

This is the third community newsletter on the progress of investigations into upgrading the Pacific Highway through Coffs Harbour and between Sapphire and Woolgoolga (including possible bypasses).

INTRODUCTION

The Coffs Harbour Planning Strategy covers two sections of the Pacific Highway.

There is a shorter-term plan to upgrade the northern section between Sapphire and Woolgoolga to dual carriageways to improve road safety and travel conditions.

In the south, the feasibility of a long-term bypass of Coffs Harbour is being investigated.

Both sections are being considered at the same time to ensure the highway upgrade for the northern section is compatible with any long-term proposal to bypass Coffs Harbour. Making a decision now about the future traffic needs for Coffs Harbour will provide greater certainty for current and future planning and development for the area.

The investigations have been undertaken by a Steering Committee with representatives from Coffs Harbour City Council, the Roads and Traffic Authority, and PlanningNSW.

COFFS HARBOUR SECTION

By March this year, the Steering Committee was able to reduce the options for the Coffs Harbour section to the inner corridor and upgrading the existing highway.

Details were provided via public displays and forums. A second information sheet was released and community submissions were invited.

In May, Coffs Harbour City Council resolved to commission an independent peer review of the planning process for the Coffs Harbour section. As a result, further work on the southern section has been deferred until the results of the peer review are considered.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The public display in March attracted wide community interest with more than 1,600 written

submissions and 600 comment forms received by the project team. The submissions are summarised in the *Community Involvement Summary Report (Corridor Options Stage)*. The report is now available (see back page for details).

Community comments covered a range of issues including: road safety, noise, air quality, visual impact, property, environment and social impact—particularly how the highway might physically separate communities.

A range of views were expressed regarding the inner corridor bypass of Coffs Harbour, earlier bypass options, suggested alternative bypass options and the option of upgrading the existing highway.

Varying levels of support or opposition were expressed for each of the three Woolgoolga bypass options, while respondents were evenly divided on the issue of upgrading the existing highway. Developing and refining the routes within each Woolgoolga bypass corridor was seen as a priority with the aim of reducing the number of properties affected. Another major issue was the potential impact on Woolgoolga's banana industry and subsequent impact on the local economy and employment.

SAPPHIRE TO WOOLGOOLGA SECTION

Community Focus Groups (CFGs)

The CFGs have played an important role, providing a link between the wider community and the Steering Committee. While they are not decision-making bodies, the CFGs are kept informed of project developments and investigation results.

In response to requests for additional information, the Sapphire/Moonee and Woolgoolga CFGs have been provided with schematic plans of proposals for upgrading the existing highway and the three bypass options. This more detailed information will enable CFG members to seek feedback from the communities they represent.

CFG members can be contacted by calling the toll free number on the back page.

Refining the route options

At the beginning of the investigations, a broad study area was identified. By March this year, four wide

corridors were proposed including three bypass options and upgrading the existing highway. Considerable work is being done to refine these corridors to give residents a better idea of where a possible highway upgrade could go and what impact it may have on private and public land.

One refined option within each of the four corridors is now being developed. The width of each refined option will generally be 50 to 60 metres with some wider sections to accommodate specific features such as deep cuttings, high road embankments or environmental protection measures.

Field studies involving geotechnical (earth), flora and fauna, indigenous heritage and agricultural investigations are now substantially completed. Other studies are underway to provide further information for the refinement of route options including: traffic modelling; cost estimates; and important socio-economic impacts. These include property, access, noise, visual and business.

What happens next

Feedback from the CFGs on the intersections and access options will be consolidated with the remaining study results in order to finalise the refined route options.

The refined options for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga section will be exhibited for public comment in October or November 2002. Community submissions following the display will contribute towards the selection of a final route. The process will include detailed analysis of environmental, social, economic and engineering issues.

A workshop with participants representing a range of government departments, council and community interest groups will be held to consider the options. Any recommendations from the workshop will be reviewed by the steering committee.

Timetable

The level of community interest and investigations required, have had an impact on the proposed timing of the project. A revised timetable is outlined below:

• Display refined options	October or November 2002
• Community feedback	November/December 2002
• Assessment of options	Early 2003
• Final decision and display of preferred route	Mid 2003

Community Involvement Summary Report (Corridor Options Stage)

The report is a summary of community activities and feedback received over a five-month period from December 2001 to May 2002. It includes a summary of submissions received following the public displays in March.

Copies of the report will be distributed to all CFG members. The report is also available on the project web site www.rta.nsw.gov.au/pacific.htm. Copies are also available for viewing at the following locations:

- Coffs Harbour City Council
- Coffs Harbour, Toormina and Woolgoolga Public Libraries
- Sapphire Service Station, Pacific Highway, Sapphire
- PlanningNSW, Grafton
- RTA Pacific Highway Office, Grafton

Please note that submissions are welcome at any time during development of the Planning Strategy.



PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADING PROGRAM

The Pacific Highway Upgrading Program is the single largest construction program in NSW for the last 40 years. Twenty-one major projects and 19 smaller projects have been opened to traffic. Four major construction projects are underway—including Karuah Bypass, Halfway Creek Realignment, Coopernook Bypass and Taree to Coopernook Upgrade. A further 14 are at various stages of planning and development including the Bulahdelah, Moorland to Herons Creek and Kempsey to Eungai upgrades.

The program has brought enormous improvements to road conditions and travel times. From 1997 to 2002, travel times between Hexham and the Queensland border have been reduced by around 55 minutes for passenger vehicles and just over an hour for heavy vehicles. Notorious accident spots have been removed with the completion of the Bulahdelah to Coolongolook Freeway, Yelgun to Chinderah Freeway, Raleigh Deviation and Ewingsdale Interchange.

As well as boosting tourism and transport efficiency, providing safer and more consistent overtaking opportunities has saved lives and reduced the incidence of serious injury accidents.

For more information contact:

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Or visit the RTA's website at

www.rta.nsw.gov.au/pacific.htm