The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information on the findings of the F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study, in particular the option selected for further development to the stage of a concept proposal, and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). It also provides details on how to get more information and access the study reports.

The Study

The aim of the study was to identify a high standard transport link between the F3 and the Sydney Orbital. The new link would replace Pennant Hills Road as the interim National Highway.

The new link would:
- Alleviate traffic congestion and improve reliability on the National Highway.
- Reduce the operating costs of long-distance commercial and freight transport.
- Improve road safety on the National Highway.
- Improve local amenity (reduce traffic, air and noise emissions and severance) for people living and working along Pennant Hills Road.
- Minimise social and environmental impacts during construction and operation.
- Provide opportunities for improved public transport.
- Integrate with the regional transport network.
- Serve the future growth needs of long-distance transport.
- Be economically justifiable and affordable to government.

The study was carried out by Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM). It was funded by the Australian Government and managed by the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA).

On 8th May 2004 the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, and the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, Senator Ian Campbell, announced that a preferred corridor has been chosen for a new link to be constructed from the F3 to the Sydney Orbital.

The preferred corridor is the “Purple Option” as described in public consultation last year, and outlined in this newsletter. It is 8km long, mostly in tunnel, and connects the F3 at Wahroonga to the M2 at the Pennant Hills Road interchange. The Purple Option corridor would improve travel conditions on the National Highway, and improve local amenity on Pennant Hills Road.

The Study Process

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The Broad Corridors
The study area extends from the Sydney to Newcastle Freeway (F3) at Kaniong on the Central Coast, to the northern section of the Sydney Orbital from Dean Park in the west, to the M2 Motorway at Macquarie Park in the east.

Three broad corridor types were investigated - Type A, B and C.

Community and Stakeholder Consultation
Consultation has been ongoing throughout the study period, and included discussions with local councils, individuals within the study area and stakeholder groups. As a result more than 3,000 phone calls, emails and faxes were received by the study team and over 1,000 submissions were received in relation to the display of options in August 2003.

About the submissions received
- The majority of submissions were from areas potentially affected by the Type A options.
- Type A options were generally preferred over Type B and C options.
- There was strong preference for the Type A-Purple option, predominantly on the basis that it would best meet the project objectives, is close to an existing transport route and would provide most relief to Pennant Hills Road with least adverse environmental and social impacts.
- In relation to the Purple option there was opposition by local residents and the Hornsby Council to the concept of an open trench in the vicinity of Brickyard Park. The Park is being developed with sporting and community facilities highly valued by the community.
- There was least support for (and very strong opposition to) the Type A Red option, predominantly on the basis that it is in the vicinity of the abandoned B2-B3 corridor.
- The potential impacts from the tunnels on air quality and possible location of ventilation stacks were key issues raised.

The study team took into consideration the content of the submissions as well as discussions with members of the community, industry and business groups, issues raised at Community Focus Group meetings and discussion with other stakeholders such as Councils.

The Preferred Purple Option
The study has found that rail is unlikely to meet the future inter-regional transport task even if major rail infrastructure upgrades occur. It was found that the Type A Purple Option would best meet National Highway objectives and is justified on social, environmental, economic and inter-regional transport grounds. The indicative route for the Purple option would be mostly in tunnel running 30 to 40 metres underneath Pennant Hills Road. There is likely to be no significant impact on terrestrial ecology, water quality, heritage sites or open space. Pennant Hills Road south of the M2 would be required to be widened as far as the North Rocks Road intersection as part of the project to provide acceptable traffic flows and no queuing in the tunnels. This option has been selected as the preferred option as it would have the following benefits:
- It would result in a significant improvement in urban amenity (reduced severance, reduced traffic noise and improved accessibility) along Pennant Hills Road as a result of substantial relief to traffic congestion on surface roads that would occur from opening the new link.
- There would be opportunities to reallocate road space on Pennant Hills Road to realise benefits for other users, improve the general amenity of the area and access to Pennant Hills and Thornleigh railway stations.
- There would be an improvement in air quality along Pennant Hills Road and a reduction in vehicle emissions and traffic noise for properties along Pennant Hills Road and in close proximity to Pearees Corner.

Tunnels and Ventilation
- The current tunnel concept can be described as twin tubes with two lanes of northbound traffic in one tube and two lanes of southbound traffic in the other.
- Ventilation stacks would be required at various points along the length of the tunnel.
- Department of Environment and Conservation requirements for air quality would be achieved in all locations.

Construction
- Construction would take 3-4 years.
- The majority of construction would be underground and therefore most construction impacts would be relatively minor in comparison with the scale of the project.

Property Effects
- Only after further concept development is undertaken and an EIS design is completed would it be possible to say with any certainty which properties would be affected and to what extent.
- The final route within the Purple corridor option will be mostly in tunnel to reduce direct surface property impacts on areas of environmental value, and other land uses.
- Surface property impacts would be limited to those properties located within the potential interchange areas and other areas that may be required for associated roadworks.
- The tunnel would generally be located deep (30-40 metres) below most properties and would have no discernible effect on them during construction or operation.

Travel Time Savings
- The Purple corridor option would avoid 22 sets of traffic lights along the existing route and would save travellers 10-15 minutes journey time on average in 2011 compared to travel times on Pennant Hills Road without the new link.