1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the project and provides context for the environmental assessment report. It presents the main elements of the project, its location, and the reasons why it is being pursued. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of this report.

1.1 The project

The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) proposes to widen around 20 kilometres of the M5 South West Motorway between King Georges Road, Beverly Hills and Camden Valley Way, Casula (the project). No land acquisition would be required for the project.

The project would include:

- Providing additional lanes on the M5 South West Motorway for the majority of its length by pavement widening, asphalt overlays and new line-marking.
- An operations management control system on and in the vicinity of the M5 South West Motorway including a new control building at Hammondville and variable message signs on the motorway and surrounding arterial roads.
- Bridge widening by placing new infill decking in the central median between existing bridges over Queen Street and Nuwarra Road. The underpass structures at De Meyrick Avenue would be upgraded. All other bridges can accommodate the proposed widening works without structural modification.
- Noise attenuation measures at various locations along the M5 South West Motorway between King Georges Road and Camden Valley Way.

1.2 Overview

1.2.1 The M5 transport corridor

The M5 South West Motorway is part of the National Highway Network connecting Sydney, the Southern Highlands, Canberra and Melbourne. The motorway forms the western part of the M5 transport corridor, which is the main freight, commercial and commuter route between Port Botany and Sydney Airport and south-western Sydney. The M5 transport corridor consists of two main sections:

- Section 1: The M5 South West Motorway – A 21 kilometre tolled road with generally two lanes in each direction between King Georges Road, Beverly Hills and Camden Valley Way, Prestons.
- Section 2: The M5 East Freeway – A 10 kilometre road connecting the M5 South West Motorway with General Holmes Drive/Eastern Distributor. The M5 East Freeway currently includes two four-kilometre tunnels between Bexley Road, Earlwood and Marsh Street, Arncliffe. Each tunnel contains two lanes of traffic.

Interlink Roads Pty Ltd (Interlink Roads) built, owns and operates the M5 South West Motorway under a concession granted by the RTA. Following an approach by Interlink Roads with a proposal to widen the M5 South West Motorway, the RTA commenced negotiations with Interlink Roads in accordance with the Working with Government Guidelines for Privately Financed Projects (NSW Government, 2006).

While the process of considering options to improve the other parts of the M5 corridor is continuing, this environment assessment focuses only on the M5 South West Motorway, which is identified in the NSW Government's *Metropolitan Transport Plan Connecting the City of Cities* (2010a) and is required to address existing traffic congestion and future travel demand. Any proposal to upgrade the M5 East Motorway would be the subject of a separate environmental assessment and approval process.

1.2.2 M5 Transport Corridor Feasibility Study

In May 2008, the Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government announced $5 million in funding for a feasibility study into potential improvements to the M5 transport corridor from Port Botany and Sydney Airport to south-western Sydney. A steering committee was then established to oversee the preparation of the feasibility study. The committee was headed by the NSW Infrastructure Co-ordinator General and comprised representatives from the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; and heads of the Department of Planning (DoP), the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA), Treasury, NSW Transport and Infrastructure and RailCorp.

The study (M5 Transport Corridor Feasibility Study (RTA, 2009a)) provides an overview of the feasibility of various proposals to improve the M5 transport corridor. The outcome of this study was the identification of an indicative preferred option for potential improvements to the M5 transport corridor. In relation to the M5 South West Motorway, the feasibility study identified the following scope of works:

- Widening of the M5 South West Motorway to provide three lanes between:
  - King Georges Road, Beverly Hills and Camden Valley Way, Prestons (in a westbound direction).
  - Camden Valley Way, Prestons and Fairford Road, Padstow (in an eastbound direction).

1.2.3 Project funding

As outlined in section 1.2.1, Interlink Roads owns and operates the M5 South West Motorway under a concession granted by the RTA until 2023. Given this arrangement, it is anticipated that Interlink Roads would fund the M5 West widening project with an agreed compensation mechanism. The NSW Government is yet to finalise negotiations and confirm the funding mechanism for the project.

Potential sources of funding may include the following, or a combination of two or more:

- Toll increase(s) when the widened motorway is opened to traffic.
- An extension of the toll collection/concession period.
- Some form of government funding.

1.3 Project location and study area

The M5 South West Motorway traverses the Canterbury, Bankstown and Liverpool local government areas (LGAs).

The motorway generally runs in an east–west direction. The eastern extent of the project is at King Georges Road, Beverly Hills and the western extent is at Camden Valley Way, Casula. The regional context is shown in Figure 1.1. An overview of the project is shown in Figure 1.2.

The motorway traverses the Georges River Basin, crossing both the Georges River and Salt Pan Creek. The land uses in the surrounding area include low- and medium-density residential development, commercial and industrial areas, educational institutions (including the University of Western Sydney and schools) and recreational and open space uses including parks, reserves and golf courses.

The landform of the area immediately surrounding the motorway is relatively flat. Native vegetation on the motorway has been extensively cleared, but there are planted stands of Downy Wattle (*Acacia pubescens*) in the median and on the verges of the motorway and the Cumberland Plain Woodland ecological community along the corridor.

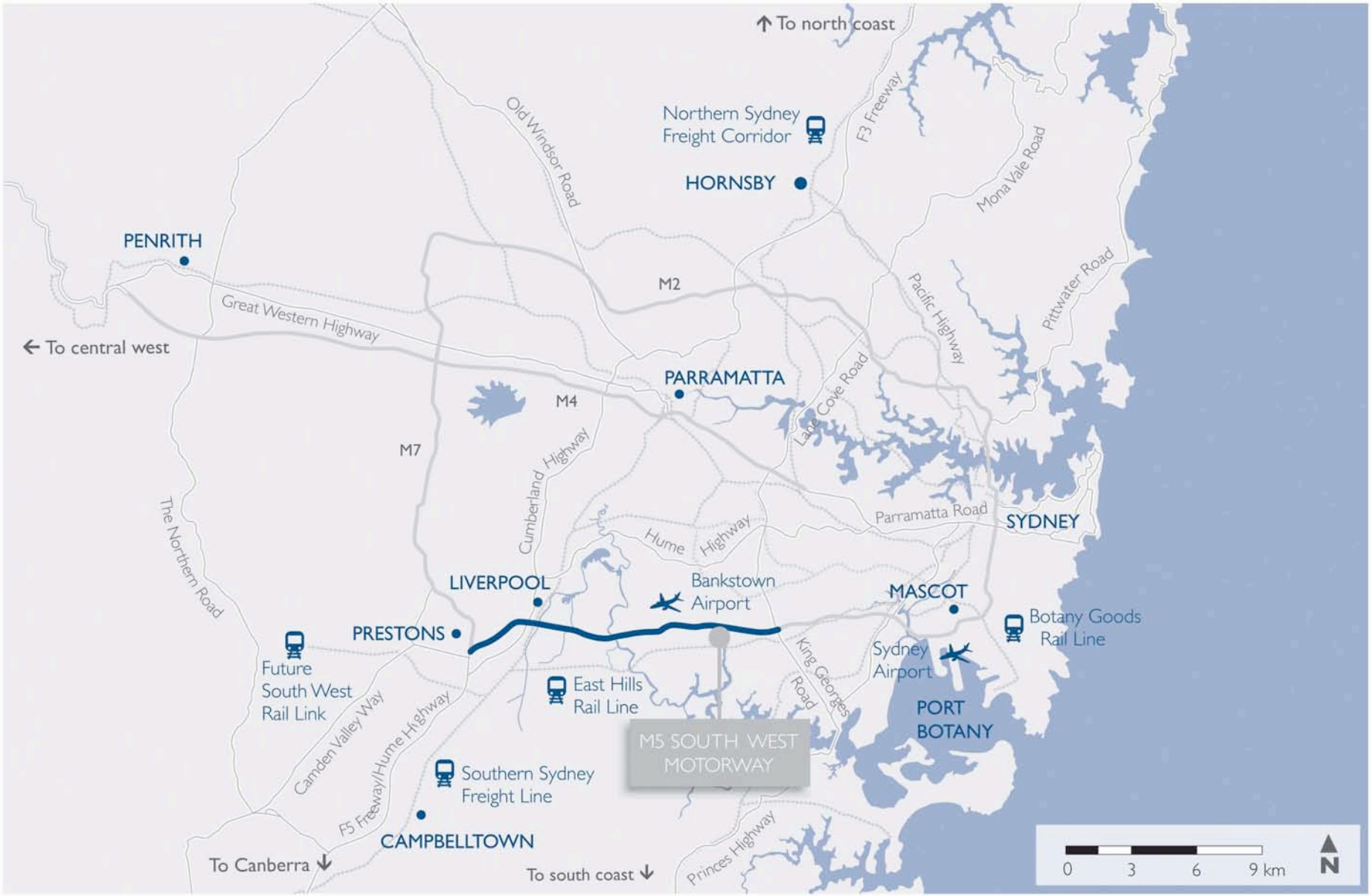

Figure 1.1 Regional context

Note: Project detail shown is indicative only, subject to detailed design