

**Purpose of Meeting    Maclean Community Liaison Group Meeting No. 3**
**Project**                      Wells Crossing To Iluka Road -  
Upgrading the Pacific Highway

**Prepared By**                Jenny Bailey                                      **Phone No**                1800 557 673

**Place of Meeting**            Maclean Council Chambers  
River Street, Maclean                      **Date**                      3 May 2005  
6:30-8:30pm

<b>Present</b>	Don Day (DD)	Peter Black (RTA) (PB)
	Rob Donges (RB)	Jo Moss (SKM) (JM)
	Brian Holland (BH)	Paul Robilliard (PR)
	Ivars Katuzans (IK)	Jenny Bailey (SKM) (JB)
	Mark Kingsley (MK)	
	Harry Lang (HL)	
	Tony McGrath (TM)	
	Chris Sparks (CS)	
	Matt Thompson (MT)	
	Bruce Walsh (BW)	

<b>Apologies</b>	Pat Battersby (PB)
	Peter Dibella (PD)
	Austin Sheehan (AS)
	Bob Thompson (BT)

**Distribution**                      All of the above

The meeting commenced at 6:35 pm.

**Agenda**

JM welcomed everyone and thanked RD for organising the new venue for the meeting. JM advised that Tanya Tuckey has left SKM.

PR was the meeting facilitator. He outlined the agenda for the Community Liaison Group (CLG) Meeting No. 3 as follows:

- Welcome, introduction, notes from last meeting and update from CLG members
- Update on consultation activity and issues
- Route options selection process
- Amendment of the study area boundary
- Update on environmental studies (land use, ecology and indigenous heritage)
- Update on traffic and transport studies
- Questions and answers



- Close

#### **Feedback from CLG Members**

PR asked the CLG members if they wished to discuss the record of meeting from the last CLG meeting. The CLG members indicated they were satisfied with the notes.

PR invited the CLG members to provide feedback on their community's or organisation's issues or concerns.

- DD indicated that the people of Maclean are concerned about the maintenance of the local road network. DD also asked what provisions would be made at the Harwood Bridge to prevent it from becoming a bottleneck. PB advised that a new bridge would be constructed adjacent to the existing bridge.
- BW questioned the decision to move the eastern study area boundary, particularly when the boundary has been moved slightly closer to Gulmarrad. BW reported that the community believes a route option will follow the new boundary.
- MK supported BW's comments. He also expressed concern that the media was informed about the study area extension prior to the CLG<sup>1</sup>. MK believes the community is questioning the community consultation process.
- IK reported that the residents of James Creek were concerned about the environmental impacts of a new route, particularly with respect to impacts on threatened species. The community has also been asking when the route options will be released.
- MT attended the CLG in place of AS. MT reported that the community is concerned about land acquisition, particularly as the community believed the route would be to the west of the range.
- CS emphasised the need to separate local and through traffic to improve safety. He is also concerned about rogue truck drivers who generate significant noise in residential areas. CS has been providing members of the vintage car clubs with information about the project via updates in the club newsletter.
- RD reported that Council does not have any specific concerns at this stage.
- BH reported that the Brushgrove residents support an upgrade to the east as it will decrease the number of trucks using the existing highway. BH is concerned about safety, particularly in response to a recent accident in which a truck ran off the road at Cowper.
- HL supports a route to the east as the upgrade of the existing highway would be very complicated. HL is concerned that the general public do not know who the CLG members are. He requested that RTA/SKM address this issue.
- AM is a new CLG member who lives in Taloumbi. AM reported that the residents in that area would like better maps so that they can identify where the study area boundary is in relation to their property. Most of these residents are opposed to the highway upgrade, primarily due to the uncertainty and the environmental impacts that would occur.
- TM reported there have been rumours that the RTA is proposing to put a tunnel through Bondi Hill (Tyndale Hill) as there have been drill rigs in that area. He is also concerned that so many people claim to have inside knowledge about the route location.

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<sup>1</sup> This was not addressed specifically at the meeting. The release of project information is preceded by a Ministerial announcement and letters advising of this announcement were sent to all CLG members with a map showing the extended study area as soon as it was possible to do so.



### **Update on Consultation Activity**

JM summarised the correspondence the project team has received to date. There have been 245 phone calls, 200 emails, 49 letters and 24 faxes.

JM outlined the 10 issues that have been recorded as most frequent to date, via phone, email, letter and fax. Most frequent communications relate to the CLGs, the consultation process and the project in general. SKM is continuing to receive requests from people who wish to be added to the mailing list.

### **Summary of CLG Meetings**

PB provided a summary of the topics discussed at the CLG meetings to date. He highlighted the purpose of the first two meetings was to provide CLG members with an understanding of the route development process and the process of identifying constraints for feasible routes. The routes are assessed against environmental, social, environmental and functional (engineering) criteria. PB emphasised that the route selection process is not a vote.

The purpose of this CLG meeting was to provide CLG members with an update on the investigations that have been undertaken to date. PB explained that the project team has identified potentially feasible route options, however, these routes are still being validated and refined and are still likely to change. Therefore, they cannot be released/discussed until they are final, as it would cause unnecessary anxiety in the community.

PB indicated the next CLG meeting will be held during the route options display period. PB explained that the project team's priority during the first week of the display will be communicating with potentially directly affected property owners.

### **Amendment of Study Area Boundary**

PB explained that the project team has considered opportunities for feasible route options outside the study area. An opportunity to identify feasible route options existed to the east of Pine Brush State Forest and ecologically significant wetlands was identified and hence the study area boundary was extended. Field staff have been gathering information about the study area, including the extended area, to determine the feasibility of the route options under consideration. PB stated that the property owners in the extended study area have been contacted via letter.

#### *Question*

Are the route options under consideration only those that have been identified by the RTA/SKM or are community suggestions also considered?

#### *Answer*

PB – All route options submitted by community members will be considered, and assessed against the project objectives to determine their feasibility.

#### *Question*

Have the submissions been directed to the RTA or SKM?

#### *Answer*

PB – Both the RTA and SKM have received submissions, however, it doesn't matter who they are directed to as the RTA and SKM are working as one team, and copies of all submissions received are forwarded to PB (RTA) and JM (SKM) for action.



*Question*

Why has the study area boundary moved closer to Gulmarrad?

*Answer*

PR and PB – The study area boundary is an indicative boundary for the purposes of data collection and is not a surveyed line. The amended boundary was drawn as a straight line between the extended section (in the vicinity of Pine Brush State Forest and the SEPP 14 wetlands) and the northern part of the study area, resulting in a minor deviation from the original boundary in the Gulmarrad area.

*Question*

Can the upgraded highway be constructed anywhere in the study area? For example, could a road be built across the floodplain?

*Answer*

PB – Yes, the road could be designed to overcome engineering constraints, however, the cost implications need to be considered.

### **Update on Environmental Studies**

PR referred to the study process that was discussed at the first two CLG meetings and indicated that he would present some of the preliminary findings from the investigations that have been undertaken to date.

### **Study Area Constraints**

PR referred to the constraints slide that JM presented at the last CLG meeting and emphasised that there is no perfect solution to the highway upgrade.

### **Land Use and Planning**

PR explained that there have been discussions with Clarence Valley Council about land use and planning. Council has supplied current and proposed future zoning information about the study area. The Clarence Valley Settlement Strategy also documents existing and proposed residential areas within the study area. Contact has also been made with DIPNR (NSW Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Resources), DPI (NSW Department of Primary Industries) which comprises the former NSW Forests, NSW Agriculture, NSW Fisheries and NSW Mineral Resources to discuss land use. NSW Forests has also provided information about the different management zones within the State Forests, which reflect the land use.

New aerial photography over the study area was flown in November 2004. This has been used to identify all buildings which appear to be houses, schools, churches etc in the study area. This information will be used by specialists to identify potential impacts of route options.

Field investigations have been undertaken to verify the mapping information the project team has collected.

*Question*

Can Council approve a new Development Application within the study area without SKM's/the RTA's knowledge?



*Answer*

PR – Yes, Council is not obliged to notify the RTA of any Development Applications until the preferred route has been identified, however, there is regular liaison with Council to ensure the project team is aware of any significant changes to planning/land use.

*Question*

Are the potential noise impacts on areas which are outside the study area, eg. Brushgrove, assessed?

*Answer*

PR – The project team considers the potential impacts of route options on all potentially affected areas, which may include areas outside the current study area.

PR summarised the key findings of the land use assessment:

- Rural residential areas, towns and villages are key constraints;
- The Clarence Valley Settlement Strategy provides an indication of future land use patterns. It is unlikely that urban areas will expand beyond existing zoned land;
- The floodplain is important to agricultural production;
- There are regulatory constraints which affect proposed development through SEPP 14 wetlands, State Forests, National Parks, State Conservation Areas and Nature Reserves. Development approvals and consents in these areas are complex, and may be subject to further approvals from local government, a state government agency or at the Ministerial level.

PR showed the land use and planning constraints on a GIS layer and explained the different land uses.

### **Ecology**

PR explained that information about ecological constraints has been obtained from existing records which are compiled by DEC (Department of Environment and Conservation), from a local ecologist (Greg Clancy) who is a member of the project team, from property owners and from other sources. Preliminary field investigations were undertaken by ecologists in early April 2005 to verify the data and information collected to date, and to enhance this information with an overview of the vegetation and habitat conditions within the study area. The aim of the field investigations at this stage was to obtain information which is representative of different parts of the study area.

PR summarised the key findings of the ecological assessment:

- A large proportion of the study area has already been highly disturbed;
- Vegetation on the floodplain is of high value and has been listed by DEC as an endangered ecological community.
- Land in the eastern part of the study area which has not been cleared provides an important habitat corridor;
- There are several SEPP 14 wetlands, the Yaegl Nature Reserve, a State Conservation Area and some areas within the State Forests which are important ecological constraints.

PR showed the ecological constraints on a GIS layer and explained the different colourings associated with different areas.



PR reported that the project team has contacted several property owners to seek access to their land for ecological investigations. Some property owners expressed concern that the findings of the ecological assessment might restrict their land usage. PR clarified the current understanding of the requirements for reporting threatened species:

- SKM/RTA are required by law to report all threatened species sightings to the DEC;
- Where a new development or land usage is proposed, Council must consider whether significant impacts on threatened species will be likely;
- The same approval requirements for development apply to the RTA and property owners, ie. the consent/approval authority must consider the potential environmental impacts of any proposed development whether it is proposed by a private property owner or the RTA;
- It is an offence to damage or clear threatened species without approval.

### **Indigenous Heritage**

PR explained that the information about heritage constraints has been obtained from existing records which are compiled by DEC (Department of Environment and Conservation) and from a landscape sensitivity analysis. Preliminary field investigations were undertaken by heritage consultants in early April 2005 to verify the landscape analysis and to identify heritage sites.

PR summarised the key findings of the indigenous heritage assessment:

- A relatively small number of sites were identified during the field investigations;
- Creek and river margins and ridgelines are more likely to have indigenous heritage significance;
- Glenugie Peak (Mt Elaine) has Aboriginal cultural heritage significance.

PR showed the indigenous heritage constraints on a GIS layer and explained which areas had a higher level of sensitivity. PR explained that work is underway to update the mapping to include heritage constraints within the extended study area.

PR reported that the project team has contacted several property owners to seek access to their land for heritage investigations. Some property owners expressed concern that the findings of the heritage assessment might restrict their land usage. PR clarified the current understanding of the requirements for reporting heritage sites:

- SKM/RTA are required by law to report all Aboriginal sites to the DEC;
- It is an offence to damage or destroy Aboriginal sites without approval from the DEC;
- If an Aboriginal site is identified, land usage is not necessarily affected. For example, rural activities such as grazing are generally low impact and as such, would probably be allowed to continue;
- The same approval requirements for development apply to the RTA and property owners, ie. the consent/approval authority must consider the potential environmental impacts of any proposed development whether it is proposed by a private property owner or the RTA.

### **Traffic and Transport**

PB presented a graph illustrating the traffic growth on the Pacific Highway between Hexham and the NSW/Qld border, at a number of different locations. Traffic growth on the highway is currently about 2.5%p.a. The lowest traffic volumes along the highway between Hexham and the Queensland border are in the vicinity of Grafton.



*Question*

If the Wells Crossing to Iluka Road section has the lowest traffic volumes, will it be constructed last?

*Answer*

PB – At this stage it is not known when this section would be constructed. Once the planning has been completed for all of the Pacific Highway projects, the Minister will prioritise the projects for construction.

*Question*

Why do the traffic volumes decrease around Grafton? What happens to the traffic travelling on the highway in the sections north and south of Grafton?

*Answer*

PB – The sections north and south of Grafton would have a higher number of local vehicle movements, which may be attributed to the higher population densities in these areas.

*Question*

Is the traffic data based on axles pairs or number of vehicles?

*Answer*

PB – The graph called “Traffic Growth on Pacific Highway” shows the number of axles pairs whereas the graph called “Wells Crossing to Iluka Road Upgrade Project” shows the number of vehicle movements.

PB provided a handout from Austroads showing the vehicle classification system. Refer to **Attachment A**.

PB presented a graph showing the results of the traffic survey. The light vehicle traffic volumes peak in the middle of the day whereas the heavy vehicle traffic volumes are much more consistent over a 24 hour period. Whilst there is a community perception that there are more heavy vehicle movements at night time, the survey shows that heavy vehicle movements peak at about 5pm. Overall, heavy vehicles account for approximately 20% of the total traffic volume. In the middle of the day heavy vehicle traffic accounts for approximately 9% of the total traffic volume and in the early hours of the morning, heavy vehicle traffic accounts for approximately 75% of the total traffic volume as the volume of total traffic decreases significantly at night time. In about 20 years time, it is anticipated that total traffic volumes will increase by about 50%.

PB explained that an origin-destination survey (OD survey) has been undertaken to measure traffic volumes and the proportion of local and through traffic within the study area. During the survey the number plates of all heavy vehicles and all white cars were recorded to identify the origins and destinations of a representative sample of the traffic. The survey showed that there are approximately 7,500 vehicles/day travelling on the Pacific Highway near Grafton and approximately 30-35% of these are through traffic ie, traffic which has an origin and destination outside of the study area. Approximately 20% of the total traffic are heavy vehicles and up to 50% of the heavy vehicles are through (long distance) traffic.

*Question*

Does that mean that 65-70% of the total existing traffic and 50% of the heavy vehicle traffic would remain on the existing highway?





*Answer*

PB – Route options closer to Grafton would generally be more attractive to local traffic, however options away from the existing highway would take through heavy vehicles such as semi trailers and B-Doubles away from the existing highway.

*Question*

Does the graph called “Wells Crossing to Iluka Road Upgrade Project” show total traffic volumes ie. northbound and southbound?

*Answer*

PB – Yes.

*Question*

The heavy vehicle traffic using the existing highway includes cane trucks and school buses. Whilst these vehicles would continue to use the existing highway would a new route attract the B-Doubles and semi-trailers?

*Answer*

PB – The break-down of heavy (articulated) vehicle traffic can be provided after the meeting<sup>2</sup>.

## **Design**

PB explained that the project team is currently undertaking field investigations to identify the geotechnical conditions in the study area. The soils in the floodplain are compressible soils and as such, are subject to settlement. A road through the floodplain would have a longer construction timeframe as the soils would need to be pre-loaded prior to road construction. Consequently, even though options closer to the existing highway would be attractive for local traffic this would result in potential construction constraints in the floodplain.

## **Questions and Answers**

*Question*

Could SKM/RTA provide a comment on the letter published in the Daily Examiner on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2005 (author Ray Todd)?

*Answer*

PB – SKM and the RTA are working as one team to deliver this project. All communication received by the RTA or SKM is recorded in a database.

JM – SKM's database was initially developed as a mailing list and it has since developed into a tool for recording communications. Unlike the RTA, SKM does not have a dedicated call centre, however, the phone is answered by professionals working on the project team. At times when the phone may be unstaffed, or the team member is answering another call, the phone diverts to voicemail which is checked regularly. When an email is sent to the project email address, an automatic response is generated to confirm receipt of the email. The email message is recorded in the database and all inquiries that request an answer receive one. It is not always possible to answer inquiries immediately as they may need to input from a specific team member. The

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<sup>2</sup> The break-down of heavy vehicle traffic is still being determined. This information will be provided when it becomes available.





information gathered from the incoming communications is used by the project team to monitor current and emerging issues. The numbers reports at the CLG meetings are a guide only and do not constitute a vote. All issues are recorded and they do not have to be raised separately. All correspondence received is confidential.

*Question*

Will the RTA respond to the letter?

*Answer*

PB – The RTA respects the rights of individuals to voice their opinions about the project. The RTA/SKM would prefer to speak to concerned individuals directly rather than respond publicly to issues raised in the media.

*Question*

When will the results of the investigations be publicly available?

*Answer*

PB – The information presented at the CLG meeting will be available on the website and on request but a formal report on the investigations will not be publicly available until the route options display.

*Question*

When will the route options go on display?

*Answer*

PB – In the middle of the year.

*Question*

Will the route options assessment be broken down into sections to allow comparisons between the routes?

*Answer*

PB – This approach would be adopted for the Value Management Workshop.

*Question*

Is the highway likely to become a tollway.

*Answer*

PB – The project team is proceeding on the basis that it will not be a tollway.

PR thanked everyone for coming.

**Meeting closed at 8:45pm**

**Attachments**

- Attachment A – Vehicle classification system (Austroads)
- Attachment B - Powerpoint presentation delivered at the Maclean CLG meeting