

Submission
No 57

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES: COFFS HARBOUR

Organisation: North Coast Environment Council
Name: J Jeayes
Position: Hon. Secretary
Telephone:
Date Received: 15/11/2005

Subject:

Summary

Recd 15/11/05
GPSC

SUBMISSION TO THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE INQUIRY
CONDUCTED BY THE GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL(GPSC4)
from NORTH COAST ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

The North Coast Environment Council is the peak regional environment organisation in northern NSW representing more than 50 local environment groups. Established in 1977, we have worked as a network of conservation volunteers to defend the environment of the north coast. This has taken many forms; participation in forums, production of educational materials, litigation, media comment, lobbying government, submission writing, presentations to Commissions of Inquiry and on occasions, direct action. As we are not as a Council, unlike some of our Member bodies, a group that goes out to plant trees, we will lose our Federal Government administration grant which has been reduced over the past six years from \$12,000 to \$4,000 and now nothing. Some of our ability to contribute to these inquiries.

We intend to offer a submission on the need for lateral thinking in the transport of goods rather than viewing roads as the only or main system on the North Coast. We look at the safety issues, the environmental costs and the need for better route selection and a harder look at costs.

OUR REQUESTS

We ask the Government to start planning for regional rail transshipment depots on the North Coast and New England table lands, to make improvements to the rail tracks and the organization of the rail administration to encourage greater use of rail.

We ask that the Government require hazardous materials to be transported by rail when distances exceed 150km

We ask that the Government require trucking companies to submit schedules for long distance journeys to RTA to ensure that drivers are not being forced to meet deadlines which cause fatigue and/or accidents

We ask that the Government take a harder line with forwarding companies and drivers who insist on tight schedules and drivers who exceed speed limits or miss rest hours

We ask that the Government request the RTA to take more notice of local communities in planning new routes to duplicate the Pacific Highway

We ask that road construction costs are better monitored and new routes avoided if the savings in time do not justify the extra costs.

THE BACKGROUND

Three years ago our Council approached all Local Government Councils on the New England and Pacific Highways as to their opinion of long distance trucks carrying dangerous cargoes on these highways. There was almost an unanimous wish to remove such cargoes onto rail. Greater Taree Council had made a number of approaches over a long period to the Government but without success. It was agreed that the Taree Council and this Council would hold a one day conference to explore the issues. We did not have the finances to mount a full scale conference nor pay speakers. Invitations were sent out for speakers representing State Government, State Rail, RTA, Patricks Rail operators, fuel distributors and Local Government. Unfortunately three of the key organizations did not reply or replied too late and the conference had to be cancelled.

It was obvious that there was a great deal of concern in Local Government circles as many residents have to respond to accidents involving such dangerous cargoes not only as paid staff such as Police, Local Council staff and Ambulance but also as volunteers with the Rural Fire Brigade, State Emergency Services.

THE SITUATION

There are an increasing number of trucks, and we speak particularly on the Pacific Highway, including Double Bs many of which appear to be carrying liquids including fuel and gas. Since the closure of the fuel depot at Trial Bay near Kempsey the oil companies externalized their costs by carrying fuel to the North Coast by road so adding to long distance heavy traffic and consumption of oil.

There have been a number of serious accidents involving trucks on both highways and a number involved fuel and chemicals. In the year 2004-2005 there were 158 crashes of heavy trucks between Hexham and the Queensland border and 37 of these were on a divided road as compared to 88 on undivided roads (RTA statistics do not indicate where the other 33 accidents took place). Of these accidents 62 involved a car. There were 118 casualties from heavy truck accidents and these involved 58 car drivers/passengers and 47 truck drivers/passengers?

Heavy trucks involved in accidents showed three were carrying petrol/oil, three were carrying inflammable cargo and one had corrosive cargo. Not a high statistic and no LPG trucks thankfully were involved.

The NRMA (reported in the Sydney Morning Herald 27 Oct 03) that the death toll on the Pacific Highway had fallen by less than a quarter despite an almost four fold increase in the amount of duplicated highway

According to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau quoted by NRMA in "The State of Our Roads 2004" road crashes cost NSW \$13 million a DAY.

In 2004 there was a collision of two Double Bs at Urunga at approximately midnight which blocked both lanes of the highway. One of our members travelling from Macksville counted 185 trucks on the roadside between there and Urunga. Only light vehicles were able to take an alternate route. There were a similar number of trucks south bound waiting on the other side. The cost to the community of this accident would indeed be high if someone was able to calculate it.

Duplicated highways do not always ensure that an accident on the upside does not also close the down side. Both lanes of the highway near Newcastle have been blocked .A fuel truck turned over and caught fire near the Swan Bay turnoff several years ago and all traffic was stopped for many hours and though that road was not duplicated the intensity of the fire would have blocked both carriage ways had they existed.

It is not just the financial cost and the danger from cargoes which is costing the community along these highways. There are numerous stories of local residents who now will not drive on the highways at night due to the fear of the large trucks which "tailgate" anyone obeying the speed limit. Even during the day people travelling on the speed limit report Double Bs passing them at speeds which appear to be in excess by 10 or more kph or forcing them to slow and at times stop as trucks refuse to allow them to rejoin from the slow lane. Though it is illegal there are reports , particularly at night, where several trucks are traveling head to tail preventing vehicles which may wish to overtake.

There are many elderly people on the North Coast and to a certain extent on the Tablelands and medical facilities are concentrated at places such as Taree, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour ,Grafton , Armidale ,Tamworth which means that they are forced to travel along the highways in company ,or should it be, in competition with, large fast moving trucks with impatient drivers attempting to meet deadlines .

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.

It is claimed that road transport is more efficient in that cargoes are taken and delivered from door to door at much faster rates than rail and at times cheaper rates. But this could be the result of an antiquated rail administration rather than a special factor of road transport. According to an article in The Bulletin 3 June 2003 it is 30-40% cheaper by rail as it takes only a third to a quarter of the fuel to shift one tonne by rail and there is only 1/15 of labour involved on rail

But partly cheaper rates are a result of externalizing costs .Do fuel taxes and road charges meet the costs of repairing damage done to roads by trucks ?. Professor Philip Laird

quotes figures (personal communication) that there is 10,000 times more damage to a road than a car under the widely known fourth power law citation for a six axle articulated truck . But under current mass limits such trucks have a factor of 15,000 times the wear and tear of an average car ,whilst for B Doubles the figure is 20,000.

Are insurance costs ,medical costs ,costs to volunteers met by truck charges or shared across the community ? In the Interim Report of the Ministerial Inquiry Into Sustainable Transport in NSW it is claimed that (8.1 page 112) that efficient road use requires marginal cost pricing . That if this was introduced there would be more use of public transport and we suggest rail would then become cheaper and therefore take much freight off the roads.

In its supplementary submission to the Productivity Commission on National Competition Policy December 2004 the Railway Technical Society of Australia states in paragraph 19. "The Issues Paper on page 33 for the Commission's inquiry into energy efficiency mentions that transport accounts for 41 per cent of Australia's final energy usage, mostly in road transport. As this Issues Paper on page 34 notes (as do other references - see Appendix B) rail freight is more energy efficient than road freight whilst road freight gives flexibility. However, intermodal freight allows energy efficient rail or sea transport for the line haul, with flexible road transport for the pick up and delivery. Impediments to intermodal transport are currently being addressed by the National Transport Commission."

THE SOLUTION TO BETTER ROAD SAFETY

Our solution is to move long distance freight onto rail starting with bulk such as cement , woodchips, steel ,motor vehicles and dangerous cargoes such as fuel oil, gas and chemicals.

But it requires the re-organisation of the rail system from the methods of loading to the replacement of much of "the turn of the century" track.

There is much talk of encouraging regional development and providing jobs in the country. One way to achieve this is to establish regional rail trans shipment centres at certain locations where train wagons can be dropped off from the end of the train containing all the goods required in that location . Such "dropping off" of wagons could be accomplished in a matter of minutes allowing the train to continue so to arrive in Sydney/Brisbane after an overnight trip. Local drivers and trucks would then arrange delivery next day of the cargoes within say a hundred kilometres of the depot. It means that drivers would be home at night and not taking drugs to keep awake to meet schedules on long distance deliveries

Patrick Corporation claims (Transport Australia) government spending on roads between 1999 and 2002 totalled \$23.8 billion while rail received \$2.8. In the Australian Financial Review of 19/3/2003 the company director claimed that "if the goods trains ran at 80kph average there would be no trucks left on the road". Recent news state that the upgrading of the rail line between Sydney and Melbourne will result in the reduction of times for freight trains by over one hour and this will equal if not better road transport times. The same upgrading must be done to the North Coast rail line.

There is without question a coming oil fuel shortage allied with increasing prices. "Five out of the seven top world oil producers have now passed their peak oil production. Oil production is now falling away in these countries. At the same time the economies of India and China are growing at unprecedented rates and China is adding 11,000 vehicles per day to its fleet. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are encouraging and funding highway construction in many countries around the world and everywhere the ideology of motorization and oil dependency is firmly locked into economic strategies, development strategies and political priority setting." John Whitelegg Editor World Transport Policy & Practice .

The Government must begin planning for transport systems which are not only safer but able to cope with increasing oil fuel costs and shortages. In Appendix B "Rail transport energy efficiency and sustainability" of the Supplementary Submission of the Railway Technical Society of Australia quoted above there are figures from various sources showing the efficiency of rail over road. It is also possible to convert rail to be powered by electricity or even steam so having distinct advantages over road transport.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY ROUTES

In several places where the RTA duplicated the highway the original road was left in position and used as one carriage way while the duplicate was built close by. There are of course places where this cannot be accomplished but there appear to be a desire to shorten the highway or to straighten it to achieve higher speeds without counting the cost of construction or the social costs.

Two examples will suffice to illustrate our concern

1. on the diversion from Kempsey to Eungai Rail a western route was not taken due to what the RTA claimed was a) valuable natural habitat b) the inability of constructing the complete route in one go c) valuable farms would be affected. The eastern route now proposed to Frederickton a) cuts across valuable farm land b) greatly increases the risk of serious flooding while further north it diverges away from the flood free rail line to make a large sweep to the east on the basis of saving valuable vegetation but results in the destruction of just as much vegetation . The vegetation on the alternate route which basically follows the rail line means that the rail line could be straightened at the same time and there would be a saving of at least one kilometre in length for the road. RTA has refused to say why they have chosen a route which is one kilometre longer but claim that straightening the rail line is not their job even though both agencies would benefit and possibly less farms and people affected.

2. The Bonville section where so many lives have been lost is shortly to be built. The original proposal was to have the new road go on the west of the existing highway and then again cross that with an expensive overpass at the Sid Burke rest area. A number of organizations pointed out that the western route not only would cost more but cut through the best koala habitat. But there was no response from RTA until a few months ago a new plan suddenly appeared in which the proposed route was shown as crossing the existing highway twice then going along the eastern side. It has now been discovered that just a hundred or so metres to the east of the new RTA corridor, land that has been partly cleared by State Forest will revert to the National Park estate and thousands of dollars will need to be spent to rehabilitate it. Meanwhile koala habitat in the RTA corridor will be cleared. What is more the south section of the RTA preferred route cuts to the west side of the existing road where there will need to be extensive earth works in very good high conservation old growth. It makes sense from a cost point of view to move the new route just that little more to the east which a) avoids crossing the existing highway twice b) eliminates very expensive earth works on the west c) uses an already cleared corridor d) saves the Government in the person of the Park Service rehabilitating the cleared State Forest land e) leaves undisturbed koala habitat on the east of the existing road..

CONCLUSION

- While we have long distance trucks on the highways tied to tight schedules and often carrying dangerous cargoes we shall continue to have serious accidents and expensive delays on the New England and Pacific highways regardless of the duplication of the Pacific Highway .
- That such accidents and method of transport for freight are costing the community large sums of money.
- That renewal of the rail system is essential to remove much of this freight from the highways and give encouragement to regional development AND IMPROVE THE SAFETY OF THE HIGHWAYS FOR ALL USERS
- that route selection for duplication of the highway must be given closer scrutiny and the community views more weight.



J. Jeayes

Hon. Sec

Oct 2005

drafted by James L.O. Tedder