

2 Need for the Proposal

2.1 Need

The Pacific Highway is one of the most important strategic corridors within the Australian road network. It acts as a vital link between Sydney and Brisbane as well as providing regional connections along the North Coast of NSW. The highway carries significant traffic volumes, especially during the holiday periods.

There is substantial freight movement (with the majority non-containerised) along the Pacific Highway to ports located in Brisbane, Sydney and Newcastle. Local and intra-state road freight destined for the major cities and major markets is generated through agriculture, manufacturing and other local industries. This freight movement has led to conflicts between local traffic and heavy vehicles in several locations along the highway. The Pacific Highway carries approximately 8 million tonnes of freight every year.

The Pacific Highway is part of the AusLink National Network.

The upgrade of the Pacific Highway is essential for the State for economic, environmental or social reasons having regard to the following:

- The Pacific Highway between the F3 Freeway (near Beresfield) and the NSW, Queensland state border is a key strategic link between Sydney and Brisbane and for servicing the rapidly developing coastal communities on the North Coast and Mid-North Coast of NSW.
- With the \$2.2 billion Pacific Highway Upgrade Program in place since 1996, a total of 254 kilometres are now double-lane divided road. Projects to complete the upgrade of the Pacific Highway are either under construction, have been approved for construction or have had a preferred upgrade route identified.
- There is a need for safety, traffic, transport and economic reasons to ensure that the Pacific Highway is a four-lane divided carriageway for its entire length.
- In December 2005, the NSW and Australian Governments announced a jointly funded program of \$960 million for the three years to 2009. In May 2006, the Federal Budget announced an additional \$160 million matched by NSW for the period to the end of 2009, thereby increasing the total value of the joint investment program from \$960 million to \$1.3 billion.
- Both governments are jointly examining how the entire length of highway can be upgraded to dual carriageway by the end of 2016.

The Sydney–Brisbane corridor is expected to experience significant growth in both population and economic activity over the next 20 years. Improvements to the efficiency, safety and capacity of existing rail and road transport links (including the Pacific Highway) will facilitate the expected population growth and increase in economic activity along the corridor.

The *State Infrastructure Strategy – New South Wales 2006/07 to 2015/16* provided the direction for planning and delivery of infrastructure in New South Wales. The *State Infrastructure Strategy* investment priorities identified the Pacific Highway as a critical route supporting economic development which requires upgrading as soon as possible.

The *Draft Mid-North Coast Regional Strategy* aims to support sustainable growth of the region by ensuring adequate land is available and appropriately located to accommodate projected housing and employment needs. It also

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incorporates the specific regional infrastructure requirements identified in the *State Infrastructure Strategy* – including the upgrade of the Pacific Highway.

Both the *State Infrastructure Strategy* and *Draft Mid- North Coast Regional Strategy* identify the Macksville to Urunga project as a key component of the Pacific Highway Upgrade.

The Warrell Creek to Urunga section is a key link in the overall framework of the Pacific Highway corridor. It is also a significant link for the region, particularly in terms of economic growth and tourism. The section of the Pacific Highway between Warrell Creek and Urunga services the townships of Macksville, Nambucca Heads and Urunga, as well as other smaller villages.

Traffic volumes on the highway have approximately doubled in the 18 years between 1986 and 2004. There are significant seasonal variations through the year as is expected of coastal tourist areas, with weekly traffic during the Christmas holiday period some 45 per cent more than during August. Traffic volumes are predicted to continue to increase due to increases in the population both along the eastern seaboard and within the region, and in tourism within the North Coast area.

Road safety is a community concern and one of the Pacific Highway Upgrade objectives is to significantly reduce road accidents and the associated costs. Upgrading of the Pacific Highway has significantly reduced the number and severity of road crashes on the completed dual carriageway sections and eliminated a number of accident blackspots.

The existing Pacific Highway through the investigation area is primarily a two-lane road with occasional overtaking lanes. RTA crash data indicates that a total of 269 crashes accidents occurred on the Pacific Highway in the study area in the five-year period between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2006. These included 13 fatal crashes resulting in 16 fatalities, 122 injury crashes and 134 non-injury crashes. As the crash rates on the single carriageway sections of the Pacific Highway are higher in all categories (fatal, injury and total) than the adjacent dual carriageway sections, upgrading this section of the highway to dual carriageway is expected to significantly reduce road accidents and costs.

Two other objectives of the Pacific Highway Upgrade are to reduce travel times and freight transport costs. The Warrell Creek to Urunga Upgrade would reduce travel time along the highway through the investigation area by approximately 25 per cent at signposted speed limits from 32 minutes to 23 minutes. Reductions in travel times, together with the benefits provided by an efficient high standard dual-carriageway highway, will result in decreased freight transport costs. Duplication of the highway has the potential to significantly improve freight competitiveness for existing vehicles.

With the completion of other Pacific Highway Upgrades attention will focus on uncompleted lengths. Travelling conditions on these lower standard sections will provide a stark contrast to the completed sections of the highway.

The Proposal would make an important contribution to road safety for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians; improved efficiency of freight transport, better access for rural communities; and meeting community expectations. A delay to the delivery of the Proposal will result in a delay in delivering these benefits to the community.

2.2 Proposal objectives and design principles

2.2.1 Pacific Highway Upgrade program objectives

The Pacific Highway is an AusLink National Network road. Its upgrade is funded by the NSW and Australian Governments. For the 10 years to June 2006, the NSW Government has contributed \$1.66 billion and the Australian Government has invested \$660 million. Both governments have committed a further \$1.3 billion to 2009.

The objectives of the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program are to:

- Significantly reduce road accidents 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.

2.2.2 Warrell Creek to Urunga Project objectives

The proposed Warrell Creek to Urunga Upgrade would form an essential part of the overall upgrade of the Pacific Highway between Hexham and the Queensland border.

As well as contributing to the objectives of the Pacific Highway Upgrading Program, specific objectives of the Warrell Creek to Urunga Upgrade are to:

- Achieve safe driving conditions on the highway for travel speeds of 110 kilometres per hour in rural areas and 80 kilometres per hour in urban areas.
- Provide connections from the upgraded highway to the key centres of Macksville, Nambucca Heads and Urunga.
- Have acceptable roadway capacity for traffic volumes 30 years after opening.
- Develop a dual carriageway road that accommodates all vehicles up to and including B-Doubles.
- Provide acceptable access to properties.
- Maintain highway access during flood conditions.
- Integrate input from local communities into the development of the project.
- Develop delay management strategies to minimise disruption to local and through traffic and maintain access to affected properties and land during construction.
- Develop solutions that facilitate the staged construction of the project.
- Develop solutions for the ultimate grade separation of the Pacific Highway and local road intersections including consolidation of accesses by the use of local access roads.
- Provide rest areas within the investigation area.
- Provide transport infrastructure that is complementary with surround land use.
- Ensure the project outcomes achieve value for money.

2.2.3 Design principles

The Warrell Creek to Urunga Upgrade has been developed as a motorway standard (or Class M) project as designated in the *Draft Pacific Highway Design Guidelines (RTA 2005)*. Key characteristics of Class M standard projects include:

- Project designed to a standard that would enable an ultimate signposted speed limit of 110 km/h to be adopted.
- 4-lane dual carriageway highway with median width to accommodate future upgrading to 6 lanes (desirable minimum width 12metres).
- Each carriageway comprising two 3.5metre lanes, a 2.5metre left-hand shoulder and 0.5metre right-hand shoulder.
- Access to the highway provided at grade separated interchanges.
- Alternative routes provided for access to townships, communities and properties. Where required, these access roads will pass over or under the new highway.

A typical cross section of the upgraded highway is shown in **Figure 2-1**.

Figure 2-1: Typical cross-section of the upgraded highway

