

1. Introduction

This section introduces the proposal and provides the context of the environmental assessment. In introducing the proposal, the objectives and proposal development history are detailed and the purpose of the report provided.

1.1 Proposal identification

Transport for NSW (Transport) proposes to upgrade the Great Western Highway between Little Hartley and Lithgow, NSW (the proposal), located about 96 kilometres west of the Sydney central business district within the Lithgow City local government area.

The Australian and NSW Governments are investing more than \$4.5 billion towards upgrading the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Lithgow. The proposal forms the 'West Section' of the Great Western Highway Upgrade Program.

The Great Western Highway is the main road corridor between Central West NSW and the Sydney road network. It services freight, tourist and general traffic, with varying traffic volumes from about 8,500 vehicles per day near Lithgow and up to 20,000 vehicles per day in the Blue Mountains. A growth rate of two per cent per annum is expected on the Great Western Highway at the proposal location. In particular, there is a relatively high proportion of heavy vehicles (between 12 and 24 per cent), reflective of the 18,000 tonnes of freight transported daily between the Central West and Sydney.

Without the proposed upgrade to the Great Western Highway, travel times and intersection level of service would deteriorate to unacceptable levels. The current performance of the Great Western Highway would constrain access between Sydney and proposed new freight infrastructure (and associated land use changes) in the Central West, including the Parkes National Logistics Hub and the Inland Rail Program.

The proposal forms part of the broader Greater Western Highway Upgrade Program that aims to reduce congestion and deliver safer, more efficient and reliable journeys for those travelling in, around and through the Blue Mountains, while also better connecting communities in the Central West. Provision of dual carriageway would provide travel time savings of about 10 minutes for light vehicles and for heavy vehicles between Katoomba and Lithgow, and would largely maintain those savings through to 2036 (for the modelled weekday).

Key features of the proposal would include:

- Upgrade of about 14 kilometres of the Great Western Highway between Little Hartley and Lithgow to a four lane divided highway
- Provision of service roads
- Provision of two rest areas, one eastbound and one westbound
- Provision of five new bridges
- Upgrade of the existing bridge over River Lett.

The proposal would provide improved facilities for the movement of freight between the Central West and Sydney while enhancing accessibility and improving road safety in the area.

The location of the proposal is shown in Figure 1-1 and an overview of the proposal is provided in Figure 1-2. Section 3 describes the proposal in more detail.



Figure 1-1 Location of the proposal

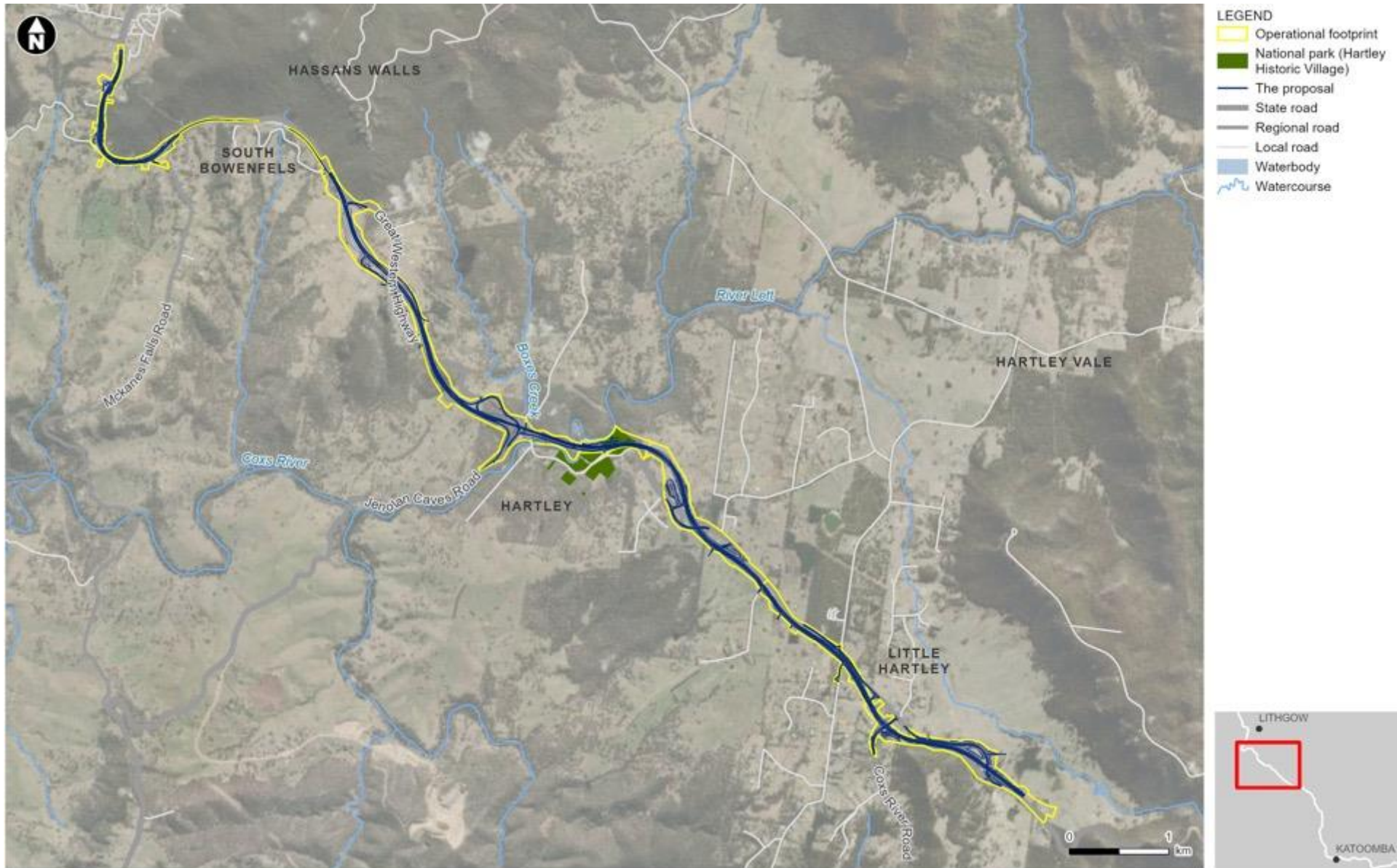


Figure 1-2 Overview of the proposal operational features

1.2 Purpose of the report

This review of environmental factors (REF) has been prepared by Jacobs/Arcadis Joint Venture on behalf of Transport. For the purposes of these works, Transport is the proponent and the determining authority under Division 5.1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).

The purpose of the REF is to describe the proposal, to document the likely impacts of the proposal on the environment, and to detail mitigation and management measures to be implemented.

The description of the proposed work and assessment of associated environmental impacts has been undertaken in the context of clause 228 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000, the factors in *Is an EIS Required? Best Practice Guidelines for Part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (Is an EIS required? guidelines) (DUAP, 1995/1996), *Roads and Related Facilities EIS Guideline* (DUAP 1996), the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act), the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* (FM Act), and the Australian Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Refer to Section 4 Statutory planning and framework for more information on statutory considerations.

In doing so, the REF helps to fulfil the requirements of:

- Section 5.5 of the EP&A Act including that Transport examine and take into account to the fullest extent possible, all matters affecting or likely to affect the environment by reason of the activity
- The strategic assessment approval granted by the Federal Government under the EPBC Act in September 2015, with respect to the impacts of Transport's road activities on nationally listed threatened species, ecological communities and migratory species.

The findings of the REF would be considered when assessing:

- Whether the proposal is likely to have a significant impact on the environment and therefore the necessity for an environmental impact statement to be prepared and approval to be sought from the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces under Division 5.2 of the EP&A Act
- The significance of any impact on threatened species as defined by the BC Act and/or FM Act, in Section 1.7 of the EP&A Act and therefore the requirement for a Species Impact Statement or a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report
- The significance of any impact on nationally listed biodiversity matters under the EPBC Act, including whether there is a real possibility that the activity may threaten long-term survival of these matters, and whether offsets are required and able to be secured
- The potential for the proposal to significantly impact any other matters of national environmental significance or Commonwealth land and the need, subject to the EPBC Act strategic assessment approval, to make a referral to the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment for a decision by the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment on whether assessment and approval is required under the EPBC Act.