



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 4

MEDIA RELEASE

Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades: Final Report

The final report of the parliamentary inquiry into certain Pacific Highway Upgrades was released today by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 Chair, Jenny Gardiner, MLC.

“While there is, of course, community consensus that the Pacific Highway must continue to be upgraded, the Inquiry found there is extensive community concern about the level of some of the upgrades proposed by the State Government. Further, there is great concern about the NSW Government’s lack of integrated transport planning for the North Coast.

“Throughout the inquiry, coastal residents told us that they were extremely concerned about the dangers of mixing local and heavy traffic on the Highway. They said that the impact of heavy vehicles had worsened dramatically since the longer and heavier B-doubles were allowed onto the Highway in 2002. However, they said that proposals for six-lane, 110km/h motorway-type upgrades were not always the best solution, and called on the NSW Government to take a strategic approach to Highway upgrades, Jenny Gardiner said.

“The Committee’s central finding is that New South Wales lacks the comprehensive freight strategy needed to guide the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program,” Ms Gardiner said.

“The Committee recommends that the NSW Government thoroughly examine upgrading the Summerland Way for use as an interstate freight route, helping ease the stress on coastal communities.

“The Committee also finds that there is strong community support for greater use of rail freight to reduce the environmental and safety impact of heavy vehicles.

The report concludes that while it may be feasible to downgrade the scale of certain Highway upgrades, 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.

“In addition to broad strategic issues, this Final Report examines the upgrades between Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga, and at Bonville, where prolonged delays in commencing the upgrade have caused great community concern,” Ms Gardiner said. “This report follows the Committee’s inquiry into Upgrades in the Ballina area which also found serious community concern about the community consultation processes indicating systemic problems which the RTA needs to address”.

The Committee’s recommendations are attached.

11 May 2006

The Final Report is on the Committee’s website at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/gpsc4. Hard copies can be requested by phoning 02 9230 3544.

For comment please contact Ms Jenny Gardiner, Committee Chair, 02 9230 2903 or 0428 475 502.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

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

Recommendation 2

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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

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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

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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

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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.