

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

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Subject:

Summary

SUBMISSION: Inquiry into the Pacific Highway Upgrades

Due: 19 August 2005

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The proposed upgrade of the T2E section of the Pacific Highway outside the existing highway corridor will have the following impacts on:

THE ADJACENT UPGRADES

Completion times for the adjacent Pacific highway upgrades will be greatly increased.

The Ballina Bypass to the south and the Ewingsdale/St. Helena/Bangalow section to the north which have already undergone extensive studies at considerable expense and been signed off on, have been put on hold.

Construction costs will be greatly increased.

If the T2E upgrade is located outside the existing highway corridor, the final, total cost of the upgrades for the T2E upgrade, the Ballina Bypass and the St. Helena/Ewingsdale section will be increased by many millions of dollars representing a significant waste of tax payers' money.

Land from Emigrant Creek (North of Knockrow) to the Bangalow overpass is already zoned 9A for highway upgrade. Land has already been acquired in the Ballina Bypass sector. The Bangalow section which has already been upgraded at a cost of \$19million is part of this corridor and will become redundant if the corridor route is not followed. The studies already done for the Ballina Bypass and the St. Helena/Ewingsdale section will need to be redone.

Delay the improvement of road safety.

Further delay caused by considering routes outside the existing highway corridor will significantly contribute to the number of deaths on these sections as the use of the highway continues to increase beyond its capacity.

THE CONSTRUCTION COSTS OF THE T2E

Any route located outside of the existing highway corridor will be longer and therefore more costly to construct.

Any route constructed on the Newrybar swamp will be much more costly to build than a route within the existing corridor because of: severe and periodic flooding, frequent fog episodes, subsidence due to soil structure as well as the problems associated with acid sulphate soils.

Any route traversing the escarpment will be extremely expensive to construct as it will necessitate excessively deep cuts in order to achieve the desired grade.

REASONABLE COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Investment expectations and investment projects already undertaken by people will not be realized.

Given the huge investment costs undertaken by the government for the Northern and Southern sections, it was reasonable for people to assume that the Pacific Highway upgrade would link these two areas along the existing highway corridor.

Consequently in the intervening years, development plans were made and money spent by families to upgrade businesses and farms, investments which will never be recouped if the highway goes anywhere else but in the existing highway corridor.

People outside the existing highway corridor are being severely and adversely affected financially and emotionally.

The assets, investment decisions and livelihoods of people outside the existing highway corridor have been *entombed for an indeterminant time without access to compensation*. The feelings of anxiety, frustration and insecurity created by the dictatorial methods currently being employed by the RTA underpin the suffering being endured.

The equilibrium between amenity and land values will be destroyed.

Constructing the T2E outside the existing highway corridor will destroy the established equilibrium between amenity and land values across the whole study area. People who located *on* the highway should not benefit financially at the expense of other people who have paid a high financial price to locate their businesses and residences *away* from the highway. The Bangalow and Ewingsdale communities who have built homes near their respective upgrades (Bangalow Bypass and the Byron Bay/Ewingsdale Upgrade) are now unfairly seizing the opportunity to create another bypass to bypass their original bypass.

CURRENT URBAN INVESTIGATIVE AREAS

There has been no consultation with either Ballina or Byron Shire Councils with respect to current urban zoning plans particularly with respect to the Cumbalum Ridge which has been identified since the mid-1990's as a key location for an expected housing demand of between 5,000 to 7,000 people. Putting the Pacific highway through this area would remove any possibility of achieving such an outcome for one of the most rapidly expanding shires in NSW. The upgrade of the T2E along the existing highway corridor would preserve the integrity of the Urban Investigative zones approved by Ballina Shire Council.

SENSITIVE HABITATS AND SPECIES

Extensive environmental studies by Councils have identified, in the area outside the highway corridor, sensitive habits and species which have been ignored by the RTA because of the lack of consultation before the study area was proclaimed. For instance, constructing a highway through identified wetlands along the bottom of the Newrybar escarpment and then cutting up through the escarpment at Coopers Shoot will destroy areas of high conservation value which have been identified by Byron Council in the documents, Biodiversity Strategy, Sept 2004 and Byron Flora and Fauna Study 1999.

Constructing a highway through these areas is a direct contradiction to one of the stated objectives (S5a) of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW) put in place to encourage 'The protection of the environment, including the protection and conservation of native animals and plants, including threatened species, populations and ecological communities, and their habitats'.

AGRICULTURAL LAND

The recommendations of the impending legislation, outlined in the paper, Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project, February 2005, should be adhered to, namely that, 'Public infrastructure is permitted on land mapped as State or Regionally significant *where no feasible alternative is available*. Councils or State agencies proposing public infrastructure on such land should select alternative sites where possible'. [p.29]

That site is available and it is the existing highway corridor.

Rous Water has also indicated [Rous Water Council meeting, May 18, 2005] that the highway upgrade can take place on the existing highway corridor without compromising water quality provided proper engineering guidelines are followed.

THE STATUS OF THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY

Under the guidelines of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, Mr. Craig Knowles said that the Pacific Highway was a *designated Regional Highway*. He clearly stated 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). In the past three years since Mr. Costa allowed B-Doubles to travel the Pacific Highway, without community consultation and against its own guidelines, there have been exponential problems associated with the mixing of inter-state heavy transport with local and tourist traffic. The Pacific Highway has become the pseudo- National Highway at community expense. Returning interstate heavy freight to the New England National Highway would have an immediate beneficial effect on road safety and community amenity and return the Pacific Highway to its original intended status, that of a Regional Highway.

It took ten years to determine the original study area and then three months to extend it, largely based on submissions lodged for the Bangalow Bypass in 2000. At best, this was negligent and at worst, fraudulent. Constructing the T2E upgrade within the highway corridor will help restore flagging public confidence in government policies and processes. It will also save millions of dollars. Further, it will give a much needed sense of security to people who have had their lives put in limbo and now face years of uncertainty.

The T2E Upgrade should be contained within the existing highway corridor.

Signature

M. A. Armstrong

Date

14/08/05.

I STRONGLY OBJECT TO EXTENDING THE STUDY AREA EAST OF THE ESCARPMENT.

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