

Upgrading the Pacific Highway Sapphire to Woolgoolga and Coffs Harbour bypass

Connell Wagner has been involved in two associated, though separate, projects: The Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy, which includes the Sapphire to Woolgoolga upgrade and the Coffs Harbour bypass.

Sapphire to Woolgoolga

The Sapphire to Woolgoolga Pacific Highway Upgrade focuses on the upgrade of the existing highway between Sapphire and Arrawarra, consisting of a 14 km highway upgrade from Sapphire to south Woolgoolga and a 10 km bypass around Woolgoolga, rejoining the highway at Arrawarra.

Two community focus groups (CFGs) were created for this project, each focusing on geographically separate areas – a “southern CFG” for the upgrade section and, for the bypass section, a “northern CFG”.

From the initial stages of project development, the southern CFG expressed a desire for the project to provide local benefits through improved accessibility for the local community. Thus, early in the project’s development, a “Class A” highway arrangement was considered that required local traffic to travel along the highway, with access to local roads and properties via at-grade intersections. However, during development of the design at the environmental assessment phase, it was decided that a “Class M” highway arrangement would provide a far safer design that included grade separated interchanges and a local access road along the length of the project that was separate to the highway alignment. The southern CFG was grateful for the inclusion of this revised local access road arrangement, as it essentially enabled the community to undertake local trips (from Sapphire through to Arrawarra) without mixing with the highway traffic. The community also provided input into the location of interchanges and overpasses based on local resident cross-highway movements.

The bypass options for Woolgoolga consisted of five options for the route alignment. However, through consultation with the community and Council, a further two options were developed and assessed. Of these two options arose the preferred route alignment which was ultimately developed in order to reduce the impact on agricultural farming in the area.

Coffs Harbour bypass

The Coffs Harbour bypass route options process was initiated as part of the Sapphire to Woolgoolga project, with a decision on the corridor for the Coffs Harbour bypass required prior to the selection of a preferred route for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga upgrade. As with the route options for the bypass of Woolgoolga, the community was instrumental in the consideration of a number of route options, including the Coffs Harbour City Council preferred corridor option.

Community involvement was integral to the final outcome of this project, including the selection of the preferred route for the northern part of the Coffs Harbour bypass which was generated as a result of community concerns associated with the proximity of the alternative option to residential development.

Another issue for the Coffs Harbour community was the retention of a pedestrian overbridge at Korora. Due to the upgrade of the highway, the pedestrian bridge could no longer be retained as a pedestrian crossing over the wider highway footprint. The project team had intended that access across the highway would be via an underpass north of the pedestrian overbridge. However, during exhibition of the concept design, the community – not just school children – to gain access across the highway without having to navigate through the highway. The RTA, in response to community sentiment, consequently developed a number of scenarios that would see either the retention of the bridge or an alternative footbridge being constructed over the upgraded highway.

