

Submission
No 157

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

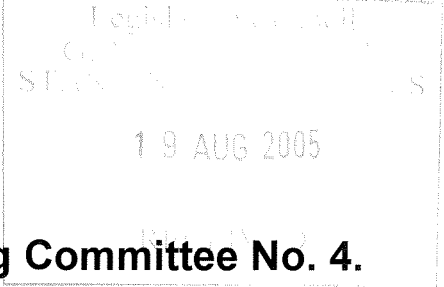
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Subject:

Summary



Submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4.
NSW Legislative Council.
Inquiry into Upgrades of the Pacific Highway
The Tintenbar to Ewingsdale Upgrade

by Ian and Kathy Dall,

The RTA route selection process.

- 1)The RTA terms of reference (TOR) for the highway upgrade study (Appendix A), fail to indicate what weightings the criteria will be given to inform the analysis that will lead to the final route recommendations.
- 2)Five of the seven TOR criteria focus on issues which are unrelated to the local community and only one criteria mentions community interests. There is no indication of how conflicts between local community defined concerns, and state or nationally defined interests, will be resolved.
- 3)According to the RTA, the route selection study, could not include consideration of options, other than an upgraded highway that would follow a route within the now expanded study area.
- 4)The significant issue of increased truck traffic on the Pacific Highway, especially since the road was gazetted to permit B-doubles to utilise the route as an alternative to the New England Highway, therefore falls outside the ambit of the study. Also the possibility of considering other options, such as the coastal inland Summerland Way route from Coffs Harbour to Brisbane, or the return of at least B-doubles, if not all inter-capital city trucks to the New England Highway, has been excluded from the agenda.
- 5)The process has highlighted the paucity of planning for regional, state and national transport infrastructure, whether it be roads, rail or coastal shipping. There is no integrated

transport plan, and the recent closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah railway line has reminded Northern Rivers residents that there is no plan to provide for a future coastal rail link for the Northern Rivers with the Gold Coast and Brisbane. This also highlights a history of successive local, state and national governments failing to plan and protect transport corridors to allow for the future uncomplicated upgrading of road and railway links between major population centres.

- 6) The community consultations, an integral part of the highway upgrade study, have proved to be source of division and angst for local residents. The expansion of the original study area, which was one of the factors that triggered the establishment of the Legislative Council Committee Inquiry, generated wild speculation that there was possibly an unholy corrupt alliance between the RTA and the residents of the original study area, when the reason was probably that the RTA had foolishly restricted potential route options, by defining a very narrow corridor, which had undifferentiated landform, environmental and agricultural features, and a dense settlement pattern.
- 7) The composition and functioning of the Community Liaison Group, has been an endless source of cynicism in the local community. The precise selection process, that determined the membership of the original and current reconstituted CLG, remains a mystery. Recent demands by the RTA and ARUP, that the community CLG members maintain confidentiality about the route options, represents a travesty of community consultation. The enforced secrecy has further fuelled the cynicism of residents in the study area.
- 8) Many residents in the central and southern portions of the study area, especially around Newrybar and Knockrow, judge they have been abandoned by their local government representatives on Ballina Shire Council. Ballina Councillors have failed to represent this constituency, by focussing exclusively on lobbying for the expeditious building of an upgraded Pacific Highway and in particular the early completion of the Ballina By-pass.

- 9)The suggestion by Ballina Councillors, that the community debate about the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade is delaying the construction of the Ballina By-pass is questionable, given the serious geotechnical problems challenging the RTA along the preferred route. If engineering solutions can be found for the geotechnical problems, the By-pass could be completed north to the Cumbalum interchange, while leaving the option open for the redesign of the highway route from Cumbalum through to Ross Lane between Tintenbar and Newrybar Swamp Road.
- 10)There is also concern about the role Ballina Councillors, and especially the Mayor has played as Chairman of Rous Water, in the repositioning of the water authority in regards to an upgraded highway route tracking through the Emigrant Creek Dam catchment. There is concern that Mayor Silver has discounted the potential for compromising Ballina's water supply, despite cautionary advice from Rous Water staff.
- 11) Additionally there is concern about the role Ballina Councillors may play in the future rezoning of land near Ross Lane, and how consideration of that possibility, may be influencing their determination for the upgraded highway to follow a route within the original narrow study area. The residents of Newrybar and Knockrow are understandably cynical about the elevation of the interests of a hypothetical future community, above the interests of existing vibrant communities, already suffering the serious loss of amenity, as a consequence of increased truck traffic on the current highway.
- 12) Residents in the study area are also experiencing anxiety about a future of uncertainty, with possible delays of many years after the announcement of the preferred route before the final approvals by the Minister responsible for Planning, and the allocation of funds for construction. The triggering of the "Just Terms" legislative provisions, for the acquisition of land required for the highway, is dependent on the final approvals, and in the meantime property owners are left hanging in a compromised property market. This arrangement

requires review, because there is currently no “justice” for property owners who may wish to sell their property in the period before the completion of the final approvals for the construction of the highway.

Tintenbar to Ewingsdale - What action? What route?

- 1) For the short term, there is undoubtedly a consensus among residents of the study area for early action to degazette the Pacific Highway for B-double trucks and force their return to the New England Highway.
- 2) Residents are also generally supportive of promoting the investigation of alternative routes for a highway to cater for interstate truck freight traffic, including the Summerland Way option.
- 3) Residents are also supportive of the promotion of railway and coastal shipping options for the movement of goods as an alternative to road freight.
- 4) Some residents of the study area support a limited up-grade of the highway along the existing route, however, this proposal will not adequately address concerns about traffic noise and road safety, and the continuing impact of the highway on the amenity of local residents, unless interstate trucks are diverted from the Pacific Highway.
- 5) Locally, there is a common belief that there is a State and National political imperative, driven by influential interest groups, including the road transport industry lobby, to complete a motorway standard Pacific Highway in the coming years, and objections by locals along the route, will be treated as inconveniences, but ultimately, the concerns of local communities will be considered inconsequential, irrelevant or damned as parochial, and lost in the bigger picture.
- 6) Despite this dismal perspective, local residents are determined to fight, if there is no other choice, for the selection of an upgraded highway route, that has the least impact on the fewest number of residents in the study area.

- 7)The original study area is possibly the most densely settled portion of rural hinterland in the Northern Rivers, which includes the Rous Water Supply catchment for Ballina, prime agricultural land, and a diversity of productive and financially successful primary industries, including large acreages of increasingly important coffee and macadamia plantations.
- 8)The communities in the original study area, and Newrybar is an excellent example, have developed over the last three decades, a renewed strength and vitality, after the decline of the local dairy industry in the fifties and sixties. It is a community with a real and demonstrated sense of neighbourhood, which believes it is threatened by the prospects of an upgraded highway, that may physically divide the community and jeopardise the social fabric, by carving a corridor, up to 250 metres wide, through our homes and backyards.
- 9)If the principle of minimal impact, informs the decision making process, then the Eastern portion of the enlarged study area is the logical location for route options. With the expanded application of this principle, there may be a case for considering an Eastern route North of Midgen Flat Road, which lies further to the to the east of the Study Area boundary.

Appendix A

Pacific Highway Upgrading Program aims to:

- ⑩Significantly reduce road accidents and injuries.
- ⑩Reduce travel times.
- ⑩Reduce freight transport costs.
- ⑩Develop a route that involves the community and considers their interests.
- ⑩Provide a route that supports economic development.
- ⑩Manage the upgrading of the route in accordance with Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) principles.
- ⑩Provide the best value for money.