

Submission to NSW Planning & Environment Princes Highway – Albion Park Rail bypass

Made by – Economic Development Office, Shoalhaven City Council

Introduction

Roads and Maritime Services is planning for a future extension of the M1 Princes Motorway between Yallah and Oak Flats to provide a bypass of Albion Park Rail.

A bypass of Albion Park Rail would be consistent with the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.

A commitment to construct a bypass has yet to be made.

The Princes Motorway / Princes Highway (M1/A1) route is a major commuter, tourist, and freight road connecting Sydney and Wollongong to the Illawarra-Shoalhaven, the South Coast and Victoria.

Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) has undertaken substantial upgrades in the last 10 years to improve the route between Wollongong and Nowra.

In the mid 1990s, the then Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA, now incorporated in Roads and Maritime) undertook a study to identify a preferred route for an upgrade of the route between Yallah and Oak Flats, about 20 kilometres south of Wollongong. The study identified a preferred road corridor that would involve an extension of the M1, which would bypass the Princes Highway and the township of Albion Park Rail.

To reserve the land for the future bypass, the proposed road corridor was included in the Wollongong City and Shellharbour City Council local environmental plans (LEPs), as it is located within both local government areas. At the time, RTA (now RMS) advised the local community that construction of the preferred route would be unlikely to take place within 15 years as traffic volumes were not sufficient to justify investment in the project.

There are however two alternatives to the project. One being longer term and a full bypass the other being a resolution of the intersection issues at the convergence of the Princes Hwy (M1/A1) and the Illawarra Hwy (A48) which is currently served by a signalised roundabout. This roundabout is the cause of congestion and traffic delays in morning and evening peak periods.

Existing Conditions/Issues

Traffic on the Princes Motorway / Princes Highway in the study area is characterised by:

- Varying traffic volumes throughout the study area. The annual average daily traffic volumes vary markedly at different locations in the study area
- Steadily increasing traffic volumes, with linear growth rates of between about one and two per cent per annum.

- Significant variations in daily traffic flows. Weekdays tend to follow a similar pattern, the northbound movement is the peak direction in the morning and the southbound movement is the peak direction in the evening. The Friday afternoon southbound peak movement tends to be higher than the other days, due to tourist traffic combining with the commuter peak.
- Weekend days show a different traffic pattern to the weekdays with the dominant northbound peak occurring on Sunday afternoons and the southbound peak on Saturday mornings. These weekend peaks are similar to or greater than the weekday peaks.
- A high proportion of regional freight trips. The highway is classified as a B-double route between Wollongong and Nowra. Heavy vehicles comprise about nine per cent of vehicles on the route.
- A high proportion of tourist trips in particular during weekends and holiday periods. This is likely to be contributing to the Friday southbound and Sunday northbound peaks being so high.
- Traffic congestion during the morning and afternoon peak. Travel time surveys conducted in 2013 show that the level of service in the northbound direction reaches E (the second worst level of service) in the morning peak northbound approaching the intersection with the Illawarra Highway. The extent of delays during the morning and afternoon peaks has been gradually increasing, with average travel speeds reducing and travel times generally increasing. Currently it takes 9.5 minutes in the northbound morning peak and 7.5 minutes in the southbound afternoon peak to travel the 7.6 kilometre section of the existing route.
- Seasonal variation in traffic volumes. The weekly volumes can vary by about 25 per cent throughout the year largely due to holiday traffic associated with the peak holiday periods.
- Varying travel speeds during the morning and afternoon peak. The slowest section is between Creamery Road and the Illawarra Highway, where speeds are at least 30 kilometres per hour slower than the speed limit for the dominant traffic flow in both directions.
- Substantially reduced traffic speeds during peak holiday periods, when large queues of traffic are being experienced due to increased traffic volumes and local traffic constraints.
- A high proportion of through traffic (71 per cent in the morning peak, and 47 per cent in the afternoon peak).

Accessibility improvements

Social issues include considerations of impacts on residents, businesses, visitors and/or the travelling public. The elimination of the queuing for kilometres through Albion Park Rail would be eliminated or at least significantly reduced with a bypass of Albion Park Rail.

The bypass would have several major social benefits:

- It would remove the substantial delays experienced by the motorists during peak periods, which are exacerbated during peak travel times such as holiday periods. These delays impact commuters daily as they travel to and from work. Anecdotal

evidence suggests that congestion levels are such that people's travel patterns are modified, for example commuters may change their start and end times or avoid congested areas altogether.

- It would be of benefit to tourists, and the tourism industry. During holiday peak periods, the Princes Highway / Princes Motorway takes a substantial amount of holiday traffic. This traffic often experiences extended delays. The bypass would increase the reliability of tourism related trips.
- It would reduce highway traffic through Albion Park Rail and reduce the physical barrier of the highway traffic from the centre of town. The improved amenity along the existing Princes Highway would improve the quality of the Albion Park Rail urban environment for businesses and the local community, create a more pedestrian-friendly environment and reinforce a sense of community identity and community wellbeing.

Benefits

Time costs

With the bypass in place for the future the travel times on the existing route show that the travel times are between 9 and 9.5 minutes with a considerable saving in time for bypass traffic, this journey taking about 6.5 minutes. However under a 'do nothing' scenario travel times on the route would substantially increase to 44 minutes in the northbound peak and 24 minutes in the southbound peak direction by 2046.

Lifecycle costs

With a benefit versus cost ratio of at least 2 this means that the economic benefits produced by constructing the bypass are more than twice the cost of the infrastructure over the 30 year life of the analysis period. For a large road infrastructure project, this is considered to be a very positive result and reflects the economic merits of the project. On this basis, the benefits of the project are sufficient to justify its cost, and the bypass would represent a good economic investment.

General benefits

- Improve travel times in both directions on this important route.
- Improve the reliability of travel times. This would be particularly important for trips during peak travel periods.
- Divert substantial through traffic away from the Princes Highway in Albion Park Rail. The bypass would cater mainly for through trips, while the existing Princes Highway would cater mainly for local trips.
- Increase road capacity in the study area, which would cater for the anticipated future population growth in West Dapto, Calderwood and Tallawarra.
- Maximise the benefits of upgrading the M1/A1 route between Sydney and Nowra by bypassing the only traffic lights on the route between Heathcote and Bomaderry.
- Maximise the benefits of upgrading the M1/A1 route between Sydney and Bomaderry by bypassing the only town not bypassed (following completion of the Berry Bypass by 2018).

- Remove the section of the Illawarra Highway near the Illawarra Regional Airport that is highly susceptible to flooding.
- Substantially improve road safety by separating through and local traffic and removing traffic conflicts.
- Provide economic benefits more than twice the costs.

Staging of the project

Grade separated interchange at Yallah

It is proposed that the project be staged to allow the grade separation of the traffic interchange at Yallah and eliminate the signalised roundabout at the intersection of the Princes Highway (A1) and the Illawarra Highway (A48). This roundabout contributes substantially to the congestion and traffic delays in morning and evening peak periods.

This interchange can provide immediate benefits to relieve the peak traffic congestion and is part of the bypass solution. Already 4 lanes, with parking/breakdown lanes exist through the Albion Park Rail shopping centre and whilst there are 4 sets of traffic signals they are spaced quite a distance apart.

The early staging of these works at Yallah can deliver much of the benefit to daily commuters and through traffic whilst the longer bypass is being constructed.

Summary

The benefits of an Albion Park Rail bypass will be felt far outside the immediate study area.

Benefits will accrue to commuters, hauliers and tourists and improve the quality of life in Albion Park Rail and the commercial precinct of Albion Park Rail.

The project as presented is supported.

25th November, 2015