

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 4

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

At Sydney on Monday 26 September 2005

The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. J. A. Gardiner (Chair)

The Hon. J. C. Burnswoods

The Hon. D. C. Clarke

Mr. I. Cohen

The Hon. G. J. Donnelley

Ms L. Rhiannon

CHAIR: Welcome to the first public hearing of the inquiry of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 into Pacific Highway upgrades. Before we commence proceedings I would like to make some comments about the procedure for today's hearings. The Committee is currently undertaking two inquiries into Pacific Highway upgrades. One relates to the far North Coast and the other relates to the area around Coffs Harbour. As noted in the terms of reference for the Coffs Harbour inquiry, the two inquiries are in the same terms and will be conducted concurrently. Hearings and submissions for one inquiry may be considered in the other and questions today can cover either or both hearings. I note, however, that as the terms the reference for the Coffs Harbour section of the upgrades were adopted only last week some witnesses may not have had time to be sufficiently prepared to answer questions about the Coffs Harbour upgrades today and we will take that into consideration.

The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of the guidelines governing the broadcast of proceedings are available from the table by the door. In accordance with Legislative Council guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, members of the Committee and witnesses may be filmed or recorded but people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee the media must take responsibility for what it publishes or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee.

Witnesses, members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendants or the Committee clerks. I also advise that, under the standing orders of the Legislative Council, any documents presented to the Committee that have not yet been tabled in Parliament may not, except with the permission of the Committee, be disclosed or published by any member of such committee or by any other person. The Committee prefers to conduct its hearings in public. However, it may decide to hear certain evidence in private if there is a need to do so. If such a case arises I will ask the public and the media to leave the room for a short period. I ask all people present to turn off their mobile phones for the duration of the hearing.

HUGH McMASTER, Corporate Relations Manager, New South Wales Road Transport Association. Inc., 30-31 Hallstrom Place, Wetherill Park, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: I welcome our first witness, Mr Hugh McMaster, Corporate Relations Manager, Road Transport Association. Mr McMaster, thank you for being here this morning.

Mr McMaster: Thank you.

CHAIR: In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr McMaster: As representative of the New South Wales Road Transport Association.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of the inquiry?

Mr McMaster: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you may wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. Mr McMaster, would you like to commence by making a short statement to the Committee?

Mr McMaster: Yes, thank you. The New South Wales Road Transport Association has been the peak industry organisation for road transport operations since 1890. Its members have a considerable interest in issues concerning the upgrade of the Pacific Highway. Road is the dominant mode for freight transport in Australia. Generally, other modes cannot compete for freight transport tasks with road transport operators. That is driven by the industry's inherent flexibility and reliability, its strong customer service ethos and the long-term sharp decline in operating costs and freight rates. Nearly all freight is moved by truck either for the entire journey or for some part of the journey. Because of the absence of seaports or intermodal terminals, all freight moving to and from the North Coast of New South Wales is moved by road. Everything produced by local industry and everything consumed by the local community is transported by truck.

The community depends totally on the road transport industry for the movement of goods. Most freight moves north-south along the Pacific Highway, which serves an extremely important social and economic function. Most truck trips are local trips. Heavy vehicles with larger payloads are more prevalent in longer distance transport.

The national road freight task is set to double within the next 15 years. In the absence of underlying reforms this means that the number of trucks on the road will double. However, the rate of growth in the freight task along the Pacific Highway will exceed the national average by far because of population growth on the east coast.

B-doubles provide beneficial social, economic and environmental outcomes and are ideally suited to high-volume line haul freight tasks. They are considered to be the safest of the larger heavy vehicles used on Australian roads because they are a more stable vehicle combination with better road holding and steering ability than semi-trailers. Two B-doubles can perform the same freight task as three semi-trailers. Freight costs of B-doubles are approximately 20 per cent less than is the case for semi-trailers. The level of greenhouse gas emissions and fuel consumption per tonne kilometre is significantly lower with B-doubles than is the case with semi-trailers.

Recognition of the benefits of B-doubles is very important in moving forward. Interstate transport is well established on the Pacific Highway because of the role of Brisbane as a distribution hub, a market and a port. The Pacific Highway is now the major freight route between Sydney and Brisbane. The impact of the mix of local and interstate traffic means the Pacific Highway is increasingly a local road, a tourist road and an interstate freight route. As a two-lane road carrying current and forecast traffic volumes, this cannot continue.

Our association supports AusLink and urges the New South Wales Government to sign the AusLink agreement with the Commonwealth as soon as possible. We also urge the Government to match the increased contribution the Commonwealth has committed to AusLink. We support the

investigation of other financing options through the private sector to complete duplication of the Pacific Highway within a short timeframe, provided it does not compromise existing and proposed Government commitments to funding construction.

There are other issues we think are relevant to this inquiry. Rest areas for truck drivers are inadequate. Relatively low fuel prices in Queensland compared with New South Wales hampers the development of critical infrastructure such as service centres on the North Coast.

Finally, I would like to talk about last Friday's blockade at Macksville. We are hearing serious allegations about what happened as a result of this blockade that warrant attention. We believe a thorough review of the management of the blockade and its social and economic consequences needs to be undertaken, and I am happy to talk about that later on if the Committee wishes.

CHAIR: You submit that most truck trips on the Pacific Highway are local trips and most of them are regional traffic, if I could put it that way. Can you give us a bit of the history of whether or not that has always been the profile of the Pacific Highway? Did it used to be the New England Highway? Has the Pacific Highway in more recent times started to take on more of a freight burden, so to speak?

Mr McMASTER: I think generally most truck trips are local trips. It is not well understood, but irrespective of where you are, most truck trips are local; they involve movements of extractive materials, materials for building, for construction, trips from warehouses to retail outlets, et cetera, et cetera. What has made the Pacific Highway particularly unique is the sudden shift in long-distance freight from the New England to the Pacific Highway following the opening of the Chinderah-Yelgun freeway in August three years ago. That certainly substantially increased the volume of long-distance truck traffic on the highway but, notwithstanding that, we maintain the view that most truck trips are local trips because they involve short-haul transport tasks to and from local communities on the North Coast.

CHAIR: Can you give us a breakdown of the proportion of long-distance haulage as distinct from the more localised usage of the Pacific Highway by trucks?

Mr McMASTER: No, I cannot, but, as a rule of thumb, the industry takes the view that about 80 per cent of all truck trips involve transport tasks less than 80 kilometres long. Probably a high proportion of those would be in urban areas compared with regional areas. The best indication I have is the figures I have included in the submission, which show the tonnage moved that is local to regional to interstate, et cetera. But, as I said in my opening remarks, the average payload per long-distance trip is quite a lot larger than the average payload per-short distance trip. So the statistics in the submission overstate the relative importance of interstate traffic in terms of the number of trucks on the road.

CHAIR: You say that Pacific Highway is now the major freight route between Sydney and Brisbane?

Mr McMASTER: Yes.

CHAIR: Is it the association's belief that that is the way it should stay, in general terms?

Mr McMASTER: Yes, we do. The reason is that the Pacific Highway is about a 40 to 50 minute shorter trip from Sydney to Brisbane, as an example. The fuel consumption per truck on the Pacific Highway is about 10 per cent less than on the New England Highway. Sections of the New England Highway such as the Moonbi Ranges, the Murrurundi Range and so on, are very hard on trucks. So maintenance costs are a lot higher on the New England as well. In winter you encounter black ice and various other hazards such as that. So the consensus in the industry is that the Pacific Highway is definitely a better route. As new sections of the highway open it will only reinforce in the industry's mind that it is a safer, more reliable, more consistent road. The other problem is that it was always touch and go for truck drivers to complete a journey via the New England from Sydney to Brisbane within legal driving hours. It was always a close call. Now on the coastal route that is not an issue.

CHAIR: You talked about the relative safety of B-double trucks. Would you like to expand on that so that we have on record why B-doubles are considered safer than some smaller trucks?

Mr McMASTER: Certainly. The main reason is that B-doubles are a more stable unit on the road than a semitrailer. The swept path, as it is called, or the way the vehicle steers or holds the road is more stable. It takes a more consistent and reliable path. It is better at sticking to the lane than a semitrailer. They are the main reasons why it is considered to be a safer vehicle. As I said previously in my opening remarks, a B-double also carries more freight so fewer B-doubles are needed to complete the same freight task compared with semitrailers. There are economic and environmental advantages as well.

Mr IAN COHEN: From both planning and road safety perspective, what is your organisation's opinion on having only one upgraded Sydney to Brisbane route that carries both light and heavy State transport traffic as well as local and inter-regional traffic? Do you think that could be seen as putting too many eggs in one basket in terms of development? Perhaps we could instance the Macksville situation and the level of inconvenience—and dangerous inconvenience—that was caused by the fragility of one transport route like that.

Mr McMASTER: As I said in my opening remarks, the community depends very heavily on the Pacific Highway. It is like a backbone running up the spine of the coast. And most freight moves north to south. It is certainly our view that we need a duplicated highway, perhaps part motorway, from Hexham to the Queensland border. There is no doubt about it. We believe that there is probably a good case for separating on certain parts of the highway local traffic from through traffic. Naturally local traffic will gravitate towards a freeway or a motorway because the driving conditions are better but there will be parts of the route where you will want to bypass towns or areas of the road that are hilly or winding. So you definitely need an alternative route to the existing highway.

Mr IAN COHEN: But on freeways we have essentially a mixing of local car traffic and interstate B-doubles and semitrailers. That is forced; you have to go that way. With a motorway there is a separation. Has your organisation has been encouraging at a government level that a motorway is needed in order to achieve that separation?

Mr McMASTER: Our view is that a motorway to partially fund construction is warranted in order to speed up construction because social and economic benefits will flow from that. Thereafter the community or road users should have the choice of using the old highway, where it is there to be used, or the motorway. Our view is that those who use the motorway should pay for it; those who do not can use the old highway. Our view also is that existing sections of the highway that have either been duplicated or are under construction should be considered as freeway. So the motorway should apply at maximum to those parts where construction has not yet started. We also think that government should continue to maintain, if not increase, the level of financial commitment that it has made publicly and that therefore the balance of the task of duplicating the road should be undertaken by private finance and financed through a toll.

Mr IAN COHEN: From what you said before your organisation has been pleased with the upgraded sections on the Pacific Highway. You said there has been quite a considerable transfer of truck traffic onto the Pacific Highway as it has created a faster and more effective route between Brisbane and Sydney. B-doubles were allowed onto the Pacific Highway in 2002. Did your organisation push for that access? Given that some 70 per cent of the Pacific Highway had not been upgraded at that stage, was it not dangerous and irresponsible on the part of your industry?

Mr McMASTER: I do not know whether the association pushed for an upgrade; I did not work for them at the time. I will be happy to take that question on notice and come back to the Committee. Whether it was dangerous or not I think is a moot point. It is my understanding that there are very few fatal crashes involving B-doubles on the Pacific Highway. I think there may have been four or five in the last three years since they were allowed. I imagine that in most cases the other driver would have been at fault, not the driver of the truck. Our view would be that overall a B-double is a safer truck. I should also add that the improvements to the highway have made it safer.

Mr IAN COHEN: In parts. There are also black spots. Is your organisation encouraging the installation of speed cameras in black spots, for example, to get control of what might be seen as the

cowboy element in the trucking industry—whether or not it is a minority—that are travelling at a dangerous rate through sections of the highway that are old and perhaps not well designed safety wise to deal with B-double trucking, or semitrailers for that matter?

Mr McMASTER: Our association has on numerous occasions publicly and formally put the view to government that we support speed cameras and we also support a more visible presence of police on major roads, like the Pacific Highway. We do not condone speeding. We do not condone any breaches of road laws at all under any circumstances. But we also support the proposed drug-driving trial. We are watching with interest the way that the trial is unfolding in Victoria and, as a matter of principle, we would like to see drug driving as part of the enforcement kit of police in New South Wales.

Mr IAN COHEN: Ewingsdale Hill is near the study area we are looking at. It is just south of Byron, going into what is known as a difficult stretch of highway. The Roads and Traffic Authority has put up signs warning people that they are going too fast. Would that not be an ideal opportunity for your organisation—because speed is often ignored by truckies, and other drivers, I might add—to have speed cameras put in place on that site and at Tintenbar on the way to Ballina, which has a very bad record for accidents? Would you be prepared to make a commitment to work that way? I am surprised that we do not have speed cameras under those circumstances. Would you comment on that?

Mr McMASTER: I cannot comment on where speed cameras should or should not be located. I think that is something for the experts in traffic engineering and enforcement. As a matter of principle, if there is a particular section of any road where there are concerns from the local community about speeding vehicles of any sort—trucks, cars or any other type of vehicle—and the crash rate and other evidence suggests that some additional enforcement measures are justified, we will support in principle the installation of appropriate cameras to deal with that. We have no problem at all.

Mr IAN COHEN: You said that B-doubles are more stable and had certain safety features. You said also that they are better at sticking to the lane rather than a semi. Is that not really driver attitude in this case and are we not dealing, in terms of a B-double, with a vehicle that is going to have a significantly greater stopping distance in an emergency due to its weight and is therefore a greater danger in terms of accident potential on the road?

Mr McMASTER: It is a matter of weighing up the pros and cons of the safety benefits and the safety risks.

Mr IAN COHEN: I am disagreeing with you. I think the bigger the truck, the more potentially dangerous it is just by virtue of its velocity and problems that must be encountered on a public road with a mix of smaller vehicles.

Mr McMASTER: I think it is fair to say that any vehicle which is heavier will take a long distance to stop because of the weight that it carries.

Mr IAN COHEN: Does that not make it a more dangerous vehicle?

Mr McMASTER: Not necessarily because you cannot take one factor in isolation and say that it automatically creates a greater or lesser risk. It is a matter of looking at all factors at play and saying, "What are the risks?" At the end of the day, the record speaks for itself. I understand that there have been three, four or five fatal crashes involving B-doubles on the Pacific Highway in three years. There have been very few serious crashes, as I understand it. I am happy to get the information, if you like.

Mr IAN COHEN: Perhaps we could get the information about the amount of B-doubles on the road statistically and the amount of crashes. What concerns many people in the northern area, where the highway and type of upgrade is disputed, is the general feeling to make the highway safer but the upgrade of the highway and the resultant increase of B-doubles and semitrailer traffic is seen by many in the community as an industry out of control. People feel threatened when they are forced to share the highway with heavy traffic.

Mr McMASTER: Certainly, our concern is that the mix of traffic on the highway creates a volatile situation. People use the highway for different reasons, as I said earlier on, such as locals going to town for shopping or to take the kids to school. You have lots of tourist traffic and lots of truck traffic. The volume of all is growing quite substantially and we need the appropriate infrastructure to be able to cater for the growth in traffic and the purpose for which people use the road.

I also make the point that according to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau in 20 per cent of fatal road accidents involving heavy trucks, the truck driver is deemed to be primarily in fault; in 70 per cent of fatal crashes involving heavy trucks it is the car driver that is deemed to be at fault and in 10 per cent of those cases it is not clear. The driver of a truck invariably is a professional, committed to the safe movement of goods from point A to point B. They are not just driving because they want to drive. They are driving for their livelihood and it is important to drivers that they carry the goods they are carrying in a safe manner.

Mr IAN COHEN: It begs the statistics of all crashes, the numbers involving, in some way, heavy vehicles on that road?

Mr McMASTER: I am sorry, I did not understand the question.

Mr IAN COHEN: You are putting forward some statistics about the level of fault in terms of crashes involving heavy trucks. In terms of major crashes on that highway, what is the percentage or do you have an idea of the percentage that in some way involve heavy vehicles compared to crashes involving light private vehicles?

Mr McMASTER: I do not have those figures available to me, but I am happy to approach the Roads and Traffic Authority and get those statistics.

Mr IAN COHEN: Thank you. Leaving aside the massive funding issues with motorways for road construction, would your organisation have a different view on the location of the highway in the Northern Rivers region, forgetting about the economics of building it, but in terms of community amenity, safety and reliability for transport?

Mr McMASTER: Certainly, our view is that in working out where to build a motorway or freeway you need to select a location that is going to give you a route that allows traffic to travel at the speed of 100 kilometres an hour, where the grades are very slight, particularly for heavy vehicles, so that the inclines and declines are no more than four degrees or five degrees and other engineering standards like that need to be met, in our view.

We also believe that it is very important to take into account access for vehicles to and from the towns that are being bypassed, both for freight traffic and for cars and other vehicles. We believe that it is important to consider the range of social, environmental, cultural and heritage issues that impact on the selection of a route. At the end of the day, though, what is really important is that there has to be clear demonstrable benefits from the upgrade as compared to the cost of construction.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What is your association doing to separate tourist and local traffic from truck traffic? Are you advocating for this?

Mr McMASTER: What we advocate for is not so much a separation of one class of traffic from another per se because I do not think we can tell people which road to drive on or not to drive on. Our focus really is on having adequate road infrastructure to ensure that all road users can drive on that road with greater confidence and be more certain that they will get from their origin to their destination safely and on time.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You spoke earlier about your belief that B-doubles have been very safe in recent years. Did you mean safer for B-double drivers or safer for other drivers on the road?

Mr McMASTER: Safer for all road users—safer for the driver of the truck because the vehicle itself is inherently a safer vehicle but also safer for other road users. As I have said on two or

three occasions this morning, I think there have only been three, four or five fatal crashes involving B-doubles in the last three years on the Pacific Highway.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Mr Cohen asked you about providing some data. Can you also give it to us in the form of fatal accidents and non-fatal accidents because there is certainly a perception in the community that the number of accidents due to semitrailers and B-doubles is on the rise, so data on fatal and non-fatal accidents for semitrailers and B-doubles would be very useful.

Mr McMASTER: I will see what I can do. I will need to speak to the Roads and Traffic Authority. I will be in relying very heavily on their figures.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What does your industry do to ensure that truck drivers abide by speed limits?

Mr McMASTER: We regularly remind our members to ensure that the drivers and subcontractors they employ abide by speed limits and other road rules. As I said earlier on, road safety is particularly important to road transport operators and to our association. I am prepared, without any fear or favour, to tell you now that that is something that our members should be doing at all times and that wherever they can, they should abide by the road rules, and so should all other road users. We use plenty of forums to provide an opportunity to make that point clear.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: What work do you undertake with members of the association to ensure that they do not expect the delivery of goods in an unreal timescale, particularly on the long hauls between Sydney and Brisbane? Are you aware of the perception in the community that some of the big operators push drivers to speed and fulfil their obligations in a dangerous way?

Mr McMASTER: Are you referring to allegations from, say, the Transport Workers Union?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I refer to media reports on the run from Sydney to Brisbane that drivers are expected to drive within a certain time and to achieve that they have to drive for long hours and would have to exceed the speed limit. What does your association and your members do to ensure that truck drivers are not put in that position?

Mr McMASTER: Certainly some of our members find themselves in the position where they are expected to meet an unrealistic deadline. It is our view, and I believe the view of the Transport Workers Union, that pressure is imposed by the industry's clients, not within the industry itself. We do not condone any employer or principal contractor putting undue pressure on a truck driver to speed in order to meet a deadline. As you know the Road Transport (General) Act will come into force this week. Under that Act, obligations for compliance with road laws in a range of areas, including driver fatigue and overloading, will extend from the truck owner and driver to other players in the transport chain.

That is so because the responsible authorities and governments right around Australia now realise that so often it is the driver and the truck owner who are put under undue pressure by the other players in the transport chain to deliver to a deadline. As far as how long it takes to travel from Sydney to Brisbane, the industry has a pretty good idea because a lot of truck drivers travel that road several times a week one way. They have a pretty good idea how long it takes to get from one depot to another, just as you and I know roughly how long it takes to drive to or travel by train or bus to work. That is factored into the planning of the overall transport operation. It is not used to force drivers to drive faster. It is part of the kit of management tools that truck owners need to run an efficient, safe and reliable business.

CHAIR: The submission states that the association supports measures to improve the quality and relevance of data collection to evaluate trends and traffic volumes, including heavy vehicle traffic volumes along the highway?

Mr McMASTER: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you expand on that? Are there shortcomings in the collection of data as you see it? Presumably you would see the Roads and Traffic Authority as being responsible for upgrading data collection. Is that correct?

Mr McMASTER: Certainly the responsibility rests with the Roads and Traffic Authority. We are really saying that the volume of traffic on the highway is growing very quickly and there is a need to analyse that growth along the highway as a whole, as well as within certain sections of the highway. There is nothing like having good data and good information because then sound decisions can be made and you can better estimate the benefits of an improvement in the infrastructure.

CHAIR: You mentioned the Auslink program. What are the major benefits of the Auslink program, particularly the need for the State Government to sign up to that agreement?

Mr McMASTER: Certainly. The current agreement between the Commonwealth and the State governments as far as funding of the Pacific Highway runs out in June next year. The Commonwealth has indicated a willingness to put another \$100 million on the table to fast-track construction which would bring its contribution to \$160 million a year. Currently the State Government puts in \$160 million a year. We would like to see the State Government match the Federal Government's increase, to take its contribution to \$260 million a year. Our view is that the current state of the highway is so poor, the social and economic consequences from that are so serious that it does justify that sort of spending by government.

We are also prepared to see private finance go into the construction of the highway so we can complete it by 2016. We support Auslink overall because we see it being basically and fundamentally as a sound national land transport strategy for improving both road and rail infrastructure but we see, in particular, the corridor between Sydney and Brisbane as requiring urgent improvements to both the road link and the rail link.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Given the importance you have placed on the Pacific Highway, why would you not push the Federal Government to increase the percentage expended by it into the Pacific Highway, given that it is lower than for the other major roads? Why would you only push the State Government to contribute money?

Mr McMASTER: The Federal Government has announced it will spend another \$100 per year under Auslink.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Which still brings it up to a percentage on the Pacific Highway massively lower than the percentage the Federal Government devotes to other roads. How do you justify that?

Mr McMASTER: It certainly is. The Federal Government has traditionally funded 100 per cent of the national highway network and that has been its only firm commitment in terms of major inter-State routes or major highways.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But you are saying that the Pacific Highway is much more important to your association and, I guess, by implication to the community than, for instance, the New England highway. Do you not think it is time the Federal Government came to the party?

Mr McMASTER: Yes, we do, but as I said I believe that it is. An increase in funding per annum from \$60 million under the current Commonwealth/State agreement to finance the upgrading of the highway is not nearly as good as \$160 million as the Commonwealth is proposing on an annual basis from July next year. So we are saying that the Commonwealth is showing a commitment to put more money into the highway. We are asking that the State Government do the same.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Why are you not asking that the Federal Government put in even more, given the size of its surplus and the rate of increase on the Pacific Highway compare to, however many years ago it was, expectations of the New England highway being the main truck route, and given that the Federal Government basically has all the money and doles out money to the States? Surely your association should be pushing the Federal Government?

Mr McMASTER: We are saying, and have been saying for sometime, that both governments should put in more money but when the Auslink white paper was released in 2004 the Federal Government at the time said it would be prepared to put in another \$100 million onto the highway. It is also substantially increasing funding of other land infrastructure in New South Wales. It is going to put in more money to the Hume Highway. It will improve the main railway line between Sydney and Melbourne and between Sydney and Brisbane. It has made other commitments. Its commitments are national commitments, not State commitments.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You sound as if you are being an apologist for the Federal Government?

Mr McMASTER: No, I am not. I am certainly not at all.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: It has the taxation power. We all know it short changes New South Wales anyway in terms of the GST revenue, the fuel levy and so on. You sound as though you are praising the Federal Government for the extra it is putting in when the claim from New South Wales for many years has been that other roads get 100 per cent or 80 per cent funding and the Pacific Highway has been treated by the Federal Government as the poor relation. Now the Federal Government, I guess under a lot of pressure, is producing a little bit more but you see your role as thanking and praising it rather than saying it is not enough. At this rate the Pacific Highway will still be the way it is for another 20 years.

Mr McMASTER: It will probably be that way for longer than 20 years actually, and that is why we want to seek proper finances to facilitate the completion of construction. We are not praising the Federal Government because it is the Federal Government; we are praising it because it has said that it is prepared to put another \$100 million into the highway. It is also my understanding—and I will need to check the facts—that under Auslink something like 39 per cent of all Commonwealth expenditure planned over the next five years of the \$12 billion to \$14 billion—I cannot think of the exact amount—is going to New South Wales.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Something like what per cent?

Mr McMASTER: Thirty-nine per cent, I believe.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What percentage is New South Wales in the population of Australia?

Mr McMASTER: I think it is about 33 per cent, 34 per cent.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: And in terms of economic activity, what percentage would New South Wales be?

Mr McMASTER: It is probably around the high thirties—37 per cent, 38 per cent, 39 per cent.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: It might even be higher than 39 per cent.

Mr McMASTER: It could be marginally, yes.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: So New South Wales is getting something towards what it deserves.

Mr McMASTER: That is probably a fair comment, and I think it is a fair comment to say historically we did not get what we deserved. If we are now getting what we deserved in terms of our economic contribution to the nation, that is a good thing.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: But even with the extra money you are praising the Federal Government for, it is still only bringing its contribution to the Pacific Highway up to 50 per cent, whereas with other roads it makes it 100 per cent or 80 per cent. So surely it still has a hell of a long way to go.

Mr McMASTER: I think governments generally have a long way to go. It is a little hard to criticise a government which suddenly provides another \$100 million to upgrade a particular road, a very important road, when another government does not make a commitment. If it was the Opposition in Canberra that had made the same commitment, we would praise it. Why? Because it is showing a commitment; it is moving in the right direction. It is committing more money to improving that particular road.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Should not your line be, "Yes, we are grateful for this little bit"—

CHAIR: Mr McMaster can come up with his own lines.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: In your written submission you said that Queensland enjoys substantially lower fuel prices than New South Wales. What is that price difference?

Mr McMASTER: It is difficult to know because of the complications of the retail market for fuels. That is a hot issue on its own at the moment, as you would understand. But my understanding is that the Queensland Government gives a rebate of several cents per litre. I think there is certainly some support for a rebate, as I recall, for those who purchase fuel in northern New South Wales. I guess our main point is that a lot of road transport operators travelling from, say, Sydney to Brisbane would fill up in Queensland and have enough fuel to get back to Sydney and perhaps do another trip back up the coast again. So a relatively high proportion of long-distance fuel purchases are made in Queensland because the fuel is cheaper compared to New South Wales.

What that means is that there are not a lot of trucks filling up on the North Coast. That means that it is difficult from a commercial viewpoint to establish a business case to build the type of service centres that you see in locations like Yass on the Hume Highway. It is our view that those service centres would be very beneficial to all road users.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: How much cheaper is fuel in Queensland compared to New South Wales?

Mr McMASTER: I do not know what the difference is; it is several cents a litre. I could find out if you like and try to get back to you.

Mr IAN COHEN: The submission from the RTA states that between New England and the Pacific Highway currently it takes on average an additional 57 minutes for New England than the Pacific Highway route. You mentioned before, I am not sure whether in the inquiry or in conversation with me before, about black ice and problems on the New England Highway. However, surely Europe and other cold areas can resolve a lot of those problems. But given that it is 57 minutes, is it not a reasonable argument that other highways such as the New England Highway can be upgraded for far less cost and bring them up to parity with the times, distances and effort that would then be comparable to the Pacific Highway? Then that would provide another major link that would give the opportunity in emergencies and so on for truck traffic to get through. Is that a sensible approach?

Mr McMASTER: I do not think so because you need to look at the overall benefits to all road users. There would be more trucks travelling on the Pacific Highway from Sydney to Brisbane. There is also lots of traffic between cities and towns like Taree, Grafton, Coffs Harbour, Ballina, et cetera. There is still a lot of local truck traffic, a lot of interregional truck traffic. There is a lot of tourist traffic on the North Coast. There are a lot of locals driving from town to town as well.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is that not more of an argument to get the heavy vehicle traffic off the Pacific Highway, rather than adding it to what is a deadly cocktail at the present time?

Mr McMASTER: No, because the saving in time, the saving in fuel, the saving in wear and tear that arises from using the Pacific Highway as opposed to the New England Highway justifies the use of the coastal route. You mentioned about black ice in Europe. European truck drivers would be used to driving in cold conditions. That is something they do several months a year. Australian truck drivers are not, and it is very dangerous.

Mr IAN COHEN: Surely that is an education thing.

Mr McMASTER: No.

Mr IAN COHEN: Surely it is no more dangerous driving on black ice than exceeding the speed limit and driving like a cowboy down the existing highway with black spots.

Mr McMASTER: It is more than education. It is just straight out dangerous full stop. It is just the nature of the grade, the nature of the road conditions, the pay load. It is the combination of factors that makes it very dicey. I would not like to be a road user employer who says, "No, I want you to drive in more dangerous conditions than in safe conditions." Think about it from the viewpoint of that employer.

Mr IAN COHEN: Sure.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Recently I have been arranging a removalist to remove goods from Tweed Heads to Sydney. I was pleasantly surprised to find that they now do all of their interstate removals by train. In other words, a container goes on a truck from Tweed Heads to Brisbane, comes to Sydney by train and then goes on to a truck to be delivered, in this case, to three different suburban locations. I just wondered what your view is, particularly in relation to the Pacific Highway, of the extent to which we as a community would be advantaged if more businesses were using the Sydney to Brisbane rail line and getting the trucks off the Pacific Highway.

Mr McMASTER: There are certain types of freight tasks where it is possible to use rail rather than road. It is certainly our view that a substantial improvement in the rail line from Brisbane to Sydney is warranted. We also think as a result of that there would be some shift in long-distance freight from road to rail and we have no problem with that because it is the road transport operator who will determine the best mode of transport, the appropriate mode of transport, having regard to the needs of the client.

One of the problems, though, from a practical viewpoint, is that so much freight that is moved is time sensitive. That is a particular problem when you have blockades like the one that we had at Macksville on Friday morning. The logistics chain is based more and more these days on moving goods in a time sensitive manner, and if you need to get something to a certain point by a certain time you have a greater likelihood of achieving that by using a truck than you have taking the goods to a rail head, putting them on a train, unloading them at the other end, and completing the transport task that way. Road transport is a lot more flexible and a lot more economically viable. That is why most clients who want a land transport service would rather that be performed by truck than by train.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I guess what struck me in this case is that I would have thought, of all businesses, that domestic household removals, with varying sizes of loads and all the rest of it, would have been very much road oriented. That is why it struck me that they were saying how much cheaper it was for them to bring things from Tweed Heads to Sydney, via Brisbane and via rail.

Mr McMASTER: It does not surprise me, certainly—

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: With bulkier industries you would think the economies of scale would be even greater.

Mr McMASTER: You have to negotiate something that is favourable to you, because that container will go on a full trainload of containerised goods, and consequently the cost of that rail movement will be spread across all the clients who have put containers on that train. So you will benefit that way. Presumably, time was not a critical issue, because I would believe it would take longer to move the container from Tweed Heads to Sydney via Brisbane using both road and rail. If you wanted the container in Sydney within say 20 hours, you really could not viably put it on a truck, take it to a rail head and take it off at the other end in time.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: A lot of this would need to be transported very quickly.

Mr McMASTER: Most freight is time sensitive. Believe me, it is.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: It would be interesting to get some statistics on that.

CHAIR: Mr McMaster, that brings your evidence to a conclusion. We really do appreciate your evidence here today. Thank you very much.

(The witness withdrew.)

MARK MATTHEW ARCHIBALD CROSDALE, Secretary, Newcastle and Northern Sub-branch, Transport Workers Union of Australia, 96 Tudor Street, Hamilton, New South Wales, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Mr Crosdale, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

Mr CROSDALE: As an official of the Transport Workers Union.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr CROSDALE: I am.

CHAIR: I need to advise you that if you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you may wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. As I understand it, the TWU has not put in a submission to the inquiry. Is that correct?

Mr CROSDALE: That is correct.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make a brief opening statement to the Committee?

Mr CROSDALE: Yes, Chair.

CHAIR: You may proceed to present that.

Mr CROSDALE: Firstly, may I thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence today. Road improvements and maintenance are of particular concern to thousands of our members. I have personal knowledge of the Pacific Highway in that as a long-distance truck driver I spent some time driving up and down that road, and I have seen a range of accidents and general events on it. So it is good to be able to be able to provide some evidence to this inquiry.

The Transport Workers Union, New South Wales, represents more than 30,000 transport workers, many of those being in the long haul industry. Those doing long distance work are the ones who would be most affected by the proposed upgrades of the Pacific Highway into which the Committee is inquiring. Truck drivers from all States and Territories use major freight routes, like the Pacific Highway, and nationally the TWU represents over 130,000 transport workers.

From our perspective, as the representative body for truck drivers, safety is the major issue facing people in the road transport industry. In 2004, more than 100 people were killed on New South Wales roads in heavy vehicle accidents. Many of those who were unfortunately killed were other road users. Fatigue is the most significant contributor to accidents in the heavy vehicle industry. I am not sure whether the Committee is aware that many drivers are pushed to the limit by transport operators who are themselves working for slim margins because of the demands placed on them by clients, such as major retailers, who control the transport industry.

Having said that, the New South Wales Government recently gazetted the Occupational Health and Safety (Long Distance Truck Driver Fatigue) Regulation 2004, which will come into effect in March next year. The new regulation will ensure that all participants in the contracting chain are responsible for pressures placed on drivers to make deliveries in unreasonable and unachievable time frames. While legislative and regulation changes are essential to improving safety in the industry, well-maintained and efficient roads are also of significant importance.

The TWU is well aware of concerns surrounding the new AusLink funding models for road maintenance and for new programs. A particular concern is that the agreement between the Commonwealth and the New South Wales Government to fund dual carriageway upgrades on the Sydney to Brisbane freight corridor expires in 2006 and may not be renewed. Also, the current AusLink funding package, announced by then Minister for Transport, John Anderson, puts road maintenance funding below the level it was in the late 1990s. Funding currently stands at only \$300 million nationwide per year.

Dual carriageway is essential to improving the flow of traffic and ensuring that personal vehicles and freight vehicles can each achieve their objectives on the highway. I understand that the proposals for both Tintenbar to Ewingsdale and Woodburn to Ballina are for the extension of dual carriageway. The Transport Workers Union supports road improvements in both areas, and we encourage further expansion of dual carriageway across the entirety of the Pacific Highway. I would, however, note that the TWU recognises that there may be some environmental and social concerns associated with each of the two projects. I do not profess to have any detailed knowledge of those concerns, nor do I intend to weigh into the debate on them.

The reason that the TWU accepted the invitation to provide evidence to the Committee is to demonstrate that we support dual carriageway from the perspective of safety, which is one of the major concerns of our members. The importance of road upgrades and road maintenance must be viewed in the context of projected increases in the road freight task. In 2004 the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services predicted that the tonne-kilometres of road transport nationwide would double by 2009. I further understand that 85 per cent of all freight that travels on our roads either originates in or passes through New South Wales. In 2004 the New South Wales Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources predicted that the greater Sydney road freight task would increase by 70 per cent by 2020 and that the number of freight containers will triple by the same year.

Whether looking at the Commonwealth or State figures, that means a significant impact upon roads across New South Wales. In one way or another, roads need to be upgraded to ensure that they have the capacity for an increased number of vehicles. Alternatively, as has been proposed most notably by the Commonwealth, the size of vehicles will increase. There is a current proposal to allow B-triples onto New South Wales roads in the Far West for the first time. To come back to safety: the more traffic that there is on busy freight corridors such as the Pacific Highway, the more danger there is for drivers like our members who spend thousands of hours on the road each year.

In summary, road improvements, upgrades and maintenance are essential to improving safety in the road transport industry, especially in light of the projected increase in the road freight task over the next decade. But the TWU does recognise that local environmental and social concerns need to be considered in any proposed upgrade such as those into which you are currently inquiring. I would like to thank you for your time, and I am more than happy to take questions.

CHAIR: Firstly, you talk about fatigue being such an important issue in road safety. Can you expand on that? Can you give any statistics you are aware of in relation to the role fatigue plays, particularly in truck accidents?

Mr CROSDALE: Fatigue is a considerable issue in road transport. The heavy vehicle driver can drive 14 hours in a day or do a combination of driving and working for 14 hours. In New South Wales you need to do a thing called transitional fatigue management training. That allows you to drive 14 hours. If you have not had that training you can drive for 12 hours in a day and have two hours to load and unload your vehicle. You must also have breaks—half-hour breaks if you have not been transitional fatigue management trained and 15-minute breaks if you have been transitional fatigue management trained.

The reality of the industry is that drivers are forced to work excessive hours. It is through economic reasons primarily, and that is also backed up by the fact that in many cases they do not have the mechanism to refuse that work. The way it often works is that a driver is coerced to load in Brisbane, drive to Sydney, do a delivery in Sydney, come off logbook in Sydney, do a range of other deliveries and pickups, come back on to logbook and drive back the other way. They are simply tired. A 14-hour day is a pretty good day for anyone. Say you add your breaks on to it, basically from the time you started to the time you finished it is a 16-hour day, so that it is a pretty good day. If you are then forced to do other work at either end of the schedule, fatigue mounts up.

From personal experience, no-one works those sorts of ours unless there is a reason. They are often forced to by economic factors. That will be that major clients of road transport let out contracts which are then sublet down the transport chain to the point where the person down the end of the transport chain is not making any money. The way you deal with that if you are a single-truck operator is to work more hours. You have a combination of fixed and standing costs. Standing costs

are what it costs you to have your vehicle registered, to buy it and to pay it off. Your running costs are your fuel consumption, et cetera. If you can operate that vehicle for more hours, effectively you have more chance of making money at the end of the day. That means if you are the person who makes the decision as to how long that vehicle will drive for, then you basically drive it as long as you are physically able.

We know that there are various statistics around about drug use in motor transport and we have seen figures from somewhere between 30 per cent and 90 per cent of people in long-distance transport have taken drugs at some time in their careers. My position on that is if 5 per cent, if 2 per cent, if 1 per cent of people took drugs to go to work, that means there is something wrong with the system that allows that to happen, or encourages that to happen.

If you are a small-fleet owner you have to keep your vehicles going and if your employees feel they have not got the opportunity to say, "No, I am not going to work those hours, I am not going to do that job, I am not going to do that extra trip," your trucks continue to work and fatigue is a major player in long-distance work in New South Wales.

CHAIR: The Road Transport Association said in its submission that there are inadequate rest areas on the Pacific Highway for people in your industry. Would you agree with that?

Mr CROSDALE: I think rest areas are at a premium on the Pacific Highway. The bigger issue for us is there is no incentive for drivers to stop in those rest areas. That is more the problem. If the person writing the submission was saying that is the reason drivers are working excessive hours on the Pacific Highway or that drivers simply do not have a spot to stop, when rest areas are full that certainly makes it more difficult, but the bigger issue facing the industry is that people do not have time to stop.

CHAIR: Would you mind explaining the terminology used about logbooks, about coming off logbooks in Sydney and coming back on again?

Mr CROSDALE: Yes. What can happen is you fill out your logbook when you leave a particular city and you will arrive at the next city, say Brisbane down to Sydney. You will put down in your logbook that you have unloaded. At the end of the unloading you will then put down you have been at rest for the day, until your last pickup before you turn around and head back at north again. You will then say, "I finished my first drop and I hope I am not going to have my logbook inspected until I get to my last pickup." So, I will leave my logbook blank and at the end of the day I will put down that at my last pickup I have been resting all day and I just started to load and I will head back north again. That is common practice in road transport. I do not put it on the record to see drivers penalised. I put it on the record to demonstrate that the system is being used to allow excessive hours to be worked when people do not necessarily want to, but it is a reality, it is a fact of life, in the road transport industry.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Let us take the case of an employed driver on the Sydney to Brisbane route. You say he could be working 14 hours to 16 hours a day. How many days a week on average would that be?

Mr CROSDALE: Legally you can work six out of seven days if you have not been transitional fatigue management trained. If you have been transitional fatigue management trained you can work 12 days out of 14. You must have 24 hours continuous rest after day six for non-transitional fatigue management trained drivers and you must have 48 hours continuous rest after day 12 for transitional fatigue management trained drivers.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Do most of your drivers work the maximum allowed?

Mr CROSDALE: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: In doing that, what would the average income be for one of your drivers?

Mr CROSDALE: It depends on the method of remuneration. If you are working on an hours and overtime basis as opposed to someone who is working on a cents per kilometre basis, those incomes can vary. Obviously, if you are being paid legally for the hours you work, that will also affect your income. The figures would be somewhere between \$60,000 and \$85,000. That would be pretty much the range, I would have thought.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: The average for those on the Sydney to Brisbane route?

Mr CROSDALE: Yes. It would be within the range. If I was doing that route on a wages and overtime basis and getting paid by a major transport corporate who has an above-average agreement in place, I would be at the top end of that. If you are working for someone who is paying you on, loosely termed, trip money, if you do three trips a week you would get paid X and on that basis you would be down the lower end.

Mr IAN COHEN: Can you comment on the fact that we are planning to mix B-doubles travelling at 110 kilometres an hour with passenger vehicles on the busiest tourist highway in the country, when safety is given as the prime reason for the upgrade? Can you comment on that?

Mr CROSDALE: Safety in our position also incorporates the dual carriageway. Firstly, the dual carriageway I think from my knowledge, and I cannot quote the source but anecdotally I believe the statistics show that the dual carriageway will decrease the head-on incidences of accidents. In terms of a dual carriageway way you have two traffic lanes heading in that one direction, it deals much better with differentials of speed. A semitrailer or B-double will sit quite comfortably on 100 kilometres an hour on the flat, but coming up the hill they will drop back to 30 or 40 kilometres an hour, depending on the hill, which allows other traffic to go past.

From the perspective of a working truck driver, if you are going to have near misses often it is vehicles impatiently trying to overtake it. I remember that we used to cart milk out of Raleigh, near Coffs Harbour, back into Sydney. The cows do not stop. On a Friday night of an Easter long weekend you could find yourself going up to Raleigh get a load of milk. The amount of heart stops I have had when you get a short section of road and sometimes it is double yellow lines or an unbroken line, and other times it is a broken line, but only with room to get one car past and only just. You look out and three cars are sitting beside the trailer

Mr IAN COHEN: I know that section. It has some pretty serious black spots still. I agree with you. Surely, with the upgrading we see it the other way around, which is the big trucks actually intimidating people on the highway. I understand the time constraints and pressures, but we get constant reports that the mixing of traffic between the heavy interstate transport and local traffic is making people fear for their lives when they are forced to use those highways. Do you have a comment on that?

Mr CROSDALE: I have been in this industry for 20-odd years in a range of roles. I believe this industry is under enormous pressure. If that pressure is transferred down the line, unfortunately it affects driver behaviour whether you are an owner driver who literally has been behind the wheel worrying whether your house is going to be there when you get back or whether you are a driver who has been told, "You will get those in, you will get that there, you will make that timeslot and if you don't your job is on the line or there will be some other penalty against you." It affects driver behaviour. Unfortunately, the general public sees the human face of a whole lot of pressures rolling down the transport chain.

Mr IAN COHEN: What is the safety solution see from your membership perspective?

Mr CROSDALE: We think chain of responsibility. People who own freight on the back of trucks have a responsibility to everyone else in the chain. Ultimately they are the people who are benefiting and making financial gain from a low transport freight rate. I am sympathetic to the transport truck owners and small companies, et cetera because I know that they are not making the return on investment that they should get. If you see someone with, say, 10 B-doubles—I will make the figures round so that my maths are not too far off—with an average cost of probably \$400, 000, they have \$4 million invested. If you went and had a look at how much return they are getting from that investment I guarantee it would not be anywhere near the average. Effectively they are price

takers, not price makers. If they are price makers it is in an environment of competition, which means they cannot get the return. I will not digress very far, but there is Internet bidding for contracts.

Mr IAN COHEN: There is a lot of pressure on industry constantly?

Mr CROSDALE: People bid in real time and they watch the price come down until it comes to a point that they have the contract. If they are the person in the upper level of the chain they then have to make some decisions about how they get that done profitably and they push it down the chain.

Mr IAN COHEN: You are probably aware of the old Burringbar section, which was pretty murderous.

Mr CROSDALE: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Admittedly there has been a transfer to the new road to a huge extent, nevertheless the level of accidents has been cut down drastically purely because of permanent speed cameras on that section of that notorious road. There no speed cameras at Tintenbar Hill, which is another notorious road, at Ewingsdale Hill or Tintenbar going down to Ballina, which is an area the Committee is looking at fairly closely. What is the union's position on encouraging speed cameras to calm down speeding on those sections of roads? Is that not a cheap and effective way of saving lives?

Mr CROSDALE: I have been in this industry for more than 20 years. Until the chain of responsibility through WorkCover, it was tackled with the most gusto at targeting drivers. Yes, putting in a speed camera means that I will not drive past that speed camera if I know that, at the end of the week, I am going to get \$150 or \$200 fine and lose precious points from my licence. But the reality is they better have another one 100 yards down the road and another one 100 yards down the road after that or a policeman another 100 yards down the road after that because if I am in a system that is forcing me, under pressure, to get a job done then I will get it done by hook or by crook. If you want to transfer the problem, I agree, a speed camera, as you say, is quite cost effective. Drivers have been the target of enforcement, once again, for 20-odd years, and for 20-odd years they have been getting around it. Governments and regulators need to look at the wider picture. I am really heartened that that is starting to happen now.

Mr IAN COHEN: The previous witness mentioned that B-doubles and their design are now more safer. I challenge that because something of a greater weight and velocity, further distance to brake and suchlike can create more danger. You mentioned that B-triples are being considered on western transport routes.

Mr CROSDALE: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Could you give your perspective from practical experience as a truck driver and a member of the union as to the actual comparative safety between semitrailers and B-doubles?

Mr CROSDALE: I have also driven road trains. I hold a road train licence. It is all in the way the vehicle is operated. It is a very base level logic—I am not saying that to denigrate that proposition—that says if it is bigger it must be more dangerous, it is harder to stop and it is less stable, et cetera. In my experience all vehicle types that I have driven, if the vehicle is well maintained and it is driven according to the road conditions and the vehicle, I believe it has never been any less safe than any other vehicle. If you put me in a little eight-tonnes delivery truck that has bad brakes and have me charging around town racing through the traffic lights, I would argue that is much more unsafe than my being in a B-double, being rested and driving that vehicle professionally within its limits and design constraints.

As to its stability, no, in my experience a B-double is quite stable if driven professionally. The more variables there are the more opportunity there is for things to go wrong if a driver is fatigued and we get back to the same process I talked about. I referred to black ice and black spots. They are all things that can go wrong, and it is a case of how, as a driver, you are prepared to deal with it. If I am going too fast because I have to get there, if I have not shut my eyes in 20-odd hours, if I am not alert, or if I am on a stretch of road that is not populated by other trucks where I am not

alerted to black ice, which is one of the values of radio communication in trucks—guys are able to tell you what is going on, but the other side is that they can spot police and enforcement officials, which is common knowledge. There are goods and bads with everything.

Mr IAN COHEN: From your perspective the industry can deal with black ice through education, knowledge and proper communication. In the Tintenbar area there is some debate as part of this Committee about some of the preferred options. There is concern that if it goes through Migden Flat, which is near the Tintenbar area, there will be extra problems with fog and flooding. How does that compare? We have black ice, we have fog, and we have flooding. These are all issues that, at certain times of the year I imagine, truck drivers will have to negotiate. How big an issue is fog on the flats, for example, for someone who is regularly driving on a 24-hour schedule?

Mr CROSDALE: It is certainly an issue. It is a fatigue issue as much as anything because it makes you tired, driving through fog all night.

Mr IAN COHEN: Yes.

Mr CROSDALE: The way you deal with fog is that you have a knowledge of what is happening in front of you from the radio contact. There are various lighting and road safety aids that will assist you, but at the end of the day, it is commonsense and being in a position to make proper judgments about what is in front of you. If there are no other trucks around and you cannot see your hand in front of your face literally, to use that colloquial expression, find a parking bay, pull up, and go to bed, if you have that option. Do you know what I mean?

Mr IAN COHEN: Yes.

Mr CROSDALE: Then it is the case of, well, I need to go at a speed that I can actually get through the road and be aware of what is in front of me. But also, when there is plenty of traffic on the highway in the middle of the night, you might have someone who is not as professional in doing their job as I am and who comes along and rear ends me. Fog is quite a challenge.

Mr IAN COHEN: Fog is a big one.

Mr CROSDALE: Yes. It is.

Mr IAN COHEN: Therefore, highway routing should really take into account the fog potential, which is a fairly important factor.

Mr CROSDALE: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: If there is a choice.

Mr CROSDALE: Yes, if there is a choice. In terms of rating fog factors as high or low, I would find some difficulty in doing that because I am not a road safety expert. As I say, I have plenty of experience under my belt and that, for me, personally I find challenging.

Mr IAN COHEN: That is a big one?

Mr CROSDALE: Yes.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Earlier you spoke about the chains of responsibility. I would be interested in you commenting on how that is going in terms of being implemented. I am interested to know whether it goes as far as the people further up the chain indicating which route the drivers should use. What I am obviously exploring there is the issue between the Pacific Highway and the New England Highway. Many people on the Pacific Highway are raising their concerns that, each time there is an upgrade, more traffic is coming over from the New England Highway. While that might save time, there is often a great cost to public safety and also public living standards along that road because of the noise and accident rate, et cetera. I am just trying to link that issue in with the chain of responsibility.

Mr CROSDALE: The chain of responsibility is currently happening on two fronts at the moment. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] is involved in policing a law or implementing a law which is called compliance and enforcement legislation. That commences at the start of next month, 1 October. WorkCover is involved in a different chain of responsibility's set of legislation. The main difference—and this is very much a potted version—is that, regardless of where I sit in the transport chain, whether I am a consignor or the receiver or the driver or the owner, et cetera, if I am seen to have impact on the transport chain negatively, then I am responsible.

In the WorkCover situation, I have an absolute responsibility to make sure that that situation or that transport chain is done safely. So, once again a potted version, if I load the truck in Sydney and the consignor of the freight says, "I don't care, I want that there in 10 hours. Don't come back unless it is there in 10 hours", then that consignor, under the RTA legislation, is responsible if I have an accident up the road. If however the consignor says, "I don't care when you get it there", and I make a call to get it there within 10 hours, then I am responsible.

Under the WorkCover model, the consignor and the receiver, provided that the receiver has more than 150 employees, has an absolute responsibility. They have to make sure that when I get there, I have done it correctly, and they have to make sure that before I leave I have done it correctly. In other words, they have to ensure a safe system of work. That may allow someone in that environment to dictate whether they go along the New England Highway or the Pacific Highway. They have that power pretty much now.

If, at the end of the day, you want to take the load and they say, "I am going to tell you that I want you to go this way", bearing in mind there may be a cost involved in that and it may cost me more to get my freight via the New England Highway rather than the Pacific Highway, the consignor of the freight and the carrier enter into a negotiation and accept that. Then the carrier will go via Melbourne, if the client is prepared to pay the bill.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Mr Crosdale, my question also goes to the issue of the chain of responsibility regulation. I think in answer to an earlier question you explained that the WorkCover part of the regulation commences in March next year. Is that right?

Mr CROSDALE: They are two separate pieces of legislation. Yes, the WorkCover legislation was brought in back in April I think it was, but it has an implementation time and it does not start until March next year. So the industry is currently being skilled up so that people will understand their obligations when it comes in. The big issue is that it only covers trips over 500 kilometres and I do not know the situation in regard to interstate freight. I am not sure how that legislation will impact on a trip that is not wholly within the State. That is not my area of expertise.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That in fact was my question.

Mr CROSDALE: Sorry.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is okay. Given that the regulation, if it is a regulation of the New South Wales Parliament, will have application in New South Wales, what is the situation of a visitor or a trip that goes outside the borders of New South Wales?

Mr CROSDALE: I know that in the compliance and enforcement environment, which is the RTA's bailiwick, if you like, in that environment it requires co-operation between the States. I understand that it can happen, provided there is adequate co-operation between the States and probably at the bureaucratic level as opposed to a governmental level. In regard to the WorkCover legislation—and this is my logic, not anyone else's—I guess there must be a basis for workers compensation issues for drivers who are living in Queensland but get hurt in New South Wales. That would be the principle, I suppose, that lawyers and regulators would be looking to. But, to be honest, it is not my area of expertise.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: If you do not know the answer to this question, just say so. Are you aware that other States and Territories are seeking to move towards creating a regulation like that in New South Wales to provide for this chain of responsibility regulation?

Mr CROSDALE: In regard to the WorkCover legislation, no, I am not. I absolutely would urge them to be part of it and I congratulate the New South Wales Government on this piece of legislation. To the best of my knowledge, it is the first in Australia and may be even wider than that. I think it is the first really well thought out approach to targeting road safety that I have seen in a long time. But, no, I am not aware that there are moves afoot nationally.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Given that road transport in many respects is a national business, if I could describe it that way, with the routes of drivers often going beyond borders of any single State or Territory, are you aware that the Commonwealth Government has been a big supporter of the initiative in New South Wales to get this chain of responsibility regulation endorsed and supported?

Mr CROSDALE: To the best of my knowledge it has not been a supporter, and it certainly has not supported it with its actions. There may have been discussions, but I have not seen anything, any initiative, coming forward out of the Federal Government in this area.

Mr IAN COHEN: Mr Crosdale, given that B-doubles were put on to the Pacific Highway not so long ago, they could be removed by regulation to other transport routes with the upgrading of, for example—I am not saying only—the New England Highway sufficiently and some regulation and support of the industry with times and fuel rebates, whatever it might be, to use that other route, as a professional driver and a representative of your union, do you think that your membership would be able to work with that sort of scenario?

Mr CROSDALE: Yes, our membership would be able to work with regulation, direction and compensation. The worst thing in my mind that could happen would be not a complete regulatory approach to that. Say you took B-doubles off the Pacific Highway: I do not know this, but I imagine that if it takes longer and more fuel to get it by the New England Highway and the freight rate is a differential, and if the market forces were such that B-doubles were removed from the Pacific Highway and put onto the New England Highway and the operators were not able to negotiate an increase to compensate for that—because you do use more fuel when you go along the New England Highway as well because there is more climbing as it is much hillier—well, that would only exacerbate things. While it might move the problem in some people's view from the Pacific Highway, it would have a drastic effect on road safety in the communities up along the New England Highway and on truck drivers.

The other issue in terms of removing B-doubles from the Pacific Highway is I believe there are some benefits to communities up and down the North Coast in terms of their freight rate, in the sense that you get more freight on a B-double. It is more expensive but you only need one driver. It uses more fuel than a single semitrailer, but not double the amount. That has a flow on effect, in terms of freight rates, to those communities up and down the North Coast. The removal of B-doubles from the Pacific Highway would have the effect of probably increasing the price of goods that are brought into the place and the cost of getting freight back out, such as from the sugar mills et cetera up there.

(The witness withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

ANDREW TIMOTHY COLLINS, Economist/Policy Analyst, New South Wales Farmers' Association, Level 10, 255 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, New South Wales,

PAMELA BEVERLEY BROOK, Member, New South Wales Farmers' Association and Director of Brookfarm, 80 St Helena Road, St Helena, via Bangalow, New South Wales, and

COLIN CHARLES DOREY, Farmer, 5 Lewis Place, Ballina, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Before we proceed there are some formal matters to be dealt with, and this applies to each of you. If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to present or documents you may wish to tender should be heard or seen only by Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request.

CHAIR: Mr Collins, in what capacity do you appear before the Committee today

Mr COLLINS: Today I am representing the association, but acting as support staff for the other two witnesses. I do not wish to make a short statement.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr COLLINS: Yes.

CHAIR: Dr Brook, in what capacity do you appear before the Committee today?

Dr BROOK: As a member of the New South Wales Farmers' Association and in my capacity as director of Brookfarm, which is a gourmet value-adding macadamia farm.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference to this inquiry?

Dr BROOK: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Mr Dorey, in what capacity to you appear before the Committee?

Mr DOREY: I am representing our family farm, T. W. Dorey and Sons Pty Ltd, and also other farmers in the area and my two sons.

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr DOREY: Yes, I am.

CHAIR: Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Dr BROOK: Yes.

Mr DOREY: Yes.

CHAIR: Mr Dorey, you may start now.

Mr DOREY: I will go through our farm planning and the RTA planning, or lack of, also the effects that that planning would have on our properties. I am a fourth generation farmer, I am also a member of the community liaison group and the agricultural focus group in the current Tintenbar to Ewingsdale Pacific Highway upgrade area. Typical of our family, I left school at 15 to join my father and brothers on the farm. By doing that in a collective effort we were able to finance further farms. Today, I am happy to say that my father and five brothers and myself have 14 farms on the Richmond River flood plain. We have one farm in the Ballina to Woodburn upgrade area, one in the Ballina bypass area and nine farms in the Newrybar Swamp extended study area of the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade. That is the area that I will be concentrating on today.

In our farming, we have pioneered the growing of macadamias on the highly fertile floodplain at the Newrybar Swamp. This has been highly successful and we grow some of the best crops in the district, which shows the value of that farmland. The growing of macadamias is a long-term project and gives excellent returns. This last season grossed about \$24,000 per hectare, which again shows the value of that farmland. The return on macadamias is very good for the long-term planning for our family farming. Those returns allow for the next generation to come and join us on the farm where we had four full-time and six part-time of the next generation farming with us last year. I am telling you this so that you understand the long-term planning that goes into farming, in particular the family farms.

We asked ourselves what could go wrong. After planning for so long, and I have been planning for 30 years on the Newrybar farms, I know the answer is a six-lane freeway. That is what could go wrong. With half the current route options for the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale highway upgrade going through Newrybar Swamp, in the extended study area. Some options have more than five kilometres of freeway through our nine farms. Farms were split in halves, half a farm and a dwelling on one side of a freeway, and half on the other side. We ask: how could this happen? The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] is a government department, and it does the long-term planning. I was involved in the planning for the Ballina bypass in 1995 when the Department of Agriculture requested that I represent the farmers, which I did.

The short list of options for the Ballina bypass ended up at the Ross Lane interchange, on the escarpment. It is important to remember this in the overall episode. The RTA went on to publicly announce and formally gazette the Ballina bypass in 2002. The RTA then purchased farms and houses on the northern two-kilometre section of the announced Ballina bypass. It is the northern two-kilometre section of the gazetted Ballina bypass that is the key to the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade staying on the escarpment and not going through our farms in Newrybar Swamp.

For the RTA to consider expanding the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale study area through Newrybar Swamp, it had to renege on the key northern two-kilometre section of the gazetted Ballina bypass and go through the previously rejected Sandy flat floodplain. Some property owners who had purchased in the extended study area had more recently inquired of the RTA about the gazetted route of the Pacific Highway. They were told that the gazetted Ballina bypass would end at the Ross Lane interchange.

They now find they potentially have routes going through their properties. In mid-2004 the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] announced a study of the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale Highway upgrade. It was no surprise that the study area encompassed the existing highway corridor on the escarpment. After all, it connected to the gazetted Ballina bypass at Ross Lane where the RTA had already purchased properties. It also took in the completed dual carriageway of the Bangalow bypass and then connected to the recently accepted option B at St Helena. Everything was consistent with the RTA's long-term plans. So in early 2005 some property owners living adjacent to the current highway, or on the original Tintenbar to Ewingsdale community liaison group [CLG], working outside their charter and in conjunction with the RTA, took the opportunity through the media to suggest that the study area should be expanded into Newrybar swamp. As farmers in Newrybar swamp we never believed that would happen.

CHAIR: Who took the opportunity through the media?

Mr DOREY: Members of the community liaison group. Their minutes show that they worked outside their charter and they started to make recommendations and noises about the fact that there should be an extension of the study area. That is on record in the RTA's CLG minutes. As farmers in Newrybar swamp we wondered why anyone would consider a highway through a floodplain that has the highest rainfall in New South Wales in preference to the current flood-free route. We also wondered why anyone would consider severing every property for the entire upgrade length when the RTA already has a corridor asset in the current highway, as I mentioned earlier.

The New South Wales Government's farmland protection Act states that regionally significant land, such as that in Newrybar swamp, should be used only if there is no alternative. There is an alternative, that is, the current Pacific Highway corridor that I have mentioned. We also wondered why anyone would consider putting a freeway through the middle of three wildlife corridors

that cross Newrybar swamp. The unthinkable happened. The Tintenbar to Ewingsdale study area was expanded east into Newrybar swamp floodplain. The effects of the freeway through Newrybar swamp and the Byron hinterland to the north in the expanded study area I believe are incomprehensible and nothing more than property and environmental vandalism.

I could speak to you for the rest of today and for the whole of tomorrow about the trauma that the extended study area has already caused property owners in the area and the potential disaster if the unthinkable happens again. If they put a freeway through the extended study area it would be mind-boggling. You already have a detailed submission from me regarding how it would affect our farming enterprises, so I will cover these issues briefly. To take land from a farm and cut it in half would put the whole viability of that farm at risk. You would have to work the farm as two every time you harvested, fertilised and mowed. Every time you moved you would have to go to the next underpass or overpass, which could be five or 10 kilometres away, to get from one half of your farm to the other, not to mention the land that they would take out of that farm.

It would also affect flooding and drainage patterns as the RTA stated it would have to build three-metre and four-metre high embankments to make the highway flood free. I have a photograph that I took just the other day that I would like to pass around. The photograph, which was taken on 30 June 2005, shows the flood we had in Newrybar swamp. Where a couple of these suggested routes are we had 1.2 metres of water in the floodplain. As I said earlier, Newrybar is recognised as having the highest rainfall in New South Wales. We have around 80 inches, or 2000 millimetres per year. In 1999 we had 130 inches, or over 3,000 millimetres, filling the valley. That flood in the photograph that you are about to see is not a one-off. Floods happen quite regularly, and sometimes two or three times a year.

The flooding patterns would be all altered with the three-metre and four-meter high embankments that would be needed to breach the floodplain. Also, the loading on the freeway embankments will affect the water table in Newrybar swamp. That is crucial to the macadamias that we are pioneering on the floodplain. The RTA also admits that the soft soils are a black science. I have been managing the cane harvesting co-operative at Newrybar swamp for over 20 years. We have to use full track equipment that still bogs in the soft soil and it continues to sink unless retrieved. I do not believe the RTA has done enough research into Newrybar swamp to know what it is up against. That was confirmed at the last CLG meeting when the RTA stated it had found no peat soil and very little acid sulphate in Newrybar swamp. That is in direct contrast to other government documents. I am sure our local member, Mr Cohen, can confirm what I am saying.

Overall, the environment will be the biggest loser with a freeway through Newrybar swamp. Two recognised wildlife corridors that connect the important Broken Head Nature Reserve to native vegetation and to a big scrub remnant on the western escarpment will be cut by a freeway through Newrybar swamp. We rely on these wildlife corridors to connect our own plantings with the big scrub remnants on our properties, and we also encourage wildlife to assist in integrated pest management and farm biodiversity in our macadamia and sugar cane plantations. We have added to that by planting over 10,000 native trees in the past 15 years and putting nesting boxes and perches around our farms to assist in farm biodiversity. The freeway would also cut the important gene pools involved in those remnants.

Further north in the extended study area the Byron Bay hinterland will be violated and residents who paid for tranquillity will lose their environment with the freeway cutting through. At the top end of Newrybar swamp it would create another St Helena. The escarpment has to climb to get out of the floodplain. The RTA extended the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale study area to the east, which raises a number of questions for me. How can the RTA renege on previously gazetted routes? When can a property owner rely on closure that a gazetted route will not be changed again? If the RTA is allowed to get away with this all properties will be in a permanent state of sterilisation, which is the case at the moment. How can the RTA ignore the Northern Rivers farmland protection project?

How come one of the largest community groups, the Coastal Environment Protection Society, which has over 300 members, and which has opposed the extended study area cannot get information from the RTA through the Freedom of Information Act—information for which it paid five months ago? Most importantly, how come the study area was extended? Did Arup, the consultancy agency on the original study area, tender for the extended study area? Was the tender

publicised? If not, would it not be a conflict of interest to recommend an extension of the study area knowing who had the contract? I thank the Committee for the opportunity to finally come along and put our situation. I would also extend an invitation to the Committee, when it sits in Ballina, to come out and visit our farms and visit some of God's own country.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Dorey, I think we will be happy to take up your invitation to look at the Newrybar area. Dr Brook, we might proceed to you and then go to questions.

Dr BROOK: I have got a leaflet and also a CD that has some images that I would like to distribute to members of the Committee for their information, just to give them some background detail on some of the economic arguments that I am going to talk about, about industries in the area.

Leaflet and CD tabled.

Dr BROOK: I have been a member of the community liaison group for the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale upgrade, representing farmers and residents in our region. I am also on the agricultural focus group and I have also participated in the corridor action workshops. There is no doubt that we really need a safe Pacific Highway, but I want to emphasise that the study area from Tintenbar to Ewingsdale is a unique and valuable coastal area and it needs to be recognised as a special area. At the moment the agricultural community sees the present upgrade as the greatest threat to the agriculture and economy of the region.

As Col said, six years ago there was certainty: the Ballina bypass was gazetted; the Bangalow bypass had been built; and the Ewingsdale to Bangalow, option B, had been determined. So investment went on from there in our area. There has been a huge growth investment in the region, from the agricultural point of view, of multimillions of dollars. Hundreds of acres of macadamias have been planted; coffee plantations have been planted; value-adding industries like ours have invested extensively in the area; and all this was done on what we assumed was certainty of where things were going, which was what was happening six years ago.

To give you a bit of a background of the area: it is a unique area in Australia; its combination of landscape and environment in that region is quite unique for all of New South Wales. It is a big tourism area as well as an exceptional agricultural area. The rich volcanic soils and the subtropical climate mean that when 90 per cent of the State is in drought, we are not. It is very rare that we suffer from the major effects of drought—and this is a key to the agricultural success of the area. The other recognition of the area in terms of agriculture is the New South Wales Farmland Protection Act, where the Government actually recognised the uniqueness of the area, and in its planning it specifically set out to protect the area because of the tremendous tourism growth and people wanting to do the sea change; the Government set out to protect the area so that it could not be developed for just houses, that it will be protected as valuable agricultural land. And that is fully supported by the farmers in the region.

So agriculture now in that area is a complex thing. There are macadamias, coffee, stone fruit, cattle and bush foods. All these industries in that area work to preserve the environment and the landscape of the region. There is active rainforest regeneration on farms, and integrated pest management using these rainforests with the farms is an essential part of the region, as Col said, not only for wildlife corridors but also they are essential for farm survival and expansion. Value adding in that region is something that has been quite explosive in its growth in the last 10 years. I want to give you a case study of Brook Farm, which is our company. There are many new value-adding companies in the area and there are export-oriented companies as well. The State Government recognises this area as a centre of excellence for food production. In fact, there have recently been initiatives to form a food producers network in the area.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in Canberra has recently awarded two grants to regional producers under the food processing in regional Australia area and there have been three or four other applicants from just within that study area for the next round of grants. They are very active and growing companies. A Los Angeles-style freeway through the middle of this area is a total contradiction of all the planning and economic growth that is planned for this area. Our farm itself is a 96-acre farm that we planted in 1989. We have 4,500 macadamia trees; we have 20,000

rainforest trees and we plant on average another 1,000 each year; we have three eucalypt forests that will eventually be converted to rainforest.

We produce gourmet macadamia products on our farm: we produce gourmet macadamia mueslis, gourmet macadamia oils, macadamia nuts that we sell in every State of Australia in all capital cities; we supplied the grand final breakfast in Melbourne this year—let us hope it helps Sydney win; we are in rapid growth expansion into America; we are exporting to the East Coast, the West Coast, the mid West; we supply to the United Kingdom; we supply to Canada; we are starting to export into the European Union, and Austrade uses us as one of the real growth symbols of what can be done with value adding in a sustainable economic way and sustainable farming. And when we go overseas we also take other farmers' products from within our region, and there is a network of farmers within that study area that work together in overseas export markets, and it is growing all the time. The number of value-adders that worked there six years ago would be more than double nowadays.

The economic value of this growth to the region cannot be underestimated. There is rapid growth of coffee, macadamias, value-adding to stone fruits, all these products; there is innovation that exists in that shire because of some of the existing structure within the area; the supports that have grown up in the area over the years and the clean and green quality of the area. In our case the thing that made the difference between us getting into America was when the top gourmet buyer from one of the biggest gourmet import companies in America came to our farm and said, "Now we understand about you. Now we'll take you". And it was the visit to our farm that made all the difference. We have the Japanese coming to us in a few months time. If we have a Los Angeles-style freeway running through our farm there will not be those same benefits for the region.

The other thing I want to talk about as well as the value adding of the region is the other important agricultural aspects of the region. Cattle grazing is one of the very important industries in this region. Next door to our farm is the Jarretts' farm. The Jarretts have been in that region for over 100 years. Cattle grazing is one of the biggest rural industries in that region because of its high rainfall and high pasture. The Jarretts' land at St Helena is a specific case of being critical to the cattle industry of the area. The Jarretts serve over 110 local farmers. The local farmers are supplied their cattle by the Jarretts; they come to the Jarretts' farm, the cattle come in there, they are processed there and then they go out. The other farmers in the region do not have the infrastructure that the Jarretts have and cannot put that infrastructure into their smaller farms. So small farms can exist and survive in the cattle industry by using a farm like the Jarretts' to support that industry. Their farming capabilities are essential in times of drought because when 90 per cent of the State is in drought the cattle are brought to this region to fatten and then to go to market. One of their vital markets is the export market to Japan.

As I said, the Jarretts is a family that has been in the area for over 100 years. There are five Jarrett families in the study area. Some of the routes take out all five families in one go. The Jarretts are also a crucial link not just economically but for the community vitality of the area. They are intricately involved in things such as the Bangalow Show. If you take away the Jarretts' contribution to the Bangalow Show you are left with the dog show and some vegetables, and that is about it. There is not a lot left once you take out the Jarretts' contribution.

The other thing I want to say is that sustainable agriculture in our region is not a fiction. The commercial farms in our region recognise the value of land management and they actively practice it. Farming in our area is going through rapid change. Originally the area was a dairy, then it moved to grazing and then moved it moved more to horticulture. In five years time the farming that is happening in our region will be different again to what it is now. But farmland is a finite resource in our region. If a freeway goes through prime agricultural farmland you will lose that finite resource and it cannot be replaced. You cannot just move those farming capabilities inland because the climate and land quality is not there. So it is not a relocatable industry.

On our farm alone, for example, when we bring visitors in from overseas we talk to them about the owls in our rainforest. We do not bait our farm at all for rats or mice but we have less than 0.2 per cent rat damage because it is all controlled by the owls that come out of our rainforest. If we had a freeway running next to us, with the inversion layer that comes from the fogs in our valleys, the damage to the sustainable nature of the way we run our farms and the integrated pest management

systems where the predator bugs live in these rainforests, it would permanently damage the success of our ability to grow our crops.

Finally, I want to talk about the economic loss. Macadamia farms alone in the area are valued at more than \$30 million in terms of their production. The cattle industry that the Jarretts support in the region is more than \$10 million. One of the real growth areas of the region is value adding. Over the next six years the value-adding businesses on farm will add \$50 million to the economy. These are not rubbery figures; these figures are based on the projected growth of different businesses throughout the area. This value adding is essential as a growing export industry and a clean and green export industry that New South Wales can be really proud of. Loss of this agricultural growth will mean the loss of jobs, community loss and economic loss.

So for the RTA to build a freeway that does not follow the existing corridor and the road corridor as planned will have maximum agricultural impact. The one thing that will have a really maximum agricultural impact—and we feel is the doorway to agricultural destruction in our area—is that if you tunnel through St Helena you will open the door to maximum damage to agriculture in our region and to the economy. Safe options are available that do not use a tunnel. The RTA has said that safe options are available, and we want them to work with the most viable options that follow the existing corridor. We want a safe road for our community and we want good freight for our businesses. But we do not want that at the expense of our businesses. There is no point having a great freight road if there are no businesses to put their products on that road. I invite the Committee to visit the northern end to see from St Helena Road a great vista of the study area. You can see how that is the doorway to the study area.

CHAIR: We will take you up on that. We will do that. Mr Dorey, I think you said that at least one local group had tried to get some information from the RTA via freedom of information provisions.

Mr DOREY: Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR: You said that they have not been able to get that information.

Mr DOREY: No, they have not. It has been five months since they paid their money. That local group is the Coastal Environmental Protection Society, which is known as CEPS. It has more than 300 members. It applied but has not got any result from the RTA. Initially the RTA said there were some issues getting the okay from the indigenous communities. That is not issue; that part could be taken out. I do not know what the hold-up is now but we have not been able to get that information.

CHAIR: Do you happen to know specifically what the group requested, because this Committee might be able to ask for that information as well?

Mr DOREY: I believe they requested the whole background to the expanded study area—how it came about and the reasons why—to try to get a handle on why figures from the Ballina-Bangalow bypass in early 2001-02 were used in counting submissions when this expanded study area did not take place until sometime later.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Basically, you are saying that the Pacific Highway could be upgraded more or less along the existing route. Is that the case?

Dr BROOK: We are saying that there was an existing highway corridor of which significant areas have already been gazetted and designed and that the RTA has planned that they can follow approximately the existing corridor and build that route.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: In fact, the RTA has indicated for some 12 years that that would be the position.

Dr BROOK: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: And based on those assurances or indications over some 12 years, local residents expended large sums of money in the form of investment on their properties, farms and so on.

Dr BROOK: That is right.

Mr DOREY: That is correct. One of our biggest concerns is that, as farmers, we do our planning and all that is turned upside down by the RTA reneging on their planning, particularly on the northern two-kilometre section of the Ballina bypass. It is the key to the Pacific Highway upgrade going through Newrybar Swamp.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Do you see any valid reason for this abrupt about-face?

Mr DOREY: No, no valid reasons whatsoever. I see that they may have to change some areas in the vicinity of St Helena. They currently have a flood-free route where the 30 June flood photograph shows no flooding on that particular section of the Pacific Highway whatsoever. Yet you see the flooding in Newrybar Swamp. So to put a road in there would be absolutely ridiculous, to be quite honest.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You cannot understand why you have not been given this information under this request made under the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr DOREY: We cannot understand why. We are starting to think, "What are they hiding?" It would at least give us some comfort to know what is behind this planning and to know that it was done the right way. It is better to know than to not know.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When you contact the RTA and say, "Look, it's been five months, where is this information; why is it not forthcoming?", what does the RTA reply?

Mr DOREY: These questions are asked at a number of our CLG meetings when we regularly meet with the RTA. Initially, in the first couple of months they said it was an indigenous issue but in recent times there has been no real reason. Can you think of any, Pam?

Dr BROOK: No, not that I am aware of.

Mr DOREY: It has got us beaten.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Have they responded in the form of correspondence?

Mr DOREY: They say that it has been handed on—but handed on to who?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I see. So you have been waiting for five months and you have not progressed at all in this regard.

Mr DOREY: We have not.

Mr IAN COHEN: Mr Dorey, are you a member of the Newrybar Drainage Union? Is that correct?

Mr DOREY: That is correct. That is now administered by the Richmond River County Council but I was on that board for 15 years.

Mr IAN COHEN: We have spoken before about flood problems in that swamp area. What would be the hydraulic impact of a freeway or motorway development through that swamp? How much longer would it take to clear the floodwaters? What would be the accumulated impact of works like that?

Mr DOREY: It raises a lot of issues. To start with, you would think of the flow of water being able to get out of the valley and not altering the flood pattern. It would mean that the total area would have to be bridged because the flow is so great through there that even with viaducting it would

be basically impossible to cater for that amount of water. Newrybar swamp is like a big amphitheatre and the flow of water out of there is tremendous. Any groundworks of laying a freeway would affect the watertables and post-like drainage; it would alter the whole farming aspect of that and drain your farm or properties. With the way the valley lays, water drains from the western escarpment to the east. Unfortunately, the potential highway upgrade routes are running north-south, so they directly cut across the floodplain. This will no doubt raise the issue of not only flooding but the ground water. If they bridge the whole lot, which I do not think they will, going on their past—

Mr IAN COHEN: What sort of distance are we talking about on the low-lying land?

Mr DOREY: From top to bottom the other day, we would have had floodwaters from Ross's Lane to Midgen Flat. Five kilometres through our own properties were flooded and there would have been another four kilometres, so on some of the proposed routes you would have up to eight or nine kilometres in length. You have Lennox Head on one side of the photograph and Broken Head on the other side, so it is a fairly wide area.

Mr IAN COHEN: An earlier witness talked about quite significant issues with long-distance driving fatigue and fogs. What is the story in your local area?

Mr DOREY: I am glad you brought up fog, because that was one of the areas I missed in my haste. I said: Why would anyone consider a highway through some of the worst fog-prone land in the district?

Mr IAN COHEN: Is this worse than further north?

Mr DOREY: Far worse. You have a high rainfall. Also, the same lay of the land that catches the rain also harnesses the fogs. You have an inversion of air. Rain is channelled in between Broken Head and Lennox Head and then it gets caught against the western and northern escarpments. The reverse happens with the fogs. The fogs lay in there that thick that in my formal submission to the Committee I have photos of the fog. It looks like the Pacific Ocean is coming in, Lennox Head in the background and the fog is 10 or 12 metres off the ground—just one big carpet, as though it were another ocean. I have been in there driving a tractor, popped off the tractor and I could not see my tractor from five or 10 metres away; it was that thick.

Dr BROOK: If I could mention the northern end of the study area as far as fog. If you imagine a tunnel at St Helena, you have no fog at the coastal side of St Helena. As soon as you come through that tunnel, on a minimum 80 days per year it is just a white blanket of fog. You come from clear skies through to just a dense fog blanket on the other side of St Helena. At the moment the road goes up onto the escarpment on St Helena because, in the past, I think our ancestors must have said, "This is a safe, fog-free route" and you do not experience those same problems when you go up onto the escarpment and stay there.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: How many hours a day does the fog last?

Dr BROOK: The fog would be there especially in the evenings, which is the main time when the trucks travel through. In the morning it would be there until 7.00 a.m. or 8.00 a.m. depending on the time of the year.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: What time of the evening does it usually come down?

Dr BROOK: After the sun has gone down it starts to drift in. It is just a natural drift into those gullies in the evening.

Mr DOREY: I was out there a few weeks ago. I went out to burn sugarcane and the fog came in probably an hour before the sun set and it was quite eerie because all I could see were cows heads going along above the fog. The fog will lay in Newrybar swamp. I drive along the current Pacific Highway to get to the farms and very rarely do I have any fog on the highway where I drive. You drive down into like a pool in the valley, the fogs are that thick and they will stay around some mornings for two or three hours after the sun has come up.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Does the smoke from the sugarcane burning contribute to the low visibility?

Mr DOREY: Yes. I probably would not say "contribute", but the inversion of air seems to catch the rain and also hold the fog. I am also concerned that it will hold for any potential freeway. To answer your question: 30 years ago I was burning sugarcane there and for us to burn at the wrong time of night or day, the inversion of air held the smoke in the valley and it also held the ash. Even with the filter it does send some ash up and you get a fall-out—black snow they call it. Invariably, I would get a phone call from either Lennox Head or Broken Head where the ash fell. We have to live with that and we had to alter our times of burning to try to alleviate that problem. That is something you would not be able to do with the freeway or the fumes, because at certain times everything will just sit isolated in the valley; nothing will move.

Mr IAN COHEN: Dr Brock, you clearly indicated the agricultural potential of your property and the value adding. How would you describe your property and surrounding farmlands as assets, tourism-wise?

Dr BROOK: For many value-adding companies in our area, for example, a coffee company called Zentvelds, where the essential part of their business is for tourists to come to the region to taste their coffee, visit their farm and see the clean and green agricultural business in action. Tourists come because of the scenic landscape and the environment that is created by the farmers and the people who live there. If you bought a freeway through the middle of that, for a start a number of the tourism businesses that exist will not exist anymore. There is nothing wonderful about going on a holiday and sitting next to a freeway or having the sound amplify up through the valleys, which it would do in some of the positions they are considering placing it. Zentvelds would actually have to close their doors.

Mr IAN COHEN: You have both described the potential pretty well, but what is happening at the moment because, effectively, there has been an impact right now with respect to uncertainty in the real estate value of your land and your ability to plan ahead?

Mr DOREY: Yes. That was covered in the meeting only a couple of weeks ago when the local real estate agents have their say in the local media. Everything has just closed down; the place is really in a state of sterilisation now, understandably so. There are no properties selling. You would not even sell your property because you would not know what you would get for it. No-one wants to move there with the uncertainty and that is the problem you have with the planning that has gone on.

Mr IAN COHEN: What about crops in the near future; any impact there?

Mr DOREY: Obviously, it is going to affect the longer term but we had already made our plans when we knew we had certainty and we knew where the Ballina bypass was going. We put our crops in and expanded. We spent our \$500,000 a farm doing that already. It is already there and those are the areas where we are going to have those trees taken out. In our case it has already happened. I know other farmers would not consider doing anything at the moment until they see what happens.

Dr BROOK: There is one big farmer in the centre at the study area who had exceptional expansion plans and has now put everything on hold. He has now pulled back from doing any further investment on his farm. He has already put millions of dollars worth of planning and planting into his farm but everything is on hold. He cannot do anything else. He cannot progress. He is just stymied.

Mr IAN COHEN: The RTA you representatives or consultants working with them have held quite a number of public meetings and consultation. Could you describe to the Committee the level of satisfaction or otherwise of the consultation process?

Mr DOREY: Some of them get pretty fiery. I cannot stress enough the trauma and effect on the health of some people who have bought in a certain area, away from the highway, and now have a potential highway running next to their property. They come along to the meetings and I can understand them getting irate and fiery because it affects them. They probably say and do things that they would not normally do.

Mr IAN COHEN: Has the RTA responded?

Mr DOREY: Not really. I think it is just going along with plan A and continuing as it intends to do.

Dr BROOK: When the RTA started its planning—and one of the reasons that I believe that option B was reviewed at the St Helena end, is that it came out of the noise taskforce at the time—it initially believed that the highway was a one-issue which was that basically of noise. Now it has discovered that there are many more complex issues in this region. Everyone in the region is concerned about noise but they are also concerned about economic development and the agricultural industries. We want the impacts of noise minimised for all residents, and to re-open the entire option B, when they are not relocating the freeway any further from a community that had the initial problem, solves not the original's community's problem and destroys the entire agricultural reason by that process. So for the RTA it has been a steep learning curve to know that the farmers have had to fight really hard to put the economic issues, and to have those recognised, that it is just not a one-issue road.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Thank you for detailing the possible impact. During the past three years there has already been an increase in truck traffic on the Pacific Highway. What impact is it already having on your life and livelihood and on other people with whom you work and live in the region? Today the committee has heard about a considerable increase in B-doubles and semitrailers on that highway. Hows is that playing out for you?

Dr BROOK: Only a bit less than a half a kilometre from the highway the noise levels since the B-doubles have been on the road has risen dramatically. Also, being an active user of the highway the whole safety issue of these big trucks on the road is also of great concern. One of our biggest issues is the dramatic increase in B-doubles truck traffic on the road. As a farmer, we need freight and we do not have an objection to the need for intra-State freight. We need the freight that comes up and down but there is a tremendous amount of freight that just goes from Sydney to Brisbane and uses us just as a thoroughfare and it is destroying the lifestyle of the community and the ability of people to live near that highway. Until that highway is made safe we would really like to have B-doubles moved back to the New England highway. We in our region also want the inter-State freight to have an inland route that is an economically viable option. That is one of the essential things that our economy needs. We are a tourism area and tourism areas and major freight corridors are not a safe mix, no matter how good is the road.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I have heard stories of people not going out as much at night because of their worry about sharing the roads with these big trucks. Do some locals who use the road change their lifestyle because of their worry about heavy trucks on the road?

Dr BROOK: I do not think there would be one person who did not have a truck story. Everyone would have a truck story about when they are doing 100 kilometres an hour and there is a massive truck about 10 metres from their tail in the middle of their night. My husband had a truck overturn in front of him and head towards him at 100 kilometres an hour on its side and he has driven off the road and into a fence and missed death by a small amount. They are not uncommon stories in that region. Even on dual highway areas it is still not safe with these big trucks and the high amount of tourists and the between city travellers who use that North Coast area.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Dr Brook, you stressed that it is an important tourist area. Do you know the extent to which tourists are travelling through, whether they are accommodated overnight, or staying weekly in the area and if so, where?

Dr BROOK: There are many growth areas in tourism within the region. Ballina shire is having tremendous growth in terms of tourism is becoming a much more known tourism resort. From the Tweed down to Ballina and further south to Yamba is a huge growth of tourism. It is a popular area in which people want to live, but they also want to come there, especially from Queensland on weekends and things. They want to travel on a safe road but they do not want to go with heavy traffic.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I refer to people who as tourists go to special farms in the area. Where do they come from? Do they stay overnight at Lennox Head? Do they come down from

Lismore and Alstonville? Do you have any idea from where they are coming and how long they are staying?

Dr BROOK: A large percentage come from Queensland. But you also get significant proportions at this time of year, during school holidays, from New South Wales and from all over the world to that region too.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: From where are they travelling?

Dr BROOK: They are travelling from Queensland by road. They are coming from Sydney or Victoria and they are staying Ballina, Byron Bay, Alstonville and regional tourism areas. There is tourism growth in those areas too so they stay throughout the region.

Mr IAN COHEN: There is a network of farm-stays as well. They are really going ahead?

Dr BROOK: Yes, there is a number of resorts and those sorts of things too.

CHAIR: Mr Collins, I note that the Farmers Association has put in its written submission which we have read and appreciate. Dr. Brook and Mr Dorey. are you both members of the Coastal Environment Protection Society [CEPS] as well as the Farmers Association of New South Wales?

Dr BROOK: Yes.

Mr DOREY: Yes.

CHAIR: I thank you for your submissions and your presentations today. We appreciate the time you made available and no doubt we will see at least two of you on the far North Coast in due course.

Dr BROOK: Thank you very much. I also wanted to leave some product behind for the committee to enjoy at its leisure to remind you of some of the things that come out of our region.

CHAIR: If Leo Barry had any of your muesli I will definitely take you up on the offer.

(Luncheon Adjournment)

ROBERT GEORGE HIGGINS, General Manager, Pacific Highway, Roads and Traffic Authority, 21 Prince Street, Grafton

PAUL JOHN FORWARD, Chief Executive, Roads and Traffic Authority, Centennial Plaza, Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills

LESLIE ROBERT WIELINGA, Director, Motorways, Roads and Traffic Authority, Centennial Plaza, Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, sworn and examined, and

RAYMOND FRANKLIN SOAMES JOB, General Manager, Road Safety Strategy, Roads and Traffic Authority, Centennial Plaza, Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference for this inquiry?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes.

Mr FORWARD: Yes.

Mr WIELINGA: I am.

Mr JOB: Yes.

CHAIR: If you should consider at any stage that certain evidence you wish to give or documents you wish to tender should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. Mr Forward, the Roads and Traffic Authority has made a written submission to the inquiry. Do any of you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr FORWARD: I would like to make a presentation to provide background to the industry and to provide a response to the terms of reference. We have submitted a written response. I understand that has been circulated to the members of the Committee.

CHAIR: Yes, and it has been published today.

Mr FORWARD: I thank the Committee for the opportunity to present here this morning. This is a very important issue, and I think the inquiry into this matter is timely. I would like first to give some background to the Pacific Highway upgrade program, and then I would like to hand over to Mr Les Wielinga, Director for Motorways, to answer questions on some of the more specific issues that have been asked by the Committee.

The Pacific Highway is a vital strategic link not only between Sydney and Brisbane but also between the various growing communities on the North Coast and mid North Coast. In fact, the community along the Pacific Highway is one of the fastest-growing communities in Australia. That has been brought out by various studies undertaken over the past several years. In fact, some councils are exceeding a 2 per cent per annum growth rate, which exceeds the growth rate of the Sydney metropolitan region.

As a result of this growth, and as a result of the growth of the two vibrant economies of Sydney and Brisbane, traffic volumes along this stretch of the highway also are increasing. It becomes a particularly important issue round holiday times, when literally hundreds of thousands of people from both the north of the State and Queensland, and from the border areas of New South Wales, country and city, move to the coast for their summer holidays. Congestion is an issue round holiday periods on the North Coast and mid North Coast.

Of course, for all of us, traffic safety is a particularly important issue, and one on which we are spending a lot of effort to address Pacific Highway issues through the Pacific Highway upgrade program. There have been many claims and lots of requests by community, local government, motoring organisations and industry to upgrade the highway and in fact to fast-track the upgrading of the highway. I think it is fair to say that the tragic bus crashes that occurred in the late 1980s started to focus the attention of people on the dramatic wastage of human life in road accidents on the highway.

In 1996 there came into place the agreement that was first discussed between the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments about an upgrade of the Pacific Highway program. That agreement between this State and the Commonwealth was signed in 1996, to last for 10 years. Interestingly, there is a lot of misunderstanding about the financial contributions of the various tiers of government. If the Committee is interested, we can table the agreement.

CHAIR: That would be appreciated.

Mr FORWARD: Under the agreement, New South Wales is contributing \$1.6 billion over a 10-year period, and the Commonwealth is putting in \$600 million. So New South Wales is putting in an addition \$1 billion over the 10 years. As I say, I think there is a lot of misunderstanding, with some people thinking that this is a 50:50 program. It is not. It is nowhere near that ratio. The Commonwealth has now agreed, under the early days of AusLink, to match the New South Wales Government's contribution. I understand there have been calls for New South Wales to match the Commonwealth, when in fact the true position is the other way round.

In fact, more is being spent on this road than has ever been spent on any road in Australia. That is an important point. Since 1996, when the agreement first came into place, 44 new projects have opened to traffic. This represents some 229 kilometres of dual carriageway. Eight projects are currently under construction or are due to start shortly. And there are another 20 upgrade projects being planned. In fact, the current 20 projects now being planned will conclude the planning for the upgrade of the highway.

This graph—I know it might be a bit hard to read, and we will provide more details to the Committee later—illustrates some of the impacts on the highway. Taken from a base in 1990, and an index there of 100, the top line shows the Pacific Highway traffic volumes growth. That is a significant growth—outgrowing the growth in all New South Wales roads. The blue line at the bottom of that same first graph illustrates the trend in road safety in terms of casualty crashes. To quote the raw figures for people killed and injured on the highway: in 1990 there were 950 people either killed or injured on the highway; in 2004 there were 632 people either killed or injured. I will give a split of that. In 1990 there were 46 people killed, and in 2004 there were 32 people killed; in 1990 there were 904 injuries on the highway, and in 2004 there were 600 injuries on the highway—a significant improvement, but nevertheless a figure that is far too high for our liking, and one that needs to be reduced even more dramatically.

In terms of travel time savings: in the second graph on the bottom right-hand side, the top line illustrates heavy vehicle reductions in travel times, and the green line illustrates the reduction in travel times for light vehicles. So the improvements that have been achieved on the highway have brought dramatic improvements in travel times. This has saved motorists enormous amounts of money, in terms of not only wear and tear on their vehicles but also the fuel and other consumables that they use in their motor vehicles. Anecdotal evidence is that the trucking industry tells us that each trip they are now saving at least 70 litres of fuel, which translates to fuel savings of almost \$100 a trip. So there are a lot of savings that the industry has made; apart from the reduction in wear and tear, and more reliable trips, time savings are worth a lot of money to the trucking industry.

In terms of outcomes under the current program: in June 2006 we project that 44 per cent of the highway will either be opened or under construction for four-lane dual carriageway, with approximately 373 kilometres of the highway remaining to be upgraded. The travel time savings that we are talking about are at least 80 minutes overall, with the significant safety improvements that I have just outlined.

Once the highway is completed to four-lane dual carriageway, we expect to achieve significant social benefits: a further saving of 25 lives, and more than a halving of the serious injuries per annum. Those are significant improvements in terms of road crashes and savings of lives on the highway. We also project that there will be a further reduction of 90 minutes, improving the efficiency of the freight industry. Of course, that will bring improved travel time reliability, particularly during holiday periods.

The highway is an important economic ingredient in stimulating activity in the mid North Coast and North Coast communities. I provide that to the Committee in terms of background to the

program. I would now like to hand over to our Director for Motorways, Les Wielinga, to take you through the steps of the development process that we go through in determining the overall route and the process for upgrading the highway.

Mr WIELINGA: I would like briefly to complete some of the context before dealing with some of the specific terms of reference. When the Roads and Traffic Authority delivers major upgrading projects we generally go through three phases. We look at project development—where, essentially, we are working out what is going to be built, and doing the investigations and study work associated with that. We then get into design and construction—that is, the detailed design and building type processes. Thirdly, we then look at the operation phase, for when the highway is actually functioning.

But some of the key steps along the way that are important include the identification of the study area—the area that we are looking for to try to identify where the new road may go; and identification of route options within that study area—looking at the different alternatives for consideration, and assessment against impacts, and issues and so forth. We consider those things and look at determining a preferred route for the project, what we think is the most appropriate outcome to address the project objectives.

We then finalise a concept design where we build an engineering framework for the project, the broader issues of what is going to be built, the broad sizing of structures, and so forth, the vertical and horizontal alignments in a concept phase. We then complete a detailed environmental impact assessment. As many of you would be aware, that goes on public display. There is a consideration of formal submissions received in response to that public display of the environmental impact assessment. There is consideration by the Minister for Planning and, if approved, we then get into that second phase I mentioned earlier, design and construction, and then ultimately monitoring during the operation of the project.

Some important comments on project development: Development of any major infrastructure projects is a highly detailed and complex process which includes consideration of comprehensive information gathered on the physical, economic, engineering and social impacts of the project. Input by the community is important. Community liaison groups are established. Brochures, newsletters and web sites assist us in a communication process associated with these projects. Community liaison groups play a significant role in providing input and in assisting the project team in developing these projects.

In the steps I mentioned previously, many activities run in parallel as we work our way through the project steps. They include community consultation, field investigations that are continually updated along the way, various analyses, studies, project management and economic assessment as we progressively build up more detail information about the project. There is an important focus on identifying and addressing impact issues, and the key steps are part of an integral process. Sometimes we may go back a step when we find things out, but that is generally the sequence we go through in developing these projects.

The Ewingsdale to Tintenbar project: Dealing with location, you will see the plan on the screen shows the initial study area that we had for the project, just to help locate yourself. At the south you can see Tintenbar just north of Ballina. To the north is Ewingsdale. You can see Byron Bay out on the coast, Bangalow, Newrybar and Ewingsdale in the project as well. It involves upgrading a seven-kilometre section of the Pacific Highway from Tintenbar in the south to the completed Ewingsdale interchange in the north. It will link the approved Ballina bypass with the existing dual carriageway at Ewingsdale. The planning work we are doing at the moment is State funded as part of the current 10-year Pacific Highway program.

Reasons for expanding the study area: You will see from the picture on the screen, and it has also been included in the RTA submissions, we are showing the original study area with the expanded study area. The study area was a significant community issue for us. Many community groups and individuals called for an expansion of the study area, and I have provided a few examples of those there. Both the community submissions and the RTA investigations supported the desirability of expanding the study area. Issues include impact on agricultural land and social impacts. Route options are currently being investigated throughout this expanded study area.

Looking now at the level of the upgrade proposed for the Pacific Highway and the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar project, a four-lane dual carriageway highway, with provision for future upgrade where justified. You can see from the diagram on the screen that generally that widening will be provided in median areas. The local access road out of the side shows a typical arrangement for the Pacific Highway. Final arrangements may vary as conditions change. An example of that is depending on the local topography we find. We are looking at generating vertical and horizontal alignments in our designs, suitable for 110-kilometres-an-hour speeds. The standard of access we are proposing takes into account the growing community desire for separation of local and through traffic. High standard highway connections will result in safer driving conditions.

On that picture you can see a local road going over the top of the dual carriageway highway. A need for mitigation measures to address noise and visual amenities is a key consideration. With the Brunswick Heads to Yelgun project, which is currently under construction, and the approved Ballina bypass project, the Ewingsdale to Tintenbar project will complete the upgrading of the highway between Ballina and Queensland. That will provide a continuous dual carriageway standard for 91 kilometres.

Impact on prime agricultural land including the expanded study area: You will be aware from the RTA submissions that we provided some constraint mappings on the back of those submissions that show the different agricultural uses that were identified in that area. It is important to appreciate that no decision has yet been made on the preferred route of the highway between Ewingsdale and Tintenbar. Field investigations, including constraint mappings, are continuing. There is ongoing community consultation on this project. To date we have had 13 community liaison group meetings since December 2004. Because of the importance of the impact on agricultural land of this project, we have a separate agricultural focus group that was formed in February 2005, and this group has had five meetings to date. A corridor workshop was held in early August 2005 with members of the project team, government agencies, other stakeholders and community representatives. Once a preferred route is selected the RTA will work closely with property owners to minimise impacts.

Looking now at heavy transport and the impact of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway: a B-double is a combination consisting of a prime mover towing two semitrailers. B-doubles are currently limited in length to 25 metres and a nine-axle combination with a gross mass limit of 62.5 tonnes. We have a pamphlet with us that gives you a picture of what B-doubles look like if anyone is interested in looking at that. Nineteen-metre B-doubles of no more than 50 tonnes have general access to all roads unless a specific limit has been placed on a bridge or road.

B-double access to the Pacific Highway: 19-metre B-doubles have been using the highway since 1998; 25-metre B-doubles were granted access to the full length of the highway in August 2002 following the bypass of a low standard alignment through the Barrington Range after the opening of the Yelgun to Chinderah freeway.

The number of B-doubles using the Pacific Highway: The number of trucks using the Pacific Highway varies by location. Depending on location there are now between 1,000 and 1,500 large heavy vehicles, semitrailers and B-doubles, using the highway per day on average. The number of large vehicles using the highway near Port Macquarie, to pick a location, in 2001, late 2002 and late 2004 is shown on the table. You can see there has been a shift from semitrailers to B-doubles. The total number of heavy vehicles on the highway between late 2002 and late 2004 is about the same.

There have been two additional exercises by the RTA in addressing some of the issues associated with trucks on the Pacific Highway. We have had a noise and a separate safety task force on the Pacific Highway. Results were made available in September 2003 and May 2004 respectively. The Northern Pacific Highway Noise Task Force provided a process for further consultation with communities and councils on noise issues associated with B-doubles, made a series of recommendations for specific actions, which are being progressively implemented, and those proposed actions are public. We can make a copy of that document available as well. A Pacific Highway safety review, a review of road safety issues as they relate to heavy vehicles, included a consideration of comments from a range of stakeholders and community interests, and recommendations are being progressively implemented.

These are some conclusions on the impact of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway. The Pacific Highway provides for both intercapital freight and the transport needs of the North Coast region. The amount of freight moved to the North Coast region between greater Sydney and south-east Queensland is roughly equal to the amount of freight moving to, from or between areas of the North Coast. B-doubles carry both local and interstate freight. B-doubles provide savings as they can carry 1.5 times more freight than the standard semitrailer. The increased use of B-doubles is resulting in fewer trucks on the Pacific Highway, producing improved safety and reduced noise levels. B-doubles represent a significant proportion of the heavy vehicle fleet. We do not believe it is practical to prohibit their access on major routes such as the Pacific Highway.

I refer now to the impact of interstate trucks on the New England Highway. Again, traffic volume of New England ranges from 45,000 per day at Maitland to around 3,000 per day north of Glen Innes. Heavy vehicles of all types represent less than 10 per cent of traffic flow through major towns, for example Singleton, to more than 20 per cent in the lighter traffic rural areas. In New South Wales the length of the New England Highway in urban areas is about double the length of the Pacific Highway, with resultant noise and amenity impacts, and conflict with local traffic. The number of large heavy vehicles—semitrailers and B-doubles—using the highway near Uralla in 2001, late 2002 and later 2004 years are shown. The levels have remained essentially the same.

I turn now to the significance of the New England Highway as a designated transport route. Currently it carries about one-third of the large heavy vehicles carried by the Pacific Highway, with no growth in recent years. The main reasons for attraction of the Pacific Highway over New England Highway for Sydney-Brisbane freight transport is that the Pacific Highway is approximately one hour quicker and approximately 75 kilometres shorter. We expect that to increase to approximately 95 kilometres with the completed upgrade of the highway. Approximately 10 per cent less fuel is used on the Pacific Highway. Earlier the Chief Executive mentioned a figure of 70 litres on a typical B-double. There is less fatigue and lower vehicle maintenance costs on the Pacific highway. There is a higher standard for the Pacific Highway. Approximately 230 kilometres of the highway is dual carriageway, compared to approximately 40 kilometres of the New England. The Pacific Highway has 38.5 kilometres of 50 and 60-kilometre-per-hour speed zoning compared to about 72.9 kilometres on the New England Highway.

The New England Highway is traditionally funded by the Australian Government and its previous designated was a national highway. The Pacific Highway generally is funded by the State with some assistance from the Australian Government. Funding sources do not necessarily correlate with road importance. Under Auslink both the Pacific Highway and the New England Highway form part of the national network, and from the State perspective both remain classified as State highways. I refer to strategic plans that seek to deal with the forecast doubling by 2025 of the New South Wales freight task. The doubling of the freight task would not necessarily result in the doubling of the number of large vehicles on the Pacific Highway. Auslink includes funding for road improvements. However, the proposed four-lane dual carriageway would easily accommodate doubling of the numbers of large heavy vehicles. Proposed upgrading of the Pacific Highway to four-lane dual carriageway is an adequate and appropriate response to the forecast doubling of New South Wales freight task.

The New England Highway carries about one-third of the large heavy vehicles carried on the Pacific Highway, again with no growth in recent years. It is expected that the Pacific Highway will remain a key transport route between Sydney and Brisbane. It is important to note that the Pacific Highway will continue to serve the growing communities on the North Coast of New South Wales.

I turn now to the Ballina to Woodburn project. Again, the plan shows our study area for this project. You can see Ballina in the north and Woodburn in the south. It also affects the communities of Broadwater and Wardell in between. The project includes a 32.3-kilometre dual carriageway upgrade of the Pacific Highway from south of Woodburn to the start of the approved Ballina bypass. It will link the proposed Woodburn to Iluka project with the approved Ballina bypass. It may involve bypasses of the villages of Woodburn, Broadwater and Wardell. Again, the planning for this project is State funded and it is being carried out as part of the current 10-year Pacific Highway program, which concludes in June next year.

The impact on prime and agricultural land is as follows. As you can see from the map, again we have a constraint mapping that shows the different sorts of agricultural land used. One of the key project objectives is to minimise adverse economic effects on the local community and to maximise social economic benefits. All route options have been compared against this criterion, and are being assessed for their impact on agricultural land. Committee consultation activities include the community liaison group and a separate sugar industry focus group. There is consultation with the Richmond Valley Cane Growers Association and the Broadwater Mill. Late in July 2005 the various route options were placed on display for public comment for this project. No decision has been made on the preferred route at this stage. After the preferred route is selected the project team will work with the sugar industry and property owners to help reduce impacts.

I turn now to the impact of flooding in the mid-Richmond area. We have a map. If we look at a one-in-100-year flood there is an assessment made of the different depths of water over different areas of the study area. The RTA appreciates that flooding is a major community issue. We are working closely with the community, local councils and government agencies. The committee consultation activities include a community liaison group and a flooding focus group. Extensive technical studies have been undertaken to assess possible flooding impacts. After the preferred route is selected further investigations will be undertaken, including traditional and more detailed flood monitoring. A flood-free route was proposed by sections of the community. The RTA's initial review of the proposal found that it was not flood free. It had some localised flooding impacts and major environmental issues associated with it.

The impact on communities of Broadwater and Woodburn showed that there is a need to achieve a balance between social, ecological, engineering and cost factors in providing for future transport needs. Socioeconomic impacts on towns along the highway corridor are being addressed. The social impacts of upgrading existing highway through Woodburn, Broadwater and Wardell, if we went through the existing towns, would be severe. All options displayed in May to July 2005 include bypasses of these townships. Provision for ongoing community input includes a community liaison group, a project committee information centre, a project information line, a web site, ongoing community meetings and project displays.

CHAIR: Mr Job, did you want to make any brief preliminary comments?

Mr JOB: No.

CHAIR: Thank you for that overview. We will now proceed to some questions. Where is the timetable up to in terms of possible announcements in relation to the options, especially in relation to Tintenbar?

Mr WIELINGA: As you will realise from the process that I put up earlier, at this stage we are looking at route options for those projects. We are still working through that at this stage. We are still working on issues. It is not possible to give you an exact timetable at this stage.

CHAIR: It is not imminent? I was thinking of it in terms of our inquiry and how it might fit with what we are trying to work through.

Mr WIELINGA: Until we have worked through all of issues on the project it would not be appropriate for me to give a definite timetable as at this stage.

Mr IAN COHEN: This year?

Mr WIELINGA: As I said, I am not trying to be vague or anything. But until we work through the issues on the project it is not possible to put a definite timetable on that.

Mr IAN COHEN: You might not make the deadline, but surely it is possible to say when you will not have it ready. For example, are we to expect something in mid-November of this year, or later?

Mr WIELINGA: As I said, the process was that we would determine the route options as the next step. That is where we are at. We have Ewingsdale to Tintenbar. We are working through

those with our community liaison group and others at the moment, and hopefully we will be finalising those, but I cannot give you a definite timetable.

CHAIR: Is it possible that it would be weeks rather than months, or six months? I am not trying to get you to put an unrealistic date on it, but what would be the normal timetable that you would think of something like this would come out of the other end of the system?

Mr WIELINGA: There is not a definite normal timetable for the project. It depends on the issues that we have to deal with. You will appreciate that there are some difficult agricultural impacts that have to be dealt with on this project. There are some difficult social impact issues. We are doing some further work on those at the moment to help us in this route selection process. We are really trying to invest some time up front to come up with the best outcome in selecting these route options.

Mr IAN COHEN: I am sorry, in my naivety I do not quite understand the difficulty. You might have difficulty in saying, "We will have it done by mid-November", and perhaps in not being able to keep to the deadline, but I would think that you could give the Committee a general undertaking of what your expectation is. Is it going to be this year, or next year?

Mr WIELINGA: Clearly, we would like to do it sooner rather than later.

Mr IAN COHEN: Well, is it this year or next year, Mr Wielinga? Forgive me, but I just thought we could get a general idea. If it is too hard to say this year, then perhaps if you say in March or early next year and then perhaps the community's expectation and the Committee can function, understanding what your approximate schedule is. Surely that is not too much to ask?

Mr WIELINGA: I agree that it is not too much to ask, but what I am asking you to appreciate is that when you do these studies and you look at the issues and you are collecting information to address those issues, when all of the information arrives you are in a pretty good position to make some sort of an assessment on how long it is going to take. We are getting close with this project but we are not quite there.

CHAIR: Through the Chair, is it possible—

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods: Point of order: I think it has probably been asked about 10 times now. I am sure people have other questions. To keep asking the same question over and over again surely does nothing.

Mr IAN COHEN: Through the Chair, could I perhaps ask could Mr Wielinga to give us a not-before date?

Mr FORWARD: Look—

Mr IAN COHEN: Surely that is not too much to ask.

Mr FORWARD: Look, I do not think this is very constructive. Each project is different, each project involves a variety of different issues, and often things can go through very smoothly, but in some cases you get stuck on one or two vital issues. They have to be sorted through and worked through. We always give the community that undertaking—that we will sort through those issues. To give you a date which then becomes a locked-in date, I can see myself being here in estimates in a year's time and being asked the question, "Well, you gave this particular date, Mr Forward. Why did you not meet it?"

CHAIR: Mr Forward, I do not think that either myself or Mr Cohen asked you for a specific date. We just asked you for a framework. I think Mr Wielinga was getting to the point where he was saying that we are getting close to it, but you are saying there are a couple of issues. We are just asking whether it is this year or next year.

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods: Madam Chair, you did not actually rule on my point of order. The question has now been asked over and over again. Perhaps you will rule that there must be a limit, surely, to how many times the witness is asked the same question.

CHAIR: I think Mr Forward misunderstood my question. I did not ask for a specific date.

Mr FORWARD: I think Mr Cohen is asking for a date.

Mr IAN COHEN: No, I am not.

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods: Is that a ruling, is it?

CHAIR: Yes, it is.

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods: It is an interesting ruling.

Mr IAN COHEN: Mr Forward, just to clarify this, I was simply asking you or your officers if you could indicate when it is likely. In that way, I am not asking for a date. I guess I am asking for an assessment of when you are likely to come out with the final product. That is not a date. I am asking when would be the earliest. It can be much later than that. I am interested if results will come from the department, for example, before this Community has an opportunity to deliberate.

Mr FORWARD: Can I ask you to clarify what you mean by "it"? You said when a decision would be made on "it". Do you mean the final decision, or do you actually mean the route options?

Mr IAN COHEN: The route options.

Mr FORWARD: We are working on the route options at the moment. We will put out a document for the community, an exhibition for the community, to have a look at the route options and then we will have a look through, with the various consultative committees, the advantages and disadvantages of each of those route options. So there is still some time to go yet.

CHAIR: Okay. We do not have a final reporting date for this Committee so I guess we will not have a reporting date until we get a better idea of where it might be headed. Could you give the Committee some idea of exactly how it came to be that the study area in relation to Tintenbar-Ewingsdale came to be expanded?

Mr FORWARD: Well, I think Mr Wielinga had already given you an indication during his presentation that there are many community groups that have actually asked us to expand the study area.

CHAIR: How did they go about asking for an expanded study area?

Mr HIGGINS: When the announcement was made in October of last year about the study area, we then went through a process of informing the community within that area. Then there was a community liaison group [CLG] formed and through that process there was then the feedback that is coming back to us about the need to expand the study area. That came from a range of groups within that particular area about the need to look at a bigger area than what was originally displayed in October-November.

CHAIR: And they fed that into the CLG, did they?

Mr HIGGINS: The CLG is just one mechanism among many mechanisms. That was fed in and it came from some comments within the CLG, but it also came from groups themselves and individuals themselves. So what happened from there is a process that came in, and then what we do, when those sort of issues are raised, we then do a desktop review of the comments. We go and have a look at it, based on the available information. So it is based on those comments coming in together with the review that we did that takes us to "Hey, there might be something in this if we expand the study area."

CHAIR: Was that a public process?

Mr HIGGINS: That was not a public process because the difficulty with that, apart from the feedback input, we are considering a whole range of views there. We came to the conclusion, "Hey, there is something here", and so what we have to do is—we have only done certain desktop work, very preliminary work, based on information we could glean—we really then have to go out and do the field work and talk to more people in detail about it. So that is when the announcement was made about an expanded study area and we go out and talk to people.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: The process to determine which of the route options that you will follow, how long has that process been going on for? When did that start?

Mr HIGGINS: What happens is as Les outlined the process. Once the study area is announced, we then go and gather a lot of information, yes. That information is ongoing because people are always raising issues. There came a point over the last few months where we have been starting to, having got this information in, we are still collecting it and we start to analyse it and you start to look at what is possible among a long list of options.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When did the process commence?

Mr HIGGINS: This process commenced in October-November last year.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Would you be able to give us, or take on notice, a list of the process? Could you set out how the process has been progressing during that period of time?

Mr HIGGINS: Like a little chronology of events?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Yes, a chronology.

Mr HIGGINS: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: With dates inserted.

Mr HIGGINS: It might not be the exact dates, but it might be mid-March or mid-April or early April—that that sort of thing.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: If you could give us a chronology of how the process has been developing with some approximate dates in there?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Could I just ask this question: Have any of the groups who have shown an interest in there made any applications under the Freedom of Information Act to the RTA?

Mr FORWARD: I understand that that is the case.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: One or more than one?

Mr HIGGINS: I am aware of one.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When did you receive that application?

Mr FORWARD: On my understanding, it was some months back. There have been some third parties that we have had to consult with and some Aboriginal groups before we could release that information. It is going through the right process.

Mr IAN COHEN: That issue has been resolved, the Aboriginal group?

Mr FORWARD: That has now been resolved, that is correct, yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When was the issue resolved with the Aboriginal groups?

Mr FORWARD: I do not have the exact date.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Can you take the question on notice? If you can take it on notice, will you tell us when you received the original application, when the issue of the Aboriginal groups was resolved, and what you are waiting on now before you respond to that application?

Mr FORWARD: We are just going through the normal process. I understand it is reaching the end of its conclusion.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: What is that "normal process"?

Mr FORWARD: To follow the legislation.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Are you saying that the legislation requires a certain period of time to elapse before you can respond to the application?

Mr FORWARD: No, we have people review the documentation within the organisation to make sure it satisfies the request.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Is it in a state of review at the moment?

Mr FORWARD: It is.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: How long has it been in that state of review?

Mr FORWARD: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Thank you. Are you able to advise by whom it is being reviewed?

Mr FORWARD: It is an internal RTA person.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: How long has it been with that particular department or person and do you have any indication as to whether that application will be responded to?

Mr FORWARD: As I said, my understanding is that we are going through the final process at the moment.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Putting a time period on that, when is that likely to be?

Mr FORWARD: I cannot give you an answer to that.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Can you put it into weeks or months?

Mr FORWARD: I think it is more likely to be shorter rather than longer.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: That is still very vague. Is it likely to be within weeks rather than months?

Mr FORWARD: We are strong on dates this afternoon. My understanding is that it is more likely to be weeks.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: A matter of weeks. Will you take those other questions on notice and come back with that specific information?

Mr FORWARD: Yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: I understand the reasons given for the expansion of the study area were that issues were raised by community liaison group [CLG] membership and by individuals. That is

why you came about. Are there any other reasons why the study area was expanded? The concept, for example, of motorway, did that come into your deliberations at all—a separate road to the existing Pacific Highway upgrade proposition?

Mr FORWARD: Let me give you a brief answer and then I will ask Mr Higgins, who has been involved in the details, to comment. My understanding—and I was at several of the meetings where this issue was discussed—was that we are not rejecting the narrower footprint that was first put up. I think that is an important point to make. It just came to our attention from points made by various community members that there were some other issues that needed to be considered. If we are after a proper consideration of what is the most viable route for the Highway, I think we owe it to those community members who requested we look at the broader footprint that we should go about and do that.

Mr IAN COHEN: We are only talking about a Highway upgrade here. You were present at the meeting with Mr Costa that I attended, and he stated that a motorway, a separate motorway to the existing Pacific Highway, was in consideration. Is that not correct?

Mr FORWARD: Well, it is still one issue that is under consideration.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is that part of the driver for the expansion of the study area?

Mr FORWARD: No.

Mr IAN COHEN: It has nothing to do with it?

Mr FORWARD: I would not say "nothing" to do with it. What we are trying to build here is a four-lane dual carriageway. Whether you refer to it as a "motorway" or a "highway", it is still a four-lane dual carriageway.

Mr IAN COHEN: A motorway would be separate from the highway as a discrete or distinct project, would it not?

Mr FORWARD: The motorway would be a four-lane dual carriageway. Depending upon the standard of that motorway, some local access roads might be required.

Mr IAN COHEN: Mr Forward, why were the 1990-91 submissions for the Bangalow bypass, which is part of the original study area, used as evidence for the extension in 2004-05?

Mr HIGGINS: Might I answer that question?

Mr IAN COHEN: Thank you, Mr Higgins.

Mr HIGGINS: What happened in terms of the Bangalow-St Helena, it had been taken to a point where we had completed the environmental impact statement and we had the community comment. But when we had the noise task force, which community members actively participated in, one of the key issues that emerged in relation to it was highway noise at St Helena Hill. If you go into the recommendations that came from that, the community group asked us to do a review of the alignment for the Bangalow-St Helena project. It was one of the key recommendations. What happened from there was, given we were doing the Tintenbar project, the missing link, the idea was to look at this as part of that and what we could do to improve the alignment for the highway over that previously approved. My understanding was that, if we could not find a better way of doing it, we would go back and look at the previous work that had been done.

Mr IAN COHEN: Was there an Arup submission suggesting the extension of the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale study area, and were stakeholders and the CLG and advised of that?

Mr HIGGINS: My understanding of what you are asking about is this report that is being sought under the freedom of information legislation, but Arup is our consultant for that project and it did a review of the extended study area—the ability to extend the study area.

Mr IAN COHEN: Did Arup also tender for consultancy work on the extended study area?

Mr HIGGINS: Arup has been contacted to undertake the development work for the Tintenbar to Ewingsdale work. As part of that Arup had already done so much work within the extended study area, so we varied that. The original approved area, they were well under way and then we asked them to expand—to change the brief, yes.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is there a conflict of interest involved with a consultancy group such as Arup tendering on the basis of their own advice?

Mr HIGGINS: I do not believe so.

Mr IAN COHEN: If it took approximately 10 years to determine the original study area, why did it take only five months to extend it?

Mr HIGGINS: What we have done—the original time that was taken to do Bangalow-St Helena was right through the whole process, if my understanding is right, way back then a range of issues was raised that required the RTA to do very detailed investigations and considerations as part of it. In terms of expanding the study area, it is not that that is where the highway is going to go; it is an issue that has been raised by members of the community. So, in terms of asked applying due diligence and coming up with a preferred route at the end of the day, it is important that we consider it. One-way of doing that is to expand the study area so that we can let the property owners know that we are doing further work out there. Once we do that further work—this is drilling, understanding the ground conditions, the flooding conditions, the agricultural and noise impacts—we can actually interface with them and understand their concerns. That is the reason for the expansion of the study area.

Mr IAN COHEN: It sounds like good process, your sensitivity in listening to the community, nevertheless there is a great deal of angst that you have listened to some elements of the community and not to others; that the expansion has really encroached on the lifestyles and rights of a lot of people. I you and to comment on the fact that people who lived near the existing envelope were aware of that for many years, but who are now finding themselves within the potential development zones for a highway or motorway, really believed for many years that they were outside of that development area? Historically, the RTA indicated for many years that there was an interest in a narrower corridor? Does that not strike you as being at least very unfair to those other landholders? Mr Forward, perhaps?

Mr FORWARD: Route assessments are not easy processes. They are complex, but we only to the community to come up with what is a fairly transparent process as the best, most optimum route.

Mr IAN COHEN: A "fairly transparent" process, you say. But I understand you have actually restricted members of the CLG from communicating with the public, so you could hardly call that transparent. A lot of people feel very much in the dark about the processes as a result of that agreement. Perhaps you could comment on that? There was an agreement entered into back to that is not backed up legislatively or by regulation that these people should be commented to confidentiality.

Mr FORWARD: This processes go through a fair degree of detailed investigations, as we have pointed out to you. What we did not want to do was create any incorrect information. Everyone in the community should receive this information at the same time. It will go through a process of putting out the options, putting out a very extensive process of discussion about the options and then we will seek feedback, and then we will do an overall assessment of what is the preferred route. We really want everybody to be at the same level of knowledge of these projects.

Mr IAN COHEN: What you are saying is that when the various options are put forward at the end of the CLG process, et cetera, that there is going to be some ability for the community to have an impact on those options?

Mr FORWARD: We would expect feedback from the community on those options.

Mr IAN COHEN: In terms of that feedback, or communication, why were Ballina and Byron councils and the affected stakeholders not consulted before the study area was extended?

Mr FORWARD: Again, we would need to respond to the community in the area. We have had discussions with those councils.

Mr IAN COHEN: But they were not consulted, I understand. Do you disagree with that?

Mr FORWARD: I will ask Mr Higgins to answer that.

Mr HIGGINS: They were not consulted.

Mr IAN COHEN: Why is that?

Mr HIGGINS: Because we are moving into areas that are moving to the public domain. When we announce an expanded study area we do it once so everyone understands that is the expanded study area, and that was the announcement. As soon as that happened we briefed both councils.

Mr IAN COHEN: We have already impacted on a significant number of landholders who described the property, under this current set of circumstances, as being completely entombed. They can do nothing in the selling or future projection of their land.

Mr HIGGINS: I guess we face that issue whenever we have highway routes up and down the highway.

Mr IAN COHEN: It would not be quite the same if it were on the envelope that was originally understood, because for the past 10 or more years people have been able to buy, sell, develop or otherwise, with that knowledge. Is that not a reasonable condition for people in the run-up to motorway or highway development?

Mr HIGGINS: But you are asking about people living along the highway. My understanding is that with full knowledge that was where the highway was going to be.

Mr IAN COHEN: You would agree that that was the expectation; historically that has been the expectation with lines on maps so far in terms of the study area?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes, but as we look at these things in detail, the issues of the existing highway with the number of accesses to it, we have to look at the possibility of upgrading that and also consider whether it should be on another route. Those are the sorts of things that have to come out and we have to analyse and collect information and talk to people about them.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is the potential for the Bangalow bypass, a recently completed project, to be left unused. Is that the situation?

Mr HIGGINS: There is a possibility, but equally there is the strong possibility that it is incorporated into the allocation for the highway. There is a certain level of investment that has gone in there.

Mr IAN COHEN: It is a major investment. Would it be reasonable to say that such an investment, which was a major project, opened just a few years ago, should be guaranteed to be incorporated in the upgrade strategy?

Mr HIGGINS: It is a very important consideration.

Mr IAN COHEN: But not a guarantee?

Mr HIGGINS: We cannot give a guarantee at this stage. We try to keep an open mind on this issue, because there can be externalities that impact on this, such as property owners. It is an important consideration.

CHAIR: In your presentation you mentioned B-doubles. Do you have any statistics on the number of accidents involving B-doubles on the Pacific Highway and the number of fatalities arising from those? Do you wish to take that on notice?

Mr FORWARD: We will take that on notice and give you a detailed analysis. In general, B-doubles are a safer vehicle than some other articulated vehicles that run on the highway.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Could you expand on that? Could you comment on the accidents on the Pacific Highway involving B-doubles?

Mr JOB: The way that our data is collected, it is based on the reports of police. The way police report crashes it is not necessary for us to distinguish a B-double from a semitrailer. They report articulated vehicles in general. That is not something we can readily produce. What we do know from our studies is that per vehicle they are significantly safer than semitrailers, per vehicle per kilometre. In terms of safety, we could be very confident that the B-doubles are actually a safe vehicle. The B-double carries 1.5 tonnes of freight and per tonne of freight it is giving an even greater safety benefit.

There are a number of logical safety reasons why we expect that to be the case, it is not a fluke that that turns out to be the case in general. The reasons include that because of the increased complexity of the vehicle it is an even more rigorous requirement to have a licensed B-double driver. The B-double itself is an inherently more stable configuration than a semitrailer because of the extra point of articulation.

That means that the trailer sitting behind is less likely to throw the thing off course unless it actually has a second articulation sitting behind the prime mover. The prime mover also has to be of a higher quality and has to have spray protection, almost like a piece of broom sitting inside the rig to stop spray coming out from the tyres. So you get better visibility behind them, and they have to have ABS brakes. There are a number of engineering reasons why we expect and support that the B-doubles are significantly safer vehicles on our roads than are semitrailers. Our data currently allows us to present them separately because of the manner in which they are collected by police.

CHAIR: Could you provide the other research that you referred to?

Mr JOB: Yes, I can provide that.

CHAIR: Am I right in thinking that you are projecting that the number of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway will continue to rise, compared to that on the New England Highway where it might be a more static situation?

Mr FORWARD: The freight task has been projected by the Australian Transport Bureau to double over the next 20 years or so. The road freight task may well double in a slightly shorter period although that is obviously subject to economic growth: The rate of growth of the economy and fuel is also a consideration. Nevertheless the freight task will increase, it will not decrease. As pointed out in our presentation, two B-doubles are equivalent to three semitrailers. In terms of economics of freight, B-doubles are a more efficient vehicle.

CHAIR: In terms of the debate about the Pacific Highway versus the New England Highway, other witnesses and yourselves have pointed to the different gradients. An earlier witness pointed to the problem of black ice on the New England Highway. That problem would not present itself on the Pacific Highway, if ever, would it?

Mr FORWARD: It is unlikely to.

CHAIR: You mentioned that the length of the New England Highway goes through built-up areas is significantly greater?

Mr FORWARD: That is correct.

CHAIR: That is another reason why you would see the freight task on the Pacific Highway continuing to grow?

Mr FORWARD: That is correct. Another reason is that inherent on North Coast and the Central North Coast, is that the growth in that area itself, the growth in population. Clearly the population needs food and other commodities and products. Our estimate is that roughly half the traffic on the Pacific Highway is servicing those communities. As those communities continue to grow and the population continue to grow, then the freight task will also grow.

Mr JOB: From a road safety point of view, having the growth in these heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway rather than the New England Highway has benefits, given that we are upgrading this to dual carriageway. Essentially, the core thing the dual carriageway does is to remove the possibility of head-on crashes. The most common type of fatality involving heavy vehicles on highways is head-on crashes. So, logically, we would be removing the most severe crashes, given essentially that you have double the closing speed when you have two vehicles moving rather than just one hitting an object. We would be removing the most severe types of crashes from that highway. Those are the vehicles that very often are the cause of severe crashes involving multiple fatalities on our highways. So to have those vehicles on the dual carriageway is safer than having them on the New England where it is not a dual carriageway.

Mr IAN COHEN: The stretch between Newcastle and Sydney is dual carriageway all the way. Do you have the figures for crashes on that part of the road, in particular, crashes involving heavy vehicles?

Mr JOB: No, I do not have those figures with me.

Mr IAN COHEN: Could you provide those figures to the Committee so we can see what are the overall improvements in safety? Could you provide us with those figures?

Mr JOB: I do not know what you would compare it with, given the dramatic increase in traffic since the F3 was built.

Mr IAN COHEN: And crashes?

Mr JOB: The increase in crashes would not be as much as it would have been without the dual carriageway.

Mr IAN COHEN: Is there some way of assessing how well the dual carriageway has resolved that problem? It might be worthwhile to find out how many crashes per annum are occurring on that dual carriageway.

Mr JOB: We can supply you with that.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Mr Forward, you have taken on notice a question in which we requested a chronology of what has happened since October and November with regard to investigating route options. Would you also be able to supply us with an outline of what specific matters or issues are currently under investigation and what others are on the radar and are yet to be investigated? Those issues might be sub-headings. We will then look at those sub-headings to establish whether or not we will pursue one or several of them to see how inquiries are progressing in that area.

Mr FORWARD: I think both Mr Higgins and Mr Wielinga have given you an indication of the sorts of issues we would look at. If you would like more information on those issues we are happy to provide you with it.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I refer to the possible date of release of the favoured route options. Can you give a guarantee that the RTA's announcement of the favoured route option or any other major announcements will not be made in December, in the holiday period?

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Point of order: I have taken a point of order before about repetitive questions. The last answer given by RTA representatives made it clear that the announcement would be a discussion paper with route options for community consultation. The implication of Ms Rhiannon's question, which is a rather offensive one, totally ignored what the RTA representatives said and implies there will be some secret announcement of a decision. What RTA representatives have said is that they will be putting out a discussion paper with the option for community consultation.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: To the point of order: My question was about favoured route options. My question is relevant because government departments, and that includes the RTA, have released things in the holiday period. I was talking about options but I was trying to ensure there would be maximum time outside the holiday period for an input from the community. That is what I was seeking to get an answer to.

CHAIR: Order! I think the question is in order, in particular, as the RTA mentioned the increase in traffic during school and other holidays. I think it is a good question.

Mr FORWARD: Can I perhaps comment? It is standard RTA practice, whenever a document like that is put into the community, to provide the community with additional time outside the holiday periods. We would do it in this case.

Mr HIGGINS: We are very conscious of the holiday periods. I speak from a programming point of view in relation to my development managers. We plot the holiday periods when we are programming and we then consider that. We are conscious of this aspect of making announcements in holiday periods. We are very conscious of that.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You explained before, which was useful, about the \$1.6 billion that has gone into the Pacific Highway. I imagine the amount of money that has gone into New England Highway upgrades is a skerrick compared with that. One is therefore left assuming that, at some point in planning in years past, a decision was made to put the money into and do the upgrades on the Pacific Highway and not the New England Highway. How was that decision made? Did you, the RTA, give advice that it should be the Pacific Highway and not the New England Highway, and on what basis was that decision made?

Mr FORWARD: Up until 2004 the New England Highway was part of the national highway route. It was the full responsibility of Federal Government. So the Federal Government made a decision as to what money it would invest in the New England Highway; not the RTA or the New South Wales Government. It took that into account when it looked at projects like the Newell Highway, the Hume Highway, the Sturt Highway and the connections to Canberra. All those are part of the national highway program. So the Commonwealth—and perhaps you would be better off asking the Commonwealth this question—would look at all the investments throughout Australia and then make a decision as to where it should invest its dollars on the national highway system throughout Australia. So it was a national consideration that it took into account. The Pacific Highway really came to attention in the late 1980s when there was a coronial inquiry into bus crashes. The Coroner made a recommendation that the Pacific Highway should as quickly as possible be made a dual carriageway for its full length.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Is there not a contradiction in what you are saying considering the responsibility of the Commonwealth? Earlier you said that it was New South Wales Government money to the tune of \$1.6 billion compared to \$0.6 billion from the Federal Government. Is the huge input of money from the State Government not what has driven this massive upgrade of the Pacific Highway, which in turn resulted in more trucks using that highway because it is a faster option for them?

Mr FORWARD: I do not see it as a contradiction. I go back to what the Coroner said in the late 1980s. He made a strong recommendation that the Pacific Highway should be a dual carriageway. There were a lot of outcries from the community, not only from local people but also from people who use that highway for holiday periods or for freight, that the highway needed to be upgraded. When the Carr Government came into office in 1995 there were discussions with the Commonwealth Government and it was agreed that a memorandum of understanding would be entered into. At that

point it was decided that, in relation to the Pacific Highway, New South Wales would put in \$1.6 billion over a 10-year period and the Commonwealth would put in \$600 million over that period. That is how the decision was made.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Is there not a blurring of intent here? No-one denies that we need to make that highway safer. I think the area up north illustrates that well. We could improve the existing route so it was safer but what you are doing in part is going for a whole new highway that makes it much faster and quicker and again it becomes more attractive to big trucking companies because they can use a super highway from Brisbane to Sydney. However, you could go for the option of making it a safer route by putting in a dual carriageway, but the current route still has all its bends. I believe we have not been given a complete explanation of how we arrived at the present situation.

Mr FORWARD: It was a very considered matter at two levels of government. Remember up until a year ago the New England Highway was the full responsibility of the Federal Government. It would have made a decision—and as I said earlier you would be better off asking it—as to whether to put \$600 million into the New England Highway or \$600 million into the Pacific Highway. It made a decision that, so long as New South Wales was to continue to fund the Pacific Highway, it would put \$600 million into that project. I do not see how you can have a safe winding road, by the way, either. I am sure Mr Job could comment on the engineering features of that. But in fact, one of the whole reasons for having accidents on the highway was in fact because there was not separation of traffic, and the Coroner made the point that if you wanted to reduce crashes on that highway you had to separate the traffic.

Mr IAN COHEN: Does the separation of traffic mean it has to be four and six lanes to achieve safety?

Mr FORWARD: To separate traffic with a single lane would create an enormous congestion point when a vehicle broke down or was involved in an accident; you would not get past the vehicle. So if you are to separate traffic it needs to be at least a four-lane carriageway.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: But because you are allowing so much more traffic on the road and with the heavy articulated vehicles, do you not get to a point where safety is compromised? You have gone from a narrow, winding road to a very fast road with a mixture of these small vehicles and heavy articulated vehicles, so you are then moving into a more dangerous situation?

Mr JOB: As I said, the most severe crash types are the head-on crashes because you have, on average, double the closing speed and, on average, double the number of people involved in the crashes. If you manage to remove those you have a very significant road safety benefit. The consequence of dual carriageway is that you substantially remove those crashes with the incredibly rare exception of someone driving down the wrong side of the road. So you get a very substantial road safety benefit. It is, nonetheless, the case, of course, that eventually if you put more and more vehicles on to one road you will get more crashes, but the more vehicles you have simply following each other at a regular pace rather than more spread-out vehicles with some people speeding in between, the less severe the crashes.

So if you add up the total number of crashes you may find them more often but they will be a much less severe form because with more and more vehicles on the road you will get more rear-end crashes, which tend to be much less likely to be fatal or injury crashes. So while you might get a total increase in crashes, you will get a very substantial benefit in terms of reduced fatalities and in terms of reduced injuries because your total number of crashes mainly reflects minor crashes, property damage crashes, at that point. So from the community's point of view and, indeed, from an economic point of view, while fatality and injury crashes are a small minority of our crashes they are the vast majority of our social and economic cost in crashes. So you still get a net substantial benefit.

Mr IAN COHEN: The mix of heavy and light vehicles on, say, the upgraded Pacific Highway, is that not in itself a major danger and potential for crashes?

Mr JOB: I do not know that it is a major danger.

Mr IAN COHEN: There is certainly a great deal of fear in the community. I must say, from personal experience, there are very few people in the northern regions who do not have, as a witness said earlier today, a truck horror story to talk about—being shunted off the road or frightened off the road at least.

Mr JOB: Certainly, we are concerned about that and we are concerned about the community's problems with the heavy vehicles and their concerns with the sharing the road with them. One of the reasons for the dual lane in each direction is to actually overcome that because a lot of those conflicts arise from people travelling at different speeds. So people find that they have heavy vehicles coming up behind them or they find difficulty overtaking heavy vehicles. If you put two lanes in each direction then, in effect, you have an overtaking lane next to each travel lane.

So we expect that having multiple lanes in each direction will actually substantially reduce that perception of conflict and that perception of difficulty with sharing the road with the heavy vehicles. So it is part of the reason, again, for wanting four lanes rather than one lane in each direction with separation.

CHAIR: Which is part of the story of the Burringbar Range, is it not? People on the Burringbar Range obviously had terrible horror stories; now they have been able to reclaim part of the community life without having to, as they used to say, wash the blood off the road every morning.

Mr IAN COHEN: Perhaps you could comment on the fact that one of the major resolutions on the Burringbar Range was permanent speed cameras. Mr Higgins or Mr Forward mentioned that you have got a safety task force that has been investigating the northern Pacific Highway issues, yet with the safety task force you have not been able to see your way to installing speed cameras at such black spots as St Helena and Tintenbar hill. Surely that would go a long way to saving lives? The present time or the last time I was at St Helena it had a flashing sign saying, "You are going too fast", but there are no speed cameras on such a dangerous section of highway.

Mr JOB: I agree with you that speed cameras give us significant road safety benefits.

Mr IAN COHEN: What does the safety task force say about St Helena and Tintenbar hill?

Mr JOB: I think it is worth looking at the history of that one. If we take St Helena hill in particular, then it is a classic example of where the lack of separation has caused a problem. A number of crashes have been people going across the road because of failure to control the vehicle in curves—

Mr IAN COHEN: Due to speed and bad conditions.

Mr JOB: Sometimes due to speed, sometimes due to wet weather. Wet weather is actually a significant factor on that hill. What we have done with it is create a separation by putting median wire rope on it as part of an upgrade of St Helena hill. Since we have put median wire rope on it, the crash history on that hill has been dramatically reduced. In fact, we have had one fatality since then, and that was when the wire rope was basically destroyed for a long section by a vehicle hitting it. If I could explain: the wire rope is designed so that it bends with the vehicle rather than stays rigid. So when a vehicle hits it, it then needs to be repaired. So it is a significant commitment on the part of the RTA to get that separation of the median.

What happened was, our only fatality has been when one vehicle came down and knocked the wire rope out. That then allowed another vehicle to cross the median when otherwise it would not have happened. So the wire rope actually works extremely well as a method of resolving the crashes on St Helena hill. So we have a solution there; we do not therefore need to add more and more things.

Mr IAN COHEN: You do not think a speed camera is necessary there?

Mr JOB: I think when we have made a substantial change like that we would review the data based on what happens next to see what is necessary next. The speed camera may be necessary when we review the data, it may not be. Other solutions may again be better than a speed camera. That does not mean we are not prepared to use speed cameras on that highway. We have a number of speed cameras on that highway and we will be looking at putting more on it as the need arises, depending on

that data. We have announced that we will be putting in two more speed cameras at one location on the highway, which has a significant number of crashes. We have announced a reduction in speed and the addition of two more speed cameras—that is at Bonville.

So we are prepared to put more speed cameras out where the speed camera is the appropriate method. The reason it was the appropriate method at Bonville was because the existing carriageway did not allow the sensible use of wire rope in the median, because you need to leave a reasonable median separation either side of the wire rope. The Bonville tract did not allow that, so speed cameras were not an appropriate measure there.

Mr IAN COHEN: I think there is a certain degree of real concern in the community that we are seeing an upgrade under the guise of safety, which is agreed by all to be absolutely necessary, but there is an upgrade also that seems to facilitate heavy vehicle transport on very tight time constraints. But there are other cheaper ways of achieving the safety factors without necessarily going to the full length of the major dual carriageway, although I appreciate, Mr Forward, that you said that was a recommendation of that inquiry. However, why is the RTA seemingly insisting on a speed limit of 110 kilometres per hour on the upgrade area of the T2E? Can there not be another way of approaching this that does not necessarily presume that 110 kilometres per hour is necessarily the speed limit?

Mr FORWARD: That is part of the consideration when we look at the options. We are still considering the options and as part of that decision we will look at the speed for each of the options.

Mr IAN COHEN: Can you appreciate, Mr Forward, that there was real community dismay with the broadening of the study area when there is a lot of community knowledge about very intense fogs in the valley where you have extended the study area to? There are very soft soils on those coastal flats and that area has the highest rainfall in the State with significant flooding issues currently in that valley even before we add the development of any potential motorway through there. Fog, flood and soil instability are well-known issues in the community. If this were not such a serious issue it would make a laughable around-the-pub chat.

Mr FORWARD: All those factors are taken into account.

Mr HIGGINS: They are. Looking at any upgrade we have up and down the highway, fog is an issue we have on our floodplains and it is an issue that we take into account. Soft soil is always an issue. While we value input from the community and community comments, sometimes we have to drill a hole and look at what is underneath so that we can fully understand. Yes, the flooding is a very important issue. Expanding the study gives us the ability to draw upon all that information that is out there in the community—within councils and within other government agencies—so that we can then assess whether it is a prime consideration. Can we solve it with alignment? Sometimes we cannot, but we can analyse it all and provide that as input in the ultimate decision as to whether a highway should be there.

Mr IAN COHEN: It is interesting that you should mention test holes and such like. I understand that Arup sought to do a test hole in a geological and ecological study on the Harper's farm and then neglected to inform them that it would not be proceeding. Do you know why that was the case?

Mr HIGGINS: I would not know about that particular case. What happens at times is that you try to position holes to gather the most information you can. It is quite possible that they have gone out and found that they could gather that information somewhere else. Therefore, you do not proceed. Why go ahead with some expensive bore hole if you can gather the information somewhere else? I do not know the specific details of that case but obviously there was a reason for it.

Mr IAN COHEN: Perhaps you could take that question on notice. In terms of the expansion of that study area—and I think the same applies for the study area further to the south on the Woodburn-Ballina section—there are acute issues in terms of prime agricultural land that has been recognised by DIPNR in its assessments. Therefore, the economic viability of the entire region is at stake. Why does that not preclude expansion of that study area? Why does it not preclude the siting of certain routes in the Ballina-Woodburn section away from the existing highway? That is the lifeblood of the local community in this region.

Mr HIGGINS: When we go through the process of gathering all this information, shortlisting the routes, putting it back to the community for comment and then considering those views in arriving at a decision on a preferred route, at times sections of the community say, "Why didn't you consider that; why didn't you consider this?" In some cases we have had to go back—

Mr IAN COHEN: This is a government department. Another government department has clearly indicated the value of this prime agricultural land. It is a little different.

Mr HIGGINS: No. Agriculture is one of many issues. We are trying to gather as much information and to be informed as much as we can in order to feed into the decision. There is no perfect answer as to where the highway should go. It is all about compromise. In terms of leading that compromise, you must consider all these factors. Agriculture is very important. That is why we set up a specific focus group on Tintenbar to Ewingsdale. The cane industry in Woodburn to Ballina is very important. That is why a special group was set up for that. Equally, there is an ecological group. We are trying to make sure that we gather that information and bring it in. It will all feed in. Agriculture is one issue but the functionality of the highway, noise, amenity and ecological issues feed into arriving at a decision on a preferred route.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You might have to take this question on notice and get the statistics that I am after—although I think they are implicit in what you said in your presentation. Can you give us some figures on the growth in people-related rather than freight-related traffic over 10 years compared with trucks? You may need to break down some of those figures. We seem to be focusing on the increase in freight, particularly B-doubles and so on, but given the growth in population along the Pacific Highway I would really like to see some figures that break things down.

Mr FORWARD: We can take that question on notice.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Is it possible to separate local traffic from interstate and long-distance traffic? Obviously school buses are a major component of the traffic in some areas but they are people rather than freight related.

Mr FORWARD: We will take that question on notice.

CHAIR: We are just about out of time so I will ask you to take this question on notice also, Mr Forward. Would you mind giving us an outline of trucking and other vehicle rest area programs along the highway and how that has been rolled out? During the presentation on the Far North Coast there was specific mention of a local road that would probably run over the top of an expanded highway. Could you give us an indication of how you came to the conclusion in that particular case that you would have a local road going over the top of the new upgraded highway—which seems to make a lot of sense—but on other parts of the highway upgrades you have T-junctions with traffic travelling on the highway at 110 kilometres an hour and then the possible retrofitting of a flyover à la at Rainbow Flat, for example? Can you give us an idea of the policy and how you make that decision in some cases and not others? That would be appreciated.

Mr FORWARD: Okay. I am happy to do that.

CHAIR: In terms of overall safety, could you give us some information about the current arrangements between NSW Police and the RTA in relation to highway patrol and the like—how that fits together? That would be appreciated. I am sure that members have other questions. I ask any member who wishes to put questions on notice via the Committee to put them in an order that makes it easy for the RTA to deal with them.

Mr IAN COHEN: May I ask one more question of Mr Forward?

CHAIR: Okay—one last question.

Mr IAN COHEN: This is an easy one to answer, Mr Forward. If the RTA had adequate funds for road construction—if you did not have that tight constraint holding you back—would you have a different view of the location of the highway in the Northern Rivers region?

Mr FORWARD: No. First, on the one hand, that is a very hypothetical question. Whilst you say "if you had unlimited funds", there is always an opportunity cost—if you spend it somewhere you cannot spend it somewhere else. When we look at projects we try to get as close to the optimum route as possible, taking account of all those factors that we have talked about today—does it impact on the community, agricultural land, soil conditions and those sorts of issues. Clearly, we also take into account the cost. You say, "If funds were no object" but the fact of the matter is they always are a constraint. If you spend more in one area you always spend less in another area.

Mr IAN COHEN: I guess I was looking for an in-principle strategy if funds were not the priority—for example, looking at best design.

Mr FORWARD: I guess the day-to-day reality is that funds are always limited and there is always somewhere else you can spend that money.

CHAIR: Are you aware that the Committee is conducting concurrent, as part of our inquiry, an examination of the Coffs Harbour area and the upgrades there?

Mr FORWARD: I was informed on Friday that that might be a possible addition to the terms of reference.

CHAIR: It is now official. We will not ask you questions about that now, but you might consider that because we will be having a hearing Coffs Harbour and perhaps another Parliament House meeting that will incorporate questions, and a presentation from you would be appreciated in relation to that as well.

(The witnesses withdrew)

HILARY STUART WISE, Manager, Public Policy, NRMA Motoring and Services, Level 23, 388 George Street, Sydney, affirmed and examined, and

LISA MARIE MCGILL, Policy Specialist, Traffic and Roads, NRMA Motoring and Services, Level 23, 388 George Street, Sydney, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Are you conversant with the terms of reference of this inquiry?

Ms WISE: Yes, I am.

Ms MCGILL: Yes.

CHAIR: If you consider at any stage that any evidence you wish to give should be heard or seen only by the Committee, please indicate that fact and the Committee will consider your request. Do either of you wish to make an opening statement to the Committee?

Ms WISE: Only just to put the context that NRMA Motoring and Services represents two million motorists across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, so that is the capacity in which we appear today to respond your terms of reference.

CHAIR: Are you also aware that we have decided to do concurrently an examination of the Coffs Harbour area as well?

Ms WISE: We were here at the end of the last witnesses' evidence so we heard you say that. We will take the opportunity to address that as well.

CHAIR: Would you like to highlight for us the issues you see that relate particularly to the far North Coast upgrades? Are there any particular issues that you think the Committee should take into account from the NRMA's point of view?

Ms MCGILL: I was just going to run through a couple of the key points from our submission.

CHAIR: Yes, please do so.

Ms MCGILL: Obviously, the upgrade of the Pacific Highway is a very high priority project for the NRMA. We believe it is a national issue due to the high volumes of traffic using the highway, the high number of deaths and injuries and the rapid growth of communities along the highway. Our vision of a dual divided carriageway similar to the Yelgun to Chinderah section and other upgraded sections of the highway has the potential to reduce head-on collisions by 90 per cent. It has various other benefits as well, including reduced travel times.

The fast tracking of the upgraded Pacific Highway is critical as far as the NRMA is concerned. I will give you some statistics over the last 10 years, from 1994 to 2003, in that 453 people were killed on the highway; 6,806 people were injured on the highway; and there were 9,995 crashes. Since the upgrade program began, our last audit found that only 32 per cent is dual divided carriageway. Since 1995 there has been reduced crash and casualty rates on the highway, which demonstrates that the upgrade project is delivering on its purpose, which is reducing the number of deaths and injuries on the highway.

We also found that there needs to be a balance between the local needs and greater community good. That is looking at all the people who utilise the highway, not just the people who live in the area. We have to stop people being killed or injured on the highway. When I talk about local needs, it is balancing the environment, agriculture and the local community. I wanted to also talk about better roads panels, which the NRMA launched this year, with 10 regional panels across the State where we have been going out and capturing information from business, community and councils in the area. We have two panels on the Pacific Highway. One is on the far North Coast and one is on the mid North Coast.

The Far North Coast panel identified the completion of the Pacific Highway upgrade as its number one project. The mid North Coast actually agreed with that as well. We have also joined forces with all local councils up and down the Pacific Highway in the Pacific Highway Task Force. The councils have got together because Enough is Enough and they want to see the completion of the upgrade. NRMA has committed a \$1 million fighting fund. This campaign is targeting black spots on the Pacific Highway where we will erect billboards and commence a strong electronic and print advertising campaign to try to increase funding on the highway.

CHAIR: The two better roads panels that relate to the Far North Coast and the mid North Coast both identify the completion of the Pacific Highway as their number one priority for the region. Is that self-evident? What were the other projects or recommendations and priorities?

Ms McGILL: In relation to the Far North Coast they looked at the way the south-east corner of Queensland is growing and seems to be getting a lot of government support for the growth that is happening in the region and they thought they were missing out in that far northern corner of New South Wales. They also identified the Bruxner Highway as a key road in their area because it provides an important east-west link, and another east-west link road from, I think it is, Bangalow to Lismore as well. There was a list of many different issues that were identified but they were the top three things.

CHAIR: Was there any detail attaching to those top three or were they basically dot points spelling out those top three priorities?

Ms McGILL: The main one the Pacific Highway was literally a dot point but also the Ballina bypass came up in that discussion because that is something that is very much at the forefront of the minds of the people up there.

CHAIR: Does the \$1 million fighting fund apply right down the highway to pick out black spots to try to bring pressure to bear for them to be fixed? Will that project to the length of the highway?

Ms WISE: The \$1 million fighting fund is actually to cover three of the key routes—the Pacific Highway, the Princes Highway and the Hume Highway so it is black spots along all three of those highways.

CHAIR: I note "The NRMA supports the opportunities to put more freight onto rail where distances are long and the freight is suited to rail transport." Have you got any suggestions as to how that transfer of freight across to rail might be encouraged?

Ms WISE: I guess that is a very hard one, depending on the regulations, rates and things like that. Apart from calling on the governments to regulate more heavily, I am not sure how they will get that shift to occur without some government intervention.

Mr IAN COHEN: Does the NRMA have a position on the upgrade of the Pacific Highway and the New England Highway in terms of separation of truck and car transport from the Pacific Highway, for example, but not necessarily, to the New England Highway. Does the NRMA have a stated position on the issues and problems of heavy truck transport moving along with passenger vehicle transport?

Ms McGILL: You have to take into consideration that vehicles moving up and down the highway do not just go from Brisbane to Sydney but they are actually servicing the communities up and down the highway.

Mr IAN COHEN: But quite a percentage do. As Ms Lee Rhiannon said, 50 per cent go from Brisbane to Sydney as straight-through traffic so it is a specific route for quite a few?

Ms McGILL: Yes, the Pacific Highway is obviously faster than the New England Highway and if you want to keep your freight costs down you are going to continue to use the Pacific Highway.

Mr IAN COHEN: It has only become faster in relatively recent times as a result of some major upgrades. Would it not be an advantage for the NRMA to be campaigning to upgrade alternative routes, particularly from the safety point of view, putting all one's eggs in one's basket and having that Pacific Highway route without looking at other routes that can act as an alternative, particularly in emergencies?

Ms McGILL: We do not put all our eggs in one basket. We do lobby very strongly for the Pacific Highway because so many people die on the Pacific Highway, and it is not the fault of the heavy-vehicle drivers. There are many things that are taken into account when there is a crash and you cannot blame it on heavy vehicles all times.

Mr IAN COHEN: Do you have figures, and would you be able to provide them, that would back-up that?

Ms McGILL: Yes.

Ms McGILL: Yes, we will take that on notice. The reason we lobby so hard for the Pacific Highway is because the communities are growing along it and that is part of the reason that drives the changes that are required on the highway. It probably should have been completed a long time ago and it would have made a big difference and it would have saved a lot of lives. But we campaign for the Pacific Highway for that reason: it is about reducing the number of deaths on the Pacific Highway. But we also lobby generally for more funding for all roads across New South Wales, which includes the New England Highway. Last year we did a report on the Summerland Way. We actually flagged it as a good alternative route. So we do have a lot of eggs in the basket of the Pacific Highway but we do also support the other highways that support the region.

Mr IAN COHEN: You might have heard Mr Forward of the RTA say earlier that they do not have unlimited funds and therefore they must prioritise. You mentioned the Summerland Way and the Bruxner Highway, which have problems in terms of the quality of the road. A lot of smaller roads are also creating accidents and dangerous situations for people, particularly in northern New South Wales. Would it not make sense to look at other strategies that would get some of the heavy transport in particular off the Pacific Highway?

Ms McGILL: At this stage the Pacific Highway serves the best; it has the best use for the freight. It has the shortest travel time and until that changes you will not get the freight to move. The Government did not decide to send everyone onto the Pacific Highway when the changes came into place. The improvements are not there just for heavy freight; they are for all road users—motorists, community members, motorcyclists—and anything that reduces the number of deaths on the Highway, that is what the NRMA is about.

Mr IAN COHEN: What is the NRMA's position on the stated objective to create a 110 kilometre speed limit pretty well the full length of the Pacific Highway?

Ms McGILL: As it is a key link between Sydney and Brisbane, the NRMA is in agreeance with having a 110 kilometres standard highway. A lot of the time the new Pacific Highway is not in the current Pacific Highway alignment is that you still have the old Pacific Highway servicing the community in its current capacity.

Mr IAN COHEN: Does the NRMA have any trouble with 110 kilometres as the speed limit?

Ms McGILL: If the road is designed for 110 kilometres an hour travel, then no.

Mr IAN COHEN: Has the NRMA done any studies in terms of the mixing of truck and car traffic and assessed the potential problems with those impacts?

Ms WISE: We have the same statistics. They all come from the same place, being the RTA. Obviously, it has the statistics; it has the traffic counters. A lot of the trucks are local transport as well but in terms of the NRMA supporting anything that moves freight onto rail, for example, we would support. It is hard to achieve but generally we are very supportive of that.

CHAIR: Do you have any further information on the Summerland Way as an alternative for at least some of the transport?

Ms McGILL: We can supply you with a copy of the report that we released last year. I did not bring any of them with me, so I will have to take that on notice.

Ms WISE: The NRMA does a number of road audits, which gives us some independence in terms of looking at crash rates and things like that. We have done that very recently across the New England Highway, the Summerland Way, the Princes Highway, the Pacific Highway. There is a whole bundle of road audits that sit behind our comments, if you like, and we feed that into the mix. In fact, recently on the Princes Highway we have done an economic study as well. We can supply you with that whole bundle of material if that would be useful.

CHAIR: It would be useful because it would give us more of a statewide picture. I noted that recently there was the Pacific Highway task force summit, with which the NRMA had a great deal to do. I was hoping to be there that day but I had to go to a funeral instead. Can you brief the Committee on the main outcomes of the latest summit?

Ms McGILL: Yes. The original summit only had those councils on the Far North Coast in the group called NOROC in May and the second summit had every council up and down the highway, including Newcastle, which had come on board. They agreed to the same terms as the original summit in May and that is conveying to government the fundamental impact and importance of the Pacific Highway on the communities through which it passes; noting the significant and increasing importance of the Pacific Highway as a major transport route for business, industry and tourism; recognising the anxiety within the community about the safety on traffic of travelling on the highway; and stating that they are appalled at the unacceptable high loss of human life caused by vehicle crashes on the Pacific Highway. One other thing they agreed was that the State Government should sign Auslink.

CHAIR: In your submission you said that the commitment by the Federal Government under Auslink to increase funding levels on the Pacific Highway to \$160 million from June 2006 is a great recognition of the national importance of the Pacific Highway. Generally speaking, is it fair to say that that NRMA welcomes the Auslink proposals from the Federal Government?

Ms McGILL: Yes, we recognise the switch in funding on the Pacific Highway where it has gone from \$60 million to \$160 million, which is a significant increase. It means that more work can be undertaken in a quicker time frame.

CHAIR: That is provided the New South Wales Government actually signs the agreement.

Ms McGILL: That is right.

CHAIR: Has the NRMA called on the State Government to sign it?

Ms WISE: Yes.

CHAIR: Have you had any response yet?

Ms WISE: No. Obviously we have regular contact with the RTA and the roads Minister and we have been having ongoing discussions over the last six months and last week, and we are constantly raising the issue with them.

CHAIR: And so far they have not signed on the dotted line.

Ms WISE: That is what we understand.

CHAIR: Do you have any particular points that you want to make in relation to the Far North Coast upgrades, Ewingsdale to Tintenbar and Ballina to Wardell?

Ms McGILL: No, no specific comments on those sections.

CHAIR: I notice that you have included with your submission the performance report on the Pacific Highway of September 2003. Is that the last major analysis of the Pacific Highway situation that the NRMA has done?

Ms McGILL: Yes, that was the last one. We try to do the reports on the major highways every three years, so we are due for another one next year.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Just on the matter of the Auslink funding, would you be aware of what the normal percentage is of the Commonwealth's contribution to an Auslink project?

Ms WISE: It depends on the highways. Previously, for example, the national highway, for example, the New England was 100 per cent funded by the Federal Government, and under Auslink that has now changed. I understand it is 80:20.

Ms McGILL: On the Pacific Highway, the State Government continues with its \$160 million per annum. The Federal Government has now matched that so you have 50:50 funding on that.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: That is the current proposition but I am talking about, for example, the F3 widening, the Albury upgrade, the Musselbrook bypass and the Southern Hume duplication. Do you know what the contribution by the Commonwealth was for those projects?

Ms McGILL: Off the top of my head, no, I do not. Can I take it on notice?

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: No. I have to tell you it is 100 per cent in terms of the Commonwealth's contribution under Auslink. With respect to the F3 to Bruxner, the F3 widening stage two and the F3 Sydney orbital, would you know what the Commonwealth's contribution was to those projects?

Ms McGILL: I think the F3 to Bruxner is \$225 million.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I am talking about the Commonwealth in percentage terms.

Ms McGILL: No.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In fact that is 80 per cent, the Commonwealth's contribution to those three major projects. So in terms of the 50:50 split which is being proposed in the current formula with respect of the Pacific Highway upgrade, notwithstanding that 100 per cent support for those other projects and the 80:20 split for those other projects I just mentioned, the NRMA is still supporting the 50:50 split being proposed by the Commonwealth, notwithstanding the contributions I have just described.

Ms McGILL: We support it because there is an increase from \$60 million to \$160 million for the Pacific Highway. We have the first five years of AusLink, and if we sign on there is an opportunity to campaign to increase that funding in the next stage of AusLink. So there is a five-year plan, and I see every chance that you can then negotiate the next five-year plan if you can justify the increase in funding.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Are you saying there is actually access to greater than a 50:50 contribution by the Commonwealth under the proposal?

Ms McGILL: I do not think the percentages are set in concrete, so I think there is opportunity.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: So are you saying it is a "maybe"?

Ms McGILL: There is opportunity for increased funding.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Let me put it another way. Is there a guarantee for increased funding?

Ms McGILL: I cannot guarantee what the Federal Government will do.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: You were asked a question regarding upgrades in northern New South Wales, and you said you did not have a comment to make at this stage. Does that mean that you agree with how the RTA is conducting the upgrades and that you would agree with what the RTA comes up with? I want to get a sense of how you will engage in this process, or whether you will engage in it.

Ms McGILL: I have been involved with a number of value management workshops that the RTA undertakes to decide on a preferred route for the Pacific Highway, and I am always amazed at how robust the discussion is in the room with all the different stakeholders and that in the end you get a consensus. It is a balance of the environmental needs and the local communities' needs. The agricultural groups are represented, and the NRMA is there as the motorists' representative. I am always surprised that people come in with such diverse opinions and go away from those meetings with a resolved position. So that process is quite strong and robust.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Are you saying that you have only seen processes where you end up with consensus and people have not been dissatisfied?

Ms McGILL: I am saying that from the value management workshops that I have been to—which number about five, I think—people go away generally satisfied. I do not think you can make everyone 100 per cent happy on an issue of selecting where a road goes, because putting a road through someone's backyard is always going to make them dissatisfied. If you were doing a town bypass, and you lived on the eastern side of town, you would be pushing for the western bypass; but, if you lived on the western side of town, you would be pushing for the eastern bypass. It is trying to get a balance between those, and I think it is a difficult situation to be in.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: In those areas where there is sharp conflict and a lot of disquiet—and you would be aware of the plans to divide valuable farmland in northern New South Wales—considering some motorists not only drive their cars on roads but also have homes and farms, would the NRMA also be looking to balance your commitment to getting road upgrades with the needs of people's everyday lives?

Ms McGILL: Yes, we do try to present a balanced view when we go to meetings and in responding to community requests for NRMA representation.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Have you therefore engaged with people in northern New South Wales who have been concerned about the likely loss of valuable farmland?

Ms McGILL: Yes. I have met with some communities in the Ewingsdale and Tintenbar area.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Apart from meeting with them, is the NRMA already considering lending voice to their concerns?

Ms McGILL: They are just one section of the community. There is also the other section of the community who actually pushed for that extended consultation zone. How do you get that balance right? The NRMA treads a very fine line. I will say that we have not come down on where we are on that issue, because you have two sections of the community who have different views.

Mr IAN COHEN: On the matter of how much of an upgrade we need, I wonder whether the highway upgrade could be reduced in scale if it did not have to cater with an increase in interstate trucks on that highway. Would your organisation be supportive of that? After all, you did say you were supportive of getting the heavy transport onto rail.

Ms McGILL: With upgrading of roads in Sydney, I would say every time you build a road, and it might be two lanes in each direction, you get to capacity fairly quickly.

Mr IAN COHEN: So it induces traffic?

Ms McGILL: Yes. You need to do a dual divided, which is two lanes in each direction, and buy your road corridor as well, so that you have got it if any further improvements are required, because you do not want to go back and revisit those communities that have already had land problems. So you should at least reserve the road corridor, so that you have the potential to upgrade the road to three lanes in each direction if that is what is required. But, at this stage, you need two lanes in each direction.

Mr IAN COHEN: Are you concerned that the fixing of black spots that are controlled through speed cameras and other patch-up or bandaid solutions, but nevertheless attending to specific problems that are happening right now, is in some ways held back because of the expectation that the strategy of a major upgrade over the next ten years will result in quite a loss of life as a result, when another strategy might be to attend to those specific black spots and do them right away?

Ms McGILL: There are two definitions for black spots. The State definition of a black spot is as simple as three crashes in three years, whereas the Federal black spot focuses on injuries and fatalities, or where it causes the most harm. Obviously, if there is a high incidence of serious harm or a fatal crash, you need to do something to mitigate the circumstances that might lead to a repeat of that type of crash. The best solution is to get in and fix it properly, so that you eliminate that crash totally. As you say, going down the highway and fixing just the black spots is probably not the best way to use your money; you need to go in and fix it completely.

Mr IAN COHEN: Even though the fixing of it completely will take some 10 years or more? Obviously the NRMA is very concerned with the safety of its own membership and the general travelling public, but has your organisation assessed the potential savings in life of actually addressing those black spots quickly and now, rather than pursue a total strategy of dual carriageway for the full length of the Pacific Highway? Communities are not saying that they necessarily want a dual carriageway for the full length of the highway right now. What they are saying is that they want a solution to some significant black spot problems along the Pacific Highway. One solution is seen to be a dual carriageway overall. But, given that we have a significant number of deadly black spots, could not the solution that is as effective be to deal with those as discrete issues?

Ms McGILL: Sometimes the bandaid solution—to use your term—can take money away from the more significant projects. If you can do things like put in all-wire-rope fencing to segregate traffic as a short-term measure, yes, the NRMA supports that. The black spot program that is run by the Federal Government is assessed, they say, on the basis that for every dollar they spend they save \$14. So, yes, black spot funding definitely has a cost benefit compared to upgrading the highway.

Mr IAN COHEN: Has your organisation undertaken studies, or are you just depending on the RTA when it comes to black ice issues on the New England Highway and in other areas, as well as the issue of fog? Interestingly, earlier today a witness mentioned that, from a truck driving perspective, fog is a major hazard not only from the point of view of the physical fog but the fatigue that accompanies it from the driving for an entire night or a number of hours through the fog. Has your organisation looked at those specific types of dangers? Do you have anything that the Committee might be able to use—because, with some of the areas in dispute, there are issues specifically of flooding and fog and such like?

Ms WISE: I guess there is a lot of technology out there. For things like black ice you can have those monitors that sit just under the road pavement and when there is black ice it will flash up. We are very supportive of any of those measures that obviously increase and improve safety.

Mr IAN COHEN: And fog?

Ms WISE: Again, we do not have the in-house expertise in that area but we certainly support any studies that the State or Federal government undertake to improve those areas, including fog. The other thing you mentioned was fatigue. We do a lot of work around road safety as well, things like rest areas, and run campaigns like take a break, rest 15 minutes for every two hours. So, in conjunction with supporting the roadwork there is a whole road safety campaign and also a safer vehicle campaign that we work on as part of the Australian New Car Assessment Program, that looks at how cars react

in crashes and making them safer. It is fairly comprehensive, looking at all aspects of road safety, that we do.

Mr IAN COHEN: That is interesting. I did not realise there is technology that can give warning of black ice.

Ms WISE: Yes. Often it is in recognised spots so they know it is an issue. The technology does exist. Again, as Lisa was just saying, in doing some of those things that can be fixed, in reality you should have both the long-term solution and some of those things that can save lives now.

CHAIR: Does the association have a view about the possible need for mixing private funding, for example, motorway tolling, on the highway so as to bring the project to its dual carriageway objective faster?

Ms WISE: I do not have this research with me, but we went out in February and asked members what they thought about tolling. Sydney is the most tolled city in the world, and there is a bit of resignation that tolls are here to stay and there will be more of them. With regard to the Pacific Highway, because there has been no specific proposal, the NRMA view is that tolls are a last resort. We would obviously prefer that it comes from government. Motorists already pay 38¢ in a litre of petrol. In addition to that there is the money that goes to the States. But we are prepared to look at alternative funding options. We have not ruled out any funding options on the Pacific Highway or on any of the other highways. For example, on the M7 it brought forward the works. We have a bit of a pragmatic view about it. We are prepared to have discussions about alternative funding arrangements. But I am happy to share with you that tolls research on what members think.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Using the funding formula you were discussing earlier, the application of the proposed 50:50 split with the Commonwealth and projecting it forward, does the NRMA know how long it would take to complete the upgrade of the Pacific Highway compared to the application of the 100 per cent or the 80:20 split, which is more common on the national highway program?

Ms McGILL: Firstly, the Pacific Highway is currently not a national highway. So, it is still the State responsibility. I do not have any figure on how much is going to cost to complete the highway, unless the RTA told you before and I can backtrack and calculate how long it will take.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: No, this was not from the RTA at all. Can I just clarify, you are saying the Pacific Highway is not part of the Auslink national network?

Ms McGILL: No, it is not a national highway. It is part of the Auslink strategic network. Auslink changed the way roads are funded. You no longer have, as you say, the national highway, you have the Auslink network. I am just clarifying, because it is not a national highway and they have not called it a national highway.

CHAIR: It never was.

Ms McGILL: That is right. So, I am just clarifying that point.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Forgive me then, let us use the language the Auslink network. Would it surprise you, if the 50:50 formula was applied, that it would take almost 20 years to complete the project compared to about half that time, approximately 10 years, applying the Auslink formula that has been used in those two examples I gave you earlier, preferably the 100 per cent funding program? Would you be surprised it would take about half as long a time to complete the project if that 100 per cent formula was used over the formula that the Commonwealth Government is trying to get the State Government to agree to?

Ms McGILL: It would not surprise me but it disappoints me, because we need it done within a 10-year time frame.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.06 p.m.)