

# ISSUE

Traffic usage of the Sand Track during construction of Foxground and Berry By-Pass

## BACKGROUND

The Director General requires the effects of construction be considered in the preparation of the Environmental Assessment.

The Traffic Report in Section 7 of the Environmental Assessment indicates that the effect of this construction will only result in a 3% diverting from the Princes Highway to the Sandtrack during this period (p 169) in the absence of any deliberate action to promote the alternative route.

Using information provided, the potential traffic that could use the Sandtrack can be estimated as follows:

- Table 7-3 indicates an AADT on the Highway north of Fern St as 21,300 with a heavy vehicle content of 8%.
- This traffic splits 55/45 between the Highway and the Sandtrack as indicated in Table 7-1 and p174 suggesting a highway volume of 11715 with 13% heavy vehicles (p175) and a Sandtrack volume of 9585 with 4% heavy vehicles.
- Through traffic contributes around 80% of the traffic travelling through Berry on a typical weekday (p176)
- This indicates 9372 vehicles per day could be considered through traffic, 8150 of which are light vehicles that could utilise the Sandtrack should they choose and consequently an expected rerouting by 344 vehicles per day (it would also seem probable that some heavy vehicles would illegally choose this option.)

On p173 it is indicated that the 2 routes “are comparable in both length and travel time”.

The assessment for the effect of the construction work is set out in Table 7-2 and include “one construction zone booth north and south of Berry” and “construction would not occur during the holiday peak”.

All of the above calculations are based on 2010 traffic volumes and could be expected to increase by 20% at the time of construction based on the 3.2% growth rate predicted (p173).

## COMMENT

The position taken in the Environmental Assessment does not accord with common traffic behaviour and if incorrect are likely lead to significant safety issues on the Sandtrack.

Traffic work on the Highway will result in delays due to:

- the installation of two construction zones with intermittent stopping and speed reductions even when vehicles are not stopped
- capacity restrictions due to lower speed limits, with a greater effect if the existing 100km/hr and 90km/hr sections are affected.
- Speed limits remaining in place during weekends and holiday periods, even if no work is to take place (as currently occurs on the Gerringong upgrade).
- General interaction with construction traffic and restrictions to overtaking opportunities.

For short periods these factors may not be significant. However over the 3 year construction period for the Foxground and Berry By-Pass it is likely that this will result in behavioural change, particularly with regular users of the Princes Highway. Whilst it is accepted that estimating this switch is difficult, it will almost certainly be greater than 3% and if 50% of regular through were to change their behaviour, Sandtrack traffic would be increased by over 4000 vehicles per day. With an annual 3.2% growth, this would increase to 4800 by 2016, a 50% increase on current volumes.

The current proposal is “Strategy to identify and respond to any changes in road safety (including the “Sandtrack”) as a result of construction works.” Given the difficulty in determining any actual switch that will occur, the commitment to undertake significant treatments to the Sandtrack may well be not be appropriate at this time.

However a reliance on a predicted 3% switch may also be inappropriate and a greater consideration of the potential consequences of a higher figure should be undertaken rather than waiting to see if a road safety problem develops, something that may well not be possible to identify until most of the work is complete. This is particularly relevant given the high severity rate of accidents on the Sandtrack, due in part due to the high speeds and lack of formal overtaking lanes.

If there is to be a greater increase in traffic, there will also be maintenance consequences which may not have been addressed.

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