

**SUBMISSION BY
SHOALHAVEN CITY COUNCIL**

TO

AUSLINK –
**TOWARDS A NATIONAL
LAND TRANSPORT PLAN**
12 APRIL 2005



BACKGROUND

Shoalhaven City Council has taken a vital interest in the development of *Auslink* – ‘Towards the Land Transport Plan’ since it was released as a Green Paper in 2002 and the subsequent development since that time.

Council made a submission to the original Green Paper and was supportive of the submission put forward by the South East Australia Transport Strategy Inc (SEATS) made at that time. Summary of the points included in Councils submission were as follows:

- *Auslink* needs to plan 20 years into the future. Council advocates an initial 10 year plan with 5 year reviews. The initial 10 year period is suggested on the basis that most strategic infrastructure projects take 3-5 years to plan and deliver. Consequently, an initial 5 year period is considered too short.
- The 1991 Inter-Government Agreement to fund the National Highway system is generally supported. The opportunity for partnershiping with State Governments for Roads of National Importance is seen as highly beneficial and the declaration of MR92 (Nowra to Nerriga) as a RONI project is considered as a high quality outcome of that partnership. However, the ongoing debate between the State Government and the Commonwealth over RONI status has been a significant issue for Shoalhaven City Council – particularly in relation to the State Highway status of the Princes Highway. The “debate” is divisive and highly unproductive. The acceptance of the Princes Highway within the Shoalhaven as an *Auslink* endorsed and funded project is strongly advocated.
- Council endorses the Regional model for “transport infrastructure planning” and considered issues like intrastate linkages to regional seaports – Port Kembla, East West Escarpment crossings from the South Coast, linkage to regional airport hubs at Canberra Airport, high speed rail connections to Sydney and the establishment of an intermodal transport hub at Yass as very significant and essential transport infrastructure projects for the Shoalhaven.
- Shoalhaven City Council is prepared to work on a “regional infrastructure planning team” and its previous work in co-ordinating a DOTARS funded “South Coast Transport Study” is a statement of its vision, commitment, professionalism and an ability to take an across region approach.

- The issue of sustainability of the local road network across Australia is a key concern for Shoalhaven City Council. The fact that 85% of the road network is constructed and maintained by Local Government – primarily from General Rate revenue, with some assistance from the roads component of the Financial Assistance Grants - needs to be addressed. A long term, sustainable funding stream allocated to Local Government for use on the local arterial road network is required. Performance monitoring of road asset condition and efficiency/effectiveness reviews for Local Government expenditure is accepted.

A continuation of “Roads to Recovery” funding direct to Local Government is advocated. In addition, direct funding of Black Spot, RONI and other *Auslink* initiatives is strongly supported.

Note: it is recognised that Roads to Recovery Stage 2 is included in *Auslink*.

Shoalhaven Council – a Local or Regional Player

Shoalhaven City Council in the development of infrastructure believes it has taken a regional approach to the issue. Council is a member of the SEATS organisation, a collective of local and industry groups in South East Australia covering an area from Wollongong to Dandenong. It has played an instrumental part in moulding this organisation which addresses the networking implications of the land transport tasks. SEATS has participated in the development of a number of regional studies which have attempted to prioritise the linkages required to improve the network for freight delivery and economic development outcomes.

Shoalhaven as you may appreciate is located on the South Coast of NSW approximately 160km south of Sydney on the Princes Highway. Shoalhaven has a sound economic base quite diversified with the main activities being manufacturing, defence, education, construction and retail. Our industrial sector has a broad market base including substantial export which requires both inward and outward freight to the major metropolitan areas and key ports including Botany and Kembla.

With the Princes Highway being the main artery for the South Coast the inadequacy of this transport corridor to service the needs of the communities along its route both in Southern NSW and in the Gippsland became obvious to Shoalhaven City Council. In 2000 Council coordinated a Transport Strategy Study for the South Coast of NSW which highlighted the inadequacies of the current highway system in a north south direction as well as the east west escarpment crossings

which are vital to moving produce and freight between the coastal plain and the tablelands of Southern NSW.

Council motivated the Illawarra Regional Organisation of Council (now known as the Southern Councils Group) to form a lobby group of regional players to set about and follow an agenda to improve this vital piece of community infrastructure. This group which became known as PHocus was established by a coalition of Southern Councils Group, NRMA, SEATS, Road Transport Association, Illawarra Business Chamber, and Tourism Task Force Australia. Since its instigation in 2003 this group has played an active part in both lobbying NSW and Federal politicians of all political persuasions to understand the issues confronting the south coast communities because of the poor state of this infrastructure.

The aims of the objective of the PHocus group are as follows:

Gain commitment from the State and Federal Governments for the funding of the upgrade of the Princes Highway in order to deliver the following outcomes:

- a. A four lane dual carriageway north of the Jervis Bay turnoff, to a 100 km/h design standard, by 2010, to incorporate:
 - Design speed 80-100 km/h from Albion Park Rail and South Kiama bends
 - Oak Flats to Dunmore upgrade
 - North Kiama bypass
 - Gerringong to Berry upgrade
 - Shoalhaven River crossing
 - South Nowra duplication
 - Berry bypass by 2008

- b. B-Double access to the Victorian border, for example:
 - Strengthen Clyde River bridge
 - Realign northern approach to Wagonga Inlet
 - Realign Brogo River approach from south
 - Bega township – B-Double alternative design

- c. Elimination of major constraint points on the Princes Highway which render the link impassable due to adverse conditions:
 - Pambula River floodplain

d. All other sections, bring up to current standards, with progress upgrading to give:

- Overtaking opportunities every five kms
- Local rest areas and parking

It is this Council's belief (and also that of the Southern Councils Group, PHocus, SEATS and Australian Business Limited) that the current commitment by the NSW Government outlined in the document 'Action for Transport 2010', which is equivalent to approximately \$380m over 12 years, needs to be supplemented by at least \$400m to bring the highway up to an acceptable service standard. PHocus and this Council have sought that this \$400m be provided under a program such as *Auslink* on a \$ for \$ basis between the Commonwealth and State Governments. To date the lobbying has generated additional funding from both the State (\$30m) and Commonwealth (\$20.7m). All parties are committed to continuing to apply the pressure and lobbying to generate the funds necessary for the upgrading of this important highway network.

Council has also lobbied hard for the upgrading of the escarpment crossing between Nowra and the Southern Tablelands via the NSW Government declared, Main Road 92. In 1997 the Prime Minister announced that this part of the link between Nowra and Nerriga would be classified as a 'Road of National Importance'. This announcement was brought about subsequent to much lobbying by Shoalhaven City Council based on the fact that this part of the escarpment crossing was common to a number of different network connections which would deliver to the freight requirement, based upon the sub-region from Nowra to Port Kembla, the most efficient and effective escarpment crossing.

The NSW Governments came to the party and supported the Main Road 92 project and much planning has taken place between Shoalhaven City Council, the NSW RTA and the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services. Much frustration however has eventuated by the fact that the original budget for the upgrade of \$80m has now been eroded substantially to around \$65m (in 1997 terms), because of delays in the political process within NSW to deliver planning approval and other necessary legislative approvals (National Park boundary adjustments: SEPP 58 approvals for discharge from the road into Sydney water catchment) to the point where early in 2005, despite significant cooperation at departmental level to deliver the project, the necessary approvals to undertake the project have not yet been forthcoming.

Council seeks via the *Auslink* program to continue the work commenced in this project by joining with Goulburn Mulwaree Council to seek funding to assess the most efficient and effective route beyond Nerriga to the west towards Bungendore and Queanbeyan and eventually on the Hume

Highway at Yass, and to preserve this route in the regional planning instruments so that the tableland connection can be progressively upgraded to deliver the most efficient outcome to satisfy the regional freight need.

The importance of Main Road 92 is not linked only to the Shoalhaven but also will provide a freight corridor coming out of Gippsland via the Monaro Highway and from Northern Victoria and the Riverina areas of NSW via the Hume Highway corridor to utilise a freight link into the Illawarra in general and specifically to Port Kembla. This route will provide opportunities for export of regional produce using Port Kembla as a port supporting a regional industry base. In the restructuring of the port facilities in and around Sydney the most likely outcome for the Port of Kembla is that it will look to service the Oceania market which is a similar market that the fresh produce from East Gippsland is also trying to address.

It is noted that on the 6th April 2005, the NSW Government announced the approval of \$30m construction project to deliver improved cargo handling at the port. This announcement included an expectation that Port Kembla would see the current tonnage of 600,000 tonnes/annum increasing to 2.77 million tonnes/annum. The project will supplement works which are nearing completion on a multipurpose berth. The importance of Main Road 92 as a corridor between the Monaro and Port Kembla will bring economic benefit not only to the coastal area between Nowra and Wollongong but also to those areas around Cooma Bombala and the fruit and vegetable areas between Dandenong and Sale in the Victorian Gippsland.

Whilst Main Road 92 terminates at Nowra, the connection to Port Kembla via the Princes Highway will need to be improved to complete the link. This will add significant pressure to the Southern Councils Group and partners call for upgrading of the Princes Highway between Kiama and Nowra to a 4 lane, dual carriageway pavement by 2010.

Conclusion: Shoalhaven believes that *Auslink* is a worthwhile program should it address the regional networking needs that face not only metropolitan areas in this country but also the important regional areas. The South Coast of NSW has a rapidly growing population base and it is through industries such as those that would utilise the Port of Kembla and also markets to the west and south that it will deliver the jobs sought by the increased population. This will provide the wealth and prosperity to those communities to make them self sufficient and less dependant on social welfare programs delivered by all levels of Government.

Shoalhaven City Council believes that *Auslink* can provide the outcomes espoused in the policy documents provided that sufficient regional analysis and input is allowed to have those local issues which are robust and regional in focus filter to the top to provide realistic network improvements.