

Executive summary

What is proposed?

The proposed Kempsey to Eungai Pacific Highway Upgrade (the 'proposed upgrade') is an important component of the New South Wales (NSW) and Federal governments' Pacific Highway Upgrade Program.

Following completion of the 10-year program in June 2006, the NSW and Federal governments have agreed to further funding of \$1.3 billion for three years to mid 2009. This funding is being used to fund the completion of a number of upgrading projects, as well as the planning for other projects. For the Kempsey to Eungai Pacific Highway upgrade, this funding will be used to complete the planning and acquire properties on the basis of a hardship.

Approximately 40.8 kilometres of four-lane divided carriageway highway (capable of being upgraded to six lanes), would be built for the proposed upgrade, from south of Kempsey to Eungai. This would replace the existing Pacific Highway in this location, which currently passes through Kempsey and Frederickton. The proposed upgrade would diverge in a north-easterly direction from the existing Pacific Highway south of Kempsey, pass over the Macleay River floodplain and cross the Macleay River north-east of Frederickton. From Frederickton, it would pass to the west of the existing Pacific Highway through Collombatti and the edge of the Tamban State Forest, and north through Barraganyatti to join the existing highway south of Eungai Rail. The northern end of the proposed upgrade would involve the upgrade and duplication of the existing highway.

New grade separated interchanges are also proposed at South Kempsey, Frederickton and Stuarts Point Road, allowing easy access to and from the existing Pacific Highway, Kempsey, Frederickton, Barraganyatti, Stuarts Point and Eungai Rail.

Why is it needed?

The Pacific Highway is the major transport link between Sydney and Brisbane, and also services a growing population on the North Coast of New South Wales. Through-traffic on the Pacific Highway at Kempsey currently experiences major delays in peak times, particularly during summer holidays. With future predicted increases in traffic volumes, delays for through-traffic at Kempsey will increase and traveller safety will further diminish unless improvements are made to the highway. The operation of the existing Pacific Highway also divides the Kempsey and Frederickton town centres, reducing safety and amenity for residents and local road users.

The need for the proposed upgrade is further discussed in Chapter 2 – *Context and need for the proposed upgrade*.

How would it satisfy this need?

The proposed upgrade would:

- Improve safety for highway users.
- Reduce travel times for through-traffic between South Kempsey and Eungai Rail by around 23 minutes in 2011 and by 35 minutes in 2031.
- Reduce financial costs associated with travel on the Pacific Highway through improved travel efficiency.
- Improve access, safety and amenity for local traffic, pedestrians and cyclists by removing through-traffic from the streets of Kempsey and Frederickton.
- Improve accessibility to towns and villages in the Macleay Valley and Mid North Coast regions through provision of interchanges at locations that connect to the regional road network.
- Lower noise levels for some residents, especially at night.
- Improve air quality for residents by relocating through-traffic to outside of urban areas.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption relative to the base case of 'no upgrade'.

Alternatives considered during the development of the proposed upgrade are discussed in Chapter 5 – *Approach to route selection and design*. The adopted proposal is described in detail in Chapter 6 – *Concept design*.

What are the likely consequences of the proposal?

The proposed upgrade would improve the efficiency and safety of travel on the Pacific Highway between Kempsey and Eungai and contribute, together with other Pacific Highway projects, to the efficiency and safety of travel between Newcastle and the Queensland border. This would lead to significant regional economic benefits. There would also be benefits to residents in the towns of Kempsey and Frederickton. However, the proposed upgrade would result in some adverse impacts, including:

- Property acquisition and loss of homes and businesses.
- Noise impacts for some residents.
- Loss of highway-related trade for some businesses.
- Changes to agricultural land use.
- Loss of vegetation, including areas of endangered ecological community and loss of habitat for significant flora and fauna species.

There would also be impacts during construction of the proposed upgrade. Many of these impacts would be temporary; however, some (like impacts on property and biodiversity) would be longer term or permanent. In addition the area within which the proposed upgrade falls would be subject to cumulative positive and negative impacts from all of the Pacific Highway projects.

How will the likely consequences be managed?

This Environmental Assessment assesses the likely consequences of the proposed upgrade. As part of this assessment, measures to mitigate or manage each likely impact have been proposed. The mitigation measures developed for the proposed upgrade aim to remove or minimise potential impacts through design in the first instance, where a potential impact is unable to be mitigated through design, management measures are outlined.

The environmental, social and economic impacts and measures identified to minimise those impacts are discussed in Chapters 10 to 21 of this Environmental Assessment.

How can I comment on the proposal and/or the Environmental Assessment?

The NSW Department of Planning will make the Environmental Assessment publicly available for a minimum period of 30 days. During this period, it will be available for inspection at selected RTA offices and other locations. The RTA will also be conducting community information sessions to ensure the community and stakeholders are aware of the exhibition of the Environmental Assessment and are provided with information to allow them to make informed comments in their submissions on the report and/or the proposed upgrade. A project information line will also be available throughout the exhibition period – 1800 306 004 (toll free).

Any person (including a public authority) may make a written submission to the Director-General of the Department of Planning during the exhibition period. Submissions should be made to:

Director – Major Infrastructure Assessment
Department of Planning
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001