

General Purpose Standing Committee No 4

Pacific Highway Upgrades

Final Report

Ordered to be printed 11 May 2006

3.

New South Wales Parliamentary Library cataloguing-in-publication data:

New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4
Pacific Highway upgrades : final report / General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4. [Sydney, N.S.W.] : The
Committee, 2006. –xiii , p.157, 30 cm. (Report no. 16, May 2006)

Chair: Jenny Gardiner.

“Ordered to be printed 11 May 2006”.

ISBN 0734764650

Pacific Highway (N.S.W. and Qld.)

Roads--New South Wales--Maintenance and repair.

Title.

Gardiner, Jenny.

Series: New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4. Report ; no. 16

DDC 388.109944

How to contact the committee

Members of the General Purpose Standing Committee No 4 can be contacted through the Committee Secretariat. Written correspondence and enquiries should be directed to:

The Director

General Purpose Standing Committee No 4

Legislative Council

Parliament House, Macquarie Street

Sydney New South Wales 2000

Internet www.parliament.nsw.gov.au

Email gpscno4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Telephone 02 9230 3544

Facsimile 02 9230 3416

Terms of Reference

Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades

That the General Purpose Standing Committee No 4 inquire into and report on the impact of the proposed upgrades of the Pacific Highway between:

1. Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, with particular regard to the following issues:
 - (a) Reasons for expanding the highway upgrade study area on the St Helena to Tintenbar section;
 - (b) The level of upgrade proposed for this section and the remainder of the Pacific Highway;
 - (c) The impact of the highway upgrade on prime agricultural land;
 - (d) The potential impact of the upgraded highway on prime agricultural land in the expanded study area;
 - (e) The impacts of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway;
 - (f) The impacts of interstate heavy transport on the Pacific Highway and of the mixing of interstate and local transport;
 - (g) The impacts of interstate truck transport on the New England Highway;
 - (h) The significance of the New England Highway as a designated national transport route;
 - (i) Existing or proposed strategic transport plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the NSW freight task;
 - (j) The significance of statements by the Minister for Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources that the Pacific Highway is dedicated as a regional road; and
2. Ballina and Woodburn, with particular regard to the following issues:
 - (a) Impact on prime agricultural land;
 - (b) Impact on flooding in the mid-Richmond area;
 - (c) Impact on communities at Broadwater and Woodburn; and
3. Any other related matters

These terms of reference were self-referred by the Committee on 10 June 2005

Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades: Coffs Harbour

1. That General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 inquire into and report on:
 - (a) the proposed upgrade of the Pacific Highway between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga as outlined in the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy, and
 - (b) the progress of the proposed Bonville upgrade of the Pacific Highway.

2. That the inquiry be in the same terms as, and conducted concurrently with, the inquiry into the Pacific Highway upgrades between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, and Ballina and Woodburn, as reported to the House on 14 September 2005.

These terms of reference were self-referred by the Committee on 21 September 2005.

Committee Membership

Hon Jenny Gardiner MLC	The Nationals	<i>Chair</i>
Hon Jan Burnswoods MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon David Clarke MLC	Liberal Party	
Mr Ian Cohen MLC*	The Greens	
Hon Greg Donnelly MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Amanda Fazio MLC**	Australian Labor Party	
Ms Lee Rhiannon***	The Greens	

* Mr Ian Cohen MLC substituted for Hon David Oldfield for the duration of the Inquiry

** Hon Amanda Fazio MLC substituted for Hon Kayee Griffin MLC for the duration of the Inquiry

*** Ms Lee Rhiannon substituted for the duration of the Inquiry for Ms Sylvia Hale for the duration of the Inquiry

Table of Contents

	Chair's Foreword	xi
	Summary of Recommendations	xiii
Chapter 1	Introduction	1
	Content of Interim and Final Reports	1
	Terms of reference	1
	Submissions	1
	Hearings and public forum	2
	Site visits	2
	Acknowledgement of Inquiry participants	3
	Report outline	3
Chapter 2	Overview: Pacific Highway Upgrade Program	4
	Reasons for upgrade	4
	Safety	4
	Economic benefits	5
	Population and tourism growth	6
	Level of upgrade	7
	A and M-class upgrades	7
	Community concerns about level of upgrade	8
	Committee view: Level of upgrade	10
	Progress of upgrade	11
	Funding for Pacific Highway Upgrade Program	12
	Funding for other road projects	12
	Accelerating pace of upgrade	13
	Private sector funding	15
	North Coast Motorway	16
	Committee view: Progress of upgrade	17
Chapter 3	Coffs Harbour	19
	Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Outline of proposed upgrade	19
	Introduction to Coffs Harbour area	19
	Reasons for upgrade	20
	Initial consultation and planning	20
	Route options	21

Preferred route	22
Next steps	22
Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Consultation	23
Influence of community consultation on selection of route options	23
Provision of information	26
Concerns about consultation methods	27
Consultation with the Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh community	28
RTA's response to complaints about consultation with Punjabi Sikh community	30
Community representation on Value Management Workshop	32
ARUP Peer Review	34
Upgrade delayed by criticism of consultation process	35
Committee view: Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Consultation	36
Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Impact on agriculture and local economy	38
Value of agriculture	38
Importance of banana industry	39
Impact on banana land	40
Impact on Punjabi Sikh community	42
Other economic impacts	44
Committee view: Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Impact on agriculture and local economy	46
Bonville: Progress	46
Timeframe for completion	46
Environmental modifications	49
Interim safety measures	50
Committee view: Bonville: Progress	51
Impact of delay on small businesses	52
Committee view: Impact of delay on small businesses	53
Chapter 4 Heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway	54
Introduction to B-doubles	54
What is a B-Double?	54
History of B-doubles	54
Community concerns regarding introduction of B-Doubles to the Pacific Highway	55
Committee view: Introduction to B-Doubles	57
Number of heavy vehicles on the Highway	58
Did heavy vehicle usage increase after the opening of Yelgun – Chinderah?	58
Did heavy vehicles transfer from the New England to the Pacific Highway?	59
Usage trends since late 2002	60
B-doubles – do they just carry inter-state freight?	61
Accuracy of RTA statistics	64
Committee view: Number of heavy vehicles on the Highway	65

	Community concerns regarding heavy vehicles	66
	Impact of B-Doubles on coastal communities	66
	Mixing of passenger and heavy vehicles	67
	Benefits of road freight for coastal communities	70
	Committee view: Community concerns regarding heavy vehicles	71
	Heavy vehicle safety	72
	Number of accidents involving heavy vehicles	72
	Consequences of accidents involving heavy vehicles	73
	Design of B-doubles and safety	74
	What could be done to improve heavy vehicle safety?	76
	RTA's response to community safety concerns	77
	Committee view: Heavy vehicle safety	80
	Noise pollution	80
	Community concerns regarding noise pollution	81
	Causes of noise pollution	82
	RTA's response to community noise concerns	83
	Committee view: Noise pollution	84
Chapter 5	Strategic issues	86
	Community concerns regarding strategic planning for the Pacific Highway	86
	Views of coastal residents	86
	Committee view: Community concerns regarding strategic planning for the Pacific Highway	89
	Support for an inland freight route	89
	Community support for an inland freight route	90
	Benefits for inland communities	91
	Committee view: Support for an inland freight route	93
	Candidates for an inland freight route	93
	New England Highway	94
	Advantages of Pacific Highway over New England Highway for heavy vehicles	95
	Summerland Way	97
	Need for assessment of Summerland Way proposal	99
	Overall North Coast Pacific Highway strategy	100
	Committee view: Candidates for an inland freight route	100
	Support for rail freight	102
	Community support for rail freight	102
	Comparison of rail versus road freight	103
	Committee view: Support for rail freight	105
	Increasing rail's share of the land freight task	106
	Investment in rail infrastructure	106
	Integrated planning for road and rail	108
	Committee view: Increasing rail's share of the land freight task	110

	Strategic planning for the Pacific Highway and beyond	110
	Statements by Planning Minister – Pacific Highway as a dedicated regional road	111
	Committee view: Strategic planning for the Pacific Highway and beyond	111
Appendix 1	Maps	114
Appendix 2	Submissions	117
Appendix 3	Form Letters	126
Appendix 4	Witnesses	128
Appendix 5	Site Visits	132
Appendix 6	Tabled Documents	133
Appendix 7	Minutes	136
Appendix 8	Dissenting statements	156

Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present the Final Report of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 on the Pacific Highway Upgrades. This Report examines broad strategic issues relating to the entire Pacific Highway, as well as the proposed upgrades between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, and at Bonville, where prolonged delays in commencing the upgrade caused great community concern. The upgrades between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, and Ballina and Woodburn, were considered in the Committee's Interim Report.

This Final Report examines an issue of vital importance to road users in New South Wales: the upgrade of the more than half of the Pacific Highway that remains single carriageway. The Committee believes that the upgrade to dual carriageway should be completed as soon as possible, to improve safety and, indeed, save lives.

The central finding of this Final Report is that New South Wales lacks a comprehensive freight strategy. Such a strategy is needed to guide the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program. This need will become more pressing with the predicted doubling of the freight task by 2020. The development of a comprehensive NSW Freight Strategy should be a collaborative effort involving all levels of government and neighbouring states.

This Inquiry demonstrated that coastal residents are extremely concerned about the dangers of mixing local and heavy vehicles on the Highway. Many North Coast residents claimed that heavy vehicles are having a deleterious impact on their communities and that this situation worsened dramatically when B-Doubles were allowed onto the Highway in 2002. They said that the State Government's proposals for six-lane, 110km/h motorway-type upgrades in parts of the Pacific Highway were not the best potential solution to the growing volume of heavy vehicles on the Highway, and called on the NSW Government to take a strategic approach to Highway upgrades planned for the North Coast.

As part of this strategic approach, many North Coast residents asked the NSW Government to examine the establishment of an inland freight route incorporating improvements to the Summerland Way. The Committee supports this suggestion.

There was widespread community support for greater use of rail freight to reduce the environmental and safety impact of heavy vehicles. While substantial investment is needed to improve rail infrastructure on the key freight corridors in New South Wales, the Committee supports greater use of rail freight.

The Committee concluded that while it may be feasible to downgrade the scale of certain Highway upgrades planned for the North Coast, this decision cannot be made in isolation from consideration of broader issues such as establishing an inland freight route and encouraging greater use of rail freight.

I would like to thank the hundreds of local residents who participated in this Inquiry, including many witnesses who placed on the parliamentary record their accounts of the impact that the Pacific Highway road toll has had on them, their families, friends, other loved ones and their communities. The input of all contributors was valuable.

Finally, I would also like to thank my Committee colleagues for their work on this Inquiry, and the Secretariat staff, in particular, the Director of the General Purpose Standing Committees, Ms Beverly Duffy, and the Principal Council Officer, Ms Madeleine Foley.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jenny Gardiner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Hon Jenny Gardiner MLC

Chair

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Page 46

That the RTA recognise prime agricultural land to be a substantial constraint in developing route options.

Recommendation 2

Page 51

That, with respect to Highway upgrade projects, NSW Treasury, in its Budget Estimates papers for the Roads portfolio, publish the RTA's estimated timetable for each upgrade project from acceptance of tender, to commencement of work through to the completion date.

The RTA should make public its reasons for non-compliance with the estimated schedule at any stage.

Recommendation 3

Page 80

That the NSW Government collaborate with other state governments, the Commonwealth Government, employers and the Transport Workers' Union to develop comprehensive 'chain of responsibility' legislation, modelled on the NSW *Occupational Health and Safety (Long Distance Truck Driver Fatigue) Regulation 2004* for the trucking industry.

Recommendation 4

Page 101

That the RTA investigate the incorporation of the Summerland Way, including a route through the narrowest part of the Border Ranges to the Beaudesert area as part of its examination of the overall North Coast Pacific Highway Strategy.

Recommendation 5

Page 113

That the NSW Government act on its responsibility for strategic transport planning for freight by developing an integrated NSW Freight Strategy, and work through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to develop a national freight strategy to encourage integrated strategic planning for all modes of transport.

In addition to developing a strategy to guide all freight movements in New South Wales, the NSW Freight Strategy should:

- outline measures to encourage a shift from road to rail freight, including through integrated strategic planning for both road and rail upgrades
- investigate the adequacy of less extensive upgrades to the Pacific Highway on the Mid and Far North Coasts, taking into consideration the outcomes of investigations concerning the North Coast Highway Strategy investigate including the feasibility of incorporating the Summerland Way and measures to shift freight from road to rail.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of the process for the Inquiries into the Pacific Highway upgrades and the structure of the Report.

Content of Interim and Final Reports

- 1.1 This Final Report examines matters relating to the proposed upgrades to the Pacific Highway between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, and at Bonville. It also examines broader strategic issues relevant to the entire Pacific Highway.
- 1.2 The Committee's Interim Report, tabled in December 2005, inquired into the proposed Highway upgrades between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, and Ballina and Woodburn. The specifics of these matters will not be re-visited in this Final Report.

Terms of reference

- 1.3 The Committee established two Inquiries into the Pacific Highway upgrades, one examining Highway upgrades on the Far North Coast and the other examining Highway upgrades on the Mid North Coast (throughout the Report, 'the Highway' refers to the Pacific Highway).¹
- 1.4 The terms of reference relating to the first Inquiry into the proposed Highway upgrades between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, and Ballina and Woodburn (hereafter referred to as the Far North Coast Inquiry), were adopted on 10 June 2005, under the Committee's power to make a self-reference.
- 1.5 The terms of reference relating to the second Inquiry into the proposed Highway upgrades between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, and at Bonville (hereafter referred to as the Mid North Coast Inquiry), were adopted on 21 September 2005, also under the Committee's power to make a self-reference.
- 1.6 In examining the proposed Highway upgrades, the Committee was mindful that the selection of preferred routes is a matter for the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales (RTA). The Committee's role was to examine the RTA's processes for developing route options, and the possible impacts of the upgrades.
- 1.7 The terms of reference for both Inquiries are on pages iv and v.

Submissions

- 1.8 The Committee called for submissions to both Inquiries through advertisements in newspapers in areas relevant to the terms of reference,² and by writing to interested parties.

¹ The terms of reference for the second Mid North Coast Inquiry required both inquiries to be conducted concurrently. On adopting these terms of reference, the Committee resolved to report on both Inquiries in one report. Minutes No. 69, 21 September 2005, item 5

- 1.9 After establishing the Mid North Coast Inquiry, the Committee wrote to people who had already made a submission to the Far North Coast Inquiry but whose submissions were not confined to issues on the Far North Coast, to inform them of the new Inquiry.
- 1.10 The Committee received 207 submissions relating to the Far North Coast Inquiry, and 65 submissions relating to the Mid North Coast Inquiry. Submissions to each Inquiry were considered as evidence for both Inquiries. A list of submissions is contained in Appendix 2.
- 1.11 The Committee also received 101 form letters relating to the proposed Highway upgrade between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar. A list of the authors of these letters is contained in Appendix 3.

Hearings and public forum

- 1.12 The Committee held five public hearings. These hearings were held at Parliament House on 26 September 2005, 18 November 2005 and 21 March 2006, and at Ballina on 27 October 2005 and Coffs Harbour on 21 November 2005. A well-attended public forum followed the Ballina hearing.
- 1.13 The Committee heard evidence from the RTA, local councils, peak bodies, community organisations, members of the RTA's Community Liaison and Focus Groups, and local residents affected by the proposed upgrades. Transcripts of these hearings are on the Committee's website www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc4.
- 1.14 A list of witnesses at the hearings and the public forum is contained in Appendix 4.

Site visits

- 1.15 The Committee travelled along the Pacific Highway between Ewingsdale and Broadwater on 28 October 2005 as part of the Far North Coast Inquiry. The Committee inspected the Highway and visited several properties in the areas between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, and Ballina and Woodburn, and met with property owners and local residents directly affected by the RTA's proposed route options.
- 1.16 The Committee travelled along the Pacific Highway between Bonville and Woolgoolga on 21 November 2005 as part of the Mid North Coast Inquiry. The Committee inspected the Highway and visited the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara (Punjabi Sikh Temple) at Woolgoolga, and met with members of the Punjabi Sikh community directly affected by the RTA's preferred route option.
- 1.17 A list of site visits is contained in Appendix 5.

² The Inquiries were advertised in the *Byron Shire Echo*, *Coffs Harbour Advocate*, *Glenn Innes Examiner*, *Grafton Examiner*, *Inverell Times*, *Lismore Northern Star*, *Tamworth Northern Daily Leader*, *Tenterfield Star*, *Tweed Daily News*, *Armidale Express*, *Midcoast Observer Kempsey*, *Tweed Sun*, *Ballina North Coast Advocate*, *Grafton Coastal Views*, and *Lismore Echo*

Acknowledgement of Inquiry participants

- 1.18** The Committee is grateful to the hundreds of local residents who participated in the Inquiries by making submissions, sending letters, appearing as witnesses at hearings, speaking at the public forum, attending the hearings or the forum, or meeting the Committee on site visits.
- 1.19** Community participation is vital to the success of Committee Inquiries, and the Committee thanks participants for their efforts to ensure that the Committee was fully informed on the matters considered in the Interim and Final Reports.

Report outline

- 1.20** There are five chapters in this Report.
- 1.21** Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program, including the rationale for upgrading the Highway, progress in upgrading the entire Highway to dual carriageway, and the level of upgrade proposed for the areas examined in the Interim and Final Reports.
- 1.22** Chapter 3 examines community concerns in relation to the proposed upgrades between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, and at Bonville. For the Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga Upgrade, concerns centred on the community consultation process, and the impact on agricultural land. For Bonville the major concern was safety, and delays in commencing construction of the Upgrade.
- 1.23** Chapter 4 explores an area of key concern to Inquiry participants on both the Mid and Far North Coasts, namely the impact of heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway, and B-Doubles in particular. This Chapter considers whether the number of heavy vehicles on the Highway has increased in recent years, as well as concerns relating to heavy vehicle safety (including the mixing of passenger and heavy vehicles) and noise pollution.
- 1.24** Chapter 5 examines a range of strategic issues relating to the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program. One of these issues is support for directing freight away from the coastal strip and establishing instead an inland freight route, with the New England Highway or the Summerland Way suggested as possible candidates. The need to increase rail's share of the land freight task was suggested by residents of both the Mid and Far North Coasts. This Chapter therefore examines the relative benefits of road and rail freight and measures to encourage greater use of rail freight. This final Chapter concludes by recommending the development of a comprehensive freight strategy for New South Wales.

Chapter 2 Overview: Pacific Highway Upgrade Program

There are several reasons to upgrade the Pacific Highway to dual carriageway. The first and foremost reason is to improve safety. While North Coast residents strongly support upgrading the Highway to dual carriageway, the level of upgrade is contentious. More than half of the Highway, or 373km, remains to be upgraded from single to dual carriageway.³ It has been suggested that even with the new State – Commonwealth funding arrangements, government funding alone may not be sufficient to complete the upgrade within the next decade.

Reasons for upgrade

2.1 Evidence to the Committee strongly supported upgrading the Pacific Highway between Newcastle and the Queensland border to dual carriageway. The key reason given was to improve safety and save lives. Supplementary reasons included economic benefits and the need to address pressures generated by population and tourism growth.

Safety

2.2 Inquiry participants repeatedly spoke of their concerns regarding the safety of the Pacific Highway and the need to upgrade the Highway to dual carriageway as soon as possible. This issue was firmly placed in the spotlight in 1989 following the Kempsey and Grafton bus crashes, which claimed the lives of 55 people. The chief recommendation of the then State Coroner, Mr Kevin Waller, was that: 'First, foremost and superseding all others, it is recommended that the Pacific Highway be converted into a dual highway between Newcastle and the Queensland border.'⁴

2.3 The NRMA explained the social and economic impact of Highway accidents:

NRMA's 2003 Pacific Highway audit found that there were 10,182 crashes on the Pacific Highway in the past 10 years between Hexham and the Queensland border. Crashes, deaths and injuries on the Pacific Highway are estimated to have cost the community in excess of \$191 million between 2000 and 2002.⁵

2.4 Ms Lisa McGill, Policy Specialist, Traffic and Roads, NRMA, told the Committee that of these crashes 453 people were killed and 6,806 people were injured.⁶ Ms McGill said that dual carriageway reduces the incidence of head-on crashes, which are most likely to involve fatalities, by 90%.⁷

³ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p6

⁴ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, p6

⁵ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, p3

⁶ Ms Lisa McGill, Policy Specialist, Traffic and Roads, NRMA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p53

⁷ Ms McGill, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p53

- 2.5** The Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC) noted the need to upgrade the Highway to prevent future loss of life:

People are dying. The NRMA reports that in the 18 months between January 2003 and June 2004, 70 people died on the Pacific Highway. At the current rate of construction, completion of the highway upgrades is not expected for between 15 and 20 years. During this time an estimated 800 more people will die.⁸

- 2.6** Mr Soames Job, General Manager of Road Safety Strategy for the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales (RTA), told the Committee of the benefits of dual carriageway:

... the most severe crash types are the head-on crashes because you have, on average, double the closing speed and, on average, double the number of people involved in the crashes ... The consequence of dual carriageway is that you substantially remove those crashes ... So you get a very substantial road safety benefit.⁹

- 2.7** Mr Job noted that from 1996 to 2002 there was a 28% increase in traffic on the Highway. On sections that had not been upgraded to dual carriageway, there was a 13% increase in crashes. On sections that had been upgraded to dual carriageway, there was a 19% decrease in crashes. This led Mr Job to conclude that 'clearly the dual carriageways give us a safety benefit ...'.¹⁰

- 2.8** Mr Paul Forward, then Chief Executive of the RTA, told the Committee that it was expected that once the entire Highway is upgraded to dual carriageway, 25 lives will be saved each year, and serious injuries more than halved.¹¹

Economic benefits

- 2.9** The Tourism and Transport Forum Australia (TTF) stated that the safety benefits of upgrading the Highway would generate economic returns:

... road trauma is estimated to cost New South Wales in excess of \$13 million every day. In 2002, crashes on the Pacific Highway alone are estimated to have cost the community over \$190 million. Investments to complete dual carriageways for the length of the highway to the Queensland border will deliver dividends immediately as the cost of crashes are substantially reduced (fixing road blackspots delivers a cost benefit ratio of 1:14 for every dollar invested).¹²

- 2.10** In addition to reducing the costs of trauma, the Committee heard that upgrading the Highway will assist the tourism industry by attracting tourists through improved road safety, improved travel reliability, and reduced travel times. The transport industry was also expected to benefit from reduced travel times, as well as savings from decreased fuel usage.

⁸ Submission 190, (Far North Coast) NOROC, p3

⁹ Mr Soames Job, General Manager, Road Safety Strategy, RTA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p48

¹⁰ Mr Job, Evidence, 18 November 2005, p4

¹¹ Mr Paul Forward, Chief Executive, RTA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p33

¹² Submission 184 (Far North Coast), Tourism and Transport Forum Australia Ltd, p2

- 2.11** The RTA told the Committee that the upgrades completed to June 2006 would result in travel time savings of 80 minutes from Newcastle to the Queensland border.¹³ When the entire Highway is upgraded, this will reduce travel time by another 90 minutes, as well as improve freight efficiency and travel reliability, especially in holiday periods.¹⁴
- 2.12** NOROC described the economic reasons why local communities need the upgrade:
- Local communities are being held back economically. For many of the communities situated along it, the Pacific Highway represents a major element in the promotion of economic activity. The Pacific Highway upgrades will provide greater access to markets by local businesses, they will significantly reduce the travelling time ... they will increase tourism, and they will generate job growth.¹⁵
- 2.13** TTF also spoke about the economic benefits that would result from the upgrade:
- Better and safer roads in non-metropolitan areas strengthen regional economies, create jobs and increase income for the community. Safer roads improve efficiency and contribute to further economic benefits delivered through savings in travel times and vehicle operating costs, reductions in environmental impacts, and increases in tourism.¹⁶
- 2.14** The Hon David Campbell MP, NSW Minister for Regional Development, told the Committee that upgrading the Highway would create employment opportunities for workers during the construction phase, provide long-term benefits for by-passed towns due to the reduction in through traffic, and improve transport links between commercial centres and thus improve trade and employment in the regions affected.¹⁷

Population and tourism growth

- 2.15** The Committee heard that the Highway upgrade was also needed to cater for population growth on the North Coast. The RTA noted that the population on the east coast between Sydney and Brisbane, 'one of the fastest growing regions in Australia,' was projected to grow by between 34% and 41% over the next 20 years.¹⁸ The RTA expected that this rapid population growth would increase traffic volumes by up to 35%.

¹³ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p6

¹⁴ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p7

¹⁵ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, p4

¹⁶ Submission 184 (Far North Coast), Tourism and Transport Forum Australia Ltd, p3

¹⁷ Submission 193 (Far North Coast), Hon David Campbell MP, Minister for Regional Development, pp1-2

¹⁸ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p3

- 2.16** The President of NOROC, Councillor Ernie Bennett, said in his opening address to NOROC's Pacific Highway Summit in May 2005:

The population of the Northern Rivers is approximately 300,000 people – that's the size of a small state. And indeed the NSW Government has estimated that 25% of Australia's population will be living between Coffs Harbour and Harvey Bay by the year 2025.¹⁹

- 2.17** NOROC noted that in addition to experiencing rapid population growth, the North Coast is experiencing tourism growth:

On top of this expanding population is an explosion in tourism. Tourism industry figures estimate that 400,000 people were on holiday between Coffs Harbour and the Gold Coast during Easter 2004 ... These visitors place a tremendous strain on infrastructure. The majority of them arrive in and travel through the region either by car or in buses. At some point nearly all of them will travel along the Pacific Highway.²⁰

- 2.18** The influx of new residents and visitors was described by Far North Coast resident Mr Chris Shevellar:

They keep coming, the overseas tourists, the interstate tourists, the backpackers, the grey nomads, the sea-changers and, above all, the people fleeing Sydney and Melbourne. They come by road, by car, by Kombi, caravan, campervan or bus. They come for a week, a month or the rest of their lives, and they use the Pacific Highway to get around.²¹

- 2.19** TTF claimed that inadequate public transport in many of the growing coastal communities led to high private vehicle usage,²² exacerbating the demands that local residents placed on the Highway.

Level of upgrade

- 2.20** Despite universal support among Inquiry participants for upgrading the Highway to dual carriageway, the Committee heard evidence of considerable disquiet among some sections of the community concerning the extent of the proposed upgrades.

A and M-class upgrades

- 2.21** The RTA advised the Committee that those sections of the Highway that have not yet been upgraded to dual carriageway may be upgraded to either A or M-class standard. The proposed

¹⁹ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, Attachment A: *Proceedings*, Pacific Highway Summit, Ballina, 6 May 2005, p5

²⁰ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, p5

²¹ Mr Chris Shevellar, Evidence, Hearing 27 October 2005, p61

²² Submission 184 (Far North Coast), Tourism and Transport Forum Australia Ltd, p4

upgrades examined by the Committee on the Mid and Far North Coasts are proposed to be M-class upgrades.

2.22 An M-class upgrade is of a freeway type standard involving:

- four lane dual carriageway with provision for upgrading to six lanes in future
- 110km/h design speed
- restricted access to accommodate growing community desires for separation of local and through traffic
- alternative local access route
- high standard highway connections to result in safer driving conditions
- mitigation measures to address noise and visual amenity.²³

2.23 M-class upgrades have two 3.5m wide lanes, inner shoulders of 0.5m, outer shoulders of 2.5m, and a median strip from 2.6 to 12m.²⁴

2.24 An A-class upgrade, by contrast, is a less extensive level of upgrade. It is often associated with widening and duplication of a highway along its current path. According to the RTA an A-class upgrade involves ‘two lanes in each direction, 100km/h posted speed, limited access condition roadway with at grade intersections.’²⁵ Unlike an M-class upgrade, an A-class upgrade does not provide for upgrading to six lanes in future, and therefore requires a narrower road corridor than an M-class upgrade.

Community concerns about level of upgrade

2.25 Many residents of the Mid and Far North Coasts told the Committee they favour a smaller-scale ‘duplication’ or A-class upgrade along the path of the current Highway, rather than an M-class upgrade requiring construction of a new freeway type road on a greenfield site. These residents claimed that an M-class upgrade was excessive and would be detrimental to their communities.

2.26 On both the Mid and Far North Coasts, some sections of the community opposed an M-class upgrade because it would:

- lead to the loss of a significant amount of fertile agricultural land, land which is already threatened by urban development
- locate the new freeway type road on a greenfield site adjacent to properties that are currently not located along the Highway.

²³ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, pp12-13; RTA, Route Options Development Report, Tintenbar to Ewingsdale Pacific Highway Upgrade, October 2005, p30

²⁴ RTA, Route Options Development Report, Tintenbar to Ewingsdale Pacific Highway Upgrade, October 2005, p30

²⁵ RTA, Route Options Development Report, Tintenbar to Ewingsdale Pacific Highway Upgrade, October 2005, piv

2.27 Some residents criticised the RTA for the use of the term ‘upgrade’ to describe what is essentially a new road. At the Committee’s public forum in Ballina, the Committee was told by local resident Mr Ian Dall:

I would hazard a guess that many speakers will rightly describe the word ‘upgrade’ as seriously misleading and an obvious misnomer. However, what is being planned by the RTA for Tintenbar to Ewingsdale is a major piece of public infrastructure, not simply a lesser upgrade of the existing Highway.²⁶

2.28 Coffs Harbour resident Ms Margaret Murphy expressed similar views:

The highway ‘upgrade’ is NOT an upgrade – it is a **new motorway** with a concrete footprint 200 metres wide in places and with up to 8 lanes of traffic, elevated intersections and off ramps that will create noise problems for many residents.²⁷

2.29 The Community Alliance for Road Sustainability (CARS) described the proposed upgrades on the Far North Coast as ‘... in fact not an upgrade of the existing road but a high speed interstate freight and vehicle route in addition to the existing Highway.’²⁸

2.30 Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East, residents of the Far North Coast, shared their concerns about the level of upgrade:

The plans to upgrade the Pacific Highway to a 6 lane motorway are ill-thought and excessive. This is not necessary for local light traffic or interstate distance light traffic. These users only require a divided 4 lane road to increase safety.²⁹

2.31 Mr Steven Moody, a representative of the Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network (BAN) and Woolgoolga Area Residents’ Group (WAR), had concerns about an M-class upgrade on the Mid North Coast:

We submit that planning for an ultimate class M motorway for the Coffs Harbour highway upgrade is totally unacceptable and inappropriate for the narrow strip of land that exists on the coast between the mountain range and the shores of the Solitary Islands Marine Park.³⁰

2.32 Far North Coast resident Mr Terry Sandon feared that a new six-lane road would increase congestion by inducing traffic, stating: ‘We needed to reduce the traffic flow, not encourage it. If a six-lane highway is built, this still will not solve the traffic problem, it will only increase it.’³¹

²⁶ Mr Dall, Evidence, Public Forum, 27 October 2005, pp6-7

²⁷ Submission 95 (Far North Coast), Ms Margaret Murphy, p1, emphasis as per original

²⁸ Submission 139 (Far North Coast), C.A.R.S, p4

²⁹ Submission 54 (Far North Coast), Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East, p1

³⁰ Mr Steven Moody, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p38

³¹ Mr Terry Sandon, Evidence, Public Forum, 27 October 2005, p6

- 2.33** Byron Shire Council claimed that the proposed level of upgrade was to accommodate the freight industry:

The design criteria for the future upgrades are all about setting grades to suit the momentum of heavy vehicles rather than establishing a route for the safe transport of all users ...³²

- 2.34** Newrybar resident Ms Rebecca Zentveld expressed a similar view:

... what the RTA proposes is that a whole new four lane highway be constructed with a potential to cater for a 6 lane motorway with a road corridor of up to 250 metres, a gradient of less than 6% and a 110 km per hour speed limit. In other words the road is being designed to cater for the trucking industry at the expense of local land owners!³³

- 2.35** Ms June Zentveld told the Committee that community interests were being compromised in order to accommodate the trucking industry:

... we, the community, are being asked to pay the enormously high price of noise and diesel pollution, with the possible destruction of our homes, our livelihoods and our land – all for the economic advantage of the trucking industry.³⁴

- 2.36** However, the NRMA's Ms Lisa McGill countered arguments that M-class upgrades were for the benefit of the freight industry by noting that 'the improvements are not there just for heavy freight; they are for all road users – motorists, community members, motorcyclists ...'.³⁵ Ms McGill also explained that it was important to have the capacity to upgrade any new road to six lanes in the future, as new roads tend to induce traffic:

With upgrading of new roads in Sydney, I would say every time you build a road, and it might be two lanes in each direction, you get to capacity fairly quickly ... You need to do a dual divided ... and buy your road corridor as well ... so that you have the potential to upgrade the road to three lanes in each direction if that is what is required.³⁶

Committee view: Level of upgrade

- 2.37** In its Interim Report on the Far North Coast upgrades, the Committee acknowledged community concerns regarding the impact of a freeway type M-class upgrade on agriculture, the environment, property values, and the fabric of local communities.

- 2.38** The Committee also heard two compelling reasons why a freeway type M-class upgrade is necessary: the predicted doubling of the freight task by 2020 (most of which will be transported by road), and the expected demands resulting from rapid population and tourism growth on the North Coast.

³² Submission 188 (Far North Coast), Byron Shire Council, p3

³³ Submission 67 (Far North Coast), Ms Rebecca Zentveld, p1

³⁴ Ms June Zentveld, Evidence, Public Forum, 27 October 2005, p2

³⁵ Ms Lisa McGill, Policy Specialist, Traffic and Roads, NRMA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p55

³⁶ Ms McGill, Evidence, 26 September 2005, pp58-59

- 2.39** Coastal residents, however, countered these arguments by claiming that an A-class duplication along the path of the current Highway would be adequate for the needs of the local community and tourist traffic, if heavy vehicles transporting freight between Sydney and Brisbane were removed from the Highway.
- 2.40** The Committee believes that a less extensive upgrade, that is an A-class upgrade, may be viable but that this issue cannot be examined in isolation from broader strategic issues, such as establishing an inland route for inter-state freight and encouraging a shift from road to rail freight. These issues are discussed in Chapter 5.

Progress of upgrade

- 2.41** The NRMA's 2003 audit of the Pacific Highway found that 32% of the Highway had been upgraded to dual divided carriageway, from 9% in 1995.³⁷ The NRMA also found that 81% of the Highway had speed zones of 100km/h or 110km/h, with 77 changes of speed limit.³⁸
- 2.42** The RTA estimated that by June 2006, 44% of the Highway would be dual carriageway or under construction to dual carriageway standard, leaving 373km to be upgraded (see map in Appendix 1, Figure 1).³⁹
- 2.43** Although over half of the Highway remains to be upgraded to dual carriageway, the RTA advised the Committee that as at October 2005, significant progress had been made since the current ten-year funding agreement commenced in 1996:
- 44 new projects, or 229km of dual carriageway, have opened
 - 8 projects are under construction or due to commence shortly
 - 20 upgrade projects are being planned.⁴⁰
- 2.44** Updated figures as at May 2006 were provided by the Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, NSW Minister for Roads, to the Legislative Council:

To date, a total of 45 projects have opened to traffic since 1996, with motorists now benefiting from 223 kilometres of four-lane highway. A further 302 kilometres of new highway is under construction, have been approved for construction or have had a preferred upgrade route identified.⁴¹

³⁷ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, p3

³⁸ NRMA, *Pacific Highway Route Performance Report*, September 2003, p6

³⁹ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p6

⁴⁰ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p4

⁴¹ The Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Minister for Roads, Legislative Council, New South Wales, *Hansard*, 4 May 2006, p16

Funding for Pacific Highway Upgrade Program

- 2.45** The upgrading of the Pacific Highway to dual carriageway is jointly funded by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments. The current \$2.2 billion, ten-year funding agreement ends in June 2006. Under this agreement the NSW Government has contributed \$1.6 billion to upgrade this State road, and the Commonwealth \$600 million.⁴²
- 2.46** From June 2006 the remainder of the Highway upgrade, and all land transport infrastructure, will be funded through AusLink, Australia's first national land transport plan since Federation.⁴³ Under AusLink, separate Commonwealth funding for road and rail programs will be pooled into a single program. AusLink is designed to achieve better national land transport planning, funding and investment decision-making. According to the then Federal Ministers for Transport, the Hon John Anderson MP, and for Roads, the Hon Ian Campbell, AusLink aims to develop 'an integrated and long-term investment plan' to replace 'the existing piecemeal, short-term and mode-specific approach.'⁴⁴
- 2.47** Under AusLink, the National Highway System and Roads of National Importance have been replaced by the AusLink National Network. The AusLink National Network is based on national, regional and urban transport corridors, links to ports and airports, and inter-modal connections between road and rail. The Pacific Highway between Newcastle and Queensland is part of the AusLink network.
- 2.48** Under AusLink funding arrangements for the Pacific Highway, due to come into effect after June 2006, the Commonwealth Government will increase its funding contribution to the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program by \$100 million per year, matching the NSW Government's current contribution of \$160 million per year.⁴⁵ This will take the total State – Commonwealth commitment for the next three years to \$960 million (\$480 million each). Funding allocations beyond June 2009 are yet to be determined.
- 2.49** AusLink has also allocated funding of \$450 million to improving the Sydney – Brisbane rail link, as well as ongoing funding to the New England and Newell Highways, which it is hoped will ease some of the freight pressures on the Pacific Highway. The New England Highway and rail freight are examined in Chapter 5.

Funding for other road projects

- 2.50** Prior to the introduction of AusLink, the Pacific Highway was not part of the National Highway System. As a result, funding was mainly a State Government responsibility.⁴⁶ The

⁴² Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p4

⁴³ <www.auslink.gov.au/policy/overview/background/2000s.aspx> (accessed 14 February 2006)

⁴⁴ DOTARS, *AusLink White Paper: Ministerial foreword*
<www.auslink.gov.au/policy/overview/background/whitepaper/foreword.aspx> (accessed 14 February 2006)

⁴⁵ DOTARS, *Pacific Highway – Joint Australia and NSW Upgrading Program*,
<www.auslink.gov.au/factsheets/natnet/nsw/fs_nswua0005.aspx> (accessed 14 February 2006)

⁴⁶ Mr Forward, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p36

New England Highway, however, was designated as a national highway, and was fully funded by the Commonwealth.

- 2.51** In evidence, Mr Paul Forward explained the seemingly anomalous designation of the New England as a national highway over the Pacific, by noting that ‘funding sources do not necessarily correlate with road importance.’⁴⁷ Although the Commonwealth Government has traditionally provided a significantly higher proportion of funding for the New England Highway than the Pacific Highway, the Committee understands that this funding did not reflect an intention for the New England rather than the Pacific Highway to be the main interstate route.
- 2.52** Despite the change in the Highway’s status under AusLink, the Pacific Highway will continue to receive a smaller proportion of Commonwealth funding than the New England Highway. Under AusLink, Commonwealth funding will account for 80% of spending on the New England Highway,⁴⁸ compared to the Commonwealth’s 50% contribution to upgrading the Pacific Highway. It is noted that the total funding for the New England Highway is currently much less than the funding for the Pacific Highway.
- 2.53** In response to a Committee member’s claim that the Commonwealth Government was short-changing the Pacific Highway, Mr Luke Hartsuyker, Federal Member for Cowper, said:

... some of those projects that have higher percentages have capped amounts, whereas Pacific Highway funding is uncapped. Carl Scully asked the Federal Government to increase its funding from \$60 million to \$160 million a year. At the time that was the request by your [NSW] Transport Minister. The Federal Minister met that request.

The State Minister’s public utterances were that that was fantastic ... The RTA will have some difficulty in spending \$1 billion in three years. If you look at the projects that are about to come on line for 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007 you will see that quite a number of projects will need to be ramped up in the planning stage if they are to get work under way and to have that money spent.⁴⁹

Accelerating pace of upgrade

- 2.54** The estimated completion date for upgrading the entire length of the Pacific Highway to dual carriageway varied between ten and 20 years. The Committee notes that it is the objective of the Commonwealth Government to complete the upgrade in the next ten years, by 2016.⁵⁰ However, the Committee was told by Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive of the RTA, that meeting this objective ‘... would require a significant funding increase – well beyond the current proposed funding levels...’⁵¹ The RTA estimated the cost of upgrading the entire Highway to dual carriageway by 2016 to be \$8 billion.⁵²

⁴⁷ Mr Forward, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p36

⁴⁸ Ms Hillary Wise, Manager, Motorists’ Advocacy, NRMA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p57

⁴⁹ Mr Luke Hartsuyker, Federal Member for Cowper, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p23

⁵⁰ DOTARS, *Pacific Highway – Joint Australia and NSW Upgrading Program*, <www.auslink.gov.au/factsheets/natnet/nsw/fs_nswua0005.aspx> (accessed 14 February 2006)

⁵¹ Mr Hannon, Evidence, 18 November 2005, p10

2.55 In December 2005 the Hon Joseph Tripodi MP, then NSW Minister for Roads, gave a longer timeframe for completion of the upgrade: ‘upgrading the Highway to dual carriageway will take decades unless both governments find a way to accelerate the work.’⁵³

2.56 NOROC expressed the view that completing the upgrade would take at least 15 more years:

At the current rate of construction it will take anything between another 15 and 20 years for the remainder of the Pacific Highway to be upgraded to dual carriageway. Based on current trends we can expect between 600 and 800 people to die on the road during this period at a cost to government and the community of around \$1.5 billion.⁵⁴

2.57 The NRMA estimated that the upgrade would not be completed for another 20 years. The NRMA called for the State and Commonwealth Governments to increase funding to ensure that the upgrade was completed within the next 10 years.⁵⁵ However, the NRMA also noted that:

The commitment by the Federal Government (under the AusLink scheme) to increase funding levels on the Pacific Highway to \$160 million per annum from June 2006 is a great recognition of the national importance of the Pacific Highway.⁵⁶

2.58 In speaking at NOROC’s Pacific Highway Summit in May 2005, the President of the NRMA, Mr Alan Evans, said:

And it looks like there’s a long while to wait under current funding arrangements [for completion of the upgrade to dual carriageway]. Why shouldn’t we accept this timetable?

First of all, people are dying. Second, local towns are congested and overrun by trucks. Third, local economies are being held back. Fourth, the NSW and national economies are suffering from the trucking industry’s inability to meet freight demand safely and efficiently.⁵⁷

2.59 Like the NRMA, Mr Hugh McMaster, Corporate Relations Manager of the NSW Road Transport Association, urged increased funding to accelerate completion of the upgrade:

The Commonwealth has indicated a willingness to put another \$100 million on the table to fast-track construction which would bring its contribution to \$160 million a

⁵² Hon J Lloyd MP, Commonwealth Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, and the Hon J Tripodi MP, NSW Minister for Roads, ‘Joint Media Statement: Ministers unite to accelerate Pacific Highway upgrade,’ *Joint Media Release*, 23 December 2005

⁵³ Hon J Lloyd MP, Commonwealth Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, and the Hon J Tripodi MP, NSW Minister for Roads, ‘Joint Media Statement: Ministers unite to accelerate Pacific Highway upgrade,’ *Joint Media Release*, 23 December 2005

⁵⁴ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, p6

⁵⁵ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, p4

⁵⁶ Submission 62 (Far North Coast) NRMA, p6

⁵⁷ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, Attachment A: *Proceedings*, Pacific Highway Summit, Ballina, 6 May 2005, p19

year. Currently the State Government puts in \$160 million a year. We would like to see the State Government match the Federal Government's increase, to take its contribution to \$260 million a year. Our view is that the current state of the highway is so poor, the social and economic consequences from that are so serious that it does justify that sort of spending by government.⁵⁸

2.60 The RTA's Mr Paul Forward explained that even if additional funds were provided, there were other obstacles to accelerating the completion of the upgrade to dual carriageway:

... in New South Wales at the moment there is a construction boom going on. We are finding that contractors are finding it difficult to provide project managers for some of these projects. They are not able to start at the drop of a hat and they are not able to bring in skilled resources ... and high-tech equipment to carry out these projects on short-term notice. It takes them a lot of time.⁵⁹

2.61 Despite dissatisfaction with the estimated completion date for the upgrade to dual carriageway, Mr Forward told the Committee: 'In fact, more is being spent on this road than has even been spent on any road in Australia.'⁶⁰

Private sector funding

2.62 While commending the funding commitments made by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments, TTF argued that:

... government funding alone will not tackle the huge backlog of required road funding in a timely manner. TTF has therefore called for a full feasibility study to be developed into how the private sector could be harnessed to ensure the Highway upgrade is fast tracked.⁶¹

2.63 The Railway Technical Society of Australasia Investigation also supported investigating private sector funding:

Improved road pricing is supported by the RTSA as a means of increasing revenue for road construction and maintenance works, and assisting with road vehicle use demand management ... The RTSA is supportive of the concept of using tolls to expedite upgrades of the Pacific Highway ...⁶²

2.64 Similarly, TTF suggested that a privately financed toll road '...could help to contain the number of heavy vehicles on the road ...', as well as having the benefit of 'assist[ing] in price equalisation between road and rail freight transport along the important coastal transport corridor.'⁶³

⁵⁸ Mr Hugh McMaster, Corporate Relations Manager, NSW Road Transport Association, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p8

⁵⁹ Mr Forward, Evidence, *Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2005-06*, 20 September 2005, p4

⁶⁰ Mr Forward, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p33

⁶¹ Submission 184 (Far North Coast), Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, p2-3

⁶² Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australia, pp7-8

⁶³ Submission 184 (Far North Coast), Tourism and Transport Forum, pp3 & 4

2.65 The NSW Road Transport Association also supported private sector funding:

NSWRTA also supports an investigation of other financing options through the private sector to complete duplication within a shorter time frame, having regard to current traffic volumes and projected traffic growth even if both levels of government increase expenditure as proposed. Any investigation should not compromise existing and proposed government commitments to funding construction.⁶⁴

2.66 NOROC suggested that private sector involvement could facilitate a rapid completion of the upgrade:

Indeed, the private sector has suggested that with private sector involvement the Pacific Highway upgrade could be completed in just seven years. And as we have seen in Sydney, the State Government has been very willing to work with the private sector on road building.⁶⁵

2.67 The NRMA, however, was cautious about the use of private sector funding, especially tolls, to fund acceleration of the upgrade: ‘... the NRMA view is that tolls are a last resort. We would obviously prefer that it [funding] comes from government ... But we are prepared to look at alternative funding options.’⁶⁶

2.68 In speaking at NOROC’s Pacific Highway Summit in May 2005, the NRMA’s Mr Alan Evans noted that ‘tolling is only one option. There are a host of other ways that the finance can be raised.’⁶⁷ Mr Evans listed other revenue-raising measures namely debt financing (where the government borrows money to pay for infrastructure), partnerships with the private sector, infrastructure bonds (where funds for infrastructure are raised from private investors, who get an ongoing return on their investment), and the proceeds from the sale of Telstra.

2.69 The NRMA provided the Committee with research conducted in early 2005 on community attitudes to tolling in which the NRMA asked respondents about their attitude to the introduction of tolls to fund safety upgrades to major highways. The study found that 28% of respondents would ‘have no major problem,’ 42% wouldn’t ‘like it but would accept it,’ 16% would ‘be against it,’ and 13% would ‘be strongly against it’ (1% were undecided).⁶⁸

North Coast Motorway

2.70 On 23 December 2005 the Hon Joseph Tripodi MP, then NSW Minister for Roads, and the Hon Jim Lloyd MP, Federal Minister for Roads, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to

⁶⁴ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p7

⁶⁵ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, p8

⁶⁶ Ms Wise, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p60

⁶⁷ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, Attachment A: *Proceedings*, Pacific Highway Summit, Ballina, 6 May 2005, p21

⁶⁸ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Ms Lisa McGill, NRMA Motoring Services, NRMA, *Community attitudes towards toll roads*, NRMA, February 2005, p16

investigate the development of a North Coast Motorway from Newcastle to the Queensland border.⁶⁹

2.71 Under the Memorandum of Understanding one of the matters committed to by the Ministers was to explore private sector financing, including charging a toll on new or upgraded sections of the Highway to accelerate completion of the upgrade to dual carriageway. The Memorandum provided for the establishment of a working party of technical and financial experts to undertake analysis of the North Coast Motorway proposal.

2.72 The Committee notes this earlier commitment to toll exemptions for local traffic from the Hon Ian Causley MP, Federal Member for Page and Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, in May 2005:

We are currently working with NSW to investigate the funding options for the Pacific Highway. However, any tolling proposals for the Pacific Highway will be based on the provision of un-tolled alternative roads or toll exemptions for local traffic.⁷⁰

2.73 The Memorandum of Understanding did not detail whether the North Coast Motorway proposal would involve upgrading the Highway along its current alignment, or whether the Motorway working party would examine alternative route options for the Highway, such as an inland route. In relation to tolls, the Memorandum of Understanding contained a commitment to the 'provision of a free alternative for local traffic.'⁷¹

2.74 Speaking in the Legislative Council, the Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, NSW Minister for Roads, noted that the expert working party first met on 2 March 2006. In relation to consideration of private finance options, Minister Roozendaal advised that:

If the private sector becomes involved, a toll would be required on new or upgraded sections. A free alternative route would be provided for local traffic. At this stage no decision has been made on obtaining assistance from the private sector to finance the upgrading of the Pacific Highway.⁷²

Committee view: Progress of upgrade

2.75 The Pacific Highway is the main road linking the eastern seaboard. As noted previously, less than fifty percent of the Highway is dual carriageway, even though the need to urgently upgrade the Highway to dual carriageway was identified more than 15 years ago.

⁶⁹ Hon J Lloyd MP, Commonwealth Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, and the Hon J Tripodi MP, NSW Minister for Roads, 'Joint Media Statement: Ministers unite to accelerate Pacific Highway upgrade,' Media Release, 23 December 2005

⁷⁰ Submission 190 (Far North Coast), NOROC, Attachment A: *Proceedings*, Pacific Highway Summit, Ballina, 6 May 2005, p14

⁷¹ *North Coast Motorway: Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Australia and the Government of the State of New South Wales*, December 2005

⁷² The Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Minister for Roads, Legislative Council, New South Wales, *Hansard*, 30 March 2006, pp12 – 13

- 2.76** The Committee is of the view that the progress to date is inadequate and believes that the upgrade should be completed as soon as possible, within the next ten years, given the compelling evidence on the safety and other benefits of dual carriageway.
- 2.77** The Committee notes the recent fifty-fifty funding commitment by the Commonwealth Government, through which the Commonwealth will increase its funding by \$100 million each year. The Committee believes that this increase will make a significant contribution to bringing forward completion of the upgrade.
- 2.78** The Committee understands that the Memorandum of Understanding between the NSW and Commonwealth Governments regarding the North Coast Motorway proposal requires investigation of a range of financing options, including those that do not involve charging motorists a toll. Given this commitment the recent comments of the NSW Minister for Roads in the Legislative Council that a toll would be imposed if the NSW and Commonwealth Governments decided to use private finance to fund development of a Motorway,⁷³ are of concern.

⁷³ The Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Minister for Roads, Legislative Council, New South Wales, *Hansard*, 30 March 2006, pp12 – 13

Chapter 3 Coffs Harbour

A number of coastal residents raised concerns regarding the proposed upgrades of the Pacific Highway between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, and at Bonville. In relation to the Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga Upgrade, residents' concerns centred on the consultation process to develop route options and the impact of the preferred route on agricultural land. The major concern about the Bonville Upgrade was the delay in commencing construction, which some Inquiry participants claimed was endangering the safety of Highway users.

The first section of this Chapter examines matters relating to the Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga Upgrade. The second section relates to the Bonville Upgrade.

Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Outline of proposed upgrade

- 3.1** The upgrade of the Pacific Highway from Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga involves two separate but related projects: first, the construction of 24km of dual carriageway between Sapphire and Woolgoolga, estimated to commence in the next few years; and second, long-term planning for the future needs of the Coffs Harbour urban area, including consideration of options to bypass the city.⁷⁴ The two projects are being planned simultaneously because planning for the Coffs Harbour urban area will influence the choice of preferred route from Sapphire to Woolgoolga.

Introduction to Coffs Harbour area

- 3.2** The Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales (RTA) told the Committee that 'Coffs Harbour is one of the largest and most rapidly developing regional areas in NSW,' with a population of 65,000 that is predicted to grow to 100,000 by 2030.⁷⁵
- 3.3** The RTA said that in addition to the Pacific Highway being 'a major interstate and regional transport link,' the Highway at Coffs Harbour 'provides a major transport route for local traffic (including commuting traffic)⁷⁶ and that traffic north and south of Coffs Harbour had increased markedly over the past several years.⁷⁷
- 3.4** Local residents told the Committee that plans to bypass Coffs Harbour city have been mooted for the past two decades, but that these plans were given impetus in September 2001 with the announcement of the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy.

⁷⁴ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (RTA), p1

⁷⁵ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p1

⁷⁶ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p1

⁷⁷ From 2000 to 2005, south of Coffs Harbour, at Raleigh, average daily traffic increased by 2,476 vehicles (from 13,166 in 2000 to 15,642 in 2005). North of Coffs Harbour, at Grafton, average daily traffic increased by 2,417 vehicles (from 8,924 in 2000 to 11,341 in 2005). See answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment A, Item 9, pp5-6

- 3.5 The Committee understands that construction of the upgrade for the Coffs Harbour urban area is not due to commence for several years. The RTA advised that the traffic capacity of this section of the Highway is expected to be adequate for many years, as the Pacific Highway has already been upgraded to dual carriageway from Sawtell, through Coffs Harbour city to Sapphire.⁷⁸ However, the RTA told the Committee that they were planning for the Highway's future in the Coffs Harbour urban area now, given the area's predicted population growth and demand for residential land.

Reasons for upgrade

- 3.6 The need to improve road safety was one of the key rationales for the Coffs Harbour – Woolgoolga Upgrade among local residents. They feared that safety is being further compromised by urban development of Coffs Harbour's northern beaches. Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP, Federal Member for Cowper, gave evidence that 12 people have died on the Highway between Sapphire and Woolgoolga since 2001.⁷⁹
- 3.7 Ms Loren Redwood provided compelling evidence concerning the dangers of the Highway from Sapphire to Woolgoolga.

Case study: Evidence given by Ms Loren Redwood⁸⁰

Nineteen-year-old Ms Loren Redwood lost her best friend, nineteen-year old Tyne Nicholson, on the Highway at Moonee in March 2005. Tyne was driving home from work when she had a head-on collision with a truck and died instantly.

Giving evidence to the Committee on the eight-month anniversary of Tyne's death, Ms Redwood said: 'Tyne drove that road every day for four years and it only took one day for her life to be gone forever. She does not get a chance to sit here and have her say.'

Ms Redwood appealed to the Committee and all politicians to fix this dangerous section of Highway: 'You do not have to live here and drive that road. You do not know how scary it is. I want all of you to go home and think about your kids or grandkids, or any family that you have, and think how it would affect you if your daughter or son was killed on that Highway, and then think whether you want it fixed.'

Initial consultation and planning

- 3.8 The RTA began the initial consultation phase for the Coffs Harbour – Woolgoolga Upgrade by establishing a Steering Committee to develop the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning

⁷⁸ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy Preferred Option Report*, November 2004, p6

⁷⁹ Submission 45 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Luke Hartsuyker, p7

⁸⁰ Ms Loren Redwood, Evidence, 21 November 2005, pp44-50 and Submission 34, Ms Loren Redwood

Strategy and identify a preferred route for the Highway. The Steering Committee consisted of representatives of Planning NSW, Coffs Harbour City Council and the RTA.⁸¹

- 3.9** The aim of the initial phase of the upgrade project was to investigate and develop route options through public consultation and field investigations. The RTA advised that after the Strategy was announced they formed three Community Focus Groups (CFGs), two for the northern Sapphire – Woolgoolga section (for Woolgoolga, and Sapphire to Moonee) and one for the southern Coffs Harbour section (for Sawtell to Sapphire).⁸² The RTA's other consultation activities included producing community updates in print and electronic media, providing and updating a project website, holding public meetings, meeting with individual property and business owners, meeting with a wide range of community and interest groups, establishing a Freecall project information line, and inviting public comment through written submissions and survey forms.⁸³ The RTA advised the Committee that community feedback influenced the development of route options.

Route options

- 3.10** From 2001 – 2004, the RTA investigated route options within three broad categories:
- Far Western Bypass – bypass of Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga through the Orara Valley, from south of Coffs Harbour to Halfway Creek or Grafton
 - Coffs Harbour City Council Preferred Corridor – adopted by Council in late 2003 as its preferred option for a bypass of Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, located within the Bucca Valley and the coastal range to the west of Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga
 - Coastal Corridor – along the coastal plain south of Coffs Harbour to north of Woolgoolga, with a future extension to Halfway Creek.⁸⁴
- 3.11** There were several different route options within each of the three categories.
- 3.12** The RTA examined the Far Western Bypass and the Coffs Harbour City Council Preferred Corridor in response to requests from the local community and the Coffs Harbour City Council for these options to be considered.⁸⁵
- 3.13** The RTA advised that since the planning process commenced, the complexity of the project (including stakeholder consultation, additional activities undertaken by Coffs Harbour City Council, and investigation of additional route options) led to an 18-month extension of the original timeframe for the announcement of the preferred route.⁸⁶

⁸¹ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Developing a Planning Strategy for the Pacific Highway Coffs Harbour*, Information Sheet No 2, March 2002, p2

⁸² <www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/html/community.htm> (accessed 6 April 2006)

⁸³ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, pp2-3 and answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment A, Item 12, pp7-8

⁸⁴ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p3, and RTA, *Community Update No. 5*, June 2004, p1

⁸⁵ Mr Robert Higgins, General Manager, Pacific Highway, RTA, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p14

⁸⁶ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p3

Preferred route

- 3.14** The coastal route was announced as the RTA's preferred route option on 7 December 2004 (see maps in Appendix 1, Figures 2 and 3). For the southern or Coffs Harbour section, the preferred route consists of Inner South 1 and Inner North 2. For the northern or Sapphire to Woolgoolga section, the preferred route consists of an upgrade of the existing Highway from Sapphire to South Woolgoolga, and a Western Bypass of Woolgoolga beginning at South Woolgoolga (also known as Option E).⁸⁷
- 3.15** The RTA advised that the reasons for eliminating the other route options were:
- Far Western Bypass – could not be justified within the foreseeable planning future due to relatively low predicted traffic volumes, very high cost and lack of staging opportunities
 - Coffs Harbour City Council Preferred Corridor – unviable due to significant engineering challenges, high cost, poor value for money, significant impacts on native flora and fauna, and impacts on landscape of Aboriginal significance. In comparison to options in the coastal corridor, it would attract less traffic off the existing Highway and result in longer travel times and higher operating costs.⁸⁸
- 3.16** In March 2002 the RTA costed the construction of the Far Western Bypass at between \$700 million and \$1.1 billion.⁸⁹ The RTA discarded the Far Western Bypass as a viable option at this time, and have not updated the costing since.⁹⁰ In June 2004 the RTA costed the Coastal Ridgeway Option at \$1.46 billion. Three other options within Council's preferred corridor were costed at between \$1.205 billion and \$1.83 billion. Also in June 2004, the options in the coastal corridor, which was ultimately chosen as the preferred route, were costed at between \$710 million and \$900 million.⁹¹

Next steps

- 3.17** The RTA described the upgrade of the northern Sapphire – Woolgoolga section as a short-term objective, and the upgrade of the southern Coffs Harbour section as a long-term objective. In relation to timeframes for the Upgrades, Coffs Harbour City Council estimated that construction of the Sapphire – Woolgoolga Upgrade will commence in approximately five years, whereas the upgrade of the Coffs Harbour section will not commence for 20 years.⁹²

⁸⁷ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p4

⁸⁸ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p4

⁸⁹ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Developing a Planning Strategy for the Pacific Highway at Coffs Harbour, Information Sheet No. 2*, March 2002, p7

⁹⁰ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p10

⁹¹ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Southern and Northern Sections, Community Update No. 5*, June 2004, p2

⁹² Submission 43 (Coffs Harbour), Coffs Harbour City Council, p3

- 3.18** The RTA advised that the next steps for the northern Sapphire – Woolgoolga section were to:
- undertake survey and geotechnical investigations and refine the concept design
 - conduct an environmental assessment examining potential impacts
 - publicly display the environmental assessment for community comment prior to seeking approval to construct the project.⁹³
- 3.19** The RTA advised that the next steps for the southern Coffs Harbour section were to:
- further refine the concept design and take planning action to reserve the route corridor
 - assist Coffs Harbour City Council to replan the North Boambee Valley
 - design a package of works to manage the existing Highway through the city until the preferred route is constructed.⁹⁴

Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Consultation

- 3.20** Some Inquiry participants strongly criticised the RTA’s approach to consultation for the Coffs Harbour – Woolgoolga Upgrade. A key concern of these participants was that the RTA had already made up its mind about the location of the upgrade prior to embarking on its consultation program. The RTA’s alleged failure to involve the Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh community in the decision about the preferred route was said by some local residents to epitomise its general lack of commitment to genuine community consultation.
- 3.21** These criticisms were vigorously refuted by the RTA as well as several other people associated with the route selection process. Indeed, some Inquiry participants complained that the much-needed upgrade of the Highway between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga had been significantly delayed by a small number of residents who made unreasonable complaints about the consultation process. The following section examines these claims and counter claims.

Influence of community consultation on selection of route options

- 3.22** A fundamental criticism of the Coffs Harbour consultation process was that the RTA had already decided on a preferred route and was impervious to community views to the contrary. According to local resident, Mr RJ Christopher:

... the “consultation process” was nothing more than a cynical exercise by the RTA to try to appease concerned citizens with legitimate grievances by giving them an outlet for those grievances while at the same time knowing full well that the plans for the highway were already in place and that any legitimate concerns would not stand in the way of those plans.⁹⁵

⁹³ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p4

⁹⁴ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p4

⁹⁵ Submission 12 (Coffs Harbour), Mr RJ Christopher, p1

3.23 A similar view was held by the Bypass Action Network (BAN):

The RTA came to Coffs Harbour with their own preferred options ... The parameters of RTA community consultations are set to suit the RTA agenda and as such they never satisfy local community needs.⁹⁶

3.24 Mr Steven Moody, the technical officer with BAN, also suggested the RTA was not genuinely interested in seeking community views:

I believe they are going through this community consultation process because they are required to, but most of the consultation sessions are of the nature of a presentation where the project team presents an update of where they are, and they facilitate questions being asked. But whether or not the input from the community is being properly serviced is the question. There is certainly not that opportunity for input.⁹⁷

3.25 Mr Keith Rhoades, Mayor of Coffs Harbour City Council, told the Committee that he and others were 'astonished' when the RTA announced its preferred route in early 2004.⁹⁸ Mayor Rhoades believed the RTA's preferred option was a 'slap in the face' given the 'hundreds – and I repeat hundreds – of hours of work' councillors had dedicated to developing route options based on community views.⁹⁹ Mayor Rhoades also voiced objections to Council being dropped from the Steering Committee, after the Council announced its own position on the proposed route option. Mayor Rhoades claimed that presumably this was because Council's position did not coincide with the direction being taken by the RTA.¹⁰⁰**3.26** Mr Andrew Fraser MP, State Member for Coffs Harbour, believed that the actions of the RTA in Coffs Harbour illustrated the RTA's usual modus operandi for route selection:

The RTA makes a decision on where it would like to put a road and then it goes out and designs that whole process. To some extent the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act enables the RTA to do that. It selects a route. If six or seven routes are proposed all those routes will be put to one side and the RTA's preferred route is adopted. So, to some extent, its preferred route will always come up trumps. It goes out to the community with its preferred routes and selects a group of people who are purportedly representative of the community.¹⁰¹

3.27 Mr Bruce Scanlon, a member of the Sapphire to Woolgoolga CFG, also believed that the RTA had preconceived views about which route would be chosen. Mr Scanlon alleged that in October 2001 he overheard a conversation on a Sydney to Coffs Harbour flight between Mr Kenneth Oldfield, RTA Project Manager for the Coffs Harbour – Woolgoolga Upgrade, and Mr Tim Paterson, Consultant Team Leader for Connell Wagner. Mr Scanlon alleged that

⁹⁶ Submission 47 (Coffs Harbour), BAN, p6

⁹⁷ Mr Steven Moody, Technical Officer, Bypass Action Network (BAN), Evidence, 21 November 2005, pp39-40

⁹⁸ Mr Keith Rhoades, Coffs Harbour City Council, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p4

⁹⁹ Mr Rhoades, Evidence, 21 November 2005, pp3-4

¹⁰⁰ Mr Rhoades, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p7

¹⁰¹ Mr Andrew Fraser MP, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p13

Mr Oldfield and Mr Paterson conspired to manipulate the public consultation process to ensure that the RTA's preferred route was selected.¹⁰²

- 3.28** Both Mr Oldfield and Mr Paterson wrote to the Committee to vigorously refute Mr Scanlon's allegations.¹⁰³ Commenting on Mr Scanlon's 'at best, partial overhearing' of his conversation with Mr Oldfield, Mr Paterson said:

As a general response, I can say that his comments amount to a very inaccurate interpretation of our conversation. Ken and I were obviously quite comfortable in that public travel situation talking about aspects of the project that we did not regard as especially confidential or overly sensitive. In short, Bruce Scanlon badly misinterpreted what he may have heard.¹⁰⁴

- 3.29** The RTA denied that it had a preconceived view regarding the preferred route for the proposed upgrade and argued that it had demonstrated its responsiveness to community concerns and preferences on several occasions. According to Mr Bob Higgins, the RTA's General Manager for the Pacific Highway, while the RTA's original brief to the project consultants was to continue the duplication of the Highway along the existing route, the RTA investigated several alternative routes over a four year period, at the request of the community, including a Far Western Bypass, a Coastal Ridge Way route, and a possible route between the coast and the Orara Valley.¹⁰⁵ Mr Higgins gave evidence that:

If people come up with an idea, we do not dismiss it we look at it. Coffs Harbour was an example. We have not focused on the coastal route only; we have explored a whole range of routes that were raised by sections of the community. It is part of a process that we follow. If people raise an idea we do not dismiss it outright, we look at it.¹⁰⁶

- 3.30** According to Mr Higgins, even Option E, the western bypass of Woolgoolga finally nominated by the RTA as the preferred route, was developed at the request of Council staff:

That [Option E] evolved from suggestions by Council staff: can we do something to reduce the impact on their future urban development in the Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga areas as well as minimising the impact on the agricultural interests there? So, E is a compromise between C and B to try to lessen the impacts on the two.¹⁰⁷

- 3.31** Mr Higgins reminded the Committee that the selection of a route for a Highway upgrade involves a delicate balancing of competing interests and defended the RTA's attempts to take account of community views:

¹⁰² Submission 60 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Bruce Scanlon, p3

¹⁰³ Correspondence from Mr Kenneth Oldfield, to Chair, 25 January 2006 (confidential at request of author); correspondence from Mr Tim Paterson, Principal, Connell Wagner, to Chair, 23 January 2006 (public)

¹⁰⁴ Correspondence from Mr Tim Paterson, Principal, Connell Wagner, to Chair, 23 January 2006 (public)

¹⁰⁵ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p5

¹⁰⁶ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p14

¹⁰⁷ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p6

There are many issues, not only the social issues but environmental issues as well as making sure we have a highway that performs. That highway is not about just interstate traffic, it is also about servicing the growth areas of the northern beaches areas of Coffs Harbour, which are growing at a rapid rate. That is what led to this conclusion, as well as getting value for money. In the consultation process we did involve the community, and Council was heavily involved as part of the steering group. Ongoing, we had regular briefings with Council staff and councillors at various stages. I went along to a lot of those so we could get their feelings on issues.¹⁰⁸

Provision of information

- 3.32** According to Mr Richard Casey, a member of the Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing Community Liaison Group, a fundamental problem with many of the consultation activities undertaken by the RTA, including in Coffs Harbour, is its failure to redress the information imbalance between the RTA and residents: ‘A major problem is that residents are mostly resource poor and therefore are not on an equal footing with the proponents of a proposal.’¹⁰⁹
- 3.33** Mr Casey raised similar concerns in relation to another ‘tactic’ of the RTA: sending questionnaires to selected residents. In such cases, he argued, recipients are expected to take a ‘stab in the dark’ to determine which proposal might be preferable, without being provided with information regarding their positive or negative aspects to inform their response. Nor are people able to pose written questions to the RTA or receive answers to these questions prior to the closing date for comment.¹¹⁰
- 3.34** Mr Steven Moody raised similar concerns about the nature of information provided to CFG members:
- ... on a couple of occasions now they [RTA project consultants] have tabled drawings and aerial maps of proposed routes. As an engineer, I can look at these maps and interpret what a cutting is, et cetera, but there are many people on these consultative committees that do not have that level of technical interpretation knowledge.¹¹¹
- 3.35** In a submission prepared on behalf of the Bypass Action Network (BAN) and the Woolgoolga Area Residents’ Group (WAR), Mr Moody made several critical comments regarding information provided as part of the consultation process, including the wide distribution of ‘glossy updates’ that do not mention the pros and cons of various route options, and the provision of ‘cluttered and unreadable’ information at CFG meetings.¹¹²
- 3.36** A Peer Review conducted by the consultancy firm ARUP also recorded residents’ concerns regarding the nature of the information provided by the RTA. The ARUP Peer Review is discussed in paragraphs 3.69 – 3.72.

¹⁰⁸ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p6

¹⁰⁹ Submission 52 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Richard Casey, p4

¹¹⁰ Submission 52 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Richard Casey, p4

¹¹¹ Mr Moody, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p39

¹¹² Submission 44 (Coffs Harbour), Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network (BAN) and Woolgoolga Area Resident’s Group (WAR), p16

Concerns about consultation methods

- 3.37** Some Inquiry participants made serious allegations regarding the conduct of the RTA and its project consultants in facilitating CFG meetings. One such complainant was Mr Bruce Scanlon:

It seems that if members want to discuss during the meeting a matter they are not clear on, and the RTA wants to shut down discussion, we are told by the facilitator, “We are running short of time. We have a lot to cover tonight. We will have to move on.” That is commonly quoted at the meetings ... The facilitator has continually shown bias towards the RTA in his role.¹¹³

- 3.38** This allegation was strongly refuted by the RTA and by Pramax Communications, the consultants engaged by the RTA to conduct the community consultation for the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy. The RTA advised the Committee that the allegations against the facilitator ‘were made in general terms and did not include examples of the lack of independence.’¹¹⁴ In correspondence to the Committee, Mr Andrew Smith, a former principal of Pramax Communications, rejected Mr Scanlon’s allegation that he sought to curb discussion during CFG meetings. Mr Smith stated that while he has facilitated numerous community reference or focus groups for a range of clients, this was the first time an allegation of bias had been made:

While the role of the facilitator is to encourage and allow discussion on agenda items by all members of a group, it is also his role to progress through an agenda for a meeting – that is, to achieve a balance. The Committee is referred to the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2005 where the facilitator allowed discussion to continue beyond the time allocated for an item on the agenda. When another member of the CFG requested that they move on, the facilitator assessed that the discussion was getting bogged down and ensured the major points raised had been recorded ...¹¹⁵

- 3.39** Mr Scanlon alleged that his complaints about bias were not adequately dealt with by the RTA.¹¹⁶ Mr Chris Clark, the RTA’s Project Development Manager for the Coffs Harbour – Woolgoolga Upgrade, denied that the RTA had not responded to Mr Scanlon’s concerns:

The allegations concerning Mr Smith were made in general terms and did not include any detail or examples of the alleged lack of independence and “vested interests.” I invited Mr Scanlon to submit his concerns in writing to the RTA, to enable them to be appropriately considered.

The minutes of the meeting recorded as an action item that Mr Scanlon was to write to the RTA concerning the issues he had raised.

No written complaint regarding this matter has been received by the RTA at this stage.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Mr Bruce Scanlon, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p35

¹¹⁴ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment A, Item 2, p2

¹¹⁵ Correspondence from Mrs Janice and Mr Andrew Smith, Pramax Communications, to Chair, 23 January 2006, p2

¹¹⁶ Mr Scanlon, Evidence, 21 November 2005, pp35-36

3.40 Mr Scanlon suggested that the RTA's desire to manipulate the consultation process was demonstrated by the drafting and distribution of meeting minutes. For example, he argued, while the CFG Charter requires minutes to be distributed within two weeks of a meeting, in some cases this took up to six months. Mr Scanlon told the Committee that he did not accept the RTA rationale for the delay, namely that they have to be checked by many different people within the RTA, as he believed the minutes should be endorsed only by meeting participants.¹¹⁸

3.41 Mr Scanlon also questioned the accuracy of the minutes:

The minutes presented to the CFG meetings for adoption represent a record that the RTA would like published. They are not a true record of the meetings. That is why at some meetings it has taken up to three hours of discussion to put the minutes of a previous meeting, and the minutes still have not been adopted.¹¹⁹

3.42 The facilitator, Mr Smith, referred the Committee to the minutes of 2 March 2005 which recorded a lengthy discussion about the minutes: 'The project manager acknowledged there was a need to put more effort into getting the minutes back to members and he would endeavour to do that.' Mr Smith also pointed out that the minutes of the meeting of 2 March were distributed to CFG members on 11 March and the minutes of the meeting of 10 May were distributed on 18 May 2005.¹²⁰

Consultation with the Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh community

3.43 The RTA's preferred route for the northern (Sapphire – Woolgoolga) upgrade, Option E, traverses land owned and farmed by the local Punjabi Sikh community. As discussed later in this Chapter, the community believe that this route will devastate Sikh-owned banana farms and have an extremely deleterious impact on their community. Representatives of the local Punjabi Sikh community were highly critical of the RTA for apparently not involving them in the consultation process regarding the Woolgoolga route options.

3.44 The Sikh Council of Australia, the peak representative body for Sikhs in Australia, said:

There has been an omission and disregard of the Punjabi Sikh community on the part of the RTA in the decision-making process ... The consultation processes undertaken by the RTA have been mere tokenism and have failed the Punjabi Sikh community.¹²¹

No consideration was given by the RTA to involve the Sikh community in the development and decision making procedures and discussions which led the RTA to

¹¹⁷ Correspondence from Mr Chris Clark, RTA Project Development Manager, to Director, 27 January 2006, p2

¹¹⁸ Mr Scanlon, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p36

¹¹⁹ Mr Scanlon, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p36

¹²⁰ Correspondence from Mrs Janice and Mr Andrew Smith, Pramax Communications, to the Chair, 23 January 2006, p2, p2

¹²¹ Ms Rashmere Bhatti, Evidence, 21 November 2006, pp28-29

believe that Option E would be the preferred option for the project and the community.¹²²

3.45 A representative of the local Punjabi Sikh community, Ms Rashmere Bhatti, argued that consultation by the RTA with members of the Punjabi Sikh community was restricted to the provision of a limited amount of translated information about decisions after they had been made, and one-off information sessions.¹²³

3.46 The concerns of the Punjabi Sikh community were echoed by other local residents and organisations, including the NSW Farmers' Association:

... the RTA has failed to acknowledge or consider or investigate the social and cultural aspects on the Punjabi Sikh community ...¹²⁴

3.47 Mr Richard Casey suggested that the RTA's treatment of the local Sikh community epitomised its generally poor approach to consultation:

The recent consultation farce with regard to the Sikh Punjabi Community in Woolgoolga is a perfect example of the RTA's inability to connect with the community.¹²⁵

3.48 Ms Bhatti claimed that despite the RTA identifying her community as a 'significant group' within the Coffs Harbour community,¹²⁶ they were not adequately represented on the CFG, the RTA's key consultative group to canvass community views on route options. According to Ms Bhatti, the RTA 'hand picked' one member of the Punjabi Sikh community for the CFG, but this person was not representative of the wider Sikh community and only attended one meeting over a three year period. Ms Bhatti was perturbed that the RTA had not communicated to the community the importance or relevance of being represented on the CFG.¹²⁷

3.49 Ms Bhatti was also concerned that after the community became aware that Option E traversed many Sikh-owned banana farms, the RTA resisted attempts to join the CFG:

When the Punjabi Sikh community became aware of Option E passing through so many Punjabi Sikh farms earlier this year, we approached the RTA – I did, actually – and wrote a letter. We had a Punjabi Sikh community meeting and elected some representatives to go on the community focus group. We actually received a letter – I think it was from Mr Bob Higgins ... just saying that, "Sorry, no, you are not allowed to be on the community focus group," and it actually took a lot of pressure through our State MP to get us happening on the current community focus group.¹²⁸

¹²² Submission 22 (Coffs Harbour), Sikh Council of Australia, p2

¹²³ Submission 50 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community, p7

¹²⁴ Submission 46 (Coffs Harbour), NSW Farmers Association, p3

¹²⁵ Submission 52 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Richard Casey, p4

¹²⁶ Ms Bhatti, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p28

¹²⁷ Submission 50 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community, p6

¹²⁸ Ms Bhatti, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p30

- 3.50** The Sikh Council of Australia was also perplexed by the RTA's apparent failure to ensure adequate Sikh representation on the CFG:

There are three representative bodies of the Sikhs (Gurudwaras) in Woolgoolga and instead of writing to or asking these representative bodies to appoint/send their representatives on the Community Focus Group, RTA appointed someone of their own choice, ... not from the Sikh Community but from the Banana Industry Group who in three years attended only one of the meetings ...¹²⁹

- 3.51** A meeting chaired by the Community Relations Commissioner, Mr Stepan Kerkyasharian AM, was convened in Coffs Harbour on 13 September 2005 involving RTA representatives, and representative of the Woolgoolga Sikh representatives and the Sikh Council of Australia.¹³⁰

- 3.52** According to Ms Bhatti, for the first two years of the consultation process, the Punjabi Sikh community were under the impression that there would be a true western by-pass of Woolgoolga and their properties would not be affected.¹³¹ Ms Bhatti also claimed that Option E was only proposed after the RTA received complaints from residents affected by the original options:

In reality the RTA moved the problem ... into the backyard of the people in the community (Punjabi Sikh) least able to advocate for themselves due to cultural, language, lack of skills and knowledge of processes and already disadvantaged by their lack of inclusion in the consultation process.¹³²

- 3.53** The RTA acknowledged that Option E was developed 'to reduce the level of impacts on urban land,'¹³³ at the request of Coffs Harbour City Council:

In response to a request from Coffs Harbour City Council following the route options display, the RTA has developed a modified Option C ... and an additional option that uses parts of the initial Options B and C (Option E).¹³⁴

RTA's response to complaints about consultation with Punjabi Sikh community

- 3.54** As seen above, the Punjabi Sikh community made two central claims regarding the RTA's community consultation process: first, that the RTA did not consult the community until after the announcement of Option E; and second, that once Option E was announced, the RTA resisted their community's attempts to join the CFG. The RTA rejected these claims.

¹²⁹ Submission 22 (Coffs Harbour), Sikh Council of Australia, p2

¹³⁰ Submission 22 (Coffs Harbour), Sikh Council of Australia, p1. For the presentation presented by the Punjabi Sikh Community, see answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 November 2005, Ms Rashmere Bhatti.

¹³¹ Submission 50 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community, p5

¹³² Submission 50 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community, p1

¹³³ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Community Update No. 6*, November 2004, p4

¹³⁴ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Southern and Northern Sections: Community Update 4*, February 2004, p8, www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/pdfs/comm-update-feb04.pdf (accessed 22 February 2006)

3.55 In regard to the first issue of late consultation, the RTA advised the Committee that they began consulting with the Punjabi Sikh community prior to the launch of the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy in September 2001. The RTA advised that in July 2001, they met with the co-ordinator of the Woolgoolga Neighbourhood Centre, who was recommended as a representative of the Punjabi Sikh community by Coffs Harbour City Council. The RTA said that from this point they consulted the Punjabi Sikh community throughout the development of the Strategy, including the following measures:

- three information sessions at the two Sikh temples in Woolgoolga
- translation of community display posters into Punjabi, and display of these posters at the two Sikh temples in Woolgoolga, the Woolgoolga Neighbourhood Centre, and a local Sikh doctor's surgery
- thirteen meetings with individual Punjabi Sikh property owners, with family members or friends present at times to assist with translation
- a standing offer for members of the project team to meet with the community (contact details were advertised in community updates and other display material).¹³⁵

3.56 In regard to the second issue of resisting the community's attempts to join the CFG, the RTA advised that from the time the CFG was established, two positions were set aside for representatives of the Punjabi Sikh community.¹³⁶ The RTA said that as with other CFG members, if attendance by the Punjabi Sikh representatives became irregular, they were contacted and asked if they wished to continue to participate in the CFG or if they wished to nominate a replacement.

3.57 After selection of the preferred route, the RTA said that all CFG members were asked if they wanted to continue to participate. At this point one Punjabi Sikh representative nominated a proxy to replace him, and a second Punjabi Sikh representative was identified for the vacant position. The RTA acknowledged that they also received a request from an additional three Punjabi Sikh representatives (including the proxy) to join the CFG, which was granted.

3.58 The RTA advised that:

... there has been at least one representative of the Sikh community on the Woolgoolga CFG at any time. At least one representative of the Sikh community has attended 9 of the 18 meetings held by the CFG.

At this time, four out of a total of 14 representatives on the Woolgoolga CFG are members of the Sikh community.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment B, Item 6, pp3-4

¹³⁶ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 6, pp3

¹³⁷ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 7(b)(b), p5

- 3.59** The RTA is now ‘undertaking an assessment of the potential impact of the preferred route on the cultural and heritage values of the local Sikh [community] as part of the Environmental Assessment for the project.’¹³⁸ As part of this assessment, the RTA’s Mr Bob Higgins said that the RTA is working with the community to minimise the impact of Option E:

We are at the stage now where ... we are trying to get it between the urban area and the agricultural area, to try to find a run through. We are going through a process now, as we do the concept design, to see if we can adjust it even further to lessen the impact on the banana plantations.¹³⁹

Community representation on Value Management Workshop

- 3.60** The RTA advised that the purpose of a Value Management Workshop is:

... to bring together key stakeholders in the project to evaluate the route options against the project objectives and agreed assessment criteria and, if appropriate, to recommend an option(s) to progress the project.¹⁴⁰

- 3.61** According to the Australian Centre for Value Management, ‘the recommendations of the value management workshop are an important input into the process of selecting a preferred route option.’¹⁴¹ The RTA said that the recommendations of a Value Management Workshop are ‘one of several inputs to the selection of a preferred route for a project.’¹⁴²

- 3.62** The first Value Management Workshop in relation to the northern Sapphire to Woolgoolga section of the Highway was held in April 2003 to evaluate five route options. The Workshop recommended that Options C and D be progressed. Subsequent to this Workshop, and in response to concerns raised by Coffs Harbour City Council about options C and D, the RTA developed two new route options: Option C1 (a modified Option C), and a new option, Option E (a western bypass of Woolgoolga using parts of Options B and C).¹⁴³ By February 2004, Option D had been eliminated, and Options E, C and C1 were displayed for public comment.

- 3.63** A second Value Management Workshop was held in August 2004, the aim of which was:

¹³⁸ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 6, p4

¹³⁹ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p6

¹⁴⁰ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 7, p4

¹⁴¹ The Australian Centre for Value Management (for Connell Wagner), *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Woolgoolga – Northern Section, Supplementary Options Evaluation Workshop*, Value Management Workshop Report, August 2004, p10

¹⁴² Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 7, p4

¹⁴³ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Community Update No. 6*, November 2004, p4

To bring together the same stakeholder participants (or their interests) to review the further investigations undertaken and ... determine a preferred direction to move forward and progress the project.¹⁴⁴

3.64 At this second Workshop the ‘vast majority’ of participants recommended Option E as the preferred route option.¹⁴⁵

3.65 The submissions to this Inquiry from BAN and WAR, and Ms Margaret Murphy, were critical of several aspects of the make-up and operation of the Value Management Workshops. The criticisms included:

- limited community representation (of the 25 members, only four were community representatives)
- the exclusion of upgrade options preferred by both the community and Coffs Harbour City Council indicated during the community consultation process
- the discarding or ignoring of data prepared by technical experts on behalf of the project team and adjustment of values after detailed workshop analysis to suit the RTA’s short-listed route options
- the failure of the workshops to apply a genuine ‘triple bottom line’ assessment of the options.¹⁴⁶

3.66 The RTA said that there were thirty representatives at both Value Management Workshops, of whom nine were members of the project team, six were from government agencies, two represented road users and thirteen were from the local community. These ‘local community representatives’ included representatives of Coffs Harbour City Council (four), Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce (one), the Banana Growers’ Association (one), environmental groups (one), the local indigenous community (two), and general community representatives (four). The four general community representatives were nominated from among CFG members. The RTA commented that

In comprising almost half of the invitees, the local community was given the opportunity to have a significant involvement in the Workshops and their recommendations.¹⁴⁷

3.67 Ms Bhatti, on behalf of the Sikh community, claimed that no representatives of the Punjabi Sikh community were present at the second Workshop, despite the heavy impact of Option E

¹⁴⁴ The Australian Centre for Value Management (for Connell Wagner), *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Woolgoolga – Northern Section, Supplementary Options Evaluation Workshop*, Value Management Workshop Report, August 2004, p2

¹⁴⁵ The Australian Centre for Value Management (for Connell Wagner), *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning: Woolgoolga – Northern Section, Supplementary Options Evaluation Workshop*, Value Management Workshop Report, August 2004, p25

¹⁴⁶ Submission 44 (Coffs Harbour), BAN and WAR, p18 and Submission 95 (Far North Coast), Ms Margaret Murphy, p3

¹⁴⁷ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 7(b)(a), p5

on banana land owned by Punjabi Sikh farmers. Ms Bhatti was critical of the RTA for not ensuring Sikh representation at this second Workshop which endorsed Option E:

How was the Punjabi Sikh community informed about the Value Management Workshops and its objectives? What processes were undertaken to encourage the Punjabi Sikh community's participation as a "significant group"?¹⁴⁸

3.68 The RTA disputed the claim that they had not encouraged members of the Punjabi Sikh community to participate in the Value Management Workshops. The RTA told the Committee that all CFG members were invited to nominate themselves to participate in both Value Management Workshops, but that those members of the CFG representing the Punjabi Sikh community did not nominate themselves.¹⁴⁹ The RTA advised that:

A member of the Sikh community attended the first workshop in April 2003 as a representative of the banana growing industry. An invitation was issued to a member of the Sikh community to represent the banana growing industry at the second workshop in August 2004, but the representative did not attend.¹⁵⁰

ARUP Peer Review

3.69 After work began on the Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Strategy, Coffs Harbour City Council commissioned the consultancy firm ARUP to undertake a Peer Review of the proposed corridor options.¹⁵¹ As part of this Review ARUP examined the stakeholder involvement process, and found that while many CFG members were satisfied with the consultation process:

Most, however, considered that the objectives of the Community Involvement Plan were not all met and that major issues such as a lack of trust and lack of transparency in decision making remained a problem with the stakeholder involvement process. In response to this, the Peer Review has recommended a number of actions for future stages of the stakeholder involvement process.¹⁵²

3.70 The RTA's Mr Bob Higgins noted that ARUP's Peer Review recommended that the RTA report on social impacts through a 'triple bottom line' approach. ARUP also found that the RTA should improve some aspects of the information they provided to the community, as well as their communication with stakeholders:

They [ARUP] have also asked, as part of that, that we improve other aspects of our mapping process to make them more presentable and more easily understood by the community. They asked that the maps include information on flora and fauna,

¹⁴⁸ Submission 50 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community, p7

¹⁴⁹ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 7(b)(b), p5

¹⁵⁰ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 6, p4

¹⁵¹ Submission 43 (Coffs Harbour), Coffs Harbour City Council, Appendix A, p1 and Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p22

¹⁵² ARUP, *Peer Review: Coffs Harbour Planning Strategy Highway Upgrading Options*, 12 September 2004, p6

heritage, waterways, visual/landscape, soil, bushfire hazard, and the built environment. You will see some of the outcomes in those maps before the Committee and other maps included with our documents. They asked for better communication to CFGs, in terms of delivery of the strategy, open sessions to assist stakeholders, and those sorts of things.¹⁵³

3.71 Mr Steven Moody said that some of the limitations identified by the Peer Review included:

- limited information was provided on the ‘people’s Choice’ option and the Far Western Bypass was not considered in the same level of detail as other options
- not all the objectives of the Community Involvement Plan were satisfied and major problems remained with stakeholder involvement.¹⁵⁴

3.72 The RTA advised that they modified their consultation processes to reflect some of the Review’s findings:

Referring to that triple bottom line, that relates to our value management workshops. We changed the approach where we moved into those particular streams of functional, social and environmental to better reflect what the Council was getting at. So we sort of have responded.¹⁵⁵

Upgrade delayed by criticism of consultation process

3.73 Some Inquiry participants expressed support for the RTA’s consultation processes in Coffs Harbour. Commenting on the evidence given in the Committee’s public hearing in Coffs Harbour on 21 November 2005, local resident Mr John Longhorn noted that the most of the witnesses were dissatisfied with the outcome of the RTA’s consultations over the last few years but that:

... the rest of the community believes that all relevant issues have been aired and thoroughly investigated and that detail[ed] planning of the preferred option is proceeding.¹⁵⁶

3.74 The immediate past president of the Ulitarra Conservation Society, Mr Steve Clemesha, claimed that the campaign by supporters of the Far Western Bypass meant that the route selection process, which should have been completed within 18 months, ended up taking four years. He also lamented the fact that the RTA spent \$150,000 investigating an unviable western by-pass:

The supporters of western bypasses ignore all this [the engineering, economic and environmental arguments against such a proposal] and continue to try for a western bypass and to stop work on the coastal route and option E ... they should not be allowed to cause further delays or to waste more public money.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p23

¹⁵⁴ Submission 44 (Coffs Harbour), BAN and WAR, p 17

¹⁵⁵ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p23

¹⁵⁶ Submission 23a (Coffs Harbour), Mr John Langhorn, p1

¹⁵⁷ Submission 9 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Steve Clemesha, p3

3.75 Ms Marlene Jacobs, Secretary of the Boambee West Residents' Association, said that during her involvement in the Southern CFG over the past five years, she has had more difficulties with Coffs Harbour City Council and local 'self-interested' lobby groups than the RTA, Connell Wagner or Pramax Communications. While her community was well represented at the initial consultation sessions convened by the RTA, this declined after the Steering Committee representing the RTA, Planning NSW and the Council, ruled out the Outer and Far Western corridors as bypass options. To her surprise, the Western Bypass was put back on the agenda in mid 2003. Because the western bypass had been all but ruled out, her community was significantly underrepresented at the RTA and Council meetings¹⁵⁸

Committee view: Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Consultation

3.76 The Committee is concerned that the Punjabi Sikh community felt excluded from the RTA's consultation process to develop route options for the Sapphire – Woolgoolga Upgrade. It may be that the importance of being represented on the CFG and the Value Management Workshops could have been more clearly articulated to the community. If representatives of the Punjabi Sikh community had been present in these forums from the beginning, the community could have directly informed the RTA and other participants of Option E's impact on their interests. However, given the RTA's response to the community's concerns regarding the consultation process, the Committee cannot draw specific conclusions in relation to the involvement of the Punjabi Sikh community.

3.77 The Committee encourages the RTA to work closely with the Punjabi Sikh community to reduce the impact of Option E on this community, particularly given the community's distrust of the RTA's previous consultation process. The impact of Option E on Sikh-owned farms is discussed in the following section.

3.78 Many of the concerns expressed by Inquiry participants in relation to the consultation process for the Coffs Harbour – Woolgoolga Upgrade are similar to those identified in the Committee's Interim Report which addressed the upgrades between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar, and Ballina and Woodburn. Their concerns included the provision of inadequate information, a lack of transparency and openness in the way the RTA and its consultants dealt with the community, and problems with the accuracy and timeliness of CFG minutes.

3.79 It would appear that the deficiencies identified in the Committee's Interim and Final Reports are indicative of systemic problems besetting the RTA's consultation processes. Indeed, during the course of its hearings, the Committee questioned the RTA regarding community concerns about consultation issues relating to several other Pacific Highway upgrade projects.

3.80 The Committee noted that, in the case of the Banora Point Upgrade, the RTA refused to provide its consultant's borehole logs to community representatives, which logs would assist community representatives in analysing the RTA's costings of a route option preferred by many of them but which was not preferred by the RTA. When the Committee asked the RTA for the borehole logs at the Budget Estimates hearing of 15 March 2006, they were provided.

¹⁵⁸ Submission 54 (Coffs Harbour), Boambee West Residents Association, p1

3.81 The Committee's Interim Report made a number of recommendations relating to the RTA's community consultation processes. In light of similar issues causing grave concern to many individuals and organisations with an interest in the Coffs Harbour Upgrades and a number of other Pacific Highway upgrades, those recommendations bear repeating here:

Recommendation 1

Based on the experience of the Ewingsdale – Tintenbar and Ballina – Woodburn Highway upgrades, that the RTA substantially improve its community consultation process and its stated objectives of open and transparent consultation in relation to Highway upgrades by:

- advising all residents in a timely manner of planned information sessions
- regularly updating the RTA website
- providing a comprehensive and detailed information package to all affected residents on the day that route options are announced
- forewarning residents of the timing for the announcement of short-listed and preferred routes
- liaising with property owners in advance to explain their rights and the purpose of any proposed site visits to or tests on their property; to request permission to conduct such site visits or tests, and provide property owners with any reports on their properties.

Recommendation 2

That the RTA substantially reform the way in which CLGs are established and operate by:

- publicising the selection criteria and appointment process for CLG members
- publicising the CLG Charter, outlining the role of CLGs and members' rights and responsibilities
- producing detailed minutes of CLG meetings and ensuring they are placed on the RTA's website within one week of the meeting date
- responding in full to all minuted CLG action items
- considering the ending of the requirement for CLG members keep information relating to proposed routes and the timeframes attached to the announcement of short-listed route options and preferred routes confidential
- if the RTA refuses to end the requirement for such information to be kept confidential, it should ensure that prospective CLG members and the broader community are fully briefed on the type of information to be kept confidential, and the reasons why.

Recommendation 3

That the RTA develop a Policy and Procedures Manual for all future Highway upgrades. At the beginning of the upgrade process, affected residents should be advised that the Manual will be made available to them on request. The Manual should include information on:

- steps in the upgrade process, with clear indications of timing for the specific upgrade
- landowners' rights, including procedures for visiting consultants
- the RTA's policy on property acquisition and financial compensation
- explanation of the role of CLGs and the process for selecting and appointing members.

3.82 As in the Committee's Interim Report, the Committee calls on the RTA to substantially improve its consultation processes to ensure that they are transparent, representative, timely and influential.

Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Impact on agriculture and local economy

3.83 Both the southern (Coffs Harbour) and the northern (Woolgoolga) sections of the preferred route traverse a number of agricultural properties. Some community members informed the Committee of their concerns that the preferred route would harm local agricultural industries. Particular concerns were expressed about the impact of the upgrade on Woolgoolga's Punjabi Sikh community, the culture of which is based on agriculture, and the consequent effect on the social, economic and cultural cohesion of the area.

Value of agriculture

3.84 Agriculture is a key element of the Coffs Harbour economy providing both economic and social benefits to the North Coast community and beyond. While bananas are the major crop, the cultivation of blueberries, citrus and tropical fruits and vegetables also play an important role in the local agricultural economy.

3.85 According to the Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce the agricultural land along the coastal strip is highly productive and has some of the best soil and highest rainfall in the country.¹⁵⁹

3.86 BAN was one of several organisations to note the value of agriculture to the Woolgoolga area:

Woolgoolga's banana/fruit industry yields over \$20M per annum with a 2.5x flow on to industry and trading ... Agriculture employs 21.5% of the community.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Submission 48 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce Industry and Tourism Inc, p2

¹⁶⁰ Submission 44 (Coffs Harbour), BAN and WAR, p11

Importance of banana industry

- 3.87** Banana production is the largest agricultural industry in the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area (LGA), and particularly in Woolgoolga, as described by the RTA:

Banana growing is a long established industry in Woolgoolga with farms in the area under continuous bananas (with spell periods) for over 30 years. The success of the crop has been largely due to high levels of management, maintaining strict levels of hygiene and disease control and maintaining a complete cover of mulch on slopes that would otherwise erode severely.¹⁶¹

- 3.88** The Department of Primary Industries estimates that there are 310 banana growers in Woolgoolga and Coffs Harbour cultivating a total of 1,098 hectares with a worth of \$50 million.¹⁶²

- 3.89** According to the RTA part of the success of the local banana industry lies in its cohesiveness and co-operative approach:

The industry is particularly cohesive in the region, partly because many of the farms are family run and have been held through the generations, and partly through a cooperative approach to disease control based on aerial spraying of fungicides for leaf spot control and leaf speckle, which are critical for profitable production.¹⁶³

- 3.90** However, the RTA also told the Committee that urban expansion in the local area and increasing competition from Queensland banana growers have led to a decrease in the amount of land in the Coffs Harbour LGA suitable for banana production.¹⁶⁴

- 3.91** The NSW Farmers' Association were in agreement with this view. They expressed concern that a Highway upgrade may further reduce the amount of prime agricultural land:

... our concerns (are) about the impact on prime agricultural land ... (which is) ideal for banana production and other horticultural pursuits. ... (and) cannot be replaced. ... (B)ananas require specific conditions (and) ... prime agricultural land is precious these days.

Even though the Coffs Harbour banana industry has declined over the years it is still an important industry. ... whether it is in the Woolgoolga Basin or the Coffs Harbour Basin.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Sapphire to Woolgoolga Section, Supplementary Options Report*, February 2004, p30, <www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/pdfs/chsr/chhp_swssor_feb04_p4.pdf> (accessed 21 February 2006)

¹⁶² Mr Gerald Rossi, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p32

¹⁶³ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning Sapphire to Woolgoolga Section, Supplementary Options Report*, February 2004, p30, <www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/pdfs/chsr/chhp_swssor_feb04_p4.pdf> (accessed 21 February 2006)

¹⁶⁴ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p3

¹⁶⁵ Mr Michael Burt, Regional Service Manager, NSW Farmers' Association, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p34

3.92 Both the RTA and local agriculturalists told the Committee that farmers are diversifying their production to meet the challenges of competition from Queensland banana growers and a changing market. Their initiatives include the production of different varieties of bananas and the introduction of new crops such as blueberries. The RTA stated that:

In response to increasing competition from the Queensland banana industry, there has also been increasing diversification of the agricultural industry in both the Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga areas, with many farmers replacing bananas with other crops.¹⁶⁶

3.93 This was supported by Ms Rashmere Bhatti, who informed the Committee that, in order to supplement their income, many in the Punjabi Sikh community have added blueberries to their banana farms:

Currently, most of the farmers ... have already spent the money to put in blueberry farms. So Option E will be tearing not only through banana farms but also through blueberry farms.¹⁶⁷

3.94 Mr Gerald Rossi told the Committee that growers have diversified the variety of bananas grown in response to changes in the industry. Mr Rossi saw this as a key to the industry maintaining its competitive edge:

... I can tell you that even though the industry has declined here, growers are now switching to growing ladyfingers, which are much better money-spinners. ...

We are getting \$40 a carton for a 12 kilogram carton of lady fingers. The Cavendish growers are getting \$6 to \$8. This industry can switch all to ladyfingers. I have developed short ladyfingers which are half the height of the normal ladyfingers so that they can be grown on steep slopes. So the whole of the Red Hill, Roberts Hill and Coffs Basin area would be suitable to plant these.¹⁶⁸

Impact on banana land

3.95 Option E, the preferred route through Woolgoolga, will result in the loss of agricultural land used primarily for banana production. The RTA's preferred route will also impact on agricultural land in other parts of the Coffs Harbour LGA. The NSW Farmers' Association informed the Committee that topographic and environmental impacts on the remaining banana land would include:

- Severance of irrigation channels and waterways servicing remaining farms
- Severance of infrastructure such as farm roads
- Changes to the micro climate such as the creation of wind corridors
- Increased pollution of rainwater tanks (drinking water for farm properties)

¹⁶⁶ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p3

¹⁶⁷ Ms Bhatti, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p33-34

¹⁶⁸ Mr Rossi, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p32

- Increased buffer zones required for safe spraying of crops and effects of increased motor vehicle emissions (pollution).¹⁶⁹

3.96 The RTA provided the following details on the expected land loss from Option E:

In the Coffs Harbour area, the preferred route would require the acquisition of approximately 80 hectares of agricultural land – including approximately 50 hectares of banana land. The implementation of a 300m aerial spraying buffer zone would affect an additional 270 hectares of banana land.

In the Woolgoolga area, the preferred route would require the acquisition of 65 hectares of agricultural land ... The implementation of a 300m aerial spraying buffer zone would affect an additional 85 hectares...¹⁷⁰

3.97 Local banana grower Mr Rossi noted that the 278 ha that would be lost in the Coffs Harbour basin alone equates to 60% of the banana land in the region, plus whatever banana land is lost in Woolgoolga.¹⁷¹

3.98 The joint submission from BAN and WAR claimed that Option E would directly impact on 35 agricultural properties; of these 28 would become unviable.¹⁷²

3.99 RTA studies of the socio-economic impact of route options found that Option E was expected to have a moderate to high adverse effect on rural land use and property.¹⁷³

3.100 Mr Mark and Ms Lynne Beiers voiced the concerns of both banana growers and residents about the substantial amount of land that would be lost. They stated that an upgrade along Option E would ‘decimate the remaining banana industry with all the associated repercussions on the economic future of Coffs Harbour.’¹⁷⁴

3.101 The NSW Farmers’ Association told the Committee that it would not be possible to relocate the affected agricultural enterprises elsewhere:

... this is disease-free banana country. It has northern aspects and soil types that are ideal for banana production and other horticultural pursuits. These farms simply cannot be replaced ... because bananas require specific conditions.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Submission 46 (Coffs Harbour), NSW Farmers’ Association Coffs Harbour Branch, p3

¹⁷⁰ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p3

¹⁷¹ Submission 7 (Coffs Harbour), Mr G Rossi, p1

¹⁷² Submission 44 (Coffs Harbour), BAN and WAR, p11

¹⁷³ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning, Sapphire to Woolgoolga Section, Supplementary Options Report*, February 2004, pvii, <www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/pdfs/chssr/chhp_swssor_feb04_p1.pdf> (accessed 22 February 2006)

¹⁷⁴ Submission 2 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Mark and Mrs Lynne Beiers, p1

¹⁷⁵ Mr Burt, Evidence, 21 November, 2005, p34

- 3.102** Mr Rossi informed the Committee of his concerns about the future ability of the local banana industry to remain disease free, given the restrictions on the use of chemicals in proximity to the Highway:

If the RTA put a corridor through the Coffs Harbour Basin there would be no aerial spraying 300 metres either side of this road. Ground spraying would be allowed 150 metres from the road if one were willing to take the risk of being sued.¹⁷⁶

- 3.103** The RTA also noted that a spray buffer applies for aerial spraying and this could diminish the ability of banana farmers to share resources effectively:

For aerial spraying, a 300 metre wide spray buffer applies to either side of a highway, to prevent drift of mainly misting oil on to windshields. ... The effect of the buffer zone would be a further factor disadvantaging farms isolated from the main banana growing areas west of the proposed route alignments.¹⁷⁷

- 3.104** Mr Rossi stated that the RTA will only acquire land that is directly affected by the Highway upgrade, but due to the buffer zone for aerial spraying, farmers would be left without compensation for land that is rendered useless:

The RTA said it might only need an acre of somebody's property. It is willing to double the price of what the land is worth for that one acre, but one would be left with nine acres out of the 10 that are unsuitable for anything else.

You would not be able to grow bananas on it or put up a house or buildings because no buildings would be allowed within 150 metres of the road anyway. So that land would be worthless.¹⁷⁸

- 3.105** According to the Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce there are two other important factors relating to banana production that may be affected by the upgrade. Firstly, the unique microclimate of the area, and secondly, the role of banana growers in erosion control:

Our hilly topography plays a vital role in the microclimate of tropical fruit cultivation. Plantation and forest vegetation on slopes plays a vital role in prevention of hillside erosion ... [all] will be impacted by highway cuttings.¹⁷⁹

Impact on Punjabi Sikh community

- 3.106** Since moving to the district in the 1940s the Punjabi Sikh community have played a major role in the banana industry in Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga in particular. The Committee heard that Option E will have a devastating impact on the Punjabi Sikh community, as Option E traverses largely through Punjabi Sikh banana land.

¹⁷⁶ Mr Rossi, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p33

¹⁷⁷ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning, Sapphire to Woolgoolga Section, Supplementary Options Report*, February 2004, Appendix C Agricultural Assessment, p5, <www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/pdfs/chsr/chhp_swssor_feb04_p4.pdf> (accessed 21 February 2006)

¹⁷⁸ Mr Rossi, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p33

¹⁷⁹ Submission 48 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce Industry and Tourism Inc, p2

- 3.107** Agriculture is the mainstay of the Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh community. Community representative Ms Rashmere Bhatti stated that ‘agriculture is the dominant shape of our daily life and family structure, and supports the social, cultural and religious fabric of the community.’¹⁸⁰
- 3.108** According to the NSW Farmers’ Association 94% of the Punjabi Sikh community are involved with agricultural pursuits.¹⁸¹
- 3.109** The Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce also acknowledged the potentially negative impact of the loss of banana land for the Coffs Harbour Punjabi Sikh community whose farming practices are based on co-operation and the sharing of resources:

The survival of many banana plantations depends on shared farming infrastructures, resources and services. e.g. water source, processing equipment, labour and disease control measures.¹⁸²

- 3.110** Mr Kashmir Singh Gill, a local Punjabi Sikh and banana grower, informed the Committee of the importance of the banana industry to the community as a whole:

Woolgoolga’s unique landform, where our farms are so close to our homes, creates an opportunity for Punjabi Sikh people to live according to our social, cultural and family traditions. It is possible to work in the nearby hills and return home for the care of children or our elderly, or social obligations or religious gatherings. The agricultural industry provides virtually full employment for the Punjabi Sikh community, creating stability in a financial, family and cultural way. this stability has made a very good relationship between the Punjabi Sikh community and the non-Punjabi Sikh community based on mutual respect because of what we have achieved with our farms, and the shared purpose of our agricultural industry and pride in the natural beauty of our towns and area.¹⁸³

- 3.111** Studies undertaken by the RTA indicate that Option E would directly affect 15 residences.¹⁸⁴ As the Sikh community lives in extended family units, there is more than the average number of people per household. This was further explained by Ms Rashmere Bhatti:

There are approximately 15 family units along the route of Option E. When you look at the extended family it is a very conservative figure. We work it out at about 10 people per household, although some will have 16, some will have eight and some will have nine.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Ms Bhatti, Evidence, 21 November, 2005, p28

¹⁸¹ Submission 46 (Coffs Harbour), NSW Farmers’ Association, p2

¹⁸² Submission 48 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce Industry and Tourism Inc, p2

¹⁸³ Mr Kashmir Singh Gill, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p28

¹⁸⁴ RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning, Sapphire to Woolgoolga Section, Supplementary Options Report*, February 2004, Table 5.4, p16, <www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/pdfs/chssr/chhp_swssor_feb04_p3.pdf> (accessed 21 February 2006)

¹⁸⁵ Ms Bhatti, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p32

- 3.112** Ms Bhatti argued that this figure of 15 residences did not accurately reflect the extent of the impact on the Punjabi Sikh community, as these 15 extended families make up 30% of the community:

The flow on effects are massive if you take out 30 per cent of the community ... you take out 30 per cent of the economy, the infrastructure, the schooling and the vehicles, part of the community will be so dispersed that the numbers will not be there to give the community its vibrant nature and its colourful heritage.¹⁸⁶

- 3.113** The NSW Farmers' Association concluded that the displacement of 30% of the Punjabi Sikh community would threaten the viability of remaining farms.¹⁸⁷

Other economic impacts

- 3.114** In addition to the impact on the banana industry, the Committee was told that the preferred route from Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga would also affect the tourism and construction industries.

- 3.115** Tourism is a growth industry on the Mid North Coast. Woolgoolga resident Ms Margaret Murphy informed the Committee of the economic value of tourism to the local area and of her concern about the potential impact of the Highway:

Tourism in Woolgoolga is directly or indirectly responsible for 27% of employment and contributes at least \$19m to the local economy. The deviation will directly impact current and potential bed and breakfast and other accommodation. No-one wants to holiday near a freeway.¹⁸⁸

- 3.116** Mr Robert Forrest of the Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce was similarly concerned for tourism in the area:

There are nine caravan parks in our service area mostly catering to older travellers and to younger families. Having a freeway going through our back door will not help that industry ...¹⁸⁹

- 3.117** According to BAN, increased pollution levels as a result of the upgrade may have a negative effect on the tourism industry:

This will be exacerbated by atmospheric inversions that occur in the Coffs Harbour basin, trapping pollutants in the lower layers of the atmosphere.

... A tourist destination with a permanent brown haze over the City centre is not a good look nor is it a great marketing tool for a city with only 65,000 people, especially if you are competing with other Mid North Coast holiday destinations ... that don't have a Highway running through their town centre.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Ms Bhatti, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p33

¹⁸⁷ Submission 46 (Coffs Harbour), NSW Farmers' Association, p3

¹⁸⁸ Submission 95 (Far North Coast), Ms Margaret Murphy, p3

¹⁸⁹ Mr Forrest, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p51

¹⁹⁰ Submission 47 (Coffs Harbour), BAN Mr Wayne Evans,p5

- 3.118** The Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce voiced concern about the impact of Option E on the providers of bed and breakfast accommodation:

Option E Deviation will directly impact on established and potential bed and breakfast and other tourism accommodation. Apart from the fact that no-one wants to holiday near a freeway, noise, pollution and traffic delays will adversely impact the tourism industry (and local economy) during the four year construction period.¹⁹¹

- 3.119** However, RTA studies for the Sapphire – Woolgoolga Upgrade indicated that any impact on the tourism industry would be indirect:

Potential effects on tourist activity would relate more to issues like changes to access and effects on amenity which may make tourist areas and operations more or less attractive for visitors. The importance of car travel for tourists visiting the Woolgoolga area is vital and hence, ease of access to and within the study area is a particular issue of relevance to tourism ... The viability of tourist operations in the future will be dependent on a wide range of factors and would not be solely limited to the upgrade of the highway.¹⁹²

- 3.120** In addition to the likely impact on the tourism industry, the Committee heard of community concern regarding the limitations being placed on future urban growth of the Coffs LGA. According to Mr Mark and Mrs Lynne Beiers:

Our city is already divided by the natural boundary of Coffs Creek and the man made boundary of the existing highway. This proposed bypass, so close and in fact within the inner city itself, will only divide and inhibit further growth ...¹⁹³

- 3.121** Mr Forrest informed the Committee that the amount of land taken to construct Option E would 'negatively impact further urban development and the building trades. The flow-on economic impacts will ripple through to the finance and banking and the retail sectors.'¹⁹⁴

- 3.122** Coffs Harbour City Council was concerned that the southern section of the preferred Highway upgrade route passed through the planned North Boambee Valley urban release area.

The release area was to accommodate a population of 9,350 people ... Future population could be reduced from 9,350 to 3,870, a loss of planned 2,109 dwellings (currently a potential loss of between \$20m and \$26m in contributions.)¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Submission 48 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce Industry and Tourism Inc, p3

¹⁹² RTA, *Coffs Harbour Highway Planning, Sapphire to Woolgoolga Section, Supplementary Options Report*, February 2004, p32; www.conwag.com/external/sapphire/pdfs/chssr/chhp_swssor_feb04_p4.pdf (accessed 21 February 2006)

¹⁹³ Submission 2 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Mark and Mrs Lynne Beiers, p1

¹⁹⁴ Submission 48 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce Industry and Tourism Inc, pp3-4

¹⁹⁵ Submission 43 (Coffs Harbour), Coffs Harbour City Council, p5

Committee view: Coffs Harbour to Woolgoolga: Impact on agriculture and local economy

- 3.123** The Committee recognises the importance of agriculture to the economy of the Coffs Harbour LGA, and its contribution to community identity and cohesion. The Committee also recognises the value of cultural diversity and the iconic presence of the Punjabi Sikh community on the North Coast. As noted earlier, the Committee encourages the RTA to continue to work with the Punjabi Sikh community to minimise the impact of Option E on Sikh-owned banana farms.
- 3.124** The Committee is concerned that Option E will have a significant adverse impact on the cultivation of banana land at Woolgoolga, and notes that the loss of agricultural land may have flow-on effects for the local economy. As recommended in the Committee's Interim Report, the Committee urges the RTA to recognise prime agricultural land to be a substantial constraint in developing route options.

Recommendation 1

That the RTA recognise prime agricultural land to be a substantial constraint in developing route options.

Bonville: Progress

- 3.125** The Bonville Upgrade involves upgrading 9.6km of the Pacific Highway to dual carriageway between Perry's Road at Repton and Lyon's Road at Sawtell, south of Coffs Harbour. The Bonville Upgrade will link the completed Raleigh Deviation with the completed dual carriageway from Lyons to Englands Roads,¹⁹⁶ establishing a 17.5km stretch of dual carriageway from Coffs Harbour to Urunga.¹⁹⁷

Timeframe for completion

- 3.126** The section of the Highway north and south of Bonville township is notoriously dangerous. The Committee was told by Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP, Federal Member for Cowper, that there have been 13 deaths on the Highway since 2001.¹⁹⁸ A number of Inquiry participants told the Committee that they were frustrated with the length of time taken to complete the Bonville Upgrade. According to the NRMA:

¹⁹⁶ Submission 59 (Coffs Harbour), RTA, p5

¹⁹⁷ Hon J Lloyd MP, Commonwealth Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, and the Hon J Tripodi MP, NSW Minister for Roads, 'Joint Media Statement: Ministers unite to accelerate Pacific Highway upgrade,' *Media Release*, 23 December 2005, p4

¹⁹⁸ Submission 45 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Luke Hartsuyker, p4

In 1999 when the project started, it was expected to be completed in 2003, but by 2003, the program had been extended to 2008. For the last two years, an end date has not been reported in the State budget papers ...

Bonville Deviation has had planning approval for more than eight months and still there has been little to no action to fix this stretch of the Highway.¹⁹⁹

3.127 In the RTA's 1998 Annual Report, the estimated completion date for the Bonville Upgrade was 2003.²⁰⁰ In the 2002 Annual Report, the estimated completion date was 2008.²⁰¹ In the 2005 Annual Report, no completion date was given.²⁰²

3.128 Mr Hartsuyker blamed the NSW Government for the delays and called for the NSW Government to publish a timetable for completion of the Bonville Upgrade:

The lack of urgency is disturbing and hard to understand, given the nature of the issue we are dealing with ...

... the State Government should publish a timetable, from acceptance of a tender, through start of work, to completion of work and announce its intention to use its best endeavours to maintain that timetable. The reasons for non-compliance with the schedule at any stage should be made public.²⁰³

3.129 Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive of the RTA, updated the Committee on the timetable for completion of the upgrade during a hearing on 21 March 2006. Mr Hannon advised the Committee that tenders had been called for the contract to construct the upgrade, and that the successful contractor would be announced in May 2006. Mr Hannon said that construction was expected to commence by the end of 2006 and be completed by the end of 2008.²⁰⁴

3.130 In response to questioning on why it would take so long for construction to commence, Mr Bob Higgins explained that the Bonville contract:

... is a design, construct and maintain [DCM] contract. So the consortia submit a proposal that requires a comprehensive review of the proposed design that they have. It is not just a simple, what we would call conventional contract, in that we have done the design in advance. The contractor simply has to look at the design that has been completed ... and simply price the contract. What the contractor has to do in the case of a DCM is work off a concept that has been put forward so as to design the project ...

When tenders come in we then have to go through a comprehensive assessment of the design and maintenance regime, any environmental considerations, and the like. So it is not just simply looking at a price; it is looking at the design that has been

¹⁹⁹ Submission 62 (Coffs Harbour), NRMA, p3

²⁰⁰ RTA, *Annual Report 1998*, 'Appendix 3: Major Works – Country Operations,' p96

²⁰¹ RTA, *Annual Report 2002*, 'Appendix 1: Major Works,' p116

²⁰² RTA, *Annual Report 2005*, 'Appendix 1: Major Works,' p113

²⁰³ Submission 45 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Luke Hartsuyker, pp5-6

²⁰⁴ Mr Hannon, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p18

submitted ... Traditionally, it takes about six months to do that review. In this case, if we let the contract in May, and that is our expectation, it will be shorter than usual.²⁰⁵

3.131 The dangers of the Highway at Bonville were demonstrated to the Committee by the evidence of Bonville residents Mrs Tracy and Mr Hugh Heading, and Ms Lorraine Wood and Mr Stephen Cook.

Case study: Evidence given by Mrs Tracy and Mr Hugh Heading²⁰⁶

Mrs Tracy and Mr Hugh Heading live a few hundred metres from the Highway at Bonville. On 27 June 2005 they ran to assist at the scene of a collision between a Tarago van and a bus, in which four American tourists died. Mr Heading climbed into the van and stayed with the only survivor, a teenage girl, until emergency services arrived. Mr Heading told the Committee: 'I am not going to try to paint a picture of what I actually saw; it is pretty much beyond words.'

A month later, Mr Heading was sitting on his porch when he heard a loud bang. When he ran out to the Highway, he saw that a local man entering the Highway had collided with a B-Double. The man's seat had collapsed and he had been thrown from his van, saving his life, before his van hit a telegraph pole. This second accident was metres from the first.

A week and a half later, the Headings were informed that a young girl was killed in a head-on collision a few hundred metres from their house.

Mrs Heading told the Committee: 'Every time we hear a siren our hearts drop. In the ten years we have lived here I cannot count the amount of people who have died let alone the people who have been injured.'

Mr Heading was saddened by the consequences of the delayed construction of the Bonville Upgrade: '... the simple truth is that I should not be here today ... had the Bonville deviation gone ahead as planned ...'

Case study: Evidence given by Ms Lorraine Wood and Mr Stephen Cook²⁰⁷

Ms Lorraine Wood and Mr Stephen Cook have lived at Bonville for 25 years. They told the Committee: 'The Pacific Highway around Coffs Harbour, and in particular the southern approach through Pine Creek and Bonville, rates as one of the most neglected and dangerous sections of the entire Highway.'

²⁰⁵ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p20

²⁰⁶ Submission 29 (Coffs Harbour), Mrs Tracy and Mr Hugh Heading and Mr Hugh Heading, Evidence, 21 November 2005, pp44-45

²⁰⁷ Ms Lorraine Wood, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p46 and Submission 38 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Stephen Cook and Ms Lorraine Wood

Case study: Evidence given by Ms Lorraine Wood and Mr Stephen Cook²⁰⁸ (continued)

Ms Wood travels to Nambucca Heads for work every day through Pine Creek State Forest. She has twice had to take quick evasive action to avoid a head-on collision. On many occasions it has taken Ms Wood up to five hours to get home due to delays resulting from traffic accidents, as well as being forced to either travel out to Bellingen or travel on secondary gravel roads.

Ms Wood has lost two work colleagues on the Highway.

Ms Wood told the Committee that whenever she arrives safely at her destination after travelling through Pine Creek State Forest, she congratulates herself on making the journey safely.

Ms Wood and Mr Cook were frustrated at the progress of the Bonville Upgrade: 'We were told that the Bonville Bypass would be completed by 2003 ... it is now 2005 and not a sod of soil has been turned.'

Environmental modifications

- 3.132** The Committee was told that the RTA's efforts to reduce the environmental impact of the Bonville Upgrade contributed to the delays in commencing construction. The RTA indicated that after the Minister for Planning approved the Bonville Upgrade in March 2000, they had been asked by local environmental groups to modify the approved route alignment through Pine Creek State Forest, to reduce the impact on koalas by protecting high-value koala habitat.²⁰⁹
- 3.133** The RTA responded by undertaking a study to track koala movements and monitor koala health in the Pine Creek State Forest.²¹⁰ The findings of the study showed that it would be possible to protect koala habitat by modifying the route alignment and implementing measures such as improving a proposed fauna underpass.
- 3.134** The activities undertaken by the RTA to address environmental issues were described by Mr Bob Higgins:

... we entered into arrangements to do further research, on koalas. We did a lot of work on koala tracking and got a better handle on it. Through discussions, and through the group that was set up there, we identified that we needed to adjust or modify the alignment to lessen the impact. What you see is the result: it came up with some very worthy ideas.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Ms Lorraine Wood, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p46 and Submission 38 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Stephen Cook and Ms Lorraine Wood

²⁰⁹ RTA, *Bonville Deviation – Design Modifications*, Newsletter No. 7, November 2002

²¹⁰ RTA, *Bonville Deviation – Design Modifications*, Newsletter No. 7, November 2002

²¹¹ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p14

- 3.135** At the Committee's hearing on 21 March 2006, Mr Ian Cohen MLC noted in relation to discussions between the RTA and groups in the Pine Creek Area:

People believe that there could be a benchmark for future negotiations between the RTA and local groups. I see that as a very positive step in that southern section of what I call the Pine Creek area, which is an environmentally sensitive area.

Does this set a benchmark in dealing with these issues? Are we going to see similar communications concerning the areas further north where there is a great deal of concern on the coastal emu north of Grafton, in the Iluka to Grafton section. Will there be similar communication on environmentally sensitive issues as we have witnessed with the area to the south of Coffs Harbour?²¹²

- 3.136** After modifying the route, the RTA completed another environmental impact assessment on the modified route, and submitted the modifications to the Minister for Planning for approval.

Interim safety measures

- 3.137** The RTA advised that since September 2005 they have implemented significant safety measures to address concerns about the high accident rate on the Highway near Bonville. The safety improvements included:

- reducing speed limits – from 80km/h to 60km/h through the Bonville township, and from 90km/h to 80km/h on the approaches to the town (including additional signage)
- installing two speed cameras – installed prior to the Christmas holidays
- introducing a central median in areas with significant curves, requiring road widening
- improving transitions on the approaches to existing dual carriageway at the ends of the proposed Bonville upgrade
- road resurfacing to improve skid resistance in wet weather
- widening and sealing road shoulders to improve road-side clear zones.²¹³

- 3.138** According to Mr Hartsuyker:

An offer from the Federal Government to pay for interim safety measures was accepted, after some delay ... and now \$5m of Federal money will be used for median barriers, road widening and changing lane contours in sections merging from four to two lanes.

However, another Federal offer of \$30m to ensure that work on the main scheme starts promptly remains unanswered at the time of writing.²¹⁴

²¹² Mr Ian Cohen MLC, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p14

²¹³ Mr Michael Bushby, Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, RTA, Evidence, 21 March 2006, pp17-18

²¹⁴ Submission 45 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Hartsuyker, p5

- 3.139** The Hon Joseph Tripodi MP, then NSW Minister for Roads, rejected the claim that the Commonwealth Government was prepared to offer funding to accelerate commencement of the Bonville Upgrade. Mr Tripodi claimed that the delays were not due to a shortage of funds, but due to the time needed to go through the proper processes for such a project:

The offer for Bonville is to take money from other parts of the Pacific Highway and to apply it to Bonville. Obviously, we have concerns about the whole of the Pacific Highway. It is not extra money. The offer of that money is not relevant because the matter is progressing as quickly as possible. We are confident that we will be able to fund that project.²¹⁵

Committee view: Bonville: Progress

- 3.140** The Committee notes that while planning for the Bonville Upgrade has been underway for almost ten years, construction is not due to commence until the end of 2006. The estimated completion date is now late 2008 (the initial completion date was 2003).
- 3.141** The Committee considers that the RTA should be held accountable for any delays to the estimated timetable for Highway upgrades. NSW Treasury should publish the RTA's estimated timetable for each upgrade as part of the annual Budget Estimates papers for the Roads portfolio, and the RTA should make public its reasons for non-compliance with the estimated schedule at any stage.

Recommendation 2

That, with respect to Highway upgrade projects, NSW Treasury, in its Budget Estimates papers for the Roads portfolio, publish the RTA's estimated timetable for each upgrade project from acceptance of tender, to commencement of work through to the completion date.

The RTA should make public its reasons for non-compliance with the estimated schedule at any stage.

- 3.142** While the Committee commends the RTA on modifying the alignment of the preferred route to protect koala habitat in Pine Creek State Forest, this was only necessary because the RTA did not undertake detailed environmental studies to determine the impact on koalas prior to developing the route options and submitting the environmental impact assessment for approval.
- 3.143** Given the devastating delays in progressing the Bonville Upgrade, the Committee is disappointed that safety measures on this notorious section of the Highway were not implemented until September 2005. The Committee notes that, even then, the safety measures were not implemented until after the State Member for Coffs Harbour, Mr Andrew Fraser MP, had erected his own warning signs on the Highway's edge, warning motorists of the dangers ahead.

²¹⁵ The Hon Joseph Tripodi MP, Evidence, *Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2005-06*, 20 September 2005, p4

Impact of delay on small businesses

3.144 Small business owners also expressed concerns about the impact of delays on their businesses. Mr Roger Allen is the owner of Waterside Garden Nursery, located on the Pacific Highway at Coffs Harbour. The RTA has advised Mr Allen that the property on which his Nursery is built will be acquired in full for the upgrade. Mr Allen said that he was unable to formulate a business plan as the RTA has not given him a timeframe for the upgrade, and hence when his business would be acquired. This uncertainty was causing problems not only for Mr Allen, but also for his employees:

You cannot really plan a marketplace for the future at this point in time. Four or five of my employees are employed on a casual basis. I cannot offer them full-time or long-term employment.²¹⁶

3.145 Coffs Harbour City Council told the Committee of the Council's concern for business and property owners in relation to the extended time frame for the upgrade:

Those property owners that are directly affected by potential land acquisitions should not be required to wait without a higher degree of certainty regarding the Highway project.²¹⁷

3.146 Mr Allen summed up his frustrations when he stated: 'All I want is a final decision to be made and a set time frame so that I and others can plan and get on with life.'²¹⁸

3.147 One small business owner to complain that the RTA was unresponsive to the needs of small businesses was Mr Tony Brindley, proprietor of Brindley's Bonville Nursery. Mr Brindley claimed that following geotechnical activities undertaken by the RTA on his property in 1997 – 1998, the quality of the groundwater at his Nursery changed, causing saltwater damage to plants. Mr Brindley was concerned that despite his many complaints regarding this issue, the RTA had not been held accountable:

At the date of this submission the brief is stalled on the RTA refusing to agree to include an Environmental Compliance Audit of its activities in the Bonville area ... the RTA is accountable and will be held accountable for its actions.²¹⁹

3.148 Mr Phillip Gall owns the Sapphire Convenience Store. While Mr Gall did not have any complaints about the effect of the preferred route on his business, Mr Gall was concerned at the ongoing impact of 'noise, grit and grime from fuel exhausts' on his house, which is attached to his business and is 60m from the Highway. Mr Gall gave evidence that he had experienced a delay in having his home assessed by the RTA for the noise abatement program:

I have made an approach through the Grafton office, and I have had a letter back saying we can expect a visit in the coming weeks. That letter is about three or four weeks old now. But I have had some verbal discussions with the manager of the area office there, and there are apparently two programs and perhaps a program looking at

²¹⁶ Mr Roger Allen, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p51

²¹⁷ Submission 43 (Coffs Harbour), Coffs Harbour City Council, p3

²¹⁸ Submission 32 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Roger Allen, p1

²¹⁹ Submission 37 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Tony Brindley, Attachment 1, p6

it at the moment, which appear to me not to have much money in them, or perhaps they are not applicable to us because it could be construed not to be an upgrade of the highway but instead just a noise abatement program.²²⁰

Committee view: Impact of delay on small businesses

- 3.149** The Committee acknowledges the importance of small businesses in generating employment, and considers that the RTA should endeavour to avoid delays that impact adversely on small business owners, leaving them in limbo for long periods of time.

²²⁰ Mr Phillip Gall, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p55

Chapter 4 Heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway

Many Inquiry participants expressed considerable concern about the use of the Pacific Highway by heavy vehicles, especially B-Doubles. They claimed that heavy vehicles have made the Highway more dangerous, and are responsible for increased noise pollution. However, the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales (RTA) told the Committee that B-Doubles are safer than other heavy vehicles. They also told the Committee that the RTA has taken residents' safety and noise concerns seriously, and are addressing these concerns.

Introduction to B-doubles

- 4.1 This section describes B-Doubles and their history in Australia, as well concerns regarding the introduction of B-Doubles to the Pacific Highway in 2002.

What is a B-Double?

- 4.2 According to the RTA, B-Doubles consist of:

... a prime mover towing two semi-trailers. B-Doubles are currently limited in length to 25 metres and 9 axle combinations. The gross mass limit is 62.5 tonnes. The 19 metre B-Doubles have general access to all roads as long as the combination's gross mass is no more than 50 tonnes or a specific load limit has been placed on a road, bridge etc.²²¹

- 4.3 As B-Doubles have two semi-trailers behind one prime mover, they are significantly longer and heavier than semi-trailers which are up to 19m in length and consist of a prime mover towing a single semi-trailer.²²²

History of B-doubles

- 4.4 The NSW Road Transport Association outlined the history of B-doubles in Australia:

B-Doubles have operated in Australia for approximately 20 years. They were originally used in Canada where their use dates from the 1940s. B-Doubles are ideally suited to high volume linehaul freight tasks over both short and long distances.²²³

- 4.5 The RTA advised that 25m B-Doubles were allowed onto the Pacific Highway in August 2002, after the opening of a 28.5km Highway upgrade from Yelgun to Chinderah on the Far

²²¹ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p4

²²² RTA, '14.6m Semi-trailers', *Fact Sheet*, October 2001, <www.rta.nsw.gov.au/registration/downloads/infosheet_14-6semi.pdf> (accessed 10 May 2006)

²²³ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association Inc., p4

North Coast.²²⁴ The opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah Freeway removed a notorious accident black spot by bypassing the Burringbar Range, and was a crucial pre-condition to the introduction of 25m B-Doubles.

- 4.6 Mr Michael Bushby, Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, RTA, told the Committee that the Commonwealth Government was encouraging a move to higher mass limits on heavy vehicles because of their greater efficiency:

As part of the AusLink agreement last year, which was negotiated between the New South Wales Government and the national Government, there was a requirement that was put on New South Wales through that agreement that we move to a greater adoption of higher mass limits on heavy vehicles.

...

So in moving to higher mass limits we are looking to be supporting the increased efficiency of the transport industry but at the same time doing it in a way which will be bounded by safeguards for the community in terms of safety and asset protection.²²⁵

- 4.7 Mr Mark Crosdale, Secretary of the Newcastle and Northern Sub-branch of the Transport Workers' Union of Australia (TWU), told the Committee that the move to larger vehicles may lead to the introduction of B-Triples:

... as has been proposed most notably by the Commonwealth, the size of vehicles will increase. There is a current proposal to allow B-Triples onto New South Wales roads in the Far West for the first time.²²⁶

- 4.8 Without a move towards larger heavy vehicles, the predicted doubling of the road freight task by 2020 would result in a substantial increase in the number of heavy vehicles on the road. The NSW Road Transport Association advised that rapid population growth on the North Coast would cause the road freight task to double much sooner than 2020,²²⁷ meaning that larger heavy vehicles are needed on the North Coast to contain the increase in the number of heavy vehicles.

Community concerns regarding introduction of B-Doubles to the Pacific Highway

- 4.9 Use of the Pacific Highway by heavy vehicles evoked a passionate response from Inquiry participants, some of whom have had a family member, friend or acquaintance involved in a serious accident, and who blame trucks (particularly B-Doubles) for many of these accidents.

²²⁴ RTA, *Yelgun to Chinderah Official Opening Brochure*, August 2002, <www.rta.nsw.gov.au/constructionmaintenance/downloads/rta_yelgun_chinderah_opening.pdf> (accessed 10 May 2006)

²²⁵ Mr Michael Bushby, Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, RTA, Evidence, *Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2005 – 2006: Roads*, 15 March 2005, pp12-13

²²⁶ Mr Mark Crosdale, Secretary, Newcastle and Northern Sub-branch, Transport Workers' Union of Australasia (TWU), Evidence, 26 September 2005, p14

²²⁷ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p2

- 4.10** Newrybar residents Mr Alan and Ms Marianne Logan voiced concerns about the manner in which B-Doubles were introduced to the Pacific Highway:

The decision by the Government to change the rules to allow B double trucks to use the Pacific Highway was negligent considering that approx 2/3 of the highway is still single lane.²²⁸

- 4.11** Mrs Denise Morden of Byron Bay asked: ‘Why did the RTA allow B-doubles on an unfinished highway without community consultation?’²²⁹

- 4.12** The Community Alliance for Road Sustainability (CARS) also claimed that the community was not consulted about the introduction of B-doubles:

Upon completion of the Chinderah – Yelgun motorway in 2002 the Minister gazetted B-double use on the Pacific Highway despite the fact that this section represented only a fraction of the area needing to be upgraded. There was no community consultation or discussion with local politicians.²³⁰

- 4.13** Far North Coast resident Ms Deborah Sharp also asserted that the community was not consulted:

Why have B-Doubles been allowed onto the highway without community consultation and approval? They may be safe on this [upgraded] section of the highway, but what about the sections not upgraded, there have been numerous accidents involving them all along the Highway.²³¹

- 4.14** Ms Sharp claimed that while the RTA was required to produce an impact statement that addressed safety, technical, economic, environmental and community issues before the Pacific Highway could be gazetted for use by B-Doubles:

The RTA’s Environmental Impact Assessment used data gathered for noise level modelling collected from 17 June to 27 June 2002, the quietest time of the year for tourist traffic ... Clearly, this model is inadequate ...²³²

- 4.15** The Ocean Shores Community Association told the Committee that no community meetings were held prior to the introduction of B-Doubles, and added that:

The current [Yelgun – Chinderah] Route was approved in spite of the Local Council, Byron Council objecting to the proposed route. The route was approved before the statutory time for Council to respond. The Matter was referred to the Ombudsman and the response from the RTA was that they would not repeat the charade in the future.²³³

²²⁸ Submission 26 (Far North Coast), Mr Alan Logan and Ms Marianne Logan, p5

²²⁹ Submission 163 (Far North Coast), Mrs Denise Morden, p1

²³⁰ Submission 139 (Far North Coast), C.A.R.S, pp19-20

²³¹ Submission 6 (Far North Coast), Ms Deborah Sharp, p2

²³² Submission 6 (Far North Coast), Ms Deborah Sharp, p1

²³³ Submission 176 (Far North Coast), Ocean Shores Community Association Inc., p1

- 4.16** These views were shared by Ms Jan Barham, Mayor of Byron Shire Council, who told the Committee that the RTA had ‘broke[n] their own rules’²³⁴ by not consulting with local councils before allowing B-Doubles onto the Highway:

The Government approved the B-doubles and the gazettal was given, even before the date that we [Byron Shire Council] were meant to have to lodge our submissions. That was in 2002. It was not only the fact that the RTA breached their own guidelines in relation to B-doubles, but I think the community also thought that they were dismissive and had avoided the whole issue ...²³⁵

- 4.17** The RTA rejected claims that it had not followed correct procedure or considered potential impacts prior to making the decision to allow B-Doubles to use the full length of the Highway:

The RTA undertook and prepared a route assessment impact statement that was in accordance with a standard assessment procedure used throughout New South Wales. As part of this assessment, a broad range of issues were considered.²³⁶

- 4.18** The RTA did not advise the Committee whether or not it consulted local communities regarding the proposal to introduce B-Doubles.

- 4.19** In relation to consultation with Byron Shire Council, the RTA said that it did not need to consult Council on the specific proposal to introduce B-Doubles after completion of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade. This was because the RTA had been ‘liaising with Far North Coast councils for several years on this issue,’ and ‘it was clear that [Byron] Council did not have any technical objection to the proposal.’²³⁷

- 4.20** The RTA advised that Byron Shire Council expressed an objection to the introduction of B-Doubles, but this objection was contained in a submission on an un-related matter (a proposed Highway Upgrade), and was received after the gazettal of B-Doubles was approved and implemented. According to the RTA: ‘as the RTA had received no formal objection from Byron Council prior to gazettal, it relied on discussions and correspondence over a number of years to conclude that Council had no further issues.’²³⁸

Committee view: Introduction to B-Doubles

- 4.21** While the RTA advised that it abided by ‘standard assessment procedure’ in making the decision to grant 25m B-Doubles access to the entire Highway, the Committee is not aware of the nature or extent of any consultation that may have occurred with local communities, including local councils, prior to the RTA making this decision.

²³⁴ Ms Barham, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p4

²³⁵ Ms Barham, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p8

²³⁶ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment B, Item 27, p14

²³⁷ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 27, p14

²³⁸ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 27, p14

Number of heavy vehicles on the Highway

- 4.22** The evidence provided to the Committee shows that there was a substantial increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway in late 2002, soon after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade. This increase was not, however, the result of a direct transfer of heavy vehicles from the New England Highway, as claimed by many Inquiry participants. The RTA’s figures show that there has been no increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway since late 2002. While there has been no increase in heavy vehicle usage since that time, the composition of the heavy vehicle fleet has shifted to include a greater proportion of B-Doubles.
- 4.23** The following section examines discrepancies between evidence provided by the RTA and coastal residents in relation to these arguments.

Did heavy vehicle usage increase after the opening of Yelgun – Chinderah?

- 4.24** Coastal residents and the RTA agreed that there was a substantial increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Highway in late 2002, soon after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade. According to the Railway Technical Society of Australasia:

Following the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah highway 28.5km at a cost of \$348 million in August 2002, the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) approved B-Double truck access for the entire length of the Pacific Highway within NSW. This was on the understanding that *“There will probably be a transfer of some of the B-Doubles from the New England Highway, but the total change in heavy vehicle numbers will be relatively small.”*

Completion of Yelgun – Chinderah in August 2002 and approval of the use of B-Doubles for the entire length of the Pacific Highway was followed by a marked increase in the number of heavy trucks using the Pacific Highway.²³⁹

- 4.25** This view was shared by Associate Professor Phillip Laird of the University of Wollongong:

The opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah bypass in 2002, and other Pacific Highway upgrades have led to a significant increase in the number of long-distance heavy trucks using this highway. This is clearly a case of *‘induced heavy traffic.’*²⁴⁰

- 4.26** Mr Hugh McMaster, Corporate Relations Manager of the NSW Road Transport Association, also observed that there had been a:

... sudden shift in long-distance freight from the New England to the Pacific Highway following the opening of the Chinderah – Yelgun freeway in August three years ago. That certainly substantially increased the volume of long-distance truck traffic on the highway ...²⁴¹

²³⁹ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p2, italics as per original

²⁴⁰ Submission 96 (Far North Coast), Associate Professor Phillip Laird, p2

²⁴¹ Mr Hugh McMaster, Corporate Relations Manager, NSW Road Transport Association, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p3

4.27 The RTA's figures confirm that the number of large heavy vehicles on the Highway, ie both semi-trailers and B-Doubles, increased substantially soon after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade. Based on a count of large heavy vehicles using the Highway near Port Macquarie, usage increased from 890 heavy vehicles per day in 2001 (prior to the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah Upgrade), to 1,230 in late 2002 (soon after the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah Upgrade).²⁴² This represents an increase of 340 heavy vehicles per day.

Did heavy vehicles transfer from the New England to the Pacific Highway?

4.28 Many coastal residents claimed that the substantial increase in heavy vehicle usage of the Pacific Highway in late 2002 was due to a direct transfer of heavy vehicles from the New England Highway. This claim is not supported by figures provided by the RTA.

4.29 The RTA advised the Committee that the number of semi-trailers using the New England Highway remained stable after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade, but that the number of B-Doubles declined.²⁴³ From 2001 to late 2002, heavy traffic using the New England Highway declined by approximately 50 heavy vehicles each day (40 B-Doubles and 10 semi-trailers).²⁴⁴

4.30 The RTA was of the view that the relatively small decline in freight numbers on the New England Highway after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade 'indicate[d] that the New England Highway may not have had a major intercapital transport role even at that time.'²⁴⁵ That is, heavy vehicles on the New England Highway tended to transport local or intra-state freight, and the majority of inter-state freight was already being transported on other routes.

4.31 The RTA's figures suggest that the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade resulted in a direct transfer of 50 heavy vehicles per day (40 B-Doubles and 10 semi-trailers) from the New England to the Pacific Highway. However, the transfer of 50 heavy vehicles from the New England Highway cannot account for the extra 340 large heavy vehicles per day using the Pacific Highway from 2001 to late 2002.²⁴⁶

4.32 The RTA advised that possible reasons for the substantial increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway from 2001 to late 2002 (over and above the transfer of heavy vehicles from the New England Highway) included:

- increased freight to cater for growth in North Coast communities

²⁴² Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p16

²⁴³ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p6

²⁴⁴ Measuring traffic at Uralla, in 2001 the daily average number of semi-trailers using the New England Highway was 260, falling to 250 in late 2002. In 2001 the daily average number of B-Doubles was 120, dropping to 80 in late 2002. See Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p19

²⁴⁵ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p6

²⁴⁶ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p16

- businesses changing their manufacturing and freight distribution operations due to travel time and operating cost savings from Highway improvements
- a strong Australian economy in 2002
- heavy seasonal traffic peaking pre-Christmas.²⁴⁷

4.33 In response to questioning on whether the RTA anticipated the extent of the increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade, the RTA said:

The RTA did anticipate that there would be a transfer of some B-Doubles from the New England Highway to the Pacific Highway as a result of allowing access for those vehicles to the entire route [of the Pacific Highway].²⁴⁸

4.34 The RTA did not advise whether it anticipated the bulk of the increase, which was due to factors other than the transfer of heavy vehicles from the New England Highway.

Usage trends since late 2002

4.35 While the RTA and coastal residents agreed that there was a substantial increase in the number of heavy vehicles on the Highway soon after the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade opened, they held differing views as to whether heavy vehicle usage continued to increase in subsequent years.

4.36 The RTA told the Committee that there was no overall growth in heavy vehicle numbers on the Highway between late 2002 (soon after the opening of Yelgun – Chinderah) and late 2004.²⁴⁹

4.37 However, the RTA acknowledged that there had been a shift in the composition of the heavy vehicle fleet from semi-trailers to B-Doubles:

... the number of semi-trailers on the highway has fallen since late 2002 from around 1,050 per day to around 900 per day and now appears to have stabilised at the lower number, while the number of B-Doubles has shown a gradual increase from around 180 to 300 in the same period ...²⁵⁰

4.38 This means that while there has been no increase in the total number of heavy vehicles (both semi-trailers and B-Doubles) using the Highway since late 2002, an extra 120 B-Doubles are using the Highway every day.

²⁴⁷ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 2, p1

²⁴⁸ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 3, p1

²⁴⁹ This evidence is based on a count of heavy vehicles on the Highway near Port Macquarie. Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p35

²⁵⁰ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p4

- 4.39 The Committee considers it likely that the fears of coastal residents regarding an ongoing increase in heavy vehicle numbers stem from the increased number of B-Doubles using the Pacific Highway in recent years.

B-doubles – do they just carry inter-state freight?

- 4.40 The RTA and other Inquiry participants claimed that half, or in some cases significantly more than half, of the heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway on the North Coast are involved in transporting intra-state (ie local or inter-regional) freight. They claimed that given that such a large proportion of heavy vehicles were delivering goods to local or regional communities, calling for a ban on B-Doubles would be unworkable.
- 4.41 The RTA's submission said that approximately half of the heavy vehicles using the Highway carried intra-state freight:

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Freight Movement Survey (of freight moved on articulated vehicles) showed that the amount of freight moved through the North Coast region (i.e. between Greater Sydney and areas further south to southeast Queensland and areas further north) roughly equalled the amount of freight moving to, from or between areas along the North Coast.²⁵¹

- 4.42 The NSW Road Transport Association claimed that most of the heavy vehicles using the Highway are carrying intra-state freight:

Most truck trips are local trips. Most trucks travelling along North Coast roads, including the Pacific Highway, are moving freight to and/or from a location within that region.²⁵²

- 4.43 The NRMA produced figures from 1999-2000 that showed that at least two-thirds of the volume of freight carried on the North Coast was local or intra-state. On the Mid North Coast, 29% of freight was local, 57% was intra-state, and 14% was inter-state. In the Richmond – Tweed, 51% of freight was local, 16 % was intra-state, and 33% was inter-state.²⁵³

- 4.44 The Committee notes that the claims by the NRMA and the NSW Road Transport Association, and the claim made in the RTA's submission, were based on figures produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, prior to the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade, and prior to the substantial increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway in late 2002. It is therefore impossible to know whether the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade led to a change in the relative proportions of heavy vehicles carrying inter-state and intra-state freight on the Highway.

- 4.45 After making its submission, the RTA provided the Committee with additional, more recent statistics on the number of local and through vehicles using the Pacific Highway. These statistics were extracted from origin-destination surveys for various upgrade projects in 2004 and 2005. However, these statistics are problematic as they do not differentiate between intra-

²⁵¹ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p5

²⁵² Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p2

²⁵³ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, pp6-7

state and inter-state through traffic. Nor do they correlate with the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures from prior to the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade (which differentiated between intra-state and inter-state freight), and which were used by the RTA to assert that half of the heavy vehicles on the Highway are transporting intra-state freight. These statistics are presented in the following tables.

Project: Sapphire to Woolgoolga, north of Coffs Harbour²⁵⁴

Survey Date: May 2005

Location	All Vehicles			Heavy vehicles (Rigid and articulated)				
	Annual Average Daily Traffic (veh/day)	Through Vehicles		Total Heavy Vehicles		Through Heavy Vehicles ¹		
		Volume (veh/day)	% of total	Average Daily HV (veh/day)	% of Total Vehicles	Average Daily Through HV (veh/day)	% of Heavy Vehicles	% of Total Vehicles
North of Opal Cove Resort	19,700	5,450	28%	2,250	11%	1,350	59%	7%
North of Bucca Road	16,100	5,450	34%	1,800	11%	1,350	74%	8%
North of Sandy Beach Overpass	13,450	5,450	40%	1,800	13%	1,350	75%	10%
North of Mullaway Drive	10,150	5,450	54%	1,700	17%	1,350	79%	13%

Notes:

- 1) Vehicles (including heavy vehicles) travelling through the Coffs Harbour urban area, viz. between Englands Road and Opal Cove Resort
- 2) Vehicles (including heavy vehicles) travelling through the Sapphire to Woolgoolga Project area, viz. between Opal Cove Resort and Mullaway Drive

Project: Woodburn to Ballina²⁵⁵

Survey Date: November 2004

Location	All Vehicles			Heavy vehicles (Rigid and articulated)				
	Annual Average Daily Traffic (veh/day)	Through Vehicles ¹		Total Heavy Vehicles		Through Heavy Vehicles ¹		
		Volume (veh/day)	% of total ^{3,4}	Average Daily HV (veh/day)	% of Total Vehicles ⁵	Average Daily Through HV (veh/day)	% of Heavy Vehicles ^{3,4}	% of Total Vehicles

²⁵⁴ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Paul Forward, Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment A, Item 12.1, p1

²⁵⁵ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A, Item 12.1, p2

	All Vehicles			Heavy vehicles (Rigid and articulated)				
	ADT	Through	%	ADT	%	Through	%	%
North Woodburn	7,300	5,800	79%	1,550	21%	1,260	81%	17%
Broadwater	8,600	5,800	67%	1,640	19%	1,260	77%	15%
Wardell	8,600	5,800	67%	1,620	19%	1,260	78%	15%
South of Bruxner Highway	9,700	5,800	60%	1,680	17%	1,260	75%	13%

Notes:

- 1) Through traffic is defined as movements between North Woodburn and just South of the Bruxner Highway
- 2) ADT represents the Average Daily Traffic (vehicles per day). The data sample size was too small to provide an AADT
- 3) The % Through Traffic (All Vehicles & Heavy Vehicles) is derived from 12 Hour OD Survey
- 4) OD Survey included a sample of white cars and ALL Heavy Vehicles
- 5) % of Total Heavy Vehicles is derived from 1 week of Automatic Tube Count Data (2004)

Project: Tintenbar to Ewingsdale²⁵⁶**Survey Date: December 2004**

Location	All Vehicles			Heavy vehicles (Rigid and articulated)				
	Annual Average Daily Traffic (veh/day)	Through Vehicles		Total Heavy Vehicles		Through Heavy Vehicles ¹		
		Volume (veh/day)	% of total	Average Daily HV (veh/day)	% of Total Vehicles	Average Daily Through HV (veh/day)	% of Heavy Vehicles	% of Total Vehicles
South of Ewingsdale	16,463	2,942	18%	2,305	14%	1,500	65%	9%
South of Bangalow	11,454	2,942	26%	1,833	16%	1,500	82%	13%

Through traffic is defined as travelling from south of Ross Lane to North of the Ewingsdale Interchange and vice versa

- 4.46** For the Sapphire to Woolgoolga section of the Highway north of Coffs Harbour, the majority of heavy vehicles were through traffic, accounting for between 59% and 79% of heavy vehicles. Heavy vehicles comprised between 11% and 17% of total vehicles, with through heavy vehicles comprising between 7% and 13% of total vehicles.
- 4.47** For the Woodburn to Ballina section of the Highway, again the majority of heavy vehicles were through traffic, accounting for between 75% and 81% of heavy vehicles. Heavy vehicles comprised between 17% and 21% of total vehicles, with through heavy vehicles comprising between 13% and 17% of total vehicles.

²⁵⁶ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A, Item 12.1, p2

- 4.48** For the Tintenbar to Ewingdale section of the Highway, again the majority of heavy vehicles were through traffic, accounting for between 65% and 82% of heavy vehicles. Heavy vehicles comprised between 14% and 16% of total vehicles, with through heavy vehicles comprising between 9% and 13% of total vehicles.
- 4.49** In these three sections of the Highway, the majority of heavy vehicles were classified as ‘through traffic.’ However, as noted earlier, the RTA’s definition of through traffic includes both inter-state and intra-state traffic.

Accuracy of RTA statistics

- 4.50** Coastal residents disputed the claims made by the RTA, the NRMA, and the NSW Road Transport Association, that at least half, if not more, of the heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway on the North Coast were transporting intra-state (local or inter-regional) freight.
- 4.51** At the Committee’s public forum in Ballina, Mr Tony Gilding disputed the claim that inter-state trucks comprise less than half of the heavy vehicle traffic on the Highway:

I would like to challenge anybody who says that there are not many interstate trucks on the highway. Again, go out there tonight. The figures show that 70 per cent of that truck traffic is interstate truck traffic.²⁵⁷

- 4.52** Mr Andrew Fraser MP, State Member for Coffs Harbour, told the Committee that many people in his Coffs Harbour electorate are sceptical of the RTA’s traffic counts and projections, including the RTA’s figures on the number of heavy vehicles carrying inter-state freight: ‘So I do not believe the figures we get from the RTA can be trusted. No-one in this area really trusts the RTA.’²⁵⁸
- 4.53** However, other coastal residents, such as Mr Chris Shevellar, agreed that intra-state freight accounted for at least half of the heavy vehicles using the Highway on the North Coast. Mr Shevellar, who lives on the Highway at McLeod’s Shoot north of Bangalow, based his view on a traffic count he conducted outside his house in a non-peak period of the morning, which led him to conclude that most freight appeared to be local or regional.²⁵⁹
- 4.54** The RTA’s recent statistics on local compared to through traffic (paragraphs 4.45 – 4.49) do not demonstrate whether the majority of through freight is inter-state, as opposed to intra-state (ie local or inter-regional). Considering that for the Sapphire – Woolgoolga, Woodburn – Ballina and Tintenbar – Ewingdale upgrades examined by this Inquiry, the majority of heavy vehicles were through traffic, the claim by coastal residents that most heavy freight is not servicing their communities may be warranted, even if the majority of freight is found to be intra-state rather than inter-state.
- 4.55** The NSW Road Transport Association called for better statistics to be collected by the RTA in relation to heavy vehicle movements:

²⁵⁷ Mr Gilding, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p19

²⁵⁸ Mr Fraser, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p15

²⁵⁹ Tabled Document 23, ‘Traffic Count taken on the Pacific Highway at McLeod’s Shoot on Thursday 27th October 2005 from 10:15am to 11:15am,’ tabled by Mr Chris Shevellar

Another measure of freight flows along the Pacific Highway is data on vehicle movements, including heavy vehicle movements collected by the Roads and Traffic Authority.

NSW RTA supports measures to improve the quality and relevance of data collection to evaluate trends in traffic volumes, including heavy vehicle traffic volumes, along the Pacific Highway.²⁶⁰

Committee view: Number of heavy vehicles on the Highway

- 4.56** The number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway increased significantly by 340 heavy vehicles per day from 2001 to late 2002, after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade. The Committee concurs that only a small part of this increase was the result of a direct transfer from the New England Highway to the Pacific Highway. It is likely that most of the increase can be explained by factors such as increased demand from coastal communities for goods transported by road freight and a reduction in road freight costs as a result of the Highway improvements. The Committee accepts that the total number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway has remained stable since late 2002.
- 4.57** While the RTA anticipated that there would be some transfer of heavy vehicles from the New England to the Pacific Highway upon the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade, it is unfortunate that the RTA did not predict the extent of the increase in heavy vehicle usage of the Pacific Highway, and have not subsequently provided a rigorous analysis of the reasons for the increase.
- 4.58** The number of B-Doubles using the Pacific Highway has increased (by 120 B-Doubles per day) since late 2002. The Committee accepts that the increased number of B-Doubles reflects the changing composition of the freight task, rather than an overall increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Highway.
- 4.59** The Committee suggests that community perceptions of a continuing increase in the number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway are attributable to the increased number of B-Doubles, which are highly visible and seem to be more intimidating to other motorists as they are longer, heavier, and tend to travel at night.
- 4.60** The RTA and others claimed that at least half of the heavy vehicles using the Highway on the North Coast are servicing local communities by transporting intra-state freight. These claims are based on statistics compiled in 2001 prior to the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade. The Committee does not consider that these statistics provide a reliable basis for such claims. More recent figures provided by the RTA do not distinguish between intra-state and inter-state traffic.
- 4.61** The Committee supports improved data collection to produce current statistics on heavy vehicle usage of both the Pacific and New England Highways. The Committee considers that such data is needed to accurately analyse both intra-state (local and inter-regional) and inter-state freight movements, to inform strategic planning for the Pacific and New England Highways. Improved statistics are also needed to educate the community about the number of heavy vehicles transporting intra-state freight, which meets the needs of regional communities.

²⁶⁰ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, pp3-4

- 4.62** In relation to improved statistics, Recommendation 11 of the Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce Report called for:

Traffic data, post Yelgun to Chinderah, should be gathered by the RTA and analysed looking at the movement of freight between Sydney and Brisbane, in particular the relative distribution of the freight task between the Pacific Highway and the New England Highway.²⁶¹

- 4.63** The RTA advised the Committee that it is in the process of implementing all the recommendations of the Noise Taskforce Report. The Committee encourages the RTA to implement this recommendation as a matter of urgency.

Community concerns regarding heavy vehicles

- 4.64** Inquiry participants residing on the North Coast repeatedly told the Committee that the introduction of B-Doubles to the Pacific Highway has had a deleterious impact. In particular they expressed serious concerns regarding the safety of B-Doubles, and heavy vehicles generally, and the dangers of mixing local and through traffic. However, the Committee was also told that road freight benefits coastal communities.

Impact of B-Doubles on coastal communities

- 4.65** In describing the impact of B-Doubles, Newrybar resident Ms Rebecca Zentveld said:

Unless you were a local resident, or oft-time user of the Pacific Highway between Grafton and Ocean Shores you would have no idea of the impact caused in 2002 by allowing B-doubles onto the highway. Trucks now rule the road ...²⁶²

- 4.66** Fellow Far North Coast residents Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East expressed concerns about the 'enormous' impact of B-Doubles:

The B-Doubles with their strict time schedules, put great pressure on all other traffic to move at their speed by tail-gating and intimidation. The loss of a sense and reality of safety has been felt by all. They travel in large numbers in very close formation, particularly at night. It no longer feels safe to drive at night on the Pacific Highway.²⁶³

- 4.67** Woolgoolga residents Mrs Kay and Mr Kurt Froehling told the Committee of their fears of driving on the Highway with B-Doubles:

We live in fear of driving to and from Coffs Harbour – our regional centre, because of the number of trucks and B-Doubles that daily continue to increase because of the opening of the Chinderah Expressway – many of these drivers are “cowboys” who

²⁶¹ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A3: *Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce Report*, August 2003, p8

²⁶² Submission 67 (Far North Coast), Ms Rebecca Zentveld, p2

²⁶³ Submission 54 (Far North Coast), Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East, p2

intimidate drivers with their speed and size and cause so many accidents. Entering and leaving the Highway is fraught with danger.²⁶⁴

4.68 Similarly, Mrs Shirley and Mr Ken Medhurst of the Mid North Coast told the Committee of their own negative experiences of sharing the Highway with trucks. They concluded:

I now hate living on this part of the coast as it's a nightmare to travel into Coffs Harbour along that road, and of a night-time to listen to the noise of them on the highway. We now have our house up for sale, as we can see nothing has been done about the matter ...²⁶⁵

4.69 The Newrybar Landcare Group submitted a booklet of numerous stories from North Coast residents outlining their adverse experiences with trucks. The booklet said in summary:

The writers document stories of intimidation, bullying, tailgating, speed, overtaking illegally. But the constant message is that people are being pushed off the highway so the trucks can get through.²⁶⁶

4.70 One contributor, a resident of the Coffs Harbour area, said that he had urged locals who had stories of similarly 'horrific experiences' to contact him:

I received about four and a half thousand letters, email, phone calls, and petition signatures, over a fairly short period of time, all from very frightened and concerned residents.

The areas of complaint fell into three main groups:

- Serious, very dangerous tailgating.
- Highly excessive speeds, up to one hundred and thirty kph in many cases.
- Deliberate cutting off of smaller vehicles at the end of overtaking lanes.²⁶⁷

4.71 Inquiry participants frequently attributed their road safety fears to the mixing of passenger and heavy vehicles on the one road.

Mixing of passenger and heavy vehicles

4.72 The mixing of passenger and heavy vehicles was a key concern of Inquiry participants, including Mrs Blanche Brown, who lives near Sapphire on the Mid North Coast:

Local residents, young and the elderly alike are terrified to travel on the road where they must compete with huge trucks, especially the B-Doubles now using the highway

²⁶⁴ Submission 56 (Coffs Harbour), Mrs Kay and Mr Kurt Froehling, p1

²⁶⁵ Submission 15 (Coffs Harbour), Mrs Shirley and Mr Ken Medhurst, p2

²⁶⁶ Submission 100 (Far North Coast), Newrybar Landcare Group, Attachment B: *Truck Stories*, p1

²⁶⁷ Submission 100 (Far North Coast), Newrybar Landcare Group, Attachment B: *Truck Stories*, p19

in our area. We have no other road to use to do our grocery shopping and parents are terrified to let their P plate teenagers go out at night time to visit their friends.²⁶⁸

4.73 Ms Lorraine Wood of Bonville said she also had fears about the mixing of traffic:

Going to the post office or our local shops, you are also taking your life in your hands because you are going through an area where people are going from south to north. They just want to get there quickly. You just want to post a letter.²⁶⁹

4.74 Mr Rodney and Mrs Carol Betland told the Committee of the dangers of entering the Highway from their property at Korora, which directly fronts the Highway:

We are now frightened to travel on the highway, particularly at night with the many trucks. It's a nightmare when entering and exiting – you find yourself holding your breath, praying and hoping for the best. We've had a number of close calls which have left us shaken, horrified and very angry. People shouldn't have to live like this.²⁷⁰

4.75 The comments from Ms Judy Baker, a resident of Bangalow, were typical of the fears expressed by many older drivers:

As I age, I am becoming increasingly nervous about driving my small Corolla on the highway, with large trucks looming up fast as I enter the highway from our local roads. I do not wish to become isolated and restricted in my travels because of nerves.²⁷¹

4.76 Mr Robert Forrest from the Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce also noted his concerns in relation to the impact of heavy vehicle traffic on older drivers:

We have an ageing population. Recently an aged care facility opened in our area. That industry tends to be growing. If you are going to put in a high-speed highway and mix it with local traffic, especially with aged persons, you will have a recipe for danger.²⁷²

4.77 The NSW Road Transport Association told the Committee that problems resulting from the mixing of local and inter-state traffic will increase, due to population and tourism growth:

The impact of the mix of local and interstate traffic on the Pacific Highway has also been a long standing issue ... The Pacific Highway is used by local residents for short journeys to and from school, work and for other reasons. It is also a major route for local holiday makers and overseas visitors. The North Coast has also proved attractive for retirees ...

Over time, there has been a substantial growth in the population of retirees, in employment and in the volume of tourism on the North Coast.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ Submissions 69 (Far North Coast), Mrs Blanche Brown, p1

²⁶⁹ Ms Wood, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p47

²⁷⁰ Submission 13 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Rodney and Mrs Carol Betland, p2

²⁷¹ Submission 85 (Far North Coast), Ms Judy Baker, p1

²⁷² Mr Forrest, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p52

²⁷³ Submission 14 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p5

- 4.78** Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP, Federal Member for Cowper, also noted that population growth was increasing the problem of mixing traffic. Mr Hartsuyker gave the example of the Sapphire to Woolgoolga section of the Highway near Coffs Harbour:

We are seeing a major shopping centre and we are seeing a major subdivision ... The profile of the traffic on that road is changing ... drivers who are undertaking local trips are travelling with a different frame of mind and a different mindset to those who are actually focused on a much longer trip. We are getting drivers with that short-term mentality who are just ducking down to the shop for a carton of milk and they are interfacing with B-doubles of up to 65 tonnes that are hurtling down the highway. It is a formula for disaster.²⁷⁴

- 4.79** Mr Doug Prendergast of Coffs Harbour also expressed concerns about the dangers of mixing traffic given high projected population growth:

Knowing these volumes of people are due and will arrive should mean the local traffic and the through traffic should never be mixed, but the plans that have been disclosed indicating the Highway Upgrade will be a renewing of the existing road. If ever the opportunity existed to separate the two modes of traffic, now is the time!!!²⁷⁵

- 4.80** Far North Coast resident Mr Colin Lewis claimed that the dangers of mixing local and through traffic are well known:

Experience world-wide has demonstrated that the mixing of completely different types of transport (such as local, long-haulage heavy freight, tourist, business, pleasure etc.) on a single road system, no matter how well-designed and built, is a recipe for disaster.²⁷⁶

- 4.81** Byron Shire Council noted the ‘well documented’ dangers of mixing traffic:

It is a well documented fact that the mix of local traffic with through traffic is undesirable in road safety, but a system that encourages a mix of heavy through traffic with local traffic can produce a deadly cocktail that this local community does not want.²⁷⁷

- 4.82** Mr Neville Neal, Executive Officer, Coffs Harbour Students’ Association, told of the dangers of mixing inexperienced drivers with heavy traffic:

... what we need is to separate the traffic because, while you have that sort of traffic – B-doubles coming in one direction and an 18-year-old who has just got his licence going in the other direction – people are going to get killed.

- 4.83** It was not only coastal residents, but truck drivers too, who objected on safety grounds to the mixing of local traffic and heavy freight. According to the NSW Road Transport Association:

²⁷⁴ Mr Hartsuyker, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p19

²⁷⁵ Submission 39 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Doug Prendergast, p1

²⁷⁶ Submission 75 (Far North Coast), Mr Colin Lewis, p2

²⁷⁷ Submission 188 (Far North Coast), Byron Shire Council, p3

The Pacific Highway is now the major freight route between Sydney and Brisbane. The impact of the mix of local and interstate traffic means the Pacific Highway is increasingly a local road, a tourist road and an interstate freight route. As a two-lane road carrying current and forecast traffic volumes, this cannot continue.²⁷⁸

- 4.84** This Chapter will later consider steps taken by the RTA to address residents' safety concerns (paragraphs 4.124 – 4.133).

Benefits of road freight for coastal communities

- 4.85** Many North Coast residents who were concerned about road safety called for heavy vehicles, especially B-Doubles, to be removed from the Highway. However, the Committee heard counter-arguments that the growing communities of the east coast depend on the goods transported by heavy vehicles.

- 4.86** Mr Chris Shevellar, a resident of the Far North Coast, told the Committee that new residents '... expect city services. They expect next day delivery in the supermarket, in their businesses and elsewhere. This demand can only be met by road freight.'²⁷⁹

- 4.87** Mr Hugh McMaster, Corporate Relations Manager of the NSW Road Transport Association, claimed that road freight is suited to the speedy delivery of goods:

The logistics chain is based more and more these days on moving goods in a time sensitive manner, and if you need to get something to a certain point by a certain time you have a greater likelihood of achieving that by using a truck ...²⁸⁰

- 4.88** In addition, the NSW Road Transport Association noted the importance of road freight in transporting locally-produced goods to Brisbane and thus supporting the economies of the North Coast:

Brisbane and other areas of south east Queensland are also a natural market for industry based on the Mid North Coast and North Coast. Brisbane is also a major port and the export destination for containerised cargo and break bulk cargo that originates from the North Coast.²⁸¹

- 4.89** Mr Mark Crosdale of the TWU said that removing B-Doubles from the Highway would lead to higher prices for consumers:

... you get more freight on a B-double ... The removal of B-doubles from the Pacific Highway would have the effect of probably increasing the price of goods that are brought into the place and the cost of getting freight back out ...²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Mr McMaster, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p4

²⁷⁹ Mr Shevellar, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p61

²⁸⁰ Mr McMaster, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p11

²⁸¹ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p5

²⁸² Mr Crosdale, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p20

- 4.90** The RTA claimed that B-Doubles were the most effective type of road freight in catering for the needs of growing coastal communities, and indeed may lead to a reduction in the number of vehicles on the Highway:

These vehicles carry both local and intrastate freight and have provided savings due to the fact that they can carry 1.5 times more freight than the standard semi-trailer. The end result means fewer trucks on the Highway creating improved safety and noise levels.²⁸³

- 4.91** The benefits of B-Doubles compared to other types of articulated vehicles were also acknowledged by Byron Shire Council:

It is recognised that B-Doubles may have some benefit in terms of their impact on infrastructure. The axle loadings remain the same as single articulated trucks but the added bogey has a net result of lowering the potential increase in total truck numbers using the highway. However, their impact on road safety is the main concern of the local community across Byron Shire.²⁸⁴

- 4.92** Evidence was presented that reducing the number of trucks on the road would reduce negative environmental impacts such as greenhouse gas emissions and fuel consumption. The NSW Road Transport Association noted that regardless of decreasing the number of trucks on the Highway, B-Doubles tended to be more environmentally friendly than semi-trailers:

There are also substantial environmental benefits from the use of B-Doubles compared to semi-trailers, because the level of greenhouse gas emissions and fuel consumption per tonne-kilometre is significantly lower with B-Doubles than is the case with semi-trailers.²⁸⁵

Committee view: Community concerns regarding heavy vehicles

- 4.93** The substantial evidence received by the Committee demonstrates that the mixing of passenger and heavy vehicles is one of the key concerns of North Coast residents. It was clear to the Committee that North Coast residents wanted local traffic separated from through traffic, and in particular, from heavy vehicles transporting inter-state freight. Not only coastal residents objected to the mixing of traffic: truck drivers also considered it dangerous.
- 4.94** While local residents voiced strong objections to heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway, the Committee notes that road freight benefits coastal communities by delivering goods in a timely manner and transporting locally-produced goods to market. The evidence also indicated that B-Doubles have additional benefits compared to other types of heavy vehicles, in terms of carrying more freight (lowering the number of trucks on the road and decreasing the cost of freight) and environmental benefits (lower greenhouse emissions and fuel use).

²⁸³ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p4

²⁸⁴ Submission 188 (Far North Coast), Byron Shire Council, p2

²⁸⁵ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p4

- 4.95** Despite these apparent benefits, the Committee notes the serious safety concerns of many community members that stem from the mixing of traffic. In Chapter 5 the Committee examines the evidence in favour of establishing an inland freight route, which has the potential to decrease the mixing of local and heavy inter-state traffic.

Heavy vehicle safety

- 4.96** Inquiry participants were divided on the safety of B-Doubles: coastal residents argued that as B-Doubles are larger and heavier than other types of heavy vehicles, such as semi-trailers, they are inherently more dangerous. However, the RTA told the Committee that B-Doubles are a comparatively safer type of vehicle, and that size and weight are not the most accurate predictors of vehicle safety. Central to this argument are the statistics on the number of B-Doubles involved in accidents.

Number of accidents involving heavy vehicles

- 4.97** The Committee heard debate as to the number of heavy vehicles, especially B-Doubles, that are involved in accidents, as well as whether heavy vehicles generally are more likely to cause accidents.

- 4.98** The Pacific Highway Safety Review was conducted by the RTA after it was established by the Hon Carl Scully MP, then NSW Minister for Roads, in late 2003. The aim of the Review was to analyse the circumstances of the high number of fatalities on the Highway in 2003, with particular reference to the impact of heavy vehicles on road safety. The Review found that of the 44 fatal accidents on the Highway in 2003, 14 involved heavy vehicles. It also found that 25% of vehicles involved in fatal crashes on the Highway were heavy trucks. As heavy trucks account for only 15 – 20% of total traffic, this led the RTA to conclude in the Review that ‘heavy trucks appear to be over-represented in fatal crashes.’²⁸⁶

- 4.99** The Railway Technical Society of Australasia provided figures for fatalities involving heavy trucks in the decade previous to 2003:

Additional data supplied by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority to the University of Wollongong shows that for the 10 years to 31 December 2003 and for road accidents on the Pacific Highway from Maitland to the Queensland Border, articulated trucks were involved in 36 per cent (163) of all fatalities (551).²⁸⁷

- 4.100** There was conjecture concerning whether the increase in heavy vehicle usage of the Highway in late 2002 led to a deterioration in road safety. According to Associate Professor Phillip Laird of the University of Wollongong ‘the increase in heavy traffic to date has had adverse road safety and other impacts on motorists.’²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ RTA, *Pacific Highway Safety Review*, May 2004, pp2- 3

²⁸⁷ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p3

²⁸⁸ Submission 96 (Far North Coast), Associate Professor Phillip Laird, p1

4.101 On the other hand, the RTA told the Committee that:

... since the opening of the Pacific Highway to B-Doubles, the number of crashes involving large heavy vehicles has not reflected the increased usage of the route. For example, between July 2002 and June 2005, the number of crashes involving these vehicle types was roughly the same as would have been expected from the monthly average of the previous three and a half year period ... Since implementation of measures outlined in the Pacific Highway Safety Review, the number of these fatal crashes has been trending down.²⁸⁹

4.102 Figures provided by the RTA showed that for 2004, there were 911 crashes on the Highway, of which 30 involved B-Doubles.²⁹⁰ Of the 30 crashes that involved B-Doubles, 2 were fatal, 16 resulted in injury, and 12 were classed as non-casualty. The RTA concluded that ‘the information shows the number of recorded crashes involving B-doubles is a small proportion of the recorded number of all crashes.’

4.103 The RTA claimed that B-Doubles are safer than other types of articulated heavy vehicles. In response to questioning from the Committee, the RTA analysed of heavy vehicle crashes in New South Wales, which showed that ‘... there are considerably less crashes involving B-Doubles than other articulated vehicles per million tonnes of goods moved in NSW.’²⁹¹ These figures showed that B-Doubles had 0.025 involvements in recorded crashes per million vehicle tonne km travelled, whereas other articulated trucks had 0.089 involvements in recorded crashes per million vehicle tonne km travelled.

4.104 Some sections of the community questioned the accuracy of RTA statistics concerning the involvement of B-Doubles in road accidents. CARS member Dr Robert Lodge told the Committee that:

The issue is this: Are there fewer people dying on the road now than there were before the upgrades? The answer is: No, there are more people dying. That is the straight interpretation of the figures on the RTA web site. There is an interpretation on the RTA web site of road fatalities which refers to years before. I cannot give you the exact date, but it certainly does not detail the last three years since the Yelgun-Chinderah section has been open.²⁹²

Consequences of accidents involving heavy vehicles

4.105 Despite the high proportion of heavy trucks involved in fatal crashes, the RTA’s Pacific Highway Safety Review found that for the 14 fatal crashes involving heavy trucks in 2003, ‘only one in three heavy trucks were deemed to be the key vehicle – *the key vehicle is deemed to be the vehicle performing the manoeuvre most likely to have contributed to the crash.*’²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p5

²⁹⁰ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A, Item 6, p2

²⁹¹ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A, Item 7, pp2-3

²⁹² Dr Lodge, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p18

²⁹³ RTA, *Pacific Highway Safety Review*, May 2004, p15, emphasis as per original

- 4.106** Whether or not heavy vehicles were at fault in most crashes in which they were involved, the NRMA noted that the consequences of crashes involving heavy vehicles were likely to be more serious:

Collisions between light and heavy vehicles are a major concern as in most cases the occupants of the light vehicle are killed or seriously injured ... While in many of these collisions the light vehicle driver is judged to be at fault, heavy vehicles should be designed to minimise injury to other road users. The mass and stiffness of heavy vehicles means they are very aggressive to other road users.²⁹⁴

- 4.107** A similar view was expressed in the findings of the Pacific Highway Safety Review, which used as an example the consequences when heavy vehicles exceed the speed limit:

Even when the truck is not recorded as the 'key vehicle' in the crash, it may have been a significant contributor to the crash by virtue of its speed ... The impact when colliding with a truck is also likely to be of greater severity than if another type of vehicle such as a car was involved.²⁹⁵

- 4.108** The Pacific Highway Safety Review further found that:

... recent surveys have confirmed that there is a speeding problem on major highways across NSW. There is also a view in some parts of the industry that the chances of being detected while speeding is low, particularly late at night and in the early hours of the morning when many long distance heavy vehicle movements take place.²⁹⁶

- 4.109** CARS elaborated on the incidence of speeding among heavy vehicles:

RTA speed surveys on the Pacific Highway have shown "85% of trucks are speeding in the range 104 to 114 kph with individual vehicles recorded at significantly higher speeds".²⁹⁷

Design of B-doubles and safety

- 4.110** The fears of coastal residents regarding the safety of B-Doubles were expressed by Mr Andrew Fraser MP, State Member for Coffs Harbour, who told the Committee:

There is a lot of angst about B-doubles on that highway, which have the ability to scare many people. I think a 65-tonne vehicle trying to stop in a hurry is more of a problem than a 45-tonne vehicle.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, p8

²⁹⁵ RTA, *Pacific Highway Safety Review*, May 2004, p19

²⁹⁶ RTA, *Pacific Highway Safety Review*, May 2004, p40

²⁹⁷ Submission 139 (Far North Coast), C.A.R.S, p25

²⁹⁸ Mr Fraser, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p14

4.111 However, the Committee was told by Mr Soames Job, General Manager, Road Safety Strategy, RTA, that ‘there are a number of logical safety reasons’ why B-Doubles are safer than semi-trailers, including:

- more rigorous driver licensing requirements due to increased vehicle complexity
- inherently more stable configuration of a B-Double than a semi-trailer because of the extra point of articulation
- prime mover must be of a higher quality
- prime mover must have spray protection (to stop spray coming out of the tyres) to improve visibility for vehicles behind them
- must have ABS brakes.²⁹⁹

4.112 The NSW Road Transport Association agreed that B-Doubles are safer than other types of heavy vehicles such as semi-trailers:

B-Doubles are considered to be the safest of the larger heavy vehicles used on Australian roads. This is because they are a more stable vehicle combination with better road holding and steering ability than semi-trailers. B-Doubles on average comprise a younger fleet than semi-trailers. The average B-Double holds 50% more freight in terms of weight and volume than a semi-trailer ... Therefore, B-Doubles reduce the number of heavy vehicles on the highway.³⁰⁰

4.113 In evidence, the NSW Road Transport Association’s Mr Hugh McMaster told the Committee that while the heavier B-Double takes a longer distance to stop, this did not make the B-Double a more dangerous vehicle:

... you cannot take one factor in isolation and say that it automatically creates a greater or lesser risk. It is a matter of looking at all factors at play ... At the end of the day, the record speaks for itself. I understand that there have been three, four or five fatal crashes involving B-doubles on the Pacific Highway in three years. There have been very few serious crashes, as I understand it.³⁰¹

4.114 Mr Mark Crosdale of the TWU said that the primary determinant of vehicles safety is its operation and maintenance, not its size:

It is all in the way the vehicle is operated ... In my experience all vehicle types that I have driven, if the vehicle is well maintained and it is driven according to the road conditions and the vehicle, I believe it has never been any less safe than any other vehicle. If you put me in a little eight-tonnes delivery truck that has bad brakes and have me charging around town racing through the traffic lights, I would argue that is much more unsafe than my being in a B-double, being rested and driving that vehicle professionally within its limits and design constraints.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Mr Soames Job, General Manager, Road Safety Strategy, RTA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p45

³⁰⁰ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p4

³⁰¹ Mr McMaster, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p5

³⁰² Mr Crosdale, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p17

What could be done to improve heavy vehicle safety?

4.115 The Committee was told that fatigue, and systemic pressures on drivers to work long hours, were key factors in heavy vehicle accidents. According to Mr Crosdale of the TWU, heavy vehicle drivers work 14 to 16 hours each day, for either six out of seven days or 12 out of 14 days. Mr Crosdale noted that drivers were often forced into doing additional work at either end of these shifts (such as loading or unloading the vehicle or making additional short trips), exacerbating fatigue.³⁰³

4.116 The Committee heard that there are not enough rest stops on the Highway to combat driver fatigue. The RTA advised the Committee that its target is to have no more than 50km between designated rest areas, and that:

There are currently 29 heavy vehicle rest areas located along the 677km length of Pacific Highway. Of these, 5 rest areas are newly constructed and a further 9 sites have been upgraded within the last three years.³⁰⁴

4.117 In addition, there are few service centres in northern New South Wales. Mr Hugh McMaster of the NSW Road Transport Association noted that the lower price of petrol in Queensland made it difficult to encourage the establishment of service centres:

... my understanding is that the Queensland Government gives a rebate of several cents per litre ...

What that means is that there are not a lot of trucks filling up on the North Coast. That means that it is difficult from a commercial viewpoint to establish a business case to build the type of service centres that you see in locations like Yass on the Hume Highway. It is our view that those service centres would be very beneficial to all road users.³⁰⁵

4.118 Mr McMaster added that introducing a fuel rebate for drivers filling up on the North Coast would encourage the establishment of service centres.

4.119 However, Mr Crosdale said that building rest areas or establishing service centres alone will not prevent driver fatigue: 'The bigger issue for us is there is no incentive for drivers to stop in those rest areas... the bigger issue facing the industry is that people do not have time to stop.'³⁰⁶

4.120 Mr Crosdale described the new 'chain of responsibility' legislation which came into force in March 2006 which aims to remove systemic pressures forcing drivers to work excessive hours:

Fatigue is the most significant contributor to accidents in the heavy vehicle industry. I am not sure whether the Committee is aware that many drivers are pushed to the limit by transport operators who are themselves working for slim margins because of the

³⁰³ Mr Crosdale, Evidence, 26 September 2005, pp14 - 15

³⁰⁴ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A, Item 12.2, p5

³⁰⁵ Mr McMaster, Evidence, 26 September 2005, 10

³⁰⁶ Mr Crosdale, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p15

demands placed on them by clients, such as major retailers, who control the transport industry.

Having said that, the NSW Government recently gazetted the *Occupational Health and Safety (Long Distance Truck Driver Fatigue) Regulation 2004*, which will come into effect in March next year [2006]. The new regulation will ensure that all participants in the contracting chain are responsible for pressures placed on drivers to make deliveries in unreasonable and unachievable time frames.³⁰⁷

- 4.121** Mr Michael Bushby, Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, RTA, told the Committee that the new legislation would apply across jurisdictions:

Certainly Queensland also has chain of responsibility legislation and the other jurisdictions will progressively be falling into line with that model legislation. We recognise that the heavy vehicle industry is a national industry. It means that the jurisdictions need to be able to work together to have a consistent approach ...³⁰⁸

- 4.122** The RTA updated the Committee on progress in implementing this new legislation:

The RTA has begun exercising its new powers under the Act by issuing statutory Directions to produce information and records to several off-road parties. To date, enforcement activities have concentrated on customers of freight.³⁰⁹

- 4.123** The NRMA claimed that better design could also significantly improve heavy vehicle safety. They argued that the constant push from the heavy vehicle industry for longer vehicles and greater weights should be balanced against requiring improvements to vehicle design such as front, side and rear under run guards, anti-lock brakes on all axles, and tamper-proof on-board monitoring and speed limited equipment.³¹⁰ In addition to design improvements, the NRMA called for increased enforcement of heavy vehicle speed limits, and front and rear detection for all heavy vehicle camera enforcement (due to the practice of the prime mover having a different number plate to the trailer).

RTA's response to community safety concerns

- 4.124** The RTA advised the Committee that 'the RTA appreciates that the larger 25-metre B-Doubles are a cause of concern to some sections of the community.'³¹¹ The RTA said that it had actively engaged with coastal communities and other stakeholders regarding heavy vehicle safety and had taken steps to address their concerns.
- 4.125** Despite the objections of some sections of the community, the RTA advised the Committee that plans to upgrade the Highway to freeway type M-class standard were in response to residents' concerns about sharing the road with heavy vehicles. Mr Soames Job said:

³⁰⁷ Mr Crosdale, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p13

³⁰⁸ Mr Bushby, Evidence, *Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2005 – 2006: Roads*, 15 March 2005, p12

³⁰⁹ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence, 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment A, Item 14, p9

³¹⁰ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, p8

³¹¹ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p4

... we are concerned about the community's problems with the heavy vehicles and their concerns with the sharing the road with them. One of the reasons for the dual lane in each direction is to actually overcome that because a lot of those conflicts arise from people travelling at different speeds. So people find that they have heavy vehicles coming up behind them or they find difficulty overtaking heavy vehicles. If you put two lanes in each direction then, in effect, you have an overtaking lane next to each travel lane.

So we expect that having multiple lanes in each direction will actually substantially reduce that perception of conflict and that perception of difficulty with sharing the road with the heavy vehicles. So it is part of the reason, again, for wanting four lanes rather than one lane in each direction with separation.³¹²

- 4.126** The RTA advised that by proposing M class upgrades, they were responding to community sentiment as the 'standard of access takes into account growing community desires for separation of local and through traffic.'³¹³ According to the Mr Bob Higgins, General Manager, Pacific Highway, RTA:

Interestingly, as we move forward we are now getting representations from those sections of the community that have been upgraded to class A that they now want grade-separated interchanges ... So we are under increasing pressure to move to a higher standard for their safety as they access that highway. We are under pressure even on some of our projects that we are building now, which we believe are safe for at-grade intersections. They are saying to us now, "We want you to move to an at-grade separated interchange now." So one of the things that we are doing on the class A sections is trying to get it planned in such a way that it can be upgraded to that higher standard in the future.³¹⁴

- 4.127** As noted earlier, the NSW Roads Minister tasked the RTA with conducting the Pacific Highway Safety Review in late 2003. The aim of the Review was to review 'road safety issues as they relate to the heavy vehicles and involved consideration of comments from a range of stakeholders and community interests.'³¹⁵ The Review's findings were published in May 2004.
- 4.128** Five strategic programs were developed through the Pacific Highway Safety Review to reduce the severity and incidence of crashes, including upgrading the condition of the road (through engineering works other than the provision of dual carriageway), and behavioural, enforcement and technology measures targeting behaviour such as driver fatigue and speeding.³¹⁶
- 4.129** The 'Enforcement program' contained a set of activities to address key concerns relating to the regulation of heavy vehicles, namely driver fatigue, speeding, and compliance with legal requirements. These enforcement activities included logbook checks (cross-checks to verify accuracy), Safe-T-Cam surveillance, monitoring roadworthiness (visual and mechanical

³¹² Mr Job, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p49

³¹³ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p13

³¹⁴ Mr Bob Higgins, Evidence, 18 November 2005, p26

³¹⁵ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, pp4-5

³¹⁶ RTA, *Pacific Highway Safety Review*, May 2004, p31

inspections at roadside enforcement sites), deploying RTA vehicle inspectors, co-ordination with police enforcement, and education and consultation with truck drivers and fleet managers.³¹⁷

- 4.130** At a Budget Estimates hearing in March 2005, the RTA said that much had been done to improve heavy vehicle safety in recent times, including the introduction of new legislation relating to placing speed limiters in heavy vehicles, conducting heavy vehicle inspections as part of the registration process, trialling in-vehicle speed cameras, the ‘chain of responsibility’ laws, requiring front under-run protection and cabin strength for 26-metre B-Doubles, and ongoing campaigns to address the behavioural issues of truck drivers.³¹⁸
- 4.131** In relation to heavy vehicle checking stations, which are used to enforce road transport law by deterring speeding and overloading and avoiding driver fatigue, the RTA advised that in the last financial year they screened 111,063 heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway, resulting in 43,289 vehicles inspected and 7,558 offences recorded.³¹⁹ In relation to the automated Safe-T-Cam monitoring system, the RTA advised that there are six Safe-T-Cam locations along the Highway, which identify speed, fatigue and unregistered vehicles, as well as vehicles attempting to avoid a Safe-T-Cam or Heavy Vehicle Checking Station.³²⁰
- 4.132** The Review involved consultation with local communities and other stakeholders, including experienced road safety experts, RTA officers, representatives of the NSW Police, an inspection of the Highway by senior RTA officers including on-site meetings with representatives of the RTA and NSW Police, as well as stakeholder input including local government, health and emergency services, the road transport industry, local communities, and the NRMA.³²¹
- 4.133** The RTA advised that all recommendations of the Review were being progressively implemented, and that progress to date included:
- 12.2km of Median Wire Rope Safety Barrier constructed over the length of the Highway
 - eight intersections constructed with a further seven planned
 - painted wider medians, audio tactile line marking, signposting and delineation
 - ten Variable Message Signs (VMS), with a total of 27 strategic sites identified
 - four new rest areas and eight upgrades completed and 17 truck bays (with more planned).³²²

³¹⁷ RTA, *Pacific Highway Safety Review*, May 2004, pp38 – 39

³¹⁸ Mr Bushby, Evidence, *Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2005 – 2006: Roads*, 15 March 2005, pp11-12

³¹⁹ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence, 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment A, Item 10, pp6-7

³²⁰ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence, 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment A, Item 13, pp8-9

³²¹ RTA, *Pacific Highway Safety Review*, May 2004, pp5 & 7

³²² Answers to questions taken on notice during hearing of 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 5, pp2-3

Committee view: Heavy vehicle safety

- 4.134** The Committee concludes that while heavy vehicles are not at fault in most road accidents, heavy vehicles are over-represented in fatal accidents due to their greater size and weight. As B-Doubles are involved in comparatively fewer crashes than other types of heavy vehicles, it is erroneous to conflate B-Doubles with other types of heavy vehicles, as seems to be case among coastal residents, when considering heavy vehicle safety.
- 4.135** The Committee heard evidence that the RTA is aware of community safety concerns regarding the mixing of light and heavy traffic and is attempting to respond to these concerns, in part by the proposal to upgrade the Highway to M-class or freeway-type standard. A number of coastal residents, on the other hand, claimed that upgrading the Highway to M-class standard is only necessary due to the substantial number of heavy vehicles using the Highway, and in particular, heavy vehicles carrying inter-state freight. These residents asserted that if heavy vehicles carrying inter-state freight were directed to instead use an inland route, an A-class upgrade of the Pacific Highway would be adequate for the needs of local residents and tourist traffic. Calls for an inland freight route are discussed in Chapter 5.
- 4.136** The RTA said the Pacific Highway Safety Review demonstrates its willingness to address community concerns about heavy vehicle safety. The Committee urges the RTA to ensure that the recommendations of the Review, particularly those relating to heavy vehicle safety, are implemented as soon as possible.
- 4.137** In addition, the Committee calls on the RTA to improve heavy vehicle safety by collaborating with state governments, the Commonwealth Government, employers and the Transport Workers' Union to develop comprehensive 'chain of responsibility' legislation similar to that already implemented in New South Wales.

Recommendation 3

That the NSW Government collaborate with other state governments, the Commonwealth Government, employers and the Transport Workers' Union to develop comprehensive 'chain of responsibility' legislation, modelled on the NSW *Occupational Health and Safety (Long Distance Truck Driver Fatigue) Regulation 2004* for the trucking industry.

Noise pollution

- 4.138** Some Inquiry participants told the Committee that noise generated by the greater number of heavy vehicles using the Highway had increasingly intruded into their lives in recent years, and was destroying the peace of their coastal communities. In particular, blame was directed towards B-Doubles.

Community concerns regarding noise pollution

4.139 Ms Deborah Sharp was one of many residents living near the Highway who said that noise levels had increased. Ms Sharp told the Committee that she lives half a kilometre from an upgraded stretch of Highway in Byron Shire. According to Ms Sharp the pavement surface is a random grooved concrete surface, which increased the sound intensity of traffic noise by 180%. Ms Sharp questioned why the RTA was still using concrete surfaces, given that pavement type is known to be a key issue in the type and level of traffic noise.

4.140 Ms Sharp believed that the increased noise resulting from the concrete surface was exacerbated by the introduction of B-Doubles:

To make matters worse, since the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah By-pass, we are now subjected to a 30%, possibly more increase in heavy traffic with B-doubles which used to travel the New England Highway, now roaming the Pacific Highway day and night with their increased engine capacity and tyre noise.³²³

4.141 Mr RJ Christopher, a resident of the Mid North Coast, described his experience of noise levels since the completion of the Yelgun to Chinderah Upgrade and the introduction of B-Doubles:

... the noise level for people living in proximity of the highway in the Coffs Harbour area has risen to unacceptable levels. Anyone living on a down hill stretch of the highway suffers doubly with the noise of compression braking on the down hill side and the exhaust noise of huge trucks climbing on the uphill side.³²⁴

4.142 Mr Alan and Ms Valerie Griffiths described the noise problems experienced by residents of Korora on the Mid North Coast:

The residents of Korora are long suffering indeed. Because of the land formation the ongoing truck noise permeates every corner ... Compression braking from south bound trucks down the Opal Cove section, as well as those north bound travelling down Korora Hill, can at times, be likened to Kingsford Smith Airport's peak periods.³²⁵

4.143 Several residents of the Far North Coast who live near the Highway told the Committee that noise had increased since the introduction of B-Doubles. Mr Gerry Swain of Newrybar said that the Highway:

... was a liveable road until three years ago when the Government allowed B-doubles on it. The opening of the Chinderah to Yelgun section brought many trucks as well as the B-doubles, all with their noisy, outdated braking systems.³²⁶

4.144 The Committee heard a similar complaint from Mr David McDonald of Woodburn: 'We live within about half a kilometre of the highway and the noise is just about unbearable.'³²⁷

³²³ Submission 6 (Far North Coast), Ms Deborah Sharp p1

³²⁴ Submission 12 (Coffs Harbour), Mr RJ Christopher, p1

³²⁵ Submission 24 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Alan and Ms Valerie Griffiths, p1

³²⁶ Mr Swain, Evidence, Public Forum, 27 October 2005, pp4-5

³²⁷ Mr McDonald, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p38

- 4.145 Mr Alan Scott told the Committee that he bought a hotel in Coffs Harbour in July 2001. Mrs Chris Scott described the ‘negative impact’ of increased noise levels, explaining that ‘the heavy vehicles are also affecting our business turnover with noise levels increasing to such a degree that guests in some of the rooms have vowed never to stay again ...’³²⁸
- 4.146 The RTA’s Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce Report acknowledged that the increased number of heavy vehicles using the Highway resulted in increased noise levels:

The Upgrade Program along the northern Pacific Highway has led to increased heavy vehicle volumes. This in turn has resulted in exposure to higher levels of heavy vehicle noise particularly at night, including engine brake noise which is difficult to mitigate, than previously experienced. This has caused many complaints, with sleep disturbance the major issue.³²⁹

- 4.147 The Noise Taskforce is discussed in paragraphs 4.152 – 4.154.

Causes of noise pollution

- 4.148 CARS attributed part of the noise problem to heavy vehicle braking systems:

This noise problem is particularly ugly, as the compression brake noise is impulsive in nature, and having large components at low frequencies (less than 200 Hz) is not readily attenuated by walls, glass or vegetation, not even by ear plugs. This leads to sleep disturbance of residents over a wide region (about 3km ...) surrounding the highway. Background levels of noise in rural and regional areas are quite low, particularly at night, around 30dBA, so such intermittent peak noises are even more noticeable.³³⁰

- 4.149 Mr Paul Gannon, a resident of the Far North Coast, asked:

Why can’t we reduce the noise trucks make rather than ineffectually try to insulate roads from making the noise in the surrounding areas?³³¹

- 4.150 Ewingsdale resident Mr Bernard Grinberg told the Committee of his frustration that the RTA had not addressed truck noise levels, and in particular braking noise:

A senior RTA operative came and captured details of particularly noisy trucks. He did it on St Helena Hill, but after he said, “I could have just stood at the Ballina roundabout. The noisy guys are really noisy and they are noisy because they have got dreadful exhausts which then amplify compression brake noise, which is a fairly unique problem.”

³²⁸ Submission 49 (Coffs Harbour), Mrs Scott, p1

³²⁹ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A3: *Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce Report*, August 2003, p13

³³⁰ Submission 139 (Far North Coast), C.A.R.S, p29, emphasis as per original

³³¹ Mr Gannon, Evidence, Public Forum, 27 October 2005, p4

He then said, “I will send these trucks off and we will stop them at our inspection stations.” This was three months ago. And he said, “I will give you feedback.” No feedback has been forthcoming.³³²

- 4.151** CARS emphasised that due to the difficulty of alleviating Highway noise, Highway upgrades should be built away from communities:

When new highways are built care should be taken to distance them from communities. Outside of major metropolitan areas there is no reason why the minimum distance of a major road to any community cluster should be less than 5km ...³³³

RTA’s response to community noise concerns

- 4.152** As with the Pacific Highway Safety Review, the RTA said that they had actively engaged with coastal communities and other stakeholders regarding increased noise levels on the Pacific Highway, and had taken steps to address their concerns.
- 4.153** For example, the RTA established the Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce to provide ‘a process of further consultation with communities and councils along the northern section of the highway for noise issues associated with B-Doubles.’³³⁴ The Noise Taskforce included strong community involvement. The membership of the Taskforce included representatives from five local councils, the Environment Protection Authority, the RTA, seven local communities, and a truck industry representative.³³⁵ The Taskforce’s findings were published in September 2003.
- 4.154** The role of the Taskforce was to assess the impact of increased traffic on Highway noise levels between Coffs Harbour and the Queensland border, and suggest possible measures to address noise issues. The recommendations of the Taskforce aimed to ensure that the RTA gave greater consideration to road traffic noise in planning Highway upgrade projects, and put mitigation measures in place to assist communities currently affected by Highway noise. In addition to making recommendations on noise issues, the Taskforce also made recommendations relating to heavy vehicle safety.
- 4.155** The RTA advised that the recommendations of the Noise Taskforce were being progressively implemented, with the exception of Recommendation 10 (which related to investigating alternative freight strategies to re-distribute freight between the Pacific Highway and New England Highway).³³⁶ Measures that have been implemented as a result of the Noise Taskforce included:

³³² Mr Grinberg, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p26

³³³ Submission 139 (Far North Coast), C.A.R.S, pp30 – 31

³³⁴ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, pp4-5

³³⁵ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A3: *Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce Report*, August 2003, p3

³³⁶ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Forward, Attachment A, Item 3, p1

- review of Environmental Criteria for Road Traffic Noise (in conjunction with the Department of Environment)
- enforcement campaigns for heavy vehicles (through vehicle inspection stations, annual noise testing for road worthiness, development of satellite and on board speed-monitoring technologies)
- noise camera development (to target trucks with noisy engine brakes)
- \$18m program of works (architectural works to 260 houses from Coffs Harbour to the Queensland border, 3km of low noise pavement at Sapphire, 1.5km of noise walls at Tweed Heads, 1.5km of noise walls planned for Ewingsdale and Newrybar)
- consideration of noise effects early in design of new highways (including use of low noise pavement in noise sensitive areas).³³⁷

Committee view: Noise pollution

- 4.156** The Committee concludes that a number of North Coast residents living near the Pacific Highway have experienced increased noise levels since the substantial increase in heavy vehicles usage of the Highway in late 2002. However, the Committee has no evidence to attribute the increased noise to B-Doubles.
- 4.157** The Committee is sympathetic to these residents' concerns regarding noise pollution. To alleviate the noise pollution experienced by these residents, the Committee calls on the RTA to accelerate the implementation of the recommendations of the Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce.

³³⁷ Answers to questions taken on notice during hearing of 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 5, p2

Chapter 5 Strategic issues

Inquiry participants suggested that questions regarding the extent and location of the proposed Highway upgrades should not be viewed in isolation from broad, strategic issues regarding road and rail freight both within and beyond New South Wales. This Chapter examines such issues, including establishing an inland freight route, encouraging greater use of rail freight, and developing an integrated freight strategy for New South Wales.

Community concerns regarding strategic planning for the Pacific Highway

5.1 The Committee heard a substantial amount of evidence that planning by the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales (RTA), and indeed the NSW Government, for the North Coast Highway upgrades should have taken place in the context of a broader strategic plan for the inter-state movement of freight.

Views of coastal residents

5.2 A number of North Coast residents suggested that the RTA did not consider ‘big-picture’ alternatives to upgrading the Pacific Highway as the major inter-state road. For example, local resident Mr Paul Gannon described the RTA’s Pacific Highway Upgrade Program as ‘joining the dots.’³³⁸ Mr Ian Duncan of the Knockrow Newrybar Residents’ Group shared this view, describing the Upgrade Program as ‘connecting dots in a haphazard fashion of segment upgrades.’³³⁹

5.3 These and other coastal residents claimed that the RTA did not have a freight strategy, not only for the North Coast but for the State. North Coast residents Mr Alan and Ms Marianne Logan said: ‘It is clear that the de facto way in which the Pacific Highway has become the inter-state truck transport route is not good infrastructure planning, in fact it has occurred with no planning.’³⁴⁰

5.4 The Northern Rivers Regional Development Board emphasised the importance of strategic transport planning for the region’s economy:

Transport is a key element of the Northern Rivers regional economy with major implications for both current and future public sector and commercial investment decisions and land use planning. Transport decisions therefore affect social equity and amenity and the health and wellbeing of our communities – where and how we live, work, learn and recreate. Effective transport planning and management is fundamental to our collective impact on the environment’s life support systems and has far-reaching implications for income distribution and welfare dependency.³⁴¹

³³⁸ Mr Paul Gannon, Evidence, Public Forum, 27 October 2005, p4

³³⁹ Mr Ian Duncan, Knockrow Newrybar Residents’ Group, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p27

³⁴⁰ Submission 26 (Far North Coast), Mr Alan and Mrs Marianne Logan, p6

³⁴¹ Submission 192 (Far North Coast), Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, p1

5.5 The Board further noted that:

The provision of sufficient strategic/economic enabling infrastructure to maintain appropriate conditions for continued employment and economic growth is critical for the region's communities.³⁴²

5.6 Mr Ian Oelrichs, a Director of the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board as well as a member of the Community Alliance for Road Sustainability (CARS), criticised the RTA's lack of co-ordination with other Government agencies regarding the Far North Coast upgrades:

Unfortunately, the decision about the Highway [ie route selection for the Ballina – Woodburn and Ewingsdale – Tintenbar upgrades] is to be made in the absence of the release of the Far North Coast Strategy, which is being prepared by the Department of Planning, and covers that part of the region north of Evans Head to the border and well west of Kyogle.³⁴³

5.7 The Committee notes that the Department of Planning's *Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy* was released in March 2006, after the selection of a preferred route for the Ballina – Woodburn Upgrade, and after the development of route options for the Ewingsdale – Tintenbar Upgrade.³⁴⁴ The Committee notes that among the key actions for regional transport are to: 'Continue planning and construction of the Pacific Highway upgrades through the Region' and 'Investigate improved links from the Summerland Way through to South East Queensland (to the future employment lands at Bromelton).'³⁴⁵

5.8 Some Inquiry participants called for a co-ordinated, State-wide approach to freight movements. Ms Jan Barham, Mayor of Byron Shire Council, told the Committee:

If you are looking at freight as an issue from a strategic planning point of view, it is necessary to look at the whole State. It is a tragedy that the State does not have a freighting strategy to consider those options and determine them.³⁴⁶

5.9 The Executive Director of the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, Ms Katrina Luckie, described the inter-state co-ordination problems resulting from the absence of a transport strategy:

... there has been a gross oversight in terms of some of each of these Highway upgrades in that there is no integration at present with the work that is happening in terms of south-east Queensland and the infrastructure and development planning that is occurring up there.³⁴⁷

³⁴² Submission 192 (Far North Coast), Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, p2

³⁴³ Mr Ian Oelrichs, Director, Community Alliance for Road Sustainability, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p15

³⁴⁴ Department of Planning, *Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy*, March 2006

³⁴⁵ Department of Planning, *Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy*, March 2006, p35

³⁴⁶ Cr Jan Barham, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p10

³⁴⁷ Ms Katrina Luckie, Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, pp69-70

5.10 Some coastal residents believed that if the Highway Upgrade Program had been guided by a broad strategic plan, an inland route would have been the logical choice for inter-state freight, given the freight strategy developed by the Queensland Government. According to Mr Oelrichs:

Eventually most freight must go through the western corridor of Brisbane and Ipswich. That is where the south-east Queensland plan, released in south-east Queensland a few months ago, talks about the future of freight, transport and industry.³⁴⁸

5.11 The *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005 – 2026*, released by the Queensland Government in 2005, is an overarching long-term policy plan to accommodate the region’s rapid population growth.³⁴⁹ The Regional Plan considers such diverse issues as identifying land for urban development, provision of infrastructure and services, establishing sound urban development principles, protecting the natural environment and natural resources, enhancing quality of life for communities and supporting economic and employment growth. This detailed and comprehensive document contrasts with the NSW Government’s past lack of interest in integrated strategic transport planning for the adjoining North Coast region, which is experiencing similar growth pressures to those of South East Queensland.

5.12 Mr Ian Duncan told the Committee that New South Wales had not discussed any freight strategy with its Queensland neighbour: ‘I am informed that [Queensland] would like to do a border integrated transport plan, but they cannot get anyone in New South Wales to visit them.’³⁵⁰

5.13 The RTA advised that under the auspices of AusLink, they are currently liaising with the Queensland Government’s road and rail agencies to develop a strategy for the Sydney – Brisbane corridor.³⁵¹

5.14 Mr Duncan commented on the absence of past strategic planning:

Unfortunately, because of the Highway deaths and safety issues on the Highway, there is now enormous pressure just to build anything quickly to save lives. This is understandable but it is unfortunate because it ignores the strategic failures that underline the whole project. I believe we are in a mess because before now there has been little or no long-term strategic planning.³⁵²

5.15 A similar opinion was held by the Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce, in relation to the RTA’s strategic planning for the Highway at Woolgoolga:

The first Pacific Highway By-Pass (Deviation) of Woolgoolga opened in 1963. It now passes through the middle of the urban settlement area ... The RTA has stated that

³⁴⁸ Mr Oelrichs, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p15

³⁴⁹ Queensland Government Office of Urban Management, *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005 – 2026*, June 2005

³⁵⁰ Mr Duncan, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p28

³⁵¹ Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment B, Item 23, p12

³⁵² Mr Duncan, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p28

Option E deviation is a short-term solution for Pacific Highway traffic management (10 – 15 years). How many by-passes, how much land, how many farms, homes, businesses and lives destroyed before the RTA get it right?³⁵³

- 5.16** The development of strategic transport planning may have been inhibited by the fact that in the past two years there have been four different Ministers for Roads in New South Wales, namely the Hon Carl Scully MP, the Hon Michael Costa MLC, the Hon Joseph Tripodi MP and the Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC. Commenting on this turnover, Mr Keith Rhoades, Mayor of Coffs Harbour City Council, told the Committee:

It is a disappointment. When we think we are seeing some light at the end of the tunnel, all of a sudden the end of the tunnel has gone and we have to go back to the start of the tunnel and commence our journey again with a new person. We can only hope that the dialogue between the new Minister and his senior advisers and Department staff will bring him up to speed with his portfolio ...³⁵⁴

- 5.17** A number of community members were fearful of the consequences of making decisions in the absence of a strategic planning framework. Mr Oelrichs said:

No more short-term decisions, no more errors, no more expediency. There is only one chance to get this right. It is not like we are going to be able to, if we make a mistake now, come along and duplicate yet another highway within a couple of decades.³⁵⁵

Committee view: Community concerns regarding strategic planning for the Pacific Highway

- 5.18** There was widespread dissatisfaction among coastal communities with the RTA's strategic planning for the Pacific Highway. On the Far North Coast in particular, local residents were aggrieved at the perceived lack of co-ordination between the NSW and Queensland Governments regarding the movement of freight. The Committee notes that the RTA is now liaising with the Queensland Government through AusLink.
- 5.19** The Committee agrees with coastal residents who believe that strategic transport planning by the RTA is vital for the future of their coastal communities. This Chapter will explore two issues that coastal residents want considered in the context of a strategic planning framework: first, an inland freight route; and second, shifting freight from road to rail.

Support for an inland freight route

- 5.20** A substantial number of coastal residents supported the removal of heavy vehicles carrying inter-state freight from the Pacific Highway, and directing them to instead use an inland

³⁵³ Submission 48 (Coffs Harbour), Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Tourism Inc, p2

³⁵⁴ Mr Keith Rhoades, Mayor, Coffs Harbour City Council, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p6

³⁵⁵ Mr Oelrichs, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p14

freight route. These residents believed that this would alleviate the deleterious impact of B-Doubles and heavy freight on the densely populated coastal strip.

- 5.21** Residents nominated two potential candidates for an inland freight route: the New England Highway (a major inland highway almost 600km in length linking Newcastle to the Queensland border), or the Summerland Way (a rural highway 200km in length linking Grafton to the Queensland border). An alternative proposition was to direct all inter-state freight to use the New England Highway in the interim, until a new motorway could be constructed closer to the coast.
- 5.22** One of the main reasons given in favour of removing heavy vehicles from the Pacific Highway was to improve safety by decreasing the mixing of local and through traffic. Residents hoped that by removing inter-state heavy vehicles from the Highway it may be possible to downgrade the scale of the proposed upgrades, and make safety improvements to the Highway without altering its current alignment. Local residents also noted that inland communities with smaller (and often declining) populations may welcome the economic boost offered by an inter-state freight route.
- 5.23** A different but related argument emerged from some residents of Coffs Harbour. While not calling for the removal of heavy freight from the Pacific Highway, they told the Committee that they favoured a Far Western Bypass of their city, which would move the Highway away from the coastal strip (see Chapter 3).

Community support for an inland freight route

- 5.24** CARS, an umbrella group for seven community groups from Coffs Harbour to Byron Bay, was among those who supported an inland freight route:

The short-term goal is that all interstate trucks must be temporarily moved back to the New England Highway to immediately stop the killing ...

In the long term, the community is united about the construction of an alternative inland route bypassing the intensely developed areas of the Far North Coast of New South Wales.³⁵⁶

- 5.25** The Sandy Hearn Action Group also favoured constructing an inland route:

The upgrade is excessive because SHAG believes the RTA (or private enterprise) should be constructing a separate Motorway to carry interstate heavy vehicles and traffic and directing them in the meantime to the New England Highway with possible special fuel rebates.

A western motorway would have to have 'national route status' and then the New England Highway could be downgraded to Regional Road status along with the Pacific Highway.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Mr Anthony Gilding, Evidence, 27 October 2005, p14

³⁵⁷ Submission 166 (Far North Coast), Sandy Hearn Action Group, p2

- 5.26** Mr Peter Hawkins, a resident of Cooper's Shoot on the Far North Coast, stressed the lower social and environmental impacts of using the New England Highway for heavy freight:

There are vast empty areas to the west serviced by the New England Highway where the interstate truck freight would have a much lower social and environmental impact and at the same time create an economic boost to the economy through that New England Highway corridor.³⁵⁸

- 5.27** Broadwater resident Mr Michael Ward expressed concern that the RTA had apparently not considered an inland route:

We are concerned that the option of placing the upgrade along the existing Summerland Way road between Grafton and Casino has not been thoroughly pursued ... The advantages of increased tourism, visitors and economic flow-ons has backed up our preliminary enquiries ...³⁵⁹

- 5.28** Mr Ian Duncan of the Knockrow Newrybar Residents' Group was similarly concerned that, as of October 2005, the Summerland Way had not been considered:

There has been no serious examination of potential of the Summerland Way as a more cost-efficient traffic and freight route between Grafton and Brisbane. This route would have significantly lower environmental and social costs, and would reduce the distance between Grafton and Brisbane by up to 50 kilometres.³⁶⁰

- 5.29** Mayor Barham of Byron Shire Council, told the Committee that the need for an inland freight route had long been identified in regional strategic planning:

... the Northern Rivers Regional Strategy had identified an alternative western route for freighting and linking up with the southern Queensland strategic planning ... the impact on western villages and towns that may well have needed an economic boost with the freight industry being out there, whereas for us on the coast it is an incredible pressure that actually has the potential to negatively impact on our economic base.³⁶¹

- 5.30** A similar argument came from North Coast resident Mr William Bagnall, who told the Committee that constructing an inland route would allow the North Coast to thrive:

The benefits from a New Inland Route would be win-win, with the Northern Rivers benefiting from isolation from the Highway the same way that the Sunshine coast in Queensland did once their highway passed west of that region, it thrived!³⁶²

Benefits for inland communities

- 5.31** Together with a number of Inquiry participants, Mr Gerard Swain of the Far North Coast believed that inland communities would support the establishment of an inland freight route:

³⁵⁸ Submission 13 (Far North Coast), Mr Peter Hawkins, p2

³⁵⁹ Submission 111 (Far North Coast), Mr Michael Ward, p1

³⁶⁰ Mr Duncan, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p28

³⁶¹ Cr Barham, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p8

³⁶² Submission 6 (Coffs Harbour), Mr William Bagnall, p1

Move interstate traffic to the west. One route we have heard and heard and heard – the Summerland Way. Casino would love it ... Where the population is thinly distributed land is much, much cheaper and less productive, and the towns and communities can be bypassed easily, and then there are added benefits for those towns along these routes.³⁶³

- 5.32** Mr George Law of Wardell also believed that inland communities would benefit from an inland route:

A flood-free alternative could be through a western route where intensive agriculture is less prevalent eg Grafton, Casino, Kyogle, Murwillumbah ... A route in this area would assist in the development of these towns.³⁶⁴

- 5.33** Fellow Far North Coast residents Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East stressed the importance of truck stop business for the New England Highway:

Many large truck stops were built and established to provide for the large number of trucks but since the change in gazetting this business has been lost and many operators have sold out or gone broke. This is a tragedy given all the other loss of business in the west due to drought and other farming issues.³⁶⁵

- 5.34** Despite these claims, the RTA said that communities along the New England Highway do not appear to support an increase in heavy vehicle usage of that Highway:

The majority of correspondence received from communities along the New England Highway and in local print media asked for the NSW Government and the RTA NOT to consider re-routing heavy vehicles back from the Pacific Highway.³⁶⁶

- 5.35** As an example of such opposition, the RTA provided a letter from Mr Warwick Bennett, Chairman of Tourism Tamworth, regarding a possible increase in heavy vehicle usage of the New England Highway:

There is no doubt that the New England Highway is substandard to the Pacific Highway and in some areas only adequate for the current traffic load.

Increasing heavy vehicle traffic on the New England Highway will increase the number of accidents, damage the existing surfaces and have a detrimental impact on communities along the highway ...

It does seem unreasonable that the shift of a problem from one area to another could be considered a solution.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Mr Gerard Swain, Evidence, Public Forum, 27 October 2005, p5

³⁶⁴ Submission 168 (Far North Coast), Mr George Law, p2

³⁶⁵ Submission 54 (Far North Coast), Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East, p2

³⁶⁶ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 1, p1; emphasis as per original

³⁶⁷ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B1, p1

- 5.36** The Committee notes that the NSW Government has previously rejected community calls for freight to use the New England Highway. Recommendation 10 of the *Northern Pacific Highway Noise Taskforce Report* called on the Government to: ‘Investigate alternative freight transport options and potential incentives to re-distribute freight movement between the Pacific Highway, and the New England Highway.’ The RTA advised the Committee that the NSW Minister for Roads had accepted all the recommendations of the *Noise Taskforce*, with the exception of Recommendation 10.³⁶⁸ Possible reasons for rejecting a re-distribution of freight from the Pacific to the New England Highway are discussed in paragraphs 5.44 – 5.53.

Committee view: Support for an inland freight route

- 5.37** As foreshadowed in the Committee’s Interim Report, the Committee considers it sensible to investigate proposals that would facilitate the removal of heavy vehicles carrying inter-state freight from the Pacific Highway. If a significant proportion of heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway are transporting inter-state freight, requiring inter-state heavy vehicles to use an inland route would lead to a substantial reduction in the mixing of passenger and heavy vehicles, thus alleviating one of the areas of key concern to coastal residents. However, if a large proportion of heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway are transporting goods to North Coast communities, the proposal for an inland freight route may not have the substantial benefits claimed by its supporters.
- 5.38** As noted in Chapter 4, the RTA does not have statistics post Yelgun – Chinderah on the proportion of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway that are transporting inter-state freight. As noted in paragraph 4.63, the Committee urges the RTA to produce such statistics, to inform debate on establishing an inland freight route.
- 5.39** The Committee notes that many coastal residents believed that the M-class freeway-type standard of the proposed Highway upgrades would have a detrimental impact on their communities. While the existing Pacific Highway would still need to be upgraded even if freight is directed inland, it may be viable for the upgrades to be downgraded to A-class (or duplication) standard, as a consequence of establishing an inland freight route.
- 5.40** Despite advocating investigation of an inland freight route, the Committee emphasises that it has not received any evidence from inland communities on the social, economic or environmental impact of such a route nor has the NSW Government undertaken such an analysis. While the RTA has advised that communities along the New England Highway do not appear to support the establishment of an inland freight route, the Committee is unable to assess the sentiments of communities along the Summerland Way.

Candidates for an inland freight route

- 5.41** Many Inquiry participants nominated the New England Highway as their preferred candidate for an inland freight route. However, this proposal is problematic, as the Committee heard that directing inter-state heavy freight to use the New England Highway would have an adverse safety impact, as well as disadvantaging heavy vehicle operators.

³⁶⁸ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 26 September 2005, Mr Paul Forward, Chief Executive, RTA, Attachment A, Item 3, p1

- 5.42** As an alternative to directing heavy freight to use the New England Highway, other Inquiry participants recommended using an upgraded Summerland Way as an inland freight route. The Committee will consider whether the RTA could incorporate the Summerland Way as part of the proposed North Coast Motorway being investigated under the December 2005 Memorandum of Understanding between the NSW and Commonwealth Governments.

New England Highway

- 5.43** Many residents of coastal communities in the vicinity of the Pacific Highway called for heavy inter-state vehicles to be directed to use the New England Highway, as they claimed that there would be a smaller impact on communities along this route than on those along the Pacific Highway. The RTA rejected these claims:

Using the urban speed zones as an indicator of the impact on residential areas, the New England Highway in NSW has around twice the length affected (at 79km) than the Pacific Highway. Impact in these areas would be noise and conflicts with local purpose trips.³⁶⁹

- 5.44** Mr Michael Bushby, the RTA's Director of Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management said that as a result of the greater length of urban speed zones on the Pacific Highway, '...traffic using the New England Highway will experience greater exposure to those mixed-mode traffic arrangements involving more turning movements, pedestrians, cyclists and so on.'³⁷⁰

- 5.45** As noted previously, dual carriageway is a vital element in decreasing the number of fatal head-on crashes. The NRMA's 2004 route audit of the New England Highway found that 'overtaking opportunities are infrequent.'³⁷¹

- 5.46** Mr Soames Job, the RTA's General Manager of Road Safety Strategy, told the Committee that it was safer for heavy vehicles to use the Pacific Highway, given the small proportion of the New England Highway that is dual carriageway:

From a road safety point of view, having the growth in these heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway rather than the New England Highway has benefits, given that we are upgrading this to dual carriageway. Essentially, the core thing the dual carriageway does is to remove the possibility of head-on crashes. The most common type of fatality involving heavy vehicles on highways is head-on crashes ... So to have those vehicles on the dual carriageway is safer than having them on the New England where it is not a dual carriageway.³⁷²

- 5.47** The RTA provided the Committee with the following statistics comparing road safety across the Pacific and New England Highways:

³⁶⁹ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p6

³⁷⁰ Mr Michael Bushby, Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, RTA, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p2

³⁷¹ NRMA Motoring and Services, *New England Highway Route Audit: Hexham to Queensland Border*, May 2004, pi

³⁷² Mr Soames Job, General Manager, Road Safety Strategy, RTA, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p46

For the Pacific Highway in 2004 north of Hexham there were 911 recorded crashes 18% involving a heavy vehicle. Of this total 383 were casualty crashes 20% of which involved a heavy vehicle.

For the New England Highway in 2004 there were 421 recorded crashes 11% of which involved a heavy vehicle. Of this total 177 were casualty crashes 13% of which involved a heavy vehicle.³⁷³

- 5.48** Commenting on such figures, the RTA's Mr Bushby told the Committee that '... the incidence of crashes, in particular heavy vehicle crashes, is lower on the Pacific Highway than on the New England Highway.'³⁷⁴
- 5.49** Indeed, the Committee noted that the provisional fatality statistics for the six months to 28 February 2006 showed that there were 12 fatalities on the New England Highway and 11 on the Pacific Highway.³⁷⁵

Advantages of Pacific Highway over New England Highway for heavy vehicles

- 5.50** The RTA advised that for heavy vehicles transporting freight from Sydney to Brisbane, the Pacific has many advantages over the New England Highway:
- time savings of 57 minutes for freight
 - shorter by 75km (will be 95km shorter when entire Highway upgraded)
 - more dual carriageway (230km or 44% completed or under construction by June 2006, compared to 40km or 6% of New England)
 - lower fuel usage (for B-Doubles, 10% less fuel usage, or 70L, than New England)
 - lower maintenance costs
 - lower fatigue levels resulting from shorter journey time
 - less local speed zones (38.5km of 50 or 60km/h speed zones compared to 72.9km).³⁷⁶
- 5.51** Mr Hugh McMaster, Corporate Relations Manager of the NSW Road Transport Association, described advantages additional to those listed by the RTA:
- More undulating grades and black ice in winter make the New England Highway inherently more dangerous; ...
 - Whereas it is a marginal proposition as to whether a truck driver could complete a journey from Sydney to Brisbane within the legally allowable driving hours, there is no doubt that this is possible on the Pacific Highway;

³⁷³ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 18 November 2005, Mr Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, Item 5, p2

³⁷⁴ Mr Bushby, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p2

³⁷⁵ The Hon George Souris MP, Legislative Assembly, New South Wales, *Questions and Answers Paper No. 173*, Question 5371, 'New England Highway Fatalities'

³⁷⁶ Submission 203 (Far North Coast), RTA, p7

- The risk of being caught in peak hour traffic on overnight inter-state trips between Sydney and Brisbane is virtually eliminated when using the Pacific Highway.³⁷⁷

5.52 In response to questioning on the risks of driving with black ice, Mr McMaster said:

You mentioned about black ice in Europe. European truck drivers would be used to driving in cold conditions. That is something they do several months a year. Australian truck drivers are not, and it is very dangerous.

...

It is more than education. It is just straight out dangerous full stop. It is just the nature of the grade, the nature of the road conditions, the pay load.³⁷⁸

5.53 It was suggested that to offset the disadvantages of the New England for heavy vehicle operators, the NSW Government could offer incentives for using the New England Highway. Coffs Harbour City Council, for example, supported offering a fuel rebate.³⁷⁹ The proponents of this argument claimed that drivers should be compensated if B-Doubles were required to use the New England Highway.

5.54 This suggestion was supported by Mr Mark Crosdale, Secretary of the Newcastle and Northern Sydney Branch of the Transport Workers' Union, who was questioned whether his membership could work within a scenario where B-Doubles were removed by regulation from the Pacific Highway. Mr Crosdale responded:

Yes, our membership would be able to work with regulation, direction and compensation. The worst thing in my mind that could happen would be not a complete regulatory approach to that. Say you took B-doubles off the Pacific Highway: I do not know this, but I imagine that if ... B-doubles were removed from the Pacific Highway and put onto the New England Highway and the operators were not able to negotiate an increase to compensate for that – because you do use more fuel when you go along the New England Highway as well because there is more climbing as it is much hillier – well, that would only exacerbate things. While it might move the problem in some people's view from the Pacific Highway, it would have a drastic effect on road safety in the communities up along the New England Highway and on truck drivers.³⁸⁰

5.55 In response to community calls for B-Doubles to be removed from the Pacific Highway, the RTA stated that it is 'not practical to prohibit their access on a major route such as the Pacific Highway.'³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p6

³⁷⁸ Mr Hugh McMaster, NSW Road Transport Association,, Evidence, 26 September 2005, pp10-11

³⁷⁹ Submission 43 (Coffs Harbour), Coffs Harbour City Council, p1

³⁸⁰ Mr Mark Crosdale, Transport Workers' Union, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p20

³⁸¹ Correspondence from Mr Les Wielinga, Director, Motorways, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, 6 October 2005, p18

- 5.56** Mr Bushby explained that removing B-Doubles from the Pacific Highway may not have the effect intended:

The concept of forcing trucks to move from one route to the other may not be as successful as it would seem just as a first viewing of the idea because what you might see is just a change in the nature of the vehicles using the route. For instance, if we said B-Doubles had to go on the New England Highway it may well be that we would just have that freight change onto semi-trailers ...³⁸²

Summerland Way

- 5.57** Many Far North Coast residents told the Committee that they supported upgrading the Summerland Way for use as an inland freight route. They suggested that heavy vehicles could be directed off the Pacific Highway and onto the Summerland Way at either Coffs Harbour or Grafton.

- 5.58** Mr Donald Page MP, State Member for Ballina, supported an inland freight route utilising the Summerland Way:

The inland option would be much cheaper, easier and faster to build (the State Government owns most of the corridor) and it affects fewer people.³⁸³

- 5.59** A joint submission from State Members Mr Page, Mr Steve Cansdell MP, Member for Clarence, and Mr Thomas George MP, Member for Lismore, supported 'an alternative route for upgrade to dual carriageway between Tyagarah/Ewingsdale and Grafton.'³⁸⁴ The Members claimed that this route would be cheaper and quicker to build, of similar distance, separate local from inter-state traffic, have less environmental impact, impact fewer people, and link with the proposed Queensland freight terminal in Beaudesert. They called for a cost/benefit study comparing the inland and coastal routes, and concluded that:

It is important to do this comparative analysis now before construction money is spent on the dual carriageway between the Tyagarah/Ewingsdale area and the Grafton area, otherwise an inland option will not be considered in the foreseeable future.³⁸⁵

- 5.60** Upgrading the Summerland Way was also supported by the Summerland Way Action Group, an umbrella group established by concerned coastal residents and groups along the Pacific Highway, to advocate for the removal of heavy freight from the coastal strip:

There is an alternative already proposed by Shires on the Summerland Way Promotional Committee and legislated after extensive surveying and consultation in 1989 – 1991 from Coffs Harbour to Brisbane via Beaudesert. The initial upgrades and construction would need to be dealt with now before the Coffs Harbour by-pass is set in concrete as the Summerland Way starts in Coffs Harbour with the Orara Way. This is essential to directing traffic inland at this point of the Pacific Highway to Brisbane

³⁸² Mr Bushby, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p3

³⁸³ 'Ballina MP proposes inland route,' *Lismore Northern Star*, 25 October 2005, <www.northernstar.com.au> (accessed 25 October 2005)

³⁸⁴ Submission 206 (Far North Coast), Mr Donald Page MP, p1

³⁸⁵ Submission 206 (Far North Coast), Mr Donald Page MP, p2

via Grafton, Casino, Kyogle, Rathdowney and Beaudesert. These are some of the Shires set to benefit from such infrastructure but only if we begin now at Coffs Harbour with a Far Western Bypass as planned over a decade ago when we went through the same process that we are being forced to go through again now.³⁸⁶

5.61 Mr Bill Walker, Sugar Operations Manager, NSW Sugar Milling Cooperative, also supported the ‘cheaper and far less disruptive inland option’ of utilising the Summerland Way

Some of the benefits of this inland option are obviously that significantly fewer landholders would be impacted. We believe the cost of construction would be significantly lower by using the Summerland Way and the rail corridor. Another big cost factor would be being able to build the new highway without disrupting the traffic flow on the Pacific Highway during the construction phase. There would clearly be less impact from the significant flooding that all of us know will occur in our region ... My option is to take the Summerland Way out of Grafton and take it over the river so that you would only have one river crossing over the Clarence instead of two, as currently committed.

I believe there would be significant benefits to Grafton by taking the Summerland Way out of the central business district. Obviously we believe that Lismore and Casino would also benefit by being close to the major highway. It goes without saying that there would be a significantly lower impact on agriculture ...³⁸⁷

5.62 Based on a 2004 NRMA route audit, it is clear however that the Summerland Way would have to be extensively upgraded if it was to be part of an inter-state freight route. According to the NRMA:

The route audit of the Summerland Way has judged the section from Kyogle to Grafton to be of fair quality and the section north of Kyogle to be of poor quality. In particular, the pavement conditions of small sections of the route, amounting to two percent of the route, are extremely poor and warrant immediate attention. Shoulders are narrow and there are only six rest areas. Only 24 curve advisory signs have been provided ...

Crash analysis reveals a very slight downward trend in the total number of crashes and the number of fatalities and injuries between 1994 and 2003 ...

Since the 1995 audit, it would appear that lanes have not been widened and the opportunities for overtaking have not increased. However, pavement condition has improved, together with additional curve advisory signs and the introduction of ‘50 kilometres per hour zones’ in urban areas, which may have contributed to the decrease in the number of crashes and injuries in 2003.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Submission 175 (Far North Coast), Summerland Way Action Group, p1

³⁸⁷ Mr Bill Walker, Sugar Operations Manager, NSW Sugar Milling Cooperative, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p48

³⁸⁸ NRMA Motoring and Services, *Summerland Way Route Audit: Grafton to Mount Lindesay Highway*, October 2004, p41

Need for assessment of Summerland Way proposal

- 5.63** The Committee's Interim Report noted that 'the proposed route [Summerland Way] has not been surveyed, costed or subjected to any of the studies that would be required to determine if it is a viable alternative.' Given the clear community support for investigating the viability of the Summerland Way as an alternative inland freight route, prior to other preferred routes being 'locked in,' the Committee recommended:

That the NSW Government urgently commission a cost/benefit study of upgrading an alternative route incorporating the Summerland Way between Tyagarah/Ewingsdale and Grafton.³⁸⁹

- 5.64** The NSW Government's response to the Interim Report is not due until June 2006. The Committee has not been advised if the Government will conduct such a comparative cost/benefit study.

- 5.65** The Committee's Interim Report noted that in December 2005 the Hon Joseph Tripodi MP, then NSW Minister for Roads, gave a commitment that the NSW Government would conduct a preliminary assessment of the Summerland Way proposal, notwithstanding the recent selection of a preferred route for the Ballina – Woodburn Upgrade.³⁹⁰

- 5.66** The Hon Warren Truss MP, Federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services, welcomed the study of the Summerland Way proposal:

I would welcome further information being provided by the NSW Government once the investigation has been finalised.

The Australian Government is certainly prepared to consider the options with an open mind, as I am always interested in possible innovative solutions to assist with the national transport task which is expected to nearly double from 2000 to 2020.³⁹¹

- 5.67** The RTA advised that they had investigated the proposals put forward by the community for use of the Summerland Way, specifically the proposals of Mr Donald Page MP and CARS, as well as examining the Summerland Way as a route to southeast Queensland.³⁹² Mr Bob Higgins, General Manager, Pacific Highway, RTA, said:

What we have done is we have taken the lines that they put forward and modified those lines to come up with a more feasible engineering route. From there we have alignments, both horizontal and vertical, from which we can work out the size of cuts, fills, where tunnels are required, or large cuts, and the nature over soft soils from

³⁸⁹ NSW Legislative Council, General Purpose Standing Committee No 5, *Pacific Highway Upgrades: Ewingsdale – Tintenbar and Ballina – Woodburn*, Interim Report, December 2005, p116

³⁹⁰ 'Highway route chosen,' *The Northern Star*, 1 December 2005, <www.northernstar.com.au/storydisplay.cfm?storyID=3663047&thesection=localnews&thesubsection=> (accessed 8 December 2005)

³⁹¹ The Hon Warren Truss MP, Minister for Transport and Regional Services, 'NSW RTA's Summerland Way study welcomed,' *Media Release*, 13 March 2006

³⁹² Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 21(b), p11; Mr Bob Higgins, RTA, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p19

which we can do estimates behind all those. At the same time we have also done a traffic assessment. We have looked at what would happen if it were via that way compared to the Pacific Highway and what the implications are. We have also done work to understand what would be the social issues with routes via that way and we have compared that to the Pacific Highway. We have addressed the agricultural issues and we have done some preliminary environmental work so that we understand what are the sensitivities compared to the Pacific Highway. We will be putting in a report that is being prepared that will bring all that together.³⁹³

- 5.68** Mr Higgins advised the Committee that the preliminary assessment report would be provided to the NSW Minister for Roads by the end of March 2006. At the hearing of 21 March, Mr Hannon agreed to advise the Minister of the Committee's request for a copy of the report.³⁹⁴ The Committee has now been advised by the RTA that the report will be finalised and with the Minister by the end of May.³⁹⁵

Overall North Coast Pacific Highway strategy

- 5.69** The Memorandum of Understanding committing the Commonwealth and NSW Governments to investigate the development of a North Coast Motorway was signed in December 2005.³⁹⁶ The Memorandum does not detail whether the proposed Motorway would involve upgrading the Highway along its current alignment, or whether alternative route options, such as an inland route, may be examined. The Committee strongly encourages the NSW Government to investigate the feasibility of incorporating the Summerland Way as part of the overall North Coast Highway Strategy.

Committee view: Candidates for an inland freight route

- 5.70** The Committee continues to support the thorough investigation of proposals to establish an inland freight route to remove heavy vehicles carrying inter-state freight from the densely populated coastal strip. The Committee regards consideration of proposals for an inland freight route to be an essential component of strategic planning for both the Pacific Highway and the movement of freight in New South Wales.
- 5.71** The Committee believes that much of the community support for directing heavy vehicles to use the New England Highway was based on a mistaken belief, that the increased number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway after the opening of the Yelgun – Chinderah Upgrade was the result of a direct transfer from the New England Highway. According to this line of argument, it is only fair that these heavy vehicles, which are having such a deleterious effect on coastal communities, should be 'returned' to where they came from.

³⁹³ Mr Higgins, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p19

³⁹⁴ Mr Hannon, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p23

³⁹⁵ Telephone conversation between Ms Helen Vickers, A/Corporate Counsel, RTA and Principal Council Officer, 4 May 2006

³⁹⁶ *North Coast Motorway: Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Australia and the Government of the State of New South Wales*, December 2005

- 5.72** However, the Committee found that heavy vehicles transferring from the New England Highway accounted for only a small proportion of the increased heavy vehicle usage of the Pacific Highway post Yelgun – Chinderah. Directing heavy vehicles to use the New England Highway would therefore result in a dramatic increase in heavy vehicles usage of this Highway. The introduction of such unprecedented numbers of heavy vehicles could be expected to have significant safety and social impacts.
- 5.73** The Committee believes that it would be inappropriate to direct inter-state freight to use the New England Highway. As noted in evidence, only 6% of the New England Highway has been upgraded to dual carriageway, over 70km is through urban areas, and the Highway is prone to black ice. In addition, the Pacific Highway has many advantages for heavy vehicles compared to the New England Highway, including an hour less travel time, greater length of dual carriageway, and lower fuel usage. Significant incentives would have to be offered, such as fuel rebates, to convince truck drivers to use this less desirable route. The Committee notes its concern at the safety risks for motorists using the New England Highway, in particular that only 6% has been upgraded to dual carriageway.
- 5.74** As an alternative to using the New England Highway as an inter-state freight route, the Committee supports further investigation of the proposal to utilise an upgraded Summerland Way. As noted in the Committee’s Interim Report, the Committee calls on the Government to complete a study on the benefits of using the Summerland Way as an inter-state freight route as soon as possible. It is necessary to examine the Summerland Way proposal before other options are ‘locked in,’ namely the irreversible upgrade of the current Highway to M-class standard.
- 5.75** The Committee notes that there are ‘black spots’ along the existing Pacific Highway that need to be eliminated regardless of investigation of alternatives such as the Summerland Way proposal, and regardless of which option is ultimately selected. For example, the Ballina Bypass is required so as to eliminate the dangerous Tintenbar Hill section and remove through traffic from Ballina.
- 5.76** The Committee notes that the Summerland Way would need to be extensively upgraded before it could be used as an inter-state freight route. To facilitate the necessary high-level upgrade, the Committee recommends that investigations into using the Summerland Way as an inland freight route be conducted together with examination of the North Coast Motorway proposal, with a view to incorporating the Summerland Way as part of the proposed North Coast Highway Strategy. This should take place in the context of a comprehensive freight strategy for New South Wales, discussed later in this Chapter.

Recommendation 4

That the RTA investigate the incorporation of the Summerland Way, including a route through the narrowest part of the Border Ranges to the Beaudesert area as part of its examination of the overall North Coast Pacific Highway Strategy.

Support for rail freight

- 5.77** There was considerable support among Inquiry participants for greater use of rail freight as a means of decreasing the number of heavy vehicles on the road, thus improving road safety and lessening the environmental impact of road freight. However the Committee also heard that support for rail freight must be balanced against the advantages of road transport, which tends to be more cost and time efficient.

Community support for rail freight

- 5.78** Many coastal residents told the Committee that the NSW Government should encourage greater use of rail freight to decrease the number of heavy vehicles on the Highway. Far North Coast resident Mr Nick Casmirri said:

What we need is more investment in our rail system to take some of the long term pressure off our roads ... it is a great shame that whilst other governments around Australia and the world recognise rail as an integral part of the solution to future transport challenges, our rail infrastructure is being left to decay.³⁹⁷

- 5.79** Mr EJ Armstrong of Coffs Harbour expressed similar views:

To make rail freight attractive and hopefully remove much freight from the Pacific Highway, it goes without saying that the rail line from Sydney to Brisbane along and through the coastal population centres must be straightened and duplicated.³⁹⁸

- 5.80** Mr Max Bolte of Bangalow called for the immediate upgrading of inter-state rail lines and infrastructure, with the aim of having all freight transported by rail within 20 years, allowing B-Doubles to be banned from the Pacific Highway.³⁹⁹

- 5.81** The North Coast Environment Council highlighted the environmental impact of road freight:

There is too much reliance on trucks for long distance transport of goods. Not only is this trend dangerous to other users, it is also uneconomic in terms of fuel oil use, it contributes heavily to greenhouse gas emissions, and the wear and tear on the roads is considerable.⁴⁰⁰

- 5.82** These views were shared by the Blackwall Highway Action Group:

... the economic, environmental and health costs of continuing to use diesel trucks as the major freight transport mode mandate that alternatives be found. It is irresponsible to spend the sums of money necessary to construct a 100 metre wide highway, designed for B-doubles at 110kph, through this terrain when we will soon be forced by rising fuel costs to find alternatives.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁷ Submission 81 (Far North Coast), Mr Nick Casmirri, p1

³⁹⁸ Submission 58a (Coffs Harbour), Mr EJ Armstrong, p8

³⁹⁹ Submission 14 (Far North Coast), Mr Max Bolte, p2

⁴⁰⁰ Submission 57 (Coffs Harbour), North Coast Environment Council, p3

⁴⁰¹ Submission 78 (Far North Coast), Blackwall Highway Action Group, p31

- 5.83** The Blackwall Highway Action Group suggested that increased investment in rail infrastructure could result in a significant shift of freight from road to rail:

The Australian Bureau of Transport Economics has estimated that upgrading Australia's intercapital mainline rail infrastructure could result in a 40% shift of intercapital freight from road to rail and generate net social benefits of \$3.4b by 2015.⁴⁰²

- 5.84** The Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network (BAN) and Woolgoolga Area Residents' Group (WAR) recommended a greater investment in rail as opposed to road infrastructure:

We commend to Government serious reconsideration of the Motorway Pacific and improved rail infrastructure to accommodate the increasing need for freight transport in this State. The upgrading of the Pacific Highway coastal route is rapidly, if not already reached, its 'Use By Date' for inter and intrastate freight haulage at the expense of the communities along its route.⁴⁰³

Comparison of rail versus road freight

- 5.85** The Blackwall Highway Action Group listed the advantages of rail over road freight, as identified by the National Rail Corporation:

- over 2.5 times more fuel efficient per net tonne-km
- produces less than one third the greenhouse emissions
- over 30 times safer per tonne of freight hauled
- smaller contribution to noise and visual pollution.⁴⁰⁴

- 5.86** The Blackwall Highway Action Group noted that any increase in rail freight would significantly decrease the number of heavy vehicles on the Highway:

One freight train between Melbourne and Sydney replaces 150 semi-trailers and saves 45,000 litres of fuel and 130 tonnes of greenhouse gases compared with road haulage. Just 10 additional trains each day each way between Sydney and Melbourne would remove the entire 3,200 daily truck movements off the highway, saving 1 million tonnes of greenhouse gases per annum.⁴⁰⁵

- 5.87** The Railway Technical Society of Australasia noted the benefits of rail transport in terms of accident costs: 'The ratio of accident costs for road freight and rail freight in Australia is accordingly about 17 to one.'⁴⁰⁶

- 5.88** On the other hand, Mr Hugh McMaster of the NSW Road Transport Association explained why it is difficult for rail freight to compete with road freight:

⁴⁰² Submission 78 (Far North Coast), Blackwall Highway Action Group, p46

⁴⁰³ Submission 44 (Coffs Harbour), BAN and WAR, p15

⁴⁰⁴ Submission 78 (Far North Coast), Blackwall Highway Action Group, p45

⁴⁰⁵ Submission 78 (Far North Coast), Blackwall Highway Action Group, p53

⁴⁰⁶ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p3

Road is the dominant mode for freight transport in Australia. Generally, other modes cannot compete for freight transport tasks with road transport operators. That is driven by the industry's inherent flexibility and reliability, its strong customer service ethos and the long-term sharp decline in operating costs and freight rates.⁴⁰⁷

5.89 In evidence, Mr McMaster elaborated on the time-saving advantages of road freight:

... so much freight that is moved is time sensitive ... if you need to get something to a certain point by a certain time you have a greater likelihood of achieving that by using a truck than you have taking the goods to a rail head, putting them on a train, unloading them at the other end ... Road transport is a lot more flexible and a lot more economically viable. That is why most clients who want a land transport service would rather that be performed by truck than by train.⁴⁰⁸

5.90 The NRMA shared this view, 'acknowled[ging] that heavy vehicles are an important part of the freight network across Australia and are relied on to provide 'just in time' deliveries.'⁴⁰⁹

5.91 The Tourism and Transport Forum Australia claimed that road and rail were each suited to transporting different types of goods:

TTF agrees with the rail transportation of heavy freight and acknowledges the vital role that roads play in connecting and servicing communities. Rail freight is more appropriate for the transportation of bulk commodities like coal and grain, whereas suitable roads are required to ensure the timely transportation of smaller and perishable products.⁴¹⁰

5.92 A similar statement was made by the NRMA:

NRMA supports opportunities to put more freight onto rail where the distances are long and the freight is suited to rail transport (especially bulk and containerised freight).⁴¹¹

5.93 Associate Professor Philip Laird of the University of Wollongong told the Committee that 'ongoing low levels of road cost recovery from the heavier long-distance trucks' were contributing to the increasing number of heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway, by increasing the cost-efficiency of road freight. To illustrate this point, Associate Professor Laird said:

As noted last year by the NTC [National Transport Commission] in its third heavy vehicle road pricing determination, B-Doubles, as from the second determination, which applies now, are subsidised by \$8,400 per nine-axle B-Double. Multiply that by the 8,500 B-Doubles on the road [nationally], and very roughly you have \$70 million a year of subsidies going to this class of vehicle.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷ Mr McMaster, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p2

⁴⁰⁸ Mr McMaster, Evidence, 26 September 2005, p11

⁴⁰⁹ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, p6

⁴¹⁰ Submission 184 (Far North Coast), Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, p3

⁴¹¹ Submission 62 (Far North Coast), NRMA, p6

⁴¹² Associate Professor Philip Laird, University of Wollongong, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p24

- 5.94** The assertion that transporting freight by rail was more expensive was questioned by Mr Matthew Jamieson, an organic farmer of free-range turkeys on the Far North Coast, who previously farmed in Queensland. Mr Jamieson said: ‘In agriculture I have found the rail to be much cheaper to send things, and that was my experience in Queensland.’⁴¹³
- 5.95** It was suggested that the timeliness of rail freight could be improved by adopting an inter-modal rail system. Ms Christine Fira, a resident of Alstonville, supported the introduction of a system similar to:
- ... the ‘road railer system’ used in the United States whereby trailers can be loaded at warehouses, driven by road to a railway depot, connected to a railway bogie and transported by rail to other depots along the rail line. A transport company can then pick up the trailer and deliver the goods locally ...⁴¹⁴
- 5.96** Fellow Far North Coast resident Mr Garry Owers described a similar system in Australia:
- The use of Trailer-rail in South Australia and Western Australia demonstrates the advantages of this freight system which could easily be established over the whole of NSW. The cost of rail freight and passenger services should and must be kept well below road transport. Road transport is heavily subsidised by government and this money should be transferred to rail and regarded not as a profit making operation but as a service to the people of NSW.⁴¹⁵
- 5.97** Associate Professor Laird noted the potential benefits from road and rail transport working together: ‘... given the incentives, or the lack of subsidies for line-haul trucking, I think we would see a lot more of this innovation where we get the best of both modes working together.’⁴¹⁶

Committee view: Support for rail freight

- 5.98** The Committee supports the view of many coastal residents that greater use of rail freight could reduce the number of heavy vehicles on the roads, resulting in safety, environmental and social benefits. Greater use of rail freight could therefore alleviate residents’ concerns about the dangers of mixing local and through traffic, and perhaps make it possible to have smaller-scale Highway upgrades.
- 5.99** Although road freight has advantages in terms of timeliness, cost and flexibility, the attractiveness of rail freight could be increased by greater investment in rail infrastructure. The next section discusses how to increase rail’s share of the land freight task.

⁴¹³ Mr Matthew Jamieson, Evidence, Hearing, 27 October 2005, p69

⁴¹⁴ Submission 4 (Far North Coast), Ms Christine Fira, pp1-2

⁴¹⁵ Submission 47 (Far North Coast), Mr Garry Owers, p1

⁴¹⁶ Associate Professor Laird, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p29

Increasing rail's share of the land freight task

- 5.100** The Committee was told that substantial action must be taken to increase the share of the freight task transported by rail, with two steps urgently needed: first, increased investment in rail infrastructure; and second, integrated planning for road and rail.

Investment in rail infrastructure

- 5.101** According to the Railway Technical Society of Australasia: 'It is understood by the RTSA that in 2003, the Maitland – Brisbane rail line was assessed as the weakest interstate rail line in Australia.'⁴¹⁷ Associate Professor Phillip Laird agreed, claiming that 41% of the Sydney – Brisbane railway 'fails to meet the most basic fast freight train standards.'⁴¹⁸ Associate Professor Laird cited reports showing that the Sydney – Brisbane rail link was in jeopardy and may not survive as a commercial freight route without urgent improvements.⁴¹⁹
- 5.102** The Railway Technical Society of Australia noted that in 2001, rail accounted for 15.5% of land freight from Sydney to Brisbane, and by 2010, this was predicted to decline to 7%.⁴²⁰
- 5.103** Given these comments on the poor standard of the rail line and the low proportion of freight transported by rail, some Inquiry participants commented on the need to increase investment in rail infrastructure. This need was also recognised by the Hon John Anderson MP, then Federal Minister for Transport:

It's terribly important that we now move as rapidly as possible to develop a national seamless rail link, and I reckon motorists understand instinctively that we need to fix rail, otherwise we tread water. We do the roads up; we put a lot of taxpayers' money into roads; only to find that they're choked, prematurely again, by trucks, with the exploding freight task before us.⁴²¹

- 5.104** Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP, Federal Member for Cowper, told the Committee that Commonwealth investment aims to support the transfer of freight from road to rail:

I welcome the Federal Government spending \$450m on up-grading the Sydney – Brisbane railway line to take 120,000 container loads a year off the Highway and on to rail. That will help, and it is right that we should be moving as much freight as possible off road and on to rail.⁴²²

- 5.105** Mr Hartsuyker noted that the Commonwealth Government is investing \$123 million of this \$450 million on the North Coast of New South Wales.⁴²³

⁴¹⁷ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p6

⁴¹⁸ Associate Professor Laird, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p26

⁴¹⁹ Submission 96 (Far North Coast), Associate Professor Phillip Laird, p7

⁴²⁰ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p7

⁴²¹ Submission 47 (Coffs Harbour), Bypass Action Network, p3

⁴²² Submission 45 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Hartsuyker MP, p4

⁴²³ Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP, Federal Member for Cowper, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p20

5.106 Mr Hartsuyker argued that State funding must complement Commonwealth investment:

To maximise the benefits of the Federal Government's plans for the East Coast line, the branch lines feeding it, currently the responsibility of the State Government, need maintenance and improvement. Many of the branch lines in New South Wales operate under restrictions; some have been closed. The State Government must invest in these lines to provide a seamless rail route for freight from towns served by the branch lines to the major cities.⁴²⁴

5.107 The Committee notes that the Commonwealth Government is conducting a study on future rail freight demand along the Melbourne – Sydney – Brisbane corridor, which will inform strategic transport planning for the east coast.⁴²⁵ Among other things, the study is examining how to improve freight services and shorten travel times for rail freight in the Melbourne – Sydney – Brisbane corridor. The final report is due to be submitted to the Minister for Transport in June 2006.

5.108 The NSW Road Transport Association supported increased investment in rail infrastructure:

NSW RTA also supports in principle proposals to upgrade the main rail line between Sydney and Brisbane and between Melbourne and Brisbane. This may lead to some shift in market share in the long distance interstate freight moving through the North Coast. The extent to which there is a shift from one transport mode to the other will be determined by the market.⁴²⁶

5.109 It was suggested to Mr Hartsuyker that the Commonwealth's funding for rail under AusLink was relatively low in comparison to funding for roads. Mr Hartsuyker responded:

I would say that we are making a very adventurous effort. Half a billion dollars is a lot of money, and there is the feasibility study on the Melbourne – Brisbane corridor additionally, which is another huge area ... AusLink is the first co-ordinated national transport plan. It has not been done before. It was a totally piecemeal approach but now we are doing it.⁴²⁷

5.110 Associate Professor Laird noted that more than 'patch-up and catch-up' was needed to improve the attractiveness of Sydney – Brisbane rail transport, and nominated track straightening as essential to improving the condition of the rail line.⁴²⁸ Associate Professor Laird said that investment in rail infrastructure in New South Wales was poor in comparison to Queensland and Victoria, as both of these states had made significant funding commitments to rail in recent years.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ Submission 45 (Coffs Harbour), Mr Hartsuyker MP, p9

⁴²⁵ Hon John Anderson MP, Minister for Transport and Regional Services, 'North – South Rail Corridor Study,' *Media Release*, 18 April 2005; <www.auslink.gov.au/factsheets/rai/qld/fs_artc10.aspx> (accessed 23 March 2006)

⁴²⁶ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p7

⁴²⁷ Mr Hartsuyker, Evidence, 21 November 2005, p22

⁴²⁸ Associate Professor Laird, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p25

⁴²⁹ Submission 96 (Far North Coast), Associate Professor Phillip Laird, pp8-9

Integrated planning for road and rail

5.111 Byron Shire Council supported integrated transport planning involving road and rail:

Integrated transport planning is essential. Planning for road upgrades in isolation of other means of general and freight transport is doomed to failure. Moving freight around the state or country can and should involve shipping and rail. These two modes of transport have the ability to move huge quantities of freight and would lessen the burden on the road infrastructure.⁴³⁰

5.112 Similarly, the Railway Technical Society of Australasia said: ‘The Society suggests that transferring interstate freight from road to rail should be viewed as part of an integrated strategy to improve road safety.’⁴³¹

5.113 In November 2004, this Committee conducted an Inquiry into the Closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Service. During that Inquiry, many witnesses and submission authors pointed to the NSW Government’s lack of integrated transport planning for the North Coast, comparing the performance of the NSW Government with integrated transport plans and rail upgrades in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.⁴³²

5.114 Mr Nick Casmirri, a resident of the Far North Coast, argued that investment in rail infrastructure should be an integral consideration in long-term transport planning:

Railways won’t instantly relieve the pressure on our roads, but they should be at the heart of long-term transport planning strategies. We need to stop looking for short-sighted quick-fixes, and start planning for genuine long-term solutions.⁴³³

5.115 The NSW Road Transport Association noted that the absence of inter-modal terminals contributed to the dependence on road freight:

Because there are no significant sea ports or inter-modal terminals on the North Coast all freight moving to and from the North Coast of New South Wales is moved by road. This means everything produced by local industry and everything consumed by the local community is transported by truck. It means the community has a total dependence on the road transport industry for the movement of goods.⁴³⁴

5.116 The North Coast Environment Council put forward a similar argument:

We ask the Government to start planning for regional rail transshipment depots on the North Coast and New England tablelands, to make improvements to the rail tracks and the organisation of the rail administration to encourage the greater use of rail.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁰ Submission 188 (Far North Coast), Byron Shire Council, p4

⁴³¹ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p2

⁴³² NSW Legislative Council, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4, Report 10, *Closure of Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Services*, November 2004

⁴³³ Submission 81 (Far North Coast), Mr Nick Casmirri, p1

⁴³⁴ Submission 145 (Far North Coast), NSW Road Transport Association, p2

⁴³⁵ Submission 57 (Coffs Harbour), North Coast Environment Council, p1

- 5.117** Associate Professor Laird questioned the NSW Government's commitment to integrated road and rail planning, based on its reluctance to establish shared road and rail corridors:

The need for an integrated approach to road and rail infrastructure is recognised in the Federal Government's new AusLink Programme. However, with the exception of the Tugun bypass which had a strong Queensland Government influence, the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority has been apparently reluctant to explore the use of shared land corridors for road and rail upgrades.⁴³⁶

- 5.118** The Railway Technical Society of Australasia noted the lack of co-ordination between road and rail planning in New South Wales, and called on the Committee to question the RTA on '... the extent to which it co-ordinates with the ARTC [Australian Rail Track Corporation] in planning major Pacific Highway and North Coast rail track upgrades.'⁴³⁷ The Railway Technical Society of Australasia noted the potential for such integrated planning, resulting in shared land corridors for road and rail upgrades, to result in cost savings.⁴³⁸

- 5.119** Mr Andrew Honan, Chair, Government Relations Subcommittee, Railway Technical Society of Australasia, explained that the cost of constructing rail upgrades is relatively low compared to the high upfront costs (such as land acquisition). Mr Honan argued that therefore there would be a marginal additional cost from packaging rail and road upgrades together:

... we are saying if you are going in there with roads, look at it for rail because it is only very marginal to acquire a bit more land while at the same time doing a road, or while you are doing the bulk earth works for the road you can do the bulk earth works for the rail, and the marginal costs to complete the rail line are insignificant.⁴³⁹

- 5.120** Mr Honan emphasised that implementing shared road and rail corridors would 'be putting into practice the Government's policies on the environment and land transport.' Mr Honan urged the Committee to investigate the possibility of shared road and rail corridors:

This Committee and other forums like it have a unique opportunity to ask questions about ecologically sustainable development. We are talking about a four-lane or six-lane road in the Pacific Highway and a rail corridor easement of four or five metres. Surely in the concept stage we could look at the combined rail – road corridor from an environmental and social point of view.⁴⁴⁰

- 5.121** The RTA advised that in relation to integrated planning for rail and road upgrades, 'there have been discussions between the RTA and Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) in regard to the upgrade proposals from both organisations along the North Coast.'⁴⁴¹ The RTA also

⁴³⁶ Submission 96 (Far North Coast), Associate Professor Phillip Laird, p1

⁴³⁷ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p6

⁴³⁸ Submission 8 (Far North Coast), Railway Technical Society of Australasia, p9

⁴³⁹ Mr Andrew Honan, Chair, Railway Technical Society of Australasia, Evidence, 21 March 2006, pp30-31

⁴⁴⁰ Mr Honan, Evidence, 21 March 2006, p27

⁴⁴¹ Answers to questions on notice taken during evidence 21 March 2006, Mr Hannon, Attachment B, Item 4, p2

noted that together with the ARTC, they are participating in the AusLink study of the Sydney – Brisbane corridor, which is considering both road and rail freight.

Committee view: Increasing rail’s share of the land freight task

- 5.122** Investment in rail infrastructure must be significantly increased to improve rail’s share of the land freight task. The Committee considers the Commonwealth Government’s AusLink funding commitments to be a promising start, but notes the need for NSW Government funding to complement AusLink funding, particularly to upgrade rail branch lines feeding into the East Coast line. The Committee welcomes the Commonwealth Government’s AusLink initiative – an initiative that provides the NSW Government with an opportunity to make up for some of its deficiencies in providing integrated transport plans for the North Coast.
- 5.123** However, investment in rail must be accompanied by integrated road and rail planning, which is vital to the success of strategic transport planning. Such integrated planning is urgent, given the predicted doubling of the freight task by 2020, and the evidence presented to the Committee that any improvements to roads tend to induce additional traffic, quickly absorbing the additional capacity of road improvements.

Strategic planning for the Pacific Highway and beyond

- 5.124** Throughout the Inquiry, a number of North Coast residents and community groups raised concerns about the lack of a strategic plan to guide the future management of freight in New South Wales, at the national, State and regional level.
- 5.125** When asked whether there was a national strategy to support the decision to upgrade the Pacific Highway as an inter-state freight route, the RTA said:

Before the current 10-year agreement was signed by the State and Federal governments in 1996, a major study was done by the Bureau of Transport Economics, a Commonwealth body, which looked at national freight movements and recommended to the Federal Government that the Pacific Highway be upgraded to carry freight as part of our national network, which included the Hume Highway from Victoria. The report’s title is, “Adequacy of Transport Infrastructure,” Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics, November 1994, for the National Transport Planning Taskforce.⁴⁴²

- 5.126** It would appear that the decision to use the Pacific Highway as the major inter-state freight route was based on this 1994 study on national freight movements, and that there has been no study since then to guide strategic decisions regarding the Highway. The Committee notes that this study was undertaken prior to the rapid demographic changes experienced by the New South Wales east coast in the past decade.

⁴⁴² Answers to questions taken on notice during evidence 18 November 2005, Mr Hannon, Item 1, p1

Statements by Planning Minister – Pacific Highway as a dedicated regional road

- 5.127** Some Inquiry participants told the Committee that the Hon Craig Knowles MP, then NSW Minister for Planning, had previously described the Pacific Highway as a regional road. According to Far North Coast residents Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East:

Under the guidelines of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, Mr Craig Knowles said ... that the Pacific Highway's function was to operate as the North Coast's primary inter- and intra- regional road traffic route. The purpose of the Pacific Highway was for regional transport (Sydney, 03 August 1998).⁴⁴³

- 5.128** Ms Karen Hagley of Newrybar argued that: "The fact that the Minister has stated that the Pacific Highway is dedicated as a regional road is very welcome and should by rights mean that non-local freight is moved on the western roads."⁴⁴⁴

- 5.129** Fellow Far North Coast residents Mrs Yvonne and Mr Jack Harper said:

By opening up the Pacific Highway to interstate heavy traffic, Mr Costa has created a pseudo-National highway on a designated Regional highway. Mr Craig Knowles directed coastal councils to develop draft local environment plans using the Pacific Highway as a designated Regional Highway (Commercial/Retail Development along the Pacific Highway, from the Queensland Border to Hexham (Sydney, 3/8/1998)).⁴⁴⁵

- 5.130** Such interpretations of the Minister's comments were refuted by the then Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. The Department advised the Committee that:

I assume that this term of reference arose from the use of the word "regional" in then Minister Knowles' direction dated 3 August 1998 to North Coast councils about commercial/retail development along the Pacific Highway ...

The Direction uses the word "regional" in two places ... Use of the word ... had no relationship with the terminologies used by the RTA or the Commonwealth Government in their hierarchies of road classification ... Any interpretation of the Section 117 Direction that implies that the then Minister Knowles considered the Pacific Highway to be a "designated regional road" is incorrect.⁴⁴⁶

- 5.131** The Committee accepts that there was a misinterpretation of Mr Knowles' comments on the part of some interested parties on the North Coast. The Committee notes that it is unfortunate that a mistaken belief concerning the status of the Pacific Highway was circulating in the community as a result of the former Planning Minister's Direction.

Committee view: Strategic planning for the Pacific Highway and beyond

- 5.132** The Committee recognises that strategic planning to accommodate the forecast doubling of the freight task is not the responsibility of the RTA alone, as roads are but one means to

⁴⁴³ Submission 54 (Far North Coast), Mrs Lois and Mr Jeff East, p5

⁴⁴⁴ Submission 115 (Far North Coast), Ms Karen Hagley, p2

⁴⁴⁵ Submission 12 (Far North Coast), Mrs Yvonne and Mr Jack Harper, p2

⁴⁴⁶ Submission 202 (Far North Coast), Department of Planning, p2

transport freight. It is possible that the RTA's tendency to envisage the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program in terms of 'joining the dots,' as suggested by Inquiry participants, is due to its limited portfolio responsibility. Strategic planning to accommodate the expanding freight task should include a range of authorities, including but not limited to the RTA, as well as all levels of government and neighbouring states. The Committee considers that State-led freight planning is opportune, given the Commonwealth Government's recent attempts to integrate transport planning through AusLink. Such strategic planning should have as a central concern the needs of the growing communities of the North Coast.

5.133 The Committee notes the conclusions of the Inquiry into the Cross City Tunnel in relation to a lack of strategic planning for Sydney's transport needs.⁴⁴⁷ Inquiry participants considered this lack of strategic transport planning to be a serious shortcoming. The Inquiry noted that there was a need for greater strategic planning for individual projects. It also noted that the RTA is not best-placed to consider overall transport needs, and that the proponent of a project should not also do the strategic planning for that project. All of these conclusions are relevant to the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program, and suggest that the lack of strategic planning guiding the individual Pacific Highway upgrades examined by the Committee may not be an isolated occurrence in terms of road infrastructure in New South Wales.

5.134 The Committee calls on the NSW Government to act on its responsibility for strategic transport planning for the movement of freight. This responsibility is pressing given the predicted doubling of the freight task by 2020. As part of its strategic transport planning for freight, the NSW Government should investigate the feasibility of incorporating the Summerland Way as part of a North Coast Highway Strategy (establishing an inland freight route), and implement measures to facilitate a shift from road to rail freight (including through integrated planning for both road and rail). In light of the outcome of such considerations, the RTA should re-assess whether M-class, freeway-type Highway upgrades are necessary on the North Coast, and consider downgrading the scale of the upgrades to minimise the adverse impact on coastal communities.

⁴⁴⁷ NSW Legislative Council, Joint Select Committee on the Cross City Tunnel, *Cross City Tunnel: First Report*, February 2006

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government act on its responsibility for strategic transport planning for freight by developing an integrated NSW Freight Strategy, and work through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to develop a national freight strategy to encourage integrated strategic planning for all modes of transport.

In addition to developing a strategy to guide all freight movements in New South Wales, the NSW Freight Strategy should:

- outline measures to encourage a shift from road to rail freight, including through integrated strategic planning for both road and rail upgrades
 - investigate the adequacy of less extensive upgrades to the Pacific Highway on the Mid and Far North Coasts, taking into consideration the outcomes of investigations concerning the North Coast Highway Strategy investigate including the feasibility of incorporating the Summerland Way and measures to shift freight from road to rail.
-

Appendix 1 Maps

Note: All maps are sourced from the RTA website www.rta.gov.au/.

Figure 1 Pacific Highway – Tweed Heads to Newcastle



Figure 2 Preferred route

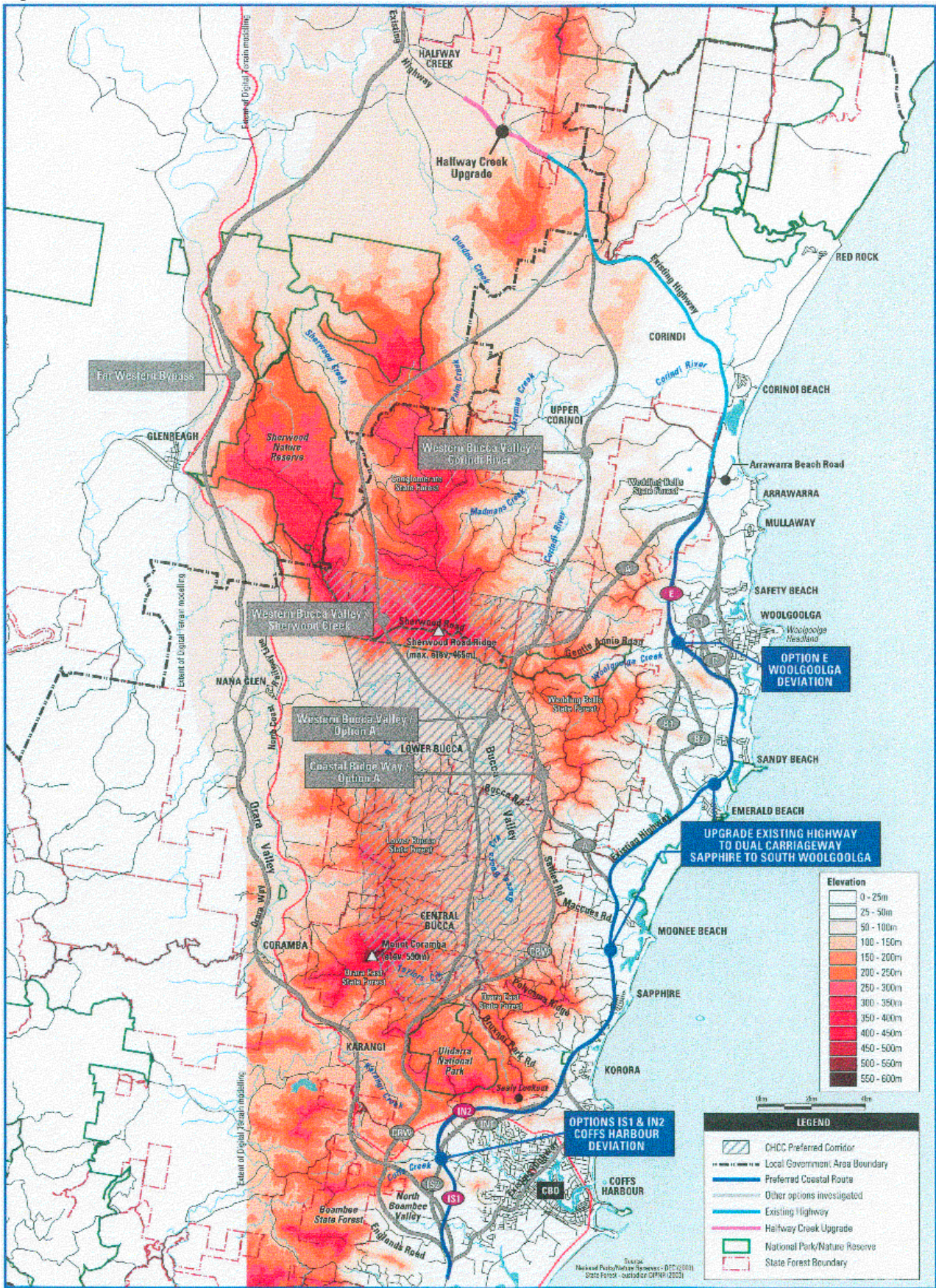
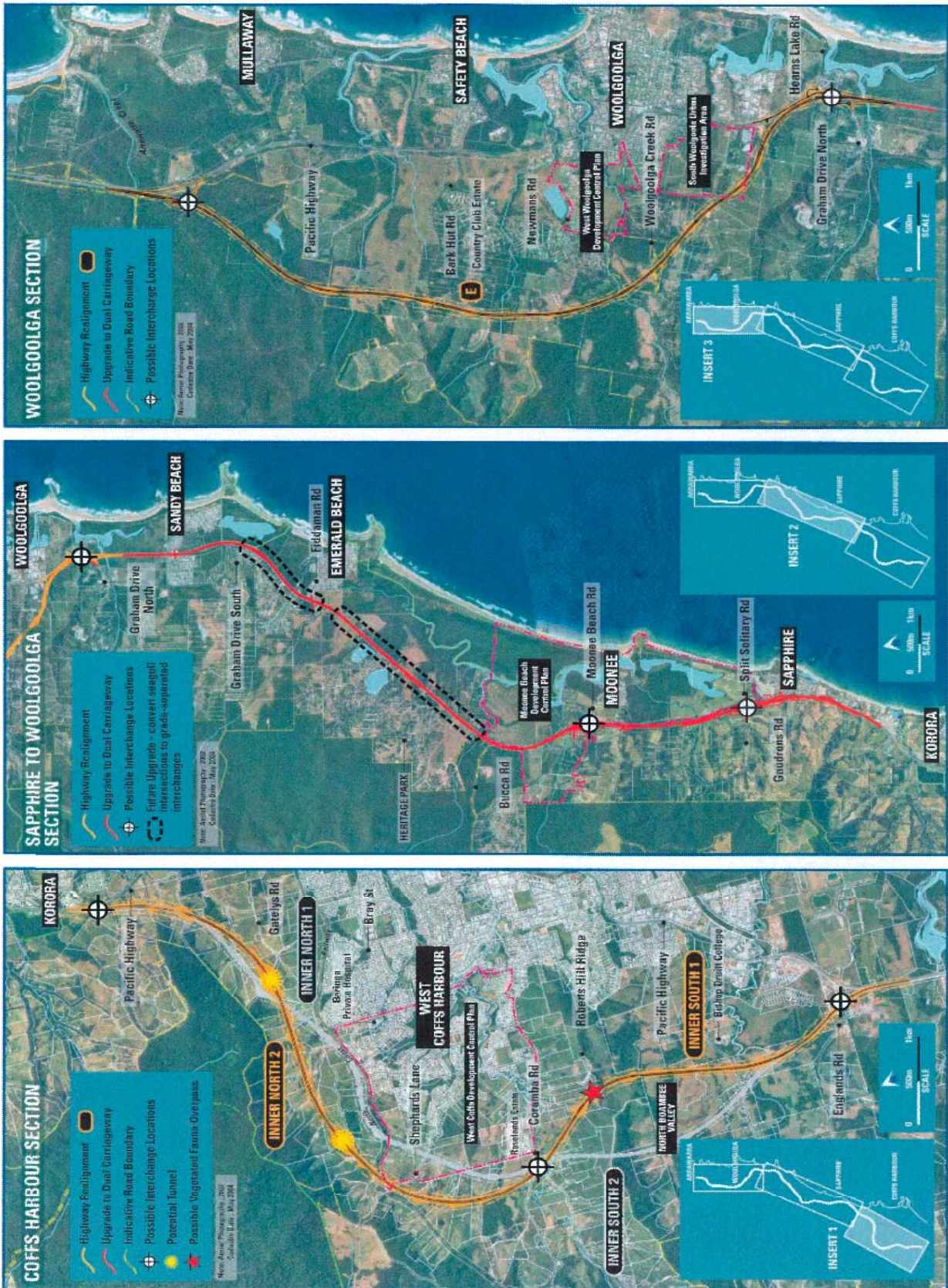


Figure 3 Preferred route by section



Appendix 2 Submissions

Pacific Highway Upgrades

No	Author
1	Ms Lois Hunt
2	Mr David Kanaley
3	Mr Alastair Annandale
4	Ms Christine Fira
5	Mr Chris Shevellar
6	Ms Deborah Sharp
7	Ms Francine Hitchens
8	Mr Chris Venn-Brown (Railway Technical Society of Australasia)
9	Mr Dave Morrow
10	Mr Isaac Shapiro
11	Mrs Louise Sheehan
12	Mrs & Mr Yvonne & Jack Harper
12a	Mrs & Mr Yvonne & Jack Harper
12b	Mrs & Mr Yvonne & Jack Harper
13	Mr Peter Hawkins
14	Mr Max Bolte
15	Mr Olivier Chaussemiche
16	Mr & Mrs Gordon & Colleen Lowrey
17	Ms Geraldine Bigelow
18	Mr W.O. McGeary (McGeary Bros Earthmoving Contractors)
19	Mr Raymond Collyer
20	Mr G.M. Messiter (NSW Sugar Milling Co-Operative Limited), and Mr R.R. Greentree (Richmond River Cane Growers Association)
21	Mr Colin Cook
22	Mr Geoff Williamson & Ms Vicki Curnow
23	Ms Aileen Cole (Bangalow Chamber of Commerce)
23a	Ms Aileen Cole (Bangalow Chamber of Commerce)
24	Ms Annette Coghill & Mr Denis Fullarton
25	Ms Gail Greig-Morrison
25a	Ms Gail Greig-Morrison
26	Mr & Mrs Alan & Marianne Logan

No	Author
27	Mrs Debbie Watsford
28	Mr Paul Gannon
28a	Mr Paul Gannon
29	Mrs & Mr Helen & Alan Craig
30	Mr Peter Barnett
31	Mr Samuel John Crump
32	Mrs Rosemary Barnett
33	Mr & Mrs Keith & Robyn Bauer
34	Mr & Mrs Michael & Judy Mellowes
35	Ms Ruth Gotterson
36	Dr Ian Falson
37	Mr Herb Jefferson
38	Mr Darren McAllister
39	Mr & Mrs John & Debra Pick
40	Mr Jeff Schneider
41	Ms Rhonda Kay
42	Mr & Mrs Ralph & Sue Keys
43	Mr & Mrs Peter & Maria Byrne
44	Mr Cliff James
45	Mr Ray Tate (Banora Point Residents Association)
46	Mrs & Mr Laurel & Richard Dumbrell
47	Mr Garry Owers
48	Mrs Lorraine Vass (Friends of the Koala, Inc)
49	Mr Mark Byrne
49a	Mr Mark Byrne
49b	Mr Mark Byrne
50	Ms Robyn Hornery
51	Ms Carol Darroch
52	Mr David McDonald (Woodburn to Broadwater Community Group)
53	Mr J.C. Matthes & Mr B.M Plenkovich (The Community Liaison Group)
54	Mrs & Mr Lois & Jeff East
55	Mr Colin Dorey (TW Dorey and Sons)
55a	Mr Colin Dorey (TW Dorey and Sons)
56	Mrs Margaret Gannon
56a	Mrs Margaret Gannon

No	Author
57	Cr Sharon Cadwallader (Australian Business Limited)
58	Mr Jerome Hensen (Macadamia Castle)
59	Ms Angela Davison
59a	Ms Angela Davison
60	Mr & Mrs Paul & Lyn Johnstone
61	Ms Jocelyn Hollis & Mr Jim Fiford
62	Mr Tony Stuart (NRMA)
63	Mr Andrew Fraser MP (State Member for Coffs Harbour)
64	Mr Andrew Stoner MP (State Member for Oxley)
65	Dr Lyn Walker (Ballina Environment Society)
66	Ms Leia Mancini
67	Ms Rebecca Zentveld
68	Ms Christine Bain
69	Mrs Blanche Brown
70	Mr Ian Duncan & Mr Bernard Grinberg (Knockrow Newrybar Residents Group & Ewingsdale Community Association)
71	Mr Maurice Spatt
72	Mr & Mrs Alan & Anja Morton
73	Mr Brian Wilkinson (Richmond Valley Council)
74	Mr Darryl Mellish (Bus and Coach Association (NSW))
75	Mr Colin Lewis
76	Ronni Hoskisson (Tweed Residents & Ratepayers Association)
77	Ms Judy Baker & Mr Brian Sundstrom
78	Mr Mark Graham (Blackwall Highway Action Group)
79	Mr & Mrs Greg & Lyn Plummer
80	Mr Keith Hammond
81	Mr Nick Casmirri
82	Ms Carol Will
83	Ms Christine Roberts
84	Mr Robert Graham
85	Ms Judy Baker
86	Mr Neil Denison (National Parks Association, Far North Coast Branch)
87	Mrs & Mr Claire & Steve Bedford
88	Ms Carly Rose Bedford
89	Mrs Donna Jarrett

No	Author
89a	Partially Confidential
90	Ms Margaret Oldham
91	Mr & Mrs Tony & Rie Gilding
92	Mr Ian McIntosh
92a	Mr Ian McIntosh
93	Ms Christine Fenech
94	Mr Alan Brown (Ballina Bypass Action Group)
95	Ms Margaret Murphy
96	Dr Philip Laird (University of Wollongong)
97	Mr & Mrs Terry & Kay Sandon
98	Mrs Elizabeth Bellinger
99	Ms Sandra Shepherd & Mr Geoff Whitehouse
100	Mrs June Zentveld (Newrybar Landcare Group)
101	Mrs June Zentveld (Zenvestments Pty Ltd)
102	Mr & Mrs Ron & Pam Gittoes
103	Mr & Mrs Mark & Roxine Gittoes
104	Ms Carmel Byrne
105	Ms Kerry Kelly
106	Mr Paul McLisky
107	Ms Anne Hicks
108	Ms Jan Fidelli (New South Wales Coffee Growers Association Inc)
109	Ms Leyla Roberts
110	Mr Steve Moody (Bypass Action Network)
111	Mr Michael Ward
111a	Mr Michael Ward
112	Ms Elizabeth Paton (Whytes Lane West Action Group)
113	Ms Kay Froehling
114	Mr Julian Goodwin
115	Ms Karen Hagley
116	Mr & Mrs Alan & Daphne Catchpoole
117	Partially Confidential
118	Mr Michael Meszaros
119	Mrs & Mr Odile & Andrew Priestley
120	Mr Dayne Mearns
121	Ms Margaret Howes

No	Author
122	Mr & Mrs Geoff & Gloria Radburn
123	Mrs & Mr Catherine & Shane Byrnes
124	Ms Dolores Kilpin
125	Mr & Mrs Ian & Julie Ritchie
126	Ms Lucy Clark & Mr Guntis Sics
127	Mr & Mr Con & Mick Melino
128	Mr Matthew Jamieson
129	Confidential
130	Ms Veronica Gill & Mr Ian Blume
131	Mr Russel Burtenshaw
132	Ms Catherine Byrnes
133	Ms Maria Matthes
134	Mr Mathew Gannon
135	Mrs Norma McAndrew
136	Mr Jack McAndrew
137	Mr John Christopherson (Ballina Shire Council)
138	Ms Prisca du Ressac
139	Mr Tony Gilding [C.A.R.S (Community Alliance for Road Sustainability)]
140	Mr James Armstrong
141	Mrs Jean Armstrong
142	Mr Neil Armstrong
143	Mr Richard Staples
144	Mr I G Fenwick
145	Mr Hugh McMaster (NSW Road Transport Association Inc)
146	Ms Christobel Munson (Bangalow Community Alliance)
147	Mr Stuart Baird
148	Mr Don Blake
149	Mr Surrey Bogg
149a	Mr Surrey Bogg
150	Mrs Betty Bolton
151	Ms Kim Brereton
152	Dr Pamela Brook (Brookfarm)
153	Mr David Brown
154	Dr James and Bronte Carlopio
155	Mrs Janette Casey

No	Author
156	Mr Ian Cooke
157	Mr & Mrs Ian & Kathy Dall
158	Ms Gwenaelle Seznec
159	Ms Sarah Jones & Mr Simon Cusack
160	Ms Alexandra Spyrtatos
161	Mrs Ilona Whiley
162	Dr Milton Easton
163	Mrs Denise Morden
164	Miss Suzanne Whiteman
165	Mr Warren Lumley
166	Mr Wayne Evans (Sandy Hearn's Action Group)
167	Confidential
168	Mr George Law
169	Mr Ken Law
170	Dr Dan Ewald
170a	Dr Dan Ewald
171	Mr Anthony Forbes
172	Mr Derek Harper
173	Mr Robert Howard
174	Mr Dwone Jones
175	Ms Tina Lloyd (Summerland Way Action Group)
176	Mr James Mangleson (Ocean Shores Community Association Inc)
177	Mr Markus Pache & Ms Kalyani Newman
178	Mr Craig Simpson
179	Ms Rosaleen Staunton
180	Mr Gerard Swain
181	Mr Neil Thomson (Kempsey Shire Council)
182	Mrs Sandy Van Veluwen (Moonee Action Group)
183	Mrs & Mr Anita & Colin White
184	Mr Owen Johnstone-Donnet (Tourism and Transport Forum Australia Ltd)
185	Mr & Mrs Les & Marcia Einhorn
186	Mr Adam Searle
187	Mr Perry Cornish
187a	Mr Perry Cornish
188	Ms Pamela Westing (Byron Shire Council)

No	Author
189	Mr John Broomhead
190	Ms Sandra Vincent (Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils Inc)
190a	Ms Sandra Vincent (Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils Inc)
191	Ms Cate Faehrmann (Nature Conservation Council of NSW)
192	Ms Katrina Luckie (Northern Rivers Regional Development Board)
193	The Hon David Campbell MP (Minister for Regional Development)
194	Mr M Gray
195	Mr & Mrs Greg & Lynne Cronan
196	Mr Barry Buffier (Department of Primary Industries)
197	Mr Andrew Collins (NSW Farmers' Association)
198	Ms Julie Trevor-Jones (Byron Creek Catchment Landcare Group Inc)
199	Mr & Mrs Owen & Julie Trevor-Jones
200	Mr & Mrs Gary & Rebecca Lock
201	Ms Betty Archer (Broadwater Koala Reserve Trust)
202	Ms Jennifer Westacott (Department of Planning)
203	Mr Paul Forward (Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW)
204	Dr Justin Meleo (Geolyse Pty Ltd)
205	Mrs Heidi Craig
206	Mr Don Page MP (State Member for Ballina)
207	Mr Robert Deards

Pacific Highway Upgrades: Coffs Harbour

No	Author
1	Mr Neil Thomson (Kempsey Shire Council)
2	Mr & Mrs Mark & Lynne Beiers
3	Mrs & Mr Louise & John Barselarr
4	Mr D Nurcombe
5	Mr John Hampton
6	Mr William Bagnall
7	Mr Gerry Rossi
8	Mr Trevor Pike
9	Mr Steve Clemesha (Ulitarra Conservation Society)
10	Mr H Lange

No	Author
11	Mr Neville Neal (Southern Cross University Coffs Harbour Students' Association)
12	Mr R.J. Christopher
13	Mr & Mrs Rodney & Carol Betland
14	Ms Vonni Bruce
15	Mrs & Mr Shirley & Ken Medhurst
16	Mrs & Mr Janette & Wolfgang Schulze
17	Mrs Beverley Miles
18	Mrs Sandy Van Veluwen (Moonee Action Group)
19	Mr Jim Brennan
20	Mr Phillip Gall (Sapphire Convenience Store)
21	Mr R. James Browne (Owners Corporation, Sapphire Beachfront Apartments)
22	Mr Bawa Singh Jagdev (Sikh Council Of Australia)
23	Mr John Langhorn
24	Mr & Mrs Alan & Valerie Griffiths
25	Mr Eddie Kendell
26	Mr & Mrs S & G Radford
27	Ms Margaret Murphy
28	Mr John Bruce
29	Mrs & Mr Tracey & Hugh Heading
30	Mrs Barbara Furze
31	Confidential
31a	Confidential
32	Mr Roger Allen
33	Ms Helen Jordan
34	Ms Loren Redwood
35	Mrs Shirley Rankin
36	Mr Brett Connolly
37	Mr Tony Brindley
38	Mr Stephen Cook & Ms Lorraine Wood
39	Mr Doug Prendergast
40	Mr Robert Moore
41	Mr John Ledger
42	Ms Cathy Jarrett (Urunga Public School P & C Association)
43	Mr Stephen Sawtell (Coffs Harbour City Council)

No	Author
44	Mr Steven Moody (Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network & Woolgoolga Area Resident's group)
45	Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP (Federal Member for Cowper)
46	Mr Michael Burt (NSW Farmers Association)
47	Mr Wayne Evans (Bypass Action Network)
48	Mr Robert Forrest (Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce)
49	Mrs Chris Scott (Premier Motor Inn)
50	Ms Rashmere Bhatti (Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community)
50a	Confidential
51	Mr John Latham
52	Mr Richard Casey
52a	Mr Richard Casey
53	Mr John Fielding OAM
54	Ms Marlene Jacobs (Boambee West Residents Association)
55	Mr & Mrs Paul & Anne Commerford
56	Mrs & Mr Kay & Kurt Froehling
57	Mr J Jeayes (North Coast Environment Council)
58	Mr E.J. Armstrong
58a	Mr E.J. Armstrong
59	Mr Mike Hannon (Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW)
60	Confidential Mr Bruce Scanlon (Woolgoolga to Sapphire Community Focus Group) Publication decision pending.
61	Mr Warren Williams
62	Mr Tony Stuart (NRMA)
63	Mr Alex McCartney
64	Mr Mark Fisher
65	Mr Garth McGilvray

Appendix 3 Form Letters

Author	Author
Anderson, Allan	Gannon, Margaret
Anderson, P	Gannon, Matthew
Anderson, Warren	Gilding, Tony
Batson, Dianne	Gotterson, Ruth
Batson, Peter	Greenwood, Malcolm
Batson, Russell	Hagley, Karen
Battersby, Beverly	Harper, Jack & Yvonne
Bedford, Stephen	Heaney, Keith
Bell, Heather	Heaney, Sylvia
Bodman, Drewin	Irwin, Col
Boyes, Audrey	Irwin, June
Boyes, R	Ivosevae, Rudi
Brook, Martin	James, Alan
Brook, Pam	Jarrett, Donna
Campbell, S	Jarrett, Gary
Catchpoole, A.D. & D.J.	Jefferson, Herb
Chegwyn, David	Kanaley, David
Clarke, Raymond	Kay, Rhonda
Coles, Tessa	Keith, C
Collins, Jason	Keith, Chris
Coulthurst, Roger	Keith, Ian
Dorey, Colin	Le Sueur, Lyle
Dorey, Geoffrey	Lewis, Marie
Dorey, Ron	Logan, Alan
Dorey, William	Mancini, Leila
Doyle, Charles	Martin, Steve
Doyle, Stephen	McAndrew, Jack
East, Lois	McAndrew, Norma
Einhorn, Les	McIlveen, K
Farrand, Peter	McIntosh, Ian
Ferns, Edith	McIntosh, Jasmine
Ferns, Tom	Molles, Robin
Gale, Marie	Molyneux, Maxine

Author	Author
Monthule, Nadia	Spear, Noel
Monthule-McIntosh, Olivier	Stewart, Wendy
Newland, Maxine	Touzel, Greta
Oelrichs, Claire	Touzel, Jamie
Oldham, D	Toynbee, Arnold & Rosemarie
Oldham, Margaret	Turnbull, P.B.
Orkin, Jamie	Wallen, Jonathan
Overington, A	Yin, Max
Overington, Tim	
Pache, Markus	There were 3 form letters from which the authors could not be identified.
Pick, Debra	
Power, Chais	
Radburn, G.M	
Ritchie, Ian	
Ritchie, Julie	
Roel, Frances	
Russell, Marilyn	
Russell, R.I.	
Ryan, Mark	
Sandon, T & K	
Scanlan, Paul	
Skennar, Colin	
Skennar, Colin	
Skyring, Nigel	

Appendix 4 Witnesses

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Monday 26 September 2005 Public Hearing, Sydney	Mr Hugh McMaster	Corporate Relations Manager, NSW Road Transport Association Inc.
	Mr Mark Crosdale	Northern Secretary, Newcastle, Transport Workers' Union
	Mr Andrew Collins	Economist/Analyst – Business, Economics and Trade, NSW Farmers' Association
	Dr Pam Brook	Local resident
	Mr Col Dorey	Local resident
	Mr Paul Forward	Chief Executive, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Les Wielinga	Director, Motorways, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Bob Higgins	General Manager, Pacific Highway, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Ms Hilary Wise	Manager, Motorists' Advocacy, NRMA
	Ms Lisa McGill	Policy Specialist, Traffic & Roads, NRMA
Thursday 27 October 2005 Public Hearing, Ballina	Cr Jan Barham	Mayor, Byron Shire Council
	Mr Steve Barnier	Strategic Planner, Ballina Shire Council
	Mr Ian Gaskell	Environmental Scientist, Ballina Shire Council
	Mr Tony Gilding	C.A.R.S (Community Alliance for Road Sustainability)
	Dr Robert Lodge	C.A.R.S (Community Alliance for Road Sustainability)
	Mr Ian Oelrichs	C.A.R.S (Community Alliance for Road Sustainability)
	Ms Christobel Munson	Bangalow Community Alliance
	Mr Ian Duncan	Knockrow Newrybar Residents Group
	Mr Bernard Grinberg	Ewingsdale Progress Association
	Mr Mark Graham	Blackwall Highway Action Group
	Mr David McDonald	Woodburn to Broadwater Community Group
	Mr Richard Paton	Whytes Lane West Action Group
	Mr Brent Leete	Whytes Lane West Action Group
	Mr Michael Archer	Whytes Lane West Action Group
	Mr Jack Matthes	Community Liaison Group Woodburn - Ballina
	Mr Bill Walker	Community Liaison Group Woodburn - Ballina (Representing the NSW Sugar Milling Cooperative)
Mr Bert Plenkovich	Community Liaison Group Woodburn - Ballina	

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mr Barry Jamieson	Community Liaison Group Woodburn - Ballina (Representing the Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council)
	Ms Emma Walke	Community Liaison Group Woodburn - Ballina
	Mr Jack Harper	Community Liaison Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Ms Gail Greig-Morrison	Community Liaison Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr Craig Simpson	Community Liaison Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr Paul McLisky	Community Liaison Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr Chris Shevellar	Community Liaison Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr David Kanaley	Community Liaison Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr Samuel John Crump	Agricultural Focus Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr Matthew Jamieson	Agricultural Focus Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr Rex Harris	Agricultural Focus Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Mr Surrey Bogg	Agricultural Focus Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar
	Ms Katrina Luckie	Agricultural Focus Group Ewingsdale - Tintenbar (Representing the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board)
Thursday 27 October 2005 Public Forum, Ballina	Ms June Zentveld	Local Resident
	Mr Dayne Mearns	Local Resident
	Mr Paul Gannon	Local Resident
	Mr Gerry Swain	Local Resident
	Mr Terry Sandon	Local Resident
	Mr Ian Dall	Local Resident
	Mr Les Einhorn	Local Resident
	Ms Robyn Hornery	Local Resident
	Mr James Mangelson	Local Resident
	Mr Mark Gittoes	Local Resident
	Mr Richard Grzegorzulka	Local Resident
	Mr Robert Deard	Local Resident
	Mr Marianne Logan	Local Resident
	Mr Heather Lloyd	Local Resident
	Mr Alistair Annandale	Local Resident
	Mr Gavin Brown	Local Resident
	Mr Robert Graham	Local Resident

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Friday 18 November 2005 Public Hearing, Sydney	Mr Mike Hannon	Acting Chief Executive, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Bob Higgins	General Manager, Pacific Highway, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Soames Job	General Manager, Road Safety Strategy, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Brian Watters	Acting Director, Road Network Infrastructure, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
Monday 21 November 2005 Public Hearing, Coffs Harbour	Mr Stephen Sawtell	General Manager, Coffs Harbour City Council
	Mayor Keith Rhoades	Mayor, Coffs Harbour City Council
	Mr Andrew Fraser MP	State Member for Coffs Harbour
	Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP	Federal Member for Cowper
	Mr Michael Burt	Regional Service Manager, NSW Farmers Association
	Mr Kasmir Singh Gill	Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community
	Ms Rashmere Bhatti	Woolgoolga Punjabi Sikh Community
	Mr Bawa Jagdev	Secretary, Sikh Council of Australia
	Mr Gerry Rossi	Local farmer
	Mr Steven Moody	Coffs Harbour Bypass Action Network & Woolgoolga Area Resident's Group
	Mr Bruce Scanlon	Community Representative, Woolgoolga to Sapphire Community Focus Group
	Mr Hugh Heading	Resident of Bonville
	Ms Lorraine Wood	Resident of Bonville
	Mrs Beverley Miles	Resident of Raleigh
	Ms Loren Redwood	Resident of Woolgoolga
	Mr Neville Neal	Southern Cross University Coffs Harbour Student's Association
	Mr Robert Forrest	Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce
Mr Phillip Gall	Sapphire Convenience Store	
Mr Roger Allen	Waterside Garden Nursery	
Tuesday 21 March 2006 Public Hearing, Sydney	Mr Mike Hannon	Acting Chief Executive, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Bob Higgins	General Manager, Pacific Highway, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Brian Watters	Acting Director, Road Network Infrastructure, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW
	Mr Michael Bushby	Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Dr Phillip Laird	Associate Professor, University of Wollongong
	Mr Andrew Honan	Chair, Government Relations Committee, Railway Technical Society of Australasia

Appendix 5 Site Visits

Date	Location
Friday 28 October 2005	Pacific Highway, between St Helena & Broadwater
	Jarretts' Farm, St Helena
	Zentvelds' Coffee, Newrybar
	Dorey Farms, Newrybar & Newrybar Swamp
	Plenkovich Farm, Broadwater
	Sheverton house, Wardell
Monday 21 November 2005	Pacific Highway, between Bonville & Woolgoolga
	Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara, Woolgoolga

Appendix 6 Tabled Documents

Monday 26 September 2005

Public Hearing, Parliament House, Sydney

1. CD copy of powerpoint presentation by Dr Brook - *tabled by Dr Pam Brook.*
2. Hardcopy of powerpoint presentation slides- *tabled by Dr Pam Brook.*
3. A4 and A3 copies of photos of flooding of Newrybar Swamp on 30 July 2005 taken from Dorey property- *tabled by Mr Col Dorey.*

Thursday 27 October 2005

Public Hearing, Ballina RSL

4. Copy of Byron Shire Sustainable Agriculture Strategy, June 2004- *tabled by Cr Jan Barham.*
5. Opening statement by Mr Steve Barnier, Strategic Planner, Ballina Shire Council- *tabled by Mr Steve Barnier.*
6. 'The Northern Star', Thursday, October 27, 2005- *tabled by Mr Tony Gilding.*
7. Copy of C.A.R.S. DVD about St Helena Hill, July 2005- *tabled by Mr Tony Gilding.*
8. 'A Strategic Approach to Regional Transport Planning'- *tabled by Mr Ian Oelrichs.*
9. 'The National Conservation Significance of the Wardell Wetlands, Tuckean Swamp and the Blackwall Range', October 2005- *tabled by Mr Mark Graham.*
10. Opening statement by Mr David McDonald, Woodburn to Broadwater Community Group- *tabled by Mr David McDonald.*
11. Map of route favoured by Woodburn to Broadwater Community Group- *tabled by Mr David McDonald.*
12. Photo's of 'Phil & Lynne's Place' and 'Looking South on the Highway'- *tabled by Mr Brent Leete.*
13. Copy of aerial map showing where the above photo's were taken at Pimlico- *tabled by Mr Brent Leete.*
14. Copy of 'Map 5 issued by RTA as part of their Woodburn to Ballina Pacific Highway Upgrade Route Selection Study'- *tabled by Mr Brent Leete.*
15. Letter from Harry Batt, Project Manager, Hyder Consulting to residents in the Woodburn to Ballina study area, dated 11 August 2005, re: the display of the route options in Woodburn and the studies being undertaken- *tabled by Mr Michael Archer.*
16. Copy of page 2 of the Notes of Meeting No.1, Tuesday 14 December 2004, of the Woodburn to Ballina Community Liaison Group- *tabled by Mr Michael Archer.*
17. Opening statement by Mr Bill Walker, Sugar Operations Manager, NSW Sugar Milling Co-operative representative- *tabled by Mr Bill Walker.*
18. Notes regarding 'the Flood free Route' proposed in the Woodburn to Ballina study area- *tabled by Mr Bert Plenkovich.*

19. CD copy of powerpoint presentation by Mr Plenkovich - *tabled by Mr Bert Plenkovich.*
20. Hardcopy of powerpoint presentation by Mr Plenkovich- *tabled by Mr Bert Plenkovich.*
21. Opening statement by Mr Jack Harper- *tabled by Mr Jack Harper.*
22. Poem 'The RTA Extends the Study Area' by Yvonne Harper- *tabled by Mr Jack Harper.*
23. Traffic Count taken on the Pacific Highway at McLeods Shoot on Thursday 27th October 2005 from 10:15am to 11:15am- *tabled by Mr Chris Shevellar.*
24. Opening statement by Mr Matthew Jamieson- *tabled by Mr Matthew Jamieson.*
25. Booklet entitled 'Piccadilly Park' Pacific Highway Bangalow- *tabled by Mr Rex Harris.*
26. Synopsis of discussion paper presented to Agricultural Focus Group in September 2005- *tabled by Mr Surrey Bogg.*
27. Notes on tabled documents and additional comments, dated Thursday 27 October 2005- *tabled by Ms Katrina Luckie.*
28. Draft Regional Industry and Economic Plan (V3) for the Northern Rivers, June 2005- *tabled by Ms Katrina Luckie.*
29. Working Paper for the Regional Industry and Economic Plan, November 2003- *tabled by Ms Katrina Luckie.*
30. An Economic Model for the Tweed and Northern Rivers: An Overview, June 2005- *tabled by Ms Katrina Luckie.*
31. North Coast Agriculture, 2000- *tabled by Ms Katrina Luckie.*
32. Northern Rivers Regional Development Board Transport Policy Statement, August 2005- *tabled by Ms Katrina Luckie.*
33. Letter from Katrina Luckie, Northern Rivers Regional Development Board to ARUP and the RTA, dated 24 October 2005, clarifying NRRDB recommendations on Upgrade of Pacific Highway for Tintenbar to Ewingsdale- *tabled by Ms Katrina Luckie.*

Thursday 27 October 2005

Public Forum, Ballina RSL

34. Copy of presentation to Committee- *tabled by Mr Les Einborn.*
35. Photo of fog over proposed tunnel exit at Ewingsdale- *tabled by Mr Les Einborn.*
36. Photo of fog over proposed route C & D between Ewingsdale & Tintenbar- *tabled by Mr Les Einborn.*
37. Photo taken looking down from 305 Coopers Shoot Road looking towards Lennox Head & Ballina- *tabled by Mr Les Einborn.*
38. Photo taken from 305 Coopers Shoot Road of all route options in the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar study area- *tabled by Mr Les Einborn.*
39. DVD copy of film 'Paradise Lost?' produced by Robert Deards- *tabled by Mr Robert Deards.*
40. Letter & Media Release regarding the above film, 'Paradise Lost?'- *tabled by Mr Robert Deards.*
41. Copy of presentation to Committee- *tabled by Mrs Marianne Logan.*

42. Photo of Marianne & Alan Logan's property- *tabled by Mrs Marianne Logan.*

Friday 28 October 2005

Site Visits, Ballina region

43. List of recommendations- *tabled by Mrs Pam Brook.*
44. Copies of letters distributed dropped in letterboxes of local residents in the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale region- *tabled by Mrs Donna Jarrett.*
45. Presentation to the Parliamentary Inquiry – On Farm Visit to the Jarrett Property, St Helena and Coopers Shoot - *tabled by Mrs Donna Jarrett.*
46. Various photos of the Dorey properties and surrounds- *tabled by Mr Col Dorey.*

Friday 18 November 2005

Public Hearing, Parliament House, Sydney

47. Response from the RTA to indicative questions - *tabled by Mr Mike Hannon.*

Monday 21 November 2005

Public Hearing, Coffs Harbour Ex-Services Club

48. Opening statement by Mr Bawa Jagdev, Secretary of the Sikh Council of Australia- *tabled by Mr Bawa Jagden.*
49. Various newspaper articles relating to the highway in and around Coffs Harbour- *tabled by Ms Rashmere Bhatti.*
50. Letter from Mr Ray Kearney, Associate Professor, Department of Infectious Diseases and Immunology, University of Sydney, to the Hon John Howard, Prime Minister, dated 5 July 2004 - *tabled by Mr Gerry Rossi.*
51. Article 'Call to protect local bananas'- *tabled by Mr Gerry Rossi.*
52. Copy of the 'Revised Charter' of the Sapphire to Woolgoolga Community Focus Groups, as at 11/12/01- *tabled by Mr Bruce Scanlon.*
53. Newspaper article 'Another truck crash at Moonee turnoff'- *tabled by Mr Roger Allen.*
54. Documents relating to acquisition of Mr Allen's property- *tabled by Mr Roger Allen.*

Appendix 7 Minutes

Minutes No. 64 - 84 were published in the Committee's Pacific Highway Upgrades- Interim Report.

Minutes No. 81, 82 and 83 were published in draft form. Amendments to those minutes are recorded in Minutes No. 89 (below).

1. Minutes No. 88

Tuesday 21 March 2006

Room 814/815, Parliament House at 10:00am.

2. 1. Members Present

Ms Jenny Gardiner (Chair)

Ms Jan Burnswoods

Mr David Clarke

Mr Ian Cohen (Oldfield)

Mr Greg Donnelly

Ms Amanda Fazio (Griffin)

Ms Lee Rhiannon (Hale)

3. 2. Public hearing – Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades: Coffs Harbour

The witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding procedures for the hearing and other matters.

The following witnesses from the RTA were examined on their former oath: Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive; Mr Bob Higgins, General Manager, Pacific Highway; Mr Brian Watters, A/Director, Road Network Infrastructure. Mr Michael Bushby, Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, RTA, was sworn and examined.

Questioning concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined: Dr Philip Laird, Associate Professor, University of Wollongong, and Mr Andrew Honan, Chair, Government Relations Subcommittee, Railway Technical Society of Australasia.

Questioning concluded, the witnesses, the public and the media withdrew.

4. 3. Deliberative meeting – Inquiries into Pacific Highway Upgrades

Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Sent

- Letter to Hon John Della Bosca MLC, Leader of the Government in the House, from Clerk of the Parliaments, enclosing a copy of the Committee's Interim Report and requesting a response by 21 June 2006 (21 December 2005)
- Letter to Clerk of the Parliaments, from Chair, tabling a copy of the Committee's Interim Report (21 December 2005)
- Letter to Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, from Director, scheduling the RTA to give evidence on 3 March 2006 (1 February 2006)
- Letter to Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, from Director, agreeing to Mr Hannon's request to defer the RTA's evidence from 3 March to 21 March 2006 and providing indicative areas for questioning (16 February 2006)
- Letter to Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, from Director, providing Mr Hannon with additional indicative areas for questioning for the hearing on 21 March 2006 (15 March 2006)

Received

- Responses to questions taken on notice during the hearing of 21 November 2005 from the following witnesses:
 - Mr Keith Rhoades, Mayor, Coffs Harbour City Council (23 November 2005)
 - Ms Rashmere Bhatti and Mr Kashmir Singh Gill of the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Woolgoolga (28 November 2005)
- Mr Phillip Gall, Proprietor, Sapphire Convenience Store (5 December 2005)
- Email from Mr Brian and Ms Madeline Mackney, to Chair, providing a copy of their submission on the Pacific Highway Upgrade Route Options Report for Tintenbar – Ewingsdale (11 December 2005)
- Letter from Mr D. Nurcombe, to Director, commending the progress on upgrading the Pacific Highway (18 January 2006)
- Email from Ms Lisa Burdell, to Chair, concerning the impact of the Pacific Highway upgrades on the Clarence Valley (20 January 2006)
- Letters from Mr Andrew and Mrs Janice Smith, Mr Tim Paterson, Mr Ken Oldfield and Mr Chris Clark, who may have been adversely identified in the submission and oral evidence from Mr Bruce Scanlon, responding to the comments made by Mr Scanlon (22, 23, 25 and 27 January)
- Letter from Mrs Elizabeth Bellinger, Broadwater Action Group, to Chair, concerning the noise impacts of the RTA's preferred route for the Woodburn-Ballina section of the Highway (8 February 2006)
- Letter from Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, to Director, requesting that the RTA's evidence be deferred to either 21 or 22 March 2006 (14 February 2006)
- Letter from Mr Richard Casey, Member, Woolgoolga – Wells Crossing CLG, to Director, forwarding a letter to the RTA concerning the non-disclosure of environmental assessment reports (20 February 2006)
- Letter from Mr Richard Casey, Member, Woolgoolga – Wells Crossing CLG, to Director, forwarding the minutes of a meeting of Ballina Shire Council held on 23 February 2006 (6 March 2006)
- Email from Mr John Jeayes, Secretary, North Coast Environment Council, to Chair, regarding alleged flaws in the environmental impact assessments for the Iluka – Wells Crossing Upgrade (6 March 2006)
- Letter from Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, advising that Mr Soames Job, General Manager, Road Safety Strategy, cannot attend the hearing on 21 March 2006, and will be replaced by Mr Michael Bushby, Director Road Safety, Licensing and Heavy Vehicle Management (16 March 2006)

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods:

- That the Committee publish the responses to questions taken on notice during the hearing of 21 November 2005, received from Mr Keith Rhoades, Mayor, Coffs Harbour City Council; Ms Rashmere Bhatti and Mr Kashmir Singh Gill of the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Woolgoolga; and Mr Phillip Gall, Proprietor, Sapphire Convenience Store;
- That the Committee consider including the letter from Mr Cohen to the Clerk of the Parliaments (16 December 2005) in the Minutes as 'Correspondence received', and that this matter be considered when the Committee considers confirmation of Minutes no. 81, 82 and 83.

Submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Clarke: That the Committee publish submissions no. 23(a), 64 and 65 relating to Coffs Harbour.

Possible adverse mention – publication of submission and transcript

Ms Fazio moved:

That the Committee:

- continue to publish Mr Scanlon's transcript of evidence from 21 November 2005 with the suppression of the names and identifying information for the persons who may have been the subject of adverse mention
- publish Mr Scanlon's submission but suppress the names and identifying information for the persons who may have been the subject of adverse mention.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Noes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Clarke moved:

That the Committee:

- publish the full version of Mr Scanlon's transcript of evidence from 21 November 2005 and place it on the Committee's website
- publish the responses from the persons who may have been the subject of adverse mention made by Mr Scanlon during his evidence of 21 November and place the responses on the Committee's website with a link to the transcript of evidence
- keep confidential the letter from Mr Oldfield responding to Mr Scanlon's evidence
- publish the full version of Mr Scanlon's submission.

Ms Burnswoods moved:

That the question be amended by:

- first dot point – adding after 'evidence from 21 November 2005', 'but without reference to Mr Oldfield'
- third dot point – deleting the existing sentence and inserting instead, 'keep confidential the letter responding to Mr Scanlon's evidence from the person who may have been the subject of adverse mention, who requested that their response be kept confidential'
- fourth dot point – adding after 'submission', 'but without reference to Mr Oldfield'.

Question: That the amendment of Ms Burnswoods be agreed to.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Noes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Amendment resolved in the negative.

Original question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Noes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Burnswoods gave notice of her intention to move to rescind the motion agreed to by the Committee regarding publication of the full version of Mr Scanlon's transcript of evidence from 21 November 2005 and his submission.

Minutes no. 81, 82 and 83

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That the Committee hold a deliberative meeting to consider the outstanding minutes and other matters during the next two sitting weeks.

Reporting date – final report

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the reporting date for the Committee's final report for the Inquiries into Pacific Highway Upgrades be 11 May 2006.

A deliberative meeting to consider the Chair's draft report will be held on Friday 5 May 9:30am – 3:30pm, with Monday 8 May from 2pm set aside for an additional deliberative meeting, if required.

Additional questions on notice

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That any Member who wishes to send additional questions on notice to the RTA should submit them to the Secretariat by Friday 24 March 2005. These additional questions will be circulated to the rest of the Committee. The RTA will be required to respond to the questions taken on notice by Monday 10 April.

5. 4.Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 1:55pm.

Madeleine Foley
Clerk to the Committee

6. Minutes No. 89

Wednesday 29 March 2006

Room 1108, Parliament House at 1:10pm.

7. 1.Members Present

Ms Jenny Gardiner (Chair)
Ms Jan Burnswoods
Mr David Clarke
Mr Ian Cohen (Oldfield)
Mr Greg Donnelly
Ms Amanda Fazio (Griffin)
Ms Lee Rhiannon (Hale)

8. 2.Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Sent

- Letters from Principal Council Officer requesting answers to questions taken on notice during hearing of 21 March 2006, dated 27 March 2006, to:
 - Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA
 - Assoc Professor Philip Laird, University of Wollongong.

9. 3.Inquiries into Pacific Highway Upgrades

Possible adverse mention

Ms Burnswoods moved: That the Committee rescind the resolution of Meeting no. 88 regarding publication of the full version of Mr Scanlon's transcript of evidence from 21 November 2005 and his submission.

Question put.
Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio
Noes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

10. 4. Confirmation of Minutes

The page numbering referred to by the Committee in their consideration of Minutes no. 81, 82 and 83 is taken from the Committee's Interim Report on Pacific Highway Upgrades.

Minutes no. 81

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 3 on p175 be deleted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Noes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That the Secretariat seek advice from the Clerks regarding the use of 'noted' in relation to individual members, in the context of a deliberative meeting of a committee to consider a draft report.

Motion withdrawn.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That following paragraph 4 on p191, the names of the members voting in the division be inserted.

Ms Rhiannon moved: That Minutes no. 81 be confirmed.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Noes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Minutes no. 82

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That following paragraph 8 on p210, the details of the ensuing division be inserted.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Rhiannon: That Minutes no. 82 be confirmed.

Minutes no. 83

Ms Fazio moved: That the last line on p224 be amended to read: 'Ms Rhiannon moved: That a recommendation prepared by the Hon Duncan Gay be inserted to read.'

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Noes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraphs 6 and 7 from the bottom of p225 be amended to correct the typographical errors.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That after paragraph 2 on p228 the following be inserted: 'Ms Rhiannon moved in Recommendation 8:

Line 2 – after 'route' – add 's' to make plural; after Way – 'New England and Gwydir Highway'

Line 3 – after 'Grafton' – 'such a study should involve a comparative cost/benefit analysis, economically, ecologically and socially between road and rail.'

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Noes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

The Committee agreed to place Ms Rhiannon's draft recommendations deferred at the last deliberative meeting to discuss the Chair's Draft Interim Report on the agenda for the deliberative meeting to consider the Chair's Draft Final Report.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That the Committee seek further advice from the Clerks concerning the rules relating to the rights of Committee members in relation to a Chair's Foreword.

Mr Cohen moved: That the question be now put.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Noes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question then put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Noes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Rhiannon moved: That Minutes no. 83 be confirmed.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Gardiner, Ms Rhiannon

Noes: Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly, Ms Fazio

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Minutes no. 88

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Clarke: That Minutes no. 88 be confirmed.

11. 5. Other business

Ms Gardiner tabled the following documents, for circulation to the Committee:

- Department of Planning, Draft Far North Coast Regional Strategy 2006 – 2031
- Queensland Government, Office of Urban Planning, Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation: South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005 – 2026, June 2005; South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005 – 2026 Draft Amendment 1, March 2006
- The Hon Warren Truss MP, Minister for Transport and Regional Services, 'NSW RTA's Summerland Way Study Welcomed,' Media Release, 13 March 2006

12. 6. Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 2:15pm.

Madeleine Foley

Clerk to the Committee

13. Minutes No. 91

Friday 5 May 2006

Room 1108, Parliament House at 9:35am

14. 1. Members Present

Ms Jenny Gardiner (Chair)

Ms Jan Burnswoods

Mr David Clarke

Mr Ian Cohen (Oldfield)

Mr Greg Donnelly

Ms Amanda Fazio (Griffin)

Ms Lee Rhiannon (Hale)

15. 2. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- Letter from Associate Professor Philip Laird, University of Wollongong, to Director, responding to questions taken on notice during the hearing of 21 March (30 March 2006)
- Letter from Ms Helen Vickers, A/Corporate Counsel, RTA, to Principal Council Officer, advising that the RTA is unable to provide answers to the questions taken on notice until Thursday 13 April 2006 (10 April 2006)
- Letter from Mr Mike Hannon, A/Chief Executive, RTA, responding to questions taken on notice during the hearing of 21 March (13 April 2006)

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That the Committee publish the responses to questions taken on notice during the hearing of 21 March 2006 from Assoc Professor Philip Laird and Mr Mike Hannon, RTA.

16. 3. Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That Minutes no. 89 be confirmed.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Clarke: That Minutes no. 90 be confirmed.

17. 4. Inquiries into Pacific Highway Upgrades

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That the following explanatory note be inserted at the beginning of the Appendix relating to minutes:

Minutes no. 64 – 83 were published in the Committee's Interim Report and are not included in this Report.

Minutes no. 81, 82 and 83 pertaining to the Committee's deliberations regarding the Chair's draft Interim Report were published in draft form in the Interim Report. Amendments to those minutes are recorded in Minutes no. 89 (below).

Chair's draft Final Report

The Chair submitted her draft report which, having been circulated to each member of the Committee, was accepted as having been read a first time.

The Committee proceeded to consider the Chair's draft Final Report in detail.

Chapter 1 read.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That Chapter 1 be adopted.

Chapter 2 read.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That paragraph 2.22 be amended by inserting the following new dot point after the third dot point: 'An alternative local access route'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That paragraph 2.27 be amended by replacing the word 'misusing' with the words 'the use of'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That paragraph 2.37 be amended by deleting the words 'validity of'.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 2.40 be deleted.

Question put and negatived.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 2.40 be amended by replacing the words 'a less' with the words 'the issue of a less', and by deleting the words 'may be viable but that this issue'.

Question put and negatived.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 2.44 be amended by deleting the word 'jointly' and by inserting the word 'both' after the words 'funded by'.

Question put and negatived.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 2.44 be amended by replacing the words 'this State road' with the words 'the Pacific Highway'.

Question put and negatived.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 2.45 be amended by deleting the following words:

... Australia's first national land transport plan since Federation. Under AusLink, separate Commonwealth funding for road and rail programs will be pooled into a single program. AusLink is designed to achieve better national land transport planning, funding and investment decision-making.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 2.49 be amended by replacing the words 'Under the pre-AusLink system' with the words 'Prior to the introduction of AusLink,'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 2.51 be amended by inserting the funding for the upgrade of the New England Highway over the next three years if available.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 2.52 be deleted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 2.52 be amended by replacing the words 'a Committee Member's claim' with the words 'an assertion by the Hon Amanda Fazio MLC'.

Question put and negatived.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 2.73 be deleted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Clarke: That paragraph 2.73 be deleted and reinserted after paragraph 2.70.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 2.77 be amended by deleting the final sentence.

Question put and negatived.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That paragraph 2.77 be amended by deleting the following words in the final sentence:

... especially if there was not provision for un-tolled alternative roads or toll exemptions for local traffic.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 2.75 be amended by replacing the words 'is of the view that the' with the word 'notes', and by deleting the words 'is inadequate' and 'within the next 10 years'.

Question put and negatived.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 2.54 be deleted and the following paragraph inserted:

In December 2005, the Hon Joseph Tripodi MP, then Minister for Roads, and the Hon Jim Lloyd MP, Federal Minister for Roads, in a joint press release announced an agreement which demonstrated the commitment of both governments to finding a solution to accelerate the upgrade of the Pacific Highway.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Chapter 3 read.

Mr Donnelly moved: That the case study after paragraph 3.7 be deleted.

Question put and negatived.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That the heading of the case study after paragraph 3.7 be amended by inserting the words 'Given in evidence by' before the words 'Ms Loren Redwood'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That footnote 99 be deleted.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That the heading before paragraph 3.37 be amended to read: 'Mr Scanlon's concerns about consultation methods'.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 3.55 be amended by replacing the word 'claimed' with the word 'said'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 3.65 be amended by deleting the word 'including' and insert a new sentence beginning 'The criticisms included'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That the last sentence of paragraph 3.80 be deleted.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 3.78 be deleted and the following paragraph inserted:

The Committee notes the evidence by some inquiry participants supporting the RTA's consultation process and criticising the delays caused by self-interested lobby groups.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 3.78 be amended by replacing the words 'These issues' with the words 'Their concerns'.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 3.79 be deleted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That Recommendation 1 be amended by inserting the words 'continue to' after the acronym 'RTA'.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That Recommendation 1 be amended by inserting the word 'prime' before the words 'agricultural land'.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 3.124 be amended by deleting the second sentence and inserting the following sentence:

The RTA does recognise land to be a substantial constraint in developing route options, as shown in the action of the Value Management Workshop in October 2003 in not preferring options B1 and B2 due to their substantial impact on agricultural land.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Fazio moved: That the case study after paragraph 3.131 be deleted.

Question put and negatived.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That the heading of the case study after paragraph 3.131 be amended by inserting the words 'Given in evidence by' before the words 'Mrs Tracy'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 3.136 be amended by replacing the fourth dot point with the following dot point:

- Improving transitions on the approaches to existing dual carriageways at the ends of the proposed Bonville upgrade

Ms Fazio moved: That recommendation 2 be deleted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 3.140 be deleted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraphs 3.141 and 3.142 be deleted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted before paragraph 3.141:

It is sometimes suggested that the RTA did not undertake detailed environmental studies prior to developing the route options and submitting the EIS for approval. This is not correct.

The Committee had before it evidence that for the Bonville Upgrade:

- A Planning Focus Meeting was held with councils and government agencies on 4 February 1997.
- Route options were publicly displayed in March 1997. Eleven route options were investigated, including options proposed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- A Value Management Workshop was held on 24 March 1997.
- The preferred route was announced on 10 October 1997.
- Environmental Impact Assessments (EIS) and Species Impact Statements (SIS) were displayed between 6 August and 11 September 1998.
- Concurrence of the Director-General of the National Parks and Wildlife Service was granted on 17 September 1999.
- Planning approval was granted by the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning on 2 March 2000.
- Modifications to the project were investigated in response to requests from local environmental groups subsequent to approval of the EIS for the project.

Koalas were considered in the EIS and SIS.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Rhiannon circulated a proposed new section of the report entitled 'Wells Crossing to Illuka'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That the Chair seek advice from the Clerks about including substantial material in the report not referred to in the terms of reference and not covered in submissions or evidence at hearings, and that consideration of the inclusion of Ms Rhiannon's amendments be deferred pending this advice being sought.

Chapter 4 read.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 4.49 be amended by replacing the words 'Based on the RTA's statistics for these three projects, it is evident that' with the words 'In these three sections of the highway,'.

Ms Fazio moved: That paragraph 4.52 be amended by deleting the quotation in the final two sentences.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 4.52:

The Committee notes the obvious bias of Mr Fraser MP, State Member for Coffs Harbour, and his heavy emotional commitment to these issues.

Question put and negatived.

The Committee broke for lunch at 1:00 pm and resumed at 1:35 pm.

The Committee received advice from the Acting Clerk Assistant-Committees regarding Ms Rhiannon's proposed section entitled 'Wells Crossing to Illuka'.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 4.135 be amended by inserting the following new sentence before the last sentence:

The Committee acknowledges that M-class motorway-style highways also improve safety by separating high speed through traffic from lower speed local traffic.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Fazio moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 4.141:

The Committee notes that the RTA has placed three kilometres of noise sensitive pavement along this section of the highway and has undertaken architectural house treatments.

Question put and negatived.

Chapter 5 read.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 5.7 be amended by inserting the following new sentence at the end:

The Committee notes that among the key actions for regional transport are 'Continue planning and construction of the Pacific Highway upgrades through the Region' and 'Investigate improved links from the Summerland Way through to South East Queensland (to the future employment lands at Bromelton)' .

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 5.19 be deleted.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That paragraph 5.69 be amended by replacing the last sentence with the following sentence:

The Committee has been advised by the RTA that the report will be finalised and with the Minister by the end of May.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That Recommendation 3 be amended by:

- inserting the words 'including a route through the narrowest part of the Border Ranges to the Beaudesert area' after the words 'Summerland Way'
- inserting the word 'overall' before 'North Coast'
- replacing the words 'Motorway Proposal' with the words 'Highway Strategy'

and that paragraphs 5.68 to 5.77 be revised to refer to the 'North Coast Highway Strategy'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That Recommendation 4 be amended by:

- inserting after the words 'NSW Freight Strategy' the words 'and work through the Council of Australian Governments to develop a national freight strategy to encourage integrated strategic planning for all modes of transport'
- deleting the words 'in collaboration with neighbouring states and all levels of government'
- deleting dot point 1
- amending dot point 3 to replace the words 'Motorway' with the words 'Highway Strategy, including the feasibility of incorporating the Summerland Way'.

And that paragraph 5.135 be revised to reflect the modified Recommendation 4.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen, that Chapter 5 as amended be adopted.

Chapter 2 re-read.

Ms Burnswoods moved: That paragraph 2.24 be amended by deleting the final sentence.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That paragraph 2.24 be amended by deleting the word 'much'.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 2.38 be amended by deleting the last two sentences.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That a new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.43 to provide an update on progress in upgrading the Pacific Highway since October 2005, based on figures provided by the Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Minister for Roads, to the LC on 4 May 2006.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Burnswoods: That paragraph 2.51 be amended by inserting the following sentence at the end:

It is noted that the total funding for the New England Highway is currently much less than the funding for the Pacific Highway.

Ms Rhiannon moved: That Chapter 2, as amended, be adopted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Noes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Chapter 3 re-read.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 3.134:

At the Committee's hearing on 21 March 2006, Mr Cohen noted in relation to discussions between the RTA and groups in the Pine Creek Area:

People believe that there could be a benchmark for future negotiations between the RTA and local groups. I see that as a very positive step in that southern section of what I call the Pine Creek area, which is an environmentally sensitive area.

Does this set a benchmark in dealing with these issues? Are we going to see similar communications concerning the areas further north where there is a great deal of concern on the coastal emu north of Grafton, in the Iluka to Grafton section. Will there be similar communication on environmentally sensitive issues as we have witnessed with the area to the south of Coffs Harbour?

Ms Rhiannon moved: That Chapter 3, as amended, be adopted.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Noes: Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Chapter 4 re-read.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That a new recommendation be inserted after paragraph 4.136, and that the recommendation be preceded by an appropriate introductory paragraph. The new recommendation to read:

That the NSW Government collaborate with other State Governments, the Commonwealth Government, employers and the Transport Workers Union to develop comprehensive 'chain of responsibility' legislation, modelled on the NSW Occupational Health and Safety (Long Distance Truck Driver Fatigue) Regulation 2004 for the trucking industry.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Rhiannon: That Chapter 4, as amended, be adopted.

The Chair circulated the Chair's foreword.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Rhiannon: That Chapter 5 be recommitted.

Ms Rhiannon moved: That the following recommendations be inserted at the end of Chapter 5:

- Recommendation: That the RTA be required to include in its road infrastructure planning, a socio-economic evaluation component for individual property owners.
- Recommendation: That an independent investigation of the RTA planning process be undertaken immediately.
- Recommendation: That the RTA be compelled to make a clear distinction between Highway upgrades and new motorways.

Question put.

Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Cohen, Ms Rhiannon

Noes: Ms Gardiner, Mr Clarke, Ms Fazio, Ms Burnswoods, Mr Donnelly

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Rhiannon moved: That the following section entitled 'Wells Crossing to Illuka' be incorporated in a new Chapter 6 of the report:

Wells Crossing to Iluka

The committee notes that residents in the area from Wells Crossing to Iluka have also raised concerns about some of the RTA plans for developing the Pacific Highway in their area.

Local traffic use

The RTA in response to Committee questions acknowledged that an upgrade of the existing Pacific Highway would cater for 90% of the existing traffic and reduce car crashes on that section by 40% and reduce fatalities and serious injuries by 51%.

The RTA also informed the Committee:

Analysis undertaken for the project to date suggests that about 90% of all the existing traffic currently using the Pacific Highway from Harwood Bridge to Wells Crossing would use the Orange/A option, which generally follows the route of the existing highway. The analysis also suggests that the Orange/A option would reduce the overall crash rate in the corridor by as much as 40%. (p. 12)

The RTA acknowledged that it was investigating "the cost, effectiveness and feasibility of upgrading the existing Pacific Highway in conjunction with each of the route options." (p. 17)

This suggests that options Purple/B, Green/C or Red/D – routes involving completely new alignments – could involve considerable additional expense upgrading the existing Highway as well as constructing the new route.

High value habitat and threatened species

The RTA acknowledged that "The eastern part of the Wells Crossing to Iluka Road study area contains areas that have been identified as high value habitat and are known to contain a range of threatened species." (p. 19) and that

A motorway/highway passing through the habitat of the coastal emu population has the potential to impact on the emu species through reduction in the area of available habitat, as a result of severance of the known habitat. (p. 19)

The NSW Scientific Committee has determined that there are only two populations of the Eastern Coastal Emu. One of these population is in the Iluka to Wells Crossing area. The RTA acknowledged that this emu population is the larger and more viable of the last two populations of Eastern Coastal Emu.

Recommendation

That the RTA recognises that areas that have been identified as high value habitat and are known to contain a range of threatened species to be a substantial constraint in developing route options.

The Chair ruled the motion out of order on the basis that the motion would incorporate material in the report outside the Committee's terms of reference.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Cohen: That Chapter 5, as amended, be readopted.

Ms Fazio moved: That the Chair's foreword be amended by deleting the first and last sentences of paragraph 3, and replacing the first sentence with the following sentences:

The main finding of this report is that there is a lack of co-ordinated freight strategy nationally. The NSW Government should develop a comprehensive freight strategy and work through the Council of Australian Governments to develop a nationally consistent freight strategy to encourage integrated planning for all modes of transport.

Question put and negatived.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Rhiannon: That the report, as amended, be the report of the Committee and be presented to the House.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Rhiannon: That pursuant to section 4 of the Parliamentary Papers (Supplementary Provisions) Act 1975 and under the authority of Standing Order 223, the Committee publish all non-confidential tabled documents, correspondence, answers to questions taken on notice, minutes, submissions and transcripts.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Fazio: That the draft minutes of the meeting be provided to the Committee Members by 5:00 pm on Monday, 8 May 2006, and that Members provide to the Secretariat any dissenting statements to the report by 5:00 pm on Tuesday, 9 May 2006.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Rhiannon: That the Committee thank Ms Madeleine Foley and Ms Beverly Duffy for their work on the inquiry.

18. 5.Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 3:40 pm sine die.

Stephen Frappell
Clerk to the Committee

Appendix 8 Dissenting statements

DISSENTING REPORT BY GOVERNMENT MEMBERS

GPSC 4 inquiry into Pacific Highway upgrades: Coffs Harbour

Agricultural land

In making its recommendation about the treatment of agricultural land in roads planning, the report fails to acknowledge that the RTA **does** recognise agricultural land to be a substantial constraint in developing route options.

In its response to the Committee's questions on notice in April 2006, the RTA outlined (see response to question 34, page 16) the preliminary assessments of the reduction in the Byron/Ballina and the Northern Rivers Region total gross regional product arising from changes in current agricultural land use.

Rural land impacts rated as the highest social impact assessment criteria (ahead of traffic noise impacts) by both the RTA value management workshops for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga project. In fact, Options B1 and B2 were not preferred by the value management workshop in April 2003 on the basis of the potential impacts on rural lands.

At the hearing on 21 March 2006, Mr Bob Higgins of the RTA gave evidence that work is currently under way in the Coffs Harbour district to try and lessen the impacts on banana plantations in the concept design stage (transcript page 6). This evidence was omitted from the report and accordingly misrepresents the RTA's position.

Consultation process

It is disappointing that the report fails to recognise the efforts undertaken by the RTA throughout all stages of its projects to consult with local communities. The Committee received evidence of extensive consultation through:

- Public meetings;
- Regular community updates;
- Public displays of route options and preferred routes;
- Dissemination of brochures concerning route options and stages in the strategy/planning process;
- Planning focus meetings;
- Community liaison group meetings
- Value management workshops;
- Route options and preferred route announcements;
- Publication of reports at various key phases of investigations including display of environmental impact assessments and species impact statements;
- Consideration of comments and specific issues raised by local communities;
- Individual meetings with affected property owners.

The report should acknowledge the extensive consultation undertaken by the RTA and recognise that consensus by 100% of communities to road proposals is simply not possible. There will always be competing views. The purpose of consultation is to canvass options, obtain appropriate feedback and keep communities informed. The Committee heard ample evidence that this is happening on RTA projects.

NSW Freight Strategy

The road system will need to continue to cater for substantial freight movements, due to capacity constraints in the existing rail network and the fact that freight must be moved in areas where there are no rail lines.

Furthermore, the report has failed to recognise that rail lines outside metropolitan Sydney are in fact controlled by the Federal Government, through the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC). Upgrading of those lines to improve freight movement capacity is the responsibility of the ARTC.

The report fails to acknowledge the importance of a strategic national approach to managing freight.

Summerland Way

In relation to the recommendation for an investigation into an alternative inland route for the Pacific Highway via the Summerland Way, the RTA is still finalising a report for submission to the Minister.

The investigations (as mentioned by Mr Higgins at the hearing on 21 March 2006) involve a technical review of two inland corridor proposals which have been put forward by a local representative directly affected by the proposal and a group known as the Community Alliance for Road Sustainability as an alternative to upgrading the coastal corridor for the Pacific Highway. It involves:

- a review of previous and current planning studies;
- an examination of the engineering aspects of the two proposals and further refinement where necessary;
- an analysis of the traffic and transport performance of both proposals;
- preparation of strategic cost estimates;
- a broad assessment in terms of the likely range of social, land use and environmental impacts;
- a comparison between the two inland corridor proposals and the current planning being undertaken of the coastal corridor.

Hon Jan Burnswoods MLC Hon Greg Donnelly MLC Hon Amanda Fazio MLC

Dissenting Report - Ian Cohen and Lee Rhiannon (The Greens)

Recommendation 10: That the RTA be required to include in its road infrastructure planning, a socio-economic evaluation component for individual property owners.

Many presenters to the Public Inquiry complained that their personal, socio-economic circumstances were not canvassed or even considered by the RTA.

People had made location and economic commitments based on the highway being upgraded on the highway corridor.

The RTA did not consult with the people in the extended study area prior to its announcement and used information that was factually wrong.

Recommendation 14: That an independent investigation of the RTA planning process be undertaken immediately.

Again, many presenters provided evidence to the inquiry re the Flawed processes used by the RTA.

For example:

The years of planning that preceded November 2004 together with Labor government policy indicated clearly that the highway upgrade for the T2E would follow the existing corridor because:

1. the Ballina Bypass was approved with commencement promised by Mr. Scully and Federal funds had been allocated
2. Ballina Council had advertised land for future urban development away from the Highway corridor following advice from DIPNA to do so
3. the Bangalow Bypass was already built (\$24m. in 1996/7)
4. the St. Helena upgrade was completed, including the EIS,
5. land in the corridor had been zoned for upgrade and other land purchased to allow the upgrade to be built on the Pacific Highway corridor
6. homes along the Highway had been air conditioned and windows double glazed.

Recommendation 15: That the RTA be compelled to make a clear distinction between Highway upgrades and new motorways.

RODR clearly states the difference between A class upgrade and motorway, see p. iv.

Q. why is an M class needed between 2 A Classes which are at either end of the T2E?

Also D route is NOT an upgrade, it is a new motorway and therefore may not be eligible for Auslink funding.