



Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW

Oxley Highway to Kempsey Upgrading the Pacific Highway Environmental Assessment

MAIN VOLUME

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GHD Pty Ltd
ABN 39 008 488 373

Level 3, GHD Tower
24 Honeysuckle Drive
NEWCASTLE NSW 2300

Phone: +61 2 4979 9999

Fax: +61 2 4979 9988

Email: ntlmail@ghd.com

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2. Strategic need for the Proposal

The Oxley Highway to Kempsey Pacific Highway upgrade is an important component of the wider Pacific Highway Upgrade Program to upgrade the Pacific Highway between Hexham (near the F3 Freeway) in NSW and the Queensland border. This chapter presents the strategic need for the Proposal at a Federal, State and regional level.

The Director-General's environmental assessment requirements identify a number of key issues to be addressed in relation to the strategic justification of the Proposal. **Table 2-1** indicates where the aspects of the Director-General's environmental assessment requirements that relate to strategic need are addressed, either in this chapter or in other chapters (in *italics*).

Table 2-1 Strategic justification

Environmental assessment requirements	Where addressed
Strategic Justification and Project - outline the strategic outcomes for the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program (PHUP), including with respect to strategic need and justification, the aims and objectives of relevant State planning policies, the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development, and cumulative and synergistic impacts associated with the Program as a whole. Identify how the project fits within these strategic outcomes and how impacts associated with the project will be considered and managed to achieve acceptable environmental planning outcomes across the PHUP.	Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 <i>Chapter 3 Proposal need, objectives and alternatives</i> <i>Chapter 10 Land use and property</i> <i>Chapter 21 Principles of ecologically sustainable development</i> <i>Chapter 22 Strategic and Proposal justification</i>
Project Justification - describe the need for and objectives of the project; alternatives considered (including an assessment of the environmental costs and benefits of the project relative to alternatives), and provide justification for the preferred project taking into consideration the objects of the <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i> .	Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 <i>Chapter 3 Proposal need, objectives and alternatives</i> <i>Chapter 22 Strategic and Proposal justification</i>

2.1 Strategic outcomes of the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program

The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program is one of the largest infrastructure projects in the history of NSW. The Pacific Highway is one of the most critical roads in NSW, affecting the safety, wellbeing and livelihoods of local residents and road users. The RTA has developed a set of objectives for the upgrade of the Pacific Highway between Hexham (near the F3 Freeway) and the Queensland border. These objectives have been developed to ensure consistency for road and environmental performance across the range of upgrades that make up the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program.

The objectives of the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program are to:

- Reduce road crashes and injuries.
- Reduce travel times.
- Reduce freight transport costs.
- Develop a route that involves the community and considers their interests.
- Provide a route that supports economic development.

- Manage the upgrading of the route in accordance with ecologically sustainable development principles.
- Provide the best value for money.

The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program to date has brought major improvements to road conditions, road safety, travel times, and transport efficiency. The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program is also improving connections between areas that are forecast to experience significant population growth and are major tourist destinations.

The Proposal has been developed within the context of the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program and its objectives. The Proposal and the broader Pacific Highway Upgrade Program also fit within the wider strategic growth and planning context for the North Coast of NSW as outlined in **Sections 2.2 and 2.3**. How the Proposal would meet the objectives of the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program is discussed in **Chapter 22 Strategic and Proposal justification**.

2.2 Growth context

2.2.1 Sydney-Brisbane corridor

The Sydney-Brisbane corridor is expected to experience significant population growth over the next 20 years and a corresponding increase in economic activity. Already the coastal area between and including the Sydney and Brisbane metropolitan areas contains approximately 40 per cent of Australia's total population (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2007). The Australian Bureau of Statistics forecasts indicate that population along the coastal route is expected to grow by around 15 to 20 per cent by 2030.

The Pacific Highway plays a vital role in linking coastal regions between Sydney and Brisbane, providing access to markets and sources of goods and services. An efficient and safe transport system is a key determinant of regional population growth and economic development. Improving the efficiency, safety and capacity of rail and road transport links between Sydney and Brisbane would provide for more cohesive growth throughout major population, commerce and employment growth areas. For this reason, the Pacific Highway is one of the most important strategic corridors in the Australian road network.

2.2.2 Mid North Coast region

The Mid North Coast region of NSW is commonly described as the area between Karuah and Yamba and includes the urban centres of Bulahdelah, Taree, Port Macquarie, Kempsey, Coffs Harbour and Grafton. The Proposal is located within this region.

This region is predicted to experience the most significant gains (through internal migration) of any region in NSW. Its population is forecast to grow from a current population of 330,600 to 424,600 by 2031, an increase of more than 28 per cent (Department of Planning 2009). The average annual growth rate for the region during this period is estimated to be 1.1 per cent (Department of Planning 2009).

The Department of Planning attributes the high growth rates to both an influx of retirees and others relocating from larger urban centres, and improved employment prospects for those seeking to establish businesses or seek employment, to meet demand for tourism and retail services in coastal towns.

The greatest population growth pressure in the region is anticipated to be experienced around Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and the Great Lakes/Taree area (Department of Planning 2009).

2.2.3 Port Macquarie-Hastings and Kempsey local government areas

Port Macquarie-Hastings

The Port Macquarie-Hastings local government area is characterised by a mixture of rural and residential areas, and as a tourist destination. The local government area encompasses a total land area of 3687 square kilometres, of which a large proportion is state forest and national park. It includes beaches, watercourses, coastal wetlands, flood plains and rugged mountain ranges. The council area has three main townships with many small villages and localities. The largest town is Port Macquarie, which serves as both a major tourist destination and regional centre. Camden Haven is the next most populated area, including Dunbogan, Kendall, Kew, Laurieton, North Haven and West Haven. The other main centre is Wauchope, which serves as the regional inland centre, particularly for rural communities and associated agricultural industries.

In 2006, the total population of the local government area was 68,429 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). It is forecast to increase to 82,691 by 2016, at an average annual growth rate of 1.48 per cent (Port Macquarie-Hastings Council 2008).

Kempsey

The Kempsey local government area is also known as the Macleay Valley Coast. The Macleay Valley area is characterised by: coastal settlements, such as Crescent Head, South West Rocks and Stuarts Point in the east; agricultural land uses on the alluvial floodplains of the Macleay River; inland towns such as Kempsey and Frederickton on the Macleay River; and agriculture, bushland, forests and small settlements on the fringe of the Great Dividing Range in the west.

The town of Kempsey has developed a strong role as a mid-journey service centre for people travelling on the Pacific Highway, and has developed as an important employment centre for the region's forestry, agriculture, education and tourism industries.

Although more recently it has experienced a decline in agriculture and other primary industries and manufacturing, Kempsey has maintained a strong employment economy with significant growth in wholesale/ retail trade, transport, education and health and other tourism-based industries (Kempsey Shire Council undated).

The estimated resident population of the Kempsey local government area at 30 June 2008 was 28,856 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009). No recent population projections are available for the Kempsey local government area.

2.3 Planning for growth

Strategic planning for infrastructure is required to ensure that the predicted high levels of population growth within the Sydney-Brisbane corridor are balanced with sufficient major infrastructure provision. The relationship of the Proposal to strategic infrastructure planning in both the Federal and State contexts is outlined below.

2.3.1 Nation Building Program

The Federal Government is investing \$35.8 billion on road and rail infrastructure through the Nation Building Program (formerly known as AusLink) over the six year period from 2008-09 to 2013-14.

The Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government is managing this investment through a range of road and rail programs and projects across the National Land Transport Network.

The National Land Transport Network is a single integrated network of land transport linkages of strategic national importance, which is funded by Australian, State and Territory Governments. The National Network is based on national and inter-regional transport corridors including connections through urban areas, links to ports and airports, rail, road and intermodal connections that together are of critical importance to national and regional economic growth development and connectivity.

In 2004, the Federal Government released the AusLink White Paper *Building our National Transport Future* (the White Paper) (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2004). The White Paper sought to promote sustainable national and regional economic growth, development and connectivity by contributing to the development of an integrated national transportation network. The Pacific Highway was identified as part of the national network defined in the White Paper and acknowledged as the key road in the Sydney-Brisbane transport corridor.

The policy set out in the White Paper was translated into legislation – in 2005 in the Federal *AusLink (National Land Transport) Act 2005* (AusLink Act) and then in 2009 in the Federal *Nation Building Program (National Land Transport) Act 2009* (Nation Building Act). The Pacific Highway forms part of the ‘National Land Transport Network’ as defined in the Nation Building Act. The express objects of the Nation Building Act are to assist national and regional economic and social development by the provision of Federal funding aimed at improving the performance of land transport infrastructure.

The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program is funded in part by the Nation Building Program. The strategic outcomes for the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program marry with the objects of the Nation Building Act. The improved performance of the Pacific Highway would provide increased road transport safety and efficiency, economic, financial and social benefits to regions through which the highway passes, and environmental benefits flowing from its operation. The Proposal would deliver all of these benefits for the Port Macquarie–Kempsey area.

2.3.2 Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy 2007

The *Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy – Building our National Transport Future* (Department of Transport and Regional Services 2007) is a document that was jointly developed by the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services (now Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government), the RTA, the NSW Ministry of Transport (now NSW Transport and Infrastructure), the Queensland Department of Main Roads and Queensland Transport.

The strategy identifies the Sydney–Brisbane corridor as the busiest on the Australian transport network. In addition to the Pacific Highway’s role as a major interstate transport route, the strategy identifies the Pacific Highway in the Mid North Coast region as a key component in linking populations in multiple regional centres.

Deficiencies in the transport corridor are highlighted by the strategy and include safety, amenity, infrastructure capacity, road geometry and ageing pavement. To overcome the deficiencies, the strategy identifies the achievement of substantial completion of the duplication of the Pacific Highway as a short-term priority and completion of the entire Pacific Highway duplication as a long-term priority. The Proposal would contribute to achieving these priorities.

2.3.3 State Plan

The *NSW State Plan: Investing in a Better Future* (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2010) identifies priorities for the NSW Government over the next 10 years. The plan provides goals and targets for regional economies, environmental protection, employment and transport, including improving the efficiency and safety of the road network through maintenance and infrastructure development. Upgrading the Pacific Highway is one of the priorities and targets for improving the efficiency of the road network. The Proposal would contribute to the upgrading of the Pacific Highway.

2.3.4 NSW State Infrastructure Strategy

The *State Infrastructure Strategy – New South Wales 2008-09 to 2017-18* (NSW Treasury 2008) provides strategic direction for planning and delivery of infrastructure in NSW. The strategy lists roadwork initiatives planned throughout NSW, including the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program.

The strategy highlights that the upgrading of the Pacific Highway would continue under agreements between the NSW and Australian Governments. The proposed Oxley Highway to Kempsey Pacific Highway upgrade (along with other Pacific Highway upgrades) is identified in the strategy.

The strategy also identifies that the Pacific Highway requires upgrading as soon as possible. The NSW Government will continue to work in partnership with the Federal Government to investigate potential timing, financing and delivery options to accelerate the upgrade of the Pacific Highway.

2.3.5 Mid North Coast Regional Strategy

The *Mid North Coast Regional Strategy 2006-31* (Department of Planning 2009a) aims to ensure that adequate land is available and appropriately located to accommodate the region's projected population growth.

The strategy identifies the Pacific Highway as the primary inter/intra region road corridor, and states that the efficiency and safety of this road corridor will be protected. A regional transport action of the strategy is that planning and development of the Pacific Highway upgrade through the region should be continued through to completion. The Proposal would improve the efficiency and safety of the Pacific Highway and would contribute to completion of the upgrading of the Pacific Highway through this region.

The relevant elements of the *Mid North Coast Regional Strategy* are further discussed in **Chapter 10 Land use and property** and **Chapter 11 Social and economic**.

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