

Singleton Bypass Preliminary Feasibility Study

Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) has completed a preliminary feasibility study to investigate the potential for a New England Highway bypass of Singleton. The report is available to view online at www.rms.nsw.gov.au

What was the purpose of the study?

The study was undertaken to determine the merit of a New England Highway bypass of Singleton.

When was the study done and by who?

The preliminary feasibility study was undertaken by RMS during 2012 -13.

What factors did the study consider?

The study looked at:

- Traffic assessment including current and predicted traffic volumes if a bypass is built
- Preliminary environmental constraints mapping to assist in identifying potential corridors
- Strategic design of potential route corridors
- Economic analysis and cost estimation of identified potential options.

Who was consulted during the study?

Key stakeholders including Singleton Shire Council and Transport for NSW were engaged at this early planning stage with the focus on technical considerations for assessing feasibility.

Community and individual consultation will occur as planning continues and greater detail develops. Community feedback will be considered prior to identification of a preferred option.

RMS welcomes feedback at any stage of the project and contact details are available on the RMS website.

What was the outcome of the study?

The results of the preliminary feasibility study determined that there is merit in undertaking further planning and assessment of a New England Highway bypass of Singleton.

How does the study align with other planning activities and strategies for the region?

The NSW Government released the Long Term Transport Master Plan (NSW LTTMP) in 2012, which identifies six key themes and challenges for the NSW transport network over the long term.

Two of these themes directly relate to the proposed initiative:

- Theme 4: Providing essential access for regional NSW
- Theme 5: Supporting an efficient and productive freight industry.

The NSW LTTMP also identifies two key actions that support assessment of a Singleton Bypass:

- Rural highway upgrades, including pinch points on the New England Highway
- A program of town bypasses for regional centres to reduce heavy truck traffic through towns.

How many cars travel on the New England Highway through Singleton each day?

Traffic surveys showed that average daily traffic (ADT) volumes in 2012 were:

Table: Average daily traffic volumes on New England Highway at Singleton, 2012

Location	Vehicles Per Day
New England Highway at Black Creek, Belford	21,600
New England Highway near Range Rd, Whittingham	16,600
New England Highway at Hunter River, Singleton	26,300
New England Highway at Rixs Creek	14,700

What has been the historical growth in traffic through Singleton?

From 2001 to 2007 there was low traffic growth of typically 1-2 per cent per annum, with the exception of some sites which showed a decrease in traffic. At the Hunter River Bridge there was a total increase of approximately 800 vehicles per day in six years from 2001 to 2007, which is an increase of four per cent over six years (0.71 per cent per annum).

From 2007 to 2012 there was higher growth, exceeding 2.4 per cent per annum at all surveyed sites. This represents a total increase of 6,000-7,000 vehicles per day along the New England Highway in this period. Each of the New England Highway count sites showed similar increases in average daily traffic. Given the even spread of this growth, the primary source is likely to be strategic trips related to mining growth.

Is there a correlation between traffic growth and growth of the mining sector?

Historical information indicates that a number of major mines have expanded over the last 4-5 years and one new mine has been established. Mining growth over the last five years has

correlated with the sharp rise in average daily traffic from 2007 to 2012. For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that this average daily traffic growth was primarily due to mining expansion during these years.

What is the expected impact of the Hunter Expressway?

While the Hunter Expressway is anticipated to provide better travel times and accessibility along the corridor, based on traffic forecasts, it is not expected to substantially increase the number of vehicles travelling along the New England Highway to Singleton and beyond.

The Pacific Highway is the major road corridor between Sydney and Brisbane. It will continue to operate in this manner and is continuing to be improved progressively with major upgrades ongoing. This is likely to continue the trend of long haul, interstate traffic utilising the Pacific Highway. The construction of the Hunter Expressway will improve local travel conditions but is not expected to change this broader strategic traffic trend.

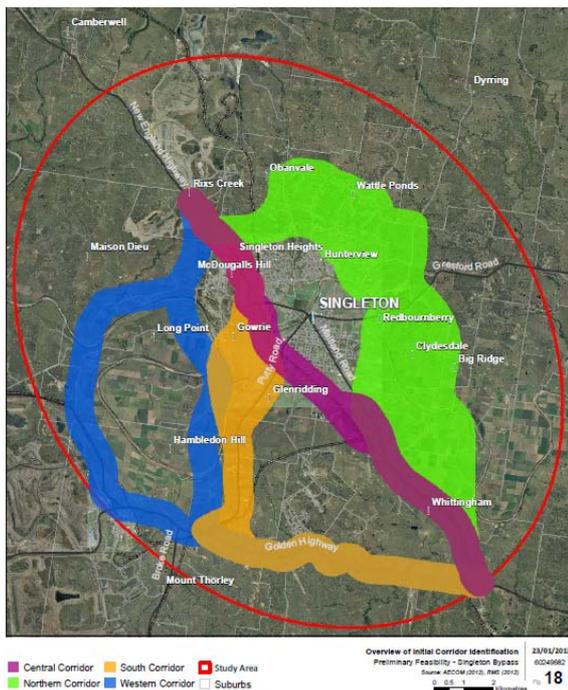
The predicted travel time savings may change where commuters choose to live but these would be long term changes that may balance themselves out with a greater demand for journey to work trips from Singleton to the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas or vice versa. Attractiveness of living further away from work locations may increase, resulting in increased demand for housing in the broader Newcastle area for the major employers in the mining sector.

Review of New England Highway traffic data north of Muswellbrook show trends indicating that there is a decline or no traffic growth along the route. The introduction of a relatively short 40km section being the Hunter Expressway is not expected to change the broader long haul traffic patterns along this corridor.

How were the four options shortlisted from the 15 initially identified?

Four broad corridor options were identified through the development process (see below). These corridor options would pass west of the Hunter River oxbow bend, southwest and northeast of Singleton and immediately to the west of Singleton (with common general alignment with the existing New England Highway).

Image 1: Initial corridor identification



Constraints associated with each of the four initial corridors were then considered in further detail and 15 route options were identified.

An assessment workshop was held in 2012 with participants from RMS, the study consultants, Singleton Shire Council and Transport for NSW. The 15 route options presented were high level strategic options, representing potential alternative routes for the New England Highway. Potential modifications to each route were considered by incorporating suggestions from stakeholders present at the workshop.

The workshop used a multi criteria decision analysis (MCDA) approach and assessed each option based on a list of agreed key constraints and potential benefits identified for the project (refer to Section 5.3 of the report).

The following criteria were established based on discussion:

- Travel time and route attraction
- Improvements to road safety, the road network and local accessibility
- Heritage impacts
- Flooding impacts
- Environmental impacts
- Social and amenity impacts
- Land use and ownership impacts
- Engineering constraints
- Cost.

Assessment of the options was made in consideration of preliminary investigations for:

- Environmental issues
- Constraints analysis
- Traffic assessment
- Preliminary strategic design.

Each of the 15 potential route options was scored against each sub-criterion question. Responses to each question were based on a subjective 1-5 scale; one representing the least desirable scenario for each criteria and five representing the most desirable scenario.

Each route option was then evaluated against the criteria using the information gained from constraints analysis, spatial analysis and stakeholder comments made during the workshop. Given that the workshop was interactive there was generally broad acceptance on each of the final scores.

Six route options were identified from the MCDA workshop for further investigation. But as some of these route options shared strong similarities critical assessment of four short-listed route options was undertaken.

What is the current strategic cost estimates for the options considered?

The assessment indicated cost estimates ranging from \$400 to \$800 million in 2012 dollars.

What are the benefits of a bypass?

Depending on the future preferred option, a bypass could potentially reduce future traffic volumes travelling along the existing New England Highway through the Singleton town centre by about 30 per cent, improving traffic flow and local amenity in town.

I own a property affected by a route option, why haven't I been consulted?

Planning for a New England Bypass of Singleton is at very early stages. The purpose of the preliminary feasibility study was to determine whether there is merit in continuing planning for a future bypass.

There is still much planning and consultation to be undertaken. There will be multiple opportunities for the community and directly impacted property owners to provide feedback to RMS during future planning stages and this feedback will be considered when identifying a preferred option.

When will RMS start discussions with affected property owners?

RMS is not contacting property owners at this stage as a preferred option has not been identified and is unlikely to be identified for some years.

As planning proceeds the proposal may change and include other options not considered to date. Additionally, at this stage there is no commitment to funding for construction of a New England Highway bypass of Singleton.

RMS is quite happy to discuss potential impacts on properties in the area with owners that have concerns regarding a future bypass. However it is not possible to provide definite information on the likely impact for any part of a property. Contact details are available on the RMS website.

Will RMS acquire affected properties?

RMS is not acquiring property in the area as a preferred option has not been identified.

I own a business in Singleton CBD. How will this affect me?

During development of a preferred option, a socio-economic study would be required to assess the potential impacts of a New England Highway bypass of Singleton.

The link to the RMS website below provides information relating to studies that have been undertaken in relation to the impact of bypasses on towns.

http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadprojects/resources/town_bypasses.html

What happens next?

The preliminary feasibility assessment has informed a NSW Government submission to the Australian Government seeking funding for more detailed planning under the Nation Building 2 program (2014–2019).

The New England Highway is part of the National Land Transport Network and funding for planning, improvements and upgrading is primarily a matter for the Australian Government.

Pending further planning funding being available, the next stage would be further options assessment and community consultation to identify and confirm a preferred route option. This may include other options that have not been investigated to date.

Who can I send feedback to about the study and options?

The preliminary feasibility study determined that there is merit in undertaking further planning for the project. The study has been published to inform the community of the preliminary work completed to date.

It is not intended to have a formal consultation period for the community to comment on the study report but RMS welcomes any feedback you might have. If you have queries in relation to the study, please contact the RMS project manager via the contact details available on the RMS website.