractions that could be added to the end of a day trip, such as sunset dinner on the river, or dinner and spotlighting packages.



Example Smart Phone App from tourist destination in Queensland



Existing images of the Daintree Village



Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Implementation Strategy

Strategic Approach

It was apparent during consultation about this project that past efforts to plan for the redevelopment of this area have not come to fruition and the community are sceptical about its implementation would deliver yet another plan that would 'sit on the shelf' and not be realised. In response to this concern, the master plan quite deliberately identifies a series of relatively small interventions that are within the scope of Council and the community to collaboratively plan and deliver. The cumulative outcome for these initiatives will be the transformation of the gateway precinct.

The location, scope and design characteristics of the proposed works are described throughout this report. The program detailed in this section of the report suggests a timeframe and high level budget for delivery of the works.

Community Participation

The Daintree communities, both north and south of the river, will be significant beneficiaries of this project through the overall improved amenity and access in their area and the stimulation of tourism activity and spending. It would therefore be opportune to involve the community to participate in delivery of the project.

The most obvious strategy is for the community to get involved in landscape works through activities such as propagation of selected species and assisting with the extensive planting and revegetation that is proposed between the intersection and western precinct. This could be potentially delivered by local landcare, charity or school groups—maybe through a series of community planting days.

Other opportunities for community participation include participation in detailed design of the works, creation of art for inclusion in the works, research for the interpretive displays and fabrication of components.

Tenure

Generally, the proposed works are located on land that Council has tenure over or are within a road reserve. It is envisaged the majority of these works can proceed without protracted negotiations to resolve tenure issues or the need to purchase land, including the works at the intersection that are planned within a Reserve for which Council is trustee.

Three key exceptions exist, these are discussed below.

Western Precinct: works within the Western Precinct are largely on road reserve and partially within a coastal esplanade. Most of the current occupants of the site have a permit to occupy which provides legal tenure for the operation of the ticket sales booths. Some operators also have permits to occupy at other frontages along the river.

Council Officers have advised Council's preference is to acquire the area of the Road Reserve identified for improvement works in this master plan, and ideally convert the land to freehold. The State Government could be requested to grant the land as an in-kind contribution to the project. This outcome is the optimum project outcome.

If the land remains a Reserve, either in the trusteeship of Council or the State, a Management Plan will need to be developed by the Trustees and other stakeholders in accordance with the provisions of the Land Act (1994). The purpose of the master plan would be to obtain permission to use the reserves for the proposed uses outlined in this report and accordingly the management plan would be based on the content of this document. It is envisaged the Management Plan would include, amongst other matters, mechanisms for Council to lease new ticket booths to operators and for the existing permits to fall away.

The Management Plan process set out under the Land Act includes a community consultation process that would enable community input to the detailed design and proposed management arrangements for this area.

Carpark at South Bank: It is understood that Eastern Kuku Yalanji are the traditional owners of this reserve. Their agreement would be required prior to upgrade works being undertaken on this site.

North Bank: The ultimate design solution for the north bank is contingent on purchase or lease of the adjoining site for parking and access. This land is privately owned and so is subject to confidential negotiations between Council and the land owner.

Management of Private Businesses Western Precinct

It is not intended that development of the western precinct directly or exclusively benefit the small number of operators who currently work from this precinct. However, at the same time the project does not seek to disadvantage established businesses who are part of the existing commercial framework.

Whilst tour bus operators do not require ticket booths for their operational model the increase in independent travellers to the region presents a strong case for retaining a presence for tour operators in the Western Precinct.

The proposed model includes scope for up to four operators to lease ticket booths from Council within the new managed western precinct area. The leases are intended to replace the current permits to occupy.

The booths would be to a standard design and would be accessed by the proposed boardwalk. In many ways they would be a like for like replacement of what currently exists, albeit more attractive. The operators would pay Council a lease fee, structured along similar lines to the Reef Fleet Terminal and other facilities that lease floor space to competing operators. This is discussed further in the Business Case section to follow.

Approvals

Key approvals that will apply to works in the Gateway are summarised below.

- The proposed works occur on road reserve, coastal esplanade and some other reserve tenures. An approved Management Plan will be required, in accordance with the Land Act 1994, to enable the works.
- The area is adjacent to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and WTMA will therefore be a referral or concurrence agency for development applications.
- The area is very likely to include 'Matters of National Environmental Significance' listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, and therefore a referral to the Federal Minister may be required. (Refer Appendix D). Refer Information Box this page.
- Areas of mapped remnant vegetation exist within the study area and limited clearing may be required to deliver the works. This will require a permit under the Vegetation Management Act 1999.
- The Daintree is identified as a Key Coastal Site under the Wet Tropics Coastal Management Plan, including the ferry crossing but not the western precinct. DERM will therefore be a referral or concurrence agency for development applications under the provision of the Coastal Management Act 1995.
- The new Queensland Coastal Plan is to take effect in mid 2011 along with updates to the provisions of the Coastal Management Act 1995. This plan will replace the Wet Tropics Coastal Management Plan. It includes provisions for 'Coastal Hazard Areas' (identifying areas under threat of sea level rise) and areas of 'Environmental Significance' within the Coastal region. The mapping for areas of Environmental Significance have not yet been released, however it is expected that the provisions of this plan will need to be considered in the context of this work and that DERM will continue to be a referral agency.
- The study area is within the footprint of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji Indigenous Land Use Agreement and Yalanji have specific rights and interests over land within the precinct. Agreement will be required for works over lands directly affected by the ILUA and it is recommended that further consultation be undertaken with Traditional Owners as a best practice approach.
- The Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031, State Planning Policies, Iconic Places legislation and Douglas Planning Scheme all have relevance to the project. Planning approvals will be required for some works in accordance with the Sustainable Planning Act 2009.
- Works could impact on State Fisheries and may require relevant approvals.
- The Department of Transport and Main Roads will have some jurisdiction/interest in the area due to both vehicular and maritime movements and should be consulted even if they do not have concurrence or referral rights.

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

The EPBC is the Australian Government's key piece of environmental legislation and is intended to protect rare and endangered species. The Act applies to development and activities likely to affect Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) which include world heritage properties, wetlands of international importance, threatened species and ecological communities, migratory species and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The legislation therefore clearly applies to work in the Daintree.

The legislation requires that proposed actions are referred to the Minister for consideration. The referral must include information regarding the value of the affected areas, nature of the proposed works, potential impact of the works on the MNES and mitigation measures.

The Minister may decide that the action must not occur, that the action is a controlled action and therefore requires an Environmental Impact Assessment or that the action is not a controlled action and may proceed as proposed. In making a decision the Minister must take into account the risk to the MNES posed by the development and the extent to which ESD principles

Daintree Gateway Master Plan

Business Case

Cost-Benefit

The business case for this proposed project can not be expressed as a simple or direct return on investment, particularly in terms of Council's investment. The explicit intent not to add another attraction that would compete with existing businesses means there is a limited income stream likely to be derived from this work. Research undertaken for this project demonstrates that Visitor Centres across the globe tend to generate insufficient revenue to cover operational costs, therefore bringing forward this project would exacerbate rather than improve the situation.

As with many of Council's projects, investment must therefore be assessed in terms of community and environmental benefit. The projected benefits from this project include:

- better management of environmentally sensitive areas;
- enhanced visitor approval and reputation for the area;
- increased patronage of Daintree businesses due to tourists being more informed;
- Additional opportunities for custodial communities to leverage value from the tourism activity; and
- improved traffic and pedestrian safety.

Potential Revenue—Western Precinct

It is proposed that Council lease tickets booths to tour operators in the Western Precinct instead of the current configuration of booths located on permits to occupy within the roads reserve. This offers an opportunity for a small revenue stream that may offset some of the operational costs in this area.

It is difficult to estimate a market rate for the ticket booths proposed, as there is no established market rate and few comparative models.

Proposed Visitor Centre

The Master Plan includes provision for information signage at pullover areas and there is the opportunity for mobile phone applications and radio for instance to provide more detailed information. Coach tours will not avail themselves of an information centre, as they have an existing itinerary and their tour guide will be providing information already.

A Visitor Centre may be of interest to independent travellers. However the disadvantage of a visitor centre is that it takes time out of what is already a full day if visitors are to see all attractions and return to their accommodation typically in Port Douglas or Cairns. It is also most unlikely that it will cover its operating costs, especially since as soon as there are goods and / or services for sale, they will be competing with other operators. In addition, international experience is that visitor centres, however modelled, almost invariably make losses.

In these circumstances, careful further investigation of the role, value adding and business model that might be adopted for a visitor centre are called for. This report recommends a Visitor Centre be delayed until after the proposed works are delivered, and a Feasibility Study be completed prior to committing to the project.

Program and Budget

Program

A proposed program for staging the works has been developed for discussion. The project aims to progress as a priority landscape works in the Intersection and Western Precinct and deliver all of the proposed initial work scope within 3-5 years.

The program includes the following considerations:

- Forward programming of works requiring environmental approvals (western precinct and north bank)
- Forward programming of small works that will deliver immediate visual benefit (landscape and signage)
- Prioritisation of the western precinct ahead of the north bank.

Budget

The following preliminary order of costs have been prepared to give Council guidance on likely future budget requirements for the implementation of the Master Plan. These figures are based on benchmarking and indicative costing of key items. These costs do not include land acquisitions and services. In summary, the order of costs are:

Intersection	\$560,000
Western Precinct (Stage 1)	\$280,000
Western Precinct (Stage 2)	\$2.2 million
South Bank (Stage 1)	\$240,000
South Bank (Stage 2)	\$280,000
North Bank (Stage 2)	\$280,000
North Bank (Stage 3)	\$1.4 million
Visitor Information Centre	\$TBC

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Future
Intersection				
Landscape, signage and intersection treatment				
Upgrade pull-over area				
Western Precinct				
Landscape and signage				
Design and approvals for works				
Reconfigure parking and access, provide amenities				
Information shelter, tour concessions, board walk to pontoon, interpretive signage and landscaping				
South Bank				
Landscape and signage				
Upgrade access and parking				
North Bank				
Landscape and signage				
Design and approvals for works, land acquisition				
Toilets and ramp access to tour boats				
New parking area, access road and landscaping				
Visitor Centre				
Feasibility Study/Business Case				
Development of centre and displays				



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