

Meeting Notes

Project:	Sapphire to Woolgoolga Upgrade Project	Reference:	1093.40.GE
Location:	Woolgoolga Bowling Club, Cinema Room, Boundary Street, Woolgoolga	Date:	22 May 2002

Present: Apology: Copy: Name:

NORTHERN CFG (Woolgoolga Area)			
✓			Graham Ashton
✓			John Beales
✓			Mark Beard
✓			Gregory Benson
✓			Jasmer Bhatti
✓			Roslyn Dunbar-Wells
✓			Ron Gray
	✓		Karrena Joass
✓			Kevin Knott
✓			Steven Moody
✓			Phillip Pearce
	✓		Des Saunders
✓			Bruce Scanlon
✓			John Tozer
✓			Robert Watson
✓			John Langhorn
PROJECT TEAM			
✓			Wes Stevenson RTA
	✓		Bob Higgins RTA
✓			Robert Kook RTA
✓			Martin Howard RTA
✓			Tim Paterson Connell Wagner

✓			Rosemary Russell	Connell Wagner
		✓	Bruce Penman	Connell Wagner
✓			Barry Hancock	Connell Wagner
✓			Andrew Smith	Pramax Communications
✓			Bill Wood	Coffs Harbour City Council
	✓		Rick Bennell	Coffs Harbour City Council
✓			George Stulle	Coffs Harbour City Council
	✓		John Finlay	PlanningNSW
✓			Jo Gardner	PlanningNSW
Recorded By: Pramax Communications				Total Pages: 8
Subject: Community Focus Group Meeting No 5 (Woolgoolga area)				

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Andrew Smith opened the meeting at 5.50pm. Tim Paterson and Wes Stevenson were delayed at a Council meeting and sent apologies for being late.
- 1.2 Andrew introduced John Langhorn who has been brought in as a representative for the Bucca community.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- 2.1 Under "Corridor Announcement" on p.4, statement that "we are making predictions for 2050" was queried as to whether it was a typo and should have read 2020. Project team confirmed that 2050 was correct – if a bypass was constructed in 2020, it would have a 30 year design life, meaning predictions of its feasibility extend to 2050.
- 2.2 The minutes were accepted as a correct record of the meeting.

3. MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 Some members had a problem with attending CFG meetings on Wednesday night – Andrew suggested that the next meeting change to Tuesday night and that a tentative date be set. The project team indicated that it would need about 5 weeks before more information would be available. This would make the next meeting date around Tuesday 25 June.
- 3.2 Replacement CFG member for Paramijit Sidhu. Initially Paramijit Sidhu had been on group as a representative for banana growers. Andrew has spoken to the BGA and they felt it was not necessary to have someone on the CFG as they have a liaison procedure in place. In addition it was recognised that Ron Gray was also a member of BGA and could represent these interests on the CFG.
- 3.3 Because of Option A coming onto the agenda and the possibility of an interchange at Bucca, John Langhorn has been nominated as a representative for that area. John

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introduced himself. He is retired and has 25 years experience in the engineering industry. He has 25 acres located right in the corridor of option A. He stressed that although there may be a lesser number of people affected by option A than the inner corridors, the effect was drastic for those people. He also has family in the Coffs Harbour district and would like to see the safest possible outcome for the highway.

- 3.4 Moonee CFG has been kept informed of the Woolgoolga group's progress. There have been requests by this group for a combined meeting. A CFG member asked why the Sapphire to Woolgoolga part of the highway was broken into two groups. In response it was pointed out that between Sapphire to Moonee there were limited options to deviate from the existing highway corridor and the primary issues are access, in contrast to the focus of the Woolgoolga group. The Woolgoolga end of the project has a number of different corridor options, including bypasses, that need to be considered and developed

Council Peer Review

- 3.5 Councillor Bill Wood told the group that Council has resolved to commission a Peer Review to look at options that have been generated so far. It is common practice to do this on large-scale projects. The need for this Peer Review arose at a briefing of Councillors by Council officers when it was realised that whatever the outcome of the highway planning strategy, it would have a huge impact on Council's strategic planning policies. Connell Wagner and the RTA are currently having further briefings with Councillors. As far as cost goes, it will be a significant amount of money. Council's contribution to the cost of the highway strategy to date has been minimal and limited to staff costs only.

CFG questions regarding Peer Review:

- 3.6 *Q: Are we contemplating a Peer Review regarding a decision for the preferred corridor for Coffs Harbour or Sapphire to Woolgoolga? It is far too premature to decide on a final outcome for the Woolgoolga end of the project.* A: (Bill Wood) It would be a review of the whole process for the whole length of the highway to date.
- 3.7 *Q: Who is going to do the Peer Review?* A: (Bill Wood) It would have to be a multi-disciplinary consultant or group of consultants. We do not know who it will be yet.
- 3.8 *Q: Who would do the selection of consultant?* A: (Bill Wood) A number of Council staff – this is something to be decided when we finalise the briefing.
- 3.9 *Q: What about the issue of impartiality?* A: (Bill Wood) The company doing the Peer Review would be an independent company with similar experience and expertise to that of Connell Wagner.
- 3.10 *Q: Why can't individuals with expertise and experience do it as opposed to a larger company that does not want to criticise the RTA?* A: The Council uses consultants who are impartial and have a high level of expertise.
- 3.11 *Q: If the Peer Review comes up with recommendations that are in conflict with the current findings, who will mediate this? Will the recommendations of the Peer Review be accepted?* A: (Bill Wood) There will be close consultation between the Steering Committee and Council. Ultimately it has to go through Council.
- 3.12 *Q: Who is drawing up the brief?* A: (Bill Wood) It will be looked at tomorrow by Council, RTA, Connell Wagner and PlanningNSW representatives. The draft will go to the Steering Committee for discussion and comment. (Jo Gardner – PlanningNSW) The brief belongs to Coffs Harbour Council. They do not have the

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technical skills internally and need confidence that the decisions that have been made are the right decisions.

- 3.13 *Q: Was there a conscious decision to exclude anyone from the CFG or the community as a whole to have input into this review?* A: (Andrew Smith) It is evident that there is a large amount of scepticism regarding the process of a Peer Review and how it is being done and put together. The input of the community is being sought in a number of different ways. The CFGs are able to directly feed information back to the project team. Through the last submission process there have been over 1000 submissions received. We also need to let the technical experts go off and gather information and bring that back into the group and the community. We need to stay fixed on the process we already have which is a legitimate process that we are working on in this room and we need to stay focused on our task.
- 3.14 **People's choice corridor:** Tim Paterson spoke to the group regarding the People's choice corridor. Barry Hancock has developed it into an engineering concept. With cuttings up to 80m high, the earthworks were significant and the option is not feasible on engineering grounds. The Steering Committee decided that it was an inappropriate use of resources to take this option any further (summary of findings attached). Attach overhead re: summary of findings on People's Choice corridor
- 3.15 *CFG member – this process basically makes decisions on travel benefit and project costs. When looking through the working papers, social and economic benefits are not quantified at all. Working Paper No 3 appears to talk about social and economic benefits but only provide mainly subjective statements with minimal quantification.* (Response – Tim Paterson) The first step is to find out if there is a need for a bypass. The next step is whether the options stand up to the basic test of economic feasibility. The options also need to pass the test of fundability. Social and economic benefits are relevant issues that need to be and will be addressed in detail as part of the next stage of the study and consultation process.
- 3.16 *CFG member – the far western corridor and outer corridor of Coffs Harbour were dismissed without even looking at the impact on the community, amenities and development. It was based just on costs.* (Response – Tim Paterson) Cost is a fundamental first test. There is an array of positive and negative social and business impacts when building a highway, but if an option does not satisfy preliminary cost benefit analysis and rate as a sound investment option by government then it cannot be considered as a viable option.
- 3.17 A CFG member questioned the urgency for the bypass in Woolgoolga as opposed to 20 years down the track for Coffs Harbour. The priority for the Pacific Highway is to duplicate four lanes along the whole length of the highway. At the same time we are implementing traffic management measures and will continue to do improvements in Coffs Harbour to make the movement and flow better. There is no minimum speed limit specification on the highway, the aim is to improve traffic times.
- 3.18 *How can a Coffs Harbour corridor be selected when it is not going to be built for 20 years and yet the Woolgoolga corridor has not even been chosen?* (Response – Tim Paterson) Work on Coffs Harbour started earlier but Woolgoolga is quickly catching up.
- 3.19 A number of CFG members were insistent that at the public meeting on 26 March it was stated that the preferred route option would be announced in July. Tim Paterson responded by saying that the preferred route would not be announced till near the end of 2002 and that this time frame has always been the one presented to the group. There is no way the project team could do the investigations required to

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make a decision on the preferred route by July. The process and strategy for the whole highway from Coffs to Woolgoolga has clearly been set out in all the documentation that has gone out from the beginning of the first community meetings. It was acknowledged that there was confusion over this issue and that a clear statement needed to be made to the broader community to clarify.

4. LAND ACQUISITION

Presentation by RTA Property Manager, Martin Howard.

Attach summary of land acquisition overheads

- 4.1 Martin invited CFG to take business cards and ring anytime with any questions they may have.
- 4.2 Also available was a booklet outlining the RTA Land Acquisition Policy.

CFG questions to Martin Howard regarding Land Acquisition:

- 4.3 *Q: Can an owner engage a valuer? A:* Yes when they are sent their first letter they are invited to engage their own valuer and the RTA will also pay what they consider reasonable fees for this service. What is considered a reasonable fee is also stated in the letter.
- 4.4 *Q: If the RTA requires only part of your land and leaves you with a dwelling on a smaller property than is allowed by Council, can you still stay in the house? A:* Council will give consideration to properties affected by acquisition and cases are taken independently at the time.
- 4.5 *Q: If you have a hotel with a view of the ocean and you had an acquisition situation develop, how would this process recognise compensation for that business? A:* A hotel acquisition would be based on business value. Where the loss would affect the business you would get experts in the hotel business to look into how it would affect trade and loss of value to the hotel etc.
- 4.6 *Q: At what point do you start land acquisition? A:* The process starts about 18 months before the land is required.
- 4.7 *Q: If a property owner intends to develop land in the future which will increase the value but it is acquired by the RTA, does a DA add value to the land? A:* Say you have four blocks of land and the Council approves a DA to redevelop these to another use, this potential will be included in the valuation.

5. UPDATE ON ROUTE OPTION DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 Barry Hancock (Connell Wagner) presented maps showing Options A, B and C superimposed on aerial photo, consolidated property ownership and terrain maps.
- 5.2 *CFG member asked when costs on the route options would be available? A:* (Barry Hancock) Calculation of cost estimates has started but is not complete. At next meeting we will have initial estimates. Between now and then these will be reviewed by the RTA and will be brought in confidence to the CFG as they will be only preliminary at this stage.
- 5.3 *CFG member asked when they would see what is being prepared for the highway upgrade option as all options can't be compared without this. A:* (Barry Hancock) We presented concept information to the Moonee CFG last night for the upgrade of the existing highway along there. It is indicative of what the upgrade of the existing highway will be through Woolgoolga.

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- 5.4 To get short listed options, property, terrain and physical features were examined. Route A is the result of a community member's (Tim Summers) suggestion and has a degree of logic in the way he has gone around the ridges.
- 5.5 Route B had two options. It is governed by a ridge and the two sub-options go either side of the ridge.

Engineering Plans

Option A

- 5.6 The deepest cutting in option A is 30 metres. There are ten major cuts. The closest comparison would be Bulahdelah in terms of grades and cuttings. Bulahdelah only has about 4 or 5 cuttings. There is a massive climb in both directions to get up one of the ridges – the ridge reaches 215 metres above sea level and the maximum grade is 6% for 2kms. The climb and grade would require six lanes to allow for trucks, which would be very slow.
- 5.7 CFG member felt that a truck might stay on the old highway to avoid this sort of slow climb. CFG asked if there was a scenic opportunity at the top. Barry felt that this was limited due to the steep country to the east and dense forest.
- 5.8 There would only be access to this route either end. It would require under or over passes for forestry etc. There is minimal impact on properties and there are possibilities to investigate, change and avoid property impacts.

Option B2 (going east around the ridge)

- 5.9 Most cuttings on this route are in the vicinity of 28 metres. Elevation is 58 metres above sea level and the maximum grade 4.5%. Going around the ridge reduces the need to go through. This route is longer than B1.
- 5.10 No connection to existing road network. It would however be put to the test of whether there would any need for interchanges along spots such as Woolgoolga Creek Road etc. There would be additional costs but also additional benefits. There would be under or over passes for all the roads that currently have access east to west.

Option C

- 5.11 Option C is 5.5 km long (half to one kilometre longer than existing highway). Elevation 30 metres. No interchanges but under and over passes to cater for existing roads.
- 5.12 Will have preliminary ideas for existing highway at next meeting.

Sapphire to Moonee Upgrade

- 5.13 Ideas for upgrading and intersection treatments along the Sapphire to Moonee section shown to group. Grade separation is the usual way of separating local and through traffic.
- 5.14 Large amounts of land already zoned for residential development have influenced preliminary concepts for possible configuration and locations of interchanges. The progressive build up of traffic and development may see staged upgrade works and development of interchanges as required.

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6. OTHER ISSUES

- 6.1 *Q: If one of the bypasses goes ahead, would there be work done on the existing highway i.e to ensure safety of the existing road if it is bypassed. A: If a bypass happens, the existing highway it is then referred back to Council as a local or regional road. There is a hand-over arrangement between the RTA and Council and that may include an ongoing contribution for upgrading and maintenance.*
- 6.2 *Q: What would happen to Graham Drive – if that went back to the care of local government it would have no chance of change. A: If the highway is handed back to local government, its function as a road will change and it will have a different role. If this happens, one way to increase safety would be to reduce the speed limit, as it would no longer be a State highway.*
- 6.3 *Q: CFG member said they were of the impression that regardless of a bypass, this section of highway would be improved anyway. At the WRR meeting in April, Jenny Bonfield mentioned \$27 million having been allocated to that section of road due to safety issues. A (George Stulle): That refers to the sum allocated to what the RTA is doing now. It is to allow us to go forward with the planning phase.*
- 6.4 It was agreed that if a bypass were to happen there were still safety issues to deal with on the existing road.

7. NEXT CFG MEETING

- 7.1 Preliminary concepts for upgrading the existing highway similar to those presented to the Moonee CFG will be discussed.
- 7.2 At the next meeting, we would be presenting more details of the ongoing design work as well as feedback from the investigations that are being done. In regard to the investigations, Tim Paterson mentioned the reluctance of land owners to let the project team gain access to their properties for investigations, eg fauna and flora, heritage investigations etc. The investigations are pretty fundamental and if there is any way the CFG can help explain to property owners what the purpose of the studies are (see 7.8), it would be appreciated.
- 7.3 A CFG member said that he believed the community had already provided a clear preference for which option it preferred. They maintained that more than 90% of the population here has overwhelmingly opposed options B, C and D and that is why there are property holders who do not want to cooperate because they say these options are not acceptable and yet you are still pursuing investigations. This indicates that you are disregarding public opinion, you are not listening.
- 7.4 Tim Paterson replied that the project team was not pushing for any option but had an obligation by law to pursue all viable options. There are many issues to consider and fundamental to these issues is going to be the broader community aspirations. We have not ignored the community by any stretch of the imagination. We have had extra public forums as requested by CFGs, Option A is now on the agenda due to public support. There are 1,240 public submissions from the last information release that are now being reviewed by a team of three full time workers. We are listening to the community very intently.
- 7.5 *Q: Why waste time and money validating options that the public does not want? A: The law does not permit us to delete a viable option because of public opposition.*
- 7.6 *Q: A CFG member again raised the issue that he believed the working documents were subjective and made assumptions and there was not a detailed study made*

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between vehicle benefit and cost of construction. A: Project team said they had not been challenged regarding any information on the working documents. People are free to do so and as yet not one challenge has been made.

7.7 Andrew Smith stated it was premature to debate the broader community views until all the submissions from the public had been processed.

7.8 *Q: A CFG member said he felt that this was all being looked at on a cost basis. He expressed a lack of confidence that anything else is being taken into consideration.*
A: Tim pointed out that this is why the need to gain additional information was essential to ensure that all factors were considered. This is why he had appealed for CFG help in gaining access to properties to gather the necessary technical information. This was fundamental to going forward so as to provide a sound basis for any decisions.

8. CLOSE OF MEETING

Meeting closed at 9.00pm.

Next Meeting: Tuesday 2 July 2002