Pacific Highway upgrade approved

The NSW Government has given planning approval for a $105 million Pacific Highway upgrade to build 6.4km of dual lane carriageway located some 70km north of Grafton.

The Devils Pulpit upgrade project is another important step in continuing the $3.6 billion NSW and Commonwealth government highway upgrade project.

Minister for Planning Tony Kelly said the upgrade would greatly improve a substandard section of the highway, resulting in increased safety and reduced travel times.

“At present, this section of the highway has a fatality rate which is more than double our State Plan road safety target and a large amount of heavy truck traffic,” he said.

“Today’s approval paves the way for the delivery of a far safer road,” Mr Kelly said.

Roads Minister David Borger said the RTA is now inviting tenders to complete the Devils Pulpit upgrade.

“The Devils Pulpit upgrade will improve road safety, ease traffic flow and provide easier access to and from the highway for local residents.

“This project involves upgrading the existing road from two lanes to a four-lane divided road, widening three kilometres of highway and installing wire rope barriers north of the four-lane divided road.

“This is a great step forward in the upgrade of the Pacific Highway. No other road in Australia is undergoing more work and this year alone NSW and federal Government’s are investing $871 million in the project.

“The fact is our work on the Pacific Highway is delivering results; 332 kilometres of the Pacific Highway between Hexham and the Queensland border is now dual carriageway, with a further 69 kilometres of dual carriageway currently under construction,” Mr Borger said.

Mr Kelly said the approval followed a detailed assessment by the Department of Planning, which focused on minimising the project’s impact on native flora and fauna.

To deal with the loss of native vegetation as a result of the project, the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) has agreed to permanently protect some 152 hectares of compensatory vegetation.

“This means that for every one hectare of native vegetation to be cleared by this project, about another 2.5 hectares will be permanently protected elsewhere,” Mr Kelly said.

The Department has imposed some 53 conditions of approval on the project, including requiring the RTA to:
• Provide fauna crossing structures such as underpasses and rope bridges to allow forest creatures (including gliders, kangaroos, bandicoots, koalas and lizards) to be able to safely cross the finished highway;
• Develop an ecological monitoring program to monitor the effectiveness of the road’s impact on local fauna;
• Undertake monitoring of road noise some 12 months after the upgrade begins operating, to see whether the predicted acceptable noise levels are exceeded;
• Retain access to the State Forest for forestry operations and surrounding properties during both construction and operation; and
• Develop a surface water monitoring program to examine the habitat of threatened aquatic fauna species during construction and after the road begins operating.

To date, some 138km of Pacific Highway upgrade projects have been assessed and approved under Part 3A of the EP&A Act.