New England Highway bypass of Scone and town centre rail bridge

December 2015

The Australian and NSW Governments are providing $90 million to build a New England Highway bypass and town centre rail bridge at Scone to improve traffic flow, travel times and safety for road users.

A concept design and environmental assessment have been carried out for the highway bypass to identify potential impacts of the upgrade and mitigation activities. Strategic design options have also been developed for the town centre rail bridge.

Stakeholders and the community are invited to comment on the concept design and environmental assessment for the highway bypass and strategic design options for the town centre rail bridge by 19 February 2016. Roads and Maritime will consider feedback to finalise both proposals.

Background

The New England Highway is part of the inland Sydney to Brisbane National Land Transport Network and the primary route connecting the Upper Hunter with Maitland and Newcastle.

In Scone, the highway intersects with the Great Northern Railway at Kelly Street. The Kelly Street rail level crossing is the only remaining level crossing on the New England Highway.

The highway south of Scone carries 8400 vehicles a day, peaking in town at 14,000. Around 8000 vehicles use the Kelly Street crossing every day, including 1200 heavy vehicles.

There is also a crash history on this four kilometre section of highway with 29 crashes in the five years to June 2014, with no fatalities recorded during this period.

In April 2014 the Australian and NSW Governments announced the preferred option for the future upgrade of the New England Highway at Scone would include a highway bypass and town centre road over rail bridge to address rising road and rail volumes and safety issues.

The announcement followed the completion of an options assessment and feasibility study which is available to view at the Roads and Maritime website rms.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects.

The concept design and environmental assessment for the highway bypass, together with the town centre rail bridge strategic design options, have been developed for community and stakeholder feedback.

Roads and Maritime is continuing to work closely with Upper Hunter Shire Council to develop the proposal.
The proposal

Key features of the proposal include:

• A two lane highway bypass to the west of Scone, which would pass through the Scone Golf Course and bridge over the rail line south of town, and at Kingdon Street and Liverpool Street
• Access to and from the bypass to the north and south of town and midway at St Aubins Street which would provide for all turning movements
• A local road over rail bridge in town.

Benefits

Key benefits of the proposal include:

• Improved traffic flow and amenity for local traffic
• Improved travel times for freight and long distance traffic
• Improved safety for all road users.

The bypass aims to support freight and long distance travel as part of the Sydney-Brisbane National Land Transport Network and would benefit the NSW and national economy.

Bypassing Scone also aligns with the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan’s focus on providing essential access for regional NSW by providing town bypasses to:

• Improve travel and amenity within towns
• Reduce delays caused to freight traffic
• Increase safety
• Improve urban amenity through reduced noise, lower emissions and less traffic.

New England Highway bypass of Scone

Environmental assessment

Roads and Maritime has carried out an environmental assessment for the highway bypass to assess the potential environmental and social impacts of the proposal and identify activities to manage and mitigate these impacts.

The environmental assessment was prepared in consultation with a range of key stakeholders including technical specialists and considered feedback received from the community.

The investigations found that the bypass proposal would not significantly impact the environment with the application of a range of mitigation and management measures.

Key considerations for assessment

The following key areas of potential impact have been identified in the environmental investigations. The environmental assessment describes these impacts and activities to reduce them.

Traffic and access

The bypass would require changed traffic arrangements during various stages of construction along sections of the existing New England Highway, Kingdon Street, Liverpool Street and St Aubins Street. This could lead to short term delays for motorists, however impacts are expected to be localised and of minimal duration.

Construction vehicles would access the upgrade area via the New England Highway and Liverpool Street wherever possible to minimise impacts within the Scone town centre. Potential construction impacts would be managed through the development of traffic management plans and consultation with stakeholders and the community.

Traffic modelling found that traffic along Kelly Street would steadily increase if the upgrade was not constructed. Projected future traffic volumes along Kelly Street and on Liverpool Street (east of Aberdeen Street) would reduce when the upgrade is completed.

Traffic flow within the town centre would improve as a result of through traffic bypassing the town and local traffic using the St Aubins Street intersection to bypass the town centre. These changes to traffic flow would result in an increase in traffic using Aberdeen Street and St Aubins Street with potential traffic impacts for local residents. Traffic using Aberdeen Street between Liverpool Street and the new intersection at St Aubins Street is forecast to increase by around 2000 vehicles per day.

Hydrology and flooding

A hydrology study was carried out including Parsons Gully, Kingdon Ponds, Middlebrook Creek and Figtree Creek and considered flood levels for various flood events with and without a bypass.

The modelling showed very little difference in the flood levels for one in 20 year and one in 100 year flood events without the construction of a bypass. For one in 20 year and greater flood events, the majority of the floodplain area is inundated including most of Scone to the west of the Great Northern Railway.

The modelling for one in 20 year and one in 100 year flood events with the construction of a bypass showed there would be a minor increase in the water levels in areas generally to the west of the proposal and in the vicinity of White Park. The impact to residences in these areas is expected to be minimal. A decrease in water levels would occur to the east of the proposal in the general vicinity of Aberdeen Street.

Roads and Maritime would continue to refine the design during the detailed design stage to further reduce potential flooding impacts. Roads and Maritime would also carry out consultation with all potentially affected property owners including providing details about the predicted changes in flood levels in relation to each individual property.
Operational traffic noise

Operational traffic noise modelling was carried out to compare the current background noise with future predicted noise levels after the bypass is built. The results show that operational traffic noise would exceed appropriate levels at a number of properties along the route.

Potential management measures identified for consideration include quieter road surfaces, noise treatment to residences and noise barriers. Individual noise treatments for properties identified as being potentially affected by operational traffic noise would be discussed with property owners during the detailed design stage.

Visual impact

The greatest visual impacts of the upgrade would be on the western edge of Scone. Elements of the proposal that are likely to be the most visually intrusive include the embankments, bridges and vehicle movements. Vehicle headlights may also cause visual impacts at night. The proposed bridge over Kingdon and Liverpool streets would visually divide these road corridors, separating the eastern and western sides of the streets. This would result in visual impacts for pedestrians and motorists travelling along these streets.

Construction of the upgrade would result in reduced traffic volumes through the Scone town centre which is likely to have positive impacts on visual amenity along the existing New England Highway.

To minimise the visual impacts of the proposal, landscaping on either side of the upgrade using native species is proposed to improve visual amenity after the upgrade is built and maintain the rural landscape character. Bridges would also be simple and visually appealing structures to blend in with the landscape.

Socio-economic impact

The key socio-economic benefits identified by the assessment are:

- Improved traffic flow and visual amenity along Kelly Street from improved driver and pedestrian safety, reduced traffic noise and lower emissions from vehicles
- Improved connectivity between both sides of the Great Northern Railway particularly for emergency services
- Increased employment opportunities from construction of the upgrade with business opportunities to supply goods and services for construction. These employment opportunities would improve business outcomes for the local retail outlets, accommodation facilities, eateries and services.

The key socio-economic impacts arising from the proposal include:

- Impacts associated with full or partial acquisition of properties
- Amenity impacts on residents, social infrastructure and recreational facilities along or adjacent to the upgrade created by increased operational noise, visual amenity and air quality impacts from construction and operation of the bypass

- Potentially reduced trade for businesses along Kelly Street when through traffic is bypassed from the Scone town centre.

Early and ongoing consultation with affected property owners, businesses and communities as well as inviting community feedback for the ongoing planning, environmental management and monitoring is important to minimise potential socio-economic impacts during construction and operation of the bypass.

Design changes since the 2014 public display

There have been several changes made to the bypass design since the 2014 public display following further investigations into hydrology and flooding, traffic operations, road safety, and noise and visual impacts.

The changes include:

- Minor realignment of the bypass near Liverpool Street and through Scone Golf Course to minimise impacts on the golf course and reduce flooding, visual and noise impacts for nearby properties
- Removal of the right turn out of Kelly Street at the southern bypass connection to improve road safety and traffic flow
- Inclusion of the right turn out of St Aubins Street to allow full access to the bypass for vehicles travelling from the west
- Removal of the right turn into Kelly Street from the northern bypass connection to improve road safety and traffic flow.

Strategic design options for town centre rail bridge

The Scone Kelly Street Level Crossing options assessment and feasibility report carried out in 2014 recommended the preferred option of a bypass and town centre rail bridge at Kelly Street. The town centre rail bridge would improve local road connectivity, emergency services access and traffic flow through Scone.

The report recognised that construction of the bridge at Kelly Street would need to be carried out after the bypass is completed to minimise traffic disruptions. Closure of the Kelly Street rail level crossing during construction of the bypass would leave only the Liverpool Street crossing available for all traffic.

Following further investigations, strategic options have been developed for a town centre rail bridge at three locations including Kelly Street, St Aubins Street and Sherwood Street. The St Aubins Street and Sherwood Street options have been considered as they could be constructed at the same time as the bypass.
**Involving the community and stakeholders**

Roads and Maritime is committed to working with the community and stakeholders during the planning process to identify issues and minimise potential impacts of the proposal and construction activities.

Stakeholders and the community are invited to comment on the concept design and environmental assessment for the highway bypass and strategic design options for the town centre rail bridge by **19 February 2016**.

Feedback will be considered to finalise the environmental assessment for the highway bypass and the preferred option for the town centre rail bridge.

**Drop-in information sessions**

Stakeholders and the community are invited to drop-in at any time during the information sessions to talk to the project team and find out more about the project. Formal presentations are not scheduled as part of the information sessions.

Location: **Scone Motor Inn**
Address: 53 New England Highway, Scone
Date: Thursday 21 January 2016 from 3pm to 7pm
  Thursday 4 February 2016 from 3pm to 7pm
  Friday 5 February 2016 from 10am to 2pm

Information is also available on the website at **rms.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects**.

**Next steps**

Upcoming planning activities include:
- Community and stakeholder consultation
- Finalise the environmental assessment for the highway bypass
- Finalise the preferred option for the town centre rail bridge, which is expected to be displayed for community feedback in mid 2016.

**Project development process**

[Diagram showing project stages: Consultation, Scone Bypass, Town Centre Rail Bridge, Concept Design and Review of Environmental Factors, Strategic Design Options, Approval to Proceed, Detailed Design and Land Acquisition, Construction]

**Contact us**

For more information about this project please contact the Project Manager, Phil Davidson by:
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