



**Pacific Highway Upgrade
Brunswick Heads to Yelgun
Community Liaison Group Meeting No. 12
5th April, 2006**

Attendees:

Pauline Millington
Malcolm Murray
Kathy Norley-Farmer
Robert Rosen
Sue Stirton
Tony Stupka
Jack Taylor
Don Armstrong
Barry Hutton
Frank Mills
Trevor Watts

Brett Lee (BSC)
Bill Gardyne (EMR – DoP Representative)

Will MacDonald (Abi)
Mark Sabolch (Abi)
Terry Paxton (Abi)
Wendy Dooley (Abi)

Peter Borrelli (RTA)
Dave Purdy (RTA)
Ron Holmes (RTA)

Apologies: Greg Milham, Colin Tarbox, Patricia Warren

1.0 Welcome

Terry Paxton welcomed attendees to the meeting and briefly outlined the agenda.

1.1 Apologies

Apologies from Greg Milham, Colin Tarbox and Patricia Warren were noted.

1.2 Comments on Notes of Previous Meeting

One member identified the need for some clarification of issues relating to the Yelgun interchange and possible use of the local road by heavy vehicles. This was agreed to be dealt with later in the meeting (Ref. section 2.2 below).

2.0 Outstanding Items from Previous Meeting

2.1 Comments on Historic Marker Text

Members of the CLG were asked if they had any comments or refinements on the content of the text for the historic marker that had been presented at a previous meeting by Mr Frank Mills.

The content of the text was accepted by all and will now be forwarded to the RTA communications staff for 'word-smithing' and formatting.

One member stated she had advised her community and local school of the initiative and it had been very well received, with people very pleased to hear such items were being considered in the project.

2.2 Possible Use of the Local Service Road by B Doubles

At the previous meeting there had been discussion relating to the proposed private development of a service station at the Shara Boulevard / Local Service Road intersection, and the possibility of this encouraging heavy vehicles, particularly B Doubles, onto the local road.

Brett Lee of Byron Shire Council provided the group with an overview of the guidelines and process of defining how and what heavy vehicle types are allowed on which roads.

Brett indicated that small B Doubles (19m long), those typically with two wheels at the back and below a certain tonnage, were not a restricted vehicle and as such had access to most roads. The typical larger 60 tonne (25m long) B Doubles are restricted to specific 'gazetted' routes, such as the Pacific Highway. It was possible for an operator to apply to the local road authority for access to a local road but the road had to be to a standard defined in the guidelines (generally relating to road width and quality etc.) If the local road authority (in this case Byron Shire Council) was to reject the application and the applicant believed the road did in fact meet the guidelines, they had the right of appeal, normally through the Local Traffic Committee.

3.0 Construction Update

Will McDonald, Abigroup Construction Manager, provided the group with his regular update on construction activities. Will noted bulk earthworks were generally completed and it was now down to detailed earthmoving activities.

The project now was focused on four main items: -

- Bridges;
- Retaining walls;
- Drainage; and

- Local Road Works.

3.1 South of the River

Will presented a series of slides showing the status of the Brunswick Heads bypass bridges south of the river. Piling on Bridge 1 had been completed and the entire substructure – everything below the deck – had also been completed and the structure was ready for erection of the pre-cast Super 'T' girders when they arrived.

The other bridge on the Brunswick Heads bypass (Bridge No. 2) would begin when the piling rig became available, which at this stage was estimated to be still over a month away.

3.2 Bridge Deck Beams

Will explained that there were in the order of 310 bridge girders to be manufactured, delivered and erected for the project and these were being sourced from pre-qualified suppliers in both Sydney and Brisbane. To date, about 30 beams (or girders) had actually been erected on the bridge structures.

The beams are obviously quite large items with each unit requiring its own semi-trailer for transport. There was significant logistical consideration in both delivering and erecting the beams on the bridges. Because of space and crane requirements as well as a desire to minimise any 'double handling', an objective for the project team was to have the beams lifted directly from the delivery vehicle onto the bridge structure. This required taking into consideration the point of origin, travel constraints on over-length vehicles, limited queuing areas and crane availability and costs.

3.3 Brunswick River Bridges

Will indicated the pier head for the local service road bridge on the southern side of the river was complete and the northern pier head was about two weeks away from completion. With a series of slides he explained the detail of the pier head prior to the placement of the mobile form travellers (MFT).

The MFTs were in themselves major structures that would support in the order of 100 tonnes of concrete per segment so it was essential that they were installed with a high degree of precision.

Will was also able to show the group a series of slides of the barges that had been obtained to assist in the management and efficient movement of the MFTs on completion of the final pours for each bridge. The MFTs would be lowered onto the barges and returned to the north and south banks of the river to commence the subsequent bridges. The barges would also be used to get other large items and materials (eg. formwork) backwards and forwards across the river, thereby avoiding additional traffic on the highway and associated delays on the existing bridge.

On the northern bank of the river the large vertical structures that people could see from the road were the curtain walls for the northern bridge abutments taking shape.

3.4 Bonanza Drive Bridges

Will indicated that some progress had been made on the bridges over the new access road into Billinudgel via Bonanza Drive, with the outer casings for columns in place. Next step is to cover these with reinforced earth walls prior to pouring the concrete into the dura duct columns.

3.5 Coolamon Scenic Drive

Piling had also commenced on the Coolamon Scenic Drive bridge and four of the twenty-eight piles had been driven at the time of the meeting. These piles were quite long – in the order of 33 metres – and required splicing or joining two lengths. This was making the pile driving a slow process. Because the area was close to residences, noise and vibration monitoring had been undertaken, which demonstrated that any noise and vibration impacts were well within the accepted guidelines for both areas.

3.6 Marshalls Creek Bridges

The Marshalls Creek local road bridge was possibly the most advanced structure on the project and Will was able to show a series of slides following the development from placing the first girder to a state where all the girders were in place and steel was being tied in preparation for the pouring of the bridge deck.

Will explained the details of actually fitting and propping the girders to get a level surface as well as the placement and function of the bearings (rubber pads) under each girder. These rubber bearings may have to be replaced several times in the 100 year design life of the structure.

Another interesting facet of these bridges is the “uplift restraints”. These effectively stoped the bridge deck ‘floating off’ in an extreme flood event. This effect (where bridge decks had not been effectively restrained and floated away) had been visible in some of the news footage of the recent New Orleans disaster.

3.7 Yelgun Interchange and Stock Route Road Underpass Bridges

Will explained the status of the Yelgun interchange bridges in relation to the current works with the aid of slides. The centre piers have been poured and the abutments are largely in place.

The Stock Route Road bridges were also well advanced with the last of the piles almost in place and the abutments also close to completion.

3.8 Billinudgel Pedestrian Bridge

Although not yet started, Will introduced the construction process and stated that the project team was not far off commencing piling for this bridge structure. In this case, steel piles had been selected rather than the octagonal concrete piles. Again, splicing of lengths would be required but this would be by a welding process. Given the proximity of the works to the Pacific Highway and other visible public open places, screening would be installed to avoid inadvertent “flash” impacts.

Although Will believed the steel piles would make the process less obtrusive, the project team are sensitive to the fact that works would be close to some residences and businesses. For this reason, wooden packers would be used to muffle the sound of the hammer driving the piles. The project team have also consulted with the closest business and agreed to work construction activities around the busy Easter holiday period.

3.9 Retaining Walls

Will referred the group to the works around the Rajah Road intersection – especially the retaining wall works of both sides of the Pacific Highway. This was a particularly difficult work area and although it looked quite 'messy' at the moment, he assured the group that it was almost at the point where a highly visible sudden burst of progress would make the new local service road alignment look quite apparent.

On the western side of the Pacific Highway in the same locality the piling for the retaining walls of the new highway was completed and the capping beam that would sit on top of this row of piles was also under construction. This was a very constrained area as there was only a one metre wide work area between the capping beam and the construction buffer to the Nature Reserve.

Will mentioned the trimming of the overhanging trees from the Nature Reserve and SEPP 14 area which had been carried out without any issues after the submission of a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) had been approved by the relevant agencies allowing the works to be carried out.

3.10 Local Road Issues

3.10.1 Rajah Road Sidetrack

The program in this area was to now create a side track to the west of the existing Pacific Highway. This would require a temporary extension of Rajah Road for entry and egress but would allow the project team to carry out more work on the eastern side of the existing highway. The target date for a traffic switch onto this sidetrack was about six weeks away.

3.10.2 Yelgun Rest Area Realignment

Another minor, but in this case permanent, redirection of traffic was scheduled for early to mid May. This switch was in the Yelgun rest area locality and would essentially redirect traffic onto the permanent alignment of the local service road adjacent to the Yelgun rest area. Once traffic was switched onto this alignment, material stockpiled at the rest area would be easily accessed to start construction of the Yelgun rest area access road.

3.10.3 Tweed Street

Will explained that a lot of work had been undertaken on Tweed Street, mostly rock drainage works in preparation for the new roundabout. Will explained the nature of the soils in this area made this drainage essential, and by way of example pointed to the impact the loading of the new road embankments was having in forcing the surface of Tweed Street upward and the team would have to continue with minor patching until this settlement had finished and a final road surface could then be applied.

3.11 Under-boring and Drainage Works

Will noted that the under-boring exercise – drilling under the Brunswick River - had almost reached a milestone with the first bore scheduled to be finished within days. The twin bores would accommodate sewerage, power and communication infrastructure, some of which is currently carried under the existing Brunswick River bridge.

Will also showed the group some slides of a specific culvert that had just been completed on the project. This item had a dual purpose, allowing not just water flow but had also had a special elevated timber log pole (recovered from the project clearing) incorporated to allow the passage of fauna under the road. This had been developed with input from agencies such as the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and RTA.



Another interesting aspect of the drainage works happening on site at the moment was the use of 'pipe-jacking' or 'micro tunnelling'. This was a construction method that allowed pipes to be installed under the operating Pacific Highway, not by open excavation (and hence disrupting traffic flows) but by forcing a large pipe through the existing embankment with hydraulic jacks under pressure while a person inside the pipe excavates the face of the embankment in front of the pipe. Will indicated this construction method would also be used to get water to the large constructed "Wetland B" which was to be constructed near the sewerage treatment plant and this would require approximately 100 metres of 'pipe-jacking' or 'micro tunnelling' but would allow the work to happen below the existing sensitive vegetation without surface damage, thereby avoiding impacts to the sensitive flora in this area.

3.12 The Month Ahead

Will indicated the focus for the next month would be on bridges, which were a little behind program – especially the Brunswick River local road bridge, which is on the critical path for project completion.

Another key milestone that people may see happening in various locations, is the commencement of "trimming" of road surfaces. Will explained this process was basically one of "shaving" the surface of the roads to the level required before paving commenced. Abigroup had two road trimmers in its

fleet and one was already on site to commence this new phase of the earthworks.

Questions and Discussions

Q When are you expecting to set up the batch plant?

A We are still looking to start batching in about June, weather permitting.

Q What is the progress on the new Coolamon Scenic Drive Alignment?

A Currently we are working on a drainage channel east of the railway line and also replacing some material along the shoulder with better material that has become available.

Q Will you seal the local roads?

A Yes, all new sections of the local roads will be sealed.

Q What weight can the barges used for the Brunswick River bridges, actually support?

A About 60 tonnes, but we are really only using them for work platforms and the easy transfer of large items across the river.

Comment: Currently coming out of Rajah Road it is still sometimes difficult to see vehicles coming from the north.

Response: We have previously checked this and found that the sight distance meets the required minimum distance. We will have another look at it, and keep an eye on it, but as the work progresses in this area, it should be less of an issue.

4.0 Update the Landscaping

4.1 Landscaping and Propagation Presentation

Project Environmental Manager, Mark Sabolch, explained that this was a two part presentation. He would be talking about the landscaping plan and where the project team was up to with propagation and the RTA's Representative and Senior Project Manager, Mr Peter Borrelli, would be giving a presentation on the translocation of the rare and the threatened species on the highway alignment.

Mark started his presentation with a recap on how the landscaping plan had been developed and shaped. He explained that HBO+EMTB (the project landscaping consultants) had many sources for developing the landscape plans including: -

- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the Species Impact Statement (SIS);
- A list of endemic species;
- The RTA's requirements as captured in the Project Deed; and
- Community input (including CLG input).

Mark also noted HBO+EMTB had developed the landscape plan using some basic principles as guidance including: -

- Endemic vegetation communities within close proximity to the highway are to be used;
- Reinforce the driver's experience where significant remnant vegetation exists by providing extensive infill plantings;
- Integrate urban entities to local road areas into the design; and
- Provide a variety of visual contrasts to delight and add character.

Mark went on to explain that the plan originally presented to the CLG and community had been at a 15% design stage. Since then input had been received from the DEC (NPWS), the RTA, the project ecologist and community members. Mark made particular reference to the valuable input by CLG member Mr Jack Taylor, especially in terms of species selection.

Mark then showed a series of slides that traced the actual physical process through from the early days of clearing and seed collection to the point we are at now, with some 8,000 plants being propagated from that seed at a range of local nurseries.

4.2 Translocation Process

RTA Representative, Mr Peter Borrelli, then provided the group with a very thorough presentation on the translocation process for the rare and threatened flora species along the alignment. This process has involved the physical recovery and relocation of, in many cases, fully grown trees from the approved alignment to a location on one of the parcels of land acquired for the compensatory habitat package.

A full copy of Peter's presentation has been included with these notes and will be available on the project website.

Questions and Discussion

Q Is there any intention to promote the translocation site, given that it is a collection of rare and threatened plants?

A We are a bit reluctant to do so as it is too fragile at present and also because DEC (NPWS) have requested we do not. It has been a success story for the RTA though, and shows what we can achieve i.e. upgrade the Pacific Highway and at the same time protect / preserve environmentally sensitive areas.

Q In how many areas has this translocation process been attempted?

A The RTA has undertaken similar processes elsewhere but this is the biggest and adds significantly to the knowledge base about the species and processes involved. For example, we know translocating some species is relatively easy and others simply do not cope with the shift. All this knowledge we can make available to other departments and interest groups. We have also contributed \$15,000 towards recovery plans for other species as well.

Q Is there any truth to the rumour that the RTA will not continue with the purchase of Lot 107?

A The future of Lot 107 is really a matter for Council.

Q How many of the habitat trees actually had fauna?

A Only about 10 trees actually had fauna in them.

Q Will there be wattles included in the planting?

A Yes, a few, but these are from the very immediate area and are rain – forest species of wattles.

Comment: Would like to thank Abigroup for how receptive they have been to expanding the original species list and incorporating plants that were not originally included.

5.0 Project Website

Due to time constraints, this presentation was held over for a future meeting.

6.0 General Business

6.1 Habitat Box Update

Terry Paxton advised the group that he had been in touch with the National Resource Advisory Council (NRAC) who were the sponsors of the funding grants scheme. He had been advised the decisions had been made but the successful applications were still with the Minister's office for approval.

6.2 Night Works

Terry advised the group that there would be night works (weather permitting) on the highway for two nights in the week prior to Easter to allow some drainage pipes to be installed under the highway north of Rajah Road intersection.

6.3 Rest Area Residence – Media

One member of the group raised the issue of recent media reports regarding the concerns of some residents in close proximity to the Yelgun rest area.

While there were of course some issues with confidentiality and privacy, the members of the CLG felt it was important, that as community representatives, they flag their concern about this matter and ensure that all community members are "looked after" in this process.

The RTA Representative acknowledged the issue but advised members not everything reported in the local press was actually factual. There were a number of issues raised in the paper but there was a high focus on noise treatments and noise issues. To put it into perspective, the RTA had identified 56 residences for noise treatments based on the modelling, including the property in question. Of those 56, 55 had reached agreement with RTA and only one of the 55 had not yet had the residence treatments completed. Offers for noise mitigation works had been made to the one outstanding property, despite what had been reported in some press, but an

agreement had not yet been reached with that specific landowner. Peter reinforced the RTA's commitment to commence noise monitoring following project opening and would treat properties as required.

Peter also pointed out that noise treatments were being handled differently on this section to the way they had been treated on the Yelgun to Chinderah section. In this case the treatments to identified residences were being done in advance of the project as opposed to six months after opening time, which had been the case on the Yelgun to Chinderah project.

In relation to the property damage claim, it was pointed out the matter was with the insurance company and had in fact been in the hands of the insurance company prior to the matter being raised in the media, but again this fact had been excluded from the reporting of the issue.

Questions and Discussion

Q Will the areas for noise monitoring be expanded?

A No, there is not a lot of point taking readings well outside the identified areas as discrepancies or exceedances, if there are any, are likely to be in areas close to the road.

Q Has the design of the rest area or local road changed the noise impacts on specific properties?

A No. The only thing that has changed is the access arrangements in response to community concerns. The changed access has actually moved traffic further from the nearest properties.

Comment: The rest area was not in the original plans.

Response: That is true, it was identified as a separate project, but do not lose sight of the fact that no one is using the rest area yet and the RTA still believes it is in a location that provides excellent screening from the nearest residences.

Comment: I know of two other households with problems where they believe the noise is affecting the resident's health.

RTA

Response: Without the specifics it is hard to comment but please ask them to contact us. If we are unaware of the situation we cannot investigate or address it.

Q How many properties are in dispute in relation to damage claims?

A The damage claims are the responsibility of Abigroup, but there have been very few and even less that have been substantiated. In some cases, cracks with grass growing in the cracks have been reported as a recent result of the works, but of course people only notice these sorts of things when they actually look for them and it's natural the works stimulate people to look.

Comment: Abigroup take all claims seriously, particularly if they relate to peoples' homes and Abigroup have never avoided its responsibility in that respect. Whenever the project team has

received such a complaint we have always managed to be on site within 20 minutes to undertake preliminary investigations.

Comment: These specific issues, if genuine, are a matter to resolve between the individual property owner and Abigroup / Insurer.

Q What is the status of the bus stop issues that were discussed at a previous CLG meeting?

A Byron Shire Council has written to Countrylink to review the situation in light of the new road.

Comment: It was noted that Ballina Shire had just received a significant grant for bus shelters.

Response: It is not unusual for Councils to apply to the RTA for specific grants. As the Byron Shire representative would be meeting with his counterpart in Ballina in the near future, he advised he will investigate the Ballina situation.

7.0 Meeting Close

The meeting was closed at 8:45 and the next meeting scheduled for 3 May 2006.