

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In early 2001, work commenced on the development of the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy (CHHPS). The Strategy, which addresses the need to upgrade the highway between Sapphire and Woolgoolga, while planning for future traffic needs within the Coffs Harbour urban area, covers a study area from Sawtell in the south to Arrawarra in the north.

The development of the Strategy was being managed by a Steering Committee comprising representatives of Coffs Harbour City Council (CHCC), Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) and the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA).

The Strategy was publicly launched in September 2001 and, in March 2002, an information sheet containing the following key announcements was released:

- identification of four initial corridor options for the northern section of the strategy area from Sapphire to Woolgoolga
- a decision that the Inner Corridor in the Southern Section of the strategy area between Sawtell and Sapphire / Moonee was the only potentially feasible bypass option suitable for further consideration
- commencement of a detailed comparison of upgrading the existing highway in the Southern Section of the strategy area as an alternative to an inner corridor bypass.

Following a decision by Coffs Harbour City Council (CHCC) to conduct a peer review of the work completed up to March 2002, work in the southern section of the study area between Sawtell and Sapphire was deferred, while work proceeded in the northern section between Sapphire and Woolgoolga. Following Council's receipt of the peer review in October 2002, investigations recommenced in the southern section. The peer review made a number of recommendations and broadly endorsed the findings from the work undertaken previously.

A community update released in December 2002 described five route options for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga Upgrade Project (Connell Wagner, 2002a) in the northern section and a decision on a preferred route was expected to be announced in mid 2003. This was delayed until CHCC concluded a series of public forums that further examined all the options for the Highway through the Council area (see Section 1.2 below).

As part of the investigations in the southern (Coffs Harbour) section, indicative route options have been developed for the Inner Bypass corridor and a range of studies has been undertaken to determine the performance of the Inner Bypass and the Existing Highway Upgrade. The findings of these investigations are summarised within the *Strategy Report* (Connell Wagner, 2004b). The community generated proposal for a western bypass of Coffs Harbour known as the Coastal Ridge Way (CRW) is described within the *Review of the Coastal Ridge Way Proposal* report (Connell Wagner, 2004c).

A further community update was released in February 2004. This provided details of route options within the Coffs Harbour section and new and modified alignment options for the northern (Sapphire to Woolgoolga) section. These options (Option C1 and Option E) were developed in response to a request from Coffs Harbour City Council and are described in further detail in the *Sapphire to Woolgoolga Supplementary Options Report* (Connell Wagner, 2004a). The update also introduced the CHCC Preferred Corridor (see Figure 2.1) and advised that a decision on the Preferred Option would be announced in mid 2004.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of Report

Following its receipt of the peer review, Council conducted a peer review workshop in November 2002. The workshop focused on improving the communication process between the Council and the members of the three Community Focus Groups (CFGs).

Following the peer review workshop, members of two of the CFG groups requested that the Steering Committee consider allowing representatives of the CFGs to attend its meetings. In response, Council advised the three CFGs that it would hold a series of community forums.

Seven forums were organised and conducted by Council between May 20 and August 12, 2003. Members of the three CFGs were invited to attend along with representatives of community groups. Although attendances fluctuated, about 100 people attended each forum including councillors and Council staff. Representatives of State Government agencies and motoring organisations such as the NRMA also were invited to some of the forums to provide comment and advice on issues raised.

Council's objectives for the Coffs Harbour Highway planning Strategy were discussed and modified to provide eleven Strategic Objectives. The positive and negative impacts of four route options were assessed and then evaluated against the Strategic Objectives. The final forum on 12 August 2003 discussed and reached consensus on a series of points.

In September 2003 Coffs Harbour City Council (CHCC) adopted a position on a preferred corridor option for a bypass of Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga. The Agenda and Minutes of this meeting are attached as Appendix A. Council's position was based on CHCC's conclusion that the Existing Highway Upgrade and Inner Bypass options failed to address the strategic objectives adopted by the community forums. Following this decision, CHCC wrote to the NSW Minister for Roads, Carl Scully, requesting that the RTA accept this option as the preferred corridor option and refine a route within the corridor.

In regard to the location of the preferred corridor, the CHCC resolution stated "that the western bypass diverge from the existing highway at or near Englands Road to Red Hill and thereafter by the best available option to Grafton with the intention that south and western Boambee and the Orara Valley be excluded from further consideration".

On 29 October 2003, Council adopted a plan showing its preferred corridor for a bypass of Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga. Minutes of the Council Meeting are included in Appendix A. The location of the CHCC Preferred Corridor Option is shown in Figure 2.1.

In its letter of 6 November 2003 to the Hon Carl Scully MP, Minister for Roads, CHCC requested that the RTA work with CHCC to identify potential routes within the CHCC Preferred Corridor.

The Minister's response noted that, in taking a position on a preferred option, Council had departed from the process that was previously in place for the development of a jointly agreed strategy and that, consequently, the Steering Committee's ability to manage the process for the development of the strategy was open to question. The Minister also advised that the RTA, in association with the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR), would examine the corridor proposed by CHCC and proceed to finalise the planning strategy for the Coffs Harbour Area.

As a result, a feasibility assessment of the CHCC Preferred Corridor Option has been undertaken to provide an assessment of the feasibility of options within the corridor in terms of functional, socio-economic and biophysical parameters.

1.3 Approach to this Review

This report investigates the feasibility and implications of possible routes through CHCC's Preferred Corridor. This assessment has been compiled using existing information such as topographical and land use maps, CHCC vegetation mapping and previous reports that examined highway options within the study area.

Key steps used for the identification of potential route options are as follows:

- Use of topographical and biophysical data to highlight constraints and opportunities within the CHCC Preferred Corridor.
- Development of broad route options to an early concept design level within the CHCC Preferred Corridor based on the outcomes of the constraints analysis.
- Review of key issues and impacts arising from possible route options within the CHCC preferred corridor, to provide an assessment of their feasibility compared to the previously investigated CRW / Option A.

The assessment has been conducted at a strategic level and this report provides broad cost estimates to allow comparison between the options.

1.4 Previous Investigations

The study area for this strategic review overlaps future highway options investigated previously including the Central Corridor and Outer Corridor options. These options were reviewed and found to be not feasible in February 2002. Further details on these options are available in '*Working Paper No 1: Preliminary Concept Design Report*' (Connell Wagner, 2002b). The CRW / Option A proposal which forms the eastern boundary of the CHCC Preferred Corridor (see Figure 2.1) has also been subject to investigation and it has been used as a reference case for comparison of new strategic options developed within the CHCC Preferred Corridor (Connell Wagner, 2004c, 2002d).

2. Key Features of the Study Area

2.1 Introduction

The CHCC Preferred Corridor covers the Bucca Valley generally from the Ulidarra National Park in the south through to the CHCC LGA boundary in the north as it was at 29 October 2003. Following the amalgamation of Copmanhurst, Grafton, Maclean and Pristine Waters Councils to form the Clarence Valley LGA on 25 February 2004, the northern boundary of the Coffs Harbour City Council was altered to incorporate the coastal villages of Corindi and Red Rock and the adjacent rural areas to the west of the Pacific Highway around Upper Corindi.

Due to the rural nature of the area included in the CHCC Preferred Corridor and its distance from other major roads, the CHCC Preferred Corridor Option cannot be considered in isolation. The CRW alignment from Englands Road to the Ulidarra National Park provides access to the CHCC Preferred Corridor from the south and, therefore forms part of the proposal. Since the CHCC Preferred Corridor ends at what was then the northern Coffs Harbour LGA border, it is necessary to examine the neighbouring northern Sherwood and Corindi areas to identify the feasibility of reconnecting identified route options with the Pacific Highway.

For the purposes of this assessment the study area is split into the three sections shown in Figure 2.1 and described below.

- *Southern Section:* This would require the construction of the CRW from Englands Road to the northern side of Ulidarra National Park. A brief overview of the route based on the 'Review of the Coastal Ridge Way Proposal' (Connell Wagner, 2004c) is included in Section 3.2.
- *Bucca Valley Section:* This section extends from the Ulidarra National Park through to the northern LGA boundary. The western boundary of the CHCC Preferred Corridor is formed generally by the ridge between the Bucca and Orara Valleys and the eastern boundary is defined by the CRW / Option A proposal.
- *Sherwood / Corindi Section:* No road corridor studies have been undertaken within this locality as part of the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy (CHHPS) assessment. However, for this review the section has included the area generally north from the CHCC Preferred Corridor up to the Pacific Highway in the vicinity of the Halfway Creek Upgrade project. The Sherwood / Corindi Section incorporates areas within both new Clarence Valley and Coffs Harbour LGA's (refer Figure 2.1).

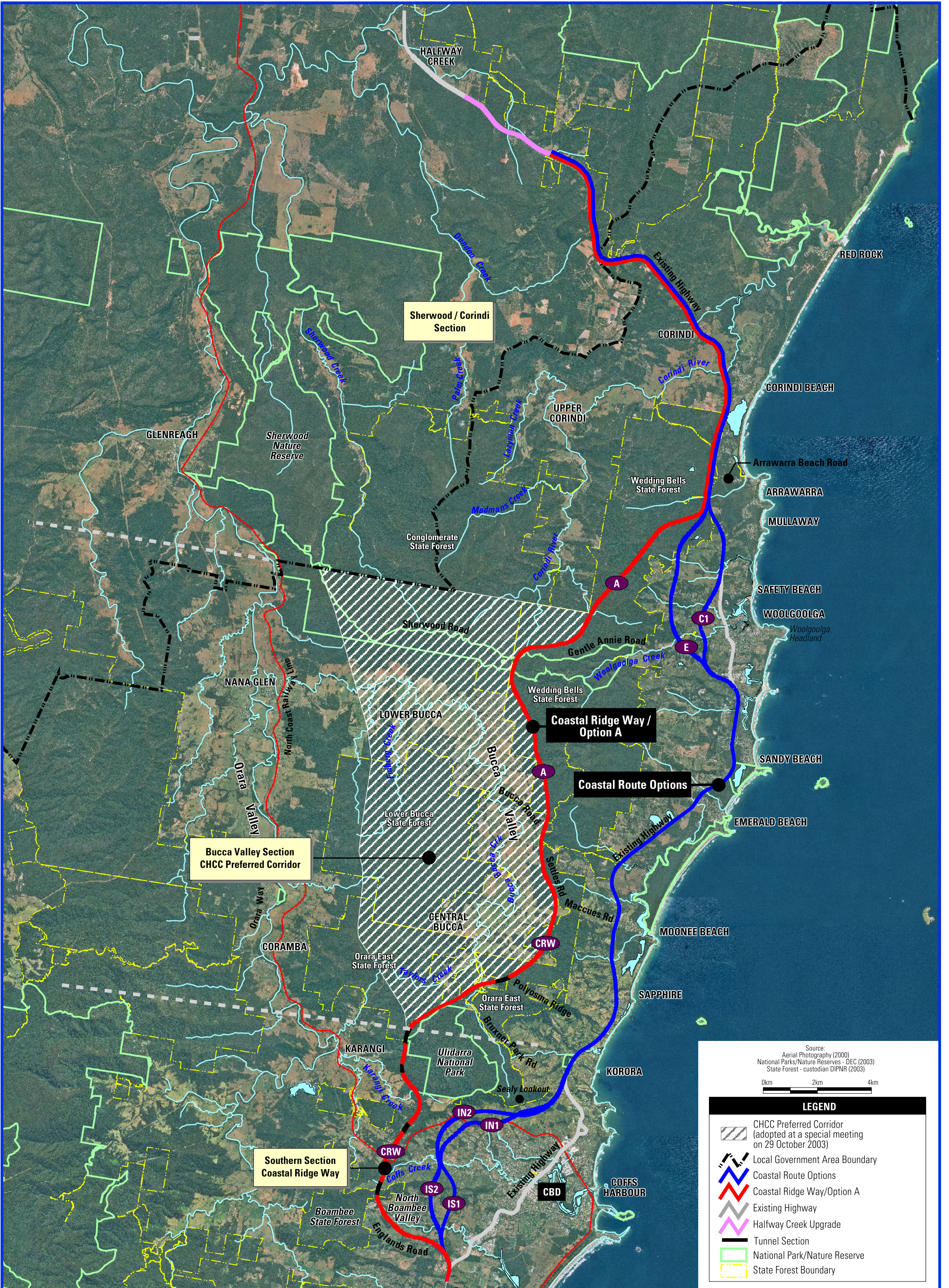
A constraints analysis which focuses on biophysical and land use issues has been undertaken to identify key features of the study area and possible routes through the defined CHCC Preferred Corridor.

Key features of the three sections of the study area are outlined below.

It should be noted that the potential highway options identified within the study area and shown in the figures referenced below, are described in Section 3 of this report.

2.2 Southern Section

The CRW would form an integral part of any routes through the southern section of the CHCC Preferred Corridor. Details of the proposed alignment are contained within the *Review of the Coastal Ridge Way Proposal* (Connell Wagner, 2004c). Figure 2.2 illustrates the topographic constraints within the Southern Section. The proposed route from Englands Road through to the Ulidarra National Park is situated within some of the most rugged terrain in the Coffs Harbour LGA, reaching heights of up to 300m above sea level. The terrain traversed by the CRW provides engineering challenges in terms of locating a feasible route alignment that would be acceptable to heavy vehicles and other through



Source:
Aerial Photography (2000)
National Parks/Nature Reserves - DEC (2003)
State Forest - custodian DIPNR (2003)

0km 2km 4km

LEGEND

- CHCC Preferred Corridor (adopted at a special meeting on 29 October 2003)
- Local Government Area Boundary
- Coastal Route Options
- Coastal Ridge Way/Option A
- Existing Highway
- Halfway Creek Upgrade
- Tunnel Section
- National Park/Nature Reserve
- State Forest Boundary



FIGURE 2.1
STUDY AREA