

PRINCES HIGHWAY CORRIDOR STRATEGY

A Joint Submission by Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra and Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO)



Submitted by:

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Executive Summary

This joint submission by Regional Development Australia Illawarra and the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation identifies the Illawarra and Shoalhaven region key factors to be considered in the Princes Highway Corridor Strategy, including:

- high levels of vehicle movements on the Princes Highway, with up to 55,000 vehicles per day
- large peri-urban region, with population growth to over 480,000 people projected by 2036
- iconic tourist road, the Grand Pacific Drive
- limited east west links to and from the Princes Highway across the Great Dividing Range
- critical importance of the Port of Port Kembla as a key economic asset which is under-utilised
- as the south coast rail line ends at Bomaderry, the principal land transport link south is via the Princes Highway, and requires further freight consideration and B-Double access.

The Illawarra's \$26 billion economy in 2017 makes it the third largest in NSW, yet travel delays are costing the region over half-a-billion a year – an amount that will only continue to grow.

The recommendations outlined in this submission are:

- 1) **Decreasing commuter travel times** (and consequently reducing costs, both actual and environmental) are imperative for our peri-urban community and the Illawarra Shoalhaven region's future potential to be realised. Therefore improvements to the Princes Highway, especially pinch-points, is welcomed.
- 2) **Increasing the opportunities for freight** to be exported through the Illawarra Shoalhaven region's global gateway, the Port of Port Kembla is imperative. Therefore improvements to the Princes Highway to enable freight to be transported to and/or from the Port of Port Kembla will not only maximise the economic benefits to the Illawarra region, but also importantly take pressure off the congestion in Sydney and enable the State of NSW to maximise its global port assets.

Introduction – The Illawarra Shoalhaven

The Illawarra Shoalhaven region is located approximately one hour south of Sydney and spans an area of 1,124 square kilometres. It is situated on a narrow coastal strip from Helensburgh in the north to Durras Waters in the south, a distance of over 230 kilometres. It encapsulates four local government areas of Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven and enjoys a mixed terrain of coastal, rural and urban environments.

Wollongong is the third largest city in New South Wales and the tenth largest city in Australia. The Illawarra Shoalhaven has a population of 404,000 (2016) and is projected to grow to over 480,000 people by 2036.

The region is connected via three main road transport links being the F6 to Sydney, Picton Road to the west and the Princes Highway to the South Coast and beyond. A rail link extends from Bombaderry in the Shoalhaven to Kiama right through to Wollongong and the Sydney CBD.

The region has a strong industry base of manufacturing, mining, engineering, finance and business services, tertiary education, tourism and retail. The area also has one of Australia's most important deep-water ports, the Port of Port Kembla located 80 kilometres south of Sydney's CBD.

About RDA Illawarra

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra has an active and facilitative role in the Illawarra region, with a clear focus on growing a strong and confident regional economy that harnesses competitive advantages, seizes on economic opportunities and attracts investment.

RDA Illawarra Board and staff are neutral brokers and collaborators across all levels of government, community, business and stakeholders for the growth of the Illawarra's economy (including Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama LGAs).

About Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO)

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO) provides a forum for Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven Councils and the NSW and Federal Governments to work collaboratively to address issues of regional significance in order to benefit our diverse local communities.

The principal functions of the ISJO are to establish strategic priorities for our region and lead the development and implementation of related strategies and plans. The ISJO also provides strong regional leadership in advocating for improvement to the infrastructure and services to our member's communities.

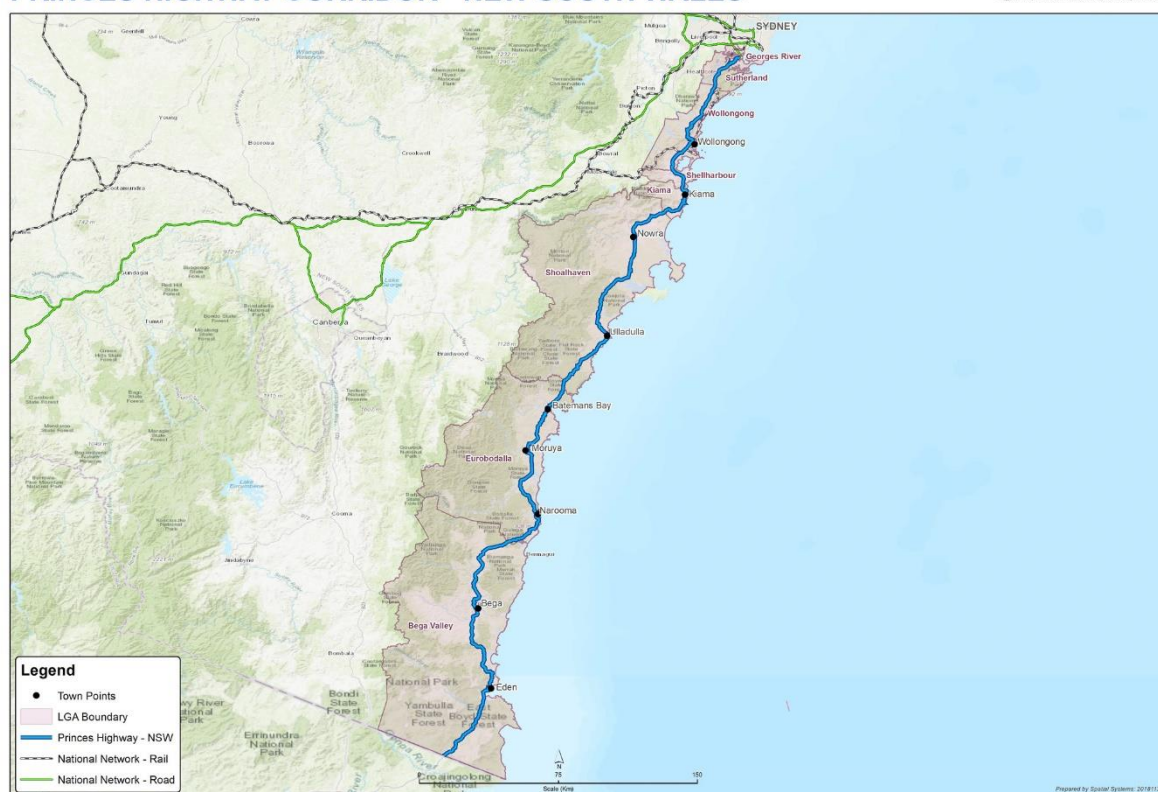
Background

The Princes Highway is a national road asset running along the southeast coast of Australia, beginning in Sydney and ending in Port Augusta. Part of Australia's Highway 1 network, the 1,941 km route extends through New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, and serves as an important connection between the metropolitan centres of Sydney, Wollongong, Melbourne, Geelong and Adelaide.

Excluding capital cities, over 1 million people live in the local government areas traversed by the Princes Highway, with an estimated 50% living in urban centres or townships. The highway supports from below 1,000 vehicles per day in rural sections to over 60,000 vehicles per day in urban centres. In the Illawarra, an average of **55,069 vehicles per day** use the Princes Motorway in Mount Ously (86% cars and 14% heavy vehicles) and an average of **39,499 vehicles per day** use the Princes Highway at Towradgi.

The highway is also an **iconic tourist road**, forming part of the **Grand Pacific Drive**, which is located in the Illawarra Shoalhaven Region. The route is a strategically important corridor for **freight** movements and provides regional industries access to the **Port of Port Kembla** in the Illawarra region. The total alignment of the Princes Highway within New South Wales is shown below:

PRINCES HIGHWAY CORRIDOR - NEW SOUTH WALES



Source: Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development

The *Princes Highway Corridor Strategy* will develop an evidence base to underpin a 'whole-of-corridor' perspective of the current and future role of the Princes Highway, including economic, social and environmental factors. The strategy will seek to integrate planning along the entire corridor and align asset management priorities and investments.

Engagement with industry and key stakeholders for this strategy was undertaken, where RDA Illawarra and ISJO attended the workshop on 10 December 2018 in Wollongong, along with a number of local and state government representatives.

In 2016, Transport for NSW with the NSW Government completed a comprehensive piece of work, the Princes Highway Corridor Strategy (TfNSW 2016). This strategy is referenced throughout this submission.

We have reviewed the Princes Highway Corridor Strategy Issues Paper (February 2019) and Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra and Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO) have partnered to develop this submission. It is noted that regional development has interdependences with other objectives, however this submission focusses on two key objectives of:

- 1) Access and Connectivity and
- 2) Activating the corridor as a means to drive better regional development and industry performance.

Importance of Princes Highway to the Illawarra Shoalhaven

The Illawarra's \$26 billion economy in 2017 makes it the third largest in NSW, yet travel delays are costing the region over half-a-billion a year – an amount that will only continue to grow.

Illawarra's main arterial roads carrying the bulk of traffic are:

- **To the North:**
Princes Highway, Princes Motorway, Memorial Drive and Lawrence Hargrave Drive; and
- **To the South:**
Princes Highway, Princes Motorway, Springhill Road, Windang Road, Shellharbour Road, King Street and Five Islands Road.

The spine of the road network within the Illawarra Shoalhaven is the Princes Highway /Motorway which runs north through the Illawarra and Sutherland, and to Ultimo, south of the Sydney CBD.

Importance of road corridors to Port of Port Kembla

(Princes Highway Corridor Strategy Issues Paper – key issues #21, 24, 38, 43, 44, 59)

The Port of Port Kembla is Australia's largest vehicle import facility, has the largest grain handling terminal on the East Coast and is the second largest coal export facility in NSW. It is a key driver of economic growth in the Illawarra region, with capacity to expand following further Outer Harbour infrastructure development.

NSW Ports in their '[Navigating the Future, NSW Ports' 30 year Master Plan', October 2015](#), state that Port Botany and Port Kembla are economic assets of national significance, critical to the future economic growth and development of NSW.

"Port Kembla, as the NSW port of growth, will continue to be NSW's largest motor vehicle import hub and bulk grain export port while catering for a growing range of dry bulk, bulk liquid and general cargo. Port Kembla will also be home to NSW's second container port."

The port of Port Kembla is a key economic asset which is under-utilised and could be further leveraged by a global Sydney, particularly in the face of growing population and transport pressures. To enable this economic asset to be effectively utilised, road and rail connectivity and an efficient supply chain will also be required.

As identified in the '[2019 Infrastructure Australia Priority List](#)', Port Kembla's Outer Harbour development is expected to attract overflow containers from Port Botany (p91). '[NSW Ports Five Year Port Development Plan](#)' (March 2014) notes, however:

"The greatest challenge facing the Port-related transport-logistics chain is the provision of efficient road and rail connections to and from the Ports. As Port-related throughput increases over the next five years and beyond, landside transport volumes will increase. Improvements in the efficiency and productivity of landside transport operations, optimising the use of existing infrastructure and building new infrastructure to provide additional capacity."

Commuter corridor to Sydney (key issue #34)

The road network between the Illawarra Shoalhaven and greater Sydney has not kept pace with the growth in traffic volumes, which is becoming increasingly evident.

A number of key road projects need to be delivered within the next 10 years in order to match the expected increase in traffic demand to greater Sydney.

The NSW Government's [Future Transport Strategy 2056](#) has identified many of the required improvements. However, the timeframes specified in the Strategy mean that a number of projects will not be delivered before the capacity of the Mount Ousley (Princes Motorway) and Picton Road is reached around the mid-2020s. This will have a direct impact on the other arterial roads, including the Princes Highway.

Access and connectivity – East/West links

There are limited east west links to and from the Princes Highway across the Great Dividing Range to the Princes Highway, particularly south of Wollongong which requires a better long term solution. Incidents which close the Princes Highway can result in significant detours to find a crossing over the escarpment which caters for heavy vehicles. The gradient and turning circles are of particular concern for heavy vehicles.

This highlights that the Federal Government's Corridor Strategy needs to identify the importance of upgrading existing east-west links including the Illawarra Highway and Moss Vale Road.

As the south coast rail line ends at Bomaderry, the principal land transport link south is via the Princes Highway which requires further consideration for B-Double access to move freight, particularly for the Defence industries along the route, and at the same time allow for people movement.

[The Transport for NSW Princes Highway Corridor Strategy](#) outlines the constraints and access issues for further consideration.

Recommendations

We commend the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (DIRDC) on undertaking the Princes Highway Corridor Strategy. We particularly **support the development of a whole of corridor perspective** and consideration of the future role of the Princes Highway within a broad context and evidence-based regime.

We have provided some additional context in this submission in relation to our unique Illawarra Shoalhaven considerations, including the **high volumes of road traffic in our peri-urban region**, as well as the potential opportunities to **grow the underutilised Port of Port Kembla**, which is contingent on efficient and effective road and rail connectivity including over the escarpment. This submission has highlighted the importance of road corridors and the Princes Highway to the Port of Port Kembla, as well as the ever-growing commuter corridor to Sydney.

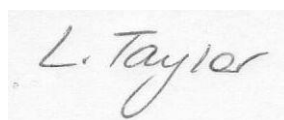
We also suggest that DIRDC seek input from respected organisations such as SEATS (South Eastern Australia Transport Strategy) to ensure that projects with regional benefits are identified.

We recommend that DIRDC consider the following additional input:

- 3) **Decreasing commuter travel times** (and consequently reducing costs, both actual and environmental) are imperative for our peri-urban community and the Illawarra region's future potential to be realised. Therefore improvements to the Princes Highway, especially pinch-points, is welcomed.
- 4) **Increasing the opportunities for freight** to be exported through the Illawarra Shoalhaven region's global gateway, the Port of Port Kembla is imperative. Therefore improvements to the Princes Highway to enable freight to be transported to and/or from the Port of Port Kembla will not only maximise the economic benefits to the Illawarra region, but also importantly take pressure off the congestion in Sydney and enable the State of NSW to maximise its global port assets.



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