

1 Introduction

1.1 Proposal identification

The Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (RTA) is proposing to upgrade the Princes Highway between Mount Pleasant and Toolijooa Road - the Gerringong upgrade (the proposal). The proposal is part of the RTA's program to upgrade the Princes Highway providing increased road safety and traffic efficiency in the south coast region.

The proposal would include the following key features:

- Widening the Princes Highway to a four lane divided carriageway between Mount Pleasant and Toolijooa Road (7.5 km in length).
- Grade-separated interchange at Rose Valley Road incorporating four-way traffic access to and from Gerringong via a bridge over the highway, a two-way service road and overbridge spanning the South Coast Railway Line at Fern Street.
- Grade-separated interchange at Belinda Street providing four-way, flood free traffic access to and from Gerringong and incorporating a two-way service road running under the highway connecting to Willowvale Road.
- Bridge structure spanning a realigned Crooked River, incorporating Bailey's Road and an existing cattle underpass.
- Northbound climbing lane between Rose Valley Road and the top of Mount Pleasant.
- Southbound climbing lane for approximately 800 m from Belinda Street on ramp.
- Property acquisition and the setting of corridor boundaries for the provision of future widening to six lanes (three in each direction).
- Extensive drainage structures maintaining cross drainage flow in the low lying area of Omega Flat.
- Future augmentation to six lanes by widening to the outside of the carriageway at Omega Flat, Rose Valley Road interchange and north of Gerringong Bends.

The study area extends from the termination of the existing four lane configuration at Mount Pleasant lookout in the north, to Toolijooa Road in the south and lies entirely within the Kiama Local Government Area and the RTA Southern Region Office (Figure 1.1).

The study area varies in width from approximately one to three kilometres and is influenced by natural landform and infrastructure features. To the north and west the southern end of the Illawarra Escarpment and Currys Mountain and their spurs and ridges provide a 'border'. To the east and south the 'border' is formed by the town of Gerringong and the South Coast Railway Line.

From north-east to south-west the study area passes over Omega Flat, past Werri Lagoon, beside the town of Gerringong and terminates at Toolijooa Road in Toolijooa. The pasture land and rural settlement patterns of the study area and the existing highway corridor are defining features.

Agricultural activities have defined the general pattern of vegetation clearance, defined rural boundaries by linear cultural plantings, and the distribution of rural houses and farm buildings.

Figure 1.1: The study area



The study area incorporates part of an alternative road to the Princes Highway connecting Gerringong to Bomaderry, which starts at Fern Street and then follows Crooked River Road, Gerroa Road and Bolong Road along the coast and the Shoalhaven River, known locally as the 'Sandtrack'.

The Princes Highway provides the principal road linking Sydney and Wollongong to the south coast and north-eastern Victoria.

The horizontal and vertical alignments of the existing largely two lane highway between Mount Pleasant and Toolijooa Road require upgrading to meet current design, safety and traffic efficiency requirements. The highway has limited overtaking opportunities, many junctions with rural roads and private uncontrolled accesses. The existing road also incorporates two access opportunities for the town of Gerringong, one at Fern Street (the northern end of the town) and one at Belinda Street at the southern end of the town.

The existing alignment within the study area has a high crash history and experiences a poor road safety record. By constructing the Gerringong upgrade it would be possible to realise high possible return in terms of immediate road safety benefits and improved travel efficiency.

The proposal would be funded by the NSW Government and subject to funding, construction of the proposal is anticipated to commence in early 2012 and is expected to take up to two years to complete. Possible construction staging is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 and in the accompanying concept design report.

1.2 Purpose of the report

The purpose of the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) is to describe the proposal, to document the likely impacts of the proposal on the environment and to detail the mitigation measures to be implemented.

The description of the proposed works and associated environmental impacts have been undertaken in the context of clause 228 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000, the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (TSC Act)*, the *Fisheries Management Act 1994 (FM Act)*, and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*. In doing so, the REF helps to fulfil the requirements of section 111 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act)* that the RTA examine and take into account to the fullest extent possible, all matters affecting or likely to affect the environment by reason of the activity.

The findings of the REF would be considered when assessing:

- Whether the proposal is likely to have a significant impact on the environment and therefore the necessity for approval to be sought under Part 3A of the *EP&A Act*.
- The significance of any impact on threatened species as defined by the *TSC Act* and/or *FM Act*, in section 5A of the *EP&A Act* and therefore the requirement for a species impact statement (SIS).
- The potential for the proposal to significantly impact a matter of national environmental significance or Commonwealth land and the need to make a referral to the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) (formerly the Department of the Environment and Water Resources) for a decision by the Commonwealth Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts on whether assessment and approval is required under the *EPBC Act*.