Gunnedah second road over rail bridge

Community Submissions Report

JULY 2013
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BACKGROUND

The NSW Government has allocated $16 million for a second road over rail bridge in Gunnedah to provide a Higher Mass Limit (HML) route for heavy vehicles and address local traffic congestion issues.

With major coal development occurring in the Gunnedah basin, coal trains have become longer, causing delays at Gunnedah’s level crossings. The existing bridge at Abbott Street is not suitable for use by HML vehicles.

Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) has engaged Kellogg Brown & Root Pty Ltd (KBR) to assist in the development of options for the second road over rail bridge. The development of options has considered community feedback on the study area released in December 2012, and a wide range of engineering, environmental and social constraints in the area.

The projects objectives are:

- Provide a grade separated HML route through Gunnedah.
- Improve local traffic efficiency.
- Improve road safety.
- Improve road transport productivity, efficiency and reliability of travel.
- Minimise the impact on the natural, cultural and built environment.
- Provide value for money.

A shortlist of three preliminary options has been made available for public review. A preferred option is expected to be identified in late 2013.

RMS is committed to informing and consulting all stakeholders to ensure a strategic solution is found to meet the needs of the Gunnedah community and the transport industry.

The project is being funded by the NSW Government and is scheduled for completion by 2016.

COMMUNITY SUBMISSIONS REPORT

This report summarises feedback received at two community drop-in sessions held on Wednesday 22 May 2013 (11am-2pm and 4pm-7pm) at the Gunnedah Town Hall and in associated submissions and private meetings.

RMS invited the community to attend these sessions through a letter drop to every address in Gunnedah (carried out by Australia Post), newspaper advertisements and a media release (published in local newspapers; The Namoi Valley Independent and The Northern Daily Leader) in the week before the event. The letters featured the RMS logo and project name, to increase the likelihood of them being distinguished from promotional mail. Personalised letters and copies of the community update were also sent to property owners within the study area (see Appendix A) and to all those who had previously expressed an interest in the project and provided their contact details.

Related project information including the community update brochure and the Preliminary Concept Options Report, were available on the RMS website. Written submissions were welcomed until Friday 31 May 2013.
Using all feedback received, this report will guide future public participation activities and the selection of a preferred bridge option. After a preferred option is identified, it will be released for community comment.

The community can contact the project team at any time by:

**Phone:** 1800 029 585 (toll free)

**Email:** secondroadoverrailbridge@kbr.com

**Post:** Gunnedah second road over rail bridge project
Reply Paid 633
Brisbane QLD 4001.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Fifty-eight community members signed in at the drop-in sessions including residents and business representatives from both within and outside the study area. Thirty-seven of those attended the morning session and 21 the evening session. Six of those people had also signed in at the community drop-in sessions held in December 2012, while the remainder were participating in face-to-face consultation on this project for the first time.

Attendees spoke with members of the project team either one-on-one or in small groups to better understand the project, ask questions and give feedback.

Eight property owners within the study area accepted individual meetings to discuss potential to impacts on their home or business.

Seventy-three formal feedback forms were returned, with some submitted on the day and others sent in by email or post. Where an identical response was received in duplicate from the same person, it was counted and analysed only once.

FEEDBACK

The preferred bridge option will be chosen after considering a range of technical, environmental and social constraints, including community feedback. It will not be chosen by public referendum however, the community’s preferences and the issues that underpin those preferences will be given careful consideration before proceeding to the next stage of the project.

Preferences

On the feedback form, respondents were asked to rank each option (see Appendix B) in order of preference (first, second and third). Not all respondents ranked the three options shortlisted and sometimes partially completed a ranking, for example, giving only their first preference or their third (least preferred). Of the three options, Option B received the largest number of first preference votes with 28; Option A received 24 votes; and Option C received 11 votes (see Figure 1).
Figure 1 – First preference

A breakdown of the results for all three preferences can be found in Figure 2. Note that almost the same number of people selected Option A as their first preference and their third and that Option B had the most number of first preference votes and the least number of third preference votes.

Figure 2 – Options in order of preference
Key topics

The comments made within feedback forms were classified by topic (Figure 3). These are the topics and issues that underpinned the preferences stated in Figures 1 and 2. The top five topics identified were:

- Business/services patronage
- Traffic flow and travel times
- Future of existing New Street level crossing
- Property access
- Project funding and cost.

![Figure 3 – Top 10 topics raised in May 2013 community consultation](image)

The top five topics raised by the respondents have been analysed for each option (below).

**Option A**

For Option A, seven topics are listed because four topics shared equal votes:

- Property access
- Business/services patronage
- Traffic flow and travel times
- Noise/rail design requirements/road safety/future of existing New Street level crossing.
Option B

The top five topics identified for Option B were:

- Business/services patronage
- Future of existing New Street level crossing
- Traffic flow and travel times
- High/wide load access
- Project cost and funding.

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Figure 4 – Option A: Top 7 topics

Figure 5 – Option B: Top 5 topics
Option C

The top five topics identified for Option C were:

- Business/services patronage
- Traffic flow and travel times
- Future of existing New Street level crossing
- Project funding and cost
- Vegetation management.

Additional comments

Respondents were invited to provide additional comments. The top five topics raised most frequently were:

- Business/services patronage
- Consultation process
- Bloomfield Street impacts
- Traffic flow and travel times
- Future of existing New Street level crossing.
SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

A summary of the comments made during the May 2013 community consultation is provided below, with topics listed in alphabetical order. These comments are currently being considered as the project team further refines the options before recommending a preferred option.

Some comments indicate confusion or misunderstanding, which may have influenced the preferences identified above. More information and clarification is provided in a separate ‘Questions and Answers’ factsheet available on the project website at www.rms.nsw.gov.au.

Option A

- Bloomfield Street
  - Would push more heavy vehicles onto Bloomfield Street.

- Business/services patronage
  - Through traffic will be able to easily access Barber Street.
  - Would make properties on New Street, who may be potentially blocked, unviable business locations.

- Dust
  - Significant impacts during construction on houses in New and Railway Street.

- Environment
  - Least disruptive.

- Flooding/drainage
  - Blackjack Creek has potential to flood which may cause ongoing issues.

- Future of existing New Street level crossing
  - Minister for Transport is required to approve any closure.
  - Preference for Option A, only if the level crossing remains open to service Railway Street.

- High/wide load access
  - If bridge is to adhere to requirements for double-stacking rail it would not be able to accommodate oversize heavy vehicles.
  - Need to consider gradient as high/wide loaded vehicles require sighting distance.

- Noise
  - Noise pollution significant due to heavy vehicles going up and down a steep gradient.
  - Significant impacts during construction on houses in New and Railway Street.

- Pedestrian safety
  - Better pedestrian access into Gunnedah CBD.
• Pollution
  o Significant impacts during construction on properties in New and Railway Street.

• Property access
  o Would block property access to businesses (especially Gunnedah Maize Mill, Fulwood Transport, and Hopes Fuel Supplies) and residents on New Street.

• Project funding and cost
  o This option would link into already existing infrastructure (roundabouts, roads etc.) therefore meaning less cost and less disturbance caused by construction.

• Property value
  o Would make properties on New Street, who may be potentially blocked, unviable business locations and impact on property value.

• Road safety
  o Placing traffic directly onto the New Street/Barber Street intersection may cause further incidents.
  o Potential steep gradient could see danger caused by brake failure (vehicles into properties at the end of the bridge) (New Street/Barber Street intersection).

• Technical specifications
  o Depending on the decision as to whether the bridge has to accommodate single or double stacking rail loads, it could be very steep.
  o Specific requirements for property entrance/exit would be required.

• Traffic flow and travel times
  o May cause congestion as all traffic will be forced to turn left or right onto Barber Street (not able to turn right on Railway Street), traffic management options would need to be reconsidered.
  o Increased traffic flow causing noise and access problems for properties on Barber Street.

• Visual amenity
  o Would look out of place when approaching town.
  o Impact on the visual amenity of the Gunnedah Maize Mill.

Option B

• Bloomfield Street
  o Will send all heavy vehicles down Bloomfield Street.

• Business/services patronage
  o Not an option if there is no access onto and off Barber Street – need an off ramp for Barber Street.
  o Traffic could easily bypass Barber Street, which relies on through traffic and walk-in clientele for viability.
- Potentially harmful to livelihoods for business owners within the Barber business area.
- Easy to bypass Gunnedah and head straight to Narrabri or Tamworth.
- Construction or ongoing impacts (noise, dust, and vibration) could deter Marcroft Park tenants.

- **Community amenities**
  - Least impact on recreational areas.

- **Dust**
  - Less impact on New Street/Railway Street properties in regard to dust.
  - Residents within the vicinity of the bridge (Stockman Close) are concerned about increased dust.

- **Flooding/drainage**
  - Runs through a high risk flooding area.

- **Flora management**
  - Preserve trees in the Blackjack Creek area.

- **Future of existing New Street level crossing**
  - Only acceptable if the New Street level crossing remains open.
  - If there is no off ramp to Barber Street, the level crossing should remain open.
  - If the crossing remains open, will the bells stop?

- **High/wide load access**
  - Need to consider gradient as high/wide loaded vehicles require sighting distance.
  - If the bridge is unable to cater for high/wide loads, the existing level crossing, New Street and Warrabungle need to remain accessible.
  - Easier for vehicles to negotiate the intersection off Oxley Highway.
  - If the New Street crossing was closed, a high/wide load problem will arise. To take high/wide load over a bridge will cause extreme logistics issues, possibly even police escorts at each end.
  - If the New Street level crossing was to close, reopen the level crossing near the old abattoir, even if the gates remain and have to be opened and closed when used.

- **Land acquisition**
  - Interference with Gunnedah Maize Mill land.

- **Noise**
  - Less impact on New Street/Railway Street properties in regard to vehicle noise.
  - Residents within the vicinity of the option (Stockman Close/Marcroft Park) are concerned about increased noise.

- **Non-indigenous cultural heritage**
  - Encroaches on the heritage buffer zone for the Gunnedah Maize Mill.
• **Pedestrian safety**
  o Should close level crossing except for pedestrian and cyclist access.

• **Pollution**
  o Less impact on New Street/Railway Street properties in regard to exhaust pollution.
  o Concern of light pollution if vehicles on bridge shine headlights into homes.

• **Project funding and cost**
  o Utilising the existing roundabout on View Street will save money and mean fewer disturbances caused by construction.
  o High cost compared to Option A.

• **Property access**
  o Less impact on property access requirements (than Option A) for New, Barber and Railway Streets.

• **Road safety**
  o Deter speeding on New Street.

• **Traffic flow and travel times**
  o Consider a roundabout at Conadilly and Warrabungle Street intersections to remove congestion risk.
  o Less impact on existing street layout and operation.
  o Removes the ‘dogleg’ at New/Barber/Warrabungle Street intersections.

• **Vegetation management**
  o Limited impact on habitats within the Blackjack Creek area.

• **Vibration**
  o Residents within the vicinity of the bridge (Stockman Close) are concerned about increased vibration.

• **Visual amenity**
  o Not an eyesore if behind the Maize Mill.

**Option C**

• **Bloomfield Street**
  o Consideration needs to be made about dedicating a Heavy Vehicle Route that is not Bloomfield Street.

• **Business/services patronage**
  o Diverts traffic from businesses in New and Barber Streets.
  o Not an option if there is no access onto and off Barber Street – need an off ramp for Barber Street.
  o Construction or ongoing impacts (noise, dust, and vibration) could deter Marcroft Park tenants.
• **Community amenities**
  - Would like to see the bridge start on the Oxley Highway, away from existing sporting areas (skate park, showground).

• **Construction**
  - Would require too much construction work.
  - Residents within the vicinity of the options are concerned about increased dust and noise during construction.
  - Least disruption during construction for the town and businesses.

• **Dust**
  - Residents within the vicinity of the bridge (Stockman Close/Marcroft Park) are concerned about increased dust.

• **Flooding/drainage**
  - Will need to take into consideration flood mitigation work for Blackjack Creek.

• **Flora management**
  - The upheaval of existing grass and trees within the reserve between Blackjack Creek and the rail line makes no sense.
  - Preserve trees.
  - Excessive impact on Blackjack Creek vegetation.

• **Future of existing New Street level crossing**
  - Keep New Street level crossing open as business within the Barber Street business area rely on through traffic.
  - Should remain open to ensure that future increases in traffic and development can be managed.

• **High/wide load access**
  - New Street level crossing will need to remain open for wide loads.
  - Maybe install a high/wide load on/off ramp at Warrabungle Street.

• **Land acquisition**
  - Potentially takes the southern corner of the Marcroft Park property.

• **Noise**
  - Residents within the vicinity of the bridge (Stockman Close/Marcroft Park) are concerned about increased noise.

• **Pollution**
  - Concern of light pollution if vehicles on bridge shine headlights into homes.

• **Project funding and cost**
  - Why not utilise the existing roundabout? To build another seems like an unnecessary expense.
  - More expensive than Option B.
• **Traffic flow and travel times**
  - There doesn’t appear to be a link to the Oxley Highway, only accessible by local traffic, complicates traffic flow.
  - Less impact on existing street layout and operation.
  - Removes the ‘dogleg’ at New/Barber/Warrabungle Street intersections.
  - Barber Street must not be made a dead-end.

• **Vegetation management**
  - Excessive impact on Blackjack Creek koala habitats.

• **Vibration**
  - Residents within the vicinity of the bridge (Stockman Close/Marcroft Park) are concerned about increased vibration.

• **Visual amenity**
  - Not an eyesore if behind the Maize Mill.

**Additional comments**

The following comments were made by community members who submitted feedback forms to the project team and aren’t attributable to a specific option.

• **Bloomfield Street**
  - A new road over rail bridge (regardless of the location) may increase HML vehicles onto Bloomfield Street.
  - Concerns about Bloomfield Street being used as a HML route due to the three schools, sporting fields, playgrounds and residences situated along it.
  - Concerns about speeding both in and out of school hours.
  - Heavy vehicles so thunderous that houses vibrate.
  - Understand the building of a new HML bypass route will be expensive, but so will the continual maintenance of the street (who will pay?).
  - Increased pollution caused by HML vehicles may harm the health of Bloomfield Street residents.
  - Visibility concerns from side streets and shopping centres.
  - Adjacent to proposed Riverina development which would see an increase recreational activity.
  - Possible property devaluation.
  - Suggestions that Maitland Street should be used instead of Bloomfield Street for HML route or that HML traffic be allowed to turn down South, Barber, Conadilly and Bloomfield Street.
  - Consider installing a crossing guard at the primary schools in Bloomfield Street (like the one at the High School) to improve safety.
  - Evidence of incidents caused near the school provided by community member.
  - Reduce speeds and install speed cameras.

**NB.** This feedback concerning Bloomfield Street has been brought to the attention of Gunnedah Shire Council and the relevant RMS department for further consideration.
• **Bridge location**
  - Consider lowering the rail tracks to reduce the height of the overpass and the noise and visual impact of trains through Gunnedah.
  - Use a combination of B and C, Option B north of the rail line and an alignment on the southern side a mixture between B and C, and roundabout towards Mullaley Street.
  - A small underpass used to exist to the west of the Maize Mill, why not rebuild that? If it is blocked due to flooding, vehicles could then use the New Street crossing.
  - Suggested new location of bridge.
  - Has Carroll Street been considered?

• **Business/services patronage**
  - Businesses, particularly those within the Barber Street business area rely on passing traffic, if traffic is diverted property values may drop.
  - Barber Street is zoned ‘Light Commercial’ and is the only part of town currently available to invest in this type of property.
  - If businesses in the Barber Street area have to close, consider what will happen to abandoned buildings.
  - Impacts of bridge location changing access to houses along New Street.

• **Consultation process**
  - Request for further consultation with Barber Street businesses before any decisions are made on the location of the bridge.
  - Concerns about not being properly informed.
  - Some community members thanked RMS for being given the opportunity to have their say.
  - Concerns that Gunnedah Shire Council and RMS have not adequately considered the impacts that Options B and C might have on businesses in Barber Street.
  - The community drop-in sessions were a great idea and a great way to provide project information, congratulations to the organisers.

• **Dust**
  - Increased dust for residents surrounding any of the options.

• **Flora management**
  - The project’s impacts on flora management should be carefully considered.
  - No koala sightings in the neighbourhood of Barber Street.

• **Future of existing New Street level crossing**
  - If the existing New Street level is closed and there is no other entry onto Barber Street (due to diversions) economic development will be stifled.
  - Consider impacts the bridge and possible closure of the existing New Street level crossing will have on emergency service access.
  - Only support Options B and C if the existing level crossing is closed.
  - Only support Options B and C if the existing level crossing remains open.

• **High/wide load access**
  - The existing New Street level crossing provides the only practical access for high/wide loads and is constantly used by the mining and agricultural industries. If it
is closed, high/wide loads will be forced to use less practical and unsafe routes.

- High/wide loads should use the Quia Road underpass.
- Make existing roundabout on Oxley Highway/View Street/New Street bigger so that high/wide vehicles can manoeuvre easily.
- Since the closure of the crossing at the abattoir entrance, all high/wide loads too big to fit under the Quia Road underpass use the New Street crossing – less than ideal but workable.

- **Noise**
  - Increased noise for residents surrounding any of the options, especially if HML vehicles use exhaust breaks.

- **Pedestrian safety**
  - All options lack detail about whether pedestrian facilities will be provided.
  - Install pedestrian access at the Railway Station, closest to Woolworths and the south side of town.

- **Project funding and cost**
  - Consider lowering the rail tracks to reduce the height of the overpass, the noise and visual impact of trains through Gunnedah – a lot of money has been spent placing double tracks to the west of the saleyards, and it looks as though the area was raised slightly. This option would be costly but would get rid of the visual monster (bridge).
  - Waste of $16 million worth of taxpayers' money (suggests replacing wooden bridges around the state or at the level crossing at Curlewis).

- **Road safety**
  - Lack of detail about what will happen at the Warrabungle/Conadilly Street (Kamilaroi Highway) intersection considering that there is likely to be a significant increase in traffic.

- **Technical requirements**
  - Ensure bridge isn’t too steep to ensure pedestrian, cyclist access and that high/wide vehicles can access.

- **Traffic flow and travel times**
  - Existing train movements are minimal – therefore none of these options are necessary.
  - The bridge selected should be the one with the shortest distance to cut travel times.
  - Not against having a second road over rail bridge in Gunnedah but are against the way that the bridges will cause the traffic to flow (onto Bloomfield Street).
  - Barber Street must not be made a dead-end.

- **Vegetation management**
  - The project’s impacts on vegetation management should be carefully considered.

- **Vibration**
  - Increased vibration for residents surrounding any of the options.
NEXT STEPS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

The feedback received during the community drop-in sessions and in written submissions will be taken into consideration in developing more detailed proposals and nominating a preferred option.

A Concept Options Report, including one preferred option, will be published to demonstrate the selection process. The report will be available online and an update will be sent to interested community members who have provided their contact details. Copies will also be displayed at:

Gunnedah Shire Council 63 Elgin Street

Gunnedah Shire Library 291 Conadilly Street

Gunnedah Motor Registry 387 Conadilly Street

For more information please visit the RMS project website at www.rms.nsw.gov.au.

The community can contact the project team at any time by:

Phone: 1800 029 585 (toll free)

Email: secondroadoverrailbridge@kbr.com

Post: Gunnedah second road over rail bridge project
       Reply Paid 633
       Brisbane QLD 4001
APPENDIX B – Preliminary options map and descriptions

Three options have been shortlisted and are described below:

**Option A**

A new north/south bridge would be built in place of the existing New Street level crossing. The bridge would span from just south of Barber Street to the Oxley Highway roundabout, which would be raised. Vehicle access to New Street properties would be limited.

**Option B**

A new bridge would be built west of the Maize Mill to connect the Oxley Highway roundabout with Warrabungle Street, north of the Barber Street intersection. The bridge would start at the Oxley Highway roundabout and run close to the railway on its south side.

**Option C**

A new bridge would be built west of the Maize Mill to connect the Oxley Highway with Warrabungle Street, north of the Barber Street intersection. The bridge would start on View Street and make a wide arc west of the Mill.
APPENDIX C – Project stages

**DEC 2012**
Announce project start, display study area and confirm plans to actively engage with the community in selecting one preferred option for the bridge.

**DEC 2012**
Hold two community drop-in sessions to identify local priorities and issues.

**FEB 2013**
Explore a range of possible options, based on community, environmental and other constraints.

**MAY 2013**
Announce and display three shortlisted options and Preliminary Concept Options Report for community input.

**MAY 2013**
Hold two community drop-in sessions and meet with potentially affected property owners in the study area.

**AUG 2013**
Incorporate community input and technical studies into the Concept Options Report.

- Display Concept Options Report (including the preferred option) and invite community submissions.
- Consider submissions from the display of the Concept Options Report.
- Consideration and decision by RMS and the Minister for Roads on the preferred option.
- Announce preferred option.
- Conduct environmental impact assessment and obtain approvals.
- Start detailed design and construction.