Part A - Preliminary
Introduction

This chapter explains why and how this Plan has been prepared, summarises the scope of the Plan, and introduces the project investigation area.

1.1 The Bells Line of Road

The Bells Line of Road (State Route 40) is an important road linking north-western Sydney with central and western New South Wales. It runs from North Richmond in the east to the intersection with the Darling Causeway at Bell in the west. The road is one of two road crossings of the Blue Mountains; the other is the Great Western Highway.

The Bells Line of Road was originally known as Bells Line, after a local pastoralist, Archibald Bell Jr, who was shown the route by Dharug men in 1823.

The Great Western Highway has historically been (and remains) the primary route across the Blue Mountains, attracting the majority of cross-mountain traffic. Bells Line of Road performs a secondary role for cross-mountain traffic and is also used as a local access road.

In this report, the Bells Line of Road ‘corridor’ refers to the Bells Line of Road as well as associated connections to the Sydney motorway network and the Great Western Highway.

1.2 Scope of this Plan

In November 2009, the Australian and NSW governments jointly announced the commencement of a Long Term Strategic Corridor Plan (the Plan) for the Bells Line of Road.

In March 2010, the Terms of Reference were released for the Plan (Appendix A). The Terms of Reference state that the Plan “will guide the development and reservation of a road corridor for a future upgraded Bells Line of Road. Although current projections indicate that a major upgrade of Bells Line of Road is not expected to be required until at least 2033, it is appropriate that planning for this corridor progresses now for the future.”

The Terms of Reference also identified a series of outputs to be included in the Plan that are to be developed through extensive community and stakeholder consultation. These are listed below, along with a reference to the section of the Plan where the outputs are included:

> Outline of the study methodology (Section 1.4).
> Summary of findings from relevant past studies pertaining to the Bells Line of Road corridor (Section 1.3).
> Forecast traffic growth along the route – 25 year horizon (Sections 4.5.3 and 4.5.4).
> Identified priorities for the development of the Bells Line of Road corridor (Chapter 8).
> Identification of broad options that meet long term corridor requirements, project objectives and project design standards (Chapter 8).
> Summary of additional work required (Chapter 9).
> Schedule of tasks for selection of a preferred corridor (Chapter 9).
> Recommended timeframe for further development (Chapter 8).
> Recommended sequencing of implementation (Chapter 8).

The Terms of Reference also established a governance structure to guide the preparation of the Plan. This included a Governmental Steering Committee comprising representatives of all levels of government, specifically:

> Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure and Transport.
> New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet.
1.3 Previous studies

A number of previous studies have considered the need for an upgrade to the Bells Line of Road, particularly the Central West Transport Needs Study (2009) and the Bells Line of Road Corridor Study (2004). These studies have generally concluded that a major upgrade of the Bells Line of Road corridor is not justified on economic, social and environmental grounds within the planning horizons that were evaluated.

Previous reports have however suggested that interim improvements to the corridor may be required. They have also identified that consideration should be given to reserving a corridor to enable future connections to Sydney’s motorway network and the Great Western Highway.

For more detail on previous reports, refer to Background Summary and Corridor Objectives Report, November 2010. This report, as well as previous reports, are posted on the project website, www.rms.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects.

1.4 How this Plan was prepared

This Plan has been prepared by integrating community consultation and strategic technical investigations covering engineering, transport and constraint analysis (Figure 1.1). This in turn has drawn on a range of previous studies undertaken in relation to the corridor (refer to the Background Summary and Corridor Objectives Report, November 2010, for a summary of previous studies).
Transport analysis
The transport analysis provides an assessment of the corridor’s existing and future capacity and efficiency. The analysis helped to identify when upgrades may be required in the short, medium and long term, and the potential locations of these improvements. (Refer to Chapter 4 and the Transport Analysis Technical Paper).

Constraint analysis
The constraint analysis provides an assessment of environmental, social and physical constraints within the corridor, and maps the locations of sensitive issues. It helps identify the feasibility of future upgrades and provides a tool for more detailed corridor planning after the completion of the Plan. (Refer to Chapter 5.)

Engineering analysis
The engineering analysis provides an assessment of the current condition of the road network and road safety in the Bells Line of Road corridor and how these could be improved. (Refer to Chapter 6 and the Crash Analysis Technical Paper).

Plan outcomes
Outcomes of the plan are described in Chapter 8, 9 and 10. These chapters bring together the findings of the four streams described above to identify the opportunities for corridor improvements (including the process associated with the reservation of a new corridor), corridor development priorities (in the short, medium and long term) and the steps that need to be taken to achieve the identified development priorities.

1.5 The project area
The project investigation area for the Plan covers three sections (Figure 1.2). The three sections have been identified on the basis of environmental character and corridor planning challenges.

**Eastern section – Sydney motorway network to Kurrajong Heights**
The eastern section comprises the area between the Sydney motorway network and Kurrajong Heights. It includes much of Sydney’s North West Sector, Richmond and North Richmond, and encompasses the M7 Motorway and the existing reservation for the Castlereagh Freeway and Windsor Road. The project area does not include the M4 motorway as it is not considered likely that there would be feasible direct connections between Bells Line of Road and the M4 motorway.

This section represents a transition between the rapidly changing urban fringe of north-western Sydney and the rural and bushland environment of the lower Bells Line of Road.

**Central section – Kurrajong Heights to Bell**
The central section covers the majority of the Bells Line of Road.

This section is characterised by a rural setting in the east, which gives way to the natural bushland and rugged terrain associated with the Blue Mountains National Park and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

**Western section – Bell to the Great Western Highway**
The western section incorporates a wide area to the west of the Bells Line of Road that will allow for identification of the most appropriate connection between the Bells Line of Road and the Great Western Highway. This section is generally bounded by Darling Causeway in the east, Chifley Road and Marrangaroo in the north, and the Great Western Highway in the south. It comprises a mix of agricultural land and bushland (mostly within national park and state forest), mining, and the city of Lithgow.
Figure 1.2 Project area