

**ROUTE SELECTION STAGE - ADDITIONAL  
CROSSING OF THE CLARENCE RIVER AT  
GRAFTON**

**FIRST INTERIM COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION REPORT**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**January 2004**

## **I. Introduction**

### **I.1 Purpose**

The First Interim Community Participation Report for the route selection stage of the RTA's Additional Crossing of the Clarence River at Grafton project identifies the community participation activities undertaken to date and the participation issues identified.

### **I.2 Background**

In May 2002 a public meeting was convened by a group of business people to campaign for a new bridge at Grafton. Following the meeting the State Government allocated funding to conduct a feasibility study, which was completed in March 2003.

The feasibility study indicated the area between Susan Island and Elizabeth Island be further investigated for a site for the new bridge.

The route selection stage commenced in September 2003 and will conclude mid 2004 with the announcement of the preferred route by the Minister.

The RTA has involved a broad range of stakeholders in its formal participation processes including government agencies; Grafton City, Pristine Waters and Copmanhurst Shire Councils; community organisations, and business, resident and landholder representatives.

Additionally the Project Manager has made himself available to speak with individuals or groups who require additional information or wish to make personal representation.

St Lawrence & Associates Consulting Services was appointed by the RTA to manage the Community Participation component as a member of the RTA project team. The RTA's Grafton Media Liaison Unit has supported the work.

### **I.3 Community Participation Plan**

A Community Participation Plan (CPP) was prepared by St.Lawrence and Associates Consulting Services to guide the process.

## **2. Route Selection Process & Community Participation Activities**

The CPP indicates five steps to the route selection process and identifies the community participation activities to be conducted at each.

To date step 1 (Feasibility Study) & step 2 (Inform the Community about Process & Provide Information) have been completed and step 3 (Develop Route Options) is nearing completion with the public display of options to occur in late February/early March 2004.

To date all activities identified in the CPP have been completed within the expected timeframe.

### **2.1 Agencies' Workshop**

The consultation process commenced with an Agencies Workshop on 29 July 2003. The purpose of the meeting was for the RTA to provide details regarding the delivery of the project and for Agencies to highlight major issues relating to the project.

### **2.2 Media**

Advertisements and media releases were used at relevant points in the process with reports in the Daily Examiner (Grafton) and Coffs Harbour Advocate Newspapers, and local and regional radio.

The initial release in August 2003 encouraged people and organisations to nominate for the Community Focus Group (CFG) and Community Workshops and promoted the free-call hotline. An advertisement was also placed in the Daily Examiner on 30 August and 3 September 2003.

The RTA's Regional Director, Northern was interviewed on both the local Grafton commercial radio and regional ABC radio. The interview explained the site selection process and encouraged people to nominate for the CFG and Workshops.

Subsequent releases in December 2003 promoted the short listed localities, the role of the CFG and encouraged interested people to attend the Community Workshops. The NSW Government Duty MLC for Clarence was interviewed on regional ABC radio and encouraged people to attend the Workshops.

### **2.3 Letter to Residents in Study Area**

A letter to residents inviting nomination to the CFG or Community Workshops was posted in late August 2003 to approximately 2,650 households & businesses in the Grafton & South Grafton study area. Nomination forms for the CFG & Workshops were attached to the letter.

A similar letter was used to forward nomination forms to members of the community who made telephone enquiries and to key community organisations and local government.

A database of landowners in critical localities in the study area was searched for non-residential owners and a letter sent to their residential address or PO Box. This ensured that owners who do not live locally were also made aware of the route selection project.

Anecdotal feedback indicated that some residents did not receive the letter so a random number of key residents were phoned to ensure the letter distribution occurred. A substantial number had received the letter or been contacted by neighbours about it. Additional letters were forwarded to those who indicated they required a copy.

### **2.4 Community Update Newsletter No 4**

The Community Update Numbers 1 to 3 were circulated during the Feasibility Study. The Community Update No 4 newsletter was circulated in September 2003 via a letterbox drop to all households in Grafton, South Grafton, Waterview heights & Clarenza. Its aim was to inform the community about the route selection process and the methods by which the community was to be involved.

### **2.5 Free-call Hotline**

The free call hotline was established in July 2003. Fifteen calls were in response to media coverage re the establishment of the CFG & the Community Workshops. Twenty-one calls were in response to the media coverage of the short-listed options. The majority of calls were immediately responded to or within 24 hours.

### **2.6 Community Focus Group (CFG)**

The role and establishment of a CFG was widely promoted in the media and via direct mail.

The role of CFG members is to convey project information to & from their group of interest and to participate in the process to develop the recommendation of the preferred route to the RTA.

Nominations to the CFG could be made by organisations, an informal group of residents from a particular area or by individuals. Nominations closed on 17 September 2003.

Twenty-three people were selected to join the CFG. Interest groups represented include:

- Local government
- Land owners within the study area
- Business representatives
- Environmental groups
- Road transport sector
- River users
- Residents Association
- Aboriginal Land Council

To date 2 CFG meetings have been held on 14 October and 10 December 2003.

## **2.7 Community Workshops**

Community Workshops have been held the day following the CFG, namely 15 October and 11 December 2003.

The role of the Community Workshops is to provide an opportunity for members of the public to access information about the project and to contribute opinion. There is no membership or expectation that attendees will participate in all workshops.

A total of twenty-eight people attended the October workshops and twenty-five people attended the December workshops including twelve who attended both.

## **2.8 Access**

The meeting venue was fully accessible for people with a disability and near public transport,

## **2.9 Meetings with Stakeholders**

The Project Manager has initiated informal meetings with residents who are located in key positions within the study area and has made himself available to meet with residents who make contact.

## **2.10 Consultation with the Aboriginal Community**

The RTA Aboriginal Liaison Officer has met with representatives of the Ngerrie Aboriginal Land Council & a letter inviting submissions was forwarded. A position is available on the CFG for a Council representative.

## **2.11 Short Listing of Localities Workshop**

A Workshop independently facilitated by the Australian Centre for Value Management was held on 28 November 2003 with the objective to “Review and assess the preliminary localities investigated for the project in order to shortlist those worthy of more detailed investigation.”

The attendees were the Project Team and staff representatives from Grafton City, Copmanhurst Shire and Pristine Waters Councils.

The results of the Workshop were presented to the CFG and Community Workshops in December.

## **2.12 Written Submissions**

Fourteen written submissions from seven people have been received by the Project Team to date. All have been acknowledged and responded to by the RTA.

## **2.13 Evaluation of CFG & Community Workshop Meetings**

Evaluation forms were provided at each CFG and Workshop. A summary of the responses is contained in the full Community Participation Report.

## **3. Social Impact Assessment Interviews**

During October and November 2003 interviews with randomly selected businesses and residents in Grafton and South Grafton, were undertaken by the consultant conducting the Social and Economic Impacts Report.

A total of 9 residents and 12 businesses were interviewed.

## **4. Community Participation Issues & Next Steps**

To date all activities and timelines of the CPP have been delivered. The effectiveness of the activities in achieving the CPP objectives is discussed below.

Ensuring a community is aware of community participation initiatives for a project is a difficult task and can consume large amounts of resources for a small return.

As detailed in the Report the RTA undertook numerous activities to inform the community about the CFG and Community Workshops and to invite nominations.

There was an adequate response to establish a widely representative CFG, however the number of people attending the Community Workshops was a disappointment.

As the largest percentage of people attending the Workshops could be directly affected by one of the bridge options, it may be that the rest of the Grafton community is not sufficiently engaged to actively participate at this stage of the site selection process.

The evaluation feedback from the CFG and Workshops (see section 2.12 of the Report) indicates that the majority of participants agree with the community participation process to date.

The following issues have been raised by a number of people.

- Feedback from the newspaper short-listing article indicated a dislike for the Villiers St/Abbott St option due to the impact on heritage area, visual impact, restriction of river use and maintenance of all traffic through the CBD.
- The short-listing of only 2 options neither of which address the issue of removing heavy vehicle through traffic.
- Concern over the validity of traffic counts and the assumptions used in the traffic model.
- The CFG and Community Workshops need to be longer to allow time for participants to digest and discuss information.
- All information to be discussed at the CFG & Workshops should be sent out beforehand to allow time to consider.
- Perception that the RTA already has a preferred site and the community participation is just a “smoke screen.”
- Perception that the short-listing workshop that resulted in only 2 localities going forward supported the view above.

The RTA will present a public display of short-listed options and distribute another Community Update in the next few weeks. Following submissions a 2 day Route Evaluation Workshop will be held in which community representatives will be involved. These activities will provide additional opportunities for the community to gain information and to provide opinion to assist in the determination of the recommended preferred site.