

Gary & Christine Gardiner
Residential: 465 Pacific Highway
Coffs Harbour South NSW 2450
Postal Address PO Box 444
Sawtell NSW 2452
Email: gary.gardiner1@bigpond.com
Phone Gary 0407 435 423
Christine 0407 512 742

Coffs Harbour Bypass
Roads & Maritime Services
PO Box 546 Grafton 2460
coffsharbourbypass@rms.nsw.gov.au

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Submission to Coffs Harbour Bypass EIS

Summary of Proposal.

Yes!!! Coffs Harbour needs a Highway By-Pass. But the proposed RMS Bypass is flawed in a number of areas.

The Coffs Harbour Bypass should leave the Pacific Highway north of Nambucca Heads interchange and travel through the range and travel west of the range and re-join the Pacific Highway South of Grafton at the most convenient location.

The problem with the current RMS proposal is that it is built on 20 years of political highway bypass designs that were commissioned for political purposes with NO intent to build. Now 20 years later Governments have promised funding and intent to build. The proposed route 20 years ago, does not accommodate the Project objectives of today or the future.

The original proposal to build a dual carriage way from Sydney to Brisbane is nearing completion. Coffs Harbour is dual carriage way through the town, however it is a bottle neck of traffic congestion causing problems for freight, through traffic and domestic traffic. The next stage is to develop a freight highway between Sydney and Brisbane.

The Coffs Harbour bypass should be incorporated in the freight highway design for the future. The present approximate costing for the RMS proposed bypass is \$1.8 Billion dollars incorporating tunnels and potentially blocking future residential growth areas of Coffs Harbour.

We live in a world where most engineering problems can be overcome with enough money. The question most residents of Coffs Harbour are asking is, will this proposal fix the traffic congestion in Coffs Harbour for the future? Your own traffic flow charts show it will not!!

The current problem with the RMS proposed Coffs Harbour Highway upgrade is the overall management of the project. All subcommittees and contractors working on the Bypass are all following the guidelines developed in 2004. The management of the overall project is lacking, probably due to head of the organisation has changed many times over the past 20 years. The current proposed Bypass does not meet most of the project objectives examined in 2000.

Background of RMS Proposal and Family history.

As a long-term resident of Coffs Harbour, with our family living in the area since the 1890's. We have seen the shire and communities grow within this time and have seen all the future development plans for the future growth of this region being mapped out.

The Coffs Harbour highway bypass has been on the maps since the 1930's with all those plans discarded for the proposals put forward in about 2000. There were a number of options for suggested routes proposed for the Coffs Harbour bypass. It was obvious to those that witnessed this process, that the head of the then RTA had chosen the shortest route that we are now being proposed with today as be the preferred route.

Detailed costings for the other options were never proposed to give a real cost analysis between the proposed options. This chosen route took 4 years to determine with the people of Coffs Harbour becoming sick of the drawn-out process to build a bypass to elevate the traffic congestion in their city. This proposed route was only to be a short-term fix of the traffic congestion in Coffs Harbour.

20 years later the By-pass is still not built and the constraints of the poorly conceived preferred route in 2000 will dramatically impact the cost of building this by-pass and impact the future growth of the City of Coffs Harbour and surrounding communities.

The proposed route has a completion date of 2024? The drilling of the tunnels, if possible, will take 5 years and it can't start before 2020. Realistic completion date will be closer to 2026 not 2024.

The Government has spent millions of dollars on this proposed By-Pass to date, however if this is not the most practical option for the future freight highway you will waste Billions of dollars.

(Extract from the Coffs Harbour Bypass EIS)

What are the project objectives?

The project supports the objectives and broader rationale of Pacific Highway upgrade program, which seeks to enhance the capacity and quality of the Pacific Highway by improving safety, travel times and reliability.

The Pacific Highway upgrade program is one of the largest road infrastructure projects in NSW. It connects Sydney and Brisbane and is a major contributor to Australia's economic activity. Since 1996, the Australian and NSW governments have been jointly upgrading the Pacific Highway to provide a four-lane divided road from Hexham to Queensland. The upgrade is planned to be completed in 2020. The objectives of the program are to:

- Significantly reduce road crashes and injuries
- Reduce travel times
- Reduce freight transport costs
- Develop a route involving the community and considering their interests
- Supporting the economic development in the region
- Manage the upgrading of the route in accordance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD)
- Provide the best value for money.

Subject to project approval and funding availability, construction of the project is proposed to start in 2020 and would take about four to five years to complete, weather permitting. Specific objectives relating to the project are to provide:

- Travel time savings for through and local traffic, and business vehicles/freight
- A road that supports and integrates with the broader transport network
- Sufficient road capacity to meet traffic demand on the Pacific Highway
- Safer road conditions for all road users on the new and existing road.

My preferred route of the Coffs Harbour Bypass.

The preferred route of the Coffs Harbour highway bypass should leave the present Pacific Highway just north of the Nambucca Heads interchange where a large freight depot and truck interchange is planned to be built. This would encourage most of the large freight depots to move out of Coffs Harbour. If these Freight Companies were moved out of Coffs Harbour it would dramatically reduce the semitrailers needing to travel into or through Coffs Harbour. The Bypass should move over the range at the most convenient and practical location. It would re-join the Pacific Highway above Woolgoolga or above the range at the most practical location.

The benefits of this route are that the merging interchanges will be located away from residential areas and require far fewer complex interchanges as depicted in the England's Road interchange and the Korora interchange.

The Western bypass will also require no tunnels that should dramatically reduce the cost per kilometre for construction and the acquisition of land should be rural or Forestry land not residential.

The construction phase of both projects would be completely different. The Western construction would have minimal impact on highway traffic due the construction being undertaken away from urban areas with minimal traffic flows and partial disruption with the construction of the highway interchanges. The RMS proposal has all the construction occurring within the Coffs Harbour City boundaries. All areas of the construction will impact various residential road and the construction phase constructing the interchanges at England's Road and the Korora interchanges will have dramatic impacts on traffic flows during construction times being years.

The Western bypass could have the benefit of allowing the townships that are located near the highway to expand with the reduced traffic times to regional townships.

The current Highway section in the Western bypass between the interchanges of Nambucca Heads and Grafton area will become the coastal route. Eliminating the vast majority of semi-trailers from this route will allow the domestic traffic and tourist traffic to utilize this link between all the coastal communities that will continue to grow into the future.

There will be objections to all and any highway routes, as have been presented at all of the highway upgrades for this Sydney to Brisbane section of the Pacific Highway.

Annualizing the project objectives comparing both options.

- Significantly reduce road crashes and injuries
- Reduce travel times
- Reduce freight transport costs

These 3 objectives are similar in objectives. The construction of a new dual carriageway with reduced gradients in the road construction to a 110km freeway design will achieve all 3 objectives. Both proposed bypasses will eliminate 12 sets of traffic lights and save at least 11 minutes off the travel time. Our proposed bypass is longer in distance for construction but the overall travel time between the roads will be comparable.

- Develop a route involving the community and considering their interests
- Supporting the economic development in the region

These 2 objectives are similar in scope. The RMS proposed bypass was conceived in 2000 and EIS completed in 2008 ready for construction that never happened. The present proposal's construction footprint requires the acquisition of over 1000 homes and property mainly in urban areas. The positioning of this bypass also eliminates the future planned urban expansion of the England's Road area, North Boambee area and all areas from the foot of the mountain range to the proposed bypass.

The construction phases of the bypass, mainly surrounding the southern England's Road interchange and the northern interchange at Korora will cause traffic chaos and bedlam for the couple of years it will take to construct these interchanges.

The Western bypass will have NO acquisitions of any properties within the city and the future expansion of the city can continue to the base of the mountain range as planned. The traffic chaos during construction at the both interchanges will be no worse than it is now.

Land acquisitions will occur for the construction for the Western bypass but the land will be rural or forested land. The interchanges will be constructed away from heavily congested areas where the construction phase will have limited impact on the travelling vehicles.

- Manage the upgrading of the route in accordance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD)

We would hope both and all roads will be built with ecologically sustainable development (ESD) in mind.

- Provide the best value for money.

The conservative cost of \$1.8 Billion for the RMS proposed bypass will probably go well over budget given the proposed construction of 3 tunnels through the hardest rock in Australia. This cost is for 14Km of road that makes it the dearest section of road per km to be constructed on all highway upgrades. The cost and loss of future urban expansion as well as the loss of properties under the construction of the highway has not been taken into consideration. The traffic disruption during construction will have an impact on the overall business carried out within the Coffs Harbour area.

The Western bypass will be much longer than 14km depending on the exit and entry points to the existing Pacific Highway. The cost of construction of this road per km will be far cheaper as there will be no tunnels. The cost of acquiring the footprint of the road should be far cheaper than the Coffs Harbour urban areas. The construction period to construct this road should be far quicker given most of the road should be built on relatively level ground over the range.

The EIS to start a new road should only take about 3 years to complete. Construction phase of the project should take 3 to 4 years. That equates to 7 years to open the road, starting in 2020 completion in 2027. The RMS bypass proposal will be completed in 2026. One year's difference to complete the bypass, with 1 option strangling Coffs Harbours future expansion and creating years of traffic chaos during construction. The Western bypass will have no direct impact of Coffs Harbour during and after the construction phase of the bypass. There should be less semitrailers travelling through Coffs Harbour after the bypass is completed than the RMS proposed bypass.

The construction of the bypass west of the range also creates the opportunity to expand communities and towns within proximity of the new highway to grow and prosper.

The future of Coffs Harbour's prosperity and growth depends on the right bypass option being constructed. The current RMS proposed bypass will compound the traffic congestion through Coffs Harbour for years during the construction phase of the project.

It will take a brave RMS manager, State or Federal Government head to re-evaluate this project at this stage. But they will be rewarded in the future with a more streamline development and construction of the final stage of developing a freight highway from Sydney to Brisbane. The Western route will allow Coffs Harbour and the surrounding communities to expand and grow into the future. Reduce the traffic congestion and chaos that will be experienced by all highway uses and Coffs Harbour traffic during the construction phase of the RMS proposed route.

I hope common sense will be implemented for the future.

Yours Hopefully
Gary Gardiner

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Gardiner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'G' at the beginning.