

Foxground and Berry Bypass (MP10_0240) – Environmental Assessment

I make the following submission as an individual resident though it's based, in part, on my experience of serving on the Community Review Group from August to December 2012 and on a working group which was particularly concerned with the South-Western Interchange - which the RTA/RMS (hereafter referred to as 'RMS') calls the Kangaroo Valley Interchange. My submission calls this 'S-W Interchange'.

The context: The RMS preferred route bisects the town; a regrettable option, but one within which the community has worked hard in order to mitigate its worst aspects.

Thanks to the initiative of State Member Gareth Ward a Community Review Group (CRG) was formed which met between August and December 2011. Seven meetings and two full-day workshops succeeded in relocating and reducing the size of the 'Berry Bridge' and mitigating the impacts on North Street by realigning and lowering the road. In achieving these outcomes, the CRG had the services of a world renowned civil engineer who gave hundreds of hours pro bono.

The consultation process was deeply flawed in a number of particulars: RMS managers clearly resented the process; one senior manager going so far as to tell us that he didn't know why we were making such an issue of it saying: "people will get used to it"

It took five treatments of the 'Berry Bridge' design and location before RMS agreed to adopt version 5 as its own. Throughout, the Project Team restricted itself to faulting our proposals and their objections were usually cost-based.

At no time did they respond with proposals of their own to meet our concerns

In meetings and correspondence, RMS refused to consider the social cost.

RMS failed to answer specific questions and continued the charade of holding working group meetings to supposedly discuss aspects of the design on which they'd already made their determination.

One example of this was the decision to include closure of Victoria Street as their preferred option.

Appeals to the Minister for Roads to address the evidence of this deception went unheeded.

In parallel with the CRG process, RMS was meeting with a small and what subsequently proved to be unrepresentative, group which sought the closure of Victoria Street.

Despite assurances that our CRG process was "inclusive and transparent", reports of those meetings were never tabled with CRG.

In December 2011, before the CRG could examine the S-W Interchange, the process was curtailed.

The reason given by the Project Manager was that that he and his colleagues were under instructions from the RMS Executive to complete both cost assessments by 30 April. When asked why, the answer was "RMS was committed to delivering an outcome during the present parliamentary term". When reminded that the Government was only 8 months into a four year term and told that that couldn't possibly be seen as sufficient reason, RMS failed to respond.

The bisecting of the town means that the half of the population which lives in West Berry will be separated from schools, churches, shops and sporting facilities. The RMS proposal exacerbates that lack of connectivity by a long bridge and two large roundabouts on Kangaroo Valley Road (KVR). It also doesn't sufficiently address pedestrian and cycle safety issues.

Alternatives which addressed each of these concerns have been proposed, only to be summarily dismissed on the basis of cost. Two others residents and I presented RMS with a S-W Interchange split ramp option which would:

- relocate the Southbound on-ramp and Northbound off-ramp to Schofields Lane/Graham Park
- remove two large roundabouts on Kangaroo Valley Road
- replace the bridge on Kangaroo Valley Road with a pair of Bebo arches (cut and cover)

These were dismissed as adding \$20 million to the cost; a figure later revised down to \$15 million, though still not justified.

Requests for details of how the cost differentials were calculated were refused; with the excuse being given that it would delay the process.

In response to a suggestion in April 2012 that Bebo arch (cut and cover tunnelling) for KVR would be less obtrusive and quieter, Adam Berry wrote " would be in the order of three to five times more expensive" I replied "After 9 months of the current review process, we're long past the point where RMS simply answers detailed questions with statements like 'three to five times more expensive' It may well be the case, but I'd still ask for specific answers to questions about depth, soil type etc. Those roundabout footprints are one of the concerns expressed by people who live near their location and/or would have to traverse them." RMS didn't reply

RMS also argued that the split S-W interchange would increase the footprint. Counter argument that the net effect, which would include removing those intrusive roundabouts at KVR and retaining the Berry gateway with Mark Radium Park would neutralise any increased footprint were ignored.

It's believed that the RMS determined to refuse suggested improvements, as their first priority was to maintain the largest-possible cost differential between their preferred and deficient Northern route and the Southern option. Another example is their exclusion of a second northbound off-ramp which, I believe, is the subject of Shoalhaven City Council's (SCC) submission.

The EA states "The split southern interchange has not been included in the project and as such further consideration of this option is not included in this environmental assessment".

It does not justify excising this option and, given my comments about process, I would ask that this option be properly examined

On closure of Victoria Street at Mark Radium Park, you will have received many submissions opposing it. I've described the abuse of process which led to its consideration.

At the June public forum, it was agreed that Victoria Street was properly a local traffic management issue. SCC argued for Model 3 - 'left in, left out and right out' - an option as close as possible to the status quo.

Model 1 would triple traffic through the cross streets - refer AECOM's Summary of Traffic Impacts. RMS describes the Victoria St/Princess Hwy junction as one of the 'conflict points' and goes on to describe benefits of Model 1 as "'acceptable changes to local roads - increase traffic on George and Edward'. In an e-mail to RMS I wrote: 'These are intersections - something we encounter on every car journey we make' and then asked; 'Just how does increasing traffic threefold on narrow residential streets 'improve road safety'?' RMS did not reply.

The Berry-based Police Senior Constable has told us that there are no records of collisions there. If that's the case now, when the Highway carries through traffic, the junction will surely be even safer post-bypass?

The fact is that, despite AECOM's evidence, SCC preference and community feeling, RMS has opted for something which runs counter to all three.

Much of the RMS rationale for closure has to do with Mark Radium Park. Their 23 May 2012 Notes describe Model 1 as having marginally less impact on the Park than either of the other two. Progressively, under questioning from residents, that differential has disappeared, to the point that RMS has now conceded there's almost no benefit to the Park from Victoria Street closure.

RMS has deliberately deceived the community, as they must have made the closure decision in March in order to have been ready to announce it on 13 June, making a nonsense of all the time and money involved in subsequent 'S-W Interchange' related meetings, including the 14 June Forum. This is based on their own timetable, which stated that any change would take "an additional three months' work".

SUMMARY

This submission describes the flawed process which has led to the unacceptable impacts of the proposed treatment of the S-W interchange and offers better solutions.

It requests that the CRG process be reopened; tasked with addressing those concerns and reviewing the transparency of the process to date.

It further requests that RMS recognises the social and well as the monetary cost of its decisions, in its evaluation of submissions.

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