



Southern Highlands Greens Submission on the Berrima Rail Project EIS

The Southern Highlands Greens strongly object to the Hume Coal Berrima Rail Project – SSD7171

The Basis of the PAC's Authority to Receive Submissions

The Minister for Planning is the consent authority for State Significant Development applications. In the case of Hume Coal, the department's recommendation to the Minister will be referred to an independent Planning and Assessment Commission (PAC).

The DOP website for State Significant Developments (www.planning.nsw.gov.au › ... › Development Assessment › Systems) requires the PAC to take into account local government policies and planning rules:

SSD applications are assessed by the Department of Planning and Environment. The Department considers the following when assessing SSD applications:

- existing strategic plans and policies (including State, regional and local)
- feedback and comments from the relevant local council(s)
- specialised and technical input and advice received from Federal and State Government agencies
- public submissions received during the exhibition
the public interest

Scope of the Berrima Rail Project

The project is for the new rail spur and loop which will connect to the private Berrima Line. The EIS (Volume 3A) states that the new rail spur and loop:

will be connected to the western end of the existing Berrima Branch Line; a privately owned line branching off the Main Southern Rail Line at the Berima Junction approximately 2.5 km north of Moss Vale and 1.5 km north of Moss Vale Junction. The Berrima Branch Line is owned and used by Boral Cement Ltd (Boral) for the transportation of cement, limestone and clinker to and from the Berrima Cement Works. It is also used by Inghams Enterprises Pty Limited (Inghams) for the transportation of grain to its feed mill east of the cement works, and by Omya (Australia) Pty Ltd (Omya) for the transportation of limestone from Marulan South Limestone Mine to their Moss Vale plant at the Berrima Junction.

The rail project will also include substantial maintenance sheds and other rail facilities to be built on the land between the Hume Freeway and the Old Hume Highway (see page 14, Volume 3A of the Hume EIS), an area which has been identified for inclusion in the Berrima

Landscape Conservation Area. The land also contains the Berrima Memorial Drive, with monuments dedicated to WWII soldiers.

What is not highlighted in the Hume Coal EIS is the rail bridge over the Old Hume Highway. The scale of this is hard to imagine, as the embankments leading up to either side of the bridge will have to be very high and of great length. This is because to move a large number of fully loaded wagons to that height requires a low gradient, in turn requiring a very long embankment to carry the rail line. This will be a major blot on the landscape and involve increased levels of noise as the engines pulling the carriages will need to be operating at close to maximum capacity.

In addition to the construction phase of the rail project there will also be its operational phase, which goes well beyond the vicinity of Berrima and New Berrima. It affects all land from the Berrima mine head and processing centre to Robertson, and from there to Port Kembla. There will be 17 level crossings and not all of these will have safety barriers.

This submission will focus on climate change, noise, dust, disruption of road traffic and the heritage impact resulting from this rail project.

(1) Climate Change

Climate change is relevant to the rail EIS because the local Council is opposed to the project and is concerned with climate change in particular in its planning rules and policies.

The DOP website for State Significant Developments (www.planning.nsw.gov.au › ... › [Development Assessment](#) › [Systems](#)) requires the PAC to take into account local government policies and planning rules:

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- **existing strategic plans and policies (including State, regional and local)**

As indicated above, the PAC is required to take into account Council strategic plans and policies. Wingecarribee Shire Council has made it clear that it does not want the coal mine. Its draft community strategic plan (adopted on 14 June 2017) addressed climate change on page 27:

4.4 Wingecarribee addresses, adapts, and builds resilience to climate change

(<http://www.yoursaywingecarribee.com.au/26652/documents/54843>)

Use of carbon fuel in railway project

The rail transport of the coal will be powered by diesel locomotives, using very high amounts of diesel fuel with each shipment to the coast. Diesel is a major industrial source of CO₂, which is a greenhouse gas. In addition, the diesel trucks used at the various stages of the rail project, both in the construction phase and the operation phase will exacerbate this negative impact. The sheer scale of the enterprise is of great concern in terms of the amount of greenhouse gases emitted.

(2) Noise, Dust and Disruption to Road Traffic

Hume Coal issued a press release on 5 May, which states *[inter alia]*:

Duncan said Hume Coal looked at all transport options and decided that the existing local rail infrastructure connecting the mine to Port Kembla allowed for a safe, effective and efficient means of transporting the product coal.

“Plans to eliminate the level crossing near the cement works are already underway, which would completely remove impacts on local traffic in the area.

“Additionally, if the mine is approved, by the time it is up and running the Tahmoor mine may be closed, and the newer and quieter Hume Coal locos with fully-covered wagons will be using the rail slots vacated by the existing coal trains.”

“In what will be an industry first in Australia the company has also committed to hard covers for all coal wagons, to and from the port.

This statement largely mirrors the overly optimistic report of Hume Coal in its EIS for the rail project. First, it assumes away the impact of noise by stating that it is “predicted” to be below the required levels. Secondly, it assumes that the covered wagons alone will remove dust pollution. Thirdly, it states that the elimination of the railway crossing near the Boral cement works will entirely remove disruption to road traffic.

In addition, the statement quoted above regarding the impact of any closure of the Tahmoor mine is incorrect. The Tahmoor mine will continue to operate up to the date of its sale, and probably beyond under the new owner. It follows that the rail slot currently used by Tahmoor will still be required and the Hume Coal rail movements will be in addition to and not in substitution of the Tahmoor coal shipments.

These false conclusions and assumptions are dealt with below.

Noise

The rail project will give rise to high noise levels, both during the construction phase and the operation phase. Berrima and New Berrima are in the path of the prevailing winds from the above ground infrastructure area, which will contain both rail yards and rail track.

The operation of the mine and the processing plants will give rise to high levels of consequential rail movements. These operations will be conducted 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The assumptions in the EIS about prevailing winds and their strength are based on their average daily velocity, as measured in the morning. The predictions take no account of above average velocity, nor the velocity at various times of the day other than the morning period in which the measurements were taken.

This noise pollution will be in addition to the noise emanating from the Boral cement works. The cumulative impact of these two sources of industrial noise will have a serious and ongoing negative impact on the heritage village of Berrima and the village of New Berrima. It will lower the amenity of the residents of both Berrima and New Berrima. In the case of Berrima it will also significantly detract from the attractiveness of the village as a tourist destination and venue for functions such as weddings. As noted above, the rail bridge over the Old Hume Highway will mean that the noise from the locomotives operating at full

capacity to achieve the height of the bridge will also mean that the transmission of the noise will be from an elevated platform, giving rise to increased levels of noise experienced nearby.

The noise emanating from the rail project will seriously affect the nearby habitats of native species of animals, in particular koalas. There are private properties nearby to the above ground infrastructure whose owners have entered into formal environmental protection agreements with the State government, and the government has a duty to protect these properties and their natural environment from industrial activities proposed in their vicinity. To permit this mine would lead the State government to be in breach of its written and legally binding agreement with the landowners. The agreements are mutually legally binding, in that the landowners have had to register their obligations on their titles and the State government has undertaken to ensure that its approvals do not detract from the protection of the property.

The impact of noise from the rail project will have a significant negative impact along the route of the coal wagons. In addition to Berrima and New Berrima, it will negatively impact Moss Vale and Robertson, as well as the rural dwellings and properties on the way. Again, it is not just the noise from the Hume Coal wagons, but the cumulative impact of those movements when added to the existing movements along the rail corridor.

Dust

Again, the EIS on the rail project assumes away the problem. It simply states [*inter alia*] (Volume 3A, page ES.6):

"The predicted concentrations from existing Berrima Branch Line users are well within the acceptable range of air quality criteria at all surrounding receptors. The introduction of additional Hume Coal train movements and associated increase in annual air pollutant emissions will increase ground level concentrations slightly; however, the increase in emissions will not result in exceedance of any applicable air quality criteria at any receptor location."

This is an assumption of something that cannot be fully predicted. The company's proposal to use covered wagons will not eliminate dust, it may only diminish it. The wagons themselves and the track will inevitably be coated with dust, which will be disturbed and resettle on the wagons and the track each time the wagons pass, gradually building up accumulations that will make the problem considerably worse over time.

These dust impacts must be added to the diesel particulates that will accumulate over time on each side of the rail line. The combination of these incendiary deposits will also increase the risk of high temperature bush fires in a warming climate.

Disruption to Road Traffic

The rail project will have a particularly negative impact on the rail crossing at Robertson.

Again, the EIS is highly optimistic in its assessments, stating:

"Traffic delays caused by additional coal trains (four trains daily in each direction) as a result of the project at the major level crossings on the route, such as on the Illawarra Highway at Robertson, will be up to an extra 24 minutes in total each day."

There are no studies cited to back up this estimate, and it takes no account of unforeseen contingencies, such as traffic accidents occurring with the train at the crossings. The likelihood of such incidents is quite substantial given the 8 movements a day of trains and carriages that can be hundreds of metres long. Emergency vehicles could well be blocked in life threatening circumstances.

(3) Heritage and Visual Impact

The EIS blithely assumes that the impact on heritage will be limited to the impact on one heritage property, namely, Mereworth. This completely disregards the impact on the heritage village of Berrima. The rail project will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. At night the rail loop, mine head and other work areas of the infrastructure site serviced by the rail project will be illuminated. This will have a significant cumulative impact when added to the illumination emanating from the cement works. In the current local government planning rules the unpolluted night sky is recognised as being of great value and the planning rules state that it should not be detracted from by artificial lighting in rural areas. The night illumination for the rail infrastructure is contrary to the objectives of this policy.

The Coal mine and associated rail works will, therefore, have a significant detrimental impact on this cultural and heritage landscape.

Of great concern is the proposal to build rail maintenance facilities (including a large shed at least large enough to hold a locomotive) on the open rural land between the Hume Freeway and the Old Hume Highway. This land has been identified for inclusion in the Berrima Landscape Conservation Area, and contains the Berrima Memorial Driveway. This Memorial Driveway was planted by Claude Crowe and has both heritage and emotional significance, as it contains memorial plaques dedicated to soldiers who died in WWII.

Hume Coal also plans for a bridge over the Old Hume Highway to carry the locomotive and rail carriages. Given the very high loads envisaged, this will need to be a very substantial structure, and the earthworks to support the approach to the bridge will need to be very high and long, blocking out the open rural landscape on each side of the bridge. Again, this substantial industrial infrastructure will have a significant negative visual impact on the rural landscape in the approach to the heritage village of Berrima.

The image of a vast industrial site next to the freeway and along the Old Hume Highway as visitors approach Berrima will replace the present undeveloped rural landscape that is evocative of the early colonial period in which Berrima was settled. To say that the vegetation planted will screen this industrial complex is to ignore the fact that the stockpile of coal next to the freeway is to be 6 storeys high and the rail maintenance sheds next to the Old Hume Highway are to be large enough to accommodate at least a locomotive. It also ignores the stark visual impact of the industrial scale bridge and embankments to carry the trains over the Old Hume Highway, which cannot be screened from view.

The wind borne noise of the continuous rail activity, coal processing and truck movements will disturb both the residents of Berrima and New Berrima, and also the high number of visitors to the heritage village of Berrima.

The Southern Highlands Greens support and endorse the Heritage Study for the Berrima, Sutton Forest and Exeter area cultural landscape, prepared by Colleen Morris, and funded by Battle for Berrima and Sustainable Southern Highlands Inc.