

1. Introduction

1.1 The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program

The Pacific Highway forms a heavily trafficked link between the Sydney and Brisbane and is a State Highway providing local and regional transport links to numerous land use activities. Heavy vehicles comprise approximately 20% of the vehicles that use the highway.

The Pacific Highway between Newcastle and Brisbane also forms part of the Australian Government's AusLink National Network. The AusLink National Network is based on national, regional and urban transport corridors, links to ports and airports, and intermodal connections between road and rail. The highway is predicted by 2026 to carry approximately double the freight tonnage between Sydney and Brisbane compared to 2002 tonnages.¹

The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program, which is being managed by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA), commenced in July 1996.

The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program aims to:

- ▶ Significantly reduce road crashes and injuries;
- ▶ Reduce travel times;
- ▶ Reduce freight transport costs;
- ▶ Develop a route that considers community interests;
- ▶ Provide a route that supports economic development;
- ▶ Manage the upgrading of the route in accordance with ecologically sustainable development principles; and
- ▶ Provide the best value for money.

The \$2.2 billion, 10-year upgrade program has achieved significant improvements to road safety and travel times. A total of 45 projects been opened to traffic and a further 22 projects (including the Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing project) are at various stages of planning and development.

1.2 Project Overview

The project involves upgrading of the Pacific Highway between Woolgoolga and Wells Crossing. The location of the project on the north coast is shown on Figure 1.1. Figure 1.2 shows the project in its local area context. The project length is approximately 27.8 km (along the existing highway and including the Halfway Creek duplication) and involves upgrading the existing highway to a dual carriageway and controlled access highway. The project is likely to comprise duplication and upgrading of the existing highway as well as construction of sections on a new alignment.

The objective of the route options development phase of the project is to identify feasible options for the highway upgrade in consultation with key stakeholders. The route options identified have been assessed and a preferred route selected. The next stage of the project will involve the refinement of the preferred route design and environmental assessment.

¹ GHD and Booz Allen Hamilton, 2005, 'South East Queensland Inter-modal Freight Terminal Study, Stage 2'



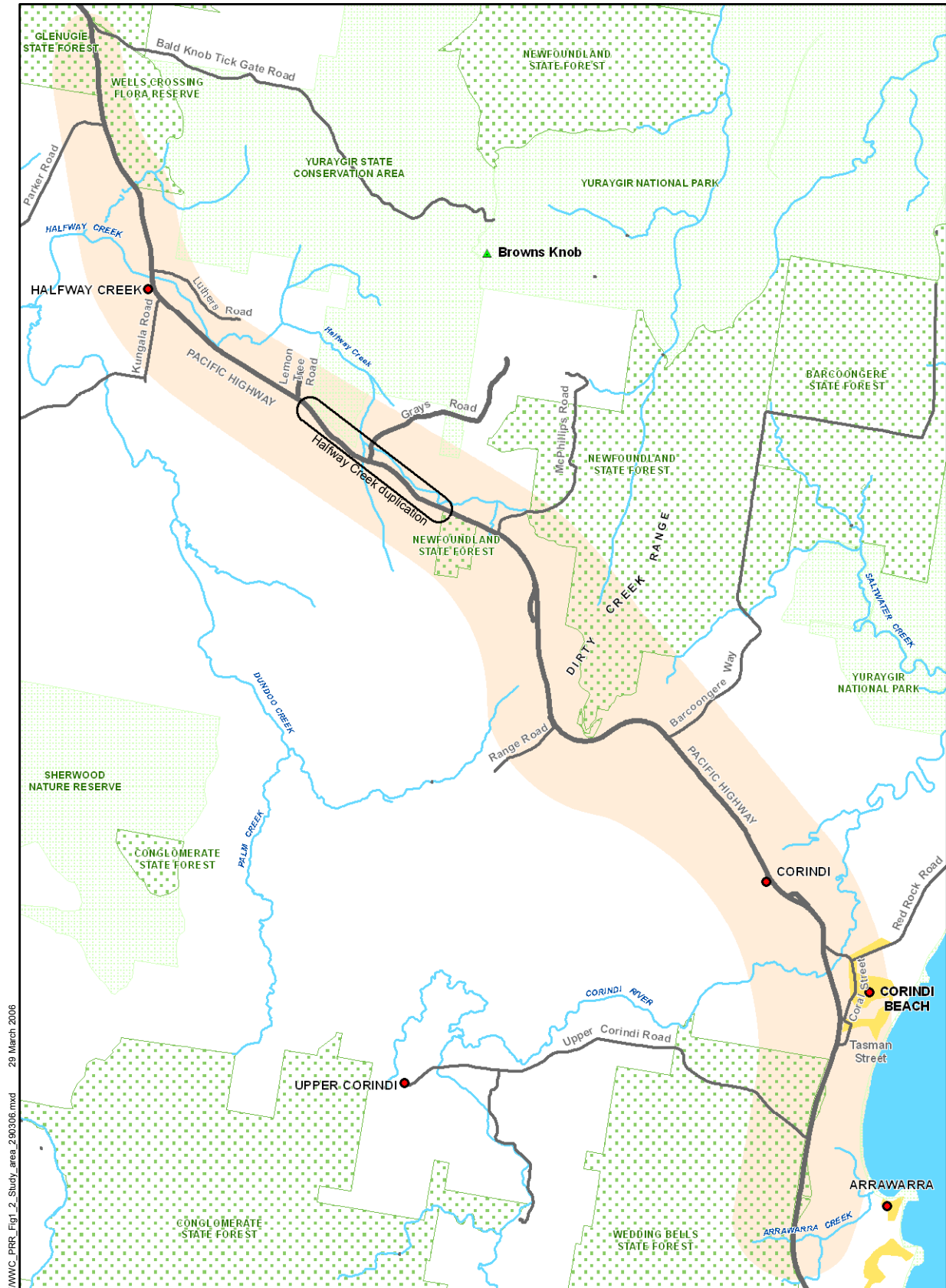
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State Map

Spatial layers courtesy of Geoscience Australia.

Figure 1.1



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<p>SCALE 1:100,000</p> <p>0.5 0 0.5 1 1.5 Kilometres</p> <p>Map Projection: Universal Transverse Mercator Horizontal Datum: Geostic Datum of Australia 1994 Grid: Map Grid of Australia, Zone 56</p>	<p>GRID N</p>	<p>Legend</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td> Study Area</td> <td> Highway</td> <td> Locality</td> <td> State Forest</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Urban area</td> <td> Main Road</td> <td> Hill/Mountain</td> <td> Nat Park / Reserve</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td> River/Creek</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	 Study Area	Highway	Locality	State Forest	 Urban area	Main Road	Hill/Mountain	Nat Park / Reserve		River/Creek		
 Study Area	Highway	Locality	State Forest											
 Urban area	Main Road	Hill/Mountain	Nat Park / Reserve											
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Spatial layers courtesy of Coffs Harbour City Council, NSW Department of Lands, NSW Roads & Traffic Authority, Geoscience Australia, NSW Department of Environment & Conservation, NSW Department of Primary Industries.

1.3 Report Purpose and Structure

The route development and selection process is documented in this report. The report includes the following information:

- ▶ Section 1 – Provides introductory information;
- ▶ Section 2 – Summarises the project scope, objectives and planning methodology;
- ▶ Section 3 – Describes the characteristics of the study area, including the main features of the existing environment and the key issues and constraints;
- ▶ Section 4 – Provides a summary of the context for the project, including an overview of relevant planning reports, the traffic and transport context and need for the project;
- ▶ Section 5 – Describes the four options developed as an outcome of the route options development process and how they were developed. A summary of the characteristics and costs of each option, including the interaction with the existing environment of the study area, is also provided;
- ▶ Section 6 – Presents a summary of the issues raised in public submissions in response to the display of the route options;
- ▶ Section 7 – Summarises the outcomes of the Value Management Workshop (VMW) and the additional technical investigations undertaken following the VMW;
- ▶ Section 8 – Describes the methodology and outputs for the selection of the preferred route. The methodology includes assumptions, inputs, assessment criteria and the scoring and ranking process. The outputs include a review of the selection criteria, scoring and ranking of the selection criteria and a summary of the findings;
- ▶ Section 9 – Includes a description of the preferred route and a summary of the potential impacts of the preferred route; and
- ▶ Section 10 – Describes the steps that will be undertaken to progress the project to the next stage.

1.4 Study Area for the Project

The study area for this project is located on the north coast of New South Wales between Coffs Harbour and Grafton. The project commences at Arrawarra Creek south of the Tasman Street intersection and extends for 27.8 km, over the Dirty Creek Range, to the intersection of the highway with Bald Knob Tick Gate Road.

The study area for the project consists of a corridor, up to three kilometres wide, which generally surrounds the existing highway, as shown on Figure 1.2.

1.5 Overview of Project Methodology

The planning phase of the project consists of the following:

- ▶ Preliminary investigations – to determine the opportunities and constraints for route options;
- ▶ Development of route options – the outcomes of this stage of the project are summarised within the Route Options Development Report;
- ▶ Selection of the preferred route – the route options have been assessed and a preferred route selected. The outcomes of this stage of the project are summarised within this report;
- ▶ Concept engineering design of the preferred route; and
- ▶ Environmental impact assessment and planning approval of the preferred route.

Further information on the methodology is provided in Section 2.