Gerringong to Bomaderry
Princes Highway Upgrade

Preliminary Urban and Regional Design Strategy

The Roads and Traffic Authority NSW

October 2007
Gerringong to Bomaderry Princes Highway Upgrade

Prepared for
The Roads and Traffic Authority NSW

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DEV06/04-UD-EW-Prelim Urban & Regional Design

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Executive Summary

Maunsell was engaged by the RTA in December 2006 to carry out an Options and Route Selection Study, Concept Development and Environmental Assessment (EA) for upgrading the Princes Highway between Gerringong and Bomaderry.

The urban and regional design strategy documents the initial input of urban and regional design into the planning of the upgrade. It has been prepared prior to the identification of route options. The urban design objectives specifically tailored to the project are applied at this stage insofar as they relate to the potential location of the upgraded highway.

The study area is set within the coastal hinterland between Gerringong and Bomaderry. For the most part the topography is flat to undulating, with the main exceptions being a series of spurs connecting with the much higher elevations to the west of the study area that comprise the southern end of the Illawarra Escarpment. The landscape setting is discussed in both the natural and cultural context.

A landscape constraint analysis has been carried out to assist in the route options development process. The visual constraint analysis evaluates three main factors influencing the likely landscape and visual impact of the road. These factors are land cover, slope and visibility. These are then considered in the context of the cultural and landscape setting to inform the urban and regional design strategy.

A specific urban and landscape design framework based on the principles of the Beyond the Pavement series has been established for the upgrade. This framework comprises a series of objectives and principles that reflect the particular and unique requirements of this project as established by the landscape constraint analysis.

The evaluation of the landscape setting and the visual constraint analysis are intended to be viewed in parallel to provide urban and regional design input into the development of route options. The visual constraint analysis is focused on identifying the potential visual impact of the upgraded highway. The visual impact also needs to be considered in the context of the overall road user experience, with both of these factors contributing to the identification of route options and ultimately, a preferred route.
Not used
1.0 Background

1.1 Overview

Maunsell was engaged by the RTA in December 2006 to carry out an Options and Route Selection Study, Concept Development and Environmental Assessment (EA) for upgrading the Princes Highway between 42.6 km to 74.6 km south of Wollongong. Maunsell has engaged a number of prominent sub-consultants to contribute to the delivery of this project.

The work includes development of route options and concept development based on the identified preferred route, environmental assessment, public displays and handover period to allow for finalisation of all activities and reports following the announcement and display of the Preferred Route, the Environmental Assessment and the Conditions of Approval.

The project will provide a bypass of Berry. The northern extremity of the project is in the vicinity of the Mount Pleasant Lookout (north of Gerringong at the termination of the four lane configuration) and the southern extremity of the project is the intersection (roundabout) of the Princes Highway with Cambewarra and Moss Vale Roads at Bomaderry.

Community involvement is a key aspect of this project and will afford the broader community the opportunity to make a demonstrable input to the process and to ensure that the requirements and aspirations of the community will be adequately and appropriately addressed. This is particularly relevant to:

a) Any potential impacts on rural and residential areas within the study area;
b) Social and economic impacts;
c) Accessibility of the road network for local and through traffic;
d) Potential impacts on water quality;
e) Potential impacts on wetlands;
f) Potential impact on flooding;
g) Potential impacts on land uses;
h) Threatened flora and fauna species;
i) Indigenous and non-indigenous heritage;
j) Visual impact;
k) Noise; and
l) Air quality.

Several studies have been undertaken since the early 1990s to identify a preferred route to upgrade sections of the Princes Highway between Kiama and Nowra including a bypass around the town of Berry.

These studies include:

m) The 1991 Gerringong to Berry Route Study;
n) 1998 North Street Berry Bypass Corridor; and
o) 2004/05 Quantm Study from Kiama to Nowra;

Sections of the highway between Gerringong and Bomaderry have a poor accident record and limited safe overtaking opportunities.
Due to the significant changes in traffic, land use and population since 1991, the NSW State Government, in March 2006 committed to investigating an area where it is likely a preferred route would be located to upgrade the Princes Highway between Mount Pleasant at Gerringong and Moss Vale / Cambewarra Road at Bomaderry to meet current road standards.

1.2 The Princes Highway urban design framework

The need for urban and regional design to be considered in a consistent and integrated way into the highway planning process is part of the RTA planning and design policy. Whilst a specific “Princess Highway Urban Design Framework” does not yet exist the objectives outlined in this report are derived and closely aligned with the RTA’s overall philosophy and policies towards urban design published in the *Beyond the Pavement* series. This is explained in more detail in Section 4.

These objectives and the principles that apply to each are considered based on the surrounding natural and cultural landscape context. They are also considered with reference to recent precedent road infrastructure upgrades within the region including the North Kiama bypass, Oak Flats to Dunmore (under construction) and Sea Cliff Bridge.

Figure 1.1 North Kiama bypass

1.2.1 Landscape context

The natural landscape setting of the study area and the greater context of the NSW South Coast is a constant interaction of ocean and beach, rocky headland, coastal plain and escarpment and mountain ranges. Other than the permanent presence of the ocean the other landscape elements vary greatly in scale and interact in many different but ultimately harmonious combinations. The existing highway is an experience and element that is layered into this landscape. The landscape contextual character provides for many experiences and interpretations. There is the sense of prosperity with stately trees (both indigenous and exotic) it is also enveloping and soothing, with tree covered escarpments and meandering creeks and rivers that nurture with the fertile coastal plains, lakes and wetlands.
The existing highway reveals all of this complex and harmonious landscape to the user. The coast is often present in distant views as are the open fertile coastal plains. The creek lines are often engaged as the highway closely follows the varying topography and the scale of the many roadside trees is always impressive.

1.2.2 Built form context

The built form context while obviously closely related to the landscape context and in combination with, defines the local character of the southern NSW coast. The towns that have developed in support of farming and industry (and later tourism) have evolved by utilising the many riches that the natural landscapes have provided. Today this built form context manifests itself in a unique South Coast character that appears timeless, welcoming and prosperous all at once. The build form appears to be balanced and in harmony with much of the landscape qualities of the region. The highway is an integral part of the link between the built and natural landscape contexts and is the conduit by which many experience the unique character of the study area and the greater South Coast region.

A context map for the study area is provided as Figure 1.2.
Figure 1.2  Context Map

Gerringong to Bomaderry
PRINCES HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Legend

- Study Area
- Princes Hwy

March 2007
1.3 **Objectives of the report**

The urban and regional design strategy documents the initial input of urban and regional design into the planning of the upgrade. It has been prepared in conjunction with the identification of route options. The urban design objectives specifically tailored to the project are applied at this stage insofar as they relate to the potential location of the upgraded highway.

The landscape setting of the study area is described in this report. The existing Princes Highway alignment is treated as a control and the existing journey is described to provide an indication of its current positive and negative aspects from the road user’s point of view.

A landscape constraint analysis has also been undertaken and is described in this document. The landscape constraints analysis is considered in the context of the *Urban and Regional Design Framework Guidelines*. They serve to compliment and inform the other. This analysis has been prepared to assist in the identification of route options and ultimately, the selection of a preferred route.

Figure 1.3  North Kiama bypass
2.0 Landscape setting

2.1 Overview

The study area is set within the coastal hinterland between Gerringong and Bomaderry. For the most part the topography is flat to undulating, with the main exceptions being a series of spurs connecting with the much higher elevations to the west of the study area that comprise the southern end of the Illawarra Escarpment. Beyond the study area to the east, there are isolated areas of higher ground, including Coolangatta Mountain near Shoalhaven Heads. (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Werri Beach and Gerringong looking south

The largest human influence on the landscape within the study area has been the agricultural practices that have occurred since European settlement. Much of the study area has been heavily cleared and utilised for agricultural purposes, mainly grazing. Agriculture in the Shoalhaven area was originally dominated by large estates on land grants (such as Alexander Berry, Coolangatta). The predominant form of agriculture since the second half of the nineteenth century has been dairying which has resulted in a characteristic landscape over large parts of the study area, of cleared rolling pasture with prominent cultural plantings marking farmhouse locations, and in some cases property boundaries. Corridors of native vegetation are often retained along drainage lines within the pastureland, whilst isolated native trees particularly larger specimens of figs and cabbage tree palms also occur. (Figure 2.2)

More extensive areas of native vegetation occur on some of the higher points within the study area, including hills near Broughton Village and on some of the spurs connecting with the higher escarpment areas to the west.
Historically the scale and character of settlement patterns were dependent on the distribution of small dairy farms. The towns of Gerringong, Berry and Bomaderry all developed as a consequence of the dairying in the area as did the smaller rural settlements. The settlement pattern today generally conforms to this historical pattern with the main exception being the significant urban expansion of Bomaderry, the northern fringe of which is situated within the study area. In its current context the landscape character (south of the Kiama bends) is widely recognised as truly becoming rural / coastal for the first time heading south of Sydney.

The main landscape elements both natural and cultural are discussed in more detail below.
2.2 Towns

2.2.1 Gerringong

Gerringong is located at the northern end of the study area. The town originally developed to support the local dairying industry but this function has declined with the main economic driver being tourism. The character of the town reflects its rural history as well as its location on an extremely scenic section of coastline. The older residential settlement behind Werri Beach has eventually merged with Gerringong, of which the older established parts are in the vicinity of the main street (Fern Street) behind the headland at the southern end of Werri Beach (Figure 2.1). Urban expansion of mostly traditional suburban style housing has occurred in more recent years to the south and west.

Despite recent growth Gerringong retains the character and scale of a coastal village. The rolling topography within the town affords regular and expansive views of the coastline and hinterland. The built form is at a generally small scale with Fern Street retaining its historical role as the focus of commercial activities.

The existing Princes Highway bypasses Gerringong with the highway and adjacent railway line forming the western boundary of Gerringong urban development. The presence of the highway has little influence on the amenity of the central part of the town, with the main commercial precinct being approximately 750 m from the highway. The western parts of Gerringong are more subject to noise from and general awareness of the highway.

2.2.2 Berry

Berry is centrally located in the study area at a point where the terrain starts to rise towards the Cambewarra Range. It is recognised as the first truly rural town south of Sydney, its heritage is visibly cultivated making it a very popular stopover point and destination for tourists and travellers. (Figure 2.2)
The town (originally called Broughton Creek) developed as an extension to the rural activities that were occurring in the area. The street grid that comprises the main part of the town represents the early development patterns. More recent development has generally expanded the grid. A less rigid development pattern has also occurred on the higher ground along Kangaroo Valley Road on the north western side of the town. These areas are not subjected to flood as much of the area closer to the traditional town grid are. In general, Berry’s character is one of an intimate historic rural town. This strong and well established identity ensures that a bypass of the town will only enhance visitor and resident experience by eliminating through traffic and heavy vehicles from the centre of town.

The existing Princes Highway alignment includes Berry’s main street (Queen Street) with the resulting traffic creating a generally negative influence on the amenity of the town centre. Queen Street does however remain the focus of activity in the town both for locals and visitors, with the historic character of the built form largely maintained and a range of boutique stores and stores more typical of a country town occurring.

The South Coast railway approximately defines the southern edge of Berry. The railway and station are prominent features on the southern side of town. The views are out across generally flat and flood prone pastureland.

The forested hills and mountains to the west and north of the town are a prominent visual presence from many locations within the town. They provide a strong connection with the surrounding natural environment which influences the character of the town greatly including that of Queen Street. Views to the flatter pastureland to the east are generally less prominent, but are most evident on the southern and eastern fringes of the town. The railway line forms a strong physical boundary to the east and south of town.

Figure 2.4 Analysis and structure plan of Berry
2.2.3 Bomaderry

Bomaderry also developed as a rural settlement, having its beginnings on the northern bank of the Shoalhaven River. The town became the end of the South Coast railway line when the section from Bombo to Bomaderry was built in the 1890’s. Along with Nowra, Bomaderry forms part of the loose knit administrative hub of the City of Shoalhaven.

The older parts of the town are laid out on a grid on the western side of the railway station. More recent urban expansion with a suburban character has occurred in a generally northward direction. The northern part of the town, which also includes commercial development along the Princes Highway coincides with the parts of Bomaderry that are in the study area.

Bomaderry now effectively functions as a northern suburb of Nowra, with no discernible break in the patterns of urban development between the two towns. The Shoalhaven River does however act as a transition between Nowra and Bomaderry, whilst the existing Princes Highway separates North Nowra and Bomaderry.

Figure 2.5 Analysis and structure plan of Bomaderry
2.3 The rural backdrop

The pastureland and rural settlement patterns of the study area are defining features. As mentioned previously this region is widely recognised as the first identifiable rural setting south of Sydney. The rural landscape that exists today is highly reflective of agricultural activities that have been occurring since the first half of the nineteenth century.

The largest agricultural influence has come from dairying activities. This has influenced the general pattern of vegetation clearance, the defining of rural boundaries by linear cultural plantings and the distribution of rural houses and farm buildings. The deep fertile soils and ample rainfall are testament to the large specimens of remnant indigenous trees and well established and significant cultural plantings.

Within the pasture landscape the major source of variation is the topography of the study area. The character of the rural backdrop is markedly different between the undulating higher elevations associated with the foothills of the Illawarra Escarpment and Cambewarra Range, and the coastal plain that occurs generally east of Broughton Creek.

The rural backdrop is slowly evolving and the partial decline in the dairying industry has created a more complex landscape pattern. A wider variety of agricultural activities (tending towards the smaller scale and boutique) is resulting in more areas under cultivation. An influx of more wealthy landowners is also changing the character of some rural houses, with the more modern buildings tending to be larger than their traditional counterparts.

Figure 2.6 Rural landscape in an undulating part of the study area
Figure 2.7  Rural landscape on the coastal plain
2.4 Waterways

The Shoalhaven River is the largest watercourse in the general area. Occurring beyond the southern boundary of the study area, the Shoalhaven has nevertheless influenced land use and terrain within the study area through its flooding patterns and its previous role as a transport corridor.

Broughton Creek is the main watercourse within the study area itself. A tributary of the Shoalhaven, Broughton Creek runs in a rough parallel to the existing Prince Highway. A narrow corridor of riparian vegetation has been maintained over much of the length of Broughton Creek. This vegetation corridor acts as a clear marker of the location of Broughton Creek and is a prominent landscape feature across much of the study area. The flooding of Broughton Creek has influenced landscape patterns within the study area, particularly in relation to human settlement. Berry is subject to flooding from the creek, while infrastructure, such as the South Coast railway line has had to be elevated via earth embankments to reduce flood risk.

A pattern of more minor creeks draining the higher elevations to the west run across the study area and feed into Broughton Creek. Most of these drainage lines include vegetated banks which increase their prominence in the landscape.

Figure 2.8 The vegetated corridor of Broughton Creek (in the centre of the image)
Figure 2.9 Vegetated creek line crossing the existing Princes Highway
2.5 Forested hills

The steep forests of the Illawarra Escarpment and Cambewarra Range create a dramatic backdrop to the study area and pronounced contrast to the coastal landscape. This mountain landscape merges with the study area via a network of forested fingers of higher ground that are directly connected to these mountains.

There are also pockets of steeper forested ground on the eastern side of the study area. While these are part of the ridge system that also connects to the mountains to the west, they appear as isolated hills because the continuity of natural vegetation is lost.

Figure 2.10 The Cambewarra Range in the background, showing vegetated connection with the study area

2.6 The existing Princes Highway journey

The landscape as experienced by road users travelling along the existing Princes Highway alignment between Gerringong and Bomaderry is described in this section. The existing experience will be an important reference point against which the experience gained by users of the upgraded highway can ultimately be assessed. The journey is discussed in terms of a southbound travel direction. It should be noted that the current Princes Highway is mostly single lane each way with design speeds varying from between 70 to 100 km/h. An overall analysis of the existing route elevation indicates that the undulating nature of the journey is most concentrated between the Kiama Bends and Berry. South of Berry the variation in elevation becomes less prominent (refer to Figure 2.11). An analysis of existing vegetation cover also demonstrates that the areas with more variety in elevation contain the more significant areas of existing vegetation (refer to Figure 2.12).
Figure 2.12 Vegetation
The study area is reached from the north after travelling through the recently completed North Kiama Bypass and the section of highway known as the Kiama Bends, the latter of which provides a dramatic road user experience with extensive views of the Pacific Ocean and proximity to the steep rain forested slopes on the western side of the highway in this area. The first views of the study area are gained from near Mount Pleasant, where the highway begins a long straight downslope with expansive views of the coast, Seven Mile Beach National Park, the pastureland of the study area, and the mountains to the west.

Figure 2.13  View of the coast line from the Kiama Bends

Upon reaching the lower elevations south of Gerringong, the highway traverses relatively flat pastureland before rising into the higher elevations west of Willow Vale. This section of the highway tends to be slow and winding with a sense of enclosure created by natural vegetation on the sides of the highway punctuated with occasional broader views to the landscape beyond.
The highway then descends to undulating pastureland north of Berry. In this area there are expansive lateral views of the coastal lowlands to the east and the vegetated mountains to the west.
Berry is reached relatively suddenly with the main street appearing to the road user after immediately rounding a bend in the highway at the entrance to the town. The Berry main street (Queen Street) is single lane in each direction, with a single parking lane on either side of the road. It is lined with a series of shops, cafes and pubs, with many of the buildings being heritage listed, providing significant character to the town centre. The presence of high traffic volumes within the main street is the only significant detractor from the experience of travelling through the town. The backdrop of the mountains is a dominant landscape feature from within the town, with the higher elevations being prominent above the rooftops of the commercial main street buildings.

Figure 2.16  Queen Street, Berry, looking west to the hinterland

To the south of Berry the route continues to follow the undulating pastoral landscape with generally open views except for several significant avenues of mature trees fringing the highway. The vegetated slopes of Cambewarra Mountain become prominent in this area, with view to the east being across the pastureland of the Broughton Creek / Shoalhaven River floodplain.
Figure 2.17 Stand of mature trees forming an avenue effect south of Berry

Figure 2.18 Views east across the Broughton Creek / Shoalhaven River floodplain
The entrance to Bomaderry comprises a relatively abrupt transition from a pastoral landscape to an urban landscape dominated by commercial development (such as car yards) of low visual quality.

Figure 2.19  The entrance to Bomaderry from the north

Beyond the study area to the south the highway passes through continuous urban development until it is south of Nowra where a predominantly forested landscape begins. The main feature of interest in this area is the crossing of the Shoalhaven River via a landmark steel truss bridge, which also forms the “Gateway to Nowra”.