



B

Context of the Roads

PART B

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CONTEXT OF THE ROADS

B1 Values

Roads throughout the wet tropics region are used for transport, recreation and education purposes, land holder access and access to public utilities. Parts of the regional road network link urban centres, residential areas and major highway systems throughout the wet tropics region.

There are a wide range of values held by different sections of the community in relation to roads. The values of road corridors for community transport benefit those who require access to urban, residential and rural areas including those within the community who move goods and services and provide opportunities for recreational and tourism activities. Such a diversity of interests reflects the need for community and industry representatives to be involved in the decision making processes of road corridor planning, design, construction and operation. Community awareness and action thus helps to enhance the transport values of the road corridor.

Roads play an important part in awareness of the regions conservation significance by presenting the forests and coastline along the major highways.

Conservation Value

It is essential that the significant natural and cultural values of the region be conserved for many generations to follow. This will require securing the conservation values of the region such as the natural and cultural experiences it provides, and protecting the internationally significant natural conservation values, the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The conservation value of areas in the region is recognised and managed in the many national parks, the marine parks of the Great Barrier Reef and the multiple tenure statutory protection provided by the declaration of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Road corridors play an important role in the conservation of the region. They provide access to areas of importance for activities relating to research, conservation and other management related activities.

The wet tropical forests of the region are for the greater part (some are privately owned) a public resource with unique natural, historical, cultural and recreational values for the benefit and enjoyment of the resident community and visitors alike. The regions striking visual quality promotes an enjoyable and often informative experience for all visitor types. Providing a range of access opportunities, including restricting access if necessary, is fundamental.

The role road corridors play in presenting the wet tropical forests of the region is significant. Many of the smaller and unsealed roads within the region are not designed with the intention of fast convenient transportation, but rather to enhance the visitor experience while providing safe access to the region.

However, roads can have a detrimental effect on the conservation values of the wet tropics region. Whilst effort is made to protect the biodiversity of the region, including critical habitats and noteworthy species of plants and animals, road corridors have the potential to fragment and impact adversely on these conservation values.

B1

Economic Value

The importance of the agricultural and tourism industries to the economy of the wet tropics region, their dependence on transportation, together with the geographical remoteness of the region from the rest of Australia mean that international, inter-state and intra-regional transport linkages are an important component of the regions economic infrastructure.

The economic function of roads in the region has two main foci, the transport of agricultural products (predominantly sugarcane) and tourism. Whilst on the coastal plain sugar cane is transported to mills for crushing via cane rail links, road transport is the predominant mechanism for the distribution of agricultural raw materials (fertiliser, livestock etc.) and of transport of sugar and molasses to sea ports for export from the region.

The regional road network has a vital role in the regions tourism industry. Over 700,000 visitors to the region arrive by vehicle. In addition, significant tourism movements are associated with Cairns City as this is the focus of tourism in the region. These movements are related to travel from accommodation to other tourism activities in the City and its hinterland with approximately 6.3 million person trips annually. The regional road network has a varied level of tourism use, with the majority to the north of Cairns.

Importantly, the tourism value of roads has two aspects, transport of tourists and passengers throughout the region and as scenic routes which present the Wet Tropics bioregion's unique landscapes.

Consequently, roads in the region are multi-function, all major highways around Cairns have important community, primary industry and tourism roles.

By improving the performance and management of roads throughout the region, the potential exists to provide considerable

benefits to the economy and the mobility of the community whilst protecting the significant natural values upon which much of the economy depends. Road corridors also play a role in facilitating telecommunications, electricity and water supply services.

B2 Main Roads Environmental Commitments

Main Roads Strategic Plan 1997-2001

The Department of Main Roads current Strategic Plan sets out a mission which is that Main Roads will plan, deliver and operate a road system that:

- improves the liveability of Queensland communities;
- affords safe travel conditions for all road users;
- supports economic development in a cost-effective way;
- reduces transport costs for industry; and
- promotes environmentally sustainable solutions.

Transport Coordination Plan

The Transport Coordination Plan has been developed in accordance with requirements of the *Transport Planning and Coordination Act 1994* to provide a strategic framework for the planning and management of transport resources in Queensland.

The Transport Coordination Plan states objectives for the transport system, criteria for assessing strategies and performance indicators for assessing progress. Importantly the plan addresses each type of transport, road, rail, air and sea. There are ten key objectives which cover the four major outcome areas of:

- Transport System Efficiency;
- Social Justice;'
- Safety; and
- Environmental Sustainability.

Environmental Management Policy and Strategy

The Department of Main Roads environmental policy states:

"Main Roads is committed to the protection of the environment by observing the Government policy of Ecologically Sustainable Development.

Main Roads will contribute to sustainable development in the provision and maintenance of road infrastructure through constant improvement in environmental performance and the commitment and involvement of its management and employees."

The four key outcome areas for Main Roads in achieving sustainable transport are:

- Biodiversity and Ecological Systems;
- Amenity and Quality of Life;
- Resource Conservation; and
- Global Environment.

Queensland Road Network Strategy

The Queensland Road Network Strategy sets out a framework in which the wet tropics regions roads are managed. The Goal *"is to improve economic, trade and regional development and the quality of life of Queenslanders through:*

- *the planning and management of a system of roads of national and State significance; and,*

- *the exercise of influence over the total road network in a manner which contributes to overall transport efficiency;*
- *whilst ensuring the appropriate balance with social justice, safety and environmental sustainability."*

The Strategy sets out six outcome areas:

- economic development;
- trade development;
- regional development;
- social justice;
- safety; and
- environmental sustainability.

B3

B3 Other Road Managers Commitments

Local Government

Local governments are major road owners and managers in the wet tropics region. Each Local Government has made specific commitments to environmental protection through their planning scheme, policies and strategies. Furthermore, all Australian Local Governments have made a commitment to the Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE). This includes specific agreed commitments to Ecologically Sustainable Development.

Other State Government Agencies

The other two key road owners in the wet tropics region are the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Environment. They both have specific statutory responsibilities for the sound environmental management of State Forests and protected areas (eg national parks) respectively. Department of Environment has other conservation and environmental protection responsibilities state-wide. Further, within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area specific legislation and the Wet Tropics Plan establishes responsibilities for the protection, conservation, rehabilitation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

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