

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT PLANNING FOR NOOSA

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Abstract

A strategic transport planning study has recently been completed for the coastal part of Noosa Shire, with the report "Coastal Area Traffic and Transport to 2016" recently released for public consultation. This report has been prepared by Colin Beard in close consultation with Council officers, principally John Lee, Paul Summers and Rod Williams. The report has:

- Made recommendations on an integrated transport system (roads, public transport, bicycle and pedestrian networks) for the coastal part of the Shire, which will maintain and enhance personal mobility within an area where tourism is vital to the regional economy;
- Provided assistance to the preparation of an IPA-based planning scheme;
- Prioritised transport infrastructure improvements to overcome existing and potential traffic and transport problems.

The transport system recommended will not rely only on private car travel, because it has been recognised that many of the features of the natural and built environment of Noosa which make it an attractive holiday destination are threatened by the direct and indirect impacts of the usage of private car travel. Consequently, a primary aim of this transport planning study has been to ensure the sustainability of the environmental, social and economic systems of this region.

Key Words: sustainable, strategic transport planning, tourism, Noosa

Background

In 1996, a traffic planning study (ref 1) was completed for Noosa Council. The key objectives of that study were:

- To make recommendations on road system upgrades which would be necessary to accommodate projected usage of the coastal area road network during the life of the next planning scheme;
- To assess the ability of the coastal area transport network to accommodate transport demands associated with different future development scenarios.

That study made recommendations on future road system upgrading requirements, principally the construction of Eenie Creek Road from Eumundi Road to David Low Way between 2000 and 2006. Eenie Creek Road is proposed to be an east-west arterial road effectively defining the southern edge of the coastal urban area. The study also concluded that continued development consistent with the previous planning scheme would lead to unacceptable traffic congestion impacts, or would require road widenings which would unreasonably impact on the existing community. That is, development on the previously planned scale was not sustainable. Based on these and other advices, the current planning scheme reduced projected development densities within the coastal area of the Shire.

Between 1996 and 2002, several key intersections have been upgraded, a local bypass has been developed in Tewantin, Beckmans Road (effectively the western extension of Eenie Creek Road between Cooroy Road and Eumundi Road) has been upgraded, Gympie Terrace along the Noosaville foreshore has been “traffic calmed,” and the first stage of Eenie Creek Road constructed between Eumundi Road and Weyba Road via Reef Street. During peak holiday periods, temporary traffic control measures, park-n-ride facilities, and a Council-funded free bus service have been utilised to serve the critical Hastings Street precinct.

Other important initiatives during this period have been the “de-maining” agreement between Noosa Council and the Department of Main Roads, whereby most of the previously “declared” roads within the coastal area have been returned to Council control and responsibility. Further, Noosa Council has developed a major roadworks Infrastructure Charges Plan (ref 3) which has been accepted by the Department of Local Government & Planning, and is now on public display.

Coastal Area Traffic & Transport to 2016

This study (ref 2) was completed in 2002. It has been through a peer review process by academics from the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology, and is now in the community consultation phase.

The study concluded that the road network could accommodate anticipated travel demands generated by forecast population and accommodation increases, to 2016 and beyond, subject to completion on all three stages of Eenie Creek Road and Walter Hay Drive (southern access road, as a northwards extension of the Sunshine Motorway to Eenie Creek Road adjacent to the proposed Shire Business Centre). Further, this can be done without traffic signals and without significant upgrading of other existing traffic routes.

Like many holiday destination areas, parts of the Noosa road network are subject to substantially higher than normal traffic volumes during some parts of the year. To avoid excessive road traffic and parking congestion during these peak holiday periods, approximately ten percent of trips will need to be made by other than private car, particularly trips to and from the Hastings Street precinct.

The study considered a number of alternative strategic directions based on different demand management techniques including:

1. Demand responsive solutions – build more car parking spaces or bigger roads in response to increasing demands;
2. Passive demand management solutions – the use of congestion to limit demand;
3. Negative demand management solutions – increasing the cost of private car travel, by measures such as tolls or parking charges;
4. Positive demand management solutions – decreasing the cost or increasing the convenience and attractiveness of alternative travel modes such as walking, cycling or public transport.

The study concluded that the best options for Noosa were combinations of demand responsive measures and positive demand management measures. Primary reliance on increasing congestion or higher private vehicle travel costs was not recommended because high levels of personal mobility are seen as being more important than normal in a holiday area, where convenience and freedom of movement contribute positively to a relaxed holiday environment.

Apart from the road construction projects (Eenie Creek Road and Walter Hay Drive), the key recommendations of the study included:

- Progressive development of a major loop demand-management bus public

transport service, linking all of the major destinations within the coastal area. This service would be free or low cost, and would incorporate a fun, (sexy) theme, probably with purpose built vehicles, and with specially trained drivers. The service would need to be marketed as part of the overall Tourism Noosa experience, whereby a Noosa holiday need not include the expectation of substantial periods inside a motor car;

- Construction of a new regional bus interchange, probably within the proposed Shire Business Centre;
- Implementation of a parking management scheme for the Hastings Street precinct, incorporating advance variable-message signing, and remote park-n-ride facilities;
- Substantially improve the bicycle network and terminal facilities, recognising the different needs of the three primary user groups – school, commuter and recreational riders;
- Develop a Noosa roundabout design guide specifically intended to be more cyclist and pedestrian friendly;
- Continue development of a safe and convenient network of walking paths;
- An on-going program of data collection and transport system monitoring.

Sustainability

The primary objective of the Coastal Area Traffic and Transport Study was sustainability.

The regional economy of Noosa depends critically on the tourism industry – on Noosa remaining an attractive place to holiday. This requires preservation of the natural environment, and the maintenance and enhancement of the built environment, or in a word, sustainability.

High personal mobility is important to a free and relaxed holiday experience. However, while mobility is seen as desirable, the transport of people or goods often has negative social and environmental impacts – air and noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, congestion delays, the social and environmental impacts of road construction, etc. Consequently, the transport planning objective of this study was to achieve high personal mobility at minimum social, environmental and financial cost to the community.

The study has demonstrated that currently planned expansion of the resident population and of tourism accommodation is sustainable. Future transport system demand increases are most likely to be generated by day-trippers and by residential development outside the Shire.

However, an increasing proportion of total trips, particularly to the most critical destinations such as the Hastings Street precinct, will be able to be made by other than private car. The study recommends measures to reduce reliance on private vehicle transport, thereby enhancing sustainability, particularly through improvement of the attractiveness of walking, cycling and public transport (the demand management bus loop). It is expected that Council will work closely with Queensland Transport in developing strategies which slowly change community attitudes to public transport. In Noosa, this is proposed to be by making public transport more attractive, rather than private vehicle use less attractive.

An important element of sustainability is realism. The Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South-East Queensland is a perfect example of non-realistic planning; being based on continued rapid population growth (primarily in areas where public transport will always remain uncompetitive), based on impossible mode split assumptions, and reliant on future transport system upgrades which have no prospect of being funded.

By comparison, this study has demonstrated that development in accordance with the demographic forecasts will not create travel demands which cannot be accommodated,

realistic mode split assumptions which recognise the need for progressive changes in community attitudes during the next decade, and based on a de-maining agreement and a major roadworks ICP which will provide the bulk of the necessary funding.

Conclusion

Without sound transport planning, based on sustainability principles, the coastal part of Noosa Shire is in real danger of being “loved to death.” More and more people want to live here, more and more people want to holiday here, and more and more people want to make day-trips here. The natural and built environments have finite capacity.

Building more roads to satisfy the ever-increasing demands for visits, for travel, could easily destroy that which makes the area so attractive.

Current, integrated land use and transport planning is primarily and realistically focussed on sustainability – of a region and of a lifestyle.

References

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Author Biography



Colin has worked in traffic and transport planning for over thirty years, primarily in south-east Queensland, and has provided strategic and design traffic planning advices to Noosa Shire Council for the past ten years. Apart from a brief period with Brisbane City Council in the mid-1980's, he has worked exclusively as a consultant, initially with Rankine & Hill, and then in his own practice. He regularly provides assistance to several government departments, councils, and private developers. His primary professional interest is in the development of safe and convenient traffic and transport systems which maximise total community benefits.

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