

**Submission
No 118**

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

Organisation:

Name: Mr Michael Meszaros

Telephone:

Date Received: 22/08/2005

Subject:

Summary

Michael MESZAROSTel:
Fax:
Mobile:**Facsimile Cover Sheet**

To: Ms Jenny Gardiner MLC **Date:** 19 August 2005
Company: General Purpose Standing Committee No.4 **Fax No.:** (02) 9230 3408
From: Michael MESZAROS **Pages (including Cover Sheet):** 6

☐ **URGENT**☐ Please Reply☒ Referred For Your Action☐ For Your Information Only**Re: Inquiry Into Pacific Highway Upgrades****Comments:**

Dear Ms Gardiner,

The attached submission is forwarded for your attention & necessary action, please. It represents not only my personal views but that of our local community.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Meszaros

Michael MESZAROS

19 August 2005

Ms Jenny Gardiner MLC
Chair of the Legislative Council's
General Purpose Standing Committee No.4

Fax: 9230 3408

Inquiry into Pacific Highway Upgrades

Dear Ms Gardiner,

I am writing to you as I have grave concerns as to the manner in which the RTA & it's consultants, Hyder has conducted the Woodburn to Ballina project.

From the outset, the Hillside Lane residents, i.e. the people most likely to be affected by this project (at the Wardell end), have been deliberately left out of the information loop. Initial requests to determine how we would be affected were met with the response that the study area footprint did NOT go near Hillside Lane but cut across Thurgates Lane some 650 metres to the east of us. As a result, we let our guard down & did not become as closely involved with the process as perhaps we should have.

All information since received from the RTA & Hyder still clearly states that Route 2C intersects Wardell Rd at the Thurgates Lane intersection. Nowhere does any of the literature state that the Hillside Lane residents would be directly be affected by this project. We now know that this is not the fact of the matter; we are directly affected!

It was not until the RTA released their proposed route options "mud map" that many of the residents were even aware of the existence of the project! It was not until 31 May 2005 (some 6 or 7 months into the project) that I was advised that I would be affected by 3 of the proposed routes via correspondence from Hyder. This was received some 10+ days into the submission period. Allowing for a further 14 days for my body & mind to recover physically from the shock of discovering all my life's work, my dreams etc where about to be shattered; there was less than a fortnight to forward a submission opposing these proposals. (Thanks to Mr Page & Mr Cohen the submission period was extended by a further week after much lobbying by the general public).

Allowing for this extension, there still was not enough time allocated for constructive public submissions for those NOT directly involved from the outset (i.e. those of us that were not

members of the CLG). All attempts to gather information & facts during this time were met with political type "non-answers" to questions raised. Requests for quantitative data directly relating to information documented on the RTA mud-map were either denied or stalled. Telephone calls & E-mails went unanswered.

Why was the study area footprint extended? Why weren't the residents affected by this change notified until AFTER the proposed routes were put on paper? Why won't the RTA release data to back up information documented on their mud-map?

Requests for information relating to Hyder's credentials & the tender process remain unanswered. The RTA still refuses to release their policies & procedures in relation to community involvement. In spite of the fact that the RTA's own in-house training package relating to community involvement clearly states that greater two-way communication and openness is required & that a community involvement plan is to be developed at the commencement of a project of this nature. Requests for a copy of this plan have to date been denied.

What is it that the RTA/Hyder don't want the public to know? Could it be that they intend to rush this whole process through to minimise political damage to the state government? Does Hyder benefit financially by rushing this through, thus saving time & money? Does Hyder stand to gain financially by minimising construction costs? What is the "nuts & bolts" of Hyder's contract with the RTA? Surely, the public have a right to know these facts, as it is OUR MONEY that the RTA is spending!

It seems to many of us, that the information that has been released to the public to-date is flawed & misleading. Every member of the CLG approached has stated that the routes put forwarded by the RTA/Hyder (on their mud map) DID NOT represent the proposals developed at their workshops. How could this be so when the theory behind community involvement is to liaise with the community to develop options? It would seem that this has only been "lip service" on behalf of the RTA/Hyder from day 1!! Furthermore, why were members of the CLG forced to sign non-disclosure/confidentiality agreements prior to commencement of the community workshops? This effectively stopped them liaising with their communities from the outset.

Why are so many of the original CLG members disillusioned with the whole process?

In relation to the Route Option Development Report released to the public toward the end of the public submission period ...

Why was this report NOT released at the time of announcing the route options, especially as this is the document that is supposed to contain ALL the facts & figures relating to the project? The majority of the appendices weren't released to the public until AFTER the submission period had closed.

The RTA/Hyder advised me that the appendices documented all relevant information relating to this project. Information such as relevant zoning laws, benefits & constraints, project costs etc etc. However it falls short of documenting facts relating to those adversely affected by a super highway running past their front door (or simply glosses over them). What does a highway adjacent to people's homes do to property prices & how do they get compensated for their loss? How do they get compensated for the loss of life-style -- the reason that most of us came here in the first place?

What impact does a super highway have on people's health? What are the real threats to the health of people (& flora/fauna) living adjacent to such a pollution-creating infrastructure? Noise pollution is only one of the issues – going from a totally peaceful existence to one of levels greater than 50dB 24 hours a day, 7 days a week! What about air & water pollution? What studies have been done in this regard? What are the facts relating to diesel emissions? How do they affect the quality of our drinking water, & the environment in general? Will the RTA & state government guarantee that our long-term health (& that of the fauna & flora) not suffer as a result of having a super highway running past our front doors?

It was stated that at least one route in section 2 (2A or 2B??) would take an act of parliament to change existing zoning laws. If the RTA was not willing to go through this process why include it as a PREFERRED option?

Section 2D runs through aboriginal lands ... nowhere has it been documented that it will take an act of parliament to force them to sell their lands (regardless as to whether they actively use this land or not). This fact (as I am led to believe it to be) was not divulged to the general community until the commencement of the VMW meetings. Why is it that our lands can be compulsorily acquired but indigenous lands cannot? Isn't this discrimination in reverse? I understood that anti-discrimination laws were introduced so that everyone was to be considered equal regardless of colour, religion, sex, race etc. Regardless, if the RTA knew this why was 2D included as a PREFERRED option?

Why did the RTA/Hyder so readily disregard option 2F?

I am led to believe that this was the favoured option by the community in section 2. Although this was not forthcoming from the RTA/Hyder when presenting the findings to the last CLG meeting held on 19 July 2005. Facts regarding sections 1 & 3 were detailed in their presentation, however in spite of being questioned about section 2, no facts & figures were forthcoming at this meeting. It was only on release of the submissions report to members of the VMW that this fact came to light. It should be noted that the community has extremely limited input into the VMW stage of this process.

The RTA/Hyder state that sugar cane land is of high economic value to both the local & wider community (and, at present, I would agree - especially in regards to the local community). This is indicated by the high \$ value they place on such land. If the long-term prospects for the industry are as promising, why is the federal government trying to encourage cane growers to sell off their cane farms (through their buy-back scheme) & get out of the industry? Doesn't this government buy back scheme indicate that this is an industry already in decline?

What do they intend for this land in the future, once the industry becomes widely recognised as being non-viable? Will it be used for urban development? In the main, I doubt it, as most of it lies on the flood plain on acid sulphate soils. Once the limited lands already identified by Ballina Shire Council have been utilised for urban development, the potential for future additional growth around Wardell is to the west – i.e. lands to be swallowed up by the middle/ northern section of Option 2C. Doesn't this then create the same problems, the highway upgrade is supposed to be negating by bypassing the towns?

Why wasn't the existing highway listed as a proposed option? One would have thought that this would be the obvious benchmark as it is a KNOWN element. All alternative proposed routes could have been assessed in relation to its performance as a super highway.

Additionally, it already conforms to a standard that will accommodate B-double heavy transport. Surely, an upgrade of the existing highway would offer additional savings not only in relation to construction, but the overall impact on the environment and socio-economic grounds.

It is widely acknowledged that the population density in Australia lies on the eastern seaboard. Why is it that we continually endanger our own existence by building this type of infrastructure in the most densely populated & environmentally sensitive areas? Governments are continually sourcing ways to better utilise the sparse expanses of land to the west of the heavily populated seaboard. With this in mind, why isn't the existing New England Highway being considered for upgrade as the major transport route along the eastern seaboard? Wouldn't this create employment opportunities & longevity for communities whose existence is currently under threat along the great divide? As I understand it, the transport routes from the west into southeast Queensland already exist. What affect would utilising the New England Highway have on road safety, vehicle operating costs, travel times etc?

If transport infrastructure is of such importance at this stage in time, why did the labour state government remove our rail link? Why isn't rail being considered as a viable option to move freight etc along the eastern seaboard in the same manner that freight is transported in the USA?

On a final note, at the end of the day (say 15 or 20+ years down track), when there is little or no oil left and we no longer have a green environment in which to live. When there is no native flora or fauna left in the wild but we do have vast tracks of concrete & bitumen everywhere. What will you say to your children or their children when they ask "Mummy, what's a koala?" or "Mummy, where did all the trees go?" How will you respond? What if they should ask ... "Mummy, why don't we go on holidays to the north coast any more?" Will you be honest enough to say to them .. "There's nothing left to see up there anymore, the government turned it into roads."

Please put a stop to this lunacy. For years, this government has stuffed/mismanaged the education, health and rail systems on the north coast & now they wish to do the same to our eco-system & general way of life. Don't let this happen. Once the natural environment is destroyed, it is gone forever. No amount of money can ever hope to buy it back. This is fact not fiction!

In summary, I hope this clarifies for you how we feel about what has transpired to date in relation to this exercise in futility. The RTA juggernaut continues to role on with little, if any, information forthcoming or real community involvement in the process. I believe that the RTA has always known which route it intends to take & nothing I've heard or read since this started makes me believe otherwise. This whole community involvement process is a farce that allows the RTA to justify to the government that the community's views were considered, when in fact we know our views weren't seriously considered and were never going to be.

From the RTA/Hyder's viewpoint, it is all about construction material & minimising costs. Option 2c gives them that; all the other routes were "red herrings", put forward to divide and confuse the community. At the conclusion of this exercise it will come down to a numbers game. If we can't get the numbers required to fight this on a political platform than we will

find the numbers to fight this on the ground, in front of the bulldozers etc. The north coast is very much an environmentally aware region & people will act once they see their green environment being raped by bulldozers.

Referred for your attention & action, please.

Yours sincerely,


M Meszaros