

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) has been investigating options to upgrade the Pacific Highway between Wells Crossing and Iluka Road on the north coast of NSW. This section of the highway is approximately 80 km in length. Planning for the proposed upgrade is being funded by the NSW State Government, as part of the ten year Pacific Highway Upgrade Program.

The RTA has engaged Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) 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.

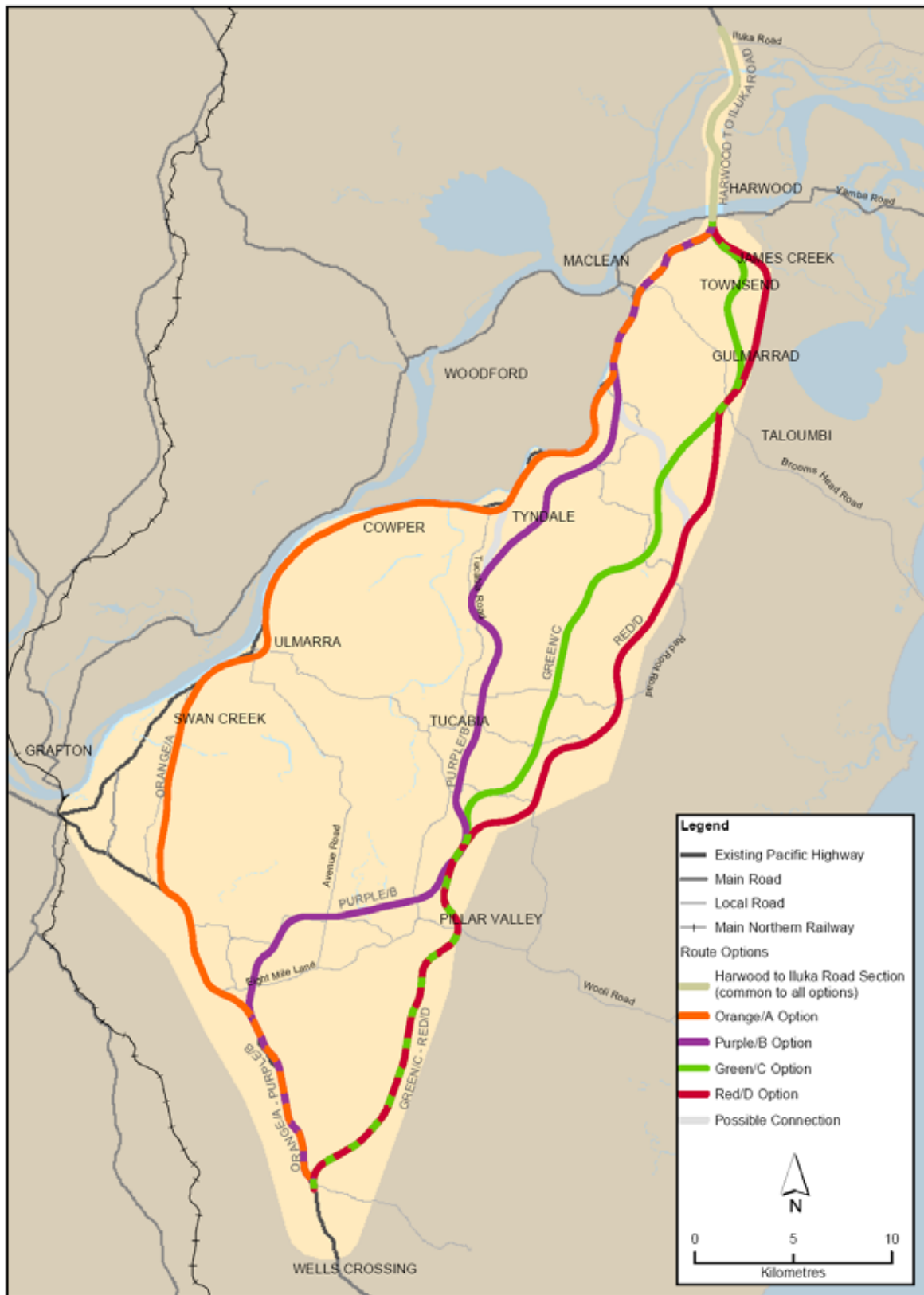
This report describes the community and stakeholder consultation undertaken during the public display of the route options, October to December 2005, and summarises the concerns raised by the community and stakeholders. The report also seeks to address some of the issues raised and describe how community concerns and suggestions will be addressed in the selection of the preferred route.

1.2 Study area and options

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 predominantly located to the east of the existing Pacific Highway alignment.

Four options and two connections have been identified between Wells Crossing and Harwood Bridge and one option has been identified between Harwood and Iluka Road (refer to **Figure 1-1**). The corridors for each option are approximately 250m wide. The actual road alignment, however, would be approximately 100m wide. This width would allow two carriageways in each direction (north and south) with a median which would have the capacity to contain an additional lane in each direction at some future time, if required.

■ **Figure 1-1 The Route Options**



1.3 Project objectives

The proposed upgrade of the Pacific Highway between Wells Crossing and Iluka Road will need to meet both the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program and the project specific objectives presented in **Table 1-1**.

■ **Table 1-1 Pacific Highway Upgrade Program and Wells Crossing to Iluka Road Project Objectives**

Pacific Highway Upgrade Program objectives	Wells Crossing to Iluka Road Project Objectives
Significantly reduce road accidents and injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a dual carriageway road with a route target crash rate of a maximum of 15 crashes per 100 MVK over the project length. ■ A concept design which achieves a 110km/hr design speed for the vertical alignment (for Class M standard) and a minimum 100km/hr design speed for Class A standard¹. ■ A concept design which achieves a 110km/hr design speed for the horizontal alignment. ■ No access points between interchanges along the length of the project for Class M standard road and minimise access points for Class A standard road sections. ■ A route that can be upgraded to Class M standard in the future (as applicable). ■ Retain or replace existing rest areas within the study area.
Reduce travel times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide a route that maximises the reduction in travel time for Pacific Highway traffic. ■ Provide intersections designed to at least a Level of Service LOS C, 20 years after opening for the 100th Highest Hourly Volume. ■ Minimise user delay from incidents and road closure on the Highway including from flooding. ■ Reduce delays from holiday congestion. ■ Minimise disruption and delay during construction.
Reduce freight transport costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide a route which reduces overall freight transport costs of trucks using the Highway. ■ A route that meets or exceeds B-Double requirements.
Develop a route that involves the community and considers their interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a project that meets the objectives of the Community and Stakeholders Involvement Plan and specifically the Criteria for Successful Projects. ■ Minimise the physical and traffic impacts of the route such as traffic noise levels, intrusion, community severance and access patterns. ■ Minimise the physical impacts on heritage (indigenous and non-indigenous) sites. ■ Provide transport developments which are complementary with land use. ■ Maintain access to affected properties and land during construction. ■ Upgrade and improve the existing highway where it is retained as part of the project.

¹ 110km/hr vertical alignment is desirable for Class A standard sections (upgrading/duplication of the existing Pacific Highway) where it can be achieved cost-effectively and without compromising environmental or social impact standards.

Pacific Highway Upgrade Program objectives	Wells Crossing to Iluka Road Project Objectives
Provide a route that supports economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maintain accessibility for local industries to regional and interstate markets. ■ Maintain access to local and regional centres of economic importance. ■ Minimise impacts on business/service facilities dependent on Pacific Highway traffic and create opportunities for businesses to capitalise on benefits that may arise from the upgrade. ■ Provide flood immunity on at least one carriageway between 1 and 100 year ARI flood event (target) and 1 in 20 year ARI (absolute minimum).
Manage the upgrading of the route in accordance with ecologically sustainable development principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Minimise the effects on sensitive habitats. ■ Minimise the effects on native vegetation. ■ Avoid direct impacts on National Parks and SEPP 14 wetlands where possible. ■ Effectively encapsulate the principles of ESD in the project framework and approach.
Provide the best value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Minimisation of the Whole of Life Costs of the project. ■ Maximise the use of the existing road reserve for duplicated sections of the project where possible. ■ Achieve a Benefit Cost Ratio of greater than 2. ■ Expenditure supports NSW State Government and Clarence Valley Council development policies.

2 Route Options Consultation

2.1 Consultation activities for the project

A consultation program was developed at the commencement of the project to provide opportunities for community and stakeholder involvement in the development of route options and in the selection of the preferred route.

The objectives of the community and stakeholder involvement program are to:

- Create stakeholder and community awareness of the study and the need for the Pacific Highway upgrade.
- Identify community and stakeholder issues and concerns associated with the project and ensure these are effectively communicated to the project team.
- Provide the community and other stakeholders with opportunities to be involved in the study process.
- Create stakeholder and community awareness of route options and the preferred route.

The key aspects of the consultation program include:

- Permanent shop front information at the Pacific Highway Office (21 Prince Street, Grafton).
- Free-call community information line (1800 557 673).
- Dedicated project e-mail address (wellscrossingtoiluka@skm.com.au).
- Project website (www.rta.nsw.gov.au/pacific).
- Project database to record all correspondence relevant to the project, including contact details and issues raised during the correspondence.
- Written communication (community updates, flyers, fact sheets, maps, Route Options Development Report (RTA, 2005), and various other background reports and material).
- Community liaison groups (CLGs) – Maclean, Grafton and Tucabia.
- Focus group meetings – hydrology and flooding, Aboriginal heritage, business, ecology and maritime.
- Information displays (staffed and unstaffed).
- Face-to-face meetings with individuals / groups of people.
- Advertising in local and national press.

The consultation activities associated with the route options display are described in more detail in the following sections.

2.2 Route options display

The route options were displayed from Friday 21 October 2005 until Friday 2 December 2005. The display period was originally scheduled to conclude on Friday 18 November 2005. However, a two week extension was granted in response to community requests. A number of submissions were received after 2 December 2006, and these have also been responded to in this report. Late submissions were accepted up to the end of February 2006 while this report was being collated. Submissions received after 2 December 2005 were considered as part of the route selection process. However, they were not included in this report.

2.2.1 Advertisements

Advertisements were placed in the following newspapers in the weeks commencing 24 October, 31 October and 14 November 2005, to inform the community of the route options display:

- Sydney Morning Herald
- Daily Telegraph
- Macleay Argus
- Daily Examiner
- Northern Star
- Byron Shire Echo

The route options display period was also announced on 27th, 28th October and 9th, 10, 11, 16, 17 November 2005, by the following radio stations:

- ABC Mid North Coast 684AM, 756AM, 95.5FM, 93.3FM
- 2GF AM 1206
- 2GF FM 104.7
- Star FM 102.3, 105.1
- 2MC FM 100.7 FM, 106.7 FM

A second advertisement was placed in these newspapers in the week commencing 18 November 2005, to inform the community of the extended display period.

2.2.2 Static displays

Posters which presented information about the route options were displayed between 21 October 2005 and 2 December 2005 at various locations in the study area and its vicinity, including:

- RTA Pacific Highway Office, Grafton
- Grafton Motor Registry
- Clarence Valley Council, Maclean Office
- Coldstream Gallery, Ulmarra

- Tucabia Village Store
- Wooli Post Office
- Yamba Chamber of Commerce noticeboard

Posters were also provided to community members on request, for display in their local areas.

2.2.3 Staffed displays

Staffed displays were held at:

- Grafton Shopping World on 27 October 2005 (10am – 6pm)
- Tucabia Community Hall on 28 October 2005 (1pm – 7pm)
- Maclean Civic Hall on 29 October (9am – 1pm) and 9 November 2005 (9am – 5pm)

Approximately 400 people visited the staffed displays and spoke with one or more of the project team. During this period, local residents were able to discuss their concerns about the project including specific issues relating to their properties.

2.2.4 Community update

A community update that provided graphical illustrations and a description of each of the route options, was released at the commencement of the display period (refer to **Appendix A**). The community update provided information about route length, the location of bridges, possible interchange locations, preliminary cost estimates and staging issues for each of the route options. Details about the dates, times and venues for display locations and contact details for the project team were also provided.

The community update was distributed to potentially affected property owners and others on the project mailing list, as well as CLG members and other stakeholders. Approximately 1,500 copies of the update were sent by mail at the commencement of the public display. The update was also available for collection at the static and staffed display venues, or by request.

A total of approximately 3,450 copies of the community update were distributed during the display period.

2.2.5 Feedback form

Reply paid community feedback forms were included in the community update and were available as loose leaf sheets during the staffed displays and on the project website (refer to **Appendix B**).

2.2.6 Flyer

A flyer was available at all display locations as well as being placed at a number of other locations such as local service stations, post offices and the Grafton Library (refer to **Appendix C**).

2.2.7 Fact sheets

Fact sheets were produced by the RTA to provide information on noise, environment, property acquisition and the Part 3A planning process (refer to **Appendix D**). These were available at staffed displays and on the RTA website. They were also available at the RTA's Pacific Highway Office in Grafton.

2.2.8 Aerial photographs

A series of aerial photographs, with the route options and cadastral boundaries overlain, were available to be viewed at the staffed displays and on the project website.

2.2.9 Route Options Development Report

Hard copies of the Route Options Development Report (RTA, 2005) were available for viewing at the staffed displays and CDs of the report were available to take home. Hard copies of the report were provided to the CLG members and on request. The report was also available on the project website.

Approximately 190 hard copies and 50 CD copies of the report were distributed during the display period.

2.3 Potentially affected property owners

Following the Minister for Roads' announcement of the route options, potentially affected property owners² were contacted in writing and where possible, by telephone, to advise them that the route options had been announced, and to offer them the opportunity to meet with a member of the project team. A copy of the community update and aerial photograph(s) with the route options and cadastral boundaries overlain, were also sent to the potentially affected property owners to show the location of the route option(s) in relation to their property. Approximately 450 letters were sent to potentially affected property owners.

Meetings with potentially affected property owners commenced on 24 October 2005. To date approximately 320 meetings have been held, both individually and in groups. Six property owners preferred telephone discussions, and some property owners indicated that they did not want additional information or discussion at this time. It should also be noted that members of the project team are available to meet with concerned property owners at any stage. Meetings with property owners have continued as part of ongoing project consultation.

The main purpose of meeting with the property owners was to personally discuss the route selection process, to answer their questions and to provide information about the property acquisition if they wanted it. These meetings were also important in the identification of specific

² Property owners whose land is traversed by one or more of the options (taken as a 250m corridor)

issues relating to individual properties that may need consideration during the selection and further refinement of the preferred route.

A key issue in this process was the difficulty of confirming the correct details of property owners. Property ownership information was obtained from existing Council data sets provided by Clarence Valley Council. A number of community members advised that property ownership details were incorrect or out of date, and information were subsequently sent to updated addresses. The process of updating property details is continuing.

2.4 Liaison with Clarence Valley Council

The RTA and SKM presented the route options to Councillors and senior staff of Clarence Valley Council on 27 October 2005.

An Extraordinary Council meeting was held on 15 November 2005. Members of the project team attended this meeting. A follow-up meeting was held with the Mayor and General Manager of Council on 6 February 2006.

Meetings have also been held with relevant Council staff in relation to planning, floodplain management, economic development and heritage.

Consultation with the Council is ongoing, and includes representation from Council on the CLGs and focus groups for ecology, business, hydrology and flooding, and maritime.

2.5 Community liaison groups

There are three separate CLGs for the project – Grafton CLG, Tucabia CLG and Maclean CLG. Members participating in the groups reside in areas across the geographical spread of the study area and in its vicinity. They do not represent individual communities. The purpose of the CLGs is to provide a conduit between the community and project team for information and study progress, and to gain local knowledge of the environment within and around the study area.

Meetings have been held individually with each CLG or as a combined CLG when appropriate. Six CLG meetings have been held to-date:

- 7-9 December 2004 - Maclean, Grafton and Tucabia CLGs.
- 22-24 February 2005 – Maclean, Grafton and Tucabia CLGs.
- 3-5 May 2005 – Maclean, Grafton and Tucabia CLGs.
- 23 June 2005 – Combined CLG.
- 9 November 2005 – Combined CLG.
- 23 March 2006 – Combined CLG.

The meetings are scheduled to align with stages of the project, to present and discuss the processes of the project. The combined meeting of the three CLGs held on 9 November 2005 was convened

to discuss the route options with CLG members and to provide an opportunity for feedback on the key issues.

2.6 Focus groups

Focus groups have been established to discuss business, hydrology and flooding, Aboriginal, ecological and maritime issues. The following meetings have been held:

- 23 May 2005 – Aboriginal.
- 23 June 2005 – Hydrology and flooding.
- 7 November 2005 – Aboriginal.
- 7 November 2005 – Ecology.
- 8 November 2005 – Business.
- 8 November 2005 – Hydrology and flooding.
- 6 February 2006 – Aboriginal.
- 24 February 2006 – Aboriginal.
- 24 February 2006 – Ecology.
- 7 March 2006 – Maritime.

The first meeting of the business and ecological focus groups and the second meeting of the hydrology and flooding, and Aboriginal focus groups were held on 7 November and 8 November 2005 to discuss the route options and the potential implications for each of these interest groups. A maritime focus group was held on 7 March 2006 to discuss issues relating to the Harwood Bridge and river use by local users of the Clarence River.

The focus group meetings are held to discuss specific technical issues of the project. Participants are invited on the basis of their specific knowledge and experience relevant to the issues.

2.7 Project website

The project website was established at the commencement of the project in 2004 and has been regularly updated. Electronic copies of the Route Options Development Report (RTA, 2005), copies of the route option maps, an interactive version of the aerial photographs (referred to as the interactive route options map), the flyer and the community update were uploaded to the website on the day of the Minister's announcement.

The project website also contains the minutes of all of the CLG meetings, contact details of CLG members and selected minutes from the focus group meetings.

3 Community and Stakeholder Involvement

3.1 Community contact

A summary of the communications between the project team and community members or stakeholders during the display period is presented in **Table 3-1**. These data represent general enquiries about the project but do not include submissions that were received by letter, email, fax and video.

■ **Table 3-1: Communications with the Community and Stakeholders during the Display Period**

Communication Method	Incoming	Outgoing
Phone (1800 557 673)	558	433
Letters ¹	17	1,014
Emails ¹	125	64
Faxes ¹	10	4
Aerial photographs	-	553
Route Options Development Report (RTA, 2005) (hard copy)	-	Approx. 190
Route Options Development Report (RTA, 2005) (CD)	-	Approx. 50
Petitions	4	-
Visits to staffed displays	-	Approx. 400
Meetings with property owners	-	Approx. 240
Website hits (Oct 05 – Dec 05)	648	-

¹ Information about submissions on the route options is reported in Section 4.