

LOWER HUNTER TRANSPORT NEEDS STUDY

TERMS OF REFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

The Lower Hunter, covering the local government areas of Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton, has an extensive existing freight and commuter road and rail network. It services both population and industries focused on coal, metal, wine, power generation, defence, manufacturing, tourism and retail. The Lower Hunter is one of NSW's most diverse regions and benefits from major regional facilities at the Port of Newcastle, Newcastle Airport, Newcastle City Centre, John Hunter Hospital and University of Newcastle. The natural environment offers attractive coastal, urban and rural lifestyles. Population growth has typically been associated with coastal areas around Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Port Stephens. In recent years, however, new urban release areas have emerged further up the valley with strong residential growth in the Maitland area. Congestion is emerging at certain times on key routes including the New England Highway as a result. Good transport links in the Lower Hunter are important for state and national economic development.

The Australian and New South Wales Governments have jointly committed \$1 million for a comprehensive study into the transport needs of the Lower Hunter Region. The study area includes the local government areas of Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton and connections to Newcastle and the F3. The Department of Infrastructure Transport, regional development and Local Government (Department of Infrastructure) and the RTA have been requested to jointly conduct a study using an independent consultant, into the appropriateness of existing land transport networks in meeting the short and long term transport needs of the Lower Hunter. The consultant's study will be submitted to Infrastructure Australia for consideration in its National Infrastructure Audit. It shall identify potential transport proposals capable of being delivered in the short term, as well as a series of strategic initiatives to meet the identified transport needs over the longer term. It is anticipated that the study will identify and assess options to enhance transport connections linking Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton with Newcastle and the F3 to support state and national economic growth.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to:

- Identify passenger and freight land transport needs connecting Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton with Newcastle and the F3 over the next 25 years, having regard to the NSW Department of Planning's Lower Hunter Regional Strategy and other land use studies undertaken and recently released. The study is not to focus on the transport of coal freight or port and airport expansion but should consider their impact on passenger services now and into the future;
- Review current performance of the land transport networks in the study area and connections to adjacent areas and identify current deficiencies and challenges that may be anticipated in the future;
- Consider the role of major centres with respect to provision of future possible intermodal terminals;
- Identify land transport strategies to meet passenger and freight needs over the next 25-years, particularly links connecting Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton with Newcastle and the F3;
- Identify a list of potential proposals to deliver these strategies and assess the relative benefits of each proposal based on strategic engineering, environmental, economic and cost assessment in meeting the identified long term land use and transport needs of the study area;

- Identify a priority list of proposals capable of being delivered in the short term (say within 5-years), as well as strategic initiatives to meet transport needs over the longer term (say 6 to 25 years); and
- Conduct an independent review of the current estimate (in current dollars and out-turn dollars) for the F3 to Branxton proposal.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The role and responsibilities of the key project participants are as follows:

Project Client

The Australian and New South Wales Governments are funding the study and will act together as the Project Client. The study will be submitted to Infrastructure Australia for consideration in its National Infrastructure Audit.

Project Steering Committee

A Project Steering Committee will be established to oversee the study and will be chaired by Department of Infrastructure and include senior officers from the Department of Infrastructure, Department of Premier and Cabinet, RTA and Ministry of Transport as members.

Project Manager & Project Team

The Department of Infrastructure and the RTA will jointly manage the study. A Project Manager from the RTA will engage a consultant to undertake the study and manage its progress to satisfactory completion for submission to both Governments. The Project Manager will work with a Project Team comprising support staff from the Department of Infrastructure, RTA and Ministry of Transport and the selected consultant.

Council Reference Group

A Council Reference Group will be established to ensure appropriate input to and engagement with key local stakeholders. Members of the Council Reference Group will include the Mayors or their representatives of Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton Councils and the NSW Department of Planning. Further, consultation will include face-to-face consultation with Councils individually to ensure issues are clearly understood.

Community Consultation Program

The Project Team will undertake a Community Consultation Program by writing to a wide range of stakeholder groups seeking their input at stakeholder workshops focusing on land transport issues in the study area.

KEY OUTPUTS

The key outputs from the Lower Hunter Transport Needs Study will be:

1. A description and summary of the short and long term land transport needs in the study area;
2. Strategies and proposals to address these land transport needs that consider other broader state-wide and national strategies;

3. Realistic, practical, economic and feasible proposal priorities for land transport capable of implementation in the short term, as well as more strategic initiatives that will need to be pursued over the longer term; and
4. An independent review of the current estimate in current dollars and out-turn dollars for the F3 to Branxton proposal.

The final study report is to be completed by 15 November 2008 for submission to respective Ministers so that it can be submitted to Infrastructure Australia by the end of November 2008.

STUDY AREA

The study should consider transport needs in the area that includes the local government areas of Maitland, Cessnock and Singleton and its connections with Newcastle and the F3.

OTHER STUDIES

The study should consider other land use and transport infrastructure studies including but not limited to:

- Draft AusLink Sydney to Brisbane Corridor Strategy;
- Lower Hunter Regional Strategy;
- F3 to Branxton Environmental Assessment and Associated Reports;
- RTA Maitland Roundabout Study
- NSW Ports Growth Plan;
- Studies undertaken by the Hunter Valley Research Foundation;
- Twice the Task – A Review of Australia’s Freight Transport Tasks; and
- Strategies, studies and plans undertaken by local councils.

CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

In undertaking the study Commonwealth, State, Local Government Agencies and other key stakeholders should be consulted beyond the Community Consultation Program. Relevant stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- Mayors, or their representatives, of Maitland, Cessnock, Singleton, Newcastle, Wyong, Lake Macquarie, Muswellbrook and Port Stephens Councils
- Link or Sink
- NRMA Motoring and Services
- Australian Rail Track Corporation
- Newcastle Port Corporation
- Local bus and truck operators
- NSW Department of State and Regional Development
- Hunter Economic Development Corporation
- Hunter Regional Organisation of Councils
- All local area Business Chambers and the Hunter Business Chamber

All consultations with Commonwealth, State and Local Government Agencies are to be attended by the Project Manager, unless prior agreement to the contrary is confirmed.

A study website will also be established to ensure stakeholders have access to key reference documents, terms of reference, study brief and study updates.

REPORTING

The consultant will provide information about the progress of the study through a monthly progress report to the Department of Infrastructure and RTA and regular meetings with the Project Steering Committee. This progress report will also serve as the basis for the Project Manager to make monthly claims for payments.