

4. Community and stakeholder consultation

4.1 Consultation objectives

A comprehensive stakeholder consultation process has been implemented since the project began. Local stakeholders have important information on issues and constraints in the study area with the potential to affect the location of route options and ultimately, the performance of the preferred route. Stakeholders can also be affected, directly and/or indirectly, by the route options.

These consultation objectives were developed and have shaped the process and activities:

- Creating stakeholder and community awareness of the study and the need for the upgrade.
- Identifying community and stakeholder issues and concerns associated with the project and making provision for these to be effectively communicated to, and addressed by, the project team.
- Providing the community and other stakeholders with opportunities to be involved in the study process.
- Creating stakeholder and community awareness of route options and the preferred route.

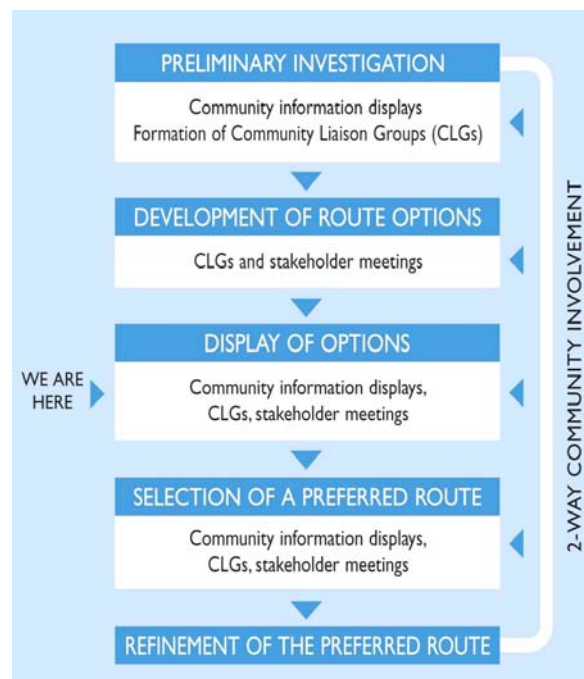
4.2 Consultation activities

A consultation program has been developed to provide multiple opportunities for involvement for the diverse range of community interests and stakeholder background associated with the project. The general approach to community consultation is outlined in **Figure 4-1** and this shows how the consultation program interacts with and supports the overall study process.

A wide range of community groups and individuals have been involved in the project through:

- Community Information Sessions held in Grafton and Maclean in December 2004 at the commencement of the study to disseminate information and receive feedback from the community in relation to their concerns or questions.
- Distribution of Community Updates in November 2004 and October 2005.

Figure 4-1 Community and stakeholder consultation process



- Formation and regular meetings of Community Liaison Groups (CLGs). Because of the large and diverse study area, a decision was made to create three CLGs to ensure representation across the whole study area. The CLGs have been established in Maclean, Grafton and Pillar Valley.
- Public notice advertising and media coverage (print and electronic) informing the community of key aspects of the project and opportunities for involvement.
- Provision of a free call community information line (1800 557 673) and e-mail for project inquiries.
- Establishment of project website to host project information, project updates and records of CLG meetings.
- Establishment of focus groups to address issues specific to Aboriginal cultural heritage and flooding issues.
- A survey focusing on the potential business impacts of the upgrade was distributed to a representative sample of the business community in the study area, to gain an appreciation of their issues and concerns. A focus group meeting to discuss the potential business impacts of the route options will be held during the route options display period.
- Meetings/briefings to local council, business, special interest and industry groups.
- Meetings and site visits with individual residents and property owners.
- Receipt of written submissions that have assisted in the mapping of constraints and provided input into the development of route options.

The route options, along with this report, will be placed on public display for a period of four weeks, and public comment invited. Consultation activities during the display will include distribution of a community update, static and staffed displays at various locations throughout the study area, meetings with individual property owners potentially affected by the route options, and CLG meetings.

Community representatives and key stakeholders will be involved in the Value Management Workshop that will provide input to a recommendation of a preferred route for the project.

4.3 Government agency consultation

Communication with key local and State Government agencies, authorities and organisations has been established and will be maintained throughout the study. Initial written consultation with the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage has also been undertaken. Ongoing communication will ensure the requirements of all government agencies are addressed and will ensure the project team is working with the most up-to-date information.

The initial contact with key government agencies and other stakeholders was made at a planning focus meeting held in December 2004, to brief them on the project. Following the planning focus meeting, Clarence Valley Council and State Government agencies have provided data about the study area. This information was critical to the constraints mapping and subsequent route options identification process.

Representatives of council, State Government agencies and authorities will be invited to participate in the Value Management Workshop for the project.

4.4 Community Liaison Groups

An important component of consultation activities during the development of route options has been the formation and regular meetings of the three CLGs. Members of the CLGs represent various localities and/or interest groups within the local community. The three groups were established at the commencement of the project and additional members were included to represent communities in the extended study area.

The CLGs have facilitated more detailed discussion on the key issues associated with the development and evaluation of route options. Presentations have been made to the CLGs by members of the project team and discussions held about potential constraints and issues in the study area. Topics presented and discussed at the CLGs have included:

- Describing the objectives for the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program and for the Wells Crossing to Iluka Road project and how these relate to the development of route options and ultimately to the selection of a preferred route.
- The role of community involvement in the study and the role of CLG members as agreed through adoption of the CLG Charter.
- Receiving information on the study process and progress and understanding how the CLGs fit into the process of route option identification, development and selection.
- Discussing key issues for route options development including social and environmental constraints and highway design considerations.
- Discussing key issues in the CLG members' areas and broader issues relevant to the proposed upgrading of the Pacific Highway.
- Identifying key issues for the communities, residents, businesses and property owners in the study area in relation to the development of route options and providing feedback on these issues and the potential impacts of a highway upgrade.
- Receiving information on, and providing input to, specialist investigations being undertaken to assist in the route selection process including traffic investigations, ecological constraints mapping, heritage investigations, and land use and planning.

- CLG members disseminating information presented at the CLG meetings to the constituents they represent.
- Receiving information on the Value Management Process and selecting CLG members to participate in the Value Management Workshop.

The CLG meetings have been chaired by a member of the project team. Records of all CLG meetings have been made and reviewed by a nominated CLG member prior to being finalised, distributed and placed on the project web page for public access. They are made available in hard copy on request to anyone without access to the internet.

The CLGs have met three times as separate groups and once as a combined group before the route options display. Meetings with the CLGs are proposed to be held during the route options display to receive feedback on key issues associated with each option.

4.5 Community meetings and activities

Community members have organised a number of public meetings which have attracted large public attendances in some cases. The RTA or its consultants have not organised or attended these meetings, and they are not part of the formal consultation program for the project. The meetings reflect the level of interest and concern within the local community about the project and the desire for the local community to have a 'voice' in the process. The RTA has been provided with records of a number of the public/community meetings organised by members of the community. These have provided useful input to understanding local and site specific issues.

Many members of the community have also written letters to the editors of local newspapers. These represent a diverse range of views and opinions. Again, the views expressed by community members through this medium assist understanding of local concerns and attitudes, particularly social and environmental issues.

4.6 Issues raised by the community

Due to the large size of the study area and the diversity of the constraints, there has been considerable variety in the level of interest and the issues and concerns raised by community members and stakeholders.

The main issues that are of importance to the wider community were raised through discussions at the Community Information Sessions, briefings and meetings with stakeholders, at CLG meetings, reported from community meetings and communications directed to the project team by letter, phone and e-mail. These are listed below, together with other issues relating to specific areas or situations that will also be considered in the development of route options and in the selection of the preferred route. These important issues include:

- The need to develop a safe highway. Reduce the number and severity of accidents. Location of rest spots and truck stop areas. Emergency vehicle access.
- Effectiveness of the consultation process and availability of information. Many people felt they wanted more and better information.
- Strong concern about the impact of a highway on the rural atmosphere, livelihoods and quality of life of people living in the study area, particularly in rural and rural residential areas. Strong views have been expressed about the potential impacts on lifestyle in the Gulmarrad/ James Creek and Townsend areas, and also Tucabia and Pillar Valley and surrounding areas.
- Concern about the impacts of any new highway route and particularly one located in the eastern part of the study area, on the ecological values of the area, on wildlife corridors and on the populations of animals especially the endangered coastal Emu population.
- Protected status of National Parks/State Forests. Some members of the community have expressed the view that State Forests and National Parks are public land and that road development should be considered in these areas, rather than on private land. Opinions have also been expressed in relation to the special nature of National Parks and State Forests and the need to preserve these areas.
- Effects on bypassed towns, and impacts on businesses that currently rely on highway trade.
- The location of connections from any new highway alignment to communities in the study area, and particularly efficient connections with Grafton.
- The extent of the study area. Concern about the eastern extension of the study area to areas not previously affected, and views that the eastern study area boundary should extend to the coast so that a route along the Coastal Range could be developed. In relation to this point, community members have made suggestions for routes both in and outside the study area. These are discussed in **Section 6.5**.
- Impacts on properties, on property values and the compensation process. Impacts on agricultural properties and their future utility.
- Increased noise impacts from a new highway.
- Flood immunity of the upgraded highway.

4.7 Issues raised by local and State Government agencies

The issues raised by local and State Government agencies in meetings and correspondence include the following:

- There was discussion at the planning focus meeting about the need to clearly communicate the decision making process to the community, and the role of the community in the process. Clarence Valley Council is a key stakeholder and there is both the need to liaise closely with

council during the study and also the opportunity to work together to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes for the project.

- The strategic context of this project in relation to other Pacific Highway upgrade projects, including the tie-in points south and north. How the study area was defined. Status of the Ulmarra Bypass project. Consideration of regional accessibility.
- Strategic planning, implications for Council's Settlement Strategy, and local accessibility and the impact on the local road network are issues that have been identified. Questions have been raised about the future maintenance of the existing highway and Harwood Bridge when a new road is constructed.
- A new bridge over the Clarence River, including its potential location and height, is a critical issue for the project. There has also been discussion in relation to crossings of other waterways. There is a need to liaise with Maritime NSW and the Department of Primary Industries (NSW Fisheries) in relation to these issues and their legislative requirements.
- A number of questions have been raised in relation to the route options identification, development and selection process including the way that non-physical considerations are factored in, and the assessment of cumulative impacts.
- Statutory considerations are a key element of concern to government agencies particularly the consequent legislative implications for routes that impact on National Parks estate areas, SEPP 14 wetlands and State Forests. Consideration of the requirements of all policies and legislation is required, in particular NSW Coastal Policy and policies for the protection of agricultural land. It has also been noted that some legislation has implications for the options investigations stages, as well as the construction and operation stages where licences and excavation permits may be required.
- Agencies have identified specific environmental, social and design issues to be addressed in the study, including water quality, acid sulphate soils, clearing of native vegetation, potential for impacts on threatened species and on endangered ecological communities, potential for impacts on indigenous and non-indigenous heritage items. Related matters are identification, collection and provision of accurate and up to date data and information, and interpretation methods.
- Changes in flooding and hydrology are significant issues for this project.
- Noise impacts must be given detailed consideration at the route options stage, as avoidance is the most effective means of minimising impacts. Effectiveness and feasibility of the range of noise mitigation measures must be determined prior to selection of the preferred route.
- An assessment is required of economic impacts on businesses in the study area, particularly on businesses that derive income directly from highway traffic and businesses in Grafton. There is a need to address the perception that the project will 'bypass' Grafton (or move traffic further away). It has also been noted that the overall Pacific Highway Upgrade Program has the

potential to bring more visitors to the area from south-east Queensland due to reduced travel times. This can be an economic opportunity if managed appropriately.

- Impacts on property values are an important consideration, particularly given growth in values in the local area in recent years.
- Requirements must be considered for Police and emergency access vehicles such as ambulances, fire trucks etc and consideration of the use of a new road during times of bush fires and floods.
- It is critical to identify major utilities and services during the route development process and to understand the potential impacts on these during the construction and operation of a new road.

4.8 How consultation influenced route options development

Community members and stakeholders have provided local information in relation to key constraints. Local residents and property owners have invaluable knowledge of ecological issues, the behaviour of floods and local waterways, and other constraints. Visits to individual properties and discussion with property owners have greatly enhanced the team's appreciation about local and site issues and enabled potential impacts of options to be better identified.

Community and stakeholder comment, together with further investigations by the project team, was an important factor in the decision to extend the study area further to the east.

Wider community input is invited and expected with the release of the route options. This will enable more focused community comment on these options.

4.9 Where to from here

The public display of the route options and invitation for comment is an important part of the consultation process. Everyone on the project mailing list and property owners within or near the corridors for each feasible route option will be sent a copy of the October 2005 Community Update, which includes details about the displays and explains how to make a submission.

Staffed displays and CLG meetings will be held during the display period to enable community representatives to ask questions about the route options and provide feedback from the communities and interests they represent. These activities will provide further important information for consideration in the route assessment process and for the selection of a preferred route.

Advertising will be used to re-engage the wider community's attention and interest by raising awareness of the route options displays, where and how people can make a submission on the route options and to provide information regarding contact details. During the exhibition period all

members of the community, interest groups and government authorities are invited to view the route options and to make a submission on any aspect of the proposal.

Following exhibition of the route options, submissions will be reviewed and these will feed into the route selection process. Further CLG meetings will continue the two-way flow of information between the community and the study team.

A further display will publicise the announcement of the preferred route after community, environmental and engineering aspects have been considered. Similar activities to the route options exhibition will take place during the display of the preferred option.

Consultation activities would continue, building on the activities carried out during the route development phase through the concept design and preparation of an environmental impact assessment.