



Submission to Transport for NSW 11 December 2020 Fingal Bay Link Road

Introduction

The Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association (TRRA Inc) represents the interests of the more than 25,000 people living on the Tomaree Peninsula located at the eastern extremity of Port Stephens LGA. Our key objective is to act and be a representative voice in all matters that will enhance and protect their residential amenity and the local environment, both natural and built.

We have an obvious interest in the proposed construction of a Fingal Bay Link Road which has been mooted for many years.

The Link Road proposal has been the subject of discussion and comment from its membership. This has revealed that there are mixed views on the need for such a link road, and on the preferred route. There was broad consensus that there is not sufficient detail in the information provided so far, to enable TRRA to make an informed decision on the options listed.

The Need for Additional Strategic Analysis

TRRA believes that there are some major threshold analyses and considerations which need to be addressed before firm commitments are made on routes. In this regard it is noted (second last paragraph on page 2 of Brochure) that ***“further studies regarding project cost, fire emergency routes and socio-economic impacts will be carried out along with detailed traffic modelling.”***

TRRA believes that a business case including a cost/benefit analysis is essential to evaluate the various options. This should clearly define the objectives of the Link Road, having regard for the nature of the communities it would serve and impact upon. For a start, TRRA queries the reference in paragraph 2 of the brochure to the purpose of the project ***“to improve access to Fingal Bay”***. This ignores the fact that there has always been a view that any link Road would serve the access needs of **both Shoal Bay as well as Fingal Bay**.

A fundamental consideration is the current and projected population in Shoal Bay and Fingal Bay. The demographics and detailed traffic modelling are equally important considerations. Both suburbs have very little greenfield site development opportunities and future growth will be limited to densification and infill. Many current residents do not welcome such development.

The other major traffic generator is tourism-based on holiday park and commercial accommodation as well as short-term rental of residences. The tourism-related demand needs to be stated and projected forward, taking account of developments such as the NPWS Coastal Walk and the future use of the Tomaree Lodge site.

While the brochure refers to an objective of “**enhancing the character and amenity of the Nelson Bay Town Centre**”, there is no acknowledgement of the potential for encouraging road traffic to by-pass Nelson Bay CBD in their journeys to and from the Tomaree Peninsula and for shopping and services. In particular, Option 1 would create an easy direct route to Salamander Centre which has already captured significant retail and service business from Nelson Bay. For some time there has been concern relating to high commercial vacancy rates in the Nelson Bay CBD. In response Council has undertaken major strategic planning initiatives and traffic studies directed to reversing this trend. These strategies include recommendations to reduce through traffic pressure on the Nelson Bay CBD and along the Waterfront.

TRRA supports these solutions which would facilitate connectivity between the Marina and the CBD and calm the traffic on Victoria Parade. TRRA is also supportive of strategies to maintain the vitality and business viability of the town.

Comments on specific issues

Alternative Road Access to cope with fire and other emergencies

This has been a long-standing argument in favour of a link road as many areas of the Tomaree Peninsula, especially Shoal Bay and Fingal Bay, are vulnerable to the threat of bush fires. TRRA notes that the brochure (page 2) concludes “***preliminary investigations have also indicated that Option 1 would not provide improved access for fire and emergency services***”.

In TRRA’s discussions of this aspect, it has been noted that bushfires that threaten Fingal Bay and Shoal Bay mostly originate in the south-west, wooded areas of the National Park and travel in a north-easterly direction towards the settled areas. The road envisaged in Option 1 could often be unsafe in high fire danger periods and not be suitable for emergency evacuations. Evacuations for health and accident emergencies are often routed to the Tomaree Hospital or the air ambulance pick-up at W.J. Strong Memorial Oval at Fly Point in which case the Option1 route would also not assist.

Environmental Impacts

Option 1 and to a lesser extent Option 2 cut through National Park land and would impact on threatened species and ecological communities. Option 2 also is adjacent to coastal wetlands. A significant number of members have expressed concerns in relation to these impacts. The task of preventing roadkill along these routes would be challenging. We understand other Tomaree community groups with objectives more focused on ecological issues have expressed serious concerns in this regard.

TRRA accepts that Option 3 would be the least expensive to design and build and would have less impact on National Park and Aboriginal assets. However, we question whether the route can be upgraded to carry more and faster traffic without seriously degrading the urban environment through which it passes. This would be especially difficult to achieve along the beachside stretch of Shoal Bay Road. The minimal time saved for travellers under option 3 would hardly justify these negative impacts.

Both Options 2 and 3 would likely need to be routed along Dowling Street past the entrances to the Bowling and the Golf clubs. TRRA members raised the question of how safe entry and exit to these clubs could be provided given the increased and possibly higher speed traffic on Dowling Street.

Future consultation

When further studies regarding project cost, fire emergency routes and socio-economic impacts will be carried out along with detailed traffic modelling, TRRA looks forward to a further opportunity to be involved in consultations on the project and its options.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben van der Wijngaart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ben van der Wijngaart
President
Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc