

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 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.

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 44 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 in consultation with key stakeholders. The route options identified would be assessed during the next phase of the project and a preferred route selected. A refined design and environmental assessment would then be prepared for the preferred route.



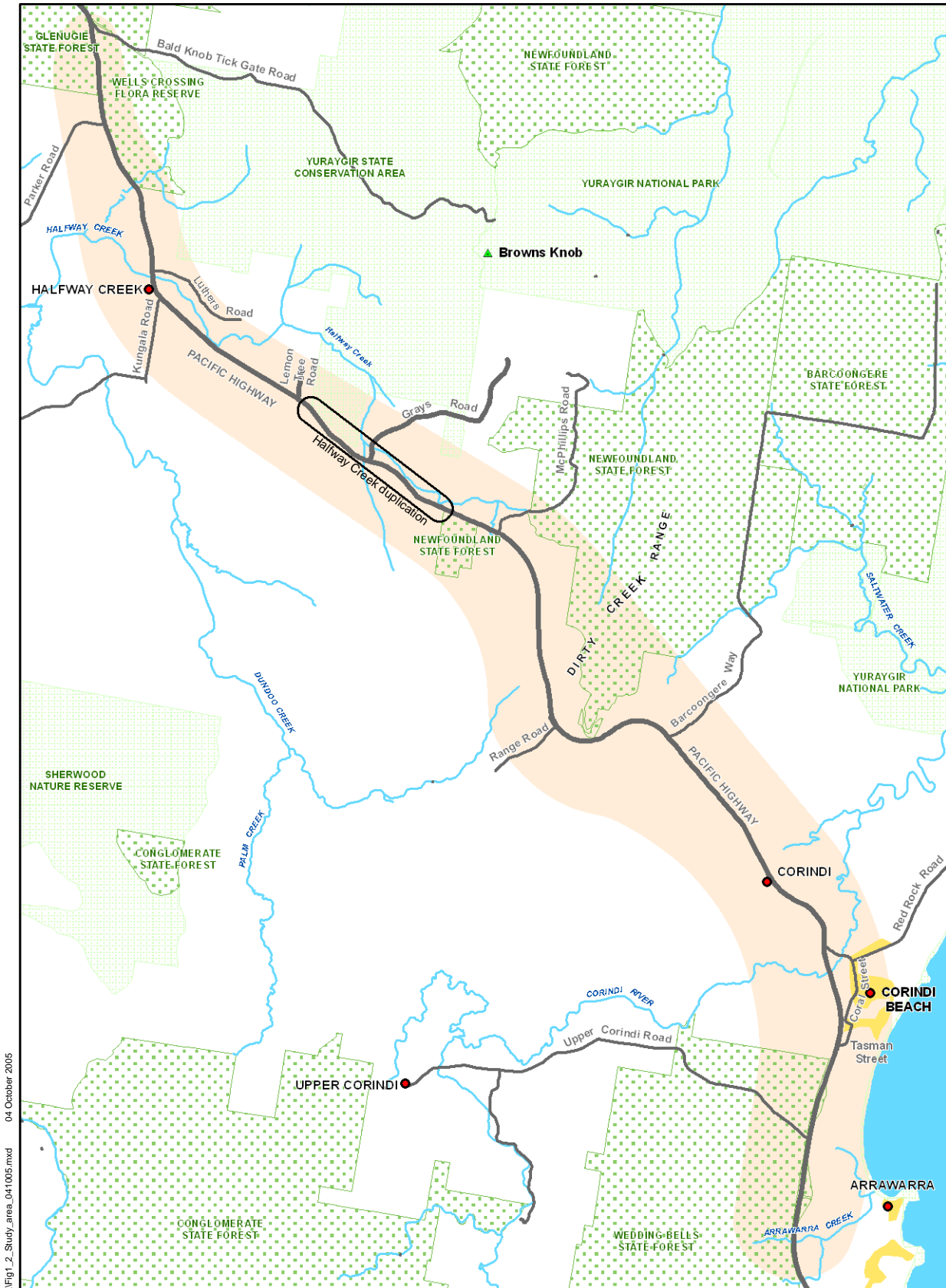
\\Fig1_1_state_map_041005.mxd 04 October 2005




Spatial layers courtesy of Geoscience Australia.

State Map

Figure 1.1



\\Fig1_2_Study_area_041005.mxd 04 October 2005

<p>SCALE 1:100,000</p> <p>0.5 0 0.5 1 1.5</p> <p>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> <p>Study Area</p> <p>Urban Area</p> <p>Highway; Main Rd</p> <p>River / Creek</p>	<p>Locality</p> <p>Hill/Mountain</p>	<p>Nat Park / Reserve</p> <p>State Forest</p>
--	---	---	--------------------------------------	---

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 options development 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; and
- ▶ Section 6 – Provides conclusions and recommendations along with the next steps in the process.

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 this report;
- ▶ Selection of the preferred route – the route options would be assessed and a preferred route selected. Community feedback would be considered as part of the assessment; and
- ▶ Refined design of the preferred route; and
- ▶ Environmental assessment and determination of the preferred route.

Further information on the methodology is provided in Section 2.