

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

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Date Received: 19/08/2005

Subject:

Summary

18 August 2005

The Hon Jenny Gardiner MLC
Chair
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4
Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades

NRMA Motoring & Services

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Dear Ms Gardiner

Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades

Thank you for the opportunity to make a public submission to the Committee's inquiry into the Pacific Highway Upgrade.

The upgrading of the Pacific Highway is a very high priority project for NRMA Motoring & Services (NRMA). The provision of dual divided carriageways similar to the Yelgun to Chinderah section and other upgraded sections of the highway, has the potential to reduce the number of head on fatalities by up to 90 % with many other benefits, including reduced travel times. The fast tracking of the upgrade of the Pacific Highway is critical.

NRMA wants high standard roads to be provided to ensure that the risk and severity of crashes is reduced. It is true that a significant number of crashes are caused by human error, but a simple mistake should result in loss of life. A forgiving road environment provides a margin for error.

Should you wish to discuss NRMA's comments please contact Brett Gale General Manager Public Affairs on 8222 2158 or brett.gale@mynrma.com.au

Yours sincerely


Tony Stuart
Chief Executive Officer

Parliamentary Inquiry - Pacific Highway Upgrades

Terms of Reference

- 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*



Background

In 1995 NRMA Motoring & Services (NRMA) was part of the National Pacific Taskforce which commissioned a report "National Pacific – A road for Australia". This report stated that "the national focus on the need to upgrade of the Pacific Highway arises because:

- It is by far Australia's most heavily used interstate highway.
- It has a higher fatality rate than other major highways.
- It does not meet current, let alone future road transport needs of two of Australia's largest cities – Sydney and Brisbane – as well as those of the nations fastest growing non- metropolitan areas – South East Queensland and the NSW North Coast."

These reasons for an upgrade are still current despite the work that has already been completed. A copy of the report is attached for your information. Attachment One

NRMA has continued to monitor the progress of the Pacific Highway Upgrade through our road safety audit program. The Pacific Highway was last audited in 2003, and a full copy of our report is attached. Attachment Two.

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.

NRMA's audit examined 643 kilometres of the Pacific Highway from Hexham to the Queensland border in both directions. Key findings include:

- Since 1995, the percentage of highway with divided carriageway has increased from nine per cent to 32 per cent.
- From 1995, crash rates decreased from 40.30 per 100MVKT (crashes per 100 million vehicle kilometres of travel) to 26.91 per 100MVKT.
- In the same period, casualty rates decreased from 31.84 per 100MVKT to 19.19 per 100MVKT.
- Fatality rates decreased from 1.60 per 100MVKT to 1.23 per 100MVKT.

The best performing link - based on road safety history and road attributes - was between Hexham and Taree, with crash and casualty rates 14 per cent and 19 per cent respectively below the route average.

The worst performing link was between Grafton and Ballina - with crash and casualty rates 13 per cent and 20 per cent above the route average.

Since 1995 the reduced crash and casualty rates demonstrate that the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program has delivered safety benefits to the community. But based on the current rate of expenditure by both the Federal Government (\$60 Million pa) and the NSW State Government (\$160 Million pa), the upgrade of the Pacific Highway will not be completed until 2025 – twenty years from now!

NRMA wants the Federal Government and NSW Government to increase funding levels for the Pacific Highway to ensure that the highway is completely upgraded within the next **ten** years.

Key Features of Pacific Highway 2003	
Divided Carriageway (%)	32
Number of Lanes (% of 2 lanes)	44
Speed Zoning (% 100+)	81
Crash Rate (crashes per 100MVKT)	26.9
Casualty Rate (casualties per 100MVKT)	19.19
Main Crash Type	Rear End (16.8%) Left off carriageway into object (9.6%) Head on (7.9%)

NRMA supports the use of Value Management Workshops (VMW) which are managed and run by the Roads and Traffic Authority to assist in the decision making process for route selection. The VMW is a tool that brings together a wide range of stakeholder interests and expertise to review investigations undertaken to date and on the balance of issues recommend a preferred option for further investigation.

NRMA has participated in a number of these workshops where the criteria for selecting the preferred option have been fiercely debated but consensus has been reached in the room. Sometimes the key criteria have agricultural land as an important element where as other times the impact on communities (such as severance) is seen as being more significant. The selection criteria for each workshop are dependent on the key issues for that group.



Better Roads Panels

NRMA has been conducting Better Roads Panels across regional NSW as part of NRMA's Safer Roads program commenced in 2004 (see attached booklet Attachment Three).

The Better Roads Panels are about helping the region to build the case for better roads through NRMA research. There is a very strong link between good quality roads and a healthy regional economy. The NRMA wants to identify what road improvements are needed in this region to help local motorists. We'll research the facts and help build a case for change. By combining the local knowledge of the Panel members and the NRMA's research, we create a "tool kit" for the community to lobby for better roads.

There were two Better Roads Panels covering the Pacific Highway - Far North Coast and Mid North Coast. Both Panels identified the completion of the Pacific Highway as their number one priority for their regions.

Pacific Highway Taskforce

In May 2005 NRMA joined forces with Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils to form the Pacific Highway Taskforce. The taskforce unites Local Government areas along the entire length of the Pacific Highway. The taskforce resolved to:

- Convey to governments the fundamental impact and importance of the Pacific Highway on the communities through which it passes
- Note the significant and increasing importance of the Pacific Highway as a major transport route for business, industry and tourism
- Recognise the increasing anxiety within the community about the safety of travelling on the Pacific Highway
- Deplore the appalling and unacceptably high loss of human life caused by vehicle crashes on the Pacific Highway

A second Pacific Highway Taskforce Summit will be held in September in Port Macquarie.



\$1 Million dollar fighting fund

In June this year NRMA announced a \$1 Million Fighting Fund. The first campaign to commence as part of the Fighting Fund will target Blackspots on the Pacific Highway.

NRMA will erect billboards and commence a strong electronic and print advertising campaign pointing out how many people have been killed on different sections of the Pacific Highway in recent years.

AusLink

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.

Heavy Vehicles

NRMA acknowledges that heavy vehicles are an important part of the freight network across Australia and are relied on to provide 'just in time' deliveries.

Some community groups have called for all freight to be transported by rail and for B-doubles to be banned from the Pacific Highway. These claims ignore the facts that many of the heavy vehicles are performing intra-regional trips (trips within the region) - for which rail is either not suitable or simply not available. Below is a table showing the Origin & Destination of Freight across NSW. The Mid North Coast has 57% of its freight as intra state trips and 28% as local, while the Richmond-Tweed has 15% as intra state and 51% as local.

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).

ORIGIN AND DESTINATION OF FREIGHT IN NSW Tonnes

STATISTICAL DISTRICT	Local Freight	To/From Rest of NSW	To/From Victoria	To/From Queensland	To/From SA/WA/Tas/NT	To/From ACT	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE ALLOCATION		
								Local	Intrastate	Interstate
									/ACT	
Sydney	46,540,399	27,483,283	8,156,616	5,135,578	1,856,634	1,477,232	90,649,742	51.3	31.9	16.7
Hunter	41,409,298	9,190,021	396,520	731,003	93,310	30,354	51,850,506	79.9	17.8	2.4
Illawarra	6,724,456	12,971,829	421,644	237,592	55,788	135,852	20,547,161	32.7	63.8	3.5
Richmond-Tweed	2,453,558	735,888	14,297	1,574,830	neg	1,213	4,779,786	51.3	15.4	33.2
Mid-North Coast	1,462,991	2,901,051	64,299	631,589	neg	16,059	5,075,989	28.8	57.5	13.7
Northern	5,098,697	3,405,926	192,922	2,070,348	43,536	12,212	10,823,641	47.1	31.6	21.3
North Western	4,394,978	2,535,422	433,910	811,706	177,989	8,239	8,362,244	52.6	30.4	17.0
Central West	5,920,978	4,114,221	655,377	499,387	93,512	33,359	11,316,834	52.3	36.6	11.0
South Eastern	1,931,714	2,711,575	867,185	56,778	44,862	459,707	6,071,821	31.8	52.2	16.0
Murrumbidgee	7,711,728	5,104,723	3,595,007	265,786	381,374	102,175	17,160,793	44.9	30.3	24.7
Murray	2,990,250	2,867,886	4,917,591	142,601	614,856	92,187	11,625,371	25.7	25.5	48.8
TOTAL	126,639,047	74,021,825	19,715,368	12,157,198	3,361,861	2,368,589	238,263,888	53.2	32.1	14.8

neg: Negligible - less than 1000 tonnes

SOURCE: NEW SOUTH WALES ROAD TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION

Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics Origin/Destination Freight Study 1999-2000



Heavy Vehicle Safety

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. This is usually related to the respective size of the vehicles. 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.

In May 2004 the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) released a report called the "Pacific Highway Safety Review". This report looked at the fatal crashes on the highway for 2003. There were 44 fatal crashes investigated. Of these 44 crashes, 25% of motor vehicles involved were heavy trucks, though only one in three heavy vehicles were deemed to be the vehicle performing the manoeuvre mostly likely to have contributed to the crash.

Heavy vehicles should be equipped with front, side and rear under-run guards, anti-lock brakes on all axles and tamper-proof on-board monitoring and speed limiting equipment.

The heavy vehicle industry is constantly pushing for great efficiency - longer vehicles and heavier weights. NRMA believes any changes should be balanced by improved safety and environmental performance to provide community benefit.

NRMA has lobbied for many years for all heavy vehicles to be fitted with electronic onboard monitors which would make it much more difficult to falsify records and could also be used by the vehicle operators as a management tool.

There is a need for increased enforcement of heavy vehicle speed limits.

The practice of the trailers having a different number plate to the prime mover makes it very difficult to identify the prime mover when the vehicle is photographed from the rear. All heavy vehicle camera enforcement should use front and rear detection.