Frequently Asked Questions

Bulli Pass (Princes Highway) closure – stage two

July 2017

The NSW Government is funding this $5 million safety project to install 1.1 kilometres of rock protection fencing along Bulli Pass.

Have the stage two closure plans been reviewed?
We thank the community for providing feedback on plans for the second stage of safety work on Bulli Pass. Over 80 submissions were received about our plans for the closure. This feedback along with information and experience from the first closure has been used to help refine and finalise our plans for the second closure and minimise the impact on motorists and the local community.

Bulli Pass will be closed for up to 10 weeks to complete the second stage of work, from 9am Monday 28 August to 3pm Friday 3 November 2017, weather permitting. Bulli Pass will be open in both directions over the October long weekend, from 3pm Friday 29 September to 9am Tuesday 3 October 2017.

The timing of the second closure will:
• include slope maintenance work to minimise future impact on the community
• avoid the busy summer period when traffic volumes are higher. Our traffic data shows this period generally has lower traffic volumes than other school holiday periods. This acknowledges impacts to motorist journeys by identifying the best times for the safety work
• avoid events including the MS Sydney to the Gong charity event as well as scheduled track work and rail closures in the region
• allow for the reopening Bulli Pass on Friday 29 September until Tuesday 3 October 2017.

Other improvements to our plans for the closure in 2017 include:
• working with emergency services to minimise response times to incidents and ensure detours operate smoothly to reduce congestion and keep traffic moving where possible during emergencies
• working closely with our contractor to ensure we can reopen Bulli Pass if necessary during major incidents on the M1 Princes Motorway.

These plans will help ensure the surrounding road network operates as safely and efficiently as possible and the impact on journey times is minimised.

We recognise the inconvenience and additional travel time due to the closure and appreciate the community’s patience while the safety fencing is completed.

What improvements have been made to the plans for the stage two closure?
We have improved our plans for the upcoming closure to help keep the road network operating as smoothly as possible and reduce the impact of the closure on the community.
Improvements include:

- enhancing our planning and ability to respond quickly to any incidents during the closure through additional briefings with NSW Police, Fire and Rescue, Ambulance, Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service and Wollongong City Council
- updating our detour management plans following a review of the 2016 closure
- increasing the presence of heavy vehicle enforcement teams and NSW Police on the M1 to carry out safety related activities
- extending the number of electronic message boards to provide up to date and clear information to motorists about the closure and detour routes
- promote that local businesses are still open near the closure and on the detour routes
- additional parking signs will be installed in Bulli to direct shoppers to parking available in side streets
- rail services will be operating throughout the closure, there are no periods of track work scheduled during the second stage of work
- Roads and Maritime will doorknock businesses in the affected areas prior to the start of work to provide information and discuss the upcoming closure.

What benefits does the safety fencing provide?

There have been a number of slips and rock falls on Bulli Pass which had the potential to cause serious injuries to road users. This includes a major natural land slip in 2008 which required slope stabilisation work and seven week closure of Bulli Pass, as well as a serious rock fall which landed on a vehicle in 2015.

Installing a rock fall protection fence and carrying out further investigations are an important part of the long-term management of Bulli Pass.

Once installed, the fencing will provide a high level of protection for road users.

What work will be carried out during stage two?

The remainder (about 500 metres) of the 1.1 kilometre fencing will be installed during the second closure, with the highest risk sections already installed during 2016.

The fence is being installed high up on the escarpment, which can only be accessed on foot or by using cranes and other lifting machinery from the road. Heavy posts (200 kilograms each) and fencing will be lifted carefully into place, drilled and installed without damaging the surrounding rainforest canopy.

Investigations carried out during stage one work identified slope stabilisation repairs required for sections of Bulli Pass. This work will be carried out during the stage two to minimise impacts on motorists and the community.

Why is it necessary to close the road during the work?

It is important to ensure the safety of all road users and workers while this work is carried out.

The work involves using large machinery and drilling equipment which doesn’t leave enough room for vehicles to pass safely. There is also an increased risk of rocks falling while the fence is installed.

Workers will be working day and night shifts, seven days a week to ensure that the work is completed as quickly as possible. The longer road closure means we can finish the work faster.

Why is the work being completed in two stages?

A number of options were considered before the start of work. The program of two longer closures provides the best outcome for workers and road users. Benefits of this closure program include:

- maximising safety for all road users by removing the risk of rocks falling while work is carried out
- removing safety conflicts between workers and live traffic
- ensuring the road will be reopened on Friday 3 November 2017, prior to the MS Sydney to the Gong charity bike ride
- installing the most complex section of fencing during the first stage to prevent potential rock falls.

The two stage closure means that the work can take place at a time when motorists, residents and local businesses will be less impacted, outside the summer tourist season.
What other options did Roads and Maritime look at?
Options were reviewed in 2016 and again in 2017 with our specialist contractor. Considerations included:
- working with one lane open. This option was considered unsafe as some of the equipment is so large that it covers the entire width of the road. It also carries an increased safety risk of rocks falling on the road without protection while work is carried out
- opening and closing the road for peak hour traffic. This option was reviewed however is problematic as some machinery can take 4-6 hours to set up and pack down which would not allow enough time for work activities to be completed. The equipment required for this stage is the same as for stage one. There would also be a high risk that the road could not be reopened after each shift due to risk of rock falls
- working only at night. There are some key activities which need to be carried out in daylight for worker safety which means this option is unsuitable
- one long closure for about four months. This option would cause significant impacts to road users, local businesses and residents, particularly during holiday periods.

A one-off ten week closure is the safest and fastest way to install the second stage of fencing and ensure Bulli Pass motorists can benefit from the completion of the safety works.

What will the impact of the detour be?
Detours will be in place via Memorial Drive and the M1, or via Lawrence Hargrave Drive and the M1.

Motorists should plan their journey and allow extra travel time. Traffic volumes on the M1 at Mount Ousley and Lawrence Hargrave Drive will be higher than usual, motorists should expect delays and where possible travel outside of peak periods.

For the assistance of road users detour maps are available on our webpage.

Portable electronic messaging boards will display information to motorists about the closure including dates and detour routes.

Heavy vehicles over 19 metres or 50.5 tonnes should use the M1 as normal.

Will residents still be able to access their properties?
Yes. Local traffic will be allowed from Lawrence Hargrave Drive up to the hairpin bend.

Who has been involved as part of the process?
We are speaking with local residents and businesses, Wollongong City Council, Wollongong Tourism, NSW Emergency Services, Sydney Trains, freight industry and Port Kembla Port Corporation about this closure.

What plans have been prepared for the detour routes?
Detailed plans for traffic and emergency management of the detour routes during the closure have been prepared. These plans will help to ensure that road safety and journey times on the detour routes are prioritised during the closure period.

The plans include:
- clearways – motorists will be reminded that clearways are in place at some locations on the detour routes. Tow trucks will be on standby to remove vehicles not observing clearways during peak hours
- traffic lights – will be closely monitored and adjusted where possible to reduce congestion
- key intersections on the road network have been identified and will be monitored to help keep traffic flowing and manage safety
- recommended routes (shown on maps and electronic signage) have been prepared for detour routes around North Wollongong to help manage congestion, particularly during peak times
- emergency management plans have been prepared to ensure that incidents on the M1, Memorial Drive and Lawrence Hargrave Drive can be cleared as quickly as possible
- emergency services are aware of the closure and crews including tow trucks will be on standby to resolve incidents as quickly as possible
- no routine maintenance work will take place on the detour routes during the closure to help minimise the impact on journey times.
Has Roads and Maritime assessed the traffic impact of this closure on Lawrence Hargrave Drive?
Traffic modelling from the first closure revealed that detoured traffic favoured the M1 and Lawrence Hargrave Drive equally. We have prepared plans for clearing traffic delays using tow trucks with easy access to these routes.

Has Roads and Maritime investigated the possibility of increasing train services and/or extra carriages during the closure?
Roads and Maritime liaised with NSW Train Link during and prior to the stage one work on Bulli Pass.

Data from NSW Trains shows that the demand for train services did not increase during stage one work.

Train loads across the network are closely monitored by NSW Train Link, particularly on services where customers face longer commutes.

A load factor of 100 per cent means there is a seat for each passenger. At 135 per cent, an additional five people are standing on each level and 15 in each vestibule.

Recent surveys show average loads are below the 135 per cent benchmark, with the morning peak recording 86 per cent and afternoon peak 101 per cent.

Stage two work will avoid scheduled track work being carried out by NSW Trains.

What arrangements have been made for cyclists?
We have been consulting with cyclist groups on managing traffic on Lawrence Hargrave Drive which is the detour route for cyclists.

Cyclists should expect increased traffic volumes, especially during peak times. There are alternate roads adjacent to Lawrence Hargrave Drive between Thirroul and Wombarra which cyclists could also use.

We will be monitoring traffic volumes along Lawrence Hargrave Drive during the closure.

How will Roads and Maritime manage traffic on the M1?
Traffic volumes on the M1 at Mount Ousley reached around 60,000 per day during the stage one Bulli Pass closure, which is an increase of around 20 per cent above the daily average. The week day peak traffic volumes increased by around 14 per cent.

About 56 per cent of diverted traffic from Bulli Pass used the M1 at Mount Ousley to access Wollongong.

During the first closure tow trucks, emergency patrols and traffic commanders were on standby to respond and clear incidents quickly and reduce the impact on traffic flow on the detour routes.

Roads and Maritime, NSW Police and emergency services have reviewed traffic management plans taking into account the experience of 2016 and have refined operations by targeting locations, resources and logistics for the 2017 closure. These resources will be in place again during the second closure so the traffic network can operate as efficiently as possible.

We will continue working closely with emergency services and other stakeholders to deliver effective incident management plans.

We will work with our heavy vehicle enforcement teams and NSW Police to implement regular safety related activities on the M1.