

12. Justification and conclusion

This chapter addresses the justification for the project, taking into account the objectives of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, the environmental, social and economic impacts of the project, the suitability of the site, whether or not the project is in the public interest, and ecologically sustainable development.

DGRs	Where addressed
Project justification	
Describe the need for and objectives of the project, alternatives considered and justification for the preferred project taking into consideration the objects of the <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979</i> and the following:	Chapters 4, 12
The environmental, social and economic impacts of the project.	Section 12.1, 12.2
The suitability of the site.	Sections 12.1, 12.2
Whether or not the project is in the public interest.	Sections 12.1, 12.2 and 12.3

12.1 Justification

12.1.1 Summary of strategic justification

The Hume Highway is the main freight corridor between Sydney and Melbourne and is an important part of the NSW state and regional road network. Section 3.1 has identified a number of national and state planning policies and provisions of relevance to this project. Particularly, the strategic justification of this project is evident in its consistency with various objectives, strategic directions and priorities within these policies. Provisions that are important for the strategic justification of this project include:

- Increase infrastructure handling and capacity — the project will improve the capacity and performance of the Hume Highway at Woomargama by upgrading the existing single carriageway through the village with a dual carriageway bypass.
- Improve safety and security — the project is expected to improve safety along the bypass and the existing highway. The project will provide consistent driving conditions for all road users. Safety will improve along the main street of Woomargama by removing traffic, reducing the conflict between local and through traffic.
- Improve transport productivity on nationally strategic and export-oriented freight corridors — the project will contribute to improving transport productivity on the significant Melbourne to Sydney freight corridor by providing road users with improved travel efficiency and consistent driving conditions.
- Improve the reliability of travel on interstate and inter-regional corridors — the project will provide local, inter-regional and interstate travellers with improved reliability of travel in this region through the provision of an efficient and safer section of the highway.

- Be consistent with viable and long-term economic and social outcomes, and with the obligation to current and future generations to sustain the environment — the project has been developed to fully integrate sustainable economic and social outcomes. While it is recognised that the project has the potential to have some adverse economic impacts on individual agribusinesses and highway-related businesses in and around Woomargama, these are not considered significant in terms of the overall regional and national benefits. The proposed mitigation and management measures seek to minimise these impacts as far as possible. While there may be some social implications associated with the adverse economic impacts, the project has the potential to improve the amenity of the village, which may contribute to an improved long-term social environment for Woomargama. Environmental sustainability has also been a key consideration for this project, ecologically sustainable development is discussed further below. Where impacts are unavoidable, measures have been identified to mitigate and/or offset these impacts.

12.1.2 Project justification

An environmental risk analysis was undertaken to identify the key risks of the project as they relate to environmental, social and economic issues. A summary of this analysis is provided in Chapter 8. The results of that analysis guided the assessment of the project's potential impacts. Key issues have been addressed in Chapter 9 and other issues have been addressed in Chapter 10. Justification of the project in the context of the identified environmental, social and economic issues is provided below.

Environmental considerations

Consideration of impact on the natural and cultural environment has been fundamental to the design process for the project. As far as possible, impacts have been avoided.

Flora and fauna

A total of approximately eight hectares of native vegetation, including seven hectares of vegetation consistent with the threatened ecological community Box Gum Woodland would be removed. Supplementary targeted surveys would be carried out prior to the commencement of any construction works to assist in further refining the mitigation measures as required. The loss of native vegetation will also lead to the loss of fauna habitat, some severance of fauna movement corridors and increased edge effects. Measures would be implemented to mitigate these impacts. Initiatives directed at offsetting the residual impacts on biodiversity would be developed in consultation with relevant agencies and stakeholders.

Heritage

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage were considered during design development; however, some impact on sites and items were unavoidable. For non-Aboriginal heritage, supplementary surveys will be carried out prior to the commencement of construction to confirm impacts. Where a site/item is to be impacted, measures have been identified to mitigate the impacts.

Surface Water

The project would alter the distribution of flow within the Mountain Creek floodplain both upstream and downstream of the proposed bridge over Mountain Creek. Changes in flow distribution may lead to increased flood levels, changes in flood inundation and velocity at sensitive receivers. These changes are generally minor in extent and are unlikely to affect flood hazard in the locality. Detailed design development would seek to minimise afflux.

Having regard to the proposed environmental mitigation and management measures identified in Chapters 9 and 10, and the draft statement of commitments identified in Chapter 11, the expected environmental impacts of the project can be managed to an acceptable level.

Social considerations

The Hume Highway is a dominant feature in the rural landscape. In Woomargama it provides the setting for the main street through the village.

During construction, the project would have some minor, temporary disruptions to the rural lifestyle and community character in Woomargama in the form of disruptions to local traffic and access, and impacts on amenity (eg noise, dust). These issues would be short-term in nature and managed through the implementation of standard management measures.

Some partial property acquisitions would be required to construct the project. Acquisition would be undertaken in accordance with the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* and the *Land Acquisition Policy* (RTA 1999) to compensate for the loss of land.

Social changes (benefits and adverse impacts) during operation of the project would relate to:

- Impacts on businesses and agribusinesses (addressed further below).
- Improvements to amenity in Woomargama village, including safety benefits through reduced conflict between local and through traffic.
- Changes to community cohesion for residences in the village and for isolated rural residences.
- Changes to the noise environment (addressed below).

Noise

All residences in the village will experience a reduction in noise levels as traffic diverts from the highway to the project. The noise impacts from the project would be varied for isolated rural residences but some would experience increased noise levels. Reasonable and feasible measures (eg architectural treatment) would be implemented in consultation with affected landowners to minimise noise impacts from the operation of the project.

Visual

The project would have some visual impacts on identified viewpoints in the assessment area, and would result in visual changes to the landscape character. The visual amenity and landscape assessment undertaken for the project (refer Section 10.3) indicated that the project would satisfy the relevant urban design objectives of the project, and that the potential visual and landscape character impacts could be mitigated through the measures and commitments identified in Chapters 10 and 11 respectively.

Having regard to the proposed mitigation and management measures identified in Chapters 9 and 10, and the draft statement of commitments identified in Chapter 11, the expected social impacts of the project can be managed to reduce impacts to an acceptable level.

Economic considerations

Businesses within the village include a service station, hotel/motel, earthworks contractor and post office. The hotel/motel and service station are largely dependent on passing trade for business viability. The economic assessment undertaken for the project (refer Section 9.5) indicated the importance of the travellers stopping and/or staying overnight or longer in the village for these highway-related businesses.

During the construction period, the presence of construction personnel would likely filter into Woomargama village through the local economy. This may include localised economic stimulus and increased business turnover from the workforce purchasing local goods, services and accommodation as well as more regional economic benefits.

During operation, the project is expected to have some adverse impacts on the economy of Woomargama. Previous studies of the impacts of highway bypasses have indicated that there is a reduction in stopping traffic (ie typically short stops for fuel, food, rest facilities etc) following the opening of a bypass. A reduction in stopping trade can result in a decrease in the value of highway-related trade, the closure of highway-related businesses, the loss of jobs and flow-on effects for other businesses and the community as a whole.

The project would alter patronage to the two highway-related businesses in Woomargama as traffic wishing to access these businesses would have to leave the Hume Highway and enter Woomargama. Accordingly, decreases in turnover as a result of the project to these businesses are likely. The motel component of the hotel/motel is likely to be least affected as a result of the improved environmental amenity of the village, appealing to potential stayers in the short and long-term.

The environmental amenity of Woomargama will improve during operation of the project and travel times to nearby towns and service centres would be reduced. This may result in Woomargama becoming a more attractive place to live, particularly for commuters looking for a more rural lifestyle than that available in Albury or Holbrook. These factors, coupled with the further development of the *Woomargama Vision 2018* (Greater Hume Shire Council 2008) may allow businesses and the community to change and adapt to the post-bypass environment. The employment of an economic development officer by Greater Hume Shire Council (supported and partially funded by the RTA) would also be of benefit to affected businesses and the community. Section 9.5 identifies some additional strategies that could be adopted by community stakeholders to assist in managing certain social and economic impacts from the project.

The project is likely to have some adverse impact on local agribusiness. Land acquisition has been minimised through design, and the RTA has held discussions with all directly affected landowners on how to best minimise the impact on the function and amenity of their land use. This has included giving preference to the purchase of larger portions of affected properties rather than severing parcels so to reduce fragmentation impacts. The project would result in the loss of some agricultural land and there would be some impact on the viability, profitability, productivity and sustainability of directly affected agribusinesses. The project is not likely to result in the cessation of agricultural practices at any impacted farm. Moreover, the viability and sustainability of agricultural business at the regional level would not be affected.

The project would assist in improving the capacity and performance of the Hume Highway, bringing substantial long-term national and state-wide economic benefits by facilitating the enhanced interstate trade of goods and services. The project is an essential component of the Hume Highway duplication project and, therefore, is fundamental to the realisation of the identified benefits.

Having regard to the proposed mitigation and management measures identified in Chapters 9 and 10, and the draft statement of commitments identified in Chapter 11, the expected economic impacts of the project can be managed to reduce impacts to an acceptable level.

As identified above, the project has sought to minimise, manage and mitigate the environmental, social and economic impacts. The expected impacts of the project are considered acceptable.

Suitability of the site

As detailed in Section 4.1, selection of the preferred option and development and refinement of the concept design involved consideration of the potential environmental, social and economic impacts, as well as the opinions and concerns of the community and relevant agencies. On balance compared with other options, the preferred option was considered to be the most suitable for the project as it:

- Minimised impacts on areas of high Aboriginal cultural and archaeological sensitivity.
- Reduced impacts on the threatened Box-Gum Woodland ecological community and on habitat for threatened woodland-dependent fauna species.
- Enabled development of Woomargama consistent with the *Woomargama Vision 1018* (Greater Hume Shire Council 2008).

Based on the preferred option selection and concept design and the need to appropriately balance potential environmental, social and economic impacts, the site is considered suitable for the project.

Public interest

The Hume Highway is part of the National Highway network serving inter-regional and interstate users. It is the main road transport corridor linking Sydney and Melbourne. The Hume Highway is also the major road linking local and regional areas surrounding the project.

The Federal and NSW governments have recognised the importance of providing complete dual carriageway conditions along the Hume Highway through significant project funding. This importance was reinforced in December 2008, when the Federal Government announced, as part of the Nation Building Program, an advance payment of \$265 million to be provided to NSW in 2008-09 to accelerate construction of Woomargama bypass. In March 2009, the Minister for Planning declared the Hume Highway bypass of Woomargama to be a critical infrastructure project because it is essential to the State for economic, environmental and social reasons.

Assessment of the existing traffic conditions on the Hume Highway at Woomargama identified that the heavy vehicle peak hour occurs around midnight and that traffic volumes are heaviest during holiday periods. Congestion occasionally occurs during these periods. The project would provide adequate capacity for future traffic growth.

The project will contribute to improved safety along the Hume Highway and within Woomargama village by reducing conflicts between local traffic and through traffic in the village. Improved clear zones and sealed shoulders would be provided on the project in addition to a central median, which will reduce the incidence and impact of head-on crashes.

As discussed in Section 3.1, the section of the Hume Highway in Victoria is fully duplicated. In NSW, dual carriageway conditions exist on 80 per cent of the highway. Completion of the project is an essential element in the completion of the Hume Highway duplication in NSW and critical to the improvement of travel efficiency and driving conditions on this nationally strategic and export-oriented freight corridor. Completion of dual carriageway conditions on

the Hume Highway between Sydney and Melbourne will facilitate increased infrastructure handling capacity and improved transport productivity.

For these reasons, the project is considered to be in the public interest.

12.2 Objects of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

12.2.1 *Relevance to the project*

Table 12-1 identifies the objects of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and their relevance to the project.

Table 12-1 Objectives of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and relevance to the project

Object	Comment
(a) (i) To encourage the proper management, development and conservation of natural and artificial resources, including agricultural land, natural areas, forests, minerals, waters, cities, towns and villages for the purpose of promoting the social and economic welfare of the community and a better environment.	The project design and the impact mitigation and management measures detailed in this environmental assessment allow for the proper management, development and conservation of natural and artificial resources. The main objectives of the project are to provide for a bypass of Woomargama which will improve the safety and transport efficiency of the existing Hume Highway. It is recognised that there would be some impact on agricultural land as a result of the project; however, this would not be significant at a local or regional level.
(a) (ii) To encourage the promotion and co-ordination of the orderly economic use and development of land.	The project will form an important element in the completion of the Hume Highway duplication in NSW. It will assist in the coordination of the orderly economic use and development of land for the region and along this nationally significant freight transport corridor.
(a) (iii) To encourage the protection, provision and co-ordination of communication and utility services.	Utilities affected by the project would be relocated and maintained as described in Section 5.3.11.
(a) (iv) To encourage the provision of land for public purposes.	The project itself is proposed for a public purpose.
(a) (v) To encourage the provision and co-ordination of community services and facilities.	The project has been designed to minimise the impacts on community services and facilities in Woomargama as far as possible. Where there are direct impacts, these will be mitigated and managed. While it is recognised that the project will have some impacts on individual businesses and agribusinesses, these would not adversely affect the ability for the community to access services and facilities and will improve access to other community services and facilities in the region.
(a) (vi) To encourage the protection of the environment, including the protection and conservation of native animals and plants, including threatened species, populations and ecological communities, and their habitats.	The project has been designed to minimise impacts on the environment, including threatened species, populations and ecological communities and their habitats. Additional measures are proposed to manage and offset impacts during and after construction.
(a) (vii) To encourage ecologically sustainable development.	Ecologically sustainable development has been considered in Section 12.2.2.

Object	Comment
(a) (viii) To encourage the provision and maintenance of affordable housing.	Not relevant to the project.
(b) To promote the sharing of the responsibility for environmental planning between different levels of government in the State.	Not relevant to the project.
(c) To provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment.	The project development process has involved extensive consultation with relevant parties and this will continue during detailed design, construction and operation. Community and stakeholder involvement in the planning and assessment of the project is described in Chapter 7.

12.2.2 *Ecologically sustainable development*

Ecologically sustainable development (ESD) is development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends. The principles of ESD have been an integral consideration for the project. This includes the effective integration of economic and environmental considerations in all decision-making processes.

In accordance with the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000*, the four principles of ESD, as set out in Schedule 2 are:

- The precautionary principle — where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for not implementing mitigation measures or strategies to avoid potential impacts.
- Inter-generational equity — the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment are equal to or better for the future generations.
- Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity — preserving biological diversity and ecological integrity requires that ecosystems, species and genetic diversity within species are maintained.
- Improved valuation and pricing of environmental resources — this principle establishes the need to determine economic values for services provided by the natural environment, such as the atmosphere's ability to receive gaseous emissions, cultural values and visual amenity.

The RTA is committed to providing its services in an environmentally responsible manner and managing or eliminating any risks that may lead to an adverse effect on the environment. During concept design development of the project, a sustainability workshop was held and attended by the Hume Highway Woomargama Alliance designers, engineers, technical specialists (including environmental representatives) and environmental and management representatives from the RTA. The aim of the workshop was to enable the integration of the concepts of sustainable development into the design of the project, and subsequently its construction and operation. Details of how the principles of ESD have been incorporated into the project are provided in Table 12-2.

Table 12-2 Incorporation of ESD principles in the project

ESD	Comment
Precautionary principle	A precondition for the operation of the precautionary principle is that there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage. This environmental assessment has demonstrated that such threats are not present for this project. Therefore, the precautionary principle does not operate. Regardless, the project has sought to take a precautionary approach to minimise environmental impacts. This has also been applied in the development of mitigation and management measures, and in the draft statement of commitments.
Inter-generational equity	The project will benefit both existing and future generations in the following ways: ▪ Improving safety. ▸ Providing safe and consistent driving conditions for road users. ▸ Reducing conflict between through and local traffic. ▸ Providing safer conditions during maintenance activities. ▪ Improving travel and freight efficiency by maintaining local and regional connectivity and connections to local, regional, state and national road network. ▪ Improving amenity of the village. It is acknowledged that the project may have some adverse impacts. However, these are not considered to be of a nature or extent to disadvantage future or existing generations.
Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity	A key objective of the project is to minimise adverse impacts on the environmental values of the area. Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity has been considered during all stages of project development and would be further considered during detailed design. Impacts have been avoided where possible, and mitigated or offset where necessary.
Improved valuation and pricing of environmental resources	Environmental and social issues were considered in the strategic planning and establishment of the need for the project, and in consideration of options. The value placed on environmental resources is evident in the extent of the planning, environmental investigations and design of management measures.

12.3

Conclusion

The project would contribute to meeting the primary objective of the Hume Highway duplication: to achieve dual carriageway conditions along the Hume Highway between Sydney and Melbourne. The project has important economic and road user benefits that assist the Hume Highway duplication in meeting the AusLink National Network objectives of supporting national economic growth through the development of sustainable transport solutions that:

- Increase infrastructure handling capacity and efficiency.
- Improve safety and security.
- Improve transport productivity on its nationally strategic and export-oriented freight corridors.
- Improve the reliability of travel on interstate and inter-regional corridors.
- Are consistent with viable and long-term economic and social outcomes, and with the obligation to current and future generations to sustain the environment.

In meeting the primary objective of the Hume Highway duplication, the design development process has sought to minimise the potential environmental, social and economic impacts, to meet the project-specific objectives.

As with any highway development, the project would result in some adverse impacts. The development of mitigation and management measures to reduce the scale of these impacts has been a key feature of project development and has been reflected through this environmental assessment. The RTA has made firm commitments to implement appropriate mitigation and management measures. Where impacts cannot be avoided or fully mitigated, residual impacts would be offset.

There is the potential for a degree of cumulative impacts associated with this and other projects that form the Hume Highway duplication program. The precautionary approach taken in the development of mitigation and management measures proposed for this project would provide sufficient mitigation to offset both immediately-identified impacts and potential additional or cumulative impacts that may arise.

The project achieves acceptable environmental, social and economic outcomes, and delivers substantial wider economic and road-user benefits. The project is considered justified.

