

## 3 Community involvement

*Community involvement has been integral to the development of the Bells Line of Road Long Term Strategic Corridor Plan.*

*From 1 November 2010 to 31 January 2011, RMS conducted an extensive community involvement process on the future of Bells Line of Road. The high level of input provided valuable insights into how the community perceives the future of the road, and shows that the road is of interest to the communities it connects as well as the community that lives along it.*

*This chapter presents key inputs from the community involvement process. The full report of the process is documented in the Community Issues Report, June 2012.*

### 3.1 RMS' approach to community involvement

RMS' approach to community involvement has been to ensure that the Plan is developed through extensive consultation with local communities and stakeholders. The following principles have been integral to the consultation process:

- > Accessibility of the project team.
- > Transparency and public accountability.
- > Equitable participation and fair process.
- > Continuous improvement.

### 3.2 Opportunities for community involvement

A range of opportunities have been available to enable as many stakeholders as possible to provide input into the Plan. Community information and opportunities for involvement included:

- > Eight separate staffed information sessions and one staffed display where community members had the opportunity to discuss issues with the project team.
- > 13 information displays where posters and other information was available. These were at RMS motor registries, local councils and community centres within the project area.
- > 12 meetings and forums with local community, special interest and business groups (refer to the *Community Issues Report*, June 2012, for a list of these groups).
- > Briefings to Hawkesbury City Council, Lithgow City Council, Blue Mountains City Council, Forbes Shire Council, Dubbo City Council, Centroc, and the Bells Line Expressway Group.
- > A project website with background documents and regularly updated project details.
- > An online forum to enable members of the community to post and share their views on the Plan.
- > Advertisements in nine local newspapers to raise awareness of the community information sessions.
- > 34,000 community updates distributed in the Bells Line of Road corridor area.
- > 9,000 postcards to raise awareness of the Plan distributed to a wider area outside the Bells Line of Road corridor.
- > A toll free phone line for members of the community to request information and provide feedback.
- > A project email address for members of the community to request information and provide feedback.



*Community information session at Bilpin*

- > Feedback forms, information sessions and constraint maps for the community to provide comment on some specific questions.

### 3.3 What we asked the community

The communities and stakeholder groups were encouraged to identify:

- > Key issues for corridor planning (Section 3.4).
- > What needs to happen to the Bells Line of Road corridor in the short, medium and long term (Section 3.5).
- > Any constraints to and opportunities for upgrading the Bells Line of Road corridor (Section 3.6).
- > Community values to be considered in the Plan (Section 3.7).

### 3.4 Key issues raised by the community

During the community involvement process, the community raised a range of issues and made many valuable suggestions.

The main issues are summarised below, along with specific issues that occurred most frequently:

- > **Safety** – the general condition and safety of the road, including alignment, road surface and width, intersections and visibility.
- > **Traffic and access** (which interlinks with safety issues) – the amount, quality and type of traffic, and increased congestion in the eastern section.
- > **Environmental impacts** – flora and fauna, endangered ecological communities and potential impacts on tourist and recreational amenity.
- > **Regional and local economies** – there is strong support from stakeholders in central and western NSW for improved access through a major upgrade of the route.

Some key comments and concerns are listed below. A full list of issues is available in the *Community Issues Report*, June 2012.

#### Safety

- > Safety on the current road is a major issue of concern to the community, particularly with respect to its crash history, width, surface quality, intersections, alignment and visibility.
- > The volume and composition of traffic is considered a major factor influencing the need for short term safety improvements.
- > There are also concerns about safety around schools, the lack of a safe cycle route, little or no lane separation, and poor visibility in bad weather.
- > Safety is seen as a key area for short term improvement.

#### Traffic and access

- > There are concerns about the volume of traffic and the quality of access, as well as increased congestion in the eastern section, particularly in the vicinity of the Richmond Bridge.
- > The road in its present form is seen as limiting accessibility between Sydney and central and western NSW.

#### Flora and fauna

- > There are concerns about potential impacts on flora and fauna species and ecological communities, especially threatened and endangered species, if the Bells Line of Road were upgraded, or a new road built.

#### World heritage

- > There are concerns about the impacts of an upgraded road on the environment of the Blue Mountains and Wollemi national parks, including impacts on scenic values, tourism, cultural heritage and wilderness.

#### Noise and amenity

- > There are concerns that a future increase in traffic, especially heavy vehicles and construction traffic, could increase noise, which could affect the amenity of residences and recreational experiences on the Bells Line of Road.

### Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage

- > There was comment regarding the need to preserve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage during planning of the corridor.

### Local economy

- > There are concerns that a bypass or motorway would impact on local businesses. Special mention was made of Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens and local businesses such as the orchards.

### Regional economy

- > There are concerns about the impacts of *not* upgrading the road. Some said there is a need to improve the connections between Sydney and central and western NSW, which would bring broad economic benefits to this area.

### Property

- > There are concerns about the potential length of the planning process and its impact on property owners, and the property market.
- > There is concern about the potential of communities being severed or divided should a major upgrade be constructed.

### Transport

- > There were comments about the suitability of Bells Line of Road as a freight route, its relationship with the Great Western Highway and future rail links as the preferred method to carry freight.

### Character and lifestyle

- > There are concerns about potentially losing the unique character of the area if a major road upgrade were to occur.

### Recreation

- > There are concerns about access for recreational users of the corridor (and surrounding recreational areas) and for cyclists.

## 3.5 How should we improve the road?

The community was asked to suggest improvements to the Bells Line of Road corridor in the short, medium and long term. The community views were as follows.

### Short term (0–5 years)

Many community members suggested that safety improvements needed to be carried out immediately. Suggestions included sealing road shoulders, improving road surfaces, removing trees, constructing overtaking lanes, and placing restrictions on heavy vehicles.

Some community members recommended that only short term improvements be completed and that the road be retained as a heritage and tourist attraction, while others suggested that a major upgrade should commence immediately, precluding the need for specific safety improvements.

### Medium term (5–20 years)

There were a number of suggestions for medium term improvements. These included increasing the length of sections of the road with two-lanes in each direction; providing a new bridge over the Hawkesbury River at North Richmond; and realigning the steep bends at Bellbird Hill, Mount Tomah and Scenic Hill near Lithgow.

### Long term (20+ years)

There were a number of strategic and specific suggestions for the long term future of Bells Line of Road. These included:

- > Completing only short term and some medium term improvements and leaving the road as a tourist, local and alternative route.
- > Upgrading the rail system to provide better freight and commuter access and reducing the demand on the road network (including Bells Line of Road).



Community information session at North Richmond

- > Building a new motorway away from the road or building a new motorway along the current alignment.

### New routes suggested by the community

A number of people suggested new routes to connect Sydney and the Central West of NSW. In broad terms, these suggestions included:

- > New routes away from the existing Bells Line of Road, including routes through ridgetop and valley terrain in Wollemi and Blue Mountains national parks.
- > Routes that represent a combination of the existing Bells Line of Road and a new route alignment.
- > Corridor connections to the Sydney motorway network, including routes connecting with the Castlereagh Freeway corridor and the Blacktown Road/Richmond Road corridor.
- > Corridor connections to the Great Western Highway, such as via the Newnes Plateau.

While this Plan is not aimed at identifying any specific routes for upgrades, these community ideas have been recorded and may be relevant to future corridor planning stages. Evaluation of any specific routes would involve a detailed examination of associated environmental constraints.

## 3.6 Opportunities and constraints

The community and stakeholders were asked about opportunities and constraints that should be considered in preparing the Plan. A broad summary of community views are listed below.

### What opportunities should be considered?

- > The opportunity to implement a two-step approach to the Plan, which would involve completing safety upgrades and then allowing five years for monitoring before considering a major upgrade.

- > The opportunity to develop the Bells Line of Road as an expressway from the M7 and M4 motorways to the growing population of the Central West.
- > The opportunity to include a potential road corridor in local environmental plans to guide development.
- > The potential to locate Sydney's second airport west of the range, which could include provision of a very fast passenger train service.

### What constraints should be avoided or investigated?

Community views regarding constraints to road development included:

- > The Bells Line of Road passes through a World Heritage Area. Impacts on the environmentally sensitive area from Bowen Mountain to Mount Tomah could compromise the World Heritage Area, possibly leading to its delisting by the World Heritage Committee.
- > An existing system of dams near Grose Vale.
- > The potential for a major upgrade of the Bells Line of Road to facilitate urban sprawl over Bellbird Ridge and onto the rural lands between Kurrajong and Berambing.

## 3.7 Community values

The community and stakeholder groups were asked to respond to the following question: 'What is it about your area that you value the most?' Community views included:

- > Use of the area for tourism and recreation – the popularity of the drive along Bells Line of Road; in particular Farm Gate, Poets Way and Mount Tomah Gardens; and the importance of the Grose River as a community asset.
- > Connections between the communities of the area.
- > Regional development – the importance of the Central West region as a significant contributor to food production in NSW.

## 3.8 Ongoing community involvement

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RMS has used the key findings of the community involvement process to inform technical studies and help identify broad strategic opportunities for upgrading the corridor (refer to sections 4, 5 and 6).

While the main consultation phase for the development of the Plan is complete, community members are welcome to contact the project team with questions or additional comments at any time via phone, email or mail (refer to the project website [www.rms.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects](http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects)).