

Moruya Bypass Action Group Presentation to Eurobodalla Council Public Access Session Tuesday 1st March 2022

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to address Council and the community. I am presenting on behalf of the Moruya Bypass Action Group which represents members of the Moruya community who have come together because they are concerned about the processes involved in the selection of the preferred Moruya bypass corridor, as well as the impacts of this corridor on our productive agricultural land, local properties and businesses, our cultural and environmental heritage, as well as the visual amenity and social fabric of our town.

We believe that the Moruya community deserves the best bypass solution possible. We are therefore deeply concerned about the flawed community consultation process undertaken to date by Transport for NSW (T4NSW) in relation to the Moruya bypass, which is without doubt the most significant project ever undertaken in our town. The community has been given insufficient and, at times, conflicting information about the various corridor options, with little opportunity to consider whether the preferred option is the best one for our town.

Support for our group has increased since 21st May 2021, when the Strategic Corridor Options report was released, and is still growing. Our members have submitted a wide range of feedback on this report, at times “copying in” the local member, relevant Ministers, Federal MPs and this Council. We have conducted our own survey of local businesses, which indicates that nearly 80% do not support the preferred option and believe it will be detrimental to their future. We initiated a petition opposing the preferred corridor which now has over 900 signatures. We have also, unsuccessfully, requested more detailed information from T4NSW to substantiate their choice for the preferred corridor, and gained wide media coverage through newspaper articles, letters and radio interviews.

The sense within the community is that this project is being rushed through based on inadequate and untimely consultation. The initial T4NSW “consultation” in March 2020 occurred just weeks after the catastrophic Black Summer bushfires had ravaged our community and at the start of the COVID-19 lockdown, and was entirely on-line. This was not the time to ask the community to provide feedback of such long-lasting strategic importance and this was not a suitable methodology to undertake such a critical process. This was reflected in the fact that T4NSW received fewer than 150 responses.

The second round “consultation” in May 2021 was equally disappointing, with the community confronted with facile answers drawn from an inadequate T4NSW Strategic Corridor Options report, together with a dubious questionnaire deliberately constructed to deliver support for their preferred option. No additional information was provided, and many critical questions were unable to be answered by T4NSW staff. The preferred corridor was presented as a “fait accompli” and the community felt that it was a done deal.

In response to the issues we raised, a “Frequently Asked Questions” document was released in June 2021. While it did not address all of our questions, it did provide more information on several workshops that were held to consider the various route

options for the bypass. Only one of these workshops included community representatives, and it is not clear who they were or how representative they were of our community. These representatives were also required to sign a confidentiality agreement before participating in the workshop, effectively shutting down any broader discussion of the outcomes. The supplementary report states **“the final workshop was not definitive on reaching a consensus on the preferred strategic bypass corridor option due to a number of differing views by workshop participants”**. It recommended further work be done on the Orange, Purple and Yellow corridor options, with additional consideration of a hybrid Purple option.

T4NSW's preferred option is an 8 km long concrete monstrosity that begins near the Moruya Industrial Estate (3 kms north of Moruya), crosses the Moruya River 2½ kms east of the town, and re-connects with the highway near Mountain View Road (3 kms south of Moruya). There are no on or off ramps planned, so our town will be completely bypassed by tourists and travellers. The people of Moruya have long spoken about the bypass, and what they expected was a shorter bypass that begins at Larry's Mountain Rd, continues along existing paper roads and ends just south of Moruya TAFE.

The community are particularly concerned that the preferred route does not provide direct access to the new Eurobodalla Hospital, currently under development in Moruya, despite assurances to the contrary from T4NSW. The facts speak for themselves - in order to deliver patients to the new hospital from the north, where the largest population centres and patient numbers occur, the preferred route will require southbound emergency vehicles to drive 3 kms past Moruya, then turn and drive 1.5 kms back towards the north, before finally turning into the hospital across the stream of southbound traffic from town. This becomes even more critical as we now understand that the new Emergency Control Centre will be co-located with the hospital, so the same issue will apply to emergency vehicles. This is inconceivable when there are shorter, cheaper and better connected options available with fewer property and environmental impacts.

We are also concerned that the consultation process has not provided any real information about the future maintenance of the existing bridge across the Moruya River, which has significant implications for Council's ratepayer-funded infrastructure works program. This should have been a core part of any meaningful formal consultation process.

Given the scale and importance of the Moruya bypass, it is surprising and disappointing that there has been no formal discussion or advice provided to the community by Council. This is despite Council being a participant in T4NSW's Values Management Workshop in September 2020, which was used to arrive at the preferred bypass route. There have only been 2 agenda items since the March 2019 announcement of this project and our most recent correspondence from Council, (following our Public Forum presentation in June 2021) was in November 2021, and indicated that T4NSW had still not responded to a letter from Council in July last year, which was initiated in part by our group.

The Moruya Bypass Action Group believes that Council should play an active role in publicising and facilitating future community consultation about the Moruya bypass. We are asking Council to accurately and comprehensively represent the interests of their community and advocate to state government on behalf of the people of the Eurobodalla.

We will only get one chance with a major project like this, so we need to make sure that T4NSW invests the time and resources to get it right. Our town and our community deserve no less.

Thank you for your attention

Deborah Stevenson
On behalf of the Moruya Bypass Action Group

Note 1 : I am authorised to answer questions on behalf of the Moruya Bypass Action Group

Note 2: Attached to this presentation is a Summary of Issues of Concern regarding the current preferred route and consultation processes for the Moruya Bypass as a reference for what we believe to be key areas that need to be properly addressed by Transport for NSW.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES OF CONCERN

Tick-the-box community consultation

The community consultation undertaken for this project was minimal given the scale and impact that the bypass will have on the amenity and environment of the Moruya River floodplain. It was announced in the lead up to the 2019 NSW elections without any consultation with the community or local businesses. The first round of consultation was conducted just weeks after the Black Summer bushfires and at the start of the COVID pandemic and was entirely online. There was one weeks notice for this second round of consultation which comprised 2 community information sessions and 2 market stalls together with a 100 page online Options report, a brochure and a survey all of which promoted Transport for NSW's preferred route. This is not genuine community consultation.

Lack of transparency

The Options report describes 5 short-listed route options which were arrived at following a number of workshops. It concludes by identifying a preferred route which will be taken forward to the design stage. Information about these workshops such as who was involved, the methods used to score the various route options and detailed justifications for the route options chosen was not provided to the community. The whole decision-making process lacks transparency.

Insufficient information

According to the Options report, the preferred route for the bypass was chosen on the basis of community acceptance of the route based on the first round of community consultation, which was neither comprehensive nor representative, and a one day values workshop. No detailed technical assessments have been undertaken of the 5 short-listed options nor have there been any costings to determine the value-for-money of these options. Risk identification and mitigation assessments and other technical assessments are only now being undertaken, but only for the preferred route. These assessments should have been undertaken across all of the short-listed options in order to arrive at a preferred corridor option based on a fully informed analysis. Without this, how can the community be confident that the preferred option is indeed the best route for the bypass?

Impacts

The Moruya bypass as proposed in the Options report will comprise an elevated 4 lane highway on 5m pylons spaced 40m apart extending for approximately 8 kilometres (see photos below of Kempsey bypass, which is of similar construction to that of preferred option)



Kempsey bypass under construction.



The Kempsey bypass on opening day.

The preferred option crosses the Moruya River floodplain at its widest part. This will have a huge visual impact on the river and its surrounding landscapes as well as the setting of the Moruya township with its beautiful natural vistas. It will also affect the largest area of productive agricultural land along the river and cause major disruption to farming activities, as well as changes to the character of the affected farmland and the flow of floodwaters across this land. By crossing the Moruya River floodplain at its widest part, the preferred option will impact on the greatest area of high conservation value wetlands and threatened vegetation, as well as creeks that feed into these nationally important wetlands. The preferred route also cuts through a large remnant of endangered woodland that connects to extensive forest areas to the east severing wildlife corridors and making this route potentially more bushfire prone.

The longer the bypass, the more properties that are impacted by it, either directly or indirectly. There is no information in the Options report about how many properties or dwellings are likely to be affected by each of the short-listed options, yet this should have been an important consideration in choosing a preferred route. It would seem obvious that the shorter the preferred bypass route, the less the impact would be on farmland, dwellings, the environment and the visual amenity of Moruya.

The preferred bypass route has been located as far as possible from town to reduce noise impacts. However, Moruya's small business owners that rely on passing traffic outside peak holiday periods are concerned that the further the bypass is from town, the less likely it will be that travellers will visit Moruya, which is not in itself a tourist destination. All other bypasses on the south coast run along the edge of their towns which are visible from the highway. Regardless of where this elevated bypass is located, it will generate noise that will carry across the Moruya floodplain, particularly if the traffic is travelling at 100kph, as predicted by Transport for NSW. Other south coast towns that have been bypassed have noise barriers installed to reduce the amenity impacts on the nearby towns. There is no discussion in any of the documents about how traffic noise will be managed and there is no real consideration of the impacts of the bypass on small business.

Conclusion

It seems that the main reason that the Transport for NSW project team chose the preferred option for the Moruya bypass was because of its distance from town even though it is longer, visually more intrusive, environmentally more destructive and will result in the direct loss of more property. It is also likely to have a significantly higher cost than any shorter option. Moruya needs a bypass, but the shorter and less destructive it is, the better. The community cannot support the preferred route for the bypass without fully understanding the scale and impacts of the proposal. The information that has been provided so far is not sufficient for the community to make a fully informed decision and we have not been provided with adequate time to ensure that any decision we do make is the best one for the town and its residents.

Moruya Bypass

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Deborah Stevenson

Moruya Bypass Action Group





Moruya bypass

Strategic Corridor Options Report



Preferred Strategic Corridor









