

1. Introduction

1.1 The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program

The Pacific Highway Upgrade Program is the single largest construction program undertaken in NSW in the last 40 years. Over 40 projects have opened to traffic, with motorists now benefiting from more than 200 kilometres of four-lane dual carriageway.

The \$2.2 billion, ten-year upgrading program has delivered significant improvements to road conditions, safety and travel times since its commencement in mid-1996. Notorious black spots have been removed with the completion of the Bulahdelah to Coolongolook and Yelgun to Chinderah sections, the Raleigh Deviation and Ewingsdale Interchange. Travel times between Hexham and the Queensland border have been reduced by approximately 70 minutes for passenger vehicles.

Four major construction projects are currently underway – Karuah to Bulahdelah (Stage 1), Brunswick Heads to Yelgun, Bundacree Creek to Possum Brush, and the Cooperook Bypass. A further 22 projects are at various stages of planning and development including Kempsey to Eungai, the Bulahdelah Bypass and Moorland to Herons Creek.

As well as boosting tourism and transport efficiency, lives have been saved, the crash rate has more than halved and serious injury accidents have been reduced.

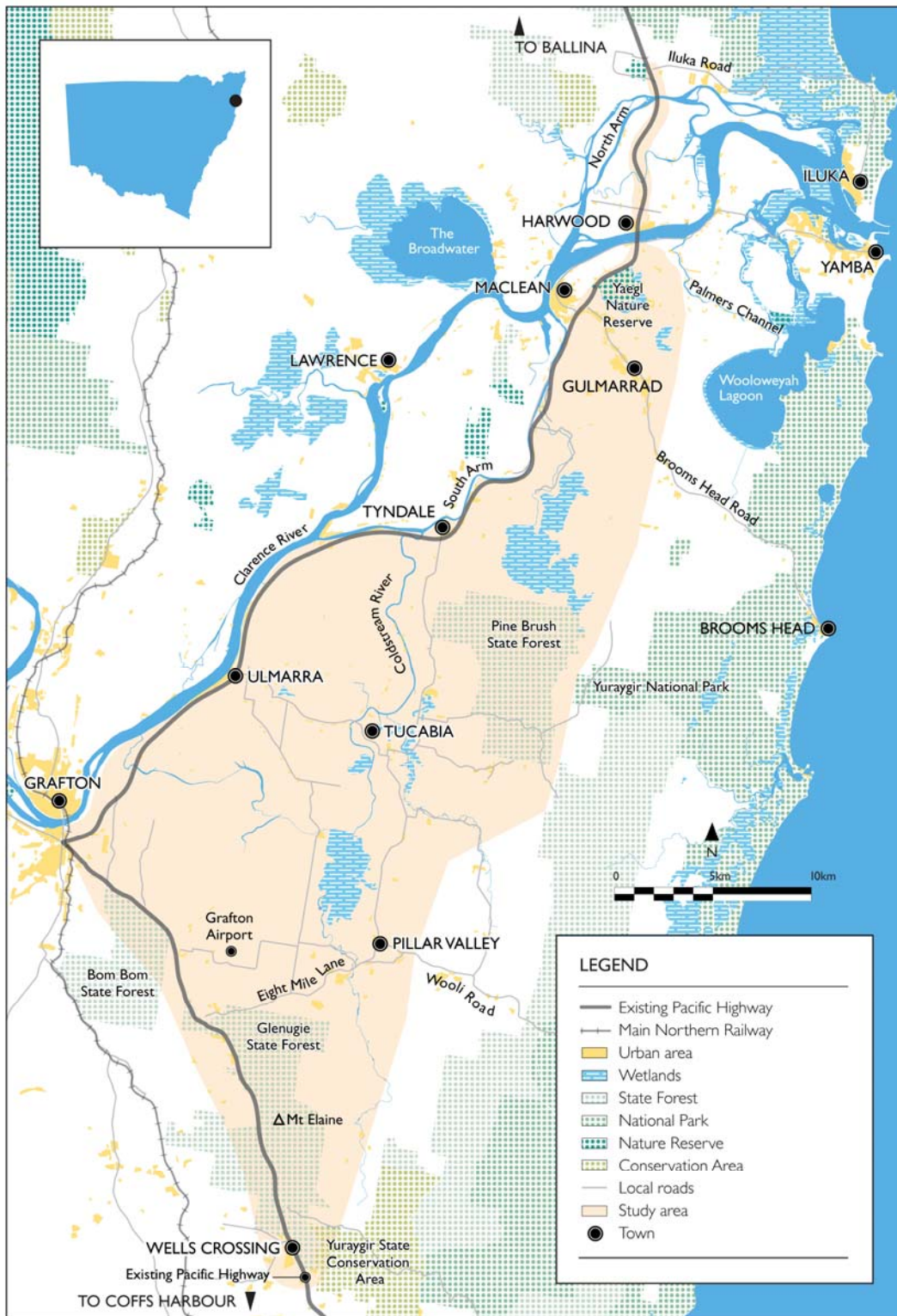
1.2 Wells Crossing to Iluka Road project

As part of the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) intends to upgrade the Pacific Highway between Wells Crossing and Iluka Road, on the north coast of NSW (refer to **Figure 1-1**). This 80 kilometre section of the highway is predominantly two lanes and it passes through several towns and rural areas.

Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) has been commissioned by the RTA to investigate route options, undertake concept design, prepare an environmental impact assessment and implement a community involvement program for the Wells Crossing to Iluka Road project. It is anticipated that the preferred route will be selected by the end of 2005, and the concept design completed in mid 2006.

This report describes the investigations that have led to the identification of feasible route options, their characteristics and their potential impacts.

Figure 1-1 Location of Wells Crossing to Iluka Road project



1.3 Study process

The study process for the Wells Crossing to Iluka Road project involves two stages and numerous tasks as follows:

- Stage 1: Development and assessment of route options:
 - A program of community and stakeholder consultation.
 - Development of project criteria, which are based on the program and project objectives.
 - Development of a long list of route options using a geographic information system (GIS) mapping tool, investigations of the study area, other project requirements such as design standards, and input from the community.
 - Assessment of the long list of route options against the project objectives and criteria to identify a short list of feasible options.
 - Development and display of a short list of route options.
 - Development of a preferred option based on information collected during targeted field work, issues raised by the community and stakeholders in relation to the options and a value management workshop.
- Stage 2: Assessment and approval of the preferred route:
 - Refinement and display of the preferred option.
 - Concept design and environmental impact assessment of the preferred option.
 - Determination of the project.

This report focuses on Stage 1, up to the development and display of the short listed route options.

1.4 The study area

The study area for the Wells Crossing to Iluka Road project encompasses two sections that have been combined into a single project: Wells Crossing to Harwood Bridge and Harwood Bridge to Iluka Road. The study area is triangular in shape and covers an area of approximately 64,500 hectares, extending from Wells Crossing in the south to Iluka Road in the north, and from South Grafton in the west to Pillar Valley in the east. It is predominantly located to the east of the existing Pacific Highway alignment. The rationale for identification and refinement of the study area boundaries is described in **Section 5.1**