

## GOAL 5 - Improved transport connectivity and freight networks

Transport and freight infrastructure on the North Coast supports jobs; provides business with good access to South East Queensland, the Hunter, Sydney, and international markets; and allows residents, who enjoy coastal and rural lifestyles, to move around the region and to other metropolitan centres.

The region continues to benefit from access to important domestic and international airports and the upgrade of the Pacific Highway.

Freight movement, freight transport facilities, and warehousing and distribution centres are well represented on the North Coast. The Pacific Highway carries the second-highest level of freight of any road in Australia. In 2011, 5.8 million tonnes of freight travelled along the highway into the North Coast and more than 3.3 million tonnes travelled out of the region. Total freight on the Pacific Highway is forecast to increase by 83 per cent over the next 20 years to 29.1 million tonnes a year.<sup>23</sup>

The draft Plan aims to:

- limit development with direct access to the Pacific Highway to allow the free flow of traffic and retain the travel time savings and safety benefits from the upgrade;
- designate highway service centre locations close to bypassed towns to deliver economic benefits and to encourage motorists to take breaks;
- provide guidelines for locating freight facilities along the Pacific Highway to support the cost-effective and efficient movement of freight;

- undertake corridor studies across State roads to set a 20-year framework for managing transport demands, including freight transport; and
- zone land close to the Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Ballina and Gold Coast airports to allow for their continued development as aviation precincts.

### DIRECTION 5.1 Strengthen the Pacific Highway's function as a key road corridor of State and national significance

Since 1995, the Pacific Highway upgrade program has cut travel times between Newcastle and the Queensland border by almost 90 minutes for heavy vehicles and about 60 minutes for light vehicles (see Figure 23). Future Pacific Highway upgrades are expected to cut travel times by another hour or more while also increasing safety.

The NSW and Australian Governments have already invested \$8.6 billion in upgrading the Pacific Highway. An estimated \$6.4 billion will be spent completing the upgrade program, with \$1.4 billion committed in 2015. This is one of Australia's most significant investments in transport and freight infrastructure, and should be finished by the end of the decade.



Tintenbar to Ewingsdale roadworks under the Pacific Highway Upgrade Program

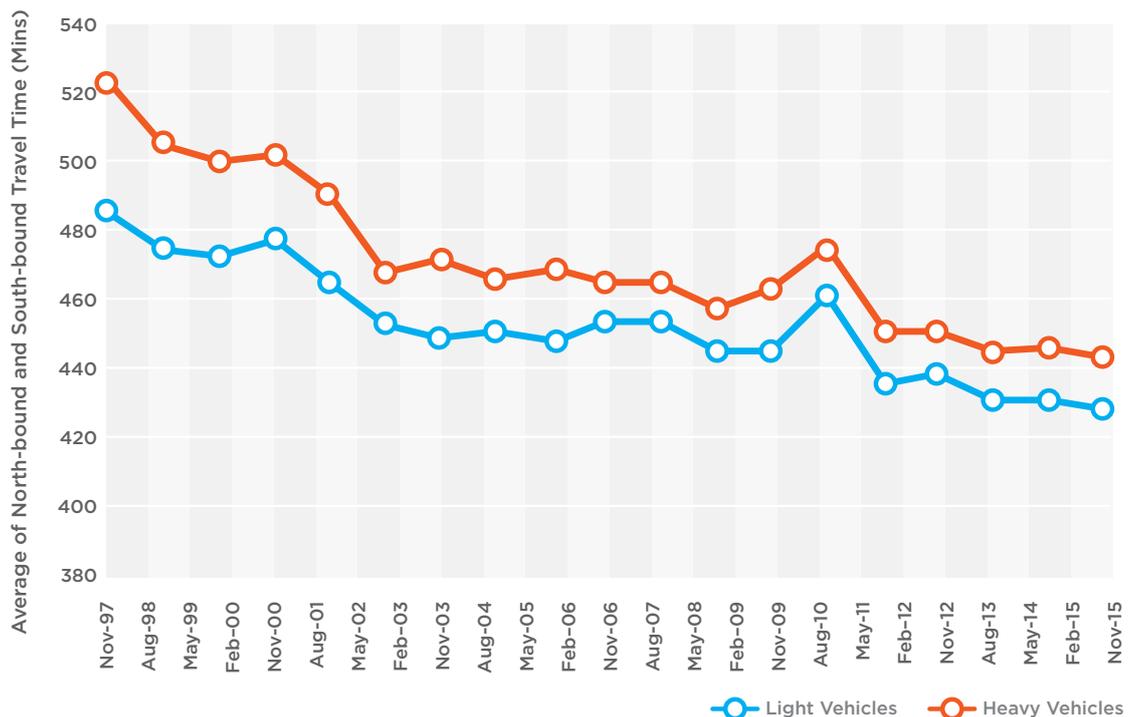
Funding has been committed to complete the duplication of the highway between Newcastle and Woolgoolga, and between Ballina and the Queensland border, by late 2017. The remaining 155-kilometre section between Woolgoolga and Ballina is in the planning and pre-construction stage. The Coffs Harbour bypass is also moving ahead, with around \$37 million expended to acquire land in the proposed corridor.

As additional sections of the Pacific Highway upgrade are completed, industries on the North Coast will have more opportunities to supply products to other markets, which will act as a catalyst for employment growth.

**ACTION 5.1.1 Protect the travel time and safety improvements from the upgrade program**

One of the many factors contributing to the time-savings on the Pacific Highway is the grade-separated access on motorway-class sections where the speed limit is generally 110 km/h. These sections optimise the safe and efficient movement of major regional and inter-regional traffic. In addition, strict traffic control, via grade-separated interchanges, delivers superior conditions for capacity, congestion, speed and safety. Local traffic can use alternative routes along service roads or the local arterial road networks.

FIGURE 23: PACIFIC HIGHWAY TRAVEL TIMES BETWEEN NEWCASTLE AND THE QUEENSLAND BORDER, 1997-2015<sup>24</sup>



Source: Transport for NSW

Access to motorway-class sections of the highway will only be allowed via grade-separated interchanges. The NSW Government and councils will prevent additional direct 'at grade' access to motorway-class sections of the upgraded highway, as this will gradually erode the safety, travel time and economic benefits.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to limit development directly accessing the Pacific Highway; and
- consider the need to provide additional grade-separated interchanges along the Pacific Highway.

### **ACTION 5.1.2** Designate highway service centres along the Pacific Highway

There is an extensive rest stop network across major road corridors in NSW. Facilities provided at each rest stop vary and typically depend on the local environment and site characteristics. Highway service centres, one type of rest stop, encourage motorists to take breaks and therefore contribute to travel safety and efficiency.

The following sites have been identified as potential locations for Highway Service Centres along the Pacific Highway:

- Chinderah (at Chinderah Bay Road and Tweed Valley Way);
- Ballina (at Teven interchange);
- Maclean (at the interchange near Ferry Park);
- Woolgoolga (at the Arrawarra interchange);
- Nambucca Heads (at the Nambucca Heads interchange);
- Kempsey (at the South Kempsey interchange);
- Port Macquarie (at Oxley Highway); and
- Taree (at Old Bar Road).

These locations are close to bypassed towns, which will retain the economic benefits.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to appropriately locate service centres along the highway.

TABLE 5: VOLUME OF FREIGHT IMPORTED ALONG THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY IN 2011 (FROM QUEENSLAND AND GREATER TAREE) IN KILOTONNES PER YEAR

| Destination                 | From South | From North | Total |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|-------|
| Far North Coast subregion   | 70         | 2,840      | 2,910 |
| Mid North Coast subregion   | 900        | 470        | 1,370 |
| Lower North Coast subregion | 1,060      | 440        | 1,500 |

TABLE 6: VOLUME OF FREIGHT EXPORTED ALONG THE PACIFIC HIGHWAY IN 2011 (FROM QUEENSLAND AND GREATER TAREE) IN KILOTONNES PER YEAR

| Destination                 | To the South | To the North | Total |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| Far North Coast subregion   | 90           | 980          | 1,070 |
| Mid North Coast subregion   | 350          | 360          | 710   |
| Lower North Coast subregion | 890          | 230          | 1,120 |

### **ACTION 5.1.3** Identify freight transport facilities along the Pacific Highway

Freight transport facilities, warehousing and distribution centres have locational needs that depend on efficient supply chains, access to customers, land availability and access to main roads. The upgrade of the Pacific Highway has highlighted the need for a coordinated regional approach to locating freight facilities along this nationally important corridor. Freight Transport Facilities Locational Guidelines (see below) have been developed to guide the development of freight facilities along the Pacific Highway.

The NSW Government will:

- encourage councils to identify strategic sites for freight transport facilities that link to existing and future transport-related industry.

### **DIRECTION 5.2** Expand the region's aviation services

Airports on the North Coast are important gateways for business, tourism and personal travel, as well as for high-value airfreight. In 2014, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Ballina Byron Gateway airports handled more than 850,000 passenger movements with Sydney Airport – placing them in the top five busiest regional NSW routes (see Figure 24).<sup>25</sup> Gold Coast Airport is an international gateway with direct flights to New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and China. The draft Plan seeks to sustainably manage an increase in services at the region's airports, while providing opportunities for aviation-related business growth by activating aviation precincts.

## Freight Transport Facilities Locational Guidelines

Development needs to be consistent with the *Draft North Coast Regional Plan* and relevant Section 117 Directions and State Environmental Planning Policies.

### ACCESS

Access to the site, to and from the Pacific Highway, should have interchange capability for heavy vehicles.

The site is to be on relatively flat land to minimise cut and fill.

### LOCATION

The site should avoid physically constrained land.

The site should avoid potential areas of high environmental value, significant farmland and natural resources mapped in the draft Plan.

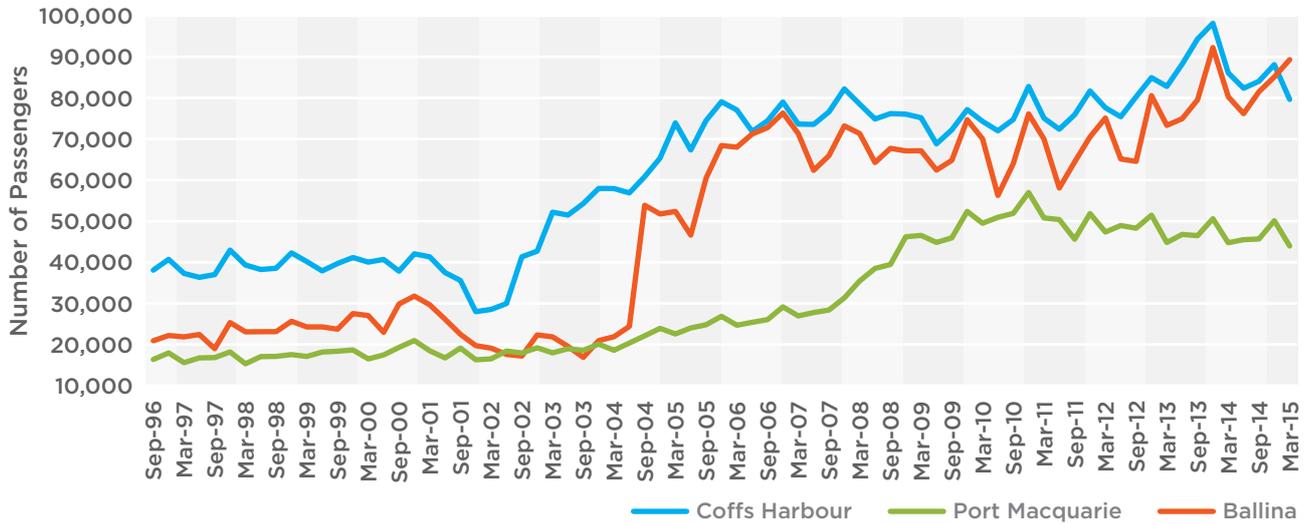
### SETTLEMENT

The site should not adjoin urban areas or sensitive land uses, such as residential development, or be located where land use conflict may limit future expansion.

### SERVICING

Infrastructure needed to service the land should be physically and financially feasible.

FIGURE 24: QUARTERLY PASSENGER NUMBERS TO AND FROM SYDNEY AIRPORT 1996-2015



Source: Transport for NSW’s quarterly passenger statistics for NSW air routes to and from Sydney Airport

Expanding regional airports will enhance the region’s reputation as a major tourism destination, and help to boost economic growth. Gold Coast, Ballina Byron Gateway, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie airports need to be able to expand to meet demand, as well as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority’s additional requirements for increasing services, passenger numbers and larger aircraft.

These four airports are near residential and other urban uses which mean there are potential noise and traffic issues, and land use conflicts from the possible expansion or development of airport services. It will be important that councils consider ways to protect the expansion of services at these airports from inappropriate surrounding development.

**ACTION 5.2.1 Develop aviation precincts with compatible and complementary uses**

In addition to Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Ballina Byron Gateway and Gold Coast airports, a number of other airports service the North Coast, including those at Taree, Kempsey, Grafton, Casino and Lismore. These airports have limited commercial flights and could provide other aviation-related services. Some councils have masterplans to capitalise on opportunities to diversify and maximise the potential of value-adding industries close to these airports.

The operational aspects of airports need to be protected to provide efficient access for passengers and freight, and to provide land for aviation-related activities. The development of retail and bulky goods uses should be avoided in these areas.

The NSW Government will:

- work with councils to encourage the development of aviation precincts with compatible and complementary industry and business uses.



Pacific Highway upgrade, Valla

### Case study: Ballina Byron Gateway Airport and Port Macquarie Airport Aviation Precincts

The Ballina Byron Gateway Airport is adjacent to the Southern Cross Industrial Estate and close to the Pacific Highway and Ballina CBD, making it well-located for an aviation precinct.

A masterplan is being developed to expand and upgrade the airport's facilities, including a new passenger terminal and access road. It will also focus on developing an aviation precinct. Ballina Shire Council has been identifying opportunities for industrial activity in the area.

Port Macquarie Airport is close to the Pacific Highway and the city's CBD. A masterplan for an airport precinct business park recommends upgrading the Hastings River Drive-Boundary Street intersection in the short to medium term to cater for increased traffic from the airport and the precinct. More traffic, transport and land use planning will be needed to identify the scope of road infrastructure improvements.

## **DIRECTION 5.3 Enhance the connectivity of the region's road and rail freight and transport services**

In addition to the Pacific Highway, transport in the region is focused on both the north-south connections provided by the Summerland Way, Mount Lindesay Road and the North Coast Rail Line to South East Queensland and the Hunter; and the east-west connections to the New England North West via the Oxley Highway, Gwydir Highway, Bruxner Highway and Waterfall Way.

The regional rail and coach network provides important freight and passenger transport links with Sydney and Brisbane. Enhancements are

### Case study: Casino Meat Production and Cross-border Connections

The Northern Co-operative Meat Company Ltd has been based in Casino for 79 years, employs more than 1,000 local people and contributes \$55 million in wages annually to Richmond Valley.<sup>26</sup> It operates an international export and domestic service abattoir and boning complex, which produces more than 49 million kilograms of meat and meat products each year.

Up to 10, twenty-foot equivalent unit containers are transported daily from Casino to the Port of Brisbane for export. The meatworks draw cattle from the New England North West region of NSW, and from the Darling Downs in Queensland. Some 80 per cent of pigs processed at the abattoir are sourced from South East Queensland.

The *NSW Freight and Ports Strategy* identified transport restrictions as a challenge for industries on the Far North Coast. These affect both raw materials being transported into the area and finished products transported out of the area, particularly to the Brisbane market and port. Due to terrain constraints, the number of east-west links between the North Coast, the New England Tablelands and the Darling Downs is limited.

The proposed Casino rail freight terminal may help cut the number of long-haul heavy vehicle trips and allow for around 250,000 tonnes of additional rail freight. It will provide a facility that can act as a base for manufacturing, processing and distribution industries, with excellent transport connections for domestic and international markets.

being made to infrastructure to increase the freight carried via rail, expand capacity, remove pinch points and modernise the freight network. This will provide opportunities for intermodal and rail freight terminals to support the region's manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

Noise from freight movements on road and rail is a sensitive issue for communities close to freight corridors. The freight network needs to be buffered from encroaching development, to allow freight activity to continue outside peak hours. While the industry has a role in minimising the impacts of freight operations, buffers can help reduce noise problems for communities.

Councils will identify buffer measures in local environmental plans to minimise the impact of development on the efficient functioning of the freight industry.

### **ACTION 5.3.1 Identify connectivity improvements for key State roads on the North Coast**

Transport for NSW, in conjunction with Roads and Maritime Services, is preparing corridor strategies for State roads in NSW to consistently manage and plan the State road network. The Department of Planning and Environment will work with Transport for NSW and Roads and Maritime Services to develop these strategies for all State roads on the North Coast.

Corridor strategies will set a vision and objectives; respond to current and future challenges and issues; and set short, medium and long term priorities and actions to manage the corridors. The strategies set a 20-year framework to align road safety, traffic efficiency and asset management with policy on freight access.

The NSW Government will:

- continue to deliver corridor strategies for all State roads on the North Coast.

### **ACTION 5.3.2 Provide improved transport services between larger settlements and regional communities**

The *Mid North Coast and Northern Rivers Regional Transport Plans* recognise the importance of investing in public transport infrastructure and services to improve connections with urban areas and to help reduce social disadvantage. Detailed plans to implement and deliver these strategies are being developed.

Transport for NSW will work with bus operators to develop routes and timetables to improve bus services in the region's major centres and their connections with regional communities. It will also work with local transport operators and councils to develop programs that focus on serving the unique characteristics of each town.

Flexible transport services are likely to be more useful in smaller towns and villages. Transport for NSW will investigate what works best for each area and will liaise with local transport operators and providers to implement these services.

The NSW Government will:

- investigate opportunities to improve bus operations in the region's regional cities and regional centres, and their connections with regional communities in towns and villages; and
- work with local transport operators and community transport providers to investigate a range of delivery models for flexible transport, to determine what works best for different areas.

### **ACTION 5.3.3 Identify and protect future rail corridors on the North Coast**

The Australian Government is investigating opportunities for a high-speed rail network to reduce travel time between capital cities along the east coast. This may generate new opportunities for economic development in the region.

Another potential rail corridor for the longer term is located south of the Gold Coast along the coastal corridor. This aligns with the Queensland Government's *Connecting SEQ 2031 An Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland* (2011), which has identified an extension of the Brisbane heavy rail line to the Gold Coast Airport.

The NSW Government will:

- work with other governments to plan for future rail corridors on the North Coast.