

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 4

INQUIRY INTO THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

At Sydney on Tuesday 21 March 2006

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. Donnelly

The Hon. A. R. Fazio

Ms L. Rhiannon

ROBERT GEORGE HIGGINS, General Manager, Pacific Highway, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW, on former oath:

MICHAEL JOHN HANNON, Acting Chief Executive, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW, on former oath:

BRIAN JOHN WATTERS, Acting Director, Road Network Infrastructure, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW, on former oath:

MICHAEL BUSHBY, Director, Road Safety, Licensing and Vehicle Management, Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Welcome to the fifth public hearing of the inquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 into the Pacific Highway upgrades. Before we commence I will make some comments about procedures for today's hearing. The Committee is currently undertaking two inquiries into the Pacific Highway upgrades: one relates to the Coffs Harbour area and the other relates to the area around Coffs Harbour. Questioning at today's hearing will be limited to issues concerning the far North Coast. Today we will be focusing on issues concerning Coffs Harbour and broad strategic issues relevant to both inquiries.

The Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of guidelines covering the broadcast of the proceedings are available from the table by the door. In accordance with the 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 they publish or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee.

Regarding the delivery of messages and documents tendered to 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 the Committee or by any other person.

The Committee prefers to conduct its hearings in public. However, the Committee 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. Mobile phones should be switched off for the duration of the hearing.

I welcome to today's hearing witnesses from the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales. I thank the witnesses on behalf of the Committee for making themselves available to give evidence today. I note that only Mr Bushby has not appeared previously. Mr Hannon, do you have a brief opening statement?

Mr HANNON: We would like Mr Bushby to give a brief presentation on some of the indicative areas that the Committee asked us to be prepared to respond to.

CHAIR: I appreciate that.

Mr HANNON: He will talk specifically about the heavy vehicles using the Pacific Highway and the New England Highway, particularly the road safety aspects. Mr Higgins will follow with a short presentation on the Coffs Harbour project and the community consultations associated with it.

Mr BUSHBY: I think it is probably worth spending a few minutes recapping some of the information that has been previously provided to the Committee in relation to safety in the corridor we are talking about. My colleague Dr Soames Job has provided information relating to safety on the highways. I would like to start by reinforcing some of that information. It has been advised that between 1996 and 2002, there was a 28 per cent increase in traffic on the Pacific Highway and during

that time there was a 13 per cent increase in crashes along stretches of the highway that had not been upgraded to dual carriageway. It should be noted that although the traffic increased by 28 per cent, the number of crashes increased by only 13 per cent where there was no dual carriageway. That result reflects work related to black spots and safety improvements generally. In the areas where dual carriageways have been constructed the number of crashes decreased by 19 per cent despite the 28 per cent increase in traffic. That information is on the record in previous advice from Dr Job.

There have also been discussions about the relative safety of the Pacific Highway versus that of the New England Highway. It is worth touching on that issue as well. Dr Job has previously advised that the incidence of crashes, in particular heavy-vehicle crashes, is lower on the Pacific Highway than on the New England Highway. I can potentially elaborate on that later if necessary. In terms of the number of fatalities on the Pacific Highway, there has been an interesting series of results over the past five or so years. In 2000, crashes on the Pacific Highway resulted in 43 fatalities; in 2001, 44; in 2002, 46; and in 2003, 55. Pacific Highway safety works, which involved a special program, have been undertaken and in 2004, there were 32 fatalities and in 2005—and these are still provisional numbers—there were 34. We are seeing a significant reduction in the number of fatalities. While we cannot rely on that as being statistically significant, it is a strong pointer to an improvement in safety on the Pacific Highway over the past couple of years.

The notes that have been sent out in advance of this meeting contain information and some proposals relating to the New England Highway and its general condition. It is worth doing a comparison between the New England Highway and the Pacific Highway and addressing several issues that are relevant to its usage and, in particular, the through usage. About one-third, or approximately 230 kilometres, of the Pacific Highway has four-lane dual carriageway. Dual carriageway is important for safety outcomes in terms of reducing the potential for head-on collisions, where there is the greatest chance of serious injury and fatalities because of the momentum of the vehicles meeting head on. The fact that a large proportion of the Pacific Highway is dual carriageway has contributed to the improvements in safety that I have mentioned. In comparison, approximately 6 per cent of the length of the New England Highway is dual carriageway. As a result, it does not enjoy the safety improvement benefits of having the carriageway separated and the consequent reduction in the probability of head-on collisions.

Another interesting characteristic of the New England Highway when compared with the Pacific Highway relates to the areas where there are urban speed limits. Those speed limits are important because of the nature of traffic movements in urban areas. Urban areas tend to have more intersections, more vehicles coming on and off via driveways and accesses, and the potential for mixing modes of transport—that is, there are pushbikes, pedestrians and so on in those areas. It also affects the travel time of the through traffic. Approximately 38 kilometres of the Pacific Highway from Hexham to the Queensland border is subject to urban speed limits of 50 or 60 kilometres an hour. By comparison, the New England Highway has approximately 73 kilometres of urban speed limits. As a result, traffic using the New England Highway will experience greater exposure to those mixed-mode traffic arrangements involving more turning movements, pedestrians, cyclists and so on.

~cont/EA

I think that is relevant in terms of the safety record of the two highways.

The New England Highway has also been described previously as far more mountainous than the Pacific Highway and the fact that that will affect some of the decisions relating to use, especially for heavy vehicle operators who are going to have to set up their truck both in a mechanical sense, relating to new ratios et cetera to be able to travel over the ranges, including Liverpool ranges on that journey and also affects the fuel consumption, obviously grinding uphill is a lot slower than travelling on the flat of the Pacific Highway and it affects the time taken for the travel from the Hexham-type area through to Queensland.

The number of heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway is probably about three times the number of heavy vehicles that exist on the New England Highway. Both routes are important as freight routes, primarily for the through traffic but in a great sense for the communities along those routes as well. There is a lot of freight that is carted to and from the intermediate stops on those routes. Looking at the changes in use though, and the New England Highway would appear to be somewhat

stagnant in the growth of heavy vehicle traffic—it is not changing very much over time whereas the growth on the increase of freight is probably being taken by the Pacific Highway.

I think it has been noted before that the New England Highway has been a national highway, and under Auslink arrangements with the Federal Government it is now part of the national network as is the Pacific Highway. That meant the New England Highway was being fully funded as a national highway by the Commonwealth and decisions relating to its upgrade and maintenance were largely when the Commonwealth could provide funding, but it was a trade-off against other national highways within New South Wales. I have mentioned that there is a perception amongst heavy vehicle users that the extra time to travel the New England, the extra distance—we think it is about a 50 kilometre journey, depending on your origin and destination—the additional fuel costs and maintenance costs of running up and down the ranges affects the choices as well.

In the dot points that were sent to us they talked about whether there was a possibility of moving the heavy vehicles from the Pacific Highway to the New England Highway. The information I have provided already is really about trying to set the scene as to whether that would be a successful move in moving them across. I think what we are seeing is that the Pacific Highway with its dual carriageway, its lower proportion of urban speed limits is somewhat suited to carrying freight that is required to go through the corridor. The concept of forcing trucks to move from one route to the other may not be as successful as it would seem just as a first viewing of the idea because what you might see is just a change in the nature of the vehicles using the route. For instance, if we said B-doubles had to go on the New England Highway it may well be that we would just have that freight change onto semi-trailers because of the advantages of that route over the other route. So it is not necessarily a simple question that has been asked and it is not one that I can predict how the operators may make their decisions.

It is important to note that both routes are needed and to recognise that the increase in population on the North Coast is driving quite a large amount of the traffic growth in heavy vehicles on the Pacific Highway and that is because those communities require goods to be carted and produce to be carted out. A sizeable proportion of the heavy vehicle traffic would be servicing those growing areas on the North Coast.

Mr IAN COHEN: Do you have percentages of how much is through traffic and how much it is actually servicing local areas on the North Coast?

Mr BUSHBY: I do not have percentages in front of me.

Mr IAN COHEN: Can you provide them?

Mr BUSHBY: Bob might be able to help.

Mr HIGGINS: I believe this issue was raised at one of the last hearings and we supplied some information from the ABS in terms of the freight coming into that North Coast area from Sydney north to the border and what was going into Sydney and elsewhere. I believe we actually provided some figures showing that it is about equal 50:50.

CHAIR: A lot of people do not believe those figures. You say that figures comes from the ABS but the RTA has not done an assessment of those figures?

Mr HIGGINS: No, we gathered it from the ABS. We actually gathered it from the information it provided.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I understood that the RTA gave figures for the Iluka/Wells Crossing area that shows 65 to 70 per cent is local traffic?

Mr HIGGINS: What you find is that the traffic changes up and down that highway. We will be talking to Coffs Harbour later where we find the local traffic is getting up towards 90 per cent and it all depends on the particular section. Those assessments of through and local traffic are based on origin/destination surveys that we do at a specific time. We take the numberplate of the vehicle coming into the area and the numberplate of the vehicle coming out of that particular study area. From

that we can make an assessment whether it is a local traffic movement within that area or whether a vehicle is coming in, from out of that area into that area or it is going through that site. The figure that you mentioned of 70 per cent are vehicles travelling in or along the Pacific Highway in that area, or vehicles coming into the site, or going from the site out of the site. The other 30 per cent are vehicles travelling through. So it changes up and down the whole highway.

Mr IAN COHEN: That would not give a real indication of whether commercial vehicles—semi-trailers and B-doubles—are using portions of the highway or on a route between Brisbane/Sydney and Melbourne? It does not give that indication?

Mr HIGGINS: No, because the particular studies we are doing are trying to get an understanding of that particular site's split between local traffic and through traffic. We then try to do that with heavy vehicles also and then you pick that up on time of day and those sorts of things. It does vary up and down the highway.

Mr HANNON: I will ask Mr Higgins to give a short presentation on the Coffs Harbour projects since that is the main one we are talking about today.

Mr HIGGINS: I will hand around two maps to which I will refer in this short presentation. One brown map shows the relief of the Coffs Harbour and Sapphire to Woolgoolga. It also then shows all the routes that we investigated over the four years that we undertook investigations. The preferred route is that dark blue route that starts to the south of Coffs Harbour that links the Lyons to Englands Road, goes around Coffs Harbour then follows the existing highway up until Woolgoolga and then there is a deviation via a route known as E to the west of Woolgoolga before joining back into the highway at Arrawarra.

This map tries to show that the relief in this area can get upwards of 500 to 600 metres and it comes in very close to the coast. So we have got those mountainous regions behind Coffs Harbour and there is this small area of land along the coast where we are getting all the growth on Coffs Harbour as well as the current Pacific Highway going through. That Pacific Highway actually has a dual role: not only does it carry interstate movements, and also to regional centres outside of Coffs Harbour, but it also services the growth needs of Coffs Harbour to the west and also up to what they call the northern beaches area where you have Sapphire, Moonee, Emerald Beach, Sandy Beach, Woolgoolga, Safety Beach, Mullaway, Arrawarra all the way up to Corindi.

The other map is similar but it shows the extent of the reserves and national parks in behind Coffs Harbour. The green colour essentially shows that they are either State Forests or national parks. They are quite extensive and have a very high biodiversity value. Not only do we have these community and social issues but we also have these environmental needs and functional needs and the role of the Pacific Highway through there.

In early 2001 the RTA was asked to look at continuing the duplication of the highway from Sapphire just north of Coffs Harbour through to the northern end of Woolgoolga. The original brief given to our consultant was to continue with the duplication of the highway, consistent with the overall highway objectives. In 2001 both the Department of Planning and Coffs Harbour City Council then said to us "We need to have a look at the strategy for the whole of Coffs Harbour, so that we can make sure that whatever is being done for Sapphire to Woolgoolga is compatible with an overall long-term view for Coffs Harbour itself. We then increased the scope of the study and looked at it in totality, in terms of the overall routes.

To make that happen, and for us to all work together, a steering group was set up that comprised Coffs Harbour City Council, the Department of Planning and the Roads and Traffic Authority. We provided the engineering support, the technical expertise and the writing of the reports. That steering committee was the one that was to steer this overall planning strategy to identify a preferred route for the highway. We commenced that in 2001 leading to a preferred route which was announced in December 2004. There was a series of pamphlets—I have only brought one copy—that led to all the information that put out. There were about six brochures, periods of key information that were put out for the community in that time. We put out information to show how we were progressing the study and what conclusions we were reaching at the time.

~break/Macdonald

In September 2001 we issued the first brochure indicating the investigations had commenced and we went ahead and it showed some tentative corridors and so forth and we sought public comment. The next one was issued in March 2002. We then put out a series of corridor options for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga section. They were broad corridors that led either through Woolgoolga along the existing highway or routes to the west. At the same time members of the community were asking us to look at a far western bypass: can we start off at the bottom and go up the Orara Valley and either come in at Halfway Creek or go north to Grafton?

We did some preliminary work on that and some estimates, and that is covered in the brochure and the subsequent reports. When we looked at it we found of the amount of traffic it would carry versus the level of investment—and you had to build it all in one go to achieve it—meant it was not worthy of investment because of the money involved in it. I will talk more about that, because Coffs Harbour City Council has a view on that. We released that information and we came to the conclusion that of all the corridors around Coffs Harbour the most feasible corridor was an inner corridor. That is where these routes are here. We released that to the public.

In December 2002 we did further work and released the route options for Sapphire to Woolgoolga—what we call A, B, C and D. You will pick that up by those little numbers at the top. We put it out for community comment. At that time we had further work on Coffs Harbour. The southern section was put on hold pending the outcome of this peer review. You asked some questions earlier about did we institute the peer review. It was not us, it was one of our partners in Coffs Harbour City Council who instituted that peer review. They wanted someone to come in and independently look at what we were doing. So, we put the work on the southern section on hold pending the outcome of that peer review. That is why it does not mention it in that No. 3 of December 2002.

We then continued to move forward. The next stage was in 2004 and you will see those handouts. We issued some information because certain members of the community were promoting a route called the Coastal Ridge Way, which essentially, you also there, has a “CRW” on it. It starts to the south, goes to the west of North Boambee and then it starts to climb up behind the back of Ulidarra National Park and then it comes back down again into the Bucca Valley and then it climbs up via option A to the west of Woolgoolga, coming back into the existing highway. This was raised by members of the community: can we move the highway from the coastal communities? The difficulty we had here was that the terrain was very challenging and we were getting well over 200 metres in elevation.

If I could put this in perspective in terms of the whole highway, you will remember we reduced the Bulahdelah Range from RL 200 down to 120, and Burringbar Range is the same. Then up on the Yelgun to Chinderah, where we eliminated a range section, that route would be like putting another range section in the Pacific Highway. So, we had some major issues about functionality. Equally, some of the cuts were extremely huge, getting up to 70 or 80 metres. The footprint a 70 or 80 metre cut causes is quite huge. It is like a couple of football fields wide. If you look at the biodiversity here, the impact on the amount of clearing and all those sorts of thing that go with it is huge. We have to say how can we minimise that impact? We looked at using tunnels, viaducts, all those sorts of things. While it moved it away from the coastal region, we had major issues with its functional performance and would heavy vehicles use it—that was the big question—given the range sections, and the impact on the biodiversity. Because it was raised by the community, we have not dismissed it. We investigated it.

About the same time the council also raised a series of options: could we put the highway somewhere—you see that cross-section on the plan? They were saying that we would not want the highway along the coastal route section, we do not want the highway up the Orara Valley and the impact that would cause on the community, but can you locate the highway in that range? We did further investigations, and it is a bit like the Coastal Ridge Way. It had a whole range of impacts on the heights, on biodiversity and so forth. We had a meeting because council had formed a view and moved a motion that that is where they would like us to investigate the highway, which compromised members of the council on the steering committee. So, there was a mutual decision in February 2004 that the steering committee would be disbanded and that the Department of Planning and the RTA would continue to finalise it. While Coffs Harbour City Council was not on the committee it was still

involved and we went through processes to keep them informed and gain their comments. We did further work on council's investigation leading to June 2004, where we put out our preferred position of the coastal route options for public comment. On 12 November 2004 a preferred route was identified for the coastal route.

In the Woolgoolga area you will see the preferred route is option E. That evolved from suggestions by council staff: that we do something to reduce the impact on their future urban development in the Coffs Harbour and Woolgoolga areas as well as minimising the impact on the agricultural interests there? So, E is a compromise between C and B to try to lessen the impacts on the two. It is like a balancing act in identifying a preferred route. On the one hand we have community issues. On the other hand we have the environmental issues and we have the functional issues, the performance of the highway and, of course, cost. When we put that back out to the community for comment we got comment back in and through our processes we came up with that as the preferred route. That is the process we used in the consultation.

It took us probably about four years because it is a difficult area to identify a highway route. There are many issues, not only the social issues but environmental issues as well as making sure we have a highway that performs. That highway is not about just interstate traffic, is also about servicing the growth areas of the northern beaches areas of Coffs Harbour, which are growing at a rapid rate. That is what led to this conclusion, as well as getting value for money. In the consultation process we did involve the community, and council was heavily involved as part of the steering group. Ongoing, we had regular briefings with council staff and councillors at various stages. I went along to a lot of those so we could get their feelings on issues. Quite a few people in the community are not happy with the outcome of the coastal route but we feel we will both service those needs and be mindful of the other issues that we had to face.

Mr IAN COHEN: You raised some specific points here. The C option compared to the E option—you talked about community consultation. There is a lot of concern in the Punjabi or Sikh community. Some 30 per cent of the community will be impacted upon with their property and agriculture. How does that compare with the C option? There is a great deal of concern and I have had reports from the New South Wales Farmers Association representing the community that the E option will devastate properties and the agricultural potential of about 30 per cent of the Sikh community there.

Mr HIGGINS: When we went out with route options we went out with A, B1, B2 and C. We also had another route option called D, which went right through the middle of Woolgoolga.

Mr IAN COHEN: Which is the original highway?

Mr HIGGINS: The existing highway, that is right. That had major biodiversity issues and Aboriginal issues as well as functional issues as well as cost. Routes B1 and B2 had major impacts on agricultural and farming interests there. When we went through the first analysis we came to the conclusion that a route C and a route D might be viable going forward but D was difficult because we were going through the middle of Woolgoolga. The mayor at the time asked us to look at it, so we did. When we put that out we started to get a few comments, particularly from the council, about what C would do with its impact on the urban community of Woolgoolga, because we were cutting across one of its future urban investigation zones for Woolgoolga as well as the country club estate. They asked us to please have a look at it. We then said what can we do, and that is when council promoted the idea of option E, which is a balance between B and C. I understand it causes an impact on the banana land in the area but it is a lot less than the B route.

Mr IAN COHEN: In terms of agriculture?

Mr HIGGINS: In terms of agriculture. We are at the stage now where—I think we talked about this once before—we are trying to get it between the urban area and the agricultural area, to try to find a run through. We are going through a process now, as we do the concept design, to see if we can adjust it even further to lessen the impact on the banana plantations.

Mr IAN COHEN: Will this be A-grade dual carriageway? I understand one of these innovative issues here is access, and it will depend on the grade of the highway. Along with that, much of this existing highway on either side is dual carriageway north of Coffs Harbour?

Mr HIGGINS: No. Dual carriageway only goes up to Korora and Sapphire, in that area. You will find there are a series of passing lanes between there and Woolgoolga, just like on other sections of the highway. Option E is a deviation away from Woolgoolga. Under that arrangement, E would be a class M, but the local route would be the existing highway, the present highway that goes through Woolgoolga.

Mr IAN COHEN: Appreciating that, why are we having a class M in this circumstance, when one of the biggest issues with the community, which, I think you are well aware, is an iconic community and has certain cultural rights and will be devastated by its inability—as it said in reports to this inquiry—to access either side of what will be a motorway with limited entry options. Regardless of the route, that will be one of the biggest problems, would you not agree?

Mr HIGGINS: I have not quite finished responding to your original question. Once we build option E to a high standard, underpasses and overpasses will be built so local residents can move from one side of the highway to the other. So, if you lived on the western side of option E, you would then go via an underpass into Woolgoolga and then travel along the existing highway to a high standard interchange either to the north or to the south and then access the highway facility from there. I think it will end up being a much more convenient and safe access for residents wanting to access this highway.

Mr IAN COHEN: You are saying there will be more access for residents with a motorway running through it than currently?

Mr HIGGINS: They will have access from one side to the other via an underpass or an overpass. Also we are going through a process of working individually with these property owners to work out their access now and they will be linked into the existing highway—

Mr IAN COHEN: Sorry, this does not quite add up to me with the nature of a motorway. Can you explain to me, in terms of the number of access points that will exist with a motorway compared to the access points currently, are you telling the Committee there will be as many access points with a motorway?

~Break/Jacobs

Mr HIGGINS: No. The existing highway starts south of Woolgoolga and it goes right through to the north of Arrawarra. I can get the number of access points along there but there are many of them directly fronting onto the highway via at-grade intersections. As traffic volumes are starting to pick up on the existing highway residents are finding it much more difficult to access the highway. To the south of Woolgoolga speed limits have been dropped because of the interaction that is going on between local traffic and through traffic. Not only inconvenience but safety issues are raised. Option E is the preferred route. It will be built to motorway standard. The residents will not get direct access to the motorway at that location at motorway style. They will go into Woolgoolga in the same way they do at the moment. They will access the existing highway and then move north or south to a high standard interchange at either end. There will be high standard ramps to and from the highway. They will be able to enter safely. In terms of the convenience factor, there should be no change to the present journey times. But there will be increased safety as they enter and leave the highway because they are a much higher standard facility than currently exists.

CHAIR: I understand increased access safety but I still do not understand whether people in the area, particularly undertaking agriculture, will have the same degree of access to their land on either side of the motorway.

Mr HIGGINS: If we sever a property we will work with the individual. Sometimes we can adjust the line so it is on one side of their property rather than through the middle. In if it goes through the middle of the property we enter into arrangements to maintain access from one side to the other for the farming business. We do that on an individual basis. For example, at Yelgun to Chinderah, the 28 kilometres to the north, there is property access under the highway. The cane farmers can move their

machinery from one side of the highway to the other without travelling on the highway via an underpass or an overpass. In one case an overpass is being built because we could not fit an underpass in. There are underpasses for other properties on that project. They are the measures we will take to make sure that people can access their block from one side to the other. Once we identify a preferred route we work closely with individual property owners to work out an arrangement that best suits each one.

CHAIR: We have been talking about the Woolgoolga area. Is it correct that the last CLG community focus group meeting was nearly a year ago, on 10 May 2005?

Mr HIGGINS: That is correct. It has been a while since we had the last meeting with them because we are still working through the concept design for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga and the Woolgoolga sections.

CHAIR: Is it true that one matter that was not able to be dealt with last May, an update from the RTA on its field investigations, was held over to the next meeting? Can you understand why members of the CLG and the community feel exasperated that they have had to wait so long to have even a matter held over from a previous meeting addressed?

Mr HANNON: Perhaps Mr Higgins should look at the minutes to see what particular issues you are talking about.

CHAIR: I am talking about item 3.87 on the minutes from 10 May 2005 stating that the RTA would give an update on field investigations on the northern section. People are still waiting for a meeting, let alone to get a report on the field investigations.

Mr HIGGINS: I do not have a copy of the minutes with me now so I need to talk to the project team about that issue and come back to you. Is that okay?

CHAIR: Yes, that is fine. Can you understand why people would be concerned that the minutes from that meeting, which they believe are inaccurate, are still up on the RTA web site and they do not have an opportunity to correct things that they believe are inaccurate for nearly a whole year?

Mr HIGGINS: I would like to take that on notice and come back.

CHAIR: Sure. Another item you can take on notice in respect of the same minutes is that the community is concerned about the independence of the facilitator of the CLG. There is a suggestion that only part of the discussion at the meeting was recorded in the minutes. You might like to check that as well.

Mr HIGGINS: One of the difficulties we have is that we normally only take notes of meetings and specific CLG members were seeking very detailed minutes of the meetings. It has always been a difficulty that we have had in working with specific members of the group.

CHAIR: Looking at the bigger picture but as it affects the Coffs Harbour area, you said earlier that in the original cost-benefit analysis the increased traffic volumes that could be generated by the opening of the Chinderah to Yelgun bypass were not taken into account. Is that right? If so, has the planning for future routes in the Coffs Harbour area been rejigged to take into account the increased traffic flow since the opening of that major upgrade?

Mr HIGGINS: It was never made public but we undertook a sensitivity analysis based on a change in the traffic volumes from Yelgun to Chinderah. There was an increase in heavy vehicles. It would have increased no matter what the option. The BCRs might change but the relativities between the various ones stays the same because you get the same increase no matter what. For example, the far western bypass, which is a route that is being promoted by certain members of the community—the one that goes up via Orara Valley—had a figure of less than 0.5 BCR, but it is now less than 0.6. So there was a very minor change. The preferred corridor for Coffs Harbour City Council, the one that goes up through the middle, had BCRs of 0.25 to 0.49 and but the figures are now 0.29 to 0.56. So there is very little change. The coastal corridor, the one that is identified as preferred, had figures of

from 1.4 to 1.8 and the figures went from 1.6 to 2. So from the benefit to cost ratio point of view the relativity is maintained even if you change the volumes as a result of Yelgun to Chinderah.

Mr CLARKE: Mr Hannon, I want to get to the question of tolls on the Pacific Highway. Can you advise what sections of the highway around Coffs Harbour will be tolled?

Mr HANNON: I think I indicated last time we talked that a working party has been set up to look at the whole question of the total project going from Hexham to the border. The working party has been established, comprising members of the Federal Government and the State Government. One of its tasks is to look at the project itself, what it is actually going to comprise. Amongst other things that will be looked at is the program that will be needed to deliver the project and how it will be funded. Tolls will be one of the things considered.

Mr CLARKE: So tolls are being considered for sections of the highway around Coffs Harbour?

Mr HANNON: I do not think any decision has been made as to what sections will be tolled at this stage.

Mr CLARKE: But it is under consideration?

Mr HANNON: Last week at the Estimates Committee we gave you a copy of an MOU that has been signed between the State Government and the Federal Government that said, amongst other things, that tolls would be looked at.

Mr CLARKE: Have you discussed the question of tolls on sections of the highway around Coffs Harbour with the Minister?

Mr HANNON: I indicated last week that I was going to check our records on that matter.

Mr CLARKE: Have you checked those records?

Mr HANNON: No, I have not.

Mr CLARKE: Can you recall any discussions between yourself and the Minister or other members of the department and the Minister on the question of tolls in the Coffs Harbour area?

Mr HANNON: I indicated that I would check my records and get back to you.

Mr CLARKE: So you have no recollection yourself of any such discussions?

Mr HANNON: I indicated that I would check my records before I gave a response.

Mr CLARKE: And when will you be checking your records?

Mr HANNON: At the last meeting I think it was indicated by the Chair that we would have 14 days to respond to questions that were raised.

Mr CLARKE: Has your department recommended tolls for that area of the highway?

Mr HANNON: At this stage my department is waiting for the outcome of the deliberations of the working party. No decision has been made on what sections of the highway will be tolled.

Mr CLARKE: I am not talking about whether decisions have been made; I am just asking whether your department has recommended tolls in respect of that area of the highway.

Mr HANNON: I am not aware of any recommendation that has been made with respect to tolls on any sections of the highway at this stage.

Mr CLARKE: Mr Higgins, do you have any costing of the far western corridor option indicated on the green map?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes. Information Sheet No. 2, which was issued in March 2002, gives costings for the far western bypass. Figure 5 has a table showing that the cost would be in the range of \$700 million to \$1,100 million. It was done as a strategic estimate at that stage. Planning update No. 5 gives detailed costings of all the route options. You will not find the far western one because it was discarded at that time. There are all the council options that we were asked to consider. The coastal ridge way option has a net figure of \$1.5 billion and the coastal option has a figure of \$700 million to \$900 million.

Mr CLARKE: So there has been no updating of that costing on the far western corridor option since 2002?

Mr HIGGINS: That is correct, because it was discarded as a viable option at that time and we then proceeded with our work on the coastal options, plus the other options that were being presented as alternatives.

~Break/Jarka

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: How did its cost compare to the other options?

Mr HIGGINS: It is similar to the coastal route. You also have to take into account the amount of traffic that it carries. The coastal route carries both through and local traffic. I believe in some of the information we have provided here, the current highway carries upwards of 80 per cent to 90 per cent of local traffic as well.

CHAIR: Does that mean that the far western option is totally off the vision of the RTA at this point?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes. We were trying to identify how we can upgrade this section of the highway. Like we find on other sections of the highway, it is there to serve not only the through traffic but the local traffic as well. The section through the northern beaches, Sapphire, Woolgoolga, that section of the highway carries a lot of traffic at the moment that we need to do something about because we are under pressure to upgrade that section.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I want to ask you a question about the Moonee intersection. This has an exceedingly high volume of traffic and I think it is partly because it is the only access to the new shopping centre and the hotel there. I understand that it has been the scene of a large number of accidents. Is that correct?

Mr BUSHBY: My understanding was that there have been some crashes. I cannot confirm that it would be a large number.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Can you get those figures for us? You can take that on notice.

Mr BUSHBY: We can take that on notice, yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Is it correct that you are proposing to increase the speed limit from 80 to 100 kilometres per hour?

Mr BUSHBY: My understanding is that during the construction of the improvement works at the intersection there was a temporary speed limit of 80 kilometres an hour put in place. My understanding is that that 80 kilometres an hour speed limit remains there at the moment.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Is it proposed to increase that speed limit?

Mr BUSHBY: My understanding is that the speed limits in that area will be reviewed, and I am not aware that that has been resolved.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When you say "reviewed" that would be reviewed upwards to increase the speed limit?

Mr BUSHBY: Not necessarily.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Not necessarily, but probably?

Mr BUSHBY: I do not know the answer to that. I cannot give you an answer. Until the review is done, I do not know whether it would be a recommendation to leave it at 80 or to raise it or, indeed, to lower it.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Have you had any representations from locals calling for a speed limit of 60 to 70 kilometres per hour?

Mr BUSHBY: I am not aware of those representations.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Is anybody here from the department aware if there have been any such representations?

Mr BUSHBY: If there were it would be to our regional office, and there is not a representative of the regional office here.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Can you ascertain whether there have been any representations from locals with regard to lowering the speed limit?

Mr HANNON: Can I just clarify that? Are you suggesting representations suggesting 60 or 70 kilometres an hour?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Representations suggesting any reduction in the—

Mr HANNON: Below the current 80.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Yes.

Mr BUSHBY: We can check that for you.

Mr HIGGINS: Could I make a comment just in relation to that? As part of the concept design we are developing for the upgrading of the highway from Sapphire through to Woolgoolga it is intended to provide a grade separated interchange, a flyover, at that location because not only have you got the situation with the current growth that you mentioned with the shopping centre but there is future growth happening in that area. It is happening all the way through to Woolgoolga, and what is intended is to take that current intersection to a grade separated structure or a flyover, and that is all through in the concept design at this stage.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Are you aware in general terms of the large number of accidents that have been occurring in this area?

Mr HIGGINS: I am aware of the accidents. I do not have the figures. I am aware of accidents in there, and that is why in terms of our planning for the upgrading of the highway is to take that to upgrade to a flyover in the future because of the volumes.

CHAIR: In relation to the Bonville section for a moment, in the memorandum of understanding that we all have I think the costing for the Bonville section is now \$217 million. Is that right?

Mr HANNON: You are talking about the press release that was sent out at the same time as the memorandum of understanding.

CHAIR: Yes. The reason I am asking is that I think the original provision was \$85 million.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Madam Chair, could you ask the witnesses in the gallery to stop having conversations that are distracting? I note that it is the Hon. Andrew Fraser again. He does not seem to behave himself particularly well at Committees or elsewhere. Please call him to order. You would do it if it was somebody else.

CHAIR: Order! If the members of the gallery want to have conversations they should not distract the Committee.

Mr HANNON: The pre-tender estimate was \$217 million. As you are aware, tenders have been called for the deviation, and we are currently examining the tenders.

CHAIR: What is the latest on the timetable?

Mr HANNON: Still an expectation that we will have a contract awarded by May this year.

CHAIR: And work would then commence shortly thereafter?

Mr HANNON: It is a design and construct contract so there will be some period of time while they complete the designs and they would start later in the year.

CHAIR: In relation to one of the questions we have been looking at, land acquisition and the difficulty that that causes to people affected by highway upgrades, I think the RTA policy statement on land acquisitions says that the RTA will consider a request for acquisition if an owner can demonstrate hardship using the criteria specified in the relevant legislation; that acquisition will be at the discretion of the RTA and subject to the availability of funds, with each party being responsible for their own costs. Do you have any estimation of how many landowners in the Coffs Harbour basin area are adversely affected or troubled by that particular matter?

Mr HANNON: I might get Mr Watters to give you an explanation of exactly what our processes are, and then Mr Higgins might address the numbers.

Mr WATTERS: I do not think we are aware of the numbers in the Coffs Harbour area. The process we go through is that once we have announced the preferred route obviously people are adversely affected by that if the line goes through their property. The Just Terms Compensation Act has provisions in it for hardship acquisition so where people are suffering such hardship we commence an acquisition process by negotiation.

CHAIR: I understand that there are a number of property owners in that area whose properties will be directly affected by any internal bypass and Coffs Harbour's local environmental plan dated 1995 shows that their land was originally proposed to be 2A residential but has now reverted to 1A agricultural. How would the RTA assess the value of such properties?

Mr WATTERS: There is a process that is undertaken involving the Valuer General. Ultimately it could go to the Land and Environment Court for settlement. Often when there are cases of acquisition where the zoning of the land, and therefore the underlying value of the land in terms of its highest and best use, is disputed, if we cannot resolve it through negotiation then it may well end up in the Land and Environment Court.

We have had a recent case where a road proposal in Sydney—nothing to do with the Pacific Highway—is a boundary between a proposed residential and a proposed commercial area. The land owners are arguing that the road land that we are buying should be zoned commercial. We have argued that it should be zoned residential because the road is actually the boundary between the two zones, and ultimately only the court can decide on what is the fair and appropriate zoning to determine the underlying value of that land. Inevitably, even if it is a paddock, it is not valued as a paddock; it is valued as its zoning as if the road proposal does not exist. So in that particular case you are quoting, hypothetically if the road proposal did not exist if the land were to be residential then the underlying value is likely to be residential even though it is a paddock. So there is a well-entrenched process involving initially the Valuer General and then ultimately the Land and Environment Court if there is no agreement on the valuation.

Mr IAN COHEN: On the point that you made in terms of the number of properties affected on whatever route you choose, are you not aware of the numbers that are impacted upon before you make an assessment? That seems to be a contradiction in terms of your studies into social impact.

Mr WATTERS: Yes, we are aware, and it is documented. We just do not have the figures with us at the moment. We could take that question on notice.

Mr IAN COHEN: So you can provide the numbers.

Mr WATTERS: Certainly.

Mr IAN COHEN: It is important. I think it goes back to our discussions perhaps on those affected by the Pacific Highway and the alternative Summerland Way in terms of looking at social impact.

Mr WATTERS: Yes. The question on notice is the Coffs Harbour study area, how many properties are directly affected. Was that the question?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr WATTERS: We will have to take that on notice.

Mr IAN COHEN: In terms of the Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing upgrade, there are some quite major environmental impacts upon old growth floodplain wetlands and threatened species habitats and the Solitary Islands Marine Park with what at this stage seems to be the preferred route. I am just wondering why the RTA has failed to show the existence of extensive old growth floodplain wetlands or recognised endangered ecological communities under the New South Wales Threatened Species Conservation Act or location within the catchment of the Solitary Islands Marine Park. Do you have any comment on that at all?

Mr HIGGINS: It is the Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing project.

Mr IAN COHEN: Yes.

Mr HIGGINS: I know we have produced a lot of maps in relation to that, so I need to take that on notice to see, if you do not mind.

Mr IAN COHEN: Thank you, no, that is fine.

Mr HIGGINS: I need to go back to the maps.

Mr IAN COHEN: It strikes me that there are some significant issues that need to be answered.

Mr HIGGINS: Just to clarify exactly where that is, is it at the southern end of that project around Corindi?

Mr IAN COHEN: As I understand it, yes. In relation to the same area, I understand that the RTA has used model vegetation data of forest ecosystems for the Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing area that is over 10 years when very recent mapping or best available data is available with Coffs Harbour City Council. Do you have any information on that?

Mr HIGGINS: I do not have any information here but I can take that on notice.

Mr IAN COHEN: Why has the RTA failed to meet the New South Wales Government guidelines for biodiversity survey in the preparation of ecological studies for the Woolgoolga to Wells Crossing upgrade?

Mr HIGGINS: I believe we have met them but I will need to take that on notice.

Mr HANNON: Is there a source document for that statement that we have not complied with the guidelines?

Mr IAN COHEN: I could possibly get you a source document. This is the information that has been given to me.

Mr HANNON: Somebody has suggested that we have not.

Mr IAN COHEN: That is right, yes, members of the community who have been active in the campaign.

Mr HANNON: And you can get us a document to tell us what we are addressing?

Mr IAN COHEN: I could do that.

Mr HANNON: It is simpler for us to address the issue if we know exactly what the issue is.

Mr IAN COHEN: Sure, I will do that. I am not sure who would be the person to ask, but would you be the project manager for the Bonville deviation, Mr Higgins?
~break/Sears

Mr HIGGINS: Yes, I have a number of project managers.

Mr IAN COHEN: I have received communications from groups, including Friends of Pine Creek and the Bellingen Environment Centre, which indicate there has been quite significant discussion on the Pine Creek area—this is a positive for you, I do not know what has got into me—about the significant realignment of the southern section near the overhead bridge road, to relocate the Mailman's Track interchange. There have been quite a number of variations and agreements regarding those sections of the Bongil Bongil National Park. People believe that there could be a benchmark for future negotiations between the RTA and local groups. I see that as a very positive step in that southern section of what I call the Pine Creek area, which is an environmentally sensitive area.

Does this set a benchmark in dealing with these issues? Are we going to see similar communications concerning the areas further north where there is a great deal of concern on the coastal emu north of Grafton, in the Iluka to Grafton section. Will there be similar communication on environmentally sensitive issues as we have witnessed with the area to the south of Coffs Harbour?

Mr HIGGINS: When we came up with the original project we did not have all the information to hand.

Mr IAN COHEN: For the original project with the Pine Creek area?

Mr HIGGINS: With the alignment. From then we entered into arrangements to do further research, on koalas. We did a lot of work on koala tracking and got a better handle on it. Through discussions, and through the group that was set up there, we identified that we needed to adjust or modify the alignment to lessen the impact. What you see is the result: It came up with some very worthy ideas. We had to go through a modification process. On other sections of the highway we are doing a lot more work upfront than we have ever done before, such as on the Bonville project. We are trying to understand the risks that we all face, not only environmental but also social as well as engineering risks in building the projects.

If people come up with an idea, we do not dismiss it we look at it. Coffs Harbour was an example. We have not focused on the coastal route only; we have explored a whole range of routes that were raised by sections of the community. It is part of a process that we follow. If people raise an idea we do not dismiss it outright, we look at it.

Mr IAN COHEN: I appreciate that. I raised that matter for comparison with the area further north that potentially bypasses Grafton. There is real concern about another threatened species. There appears to be adequate solutions from the conservationists' perspectives, will that receive diligent attention similar to what you have achieved at the Pine Creek area?

Mr HIGGINS: I believe so. We have not made any decision about the route location for Grafton. It is very difficult, because of the environmental issues and also the social impacts and engineering risks of going along a river. We have some way to go in trying to find a route for the Grafton section.

Mr IAN COHEN: Referring to the impacts that you have mentioned, this goes back to the Woodburn to Ballina section. Where is communication up to with local farmers? I have received a letter addressed to the Chair of this Committee from Mr Mark Byrne. He quite clearly contradicts assertions of suitable high ground on the route through his property. Have you revisited that area, which is in the Broadwater area? There are real concerns from local farmers, who have been there for generations, that your assessments are incorrect, because these are extremely flood-prone areas.

Mr HIGGINS: I do not know. Did they send a letter to us at the close of comments?

Mr IAN COHEN: I do not know. I am presuming you are well aware of this.

Mr HANNON: Can I see the letter?

Mr IAN COHEN: Yes, it is a handwritten letter from Mr Mark Byrne, who is part of a family of farmers in the area.

CHAIR: Order! I presume the signatory to that letter is happy for it to go before the witness?

Mr IAN COHEN: I am sorry, I will take it back. I presumed that it has been distributed.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You have put his name onto the transcript.

Mr HANNON: Would you put that letter on the web?

CHAIR: I have not seen it. I am not quite sure what is in the letter.

Mr IAN COHEN: My apologies. I will return to that later.

Mr WATTERS: We can check whether we have received a letter from Mr Byrne separately.

CHAIR: Yes, thank you. The Committee Secretariat will check whether we have a copy also. We will return to that later.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I refer to the transcript of 21 November at Coffs Harbour. On page 11 Mr Andrew Fraser, who gave evidence that morning, talking about the proposal of the internal bypass, said:

The proposals put forward for the internal bypass for Coffs Harbour are short sighted and will have a severe economic effect on the community ...

On page 12 he said:

We need an upgrade now and we need a true bypass.

On page 21 the local Federal member, Mr Hartsuyker, said:

I think it is important to start work on this road just as quickly as possible.

That was referring to the internal bypass. Would you care to comment on that? When you have a situation like this in a local community with civic leaders, and both State and Federal politicians, making statements which on the one hand express a point of view of dealing with an internal bypass and on the other hand putting it slightly differently, referring to the need for other route options elsewhere, that creates tensions inside the community, and creates real challenges for the RTA. Would you comment on the general issue of conflicting positions inside the community that creates debate?

Would you comment on how that creates matters for the RTA to deal with in its consultation with the community?

Mr HIGGINS: While we needed to understand what the debate is in the community, we have a role in trying to identify a highway route that will meet the immediate needs as well as the long-term needs and that is why we undertake investigations. Earlier we talked about Coffs Harbour. We went to the Department of Planning and the Coffs Harbour City Council and they asked us to review this. We worked it through as a steering group, albeit things changed halfway through. We have tried to meet the short-term needs by going through a rigorous process. We looked at all factors: the social and environmental issues that we faced, as well as the functional role of the highway.

We must remember that the functional role of the highway is to serve not only interstate traffic but also service their needs, because we know that we are under pressure from the northern beach suburbs. When they released the embargo for the sewerage and the development, there was pressure from the development on the northern beaches. There have been discussions about that. Earlier we had discussions about the intersections and speed limits. We understand the immediate need to solve the issue of upgrading the highway from Sapphire north, and the traffic volumes are increasing to the stage we will have to duplicate. There is an immediate need to upgrade that highway to the north. It is about investment decisions we have to make. We have been able to take that into account and also look at the long-term vision in trying to frame it together so that at the end of the day when we put up our recommendation to the Government it will be about getting a wise investment: getting the best investment for the available dollars. That is the process we go through.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Referring to the proposition put forward and argued by Mr Fraser for the far western route, which is a proposition the RTA had set aside some years ago, are you aware that the Commonwealth Government has come forward to the New South Wales Government and offered any funding whatsoever in regard to the development of a far western route as an alternative to the proposition currently pursued by the RTA?

Mr HIGGINS: I am not aware.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr Bushby, you referred at the outset to the evidence about reduction fatalities on a year-by-year basis, from 2000 to 2005. I know we have been given general information about the overall increase in traffic over a set period in the reduction of fatalities that coincide with that because of road improvements. Can you supplement that information by giving the increase in traffic volumes year-by-year from 2000 to 2005? I am happy for you to take that question on notice.

Mr BUSHBY: I will take that question on notice and make sure the information we provide is complete.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Thank you. Referring to the far western route, you said earlier that it was too expensive for the volume of traffic it would carry. Mr Higgins said that was in part due to the ever-increasing local traffic volumes between the northern beach suburbs of Coffs Harbour and Coffs itself and that that would continue to grow. Do you have a view on whether going so far from the coast would mean that a lot of tourist traffic and through traffic would still deviate into Coffs Harbour to visit the amenities such as hotels or shopping, et cetera?

Mr BUSHBY: That is an interesting question. It depends on whom you talk to in the community; some see it as a benefit but businesses that rely on highway trade have a different view. In essence there are a number of major hotel chains and motel chains in the area.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: More motels than you can poke a stick at!

Mr BUSHBY: Yes. Currently a lot of highway traffic uses the facilities in Coffs Harbour. The further you move the highway around will mean that people have to come further to come into Coffs and go out again. If you move it further away there are issues about the impact on businesses. You also need to understand that Coffs Harbour is a major freight logistics area in terms of the movement of freight. That issue has been raised with us about having good, ready access from a highway into those areas. It is like a drop-off point.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Just south of the central business district there is a huge industrial area.

Mr BUSHBY: That is right. You need to get the balance right, it is about getting the balance right. Other parts up and down the highway when we actually locate, for example Kempsey, we are looking at a bypass. There is a major industrial area to the south of Kempsey. In discussion with council we talked about locating the interchange, where the take-off point for the bypass is.

~break/Robbins

One of the things we are facing all the time is: "Can you move it as close as you can to the business area so it is an easy point to get off?" The interchange acts as a gateway statement to that particular area. So there is a bit of balance in this whole thing: on the one hand, people say one thing; and, on the other hand, we are hearing other things.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Can you give details of the work that has been done recently on the Pacific Highway at Bonville? I know that there have been some changes in the last little while.

Mr BUSHBY: I am probably in the best position to address the recent safety works because they were done through the safety program. In about September last year there were some concerns about safety and some of the crashes that had occurred on the Pacific Highway in the Bonville area. At the time there was an announcement that initial works would be done. Those initial works included additional speed signage, overhead signs et cetera. They included improved line marking and signposting in the section through Pine Creek and the Bonville township. There was also some concern about crashes occurring in the wet. Some resurfacing was done to try to improve the skid resistance in that area to try to reduce the incidence of crashes.

Major changes that were made in September last year involved reductions in speed limits. Through the township the speed limit had been 80 kilometres an hour and it was dropped to 60 kilometres an hour in recognition of the crash history in that area. The approaches to the town, both the north and the south, had been at 90 kilometres an hour. There was a change to that speed limit to bring them back to 80 kilometres an hour. When those initial works was being done there was also an announcement that two speed cameras would be put in place—one in the township itself and one at the southern end near the Pine Creek area. The undertaking was that those speed cameras would be in place and working by Christmas 2005. My understanding is that that deadline was achieved and the speed cameras were enforcing those new speed limits prior to the holiday period over Christmas and New Year. So that was achieved to try to support the safety outcomes on this section.

There is currently work under way at the moment to enhance the work that was done in that initial phase. There was a lot of concern about head-on accidents in the Pine Creek area and there had been calls for a central median to try to reduce the likelihood of head-on crashes occurring. As a result the work that is being undertaken at the moment is near the area where the speed camera has been located on the southern approach to Bonville. Some widening is being done to facilitate being able to put in a central median through those curves that were the area of concern. My understanding is that work is under construction at the moment. There has been clearing on one side and some earthworks undertaken on that side to build up a wider pavement so that the centre line can be moved across and a wire rope median placed through the centre of those curves.

It is important to recognise that the work that is being done is not just going to be useful until the bypass is done. A very large proportion of the section of road that we are talking about will become part of the local road network after the bypass is in place. So the safety benefits that are being put in place now will roll over into the local road network after the bypass is completed. Obviously during the construction period there will be safety benefits for all the traffic that is using the Pacific Highway going north and south.

Other work that has been done as part of the current package includes improvements to the transitions at each end of the section. Both to the north and to the south of this single carriageway area through Bonville there are changes from four-lane dual carriageways into the two-lane section. One of

the concerns that has been expressed in evidence before this Committee is about the change from a high-grade four-lane road to a two-lane road and the concerns associated with that. Part of what we have tried to do is improve the delineation and the certainty in drivers' minds of what is happening when they are changing from four lanes to two lanes. That has been improved by reconfiguring the merge and new line marking et cetera to make it much clearer to the travelling motorists that they are going through a transition from a four-lane dual carriageway to a single carriageway.

The other area of improvement that is being undertaken is some shoulder improvements in clear zones. Through this area the single carriageway is fairly narrow. There has been concern about having solid objects fairly close to the carriageway in some areas and the potential hazard that could cause for errant vehicles that may leave the roadway. To try to address that concern and improve safety in certain areas there has been some work to widen and seal shoulders and to try to improve the clear zones by removing some trees and other obstacles that may cause errant vehicles to crash and improve the outcome in case a crash occurs so that there is a little bit more leeway. The work that is being undertaken at the moment is due for completion by the end of June this year and my understanding is that it is on target to meet that time frame.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: When will the contract for the Bonville deviation be awarded?

Mr HANNON: We currently expect that to be awarded in May this year. Tenders have closed, they are being reviewed and hopefully it will be in May.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: How long do you think it will take to finish?

Mr HANNON: I think our estimate is that the construction work should start later this year and I would expect it to take approximately two years to construct.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: I am interested in the issue of heavy vehicles. I have a couple of questions about that—perhaps you will need to take some of them on notice. Can you tell us about the enforcement of the rules in relation to heavy vehicles? I am also interested in the issue of crash rates for B-doubles compared with other trucks.

Mr BUSHBY: Again, I think it is probably appropriate that I try to address those questions. In terms of enforcement on the Pacific Highway, we have, as we discussed earlier, quite a large freight component to the usage of the Pacific Highway. What we are trying to do in administering the network and the use of the network, especially by heavy vehicles, is to try to get compliance with the road rules. The bottom line is that if heavy vehicles using the road network are meeting their obligations in relation to meeting the rules of the road then we are getting compliance and we have fewer issues relating to inappropriate behaviour. A lot of what we try to do is deter drivers and operators from going outside those road rules.

Last week we talked at the estimates committee hearing about the compliance and enforcement legislation, and I gave some information in relation to that. That is equally relevant on the Pacific Highway, where the compliance and enforcement legislation is about trying to improve the behaviour of drivers. In terms of the enforcement strategy in New South Wales for heavy vehicles, we have a range of things that we have put in place to try to encourage that compliance and, where compliance is not in place, to enforce the rules. There are things like heavy vehicle checking stations. We have eight of those heavy vehicle checking stations around the State. Importantly, there are three that are relevant to the corridor that we are talking about here. While it is not technically part of the Pacific Highway between Hexham and the Queensland border, the Mount White checking station on the F3 is obviously critical in monitoring the traffic that is going to be using the Pacific Highway. We have also got the Twelve Mile Creek checking station and the checking station at Chinderah.

Those checking stations are interested in looking at the behaviour and the operation of heavy vehicles in the use of the road network. They are looking at things like enforcing the driving hours regulations to try to ensure that we do not have fatigue problems with truck drivers who are driving unreasonable hours and working beyond what is allowed in the regulations. We are obviously looking for overloading. I talked last week about the consumption of road pavements and the use of assets. So we are looking for over-mass vehicles that are going to cause damage to the road network. We are

looking for speeding issues. Obviously there is an issue there. When heavy vehicles are speeding they are more difficult to control and are likely to have worse outcomes when there is a crash, given the size of the vehicle. If they are going fast the momentum is greater.

We are looking for registration irregularities where there are problems with vehicles not being registered or illegal activities, such as inappropriate number plates, et cetera. We are looking for defects in heavy vehicles. We are looking for compliance with permits. Load restraint is a considerable issue that is looked at in vehicles that come in for checking at the checking stations. It is a requirement that any heavy vehicles over eight tonnes should enter the checking station when the checking station is open. That applies at Mount White, Twelve Mile Creek and Chinderah. We look at those vehicles. Where we have a screening lane—I think I may have mentioned this last week as well—the vehicle is screened, weighed in motion and checked for its registration status. We also check whether it is a vehicle of interest in terms of its previous compliance history and whether it is somebody who is known to be of concern.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Perhaps you might take on notice the question about specific statistics in relation to B-doubles compared with other trucks.

Mr BUSHBY: I would be happy to do that for you.

CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Hannon, do you have prepared responses to the indicative questions that the Committee forwarded to the RTA?

Mr HANNON: Not at this stage, but we address many of those in our opening comments. They are the indicative questions you gave us?

CHAIR: Yes. I will formally put them on notice so that we can get specific answers to them. They are very important questions. I have a question about the Summerland Way suggested option. Can you update the Committee on what sort of analysis has been done on the option that has been put forward by community members and to this Committee? Who conducted the analysis and how much money has been spent on such analysis?

Mr HANNON: I might ask Mr Higgins to give you the details. At this stage the report is not complete and we will submit it to the Minister when it is complete. Mr Higgins will outline the work that has been done.

Mr HIGGINS: In terms of the work that has been done, there were two proposals for that route via Summerland Way: one was put up by Don Page and another one was put up by the CARS group. What we have done is we have taken the lines that they put forward and modified those lines to come up with a more feasible engineering route.
~break/pope

From there we have alignments, both horizontal and vertical, from which we can work out the size of cuts, fills, where tunnels are required, or large cuts, and the nature over soft soils from which we can do estimates behind all those. At the same time we have also done a traffic assessment. We have looked at what would happen if it were via that way compared to the Pacific Highway and what the implications are. We have also done work to understand what would be the social issues with routes via that way and we have compared that to the Pacific Highway. We have addressed the agricultural issues and we have done some preliminary environmental work so that we understand what are the sensitivities compared to the Pacific Highway. We will be putting in a report that is being prepared that will bring all that together.

CHAIR: When is it expected that that report will be completed?

Mr HIGGINS: At the end of March.

CHAIR: At the end of this month?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes.

CHAIR: Would you characterise your analysis of that option as being a very serious investigation of those proposals?

Mr HIGGINS: Our previous Minister asked us to undertake a preliminary assessment. That is not to the same level as we are doing on the Pacific Highway. We are looking at those key issues on a broad strategic level, particularly in relation to traffic and the cost of that work. The other works we are doing will enable us to have a broad strategic view of a possible route via Summerland Way.

CHAIR: Every time this Committee meets there is different Minister for Roads. Have there been any further instructions from the new Minister in relation to the Summerland option?

Mr HIGGINS: We will be able to submit a report to the Minister, as I said, by the end of March. He is aware of it.

CHAIR: He is aware that it is coming?

Mr HIGGINS: Right.

CHAIR: He has not given you any further instructions compared to the previous Minister?

Mr HIGGINS: No. We are working on this preliminary assessment.

CHAIR: I refer to the Bonville matter and to the tender—issues that have been raised by a number of members. Can you advise why it seems to have taken so long to get to this point where tenders will be awarded in May? I think there was a three-month period within which tenders had to be submitted. It took six months to decide on a tender. Can the RTA explain why it seems to have taken so long for that process to get to this point?

Mr HANNON: The Bonville contract is similar to numerous other projects on the North Coast. It is a design, construct and maintain [DCM] contract. So the consortia submit a proposal that requires a comprehensive review of the proposed design that they have. It is not just a simple, what we would call conventional contract, in that we have done the design in advance. The contractor simply has to look at the design that has been completed and the schedule of rates, which indicate the amount work that needs to be done, and simply price the contract. What the contractor has to do in the case of a DCM is work off a concept that has been put forward so as to design the project. He then obviously has to price it and put a maintenance regime in place.

When tenders come in we then have to go through a comprehensive assessment of the design and maintenance regime, any environmental considerations, and the like. So it is not just simply looking at a price; it is looking at the design that has been submitted. On numerous occasions they put in design alternatives because the whole concept of a design, construct and maintain contract is that contractors do not come up with identical designs. There are different approaches and different alternatives. Those alternatives and options need to be considered to ensure we get the best environmental result for the project. Since they are not the same a review is required by various experts. We have the environmental people, the engineering people and the geotechnical people looking at it, so it is a comprehensive assessment. Traditionally, it takes about six months to do that review. In this case, if we let the contract in May, and that is our expectation, it will be shorter than usual.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Earlier today you spoke about the difficulties in establishing local traffic usage of these upgrades. I was surprised to hear you say that, considering that in the publication "Wells Crossing to Iluka Road—Upgrading the Pacific Highway Route Options, Development Report, October 2005" we have a repeat of one paragraph three times for the three different options—purple, green and red. It states:

Traffic making local trips within the study area would achieve little benefit in terms of travel time or cost savings compared to continuing to use the existing highway. It is therefore expected that only through traffic would utilise the Purple B option. This would mean that approximately 65 to 70 per cent of total traffic in the corridor and 50 per cent of heavy vehicles would continue to use the Pacific Highway in preference to the Purple B option.

That statement, which is made on page 110, is repeated on page 122 for the green option and at page 133 for the red option. That same paragraph is repeated. Do you stand by those figures, considering the doubt that you threw up earlier?

Mr HIGGINS: Referring to the doubt, those figures are based on some original destination surveys that we did. I believe you asked me another question about the total highway. I need to go back to the transcript. One of the difficulties we face, say, for example, on the Wells Crossing to Harwood job, is that if you do a major deviation away from the existing highway it attracts only through traffic. This is one of the issues that we are considering as part of the route selection process for the Wells Crossing to Harwood section. It is one of those issues that we are considering.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Staying with that theme, considering the fact that the RTA has stated, "The Pacific Highway upgrade has a principal objective, a target to reduce all crash numbers by half", where does that leave the 65 per cent to 70 per cent of users of the Pacific Highway who have to stay with the Pacific Highway, when the RTA's objective is to make the highway safer and to reduce crash numbers by half? Considering those 65 per cent to 70 per cent are not going to get any benefit—they are still going to be on the dangerous Pacific Highway—how do you weigh that up?

Mr HIGGINS: It is one of many factors that are being considered. I keep coming back to the fact that we have not made any decision on the Wells Crossing to Harwood section. That is an important issue that will be considered, just like the environmental issues. Equally, we have the difficult aspect of the agricultural interests if we follow the existing highway, as well as the flooding risks that go with it. You might also find that the other issue we have is the costs. I believe we put some costs up as a result of the value management workshop that was held recently. It referred to the fact that, if we follow the existing highway, it is about \$1.5 billion. If we follow the other routes it is about \$800 million to \$900 million. So we have some very difficult issues to consider in coming up with the preferred route. I am trying to outline the fact that there are many issues to consider. The points you have raised are part of those.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I suppose we just need to add there is an upgrade on the existing area, the Orange route. Your figures suggest that there would be a 51 per cent reduction in accidents compared to 19 per cent on the red option. Again, those are the issues that you are taking into account?

Mr HIGGINS: That is right.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I refer to the fact that you have not yet made a decision. I was, therefore, interested in an article in the *Daily Examiner* of 13 March 2006—the Monday after you had three days of workshops. A media release was issued that refers to a "modified eastern route made from combining the green and red options will be investigated by the RTA". I think your people would acknowledge it would have been quite stressful for locals, considering they had just gone through three days of workshops, and they would have thought it had been considered, as you have just said it is. Then all of a sudden they get a media release that states a decision has been made. The article on 13 March 2006 then states:

An RTA representative, Ms Loges, said to a local, "This is a cock up."

Could you comment on that? It seems to me to be quite extraordinary that a media release was issued that made such a statement when you are still saying, as of 21 March, that a decision has not been made, even though these workshops have been held. Has a decision been made, or has a decision not been made?

Mr HIGGINS: No decision has been made. I think you will find in the media release a statement to the effect that no decision was made. It is unfortunate that one of my project managers did say that. What happened, just to fill in the picture—

CHAIR: What was unfortunate: the fact that she said it or that the statement was made?

Mr HIGGINS: No it was unfortunate she said it to a property owner. I am just saying that it was unfortunate.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: It is unfortunate that she said it was a cock up?

Mr HIGGINS: Yes, it is unfortunate.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Let us forget about the language. Have you made a decision?

Mr HIGGINS: No. What happened is that on that afternoon I then rang the particular journalist involved and I was on the phone for half an hour clarifying the situation. It is also unfortunate that he omitted to report any of the discussions that we had. It was between 4.00 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. on the afternoon before that.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Would you now like to put on the record how such a media release was written which quite specifically comes down with an eastern option? How does such a media release get written?

Mr HIGGINS: I will need to take that question on notice.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Considering that you said you spoke to the journalist, it is extraordinary that you cannot tell us now.

Mr HANNON: Have you got a copy of the media release that they are talking about?

Ms LEE RHIANNON: I have not got the media release; I have the article from the front page and the media release is in a font of about six-point, which I cannot read.

Mr HIGGINS: It had a note in there which states that no decision had been made.

Mr HANNON: The media release on the front page of this article cannot be read. I think we need to look at the media release which Mr Higgins tells me states no decision has been made.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: Can you provide us with a copy of that media release?

Mr HANNON: Yes, we will provide a copy.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: There are some questions that we may have to put on notice. There is one question I want to ask because there has been some discussion about it when the Committee has been travelling. Can you tell us who commissioned the consultancy firm, ARUP, to undertake a peer review of consultation on the Coffs Harbour highway upgrade planning strategy? What was the outcome of the peer review?

Mr HIGGINS: The commissioning of the peer review was undertaken by Coffs Harbour City Council. We were informed after the event it was undertaking that review. The steering group, which it then formed part of, decided to suspend work on the southern section of the Coffs Harbour bypass until such time as the findings from the peer review were considered by council. I think I talked about that earlier.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Yes.

Mr HIGGINS: Referring to the outcomes, a report is listed on council's web site. Council did consider it on 26 February 2002. Reading from that document, it states:

ARUP's review of the Working Papers concludes that, "the Inner Corridor is the preferred of the options for a bypass of Coffs Harbour and that the next stage of the strategy will examine in detail the potential impacts associated with the development of an Inner Corridor as a new highway route and the upgrading of the existing highway.

ARUP also acknowledges that there would be benefit from an improved, more transparent decision making process during future stages of the Strategy, and that a more balanced Triple Bottom Line approach should be adopted for future decision making.

Referring to that triple bottom line, that relates to our value management workshops. We changed the approach where we moved into those particular streams of functional, social and environmental to better reflect what the council was getting at. So we sort of have responded.

~Break/Norris

They have also asked, as part of that, that we improve other aspects of our mapping process to make them more presentable and more easily understood by the community. They asked that the maps include information on flora and fauna, heritage, waterways, visual/landscape, soil, bushfire hazard, and the built environment. You will see some of the outcomes in those maps before the Committee and other maps included with our documents. They asked for better communication to CFGs, in terms of delivery of the strategy, open sessions to assist stakeholders, and those sorts of things. It is all contained in a report. The Committee probably needs to understand that council did not accept the report; it just acknowledged receipt of it.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: Before we finish, I would congratulate you on the opening of the Cooperook bypass. I think it opens to traffic today. It is worth noting that the upgrade of the Pacific Highway in that particular area, which I am familiar with, goes on, and it is making a huge difference.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I have a few other questions but, given the time, I would like to put those questions on notice and ask you to give a written response to them. The first thing is that I was interested in getting information about the process of consultation with local communities for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga project. I acknowledge that in your introductory statement you spoke about improvements in road safety since the start of the \$35 million safety works project, but I wondered if you could quantify that a little bit more for us, in writing.

The other question I want to place on notice derives partly from this inquiry but partly because I drive past them all the time but I do not quite know how they work. I refer to safety cameras such as the ones you have on the Pacific Highway. Could you give us an explanation of how the SafeTCam systems work? We see them everywhere, but I think it would be handy for us, in our deliberations, to know how they operate.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: That is a bit of a worry. Do you want to bypass them or something?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: No. They are for trucks. These cameras are on the gantries across the highway. I do not quite know how they work. Those are the only questions I want to put on notice.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: I have a question that I would like to put on notice. Could I obtain, please, some preliminary assessment by the Roads and Traffic Authority of the Road Transport (General) Act, and how it is going with respect to its implementation?

CHAIR: Mr Hannon, firstly, in relation to the questions on notice asked today, and some further questions on notice that other members of the Committee, including myself, have—and those will be formalised at a deliberative meeting later today and finalised on Monday of next week, including the indicative questions that we put to you—could you come back to us with your responses to those within 14 days, that is, by 10 April?

Secondly, when the report on the Summerland Way investigation is completed, would it be possible to send a copy of that to the Committee?

Mr HANNON: We will have to submit that to the Minister, as requested. Then we would have to take a lead from what the Minister says.

CHAIR: Would you mind asking the Minister if you can send a copy of that to the Committee?

Mr HANNON: We will certainly pass that on, yes.

CHAIR: That would be appreciated. I would like to thank all of you for being here to assist us once again, and we look forward to receiving further answers.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

PHILIP GLENCOE LAIRD, Associate Professor and Research Fellow, University of Wollongong, and

ANDREW THOMAS HONAN, Chairman, Government Relations Subcommittee, Railway Technical Society of Australasia, 11 National Circuit, Barton, sworn and examined:

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

Dr LAIRD: I am.

Mr HONAN: 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. Dr Laird, I understand you wish to make an opening statement. If so, you may proceed to provide that to the Committee.

Dr LAIRD: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to appear today. My interest in the Pacific Highway is an academic one and as one who drives it with my family. Over the last 10 years much of the Pacific Highway has been improved; however, the road improvements have been offset by a marked increase in heavy traffic on the highway.

One major upgrade was the opening of the Yelgun-Chinderah bypass in August 2002. In its wisdom, in the same month the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] said that B-doubles could now access the entire length of the highway—and, I would add, they said, "It won't make much difference." But we all know that it made a huge difference. Not only did B-doubles started using it but more semitrailers came off the New England Highway onto the Pacific Highway, and I suspect some came off rail as well. The bottom line is that there was an increase in long-distance heavy truck numbers. It is a classic example of induced traffic—but in this case induced heavy traffic.

In addition, the number of B-doubles in Australia has grown over threefold since 1997. This is from recent information from the National Transport Commission [NTC] and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In 1997 there were about 2,600 B-doubles; there are now over three times as many.

Further factors ramping up the heavy truck numbers on the Pacific Highway include the poor, substandard condition of the Sydney-Brisbane railway and ongoing low levels of road cost recovery from the heavier long-distance trucks. As noted last year by the NTC in its third heavy vehicle road pricing determination, B-doubles, as from the second determination, which applies now, are subsidised by \$8,400 per nine-axle B-double. Multiply that by the 8,500 B-doubles on the road, and very roughly you have \$70 million a year of subsidies going to this class of vehicle. It was supposed to be fixed by the NTC's third determination, but due to recent decisions by the New South Wales Minister for Transport and other transport Ministers around Australia this high level of subsidy will increase, at least until the next determination.

With regard to the safety aspect, the Committee's attention is drawn to the fact that the Pacific Highway has a bad fatal crash record. As per section 3 of my main submission, over a 10-year period to 2003, using data kindly provided by the RTA, on all sections of the highway articulated trucks are involved in 30 per cent of the fatalities. If you move away from the end urban portion, it is even higher, at 36 per cent.

I have to agree with former Federal member of Parliament Mr Colin Hollis when he was Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Transport. In 1999 he reflected on the need to address rail when we look at upgrading the Pacific Highway. He said:

The current upgrading of the Pacific Highway to a near four-lane standard ... may prove to be in vain if all it achieves is taking more and more freight off the rail and putting it onto B-doubles [that is, B-doubles on the Pacific Highway].

He also observed that 41 per cent of this track, being a string of branch lines, fails to meet the most basic fast freight train standards. The curves are less than 800 metres in radius, which slows trains down to below 80 kilometres an hour. From north of Maitland it is a string of branch lines up to Kyogle, and then it had an add-on in the 1930s to south Brisbane.

The good news is that some of it will be fixed by the Federal Australian Rail Track Corporation [ARTC]. However, it has to use not only AusLink funds to do the upgrade but loan funds as well. It will reduce the current freight train transit time from Sydney to Brisbane from over 19 hours to, hopefully, 15½ hours. But we need more than patch-up and catch-up on this line to make it a true competitor with B-doubles on a dual carriageway, which we may well have in 10 years time. We need track straightening. If this is to be done from Fassifern to the Queensland border, the point-to-point distance could be reduced by 120 kilometres.

~break/doyle

Why so much? Because the present routes are circuitous from Maitland; there is a string of branch lines that wind everywhere.

It should be recognised that track upgrades require an increase in the capacity of intermodal freight terminals. These are generally in cities, but sometimes they are in rural areas; for example, Blayney, Parkes and Mildura. Intermodal freight is transferred between road for local pick up and delivery and then rail for the line pull. It is of concern that the current ARTC program does not include one kilometre of rail deviation.

What can we do in the future? At the very least, rather than going through the agony of all the land acquisition and environmental impact assessments for improving the rail in five to ten years—as surely will be needed to cater for the increasing traffic volumes when we are talking of twice the freight task in the next 20 years, in a world in which cheap oil has gone forever and where diesel and electric trains are three times more energy efficient than heavy trucks on highways—why not have shared corridors? If we are upgrading the Pacific Highway, is it near the existing North Coast line on a section that needs straightening? If so, package the two. There are plenty of precedents for this. They are mostly to be found in Queensland. Rocklands to Rockhampton is one and a future corridor goes from Toowoomba to the west. The most recent example is the Tugun bypass, which is on the Queensland-New South Wales border. Even the RTA came to the party and the result is a shared corridor. It is there for the Tugun bypass or the Pacific Highway in the immediate future, and in the longer term for an extension of the Gold Coast railway to Coolangatta airport.

What happens in New South Wales? One recent example of the sharing option being overlooked is the upgrading of the Pacific Highway between Kempsey and Eungai. Public input was requested by the RTA and/or its consultants in late 2003. We sent off a submission and got the barest of acknowledgements. A year later we tried to follow it up. Has it been included in the representations report? We cannot find out, so we spoke to the project manager. The net impression is that it was treated very lightly. Here was a new idea, but we were assured that unless they had a formal agreement between the chief executive of the RTA and rail authorities it would just not happen.

A further example is the proposed upgrade of the Pacific Highway between Moorland and Herons Creek. The related environmental impact statement [EIS] went on public exhibition until 5 August 2005 and failed to mention the prospect of shared corridors even though in the northern part of that RTA proposal it would have worked in very well. This is despite the fact that the Federal Government's new AusLink program, which provides much of the money, states that this program is about integrated transport. What do we have? AusLink is out and the white paper was out in 2004, yet a year later the RTA and its consultants have not bought into integrated transport, at least for the Pacific Highway and the railway.

In summary, the Committee has been asked to look at the role of rail, particularly for freight. As we upgrade the Pacific Highway, do we really want all the freight off that poor old railway and that string of branch lines dumped onto the Pacific Highway? As a family man who drives that highway from time to time, I suggest that we do not. I am sure the locals of Grafton, Coffs Harbour and everywhere else do not want it either. Can we please look at the concept of shared corridors? I would be very happy to take any questions on notice.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Honan, do you have a statement?

Mr HONAN: I would like to follow on from the comments Dr Laird has made, and specifically in relation to ecologically sustainable development. The Railway Technical Society of Australasia's [RTSA] motivation in making a submission to the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] on its environmental impact statement [EIS] was to promote, or put into practice, the Government's policy of integrated transport. The requirement of an EIS as laid down by the Federal Government legislation, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, as well as the New South Wales Government legislation, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, direct the proponents to address a number of items. In part, these are: ecologically sustainable development to consider the needs and impacts of existing and potential land use and development patterns; intergenerational equity, namely, that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations; and, in terms of the strategic issues, the relationship of the proposal to relevant state and regional planning strategies and objectives and consideration of alternatives, including corridor and alignment options. The RTSA notes and is supportive of the Federal Government's AusLink plans and the subsequent agreements with the States. At a strategic level, the AusLink plan guides the planning, development and funding of land transport—both rail and road corridors. The Sydney-Brisbane corridor is included in that plan.

The RTSA also notes and supports the initial funding by the Federal Government of \$450 million in 2004 to the ARTC for rail work on the North Coast line. This initial allocation was earmarked for 14 rail deviations totalling 121 kilometres to ease curves on the line. The ARTC has ranked these 14 deviations plus others. Within the Moorland to Herons Creek route, Taree to Johns River is ranked number two in importance, Telegraph Point to Ross Glen is ranked number eight, and Johns River to Ross Glen is ranked number twenty-seven. Since May 2005, the ARTC has been concentrating on route extensions only. To quote: "Deviations were considered at length in the development of the strategy, but have not been included in the final ARTC strategy. The basis of this is that the strategy should be able to be readily delivered within five years, and preferably less. The nature of deviations requires significant land acquisition, environmental assessment and detailed engineering analysis."

Given the requirements of the EIS on the RTA, the transport corridor strategies of Federal and State Governments and the desire of ARTC for rail deviations, the RTSA believes there is merit in discussion and assessment of certain environmental and social benefits of a combined road-rail corridor within the current EIS study. This discussion and assessment would extend only to the marginal benefits and costs of associating a rail easement within a road corridor. It is the RTSA's belief that the environmental and social impacts of road infrastructure development are generally much more significant than those of rail infrastructure investment. This discussion and assessment would provide a better understanding of the economies of scope and the increasing value of the environmental and social performance of a combined road-rail corridor. Obviously, any final assessment, including an economic assessment, would be undertaken by the ARTC as a proponent for the rail development.

Specifically, the RTSA seeks a discussion and cost estimate of rail bulk earthworks, drainage, bridge works and other civil work up to the ballast level, but not including ballast, and communication trenching with the transport corridor and at the time of road construction. The basis of the cost should non-avoidable cost; that is, where shared costs such as overheads, contract administration and project management would occur irrespective of rail construction, these would be applied to the road infrastructure account. Any benefits or costs of the combined rail-road construction that were solely for the rail side would be applied to the rail account. Cost estimates would be of a preliminary nature. It also seeks a cost assessment of the marginal cost of acquiring land for combined rail-road and an

assessment of the social benefits to local and regional communities of eliminating road level crossings and other on-road and off-road conflicts with rail operations. In addition, it wants a discussion and initial environmental assessment of the costs, benefits and impacts of combining the northern railway line within the transport corridor, such as geotechnical and soil conditions, flora and fauna, habitat fragmentation and aquatic ecology. The impacts are due to the construction of the rail deviation and mitigation measures, such as revegetation of the old northern line.

In summary, RTSA is advocating that where there is a demonstrable alignment of both the rail and road corridors they should be considered, at least in the EIS stage, on a preliminary basis. We believe that that is part of the ecologically sustainable development approach and we would like to see that occur. It would be putting into practice the Government's policies on the environment and land transport. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Mr Honan, the whole idea behind John Anderson's vision for AusLink was integrated transport being delivered to the citizens of this country. Is it your belief that the RTA has not yet caught up with the fact that we are into a new era—or hopefully—of integrated planning? It appears to me to be commonsense that the options for improved rail services should be part of that preliminary assessment. Is there any evidence that the New South Wales Government has cottoned on to that yet?

Mr HONAN: It has at a policy level, certainly with the Environmental Protection and Assessment Act. The intention is there, but the issue is putting it into practice within the different levels of government and with the different State Governments. This committee and other forums like it have a unique opportunity to ask questions about ecologically sustainable development. We are talking about a four-lane or six-lane road in the Pacific Highway and a rail corridor easement of four or five metres. Surely in the concept stage we could look at the combined rail-road corridor from an environmental and social point of view.

As I said, having an integrated approach in which we do not have conflicts with road level crossings or habitat fragmentation and in doing bulk earthworks for a road system, it would be a very marginal cost to include a rail system. I am sure it would benefit the environment. It would also benefit transport in general. We talked about 13 per cent of the freight between Sydney and Brisbane going by rail. We need to increase that mode share significantly as the transport tasks between the capital cities doubles within the next 10 or 15 years. In summary, it is about putting this into practice. The leadership of these sorts of committees will prompt the RTA and the ARTC to work together.
~cont/EA

CHAIR: You mentioned some discussions in relation to the Kempsey to Ewingi section. Did you say you spoke to the project manager in relation to that part of the Pacific Highway upgrades, and you got the impression building in the option for improved freight onto rail on that section of the coast was not being seriously considered?

Dr LAIRD: Yes, I spoke with a project manager who had responsibility for Kempsey/Ewingi. He explained a fair way down a planning track already, and he said "If it came to a shared corridor I would need a formal agreement between my chief executive and the chief executive of a rail agency."

CHAIR: So it is not built into their thinking that they should do that at the outset?

Dr LAIRD: For this particular project manager it seemed way outside his thinking. It may have been a project manager for Kempsey/Eungai or Herons Creek, Moorland. It was that that prompted me to do two things: one, write a submission to Heron's Creek Moorland and, two, lodge a formal submission with the committee.

CHAIR: You mentioned the need for more intermodal freight terminals. Do you know where those concepts are up to across the State? You mentioned that Blayney, Parks and Mildura.

Dr LAIRD: Sydney has one facility at Chullora which is operated by a private rail company. There is another facility at Cooks River and then there are some very small ones in Sydney but for a growing city, Sydney is, say, far behind Toronto, Canada, which has less population. Fifteen years ago

they went to a green fields site on the north-west of town, and that terminal has been three times expanded since. In Sydney it tends to get bogged down with planning constraints and difficulties. To get one built at Minto has taken years; Enfield is another troubled spot. We have this incredible tension in society; on the one hand people vote with their feet to go to supermarkets and big stores to buy lots and lots of consumer goods and yet at the same time they don't want an upgraded highway or railway or an intermodal freight terminal or, indeed, a port expanded to bring these goods that as a population they love so much. It is a headache for planners.

But at the end of the day I think we are building bottlenecks in our intermodal terminals and ports. Another bottleneck is between Sydney and Brisbane. Firstly, from Sydney to Newcastle what have we got? We have a basic four-lane road, a bit of six lanes at one end, and on a Friday afternoon it is getting like a giant parking lot. You have got a nineteenth century railway, a double track, the most congested double track in Australia. Then going north we have got the Pacific Highway for which 10 years ago there was only one word for it "substandard". Next to it you have got the substandard string of branch lines that is an apology for a railway. So terminals, like a lot of our other infrastructure, really need addressing and at the end of the day if governments will not take the harder decisions that are sometimes needed to balance conflicting interests then we are going to get worse bottlenecks, the intermodal terminal being one.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You said that 41 per cent of the rail line between Sydney and the Queensland border does not meet basic freight train standards. Is that an appalling state of affairs?

Dr LAIRD: Yes. Let me qualify that, it is basic fast freight train standards. The average speed of that line at the moment is 50 kilometres an hour, half of which is due to inadequate numbers of crossing loops, which as Mr Honan said, has been addressed by the ARTC. Further delays result from substandard signalling from Casino to Acacia Ridge where the Brisbane terminal is. Would you believe those signals went in with manned signal boxes in 1930, when the standard gauge line was opened in Kyogle to Acacia Ridge. A few years ago they took out the men from the signals and they got the train drivers. On 6 November 1998 it went to air on the ABC's *7.30 Report* when it was then described as archaic but such is our State and Federal system of relations, is that it took years and years for the New South Wales Government to reach agreement with the Federal ARTC to handover its track for a 60-year lease. We are still to sign a contract, as I understand—we might have a preferred tender—for modern centralised traffic control signalling from Casino to Brisbane. That CTC was installed Maitland/Casino in 1980s using the Federal line.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Is it appalling?

Dr LAIRD: It is. Last year it was judged by the Prime Minister's infrastructure task force as wanting; it was judged as wanting by the Prime Minister's task force on rail revitalisation in 1999; by the House of Representative's Committee twice, looking at transport; and by the Productivity Commission in 1999. I can only agree.

Mr IAN COHEN: Did you say that B-doubles are subsidised by \$70 million? What figure did you give? Where did it come from? What is the criteria for your comments on the subsidisation of B-doubles on the Pacific Highway?

Dr LAIRD: It applies to B-doubles throughout Australia. The information on the subsidy I can give chapter and verse is the NTC's "Third Heavy Vehicle Road Pricing Determination Draft Regulatory Impact Statement", page 33. where it notes that B-doubles are subsidised, and the subsidy in the second determination for the annual charges amounted to 8,400 per nine axle-B-double. The number of 20,600 B-doubles in 1997 and this is NTC, the number of 8500 B-doubles as October 2004 is derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics data. Multiply the two numbers together and you get the \$70 million aggregate subsidy.

Mr IAN COHEN: When you assess the costs of B-doubles is that in terms of advantage gained, registration et cetera? Does that also include wear and tear costs on roads? Is that something that can be quantified?

Dr LAIRD: Yes, the annual registration charge for a B-double at very roughly about \$6,000 or \$7,000 a year is subsidised to that extent. I might add that in 1987 when New South Wales allowed

B-doubles on the roads they had to pay permit fees well in excess of \$11,000 a year. The cheap rate comes as a result of the National Road Transport Commission's first determination was applied. So on 1 July 1996 the annual charge for a B-double was more than halved in this State, and we are still picking up the difference.

Mr IAN COHEN: You said that articulated trucks involve some 30 per cent of fatalities. Are you talking specifically in relation to Pacific Highway incidents?

Dr LAIRD: Yes, those figures in the submission, and what I quoted, were specific to the Pacific Highway from Maitland to the Queensland border.

Mr IAN COHEN: What is the percentage of traffic that those trucks would account for?

Dr LAIRD: Defer to the RTA for advice on what percentage of heavy articulated trucks—let us separate them from rigid trucks which tend to do the more local work. If I had to guess I would say it would be less than 20 per cent.

Mr IAN COHEN: Do you share the RTA's optimism that a dual carriageway will resolve these problems?

Dr LAIRD: Not entirely. Two things will happen. In the short term when you get good four-lane road, bad two-lane road, good/bad it is a high accident scenario. For example, Goulburn/Yass on the Hume Highway was the terrible stretch in the late 1980s and early 1990s before it was upgraded. When you have the uniform four-lane highway with six or eight at each end then you get the situation where you will have the road freight industry saying "Come on, you've got this beaut road, let's run B-triples or road trains on it." That means if we left the present railway in its steam-age condition, in 10 years time there is no way single stack containers on trains going under 80 kilometres an hour can compete with semis, B-doubles, B-triples on a dual carriageway from Sydney to Brisbane, unless oil prices go up to \$10 a litre.

Mr IAN COHEN: Do you have a firm opinion on roll-on roll-off stock road to rail? How feasible is that in terms of distance transport?

Dr LAIRD: It has been used in the past—it was then called piggy-back. I think there is very good scope for a bit of purpose-designed containers or bodies that can go from one to the other. There is already a system called trailer-rail that was tried in this country but is used in North America. Yes, given the incentives, or the lack of subsidies for line-haul trucking, I think we would see a lot more of this innovation where we get the best of both modes working together.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: This Committee has heard that many motorways will not cater for local people. Do you have any comments about the potential to solve the problem of local rail commuter travel in regional and rural areas? Are any projects coming on stream?

Mr HONAN: I will make a short comment about that. We are seeking, with the upgrade of the performance of rail, to upgrade the total performance. I think there are economies of scope to do that. I think that specifically rail passenger transport struggles because of the economics of bus and air passengers. Local transport is very much given over to cars. From a regional point of view to reconnect communities, it is important for regional rail but in the sense unless the State Government takes a firm stand and upgrades those lines, it is problematic whether the economics are there to support regional rail from an economic point of view. It has to be done from a social or environmental point of view.

~break/Macdonald

We certainly believe if you do an integrated rail approach, it is a common purpose infrastructure, the rail infrastructure, and it can be used for passenger transport as well.

Dr LAIRD: It works brilliantly in Queensland, where they straightened out more than 200 kilometres of freight in the late 1980s and early 1990s for faster and heavier freight trains. Then they put higher speed passenger trains on top. It really gave a boost to regional communities such as Gympie, Maryborough and Bundaberg. It was so successful that the plane operator at Bundaberg,

after a couple of years, had to lower his fare from \$100 one way from Bundaberg to Brisbane to \$50, no-frills, just to keep his plane in the air, because people loved the high-speed tilt trains going on the partly upgraded tracks.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: This could be a big answer but I am just after some examples, if possible. Considering there is increasing acceptance of the peak oil phenomenon—that is, the era of travel and growth based on cheap oil is over—are you aware of any transport projects that have shifted from road to rail because of the peak oil phenomenon? I am interested in whether any governments are thinking that the era of motorways is coming to an end?

Dr LAIRD: This is a view very strongly held, at least as exposed by the Western Australian Minister for Transport and Planning, the Hon. Alannah MacTiernan. She said they are investing in this railway to Mandurah—south-west of Perth—because in the future oil is not going to be so cheap.

Ms LEE RHIANNON: She said that?

Dr LAIRD: Yes. She said it in Sydney at the AusRail conference last November. She said they were trying to future proof our cities by more investment in rail. She went further and said that if you live in a big city and you do not have a decent rail system, you do not have a decent city.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Dr Laird, in your opening statement you said in respect of the decision to allow B-doubles to access that northern section of the Pacific Highway at the time the announcement was made, the RTA said it would not make much difference. Have you any source for that assertion? Can you give us a direct quote from somebody or is that your interpretation?

Dr LAIRD: Yes. I believe I could provide to the Committee—my filing system willing—a copy of a letter to that effect from the RTA. I wrote before saying it is coming up, think twice about B-doubles, and I was blithely assured that they would not make much difference at all.

CHAIR: If you could check your filing system, and if it is possible to get back to us within the next week or so, that would be great.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: In terms of the proposition you outlined to us this morning, it seems to me it is quite a complex proposition which would link up the major population centres in Australia, at least on the east coast. Looking at New South Wales specifically and the aspect that relates to the straightening of the railway lines, have you done any costings about that? What would be the cost of doing the straightening of those railway lines in New South Wales?

Dr LAIRD: The Australian Rail Track Corporation did do costings for various deviations, some of which Mr Honan referred to, and I think they would be the most authoritative costings. They were done last year. There are others, some of which are on the public record and they are earlier, more crude, preliminary estimates for major deviations that are already on the public record as well. The bottom line is it will cost more than \$0.8 million per kilometre, which is the average cost of building the 1,420 kilometres from Alice Springs to Darwin.

The Hon. GREG DONNELLY: Have you any idea at all about what that might cost in dollar figures? Are we talking about tens of millions of dollars, or billions?

Dr LAIRD: No. The most recent single track one to be commissioned in Queensland, the Bauhinia line, was \$240 million for 110 kilometres. So, giving an indicator ballpark cost of \$2 million per kilometre, but it depends very much on the terrain, and the moment you start coming near an urban area or have to start doing tunnels or major bridges it shoots up. But it is certainly cheaper than building four-lane highways.

Mr HONAN: I think it touches really on my opening statement about costs in general of infrastructure. We are certainly seeing on a standalone basis for track upgrades the high upfront costs, the regulation costs, the land acquisition costs—all those upfront costs are very significant compared to the construction cost itself. That is part of the reason we are saying if you are going in there with roads, look at it for rail because it is only very marginal to acquire a bit more land while at the same time doing a road, or while you are doing the bulk earth works for the road you can do the bulk earth

works for the rail, and the marginal costs to complete the rail line are insignificant. I think you will find on a standalone basis the costs for rail infrastructure are variable. As Dr Laird indicated, it depends on the terrain and it also depends on the regulations and the land acquisition and the EIS and all those other issues. In promoting rail, in promoting good rail outcomes, good land transport outcomes, good environmental outcomes, good social outcomes and good economic outcomes we would like to see where it is demonstrable that the easement for rail is close to the road and you are upgrading the road corridor, consider it as part of the EIS.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: You have made a couple of references to the situation in Queensland, and you have made comments about differences in terrain. I wonder to what extent the comparisons you are making take into account the fact that Queensland has been for a century or more the most decentralised State in terms of the proportion of its population that live in the capital city, but also in recent decades the extent to which rail lines in Queensland are economic because of the increasing output of mines and other primary industry? We know Queensland and Western Australia are in the middle of a resources boom. Clearly there is a big difference between running a passenger line and running a mixed freight line and running the kinds of lines that service huge mines in different parts of Queensland?

Dr LAIRD: Certainly Queensland has benefited in recent decades from the revenue from coal exports, some of which helped to build main line upgrades and electrification. These revenues are not so forthcoming now because of national competition policy. The point about Queensland being a more decentralised State is certainly true but I think on the east coast of Australia, taking a more national point of view, you really need better transport linkages. New South Wales versus Queensland, we to have had decades of mineral exports and possibly Queensland in the 1970s and 1980s was better at extracting a rent or royalty for the giving up of these minerals than New South Wales.

There are other things too. For example, Queensland made the decision to go for high-voltage, modern 25,000-volt electrification in the 1970s. New South Wales could have gone down that track, it wanted to, and then the Hon. Barrie Unsworth, before he became Premier in 1986, had to tell the Legislative Council: we made the wrong decision. We should have gone for the more modern approach and we went for the older one. The same with planning.

The Hon. JAN BURNSWOODS: That would have been coal-fired, those power stations?

Dr LAIRD: Yes, coal-fired plus Snowy Mountains Hydro.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 1.10 p.m.)