

# The Black Hill Environment Protection Group *and* The Buttai Community Development Group

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24<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

**Attention:** Director – Transport Assessments, Planning & Assessment, Department of  
Planning Industry and Environment, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124.

**Re:** Submission by Community Groups – Major Projects (*Application SSI-7319*):  
**M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace**  
[Public Exhibition: closes August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021]

Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on the Environmental Impact Statement  
(EIS) for the proposed M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace.

Please find attached a brief submission on behalf of our Community Groups.

We are also happy to provide further clarification or input, as required.

Authorised by:



Terry J. Lewin, on behalf of the Community Groups

cc. Members of the Community Groups

**Submission by: Black Hill Environment Protection Group & Buttai Community Development Group (August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021)**  
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***Major Projects (Application SSI-7319):  
M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace***

In most respects, members of our Community Groups **strongly support the proposed M1 upgrades** – provided that genuine efforts are made to minimise impacts on the local environment and to protect the amenity of residents.

**Local Context.** Black Hill and surrounding areas provide **strategic junctions between major transport routes** – linking the M1 Pacific Motorway, John Renshaw Drive, Weakleys Drive, the New England Highway and the Pacific Highway.

Several consequences flow from this. Firstly, we have to endure **high daily traffic flows and considerable congestion**, especially during holiday periods. Secondly, we readily become the **target for a broad range of potential developments**, given our proximity to major transport routes, even though we live in a **substantially rural area and are surrounded by environmentally sensitive sub-areas**, such as coastal wetlands, the Sugarloaf range, and important national green/wildlife corridors.

Indeed, local communities are already **heavily impacted by surrounding developments**, with more on the way. These include: two existing coal mines (Bloomfield and Abel); two existing quarries (Black Hill and Buttai); existing industrial estates (Beresfield); two proposed IN2 industrial estates in Black Hill (the ‘Emerging Black Hill Precinct’); the M1 and its major intersection at Weakleys Drive; flow-on effects from the Hunter Expressway, feeding high volumes of trucks onto John Renshaw Drive (heading to Newcastle Port and the regional airport, etc); and current upgrade works on John Renshaw Drive. Into this mix, we now need to add the **proposed M1 Extension** and the future **Lower Hunter Freight Corridor (LHFC)**.

Consequently, the evaluation of **localised impacts** and **potential cumulative impacts** are important considerations for our sub-region when assessing the current Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

**Improved Traffic Flows and Reduced Congestion.** The proposed M1 upgrades are designed to **improve traffic flows** across the National Land Transport Network, which will benefit NSW as a whole and regional communities in the Lower Hunter, in particular - providing further opportunities for regional development and economic growth.

Of equal importance, reducing traffic volumes and congestion on local roads will **improve the lives of local communities**, enhancing day-to-day access to a broad range of resources, including commercial, employment, recreational, tourism and other facilities. Hopefully, as claimed, the proposed M1 upgrades will also improve the **overall safety and efficiency of the road network**.

**Project Objectives and Avoidance/Minimisation Strategies.** We support the **overall project vision and identified objectives** (EIS, Section 15.3), which include: provision of

*“... a flowing green corridor that integrates sensitively with the natural environment and ... the Hunter River floodplain”; road alignments that are “... responsive and integrated with the landscape”; and “... an enjoyable, interesting motorway” that values “... the communities and towns along the road”.*

We also **endorse efforts to “... avoid and minimise environmental and social impacts”** (e.g., minimising impacts on coastal wetlands, utilising already-cleared land adjacent to existing developments, floodplain viaducts, provisions for fauna connectivity, noise treatments, optimising the fit with existing and proposed regional developments, and reducing cumulative impacts).

It is also critical that the proposed design features, mitigation measures, and construction controls all materialise when the M1 Extension work is actually undertaken (currently scheduled for 2023 to 2028), and that they are **not ditched in future cost cutting exercises**, post approvals.

We also request that **any biodiversity offsets** that arise from this project translate into environmental improvements elsewhere in the local area, such as additions or enhancements to existing conservation areas, or improvements within Hunter Wetlands National Park.

**Protection of Local Amenity.** The amenity impacts that are likely to be most noticeable relate to **noise - both during the construction and operational phases**.

The ‘*highly noise affected residential receivers*’ during the construction phase are shown in Figure 8-4 of the EIS, which are mainly located on the northern side of the New England Highway at Tarro; many of these same properties will also be impacted when the M1 Extension is completed.

Existing and proposed noise barriers are shown in Figure 8-5, which predominantly reduce noise impacts on the Black Hill, Beresfield and Tarro communities. We **trust that these barriers will be installed as soon as possible, monitored, and refined over time**, with additional noise mitigation measures offered to impacted residences and non-residential properties, if required.

**Traffic from other developments.** Table 7-16 (Section 7.6 of the EIS) examines **potential traffic impacts from relevant identified projects**, including the Emerging Black Hill Precinct, about which the following is noted (in Table 7-16):

*“... the development [two adjacent IN2 Industrial Estates] substantially impacts the performance of the network in future horizon years due to the magnitude of traffic generated out of the development”, accounting for “... about 12 per cent of all trips in the study area by 2048”.*

Based on our local knowledge about these developments [Newcastle LGA estate, DA2020-01497, approved July, 2021; Cessnock LGA estate, DA No. 8/2018/539/1, under appeal], and their recent modified Development Applications, these projected impacts will be mediated somewhat by **future developer-funded improvements to the eastern end of John Renshaw Drive and its existing intersection with the M1.**

As correctly noted in the M1 Extension EIS documentation, all access to these Industrial Estates will “... *come from John Renshaw Drive west of the Weakleys Drive intersection which is outside the construction footprint*”.

However, the local community seeks **further reassurance** from Transport for NSW that it will **never approve southern access to these industrial estates via future M1 modifications and Blackhill Road**, which would severely compromise the lifestyles and amenity of this quiet, semi-rural community. Such restrictions would also be consistent with Cessnock Council’s Development Control Plan for this area [Chapter E18 (Black Hill Employment Area) - Section 18.1.8], which expressly prohibits any access between Blackhill Road and the IN2 estate within Cessnock LGA.

While we applaud the use of ‘*fauna crossing structures*’, it was somewhat surprising to see a proposed connection across the M1 in Black Hill (in Figure 5-1, Page 5-7) that would effectively direct fauna into the Emerging Black Hill Precinct (containing two IN2 industrial estates).

**Cycleways Connection Opportunities.** Development of the M1 Extension may also provide better cycleways connections for the Black Hill, Beresfield/Tarro and Heatherbrae communities. For example, experienced cyclists will be able to use the 2.5 to 3.0 metre wide shoulders to travel along the M1 Extension.

It is also proposed to use pathways on some of the batters within the M1 to enable cyclists to move between different parts of the road network (e.g., facilitating shifting from the M1 Extension to Lenaghans Drive). Consequently, Black Hill residents with an interest in ‘active transport’ cycling may find that they have more extensive access to local road networks in future (including direct access to the Tarro connection with the Richmond Vale Rail Trail).

**Finalised plans.** It is **clearly advantageous to have approved finalised plans for the M1 Extension**, as well as an identified route for the future Lower Hunter Freight Corridor (LHFC) [which is also currently on public exhibition - Project No.: PS124841, July, 2021].

Providing clarity about these proposals, and reducing planning uncertainties, will facilitate refinement and finalisation of other important local proposals, such as the Richmond Vale Rail Trail, and associated linked projects within regional conservation areas, as well as providing broader opportunities for enhanced cycleways connections and access to other recreational facilities.

Finalising plans for the M1 Extension is in everyone’s interests, and the sooner this upgrade work is actually completed, the better.