

M2 to F3 corridor - background

Overview

The Australian Government recognises the need for a high quality link between the M2 Motorway, a section of the Sydney Orbital, and the F3. Roads and Maritime Services (formerly Roads and Traffic Authority) coordinated a feasibility study, to consider options for this corridor, on behalf of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) was commissioned in early 2002 to conduct the study.

The study was completed and a preferred corridor for the new link was announced by the Australian Government on 6 May 2004.

F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate options for a new National Highway connection between the F3 and the Sydney Orbital.

The study was funded by the Australian Government and coordinated by Roads and Maritime Services (formerly Roads and Traffic Authority).

The study area extended from the F3 at Kariiong on the Central Coast, to the northern section of the Sydney Orbital, from Dean Park in the west, to the M2 Motorway at Lane Cove in the east.

The aim of the study was to identify a new route to meet current and future traffic demands on the National Highway north of the Sydney Orbital.

The study team took into account many issues, including:

- Current and future traffic levels.
- Future planned land developments.
- Public transport needs.
- Potential environmental and social impacts.
- Economic benefits.

Preferred option

On 6 May 2004 the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, and the then Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, Senator Ian Campbell, announced that a preferred corridor had been chosen for a new link to be constructed from the F3 Freeway to the Sydney Orbital.

The preferred corridor is the 'Purple Option'. This corridor is 8 km long, and connects the F3 at Wahroonga to the M2 at its interchange with Pennant Hills Road. It would be mostly in tunnel running 30 to 40 metres underneath Pennant Hills Road. The study concluded that the 'Purple Option' would best meet national Highway objectives and is justified on social, environmental, economic and inter-regional transport grounds.

The 'Purple Option' has the following benefits:

- It would result in significant improvement in urban amenity (reduced severance, reduced traffic noise and improved accessibility) along Pennant Hills Road as a result of substantial relief to traffic congestion on surface roads that would occur from opening the new link.
- Opportunities to reallocate road space on Pennant Hills Road to realise benefits for other users, improve the general amenity of the area and access to Pennant Hills and Thornleigh railway stations.
- Improvement in air quality along Pennant Hills Road.
- Reduction in vehicle emissions and traffic noise for properties along Pennant Hills Road and in close proximity to Pearce Corner.
- No significant impacts on terrestrial ecology, water quality, heritage sites or open space.

Previous studies

Previous road planning studies considered a conventional highway link between the F3 at Wahroonga and the M2 Motorway. These options (known as the B2 and B3 corridors) were abandoned in 1995 to preserve the bushland within the Lane Cove National Park and to avoid unnecessary community and social impacts. The F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study did not re-investigate these options.

Independent review

On 19 February 2007, the Federal Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Hon. Jim Lloyd MP, announced the establishment of an independent review of the F3 to Sydney Orbital corridor selection, to examine the technical underpinnings and the robustness of the process followed to ensure the decisions taken by governments previously on the route selection of the preferred option were soundly based.

An independent review was conducted by the Hon Mahla Pearlman AO, a former Chief Judge of the NSW Land and Environment Court (1992-2003). The Terms of Reference for the Review were to consider and advise on:

- Whether the assumptions and data used in the F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study 2004 were valid and reasonable at the time of the study.
- Whether changes since the report's publication affecting land use and transport flow in Western Sydney would support any significant changes to these projections.

- Whether any significant changes to those projections would alter the conclusions reached in the F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study of April 2004.

The Review Report was released on 14 September 2007 and concluded:

- The assumptions and data used in the SKM 'F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study 2004' were valid and reasonable at the time of the study.
- There have been changes affecting land use and transport flows since the SKM study's publication, but these changes reinforce the selection of the preferred route.
- The Australian and NSW Governments should proceed with the 'purple option' link connecting the F3 with the Sydney Orbital.

Next steps

The next stages of the project would be to:

- Refine alternative alignments within the 'Purple Option' corridor to develop a concept proposal.
- Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on the concept proposal.
- Prepare a business case on funding options for the concept proposal.
- Further community consultation to ensure that the community and stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute to the design and development of the project.