

PORT MACQUARIE

OXLEY HIGHWAY UPGRADE

REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

SEPTEMBER 2004



Summary

Purpose and Background

An upgrade of the Oxley Highway between Wrights Road and the Pacific Highway is proposed by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) to address road safety, traffic efficiency and residential amenity issues.

Following an extensive review of corridor options by the RTA, a decision to upgrade this 6km section of the highway was announced by the Minister for Roads in August 2002. Since this announcement, the RTA has undertaken a wide range of specialist studies to establish the engineering and financial feasibility of a highway upgrade, as well as a number of studies to identify the environmental impact of the Preferred Corridor and concept design (the Proposal). The study process has also involved substantial consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from government agencies and the local community.

This Review of Environmental Factors (REF) examines the environmental impact of the Proposal incorporating the Preferred Corridor and Detailed Concept Design.

Project Justification

The existing highway in its current form does not meet community expectations and there is a strong probability that it will continue to diminish in terms of road safety and travel conditions.

Future population growth and resulting traffic will further diminish road safety and travel conditions within the next ten years. As the traffic increases there would be additional demands on the existing Highway and the Level of Service would decrease markedly, particularly during holiday periods, resulting in increased delays and higher vehicle operating and travel time costs. The existing accident rates, which are high, would continue to rise to an unacceptable level.



Photomontage of Wrights Road roundabout on the Proposal looking east

In summary, justification for an upgrade to the Oxley Highway between Wrights Road and the Pacific Highway (the Proposal) is based on a combination of the following key elements:

- improved road safety
- improved road efficiency
- reduced impact on residential amenity
- improved gateway image
- scope for improved economic development
- economic feasibility (positive benefit / cost ratio).

Project Objectives

The objective of the project is to improve road safety and provide improved access between the Pacific Highway and Port Macquarie for all road users, including local community and tourists and provide a gateway to Port Macquarie.

The main issues relating to the upgrade of the Oxley Highway relate principally to road safety, travel time, community satisfaction, access and environmental protection. These issues have been translated into a series of **broad objectives** developed by the RTA and in consultation with the local community, as outlined below:

- reduce road accidents and injury rates
- be socially acceptable to the local and broader community
- support economic development
- improve traffic efficiency
- be managed in accordance with Ecologically Sustainable Development Principles
- achieve maximum effectiveness of expenditure.

Process

Since early 2003, the RTA has undertaken a two-stage process to define a preferred highway corridor and to undertake a preferred concept design for the project. The combination of these two stages has resulted in a Proposal that has been the subject of this REF assessment.

The first stage was a strategic planning process to place the highway upgrade in the context of regional transport, land use planning and environmental priorities, and to consider all feasible options for the Preferred Corridor. A broad environmental impact assessment was undertaken for each of the corridor options to help with the overall evaluation process.

After a short-listing process, three corridor options with several sub-options were considered at a Corridor Evaluation Workshop (CEW) which included representatives from the RTA, other government agencies and the community. This workshop recommended adoption of the Southern Deviation Corridor as the preferred alignment of the Oxley Highway Upgrade.

The Preferred Corridor was shown at a public display in October 2003 and received strong community support.

The second stage involved formulation of a Detailed Concept Design for the Proposal, based on a list of design objectives developed for the project as well as RTA technical specifications. The main engineering elements to be addressed included:

- the vertical and horizontal alignment within the Preferred Corridor
- the determination of intersection locations and designs
- the type of bridge structure to be built over the existing highway
- drainage structures
- environmental safeguards to minimise impact on fauna movement
- indicative landscape design
- the staging and construction schedule.

Throughout both stages of the process to date, the RTA has maintained close contact with local stakeholders. Consultation has taken a number of forms including:

- media releases and general media coverage
- Community Liaison Group (CLG)
- community updates (newsletters)
- community workshops
- public displays
- residents / landowner meetings
- display of REF and circulation of summary brochures for public comment.

The RTA has also maintained close liaison with a wide range of government agencies and public utility companies at both stages in the project.



Photomontage of central cross-over bridges looking east along existing highway

The main features of the Proposal are summarised as follows and described in detail in **Sections 5** and **6** of the REF:

- a 6km section of new highway standard road
- a four-lane dual carriageway highway with controlled access
- bridge over the current Oxley Highway near Philip Charley Drive
- 100 kph design speed, with signposted speeds of between 60 and 100kph along the Proposal
- major drainage structures
- two dedicated fauna underpasses in the central part of the corridor
- five intersections including:
 - Wrights Road roundabout
 - Lindfield Park Road (temporary full at grade intersection)
 - a left on/left off ramp at Phillip Charley Drive
 - a central overpass bridge (with provision for an eastbound on-load ramp at a future stage)
 - western service centre roundabout
- provision for on-road cycling
- lighting at major intersections
- landscaping throughout the corridor
- noise attenuation in the form of noise walls and mounds at selected locations, as well as architectural treatment of selected houses along the corridor.

There is no provision for additional access points along the Proposal. On completion of the Proposal, the existing Oxley Highway would be de-classified as a State Highway and would be transferred to Hastings Council.

Main Environmental Impacts

The environmental studies undertaken for the REF examined all aspects of the impact of the Proposal.

the Proposal would represent a substantial improvement over the existing Oxley Highway in terms of road safety, transport efficiency and improved residential amenity.

Whilst there is still land to be acquired for the Proposal, this would not have major impact on severance of local properties or adversely affect local agricultural production. The Proposal does not entail the acquisition of any additional residential dwellings.

Consideration of the potential impacts of the proposed road upgrade on threatened species and their habitats, pursuant to Section 5A of the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979* (the '8-part test') has concluded that the proposed activity is likely to impose a significant effect on three threatened fauna species (the Koala, Yellow-bellied Glider and Glossy Black Cockatoo). Whilst a number of environmental safeguards would be included in the Proposal to minimise the impact on these species, a Species Impact Statement (SIS) has been separately undertaken by the RTA in consultation with the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC).

Environmental Safeguards

The various environmental studies undertaken for the project identified a number of environmental safeguards that have been incorporated into the Detailed Concept Design. These cover several matters including:

- protection against contamination of water quality and soil erosion
- noise attenuation
- fauna underpasses and fauna fencing
- planting of food trees for Koalas and Glossy-Black Cockatoos
- avoidance, protection and/or salvage of indigenous sites along the Proposal.

Details of the environmental safeguards included in the Proposal are provided under relevant headings in **Section 7** of the REF, and are summarised in **Section 8**.

Next Steps

The REF will be made available for public comment over a four week period commencing early September 2004, and will be placed on display in a number of convenient locations within the local area as well as in RTA offices in Grafton and Sydney.

Copies of the main report and working papers will be available from the RTA for review., and a summary brochure has been prepared for general circulation



Photomontage looking east from near the Service Centre at the western end of the Proposal

Any inquiries about the REF can be directed to Freecall 1800 800 342 or via email to michael_bulmer@rta.nsw.gov.au. Written comments on the REF should be sent to RTA Northern Region, PO Box 5234 Port Macquarie NSW 2444.

The REF and public comment will be considered by the RTA in coming to a decision on:

- whether an Environmental Impact Statement is required for the Proposal
- if an EIS is not required, whether the Proposal should proceed; and if so, subject to what modifications and/or conditions.

If it is decided that the Proposal can proceed, work would commence on the detailed engineering design for the project in anticipation of construction commencing during late 2005. Construction of the Proposal is estimated to take 18 months to complete.

The RTA wishes to place on record its appreciation for the cooperation and assistance provided by members of the Part Macquarie community in the preparation of studies and consultations associated with this REF.

RTA
September 2004



Photomontage of Oxley Highway Upgrade looking east to roundabout at intersection with existing highway