



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

West Leederville Railway Footbridge is a pleasantly proportioned structure. It sits unobtrusively beside the station platform beneath the cotton palms that line Railway Avenue at this point, contributing to the aesthetic qualities of the streetscape. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

The railways were vital to the development and expansion of Perth and Western Australia. *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* is part of that history and has direct links with the second phase of development of the suburban railway system (mid-1890s) when the double track was laid and new stations were added to the line. (Criterion 2.1)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

West Leederville Railway Footbridge has provided access from West Leederville railway station to the Subiaco Oval for football games, and has been used for this purpose since the opening of Subiaco Oval in 1909. (Criterion 4.1)

West Leederville Railway Footbridge links Subiaco and West Leederville over a railway line that physically divides them. It is important for its contribution to both suburb's sense of place and sense of community. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

West Leederville Railway Footbridge is the last remaining of the timber footbridges constructed on the Eastern Railway Line around the turn of the century and is the only Queen Post footbridge surviving in Western Australia. (Criterion 5.1)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

West Leederville Railway Footbridge is representative of a number of timber footbridges constructed during the mid-1890s, when the Perth-Fremantle railway line was duplicated and new stations built. (Criterion 6.1)

12.3 CONDITION

The fabric of *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* is fully exposed to environmental conditions and deteriorating. Some of the timber is in poor condition, but the structure appears sound at present. Recent structural and security modifications are visually intrusive.

12.4 INTEGRITY

West Leederville Railway Footbridge fulfils the original intention in the same form as the original structure although the long-term sustainability is uncertain. The structure has moderate integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

West Leederville Railway Footbridge has moderate authenticity. Some of the structure has been replaced and structural and security modifications, unsympathetic to the original fabric, have been introduced.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Ham-Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Katrina Chisholm, Graduate Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

West Leederville Railway Footbridge is a timber pedestrian bridge spanning the Perth-Fremantle railway line at the West Leederville railway station. It was constructed in 1897, to a standard Government Railway plan, and 'renewed' in 1944.¹

As early as 1872, discussions were under way on a railway link between Perth/Fremantle and York, but there was controversy about whether the line should be on the north or south side of the Swan River. While the Legislative Council preferred the southern route, the Public Works Department found that the construction of a railway bridge across Perth Water would make the southern route £40,000 more expensive than a northern route. The northern route was chosen instead, authorised by the Eastern Railway Act, 1878.²

The Fremantle-Guildford railway line was a single track constructed by John Robb at a cost of £74,592. Station buildings, platforms, goods shed, etc were constructed under separate contracts.³ The line was opened in 1881, and extended through York to Beverley. The Beverley to Albany section, opened in 1889, was known as the Great Southern Railway.

Demand from passengers was high. Rail travel was faster than water transport, and faster and more comfortable than horse-drawn vehicles. Communities along the line grew rapidly. The increase in traffic necessitated the installation of double track.⁴

In its report on the Eastern Railway Duplication the Public Works Department stated, in its Annual Report of 1896/7:

...a list of principal works for which contracts have been prepared and let in this branch at a total cost of £37,980 - New station buildings or extensions at the following places, that is, North Fremantle, Cottesloe Beach, Claremont, Karrakatta, Subiaco, Leederville, East Perth, Bayswater, Guildford and Woodbridge, together with new overbridges at all these stations. The station buildings have been designed to meet full requirements, including platforms on both lines, and, as already stated, overbridges connecting the two platforms, stockyards, carriage docks, etc...⁵

In a statement on expenditure, the Public Works Department quoted £1,051 as the cost of the overbridges and reported that the work was finished that year, 1897.⁶ Bayswater, Cottesloe Beach, Karrakatta and Leederville railway

¹ *Report of the Department of Public Works for the Year 1896/7*. Perth, Gov. Printer, 1897. p. 52 & 104-5; 'West Leederville Station Buildings & improvements, 1965-1974', WAGR File, Public Records Office.

² *Eastern Railway Act, 1878*. Act No. 27 of that year.

³ Tunbridge, R. *One Hundred Years: The Perth to Fremantle Railway*. Lee Steere Essay Competition, 1982. Photocopy. Battye Library. p. 2.

⁴ Minchin, R. S. & Higham, G. J. *Robb's Railway: Fremantle to Guildford Railway Centenary, 1881-1981*. Bassendean, Australian Railway Historical Society, WA Division, 1981. p. 45.

⁵ *Report of the Department of Public Works for the Year 1896/7*. op cit. p. 52.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 104-105.

stations were part of a single tender won by H. Parker, in May 1897, at a cost of £8,795.8.3.⁷

Between 1904 and 1922, there were more than 700,000 journeys booked each year at the Leederville station, with a peak of 1,268,000 in 1913/14. During those years, the station employed 5 to 7 people as the number of houses in West Leederville doubled from 2,555 in 1901 to 5,457 in 1911.⁸

The station at West Leederville was usually referred to as Leederville at this time. The name was changed to West Leederville around 1912/13.⁹

After World War One, cars and buses began to appear on Perth roads, and rail patronage fell. There was a turnaround during World War Two when petrol rationing caused passenger numbers to soar, but by 1950, with growing prosperity, rail passenger numbers were down again.¹⁰ The population of Perth was spreading along the north-south axis, making an east-west rail link less economically feasible. Between 1964 and 1974, most stations were reduced to halts only, and full-time staff were withdrawn.¹¹ Many of the older station buildings were demolished and replaced with contemporary style shelters.¹²

On 16 January 1979, despite growing public awareness that dependence on cars could not continue indefinitely, the Government closed the Fremantle-Perth line. However, in 1983, the new Labour government re-opened the line, and in 1991, the line was electrified.

Despite the downturn in rail patronage generally, West Leederville Railway Station was very busy after football games and pop concerts held at the Subiaco Oval.¹³ People trying to get onto the station caused congestion on the *West Leederville Railway Footbridge*. The Chief Traffic Officer wrote to the Civil Engineer about the matter, in September 1969.

The severe congestion which occurs on the overhead bridge at West Leederville during the football season, and the difficulty experienced at these times in restraining intending passengers from adopting dangerous practices, has resulted in consideration being given to replacing the overhead bridge with a pedestrian subway. Would you kindly advise the anticipated remaining life of the overhead bridge and estimate for the provision of a subway.¹⁴

The Civil Engineer's reply was that *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* had been 'renewed' in August 1944, and was therefore only 25 years old.

⁷ *Western Australian Government Gazette*. 14 May 1897. p. 917.

⁸ National Trust Assessment. 10 August 1993, updated March 1995. HCWA File 3290; Gill, Barbara & Gay, Beverley. *West Leederville Primary School, 1898-1988*. P. & C. Assoc., 1988. p. 10.

⁹ Minchin, R.S. & Higham, G.J. op cit. p. 52.

¹⁰ Tunbridge, R. op cit. p. 11

¹¹ Minchin, R. S. & Higham, G. J. op cit. p. 45;

¹² Tunbridge, R. op cit. p. 12.

¹³ 'West Leederville station buildings & improvements 1965-1974'. op cit.; Spillman, Ken. *Identity Prized: A History of Subiaco*. Nedlands, UWA Press for the City of Subiaco, 1985. pp. 315-318.

¹⁴ 'West Leederville station buildings and improvements'. op cit. Letter to Civil Engineer from Chief Traffic Officer, 26 September 1969.

The footbridge over the Up and Down mains at West Leederville is in very sound condition and with normal maintenance should have a life of at least another ten years.¹⁵

The current design of *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* is simpler than the footbridge built in 1897. The finials on the posts, and the wire arch that held the lantern, are no longer part of the structure.¹⁶ Photographs and drawings of the footbridge at Subiaco railway station, show the same changes. The 'renewal' that took place in 1944, may have been quite extensive, and applied to more than just *West Leederville Railway Footbridge*.

Westrail is now planning to replace *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* with a pedestrian subway. With the upgrading of Subiaco Oval for national league football games, including night games, and the insistence of Subiaco Council that people use public transport to attend the games, the numbers using West Leederville Railway Station is set to increase. That the footbridge will not be able to cope with this increased use is clear. What is not clear is why the footbridge has to go. It should be able to co-exist with a subway. *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* is the last remaining of the timber footbridges constructed on the Eastern Railway Line around the turn of the century and is the only surviving Queen Post footbridge in Western Australia.¹⁷

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The West Leederville Railway Station is located 2.7 kilometres west of the *Perth Railway Station* on the line to Fremantle. *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* is sited at the western end of the station platform. The structure is isolated in the setting, apart from the station shelters which are located further east.

The footbridge is a painted timber structure with concrete footings and iron fixings. The engineering style is known as Queen Post construction. The U-shaped plan form is symmetrical about the centre line running parallel with the tracks and is accessed from the east. The structure has an overall length of approximately 19 metres and spans nearly 13.5 metres, some 4 metres above the line. The open riser staircases on each side of the platform have a gentle gradient and are comprised of a set of steps running parallel with the platform terminating at a quarter landing. Further steps, at right angles to the platform, lead to the upper, flat section of the bridge spanning the tracks which is supported between cross-braced, timber trusses and is approximately 2.2 metres wide.

The stair carriages run between newel posts which have substantial concrete footings at the base of the flight. The longer posts of the quarter landings are cross-braced. Three intermediate balusters support the sloping handrail and wire trellis spanning between the newel posts. The stair treads are supported on a central stringer. Additional metal, angle support brackets have been supplied at the junction with the outer carriages. A non-slip finish has been

¹⁵ ibid. 30 October 1969.

¹⁶ Photograph, 1920. 3262B/179, Battye Library Photographic Collection & Photograph, 1990, HCWA File 3290; Ways & Works Plan No. 2936/3.

¹⁷ Research by W. Larke, ex Westrail engineer, passed on by HCWA Councillor Bruce James.

applied to the front of the treads. The timber planks of the landing and upper flat portion of the bridge are overlaid with asphalt.

Comparison with construction drawings and an early photograph of *West Leederville Railway Footbridge* show that, while the structure retains the original form, there have been numerous alterations to the fabric since construction in 1897.¹⁸ These changes include the loss of the arched light fittings and supports at the quarter landings, the decorative timber detailing of the handrail and newel posts and the timber boarding enclosing the triangular section under the stair.¹⁹ The vertical, timber risers of each step no longer exist and some of the treads have been replaced and provided with additional bracketing. The concrete footings to the newel posts at the base of the stairs are not evident in either the early photograph or drawings and similarly there have been minor alterations to the intermediate balusters.

With the electrification of the train line in 1991, extra security was required to restrict public access and ensure passenger safety. Metal screens and barbed wire have been located on each side of the flat portion of the bridge. It is possible that the additional steel post and beam supporting the east truss on the south platform were introduced at this time. A surveillance camera is obvious immediately above. Concrete posts supporting the electric wires have been located close to the base of each stair.

These alterations to the fabric and the lost relationship to the former station, which has been demolished, have compromised the integrity of *West Leederville Railway Footbridge*. As a result, the footbridge has lost much of the early charm. The original detailing exploited the qualities of the fabric, and conveyed a sense of elegance more successfully than the current, more robust structure which displays an insensitivity to fabric and setting.

The footbridge is in fair condition. Some of the timber is deteriorating. The loss of structural efficacy is evident in the provision of supplementary supports. Superficially, rusting fixings have stained the paintwork and some of the asphalt toppings are badly worn.

13.3 REFERENCES

No key references.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

¹⁸ Photograph 3262B/174 from the Battye Library, c.1920 and PWD drawing 2936/3 Sheets 1-3.

¹⁹ This boarding appears on the above photograph but is not included on the construction drawings. The photograph shows only the north platform so it is not possible to determine whether the boarding existing on the stair opposite.