

WARRUMBUNGLE SHIRE COUNCIL

Ordinary Meeting – 15 November 2018

Item 18 Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Upgrade Project

Division:	Technical Services
Management Area:	Technical Services
Author:	Director Technical Services – Kevin Tighe
CSP Key Focus Area:	Public Infrastructure and services
Priority:	P13. Roads throughout the Shire are safe, well-maintained and appropriately funded.

Reason for Report

The reason for this report is to review the current status of the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Project and to consider making a commitment to lodging a funding submission.

Background

Council partnered with Walgett Shire Council and Narrabri Shire Council in 2011 to prepare a feasibility study on a project to upgrade the road between Coonabarabran and Mungindi. The upgrading project included sealing the road between Gwabegar and Pilliga in Narrabri Shire and sealing various sections of unsealed road within Walgett Shire. Within Warrumbungle Shire, 37.5km of sealed road was identified for upgrading, which included widening the sealed road to route standard and strengthening pavement.

In 2013, Warrumbungle Shire joined with all Council's in the Barwon Electorate in a study to identify regional roads of strategic importance. The report from the study ranked regional roads on a three level priority hierarchy and the road between Coonabarabran and Mungindi was rated as priority 1.

Even though funding for the joint project has not been forthcoming, upgrade works have occurred including replacement of the Gwabegar Bridge in Narrabri Shire and many kilometres of bitumen sealing occurring on the route in Walgett Shire.

Council resolved to reactivate the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Project and make contact with Narrabri Shire Council and Walgett Shire Council. As a result a meeting of senior road managers was held to discuss the viability of lodging a joint funding submission under the NSW Government's Fixing Country Roads Program. Each Council agreed to review the scope of works for the road upgrade project and seek a commitment from their own Council towards lodging a funding submission.

Issues

The Coonabarabran Mungindi Road has importance as a strategic and productivity route for the Western Region. The section of the route between Gwabegar and Pilliga, which is in Narrabri Shire, has importance to Warrumbungle Shire because sealing the road will potentially increase traffic flow through Baradine.

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One of the objectives of upgrading the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road, in particular the section of the route within Warrumbungle Shire, is for the route to be used by higher productivity trucks. Another objective is to increase visitor numbers to the region by having a road that encourages tourist travel.

The section of the route between Baradine and Gwabegar is open to road trains. The section between Baradine and Coonabarabran is open to B Double trucks only, although one local truck operator has a road train permit to travel between Baradine and Bugaldie. The focus of both the 2011 and 2013 reports was on upgrading the road between Gwabegar and Coonabarabran to road train standard. The 2013 report described the scope of works as “Rehabilitation of existing seal, realignment of high embankment and widening of shoulders to 1.5m both sides plus a full width pavement overlay of 150mm. 7.5km requires rehabilitation between Gwabegar and Baradine, 30.0km between Baradine and Coonabarabran” (*Western NSW, Regional and Local Road Plan, February 2013*). Council staff are in the process of refining the scope of works which includes identifying segments which need widening to meet route standards for travel by road trains.

General consultation with the community about the proposal to upgrade the road and open the road to road trains between Baradine and Coonabarabran has not occurred.

Council will be aware that the Newell Highway through Coonabarabran is not open to road trains. That is, if the Baradine Road is opened to road train access, the trucks will need to de-couple before accessing the Newell Highway in Coonabarabran. Council will also be aware that Roads & Maritime Services (RMS) is again in the planning stage of upgrading the road at Coonabarabran to allow access by higher productivity vehicles including road trains. Therefore, it is foreseeable that in the medium term, say between 5 and 10 years, that road trains will be able to travel either through or around Coonabarabran, which in turn will increase pressure to open Baradine Road to road train access.

Council will be aware of the State Government’s ‘Fixing Country Roads Programme’, which may be a source of funding for the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Project. The NSW Government recommends leveraging funds from the Australian Government either through the ‘Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Programme’ or the ‘Building Better Regions Fund’. Lodging a funding submission under any of these programmes requires preparation of supporting documentation including a Cost Benefit Analysis, which means that Council will need to invest time and resources into preparing a submission.

The merit of a funding submission lodged under programmes administered either by the State Government or the Australian Government will be higher if the project is of regional significance and supported by one or more Councils. It is understood that both Walgett Shire and Narrabri Shire are yet to formally commit to a joint submission.

Options

The following options for Council are apparent:

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1. Commit to the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Upgrade Project including upgrading to road train access standard the road between Baradine and Coonabarabran.
2. Lodging a funding submission either in partnership or not with Narrabri Shire Council and Walgett Shire Council. Preparation of a funding submission will involve commitment of funds for a Consultant to assist Council with submission documentation.
3. Commit to the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Upgrade Project but not to upgrading to the road between Baradine and Coonabarabran to road train access standard.

Financial Considerations

There is no budget allocation for either lodging a funding submission or for upgrade works on road between Coonabarabran and Gwabegar. Council has received funding in the past from RMS through the Black Spot Programme to upgrade various sections of the Baradine Road.

The 2013 report estimated the cost of upgrading the Warrumbungle Shire section of the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road to be \$13,125,000. This estimate may change when the scope of works are refined.

The ranking of funding submissions increases if Council makes a financial contribution to the construction project. However, the appropriate level of contribution from Council will not be known until business case details are prepared.

The cost of preparing a funding submission for the Warrumbungle Shire section of the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Project is estimated to be \$15,000.

RECOMMENDATION

That:

1. Funding submissions are prepared for the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Upgrade Project subject to a partnering agreement with both Walgett Shire Council and Narrabri Shire Council.
2. The objective for Warrumbungle Shire Council in any funding submission made for the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Upgrade Project is to upgrade the road between Coonabarabran and Baradine to road train access standard.
3. A budget allocation of \$15,000, funded from the Regional Roads Block Grant, is made for the cost of preparing funding submissions for the Coonabarabran Mungindi Road Upgrade Project.