



MidCoast Rural Strategy

Transport Background Report

Version 4 / Date: July 2020



Version	Purpose of Document	Reviewed by	Date
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Table of Contents

- 1 INTRODUCTION 6**
- 2 CONTEXT 7**
- 3 EVIDENCE BASE 9**
- 4 STRATEGIC PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS 11**
 - 4.1 National Level Considerations 11
 - 4.1.1 National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy and National Action Plan 11
 - 4.1.2 NSW Coastal Cycleway 14
 - 4.2 State Level Considerations 17
 - 4.3 Regional Level Considerations 20
 - 4.3.1 Hunter Regional Plan 2036 20
 - 4.3.2 MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 25
 - 4.4 Local Level Considerations 27
 - 4.4.1 MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility 27
 - 4.4.2 MidCoast Destination Management Plan 29
 - 4.4.3 Bucketts Way Route Access Strategy Upgrade Program (2015) 29
 - 4.4.4 Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy 2018-2023 30
 - 4.5 Environmental Planning Instruments and other regulatory considerations 32
 - 4.5.1 State Environmental Planning Policy (State & Regional Development) 2011 .. 32
 - 4.5.2 State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007 34
 - 4.5.3 Standard Instrument Principal Local Environment Plan 34
 - 4.5.4 Land use permissibility within a Local Environmental Plan 37
 - 4.5.5 Council as Consent Authority 37
 - 4.5.6 Development controls 38
- 5 ROAD TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE 39**
 - 5.1 State Roads 39
 - 5.1.1 Pacific Highway 40
 - 5.1.2 Crown Roads 43
 - 5.2 Regional Roads 45
 - 5.2.1 Thunderbolts Way 46
 - 5.2.2 The Bucketts Way 48
 - 5.2.3 Gloucester - Scone Road 51
 - 5.2.4 The Lakes Way 52
 - 5.2.5 Manning Valley - Port Macquarie Road 55
 - 5.3 Local Roads 57
 - 5.4 Touring routes 57
 - 5.5 Road management and funding 60

5.6	Road related transport services and facilities	61
6	RAIL – PASSENGER AND FREIGHT NETWORKS	63
6.1	North Coast Railway.....	63
6.1.1	Proposed High Speed Rail.....	63
6.2	Hunter Valley Coal Rail Network	66
6.2.1	Proposed Inland Rail.....	67
6.3	Rail Network considerations	67
6.4	Taree Regional Airport	71
6.5	Waterways	72
7	ANCILLARY TRANSPORT FACILITIES AND SERVICES	74
7.1	Highway Service Centres and Rest Areas.....	74
7.2	Livestock Saleyards	75
7.3	Aircraft.....	76
7.4	Tourist Gateways	76
7.5	Visitor Information Centres	77
7.6	Caravan Parks and camping grounds.....	77
7.7	Public Transport.....	79
7.8	Taxis and Ride Sharing.....	80
7.9	Walking and cycling.....	80
7.10	Horse Riding	81
8	RECOMMENDED PLANNING FRAMEWORK	84
8.1	Identifying and categorising 'key' transport corridors	84
8.2	Identifying and planning for freight routes.....	87
8.3	Identifying and planning for tourist routes	89
9	REFERENCES	91

Table of Tables

Table 1. Excerpts from National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy and Action Plan	13
Table 2. Transport Goals and Actions from MidCoast 2030	28
Table 3. Daily All Vehicle Traffic Flow - Pacific Highway, MidCoast LGA (2017)	41
Table 4. Daily Heavy Vehicle Traffic Flow - Pacific Highway, MidCoast LGA (2017)	41
Table 5. Train Passenger Journeys by Corridor by Service (Financial Year 2012-13)	69
Table 6. Recommended categories for key transport corridors	85
Table 7. Recommended categories for key freight corridors	87
Table 8. Tourist route categories for long-term planning	89

Table of Figures

Figure 1. NSW Government, Dept. Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications National Key Freight Routes Map	12
Figure 2. Great Lakes stages of NSW Coastal Cycleway	15
Figure 3. Point-to-Point versus Hub-and-Spoke transport models	19
Figure 4. Inter-regional transport connections identified in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036	21
Figure 5. Location Quotients and Employment Growth for MidCoast Industries	26
Figure 6. Bucketts Way routes from Gloucester to the Pacific Highway	30
Figure 7. Regional Transport Route Walcha-Gloucester-Newcastle	31
Figure 8. State and Regional classified roads within the Hunter Region (Roads Act 1993)	40
Figure 9. The Bucketts Way Loop	58
Figure 10. The Lakes Way Loop	58
Figure 11. Thunderbolt's Way	59
Figure 12. RMS Heavy vehicle routes for 19m B-double (over 50 tonnes)	59
Figure 13. RMS Heavy vehicle routes for 23m B-double	60
Figure 14. North Coast Railway Line – MidCoast route and stations	63
Figure 15. High Speed Rail Study Phase 1 Report (2011) Corridor Options through the MidCoast	64
Figure 16. High Speed Rail Phase 2 Report (2013) Port Macquarie- Twelve Mile Creek options	65
Figure 17. Preferred Taree High Speed Rail station location and rail alignment	65
Figure 18. Hunter Valley Coal Chain Network	67
Figure 19. NSW Trainlink Regional Services in MidCoast LGA: North Coast Line	69
Figure 20. Highway Rest Areas within the MidCoast LGA	74
Figure 21. Section 8 of the Bicentennial National Trail	83
Figure 22. Transport corridor categories for long-term planning	86
Figure 23. Freight corridor categories for long-term planning	88

1 Introduction

This Background Report has been prepared by MidCoast Council with assistance from City Plan Strategy and Development, in partnership with Aurora Research and Development and MJD Environmental as part of the MidCoast Rural Strategy Project ('the Project') to assist with the formulation of the MidCoast Rural Strategy ('the Rural Strategy').

This Report presents the findings of the consultant team's review of land use and development planning considerations relating to transport infrastructure, as relevant to rural areas across the MidCoast Local Government Area ('LGA'). This includes activities relevant to the movement of freight, commuter use, and rural based tourism use.

This review is intended to identify the main road corridors to be prioritised for tourism, freight and commuter traffic within the MidCoast LGA and to develop a planning framework to guide their management. It also outlines additional transport-oriented services within the MidCoast LGA.

This Report should be considered in conjunction with other Background Reports prepared as part of the Project. At the time of writing, these include Reports focusing on the following topics as relevant to rural areas:

1. Housing and Accommodation
2. Agriculture and rural-based industries
3. Land based conservation
4. Marine activities
5. Mining & Energy
6. Tourism
- 7. Transport (this Report)**
8. Rural Waterways

The conclusions and recommended planning framework described in all Background Reports are presented for consideration and, once finalised, will form part of the Rural Strategy information presented for public exhibition.

2 Context

This section provides a context for long-term planning associated with land use and development assessment decision-making. It recognises that the MidCoast transport networks include services of national and state relevance, including:

- The North Coast Rail Corridor
- The Heavy Rail network from the Stratford Mining Complex to the Port of Newcastle
- Pacific Highway
- Inter-regional road links via the Bucketts Way, and Thunderbolts Way
- Taree Airport

In addition to state and regionally significant transport infrastructure, other important local road networks and servicing infrastructure exist throughout the MidCoast.

Collectively, these networks accommodate a high level of through-traffic, as well as local traffic movements associated with freight, community traffic, tourism and recreation.

The MidCoast forms part of the Hunter Region. The state and regional transport networks provide good connections to other areas of the Hunter including the city of Newcastle. The following points are considered critical when considering rural transport related issues in the MidCoast LGA:

Freight

The MidCoast has a diverse freight task that supports a range of industries including agriculture, forestry, mining and construction, as well as supplying general goods to local communities. Key freight routes include the North Coast heavy rail corridor, the Newcastle Coal heavy rail and road-based corridors along the Pacific Highway, The Bucketts Way and Thunderbolts Way. The Port of Newcastle serves as an important global gateway for key import and export industries such as coal and agriculture.

- The MidCoast does not have port facilities capable of significant freight distribution.
- The heavy rail corridor currently functions primarily as a through-route for both freight and passengers.

Long-term planning will need to consider how to maintain safe and efficient traffic flows on these routes, particularly for larger and heavier vehicles.

Community

The majority of the MidCoast's population live and work along the coast, within reasonable commuting distance to Forster-Tuncurry, Taree, and Greater Newcastle (to the south of the LGA), which provide the highest order of employment and services.

- The MidCoast has a relatively poor rural public transport network which is confined within the major urban centres. Consequently, the road network caters for the vast majority of MidCoast's vehicle traffic volume.
- Under existing road management frameworks, the local road network makes up around three-quarters of Council's asset base, placing a considerable burden on Council to maintain, renew and improve road infrastructure in a timely and cost-effective manner.

- Investment must be carefully prioritised to balance considerations for among others road safety, amenity and long-term maintenance.

Long-term planning will need to consider how to support rural communities, which tend to be more dispersed and can experience much lower level access to employment and other important services.

Tourism and Recreation

The MidCoast is renowned for its diverse natural and scenic beauty. Transport networks provide residents and visitors access to the popular natural areas, including coastal beaches, rivers, lakes, landmarks such as Ellenborough Falls, and more remote World Heritage Areas and National Parks such as the Barrington Tops. There are already three numbered tourist drives within the LGA, including Tourist Drive 2 - The Bucketts Way, Tourist Drive 6 - The Lakes Way and Tourist Drive 8 - Manning Valley to Port Macquarie. Other routes have also been recognised as popular drives.

- Newcastle Airport is a key access point for local and international visitors to the region
- The Taree Regional Airport has future opportunities for leverage of particularly the rural tourism industry;
- The MidCoast is also an important thoroughfare for traffic travelling between the Hunter, Northern Tablelands, North Coast regions and coastal areas between Sydney and Brisbane.

Long-term planning will need to consider how to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for people along these routes, along with considerations for incorporating networks that support other modes of traffic (e.g. walking, cycling, and horse riding).

3 Evidence base

The review underpinning this Report considered publicly available information contained in a range of State, Regional and Local strategies, plans and guidelines as relevant to transport networks and assets in the MidCoast. To a lesser degree, this review also provides considerations for other modes of transport (e.g. walking, cycling and horse riding).

This review predominantly focused on road transport networks and their associated services and facilities, as these tend to be the main drivers influencing development demands and pressures in rural areas. Rail and air transport opportunities are also identified and discussed and where relevant, reference is made to specific government and industry related data and mapping relating to transport infrastructure. A full list of references is appended to this Report.

Views from selected stakeholders and the general community have been provided through the following initiatives undertaken as part of the Rural Strategy Project.

- Telephone interviews conducted by the consultant team between May 2018 and January 2019. In total, 60 interviews were conducted with several participants representing larger groups or peak organisations. Most participants referred to transport-related issues in some form.
- A Public Workshop focusing on Tourism ('Tourism Workshop') in the MidCoast, facilitated by the consultant team on 14 June 2018 in Gloucester. This was attended by over 30 people, with a focused discussion on how the planning framework regulates tourism in rural areas, and issues currently considered most relevant to the MidCoast.
- A public survey ('Rural Strategy survey'), conducted by Council with inputs from the consultant team. This was made available online and in hard copy and was open to the public between September and November 2018. In total, 63 surveys were returned.

Where relevant, views raised by participants have been incorporated into this Report for discussion.

The review has identified the following data gaps, which limited the extent to which higher-level assessments could be completed:

- Data for the Pacific Highway is publicly available from the NSW Roads and Maritime Services ('RMS'). Data for other corridors has been provided to the consultant team by Council but is not otherwise publicly available.
- The level of information available for current road condition and/or capacity is currently insufficient to consider the suitability of the road network for specific uses or users (e.g. freight, tourist, etc.).
- Additional context and information are required before significant opportunities can be identified regarding additional future opportunities provided by heavy rail infrastructure.
- The NSW Coastal Cycleway is referenced within the Hunter Regional Plan and is a key alternative transport route for cyclists between Brisbane and Melbourne¹.

¹ <https://www.nswcoastcycle.com/>

However, patronage of the route through the MidCoast LGA is unknown as is awareness and integration with other Council strategic policies.

- Only part of the two-lane road is sealed from Gloucester to Cobark. The remainder of the road from Cannington's Road, Cobark is unsealed. Given this, the road may only have limited significance for interregional interaction, however this needs to be assessed using traffic volume data.
- The MidCoast Destination Management Plan notes that growth in nature and adventure-based tourism activities including horse riding, should be encouraged to grow the visitor economy². However, like cycling, there is little publicly available information on the location and popularity of trail riding routes within the MidCoast. There is the opportunity to investigate, and better plan for nature-based trail rides within the MidCoast. This would include investigating potential trail routes and their popularity, and what infrastructure may be needed to better support trail riding.

² MidCoast Council 2017c

4 Strategic planning considerations

This section sets out the basis for local strategic planning in relation to rural-based transport within the MidCoast. It addresses the policy directions for plan-making in NSW, including the following Ministerial Directions issued under section 9.1 of the [Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979](#):

- **Direction 3.4 – Integrating Land Use and Transport.** This direction requires that urban structures, building forms, land use locations, development designs, subdivision and street layouts provide for the efficient movement of freight.
- **Direction 3.5 - Development near regulated airports and defence airfields.** Within the MidCoast this direction applies to land near regulated airports such as the Taree Airport and Gloucester Airfield.
- **Direction 5.4 – Commercial and Retail Development along the Pacific Highway, North Coast.** This direction applies to land and development in the vicinity of the existing and/or proposed alignment of the Pacific Highway and to protect its operation as the North Coast’s primary inter- and intra-regional road traffic route.
- **Direction 5.10 - Implementation of Regional Plans.** Within the MidCoast, this direction gives legal effect to the Hunter Regional Plan 2036, requiring any amendments to planning controls to be consistent with its vision, land use strategy, goals, directions and actions.

Discussion predominantly focuses on Government-endorsed policy directions described in long-term strategies and plan at national, state, regional and local-levels. Where relevant, reference is also made to other technical studies or reports.

4.1 National Level Considerations

4.1.1 National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy and National Action Plan

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications recently released the ***National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy and National Action Plan***.

The Strategy and Action Plan set an agenda for integrated national action across all freight modes over the next 20 years and beyond. Developed by all Australian governments with extensive input from industry, the Strategy commits to national action in four critical areas:

- smarter and targeted infrastructure
- enable improved supply chain efficiency
- better planning, coordination and regulation
- better freight location and performance data

The Strategy and Action Plan show in a joined up way, the actions that all governments are taking to respond to Australia’s freight challenges and provide a baseline for further reforms.

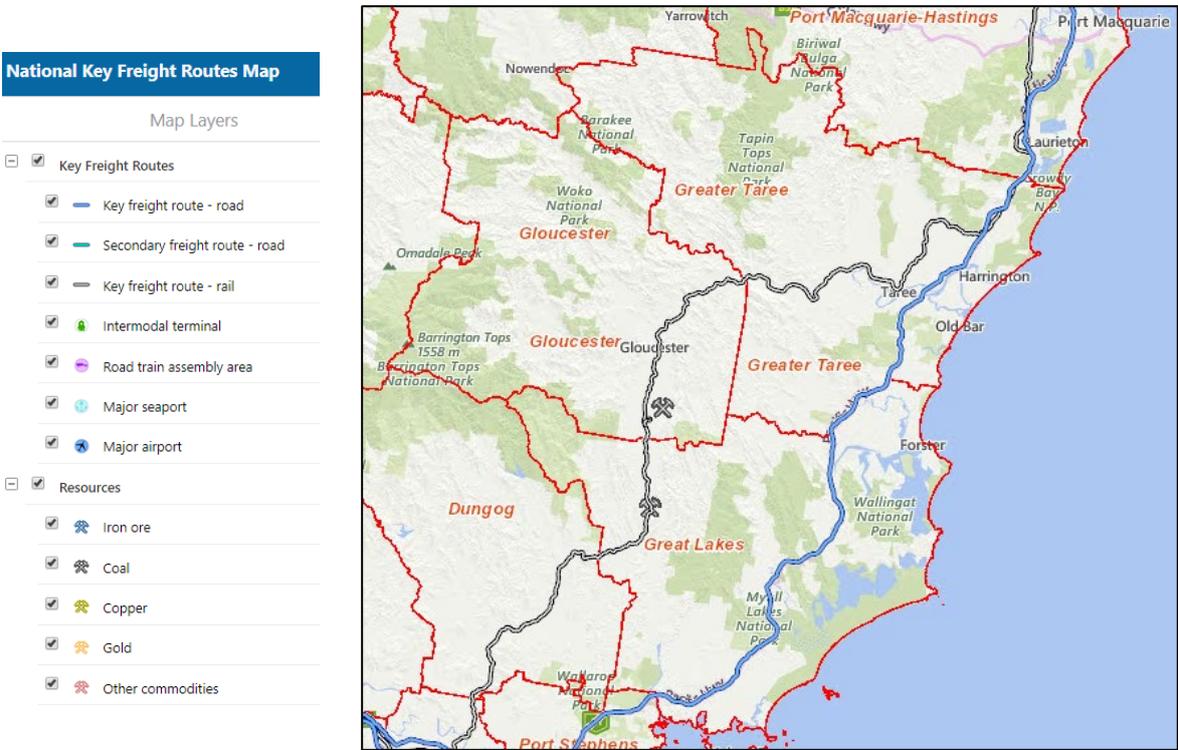
Within the MidCoast, the Pacific Highway and heavy rail line form part of Australia's National Freight Route network³ as illustrated in Figure 1.

In this regard the Strategy acknowledges:

Australia's freight task is growing and changing. The volume of freight carried is expected to grow by over 35 per cent between 2018 and 2040, an increase of 270 billion tonnes (bringing the total volume to just over 1000 billion tonne kilometres). The nature of the freight challenge is also changing in conjunction with growing population density pressures - urban freight is forecast to grow by nearly 60 per cent over 20 years to 2040.

Regional and remote Australia has an important role in responding to increasing demand from Asian and other international markets, underpinning our national economic growth, and our growing urban population.

Figure 1. NSW Government, Dept. Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications National Key Freight Routes Map



The Strategy and Action Plan, as detailed in Table 1, therefore provides an opportunity for the MidCoast to capitalise on our:

- existing freight and transport routes;
- existing and proposed industrial and freight precincts (Stratford and Taree); and
- proximity to Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane for access to national and international markets.

³ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/transport/freight/national-strategy.aspx>

Table 1. Excerpts from National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy and Action Plan

Goal 1: Smarter and targeted investment	
Action 1.2 Provide regional and remote Australia with infrastructure capable of connecting regions and communities to major gateways, through land links, regional airports or coastal shipping	
d) Fund local governments to maintain and upgrade freight assets that support community sustainability	Fund regional councils to improve road freight access (NSW)
Goal 2: Enable improved supply chain efficiency	
Action 2.4 Build community acceptance of freight operations	
d) Build community acceptance of freight by educating and raising awareness among communities on how to safely and positively engage with freight	Focus on Freight (NSW)
Goal 3: Better planning, regulation and coordination	
Action 3.1 Ensure freight demand is integrated in transport and land use planning across and between jurisdiction boundaries and freight modes	
a) Develop coordinated, long-term strategic freight plans and initiatives that are linked to the National Strategy and relevant land use and transport planning documents	Development of National Planning Principles (all jurisdictions) Action Plan implementation arrangements (all jurisdictions)
b) Adopt supply chain or region-based approaches to freight planning	City and Regional Deals (jurisdictions) Princes and Newell Highway Corridor Strategies (Cth; Vic; NSW; SA)
c) Identify and protect key freight corridors and precincts from encroachment	Inland Rail corridor preservation (Cth; Vic; NSW; Qld) National Airports Safeguarding Framework (all jurisdictions) Identify and protect freight and logistics land, corridors and precincts (NSW; Vic; WA)
Action 3.2 Strengthen the consideration of freight in all other government planning and decision-making	
b) Ensure appropriate land use planning protections for existing freight related activities and sites for future freight purposes	Partner with infrastructure partners to enable long-term investment (NSW)
Action 3.3 Investigate policy, planning and operational solutions to improve freight access and movement along domestic and international supply chains	

Goal 3: Better planning, regulation and coordination

b) Provide support to local road managers	Fund infrastructure assessment and upgrades to increase heavy vehicle road access (all jurisdictions)
Action 3.4 Improve regulation to be more outcomes focused and risk-based to support innovation and reduce regulatory burden whilst maintaining safety, security and sustainability	
b) Review regulatory frameworks relating to freight technologies and operations to ensure they are outcomes-based and do not hinder innovation and adoption	Regulatory reforms to prepare for deployment of automated vehicles (all jurisdictions)
c) Ensure border management, transport regulation, security and biosecurity regimes support freight productivity and Australia's international competitiveness	Legislative reform to ensure national harmonisation of laws (all jurisdictions)
d) Ensure environmental regulation impacting on freight operations is fit-for-purpose	Streamline environmental assessments (all jurisdictions)

Goal 4: Better freight location and performance data

Action 4.1 Develop an evidence-based view of key freight flows and supply chains and their comparative performance to drive improved government and industry decision-making, investment and operations	
a) Develop freight performance benchmarks and indicators	Regularly publishing performance measurement data (NSW)
b) Improve freight data collection, dissemination, analysis and hosting	Work with industry to maximise sharing, use and accuracy of data, including creating an online platform (NSW)
d) Investigate best approaches to data collection and use for emerging technologies	National Infrastructure Collection and Dissemination Plan (all jurisdictions) Research on road operator data for use by connected and automated vehicles (Austroads)

Many of these actions have already been endorsed and implementation plans prepared by Transport for NSW⁴.

4.1.2 NSW Coastal Cycleway

The NSW Coastal Cycleway is referenced within the Hunter Regional Plan and is a key alternative transport route for cyclists between Brisbane and Melbourne⁵.

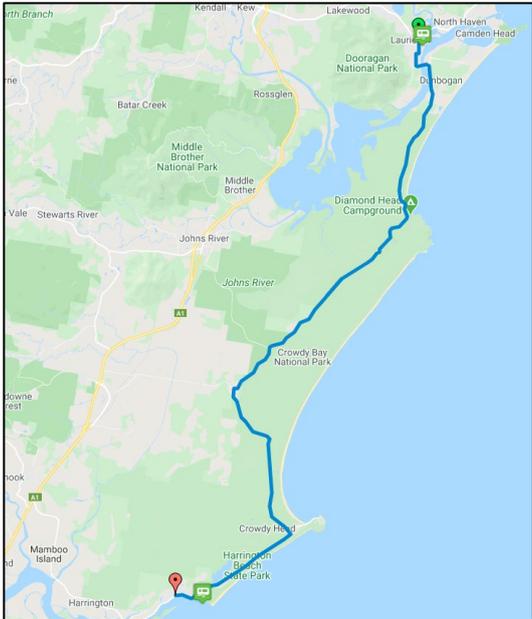
⁴ https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rail/publications/high-speed-rail-study-reports/files/HSR_Phase1_Report_Main_body.pdf

⁵ <https://www.nswcoastcycle.com/>

Patronage of the route through the MidCoast LGA is unknown as is awareness and integration with other Council strategic policies.

The 'Great Lakes' leg of this cycleway extends from Port Macquarie to Newcastle and links several key communities within the MidCoast as illustrated by the route plans below, which aim to provide an alternative off-highway route and accommodation options for travellers.

Figure 2. Great Lakes stages of NSW Coastal Cycleway⁶



Laurieton Gardens Caravan Resort to Harrington Holiday Park

DISTANCE: 35 km

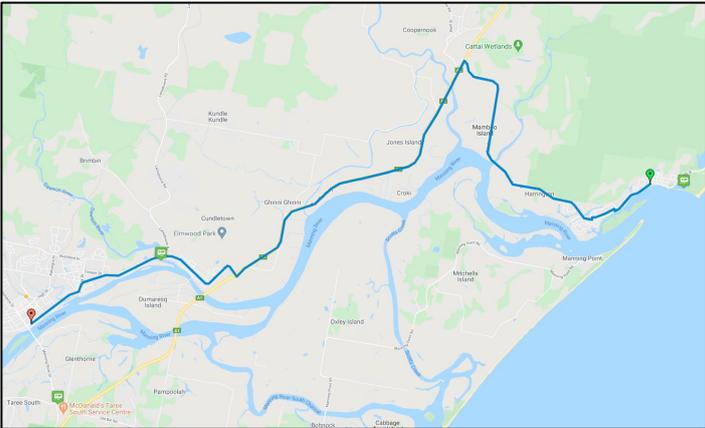
FITNESS: Easy

SKILL: Unsealed Road (22 km) Laurieton to Crowdy Head

TRAFFIC: Light, mostly tourist 4-wheel drives

GRADE: undulating with some hills mid-way Crowdy Bay National Park

Watch for road corrugations in unsealed section.



Harrington Holiday Park to Dawson River Tourist Park or Twilight Caravan Park

DISTANCE: 38 km

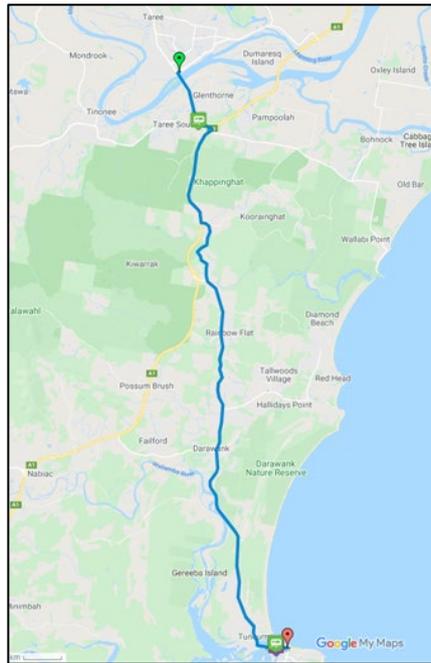
FITNESS: Easy

SKILL: Easy

TRAFFIC: town, rural & A1 highway (wide shoulder)

GRADE: flat to undulating

⁶ <https://www.nswcoastcycle.com/>



Dawson River Tourist Park or Twilight Caravan Park to North Coast Holidays Park, Forster Beach

DISTANCE: 35 km

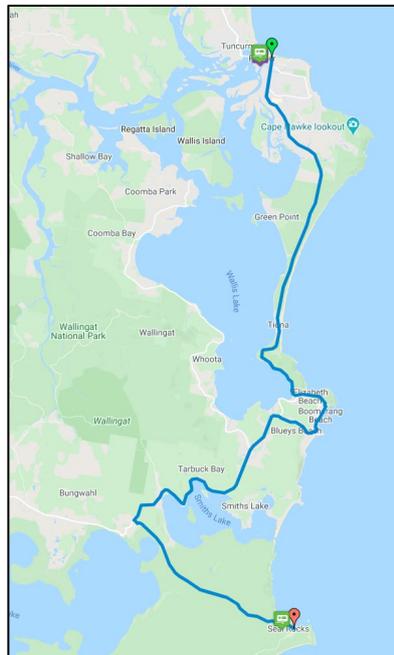
FITNESS: Easy

SKILL: A1 Highway (wide shoulders) & major rural link road with limited shoulders

TRAFFIC: Local & Tourist traffic on link road

GRADE: flat to undulating near Forster. Hills at Khappinghat (A1), south of A1 intersection, & Rainbow Flat.

Location of interest – Forster Bakehouse



North Coast Holidays Park, Forster Beach to North Coast Holiday Park, Seal Rocks

DISTANCE: 48 km

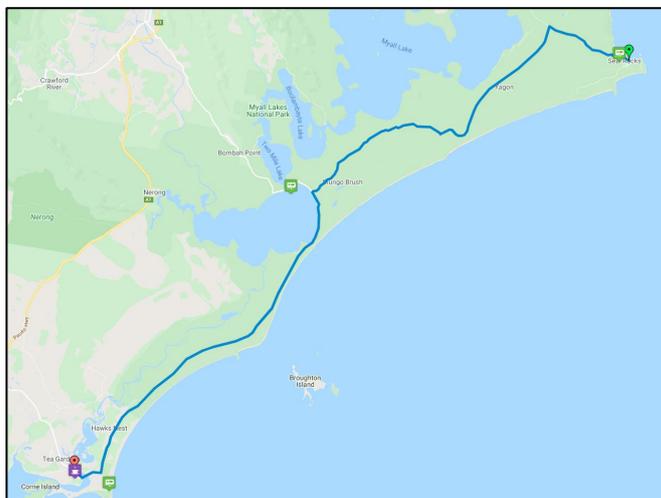
FITNESS: Moderate

SKILL: Rural sealed road

TRAFFIC: Local & Tourists

GRADE: mostly flat to undulating *Forster to Smith Lake*. Hills from *Smith Lake to Seal Rocks* including a couple of good pinches.

Seal Rocks has limited supplies.



North Coast Holiday Park, Seal Rocks to Myall Shores Holiday Park or North Coast Holiday Parks, Hawks Nest

DISTANCE: 58 km

FITNESS: Medium

SKILL: unsealed track

TRAFFIC: Light

GRADE: Hills near Seal Rocks

Seal Rocks has limited supplies

Graded gravel track from Seal Rocks to Mungo Brush (20 km)

Location of Interest - Tea Gardens Ice Cream Shack

North Coast Holiday Parks, Hawks Nest to Bellhaven Caravan Park

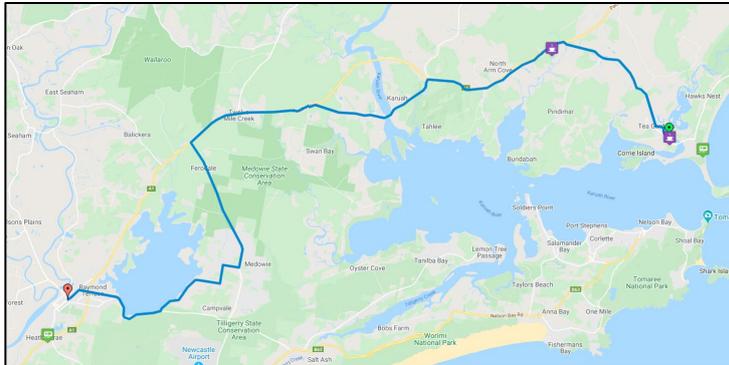
DISTANCE: 61 km

FITNESS: Easy

SKILL: Major rural link roads (limited shoulders) & A1 Highway (wide shoulders)

TRAFFIC: Commuting

GRADE: undulating. Some hills near Tea Gardens & Ferodale



Location of Interest – The Rock Service Centre

North Coast Holiday Parks, Hawks Nest to Samurai Beach Bungalows, Port Stephens or Newcastle Beach YHA

DISTANCE: 64 km

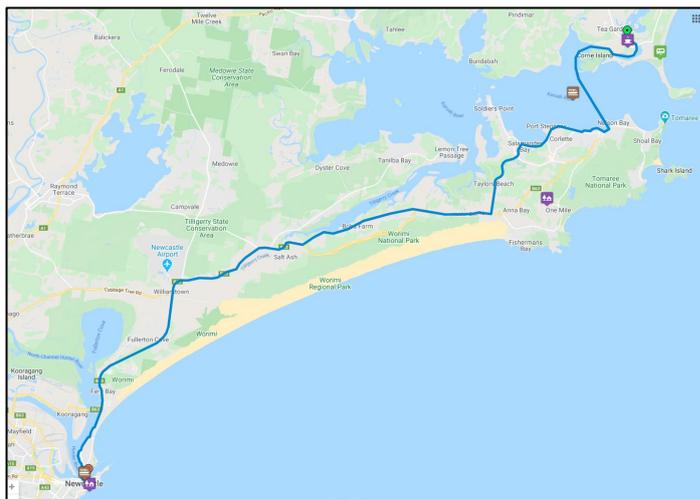
FITNESS: Easy

SKILL: cycle path & rural roads

TRAFFIC: Can be busy on link roads (shoulders are good on new sections)

GRADE: relatively flat, a few hills around Port Stephens.

Tea Gardens – Nelson Bay Ferries and Stockton Ferry



The NSW Coastal Cycleway is identified within the Hunter Regional Plan and could be integrated into both Council's infrastructure and tourism strategic plans, with linkages to game-changer projects such as the Great Lakes Walks and Trails.

4.2 State Level Considerations

State policy considerations are set out in a range of documents endorsed by the NSW Government. The 20 Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW (2018) provides a good overview of how the MidCoast LGA is considered by the State as a Functional Economic Region, with "Coastal" geographic, population and economic features.

This document, along with those listed below, offer goals, directions and actions for transport and infrastructure planning that complement, and in some instances provide more detail, than those provided in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036.

The following documents are relevant to long-term planning for transport networks in the MidCoast and have been reviewed by the consultant team.

Applying to the whole of NSW:

- 20 Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW (NSW Government, 2018)
- Future Transport 2056, which is an update to NSW's Long-Term Transport Master Plan (Transport for NSW, 2018), and supporting plans, including:
 - Regional NSW Services and Infrastructure Plan (Transport for NSW, 2018)
 - NSW Freight and Ports Plan (Transport for NSW, 2018)
 - Road Safety Plan 2021 (Transport for NSW, 2018)
 - NSW Tourism and Transport Plan (Transport for NSW, 2018)
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan (Transport for NSW, 2017)
- State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2036 (Infrastructure NSW, 2018)
- Guideline – Administration of Crown Roads (NSW Department of Industry Lands and Water, 2018)
- Principles and Guidelines for Economic Appraisal of Transport Investment and Initiatives (Transport for NSW, 2016)
- Highway Service Centres Along the Pacific Highway (NSW Roads and Maritime Services, 2014)
- Tourist Signposting (RMS, 2012)
- NSW Bike Plan (NSW Government, 2010)

Applying to part of the MidCoast area only:

- 2017 Hunter Valley Corridor Capacity Strategy (ARTC, 2018)
- Hunter Regional Plan 2036 (Department of Planning and Environment, 2016)
- Hunter Regional Transport Plan 2014 and associated 2017 update (Transport for NSW)
- Mid North Coast Regional Transport Plan and associated 2014 update (Transport for NSW)
- Great Lakes Highway Service Centres Policy (2004)

Collectively, these documents offer the following insights for transport networks, which will assist with formulating the MidCoast Rural Strategy.

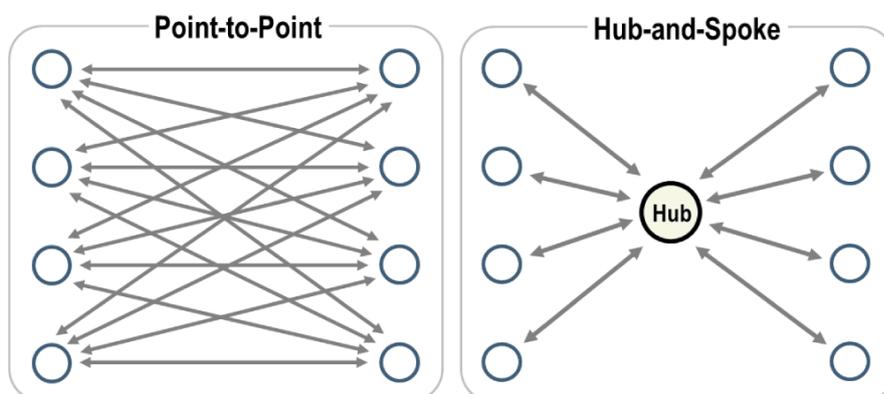
These documents go into some detail regarding key industries that are driving the economic future of regional NSW over the next 20 years, including established and emerging sectors, that are gaining ground in their share of the regional economy. Key to this for the MidCoast, is gaining advantage through transport and infrastructure opportunities provided by our proximity to Sydney and Newcastle.

In this regard, the State Government is implementing a 'hub and spoke' model, as illustrated in Figure 3 below, for transport in regional NSW, to connect strategic centres with

surrounding communities and improves access to key markets and global gateways. This is being implemented by State Agencies through a 'corridor planning' approach as follows:

- Several transport 'corridors' have already been identified or are in the early stages of planning within the MidCoast through State Government-led initiatives. These are discussed later in this Report.
- All Councils will be expected to apply planning controls or other suitable mechanisms to protect strategically important ports, airports, industrial lands, freight precincts and key freight corridors from incompatible uses.
- The State and Regional level infrastructure 'hubs and spokes' are illustrated in Figure 4. Inter-regional transport connections identified in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036. Local networks will be expected to connect with and complement this model.

Figure 3. Point-to-Point versus Hub-and-Spoke transport models



Several agencies are giving greater attention to planning for tourist drives and improving visitor access to major attractions. This recognises the significant growth in visitor numbers to National Parks in regional areas where transport has been improved.

For example, upgrades to the Pacific Highway corridor have contributed to a 70 per cent increase in visitation in the North Coast Region, of which the MidCoast is a part⁷.

- Transport for NSW and Destination NSW are expected to prepare a tourist drive strategy to upgrade and refresh tourist drives across NSW. Engaging in this process and advocating for tourist drives to be recognised in the MidCoast will benefit the local visitor economy in the future.
- Additional State or Regional-level funding may be made available to improve visitor access to areas important for nature-based and cultural tourism. Identifying these areas now can assist with funding applications later.
- Identifying strategic transport linkages throughout the MidCoast through planning controls, asset management plans, contribution plans; and ensuring assessment practices adequately consider accessibility to the region, transport hubs and individual sites of interest and/or accommodation, will assist in growing this market further.

For example, the Hunter Regional Plan 2036 offers The Lakes Way as an example of an important local tourist route.

⁷ Transport for NSW 2018

The following matters should also be recognised in the planning, design and ongoing maintenance of all transport assets, generally but will require additional efforts to be made to understand local relevance and identify place-based solutions:

- Natural disasters and extreme weather events are expected to happen more frequently and be more severe.
- People living in rural areas tend to have a lower level of access to public transport, and often rely more heavily on community transport options. This is particularly relevant for older or less mobile people living in rural areas.
- Rural areas tend to experience higher levels of road trauma. For example, in 2016 there were 843 people killed in Australia on regional and remote roads which represented 65% of all road crash deaths⁸.

4.3 Regional Level Considerations

4.3.1 Hunter Regional Plan 2036

The [Hunter Regional Plan](#) (the Plan) provides for the integration of land use and transport as outlined in Ministerial Direction 3.4 and this is evident in both the vision and introduction of this document.

Vision: The leading regional economy in Australia with a vibrant new metropolitan city at its heart.

⁸ https://www.roadsafety.gov.au/action-plan/2018-2020/priority_action_2

Figure 4. Inter-regional transport connections identified in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036



The Hunter is the leading regional economy in Australia, with thriving communities and a biodiversity-rich natural environment. The Hunter is home to more than 860,000 people and is still growing due to its reputation as one of the great places to live and work.

Beyond Greater Newcastle are vibrant centres, towns and villages, many of which have benefited from emerging job opportunities in the health, agriculture, tourism, defence, energy and transport sectors. Faster inter-regional transport and digital technology are making it easier for residents and businesses to interact and do business.

Newcastle Airport is synonymous with the technology, defence and aerospace industries.

The Port of Newcastle is a vital hub for exporting agricultural produce (including prized beef, lamb, dairy and oilseed) and coal to new markets throughout Asia. Productive agricultural land and natural resources are the foundations of the region’s gross domestic product.

Visitors are arriving in greater numbers on cruise ships, via Newcastle Airport and by a variety of rail and highway links to sample international quality wines and fresh food, walk along convict-built trails, trek through World Heritage-listed national parks and swim at lovely beaches.

Infrastructure investment is the linchpin of economic development across the Hunter. It supports freight, health and education services, and agribusiness and tourism, as well as building resilience to global economic cycles and climate change.

Ministerial Direction 5.1 also requires future changes to planning controls to be consistent with Hunter Regional Plan 2036.

Therefore, the vision, land use strategy, goals, directions and actions described in the Hunter Regional Plan are considered generally reflective of current Government policy directions at National and State levels. On that basis, the Hunter Regional Plan was used as a platform for identifying top-down considerations for local strategic planning.

The Plan recognises the importance of transport to regional economic development and the following directions and actions are particularly relevant to high-level planning for transport networks within the MidCoast:

Goal 1 – The Leading regional economy in Australia

The Hunter is the largest regional economy in Australia, ranking above Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory in terms of economic output. It drives around 28 per cent of regional NSW's total economic output and is the largest regional contributor to the State's gross domestic product.

The region has an estimated 322,000 jobs and this is projected to increase to 384,000 by 2036. There is potential to achieve higher jobs growth by planning for more diversified use of employment land.

The economy is increasingly diversified, with strong growth occurring in health care, social assistance, accommodation, food and professional services. This growth demonstrates the region is well placed to benefit from the macro trends affecting the Australian economy, such as the ageing population and greater exposure to the global economy.

The Hunter is strategically situated to leverage proximity to Asia and the region's growing agricultural, health, education and tourism sectors to supply developing Asian economies with resources and products.

The Plan aims to strengthen the region's economic resilience, protect its well-established economic and employment bases and build on its existing strengths to foster greater market and industry diversification.

Direction 4: Enhance inter-regional linkages to support economic growth

Freight and logistics contributed \$58 billion to the NSW gross state product (14 per cent) and this is expected to grow by 2036.¹¹ The Hunter has several national freight networks linking the State's economy to the global transport gateways of the Port of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport.

Managing the land uses surrounding important transport corridors is important to maintain efficiencies in the network, particularly the national freight network, and to allow for future growth.

The rail network is critical to the movement of raw materials and freight and therefore to the regional economy.

Freight transport facilities, warehousing and distribution centres depend on efficient supply chains, access to customers, land availability and access to main roads. These elements need to be planned in the right locations to make the best use of existing and future improvements to road and rail.

Improving rail passenger services to Sydney will allow more residents to access jobs and business opportunities. The Australian Government is investigating the merits of a high-speed rail network to reduce travel time between capital cities along the east coast. This would generate new opportunities for economic development in the region.

The planned upgrades to Newcastle Airport will permit more people to travel to and from the region and will accommodate international passengers from the Asia-Pacific. Taree

Airport can provide additional capacity for domestic travel and improve inter-regional passenger connections.

4.1 Enhance inter-regional transport connections to support economic growth.

4.2 Work with stakeholders to upgrade transport network capacity in line with changing demands.

4.3 Strengthen and leverage opportunities from the interconnections with other regions, particularly the Pacific Highway, the Golden Highway and the New England Highway.

4.6 Investigate opportunities for logistics and freight growth and other complementary land uses around airports, leveraging investments at Taree and Newcastle airports.

4.7 Enhance the efficiency of existing nationally significant transport corridors and protect their intended use from inappropriate surrounding land uses.

Direction 6: Grow the economy of MidCoast and Port Stephens

The MidCoast and Port Stephens area is defined by its pristine natural environment and diverse agriculture.

The area's economy and employment base are largely service-based and highly seasonal, especially in the coastal towns of Forster and Nelson Bay. These factors reflect its tourism economy and ageing communities. The quality of the natural environment also underpins valuable rural and resource industries.

The completion of the Pacific Highway upgrade has cut travel times for visitors accessing the wide range of tourist activities in the area. This is supported by upgrades to Newcastle and Taree airports, allowing more visitors to directly enter the area.

Travel times offer opportunities for industries to expand and supply products to Greater Newcastle and Sydney. This will act as a catalyst for employment growth. Attracting new industries and growing existing industries that can leverage the accessibility provided by the Pacific Highway will support economic growth.

6.1 Enhance tourism infrastructure and connectivity, recognising the importance of:

- regional and inter-regional connections via the Pacific Highway and the Newcastle and Taree airports and cruise ship gateways; and*
- local routes such as the Lakes Way and Nelson Bay Road.*

6.3 Enable economic diversity and new tourism opportunities that focus on reducing the impacts of the seasonal nature of tourism and its effect on local economies.

6.4 Promote growth of industries that can leverage accessibility provided by the Pacific Highway.

Direction 9: Grow tourism within the region

There is huge potential for the Hunter to increase the number of nights visitors spend in the region from an annual 8.8 million.

Protecting the Hunter's pristine natural areas will keep them attractive to visitors. The coastal areas are some of the most visited and scenic parts of the region and are entry points to the vast Barrington Tops National Park, a World Heritage area.

The region can also capitalise on the growth in food-based or gastronomic tourism throughout the Manning Valley and Hunter Valley to support growers of products such as olives and oysters, as well as the beef and dairy industries.

9.1 Enable investment in infrastructure to expand the tourism industry, including connections to tourism gateways and attractions.

9.2 Encourage tourism development in natural areas that support conservation outcomes.

9.5 Develop capacity for growth in food-based tourism.⁹

Goal 3 – Thriving Communities

The Hunter is home to some of the most diverse communities in NSW and their distinctive character is a significant competitive advantage for the region.

Many communities are set within and around the Hunter's natural features and open space, which are among the region's best assets. The quality of these areas and the ability to access them gives residents an array of unique experiences and the opportunity for a healthy lifestyle.

Direction 18: Enhance access to recreational facilities and connect open spaces

Expanding on the recreational walking and cycling trails that already exist in the region will allow more people to experience the region's wonderful natural areas. This includes extending the Great North Walk – a 250-kilometre bushwalking track that already links Sydney to the Hunter Valley and Newcastle – along the coast to Forster and inland.

The waterways in the region, such as Lake Macquarie, Port Stephens and Manning River, support important water-based recreational activities including both powered and non-powered boating activities.

18.1 Facilitate more recreational walking and cycling paths including planning for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail and expanded inter-regional and intra-regional walking and cycling links, including the NSW Coastal Cycleway.

18.3 Enhance public access to natural areas, including coastal and lake foreshores.

18.4 Assist councils to develop open space and recreation strategies that identify a range of accessible open space and recreation opportunities; integrate open space, active transport and recreation networks; and improve public foreshore access.

18.5 Implement actions and invest in boating infrastructure priorities identified in regional boating plans to improve boating safety, boat storage and waterway access.¹⁰

Further to this, the following transport infrastructure, are identified within the Plan and therefore are considered in more detail throughout this Report:

- The inter-regional road network within the MidCoast is identified as including the Pacific Highway, The Bucketts Way and The Thunderbolts Way, as illustrated in Figure 1.
- All of the heavy rail corridor within the MidCoast is identified as part of the inter-regional rail network, with the section from Gloucester to Newcastle identified as forming part of the Hunter Valley Coal Rail Network, as illustrated in Figure 1.
- The potential for high-speed rail connections to be provided in the future is also recognised (but not mapped) in the Plan.
- The development of logistics, freight and tourism related uses, and other complementary services close to Taree Airport is strongly supported, to leverage recent investments in this regional airport.
- Investment in transport infrastructure to enhance visitor connectivity generally is encouraged.

⁹ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Regional-Plans/Hunter/Hunter-regional-plan/The-leading-regional-economy-in-Australia>

¹⁰ <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Regional-Plans/Hunter/Hunter-regional-plan/Thriving-communities>

- Within the MidCoast, the Plan specifically supports enhanced connections to natural areas such as the Barrington Tops, along tourist routes such as The Lakes Way, and through the expansion of recreational trails such as the Great North Walk.
- Integration of Council's future pedestrian and cycleway plans consider linkages with the NSW Coastal Cycleway to ensure residents and visitors have increased awareness and utilisation of this network.

4.3.2 MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022

The development of Regional Economic Development Strategies across New South Wales was the initiative of the [NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet](#), through the Centre for Economic and Regional Development (CERD). These Strategies were developed with strong linkages to the findings and recommendations of the **20 Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW** strategy document.

CERD worked closely with local councils to the Strategies, which apply standardised regional economic development methodology to identify: existing economic strengths; new opportunities to enhance the region's development performance and competitiveness; and to set the region on a path to sustainable economic development.

The [MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy](#) (REDS) was released in July 2018. The process included a series of well-attended workshops held across the region, aimed at collaborating to build sustainable economic development. The strategy includes an action plan for the next three years, leveraging regional strengths such as our land and water assets, our infrastructure, and our location, lifestyle and amenity.

The MidCoast REDS is linked with Council's **Community Strategic Plan** and **Destination Management Plan**, and provides a strategic platform for community, business and Council to work with the State Government in driving economic growth. It is an important plan that will help attract State resources to underpin economic projects and create employment in the region.

REDS identified key strengths of the MidCoast regional economy that can be capitalised upon, including our *Infrastructure* and *Location*:

The use of natural resources for productive purposes is supported by good transport infrastructure for delivering product to market. The Pacific Highway and other regional roads are key assets which enable agriculture, forestry and fishing products to be delivered to markets outside the Region. The rail line is an important endowment for the coal mining industry.

The main population centres in the MidCoast Region are all within a short distance to the Pacific Highway. This provides direct access to the Sydney market (3–4 hours) and to the Port of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport (~2 hours).

The Region (via Gloucester, Wingham and Taree) has rail services (via North Coast line) and local air services from Taree airport that fly direct to Sydney. Connectivity to other markets is enhanced by the NBN which has been rolled-out in key townships in the Region.

Taree's location (adjacent to the Pacific Highway) renders it a convenient location for freight and transport operations. This advantage will increase with the introduction of the Northern Gateway transport and logistics hub which is in development. The hub is expected to result in significantly reduced freight transport costs in and out of the Region.

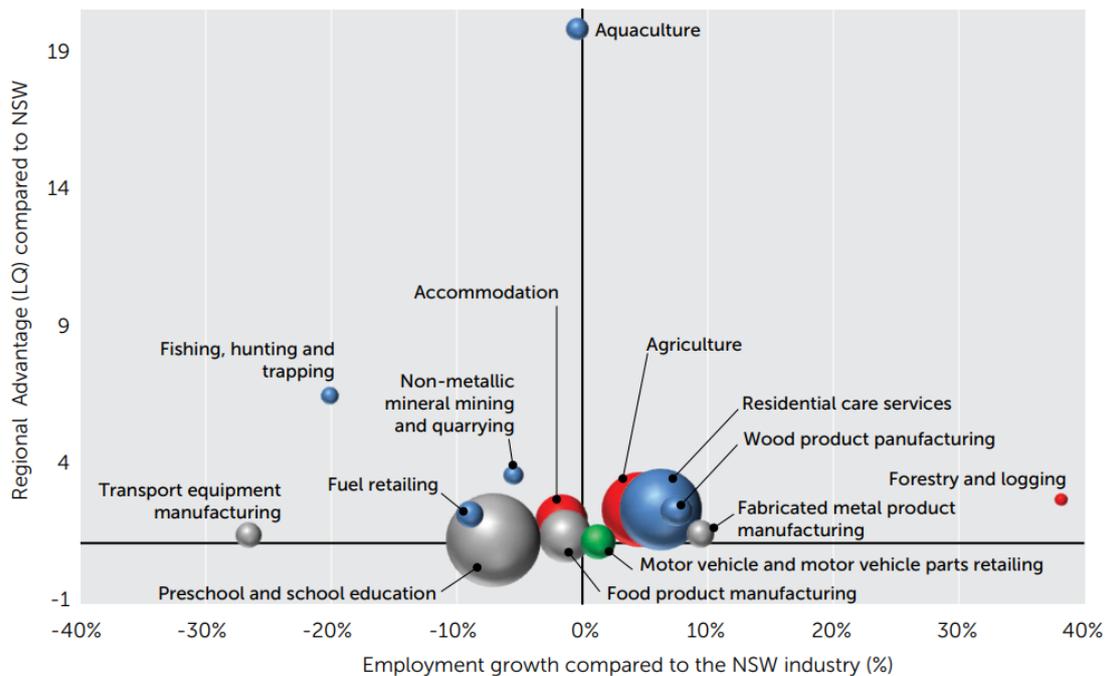
Gloucester is also conveniently located and has a rural setting. It has good access to key markets to the South (less than 3.5 hours to Sydney and 1.5 hours to Newcastle Airport) and is a gateway from the coast to the New England North West Region.

The availability and affordability of land (for employment and non-employment uses) is a key positive for the Region, particularly for industry wishing to establish in Gloucester and Taree.¹¹

REDS also examined the region’s competitive advantage (Location Quotient) by industry and comparing these findings to the same sector across NSW. The top five industries in the MidCoast were identified as:

- Aquaculture (LQ of 19.5);
- Fishing, Trapping and Hunting (LQ of 6.6);
- Non-Metallic Mineral Mining and Quarrying (LQ of 3.7);
- Forestry and Logging (LQ of 2.9); and,
- Agriculture (LQ of 2.5).

Figure 5. Location Quotients and Employment Growth for MidCoast Industries



Source: Census 2011, 2016. See the Supporting Analysis for notes regarding the analysis.

However, as illustrated by the size of the ‘bubbles’ in the chart above, these industries do not generally employ a large number of people when compared to other industries; and may not be experiencing growth when compared to the same industry across NSW.

For example - Aquaculture is a specialised industry where the MidCoast has a significant regional advantage however, it employs a relatively small number of people and this number was in slight decline compared to the rest of NSW at the time of analysis (2018).

Based on this analysis, the Strategy then identifies key opportunities within the MidCoast and how infrastructure maintenance and development can ensure they are realised.

¹¹ <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Part-of-your-every-day/Council-Projects/Regional-Economic-Development-Strategy>

Strengthening the Region as a location of choice:

While the Region has strong existing endowments, further work and investment is required to maximise its potential. This includes improvements to core infrastructure (e.g. road and telecommunications) that are important for each of the key industry sectors and industry specific assets (e.g. tourism assets).

One of the key initiatives identified in the Strategy recommends that Council and other public agencies:

- *improve the core foundation infrastructure, in particular the roads and bridges but also other infrastructure relating to telecommunications and water;*

Following on from this, specific infrastructure improvements are then identified, including:

- *road infrastructure – in particular key routes for development (Bucketts Way, Thunderbolt's Way and The Lakes Way);*
- *infrastructure to support Northern Gateway development (employment lands adjoining the Pacific Highway near Taree);*
- *renewal of maritime facilities, particularly in Forster-Tuncurry;*
- *mobile telephone infrastructure – to address coverage issues in rural area; and,*
- *water infrastructure – improving water security¹².*

4.4 Local Level Considerations

At the local level i.e. applying exclusively within the local government area (LGA), additional policy considerations are set out in a range of documents endorsed by the State Government and/or Council. Again, these offer goals, directions and actions that complement, or provide more detail, than those provided in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036.

It is important to note here that the MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy, while it applies exclusively to the MidCoast LGA, has been recognised as a regional strategy as it has this intention and purpose. The fact that the MidCoast LGA was found to be an effectively independent Functional Economic Region during preparation of the Strategy, is informative as both an opportunity and a challenge for the MidCoast.

The following Council documents, which will be discussed in additional detail below, have been identified as particularly relevant to long-term planning for transport networks in the MidCoast:

- [MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility](#)
- [MidCoast Destination Management Plan](#)
- [Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy](#)

4.4.1 MidCoast 2030: Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility

MidCoast 2030 was the first Community Strategic Plan prepared for the new 10,000 square kilometre MidCoast local government area created in May 2016.

¹² <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Part-of-your-every-day/Council-Projects/Regional-Economic-Development-Strategy>

Our Vision: We strive to be recognised as a place of unique environmental and cultural significance. Our strong community connection, coupled with our innovative development and growing economy, builds the quality of life we value.

Within this Plan we valued: our unique, diverse and culturally rich communities; a connected community; our environment; our thriving and growing economy; strong leadership and shared vision¹³. Critically, we also recognised that our rural areas and transport infrastructure were key to establishing and maintaining these connections:

We have a strong sense of community. We want our towns and villages to reflect the vibrancy and individuality of the people within them and provide opportunities for us to connect and socialise.

Much of the rural area is used for farming, primarily dairy and beef cattle with a growing poultry industry. Oyster farming and fishing are important industries on our coast.

Our region is also a key holiday destination.

During the summer months the population swells with tourists coming to enjoy the region's pristine coastline and beaches, coastal lakes, lagoons and other attractions.

With the Pacific Highway, a national route, running straight through the region, we are an important connection point for travellers and transit companies.

The North Coast Rail Line connects Gloucester, Wingham and Taree to both Sydney and Brisbane.

Taree Regional Airport provides quick connection to Sydney, and from here travellers can access a range of domestic and international routes.

Table 2. Transport Goals and Actions from MidCoast 2030

WE VALUE... a connected community		
Where do we want to be?	How will we get there?	Who can help?
It is safe and easy to get around our region	<p>Plan for, provide and maintain a safe road network that meets current and future needs.</p> <p>Encourage the use of alternative transport options through the provision of a safe, accessible and connected walking and cycling network.</p> <p>Advocate for the provision of community and public transport to meet the needs of our growing and ageing communities.</p>	<p>MidCoast Council</p> <p>NSW and Federal Government</p> <p>Community groups</p> <p>Regional Development Australia</p> <p>State and volunteer emergency and rescue services</p> <p>Chambers of Commerce and business community</p> <p>Utility providers</p> <p>Transport providers</p>
<p>How will we know we are on track?</p> <p>3. The condition of our sealed roads has improved</p>		

WE VALUE... our thriving and growing economy

¹³ <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Council/Plans-and-reports>

Where do we want to be?	How will we get there?	Who can help?
We encourage greater rural and agricultural economic diversity	Encourage the diversification and sustainability of agribusiness through the utilisation of sustainable farming practices, new technologies and innovation.	MidCoast Council NSW and Federal Government Regional Development Australia Tourism providers and Destination NSW Chambers of Commerce and business community
How will we know we are on track?		
2. The net number of new businesses has increased		

4.4.2 MidCoast Destination Management Plan

The MidCoast Regional Economic Development Strategy endorses the MidCoast Destination Management Plan (DMP) and recommends its implementation to support investment in key tourism assets to increase yield and visitation, particularly in the off season.

Several of the signature visitor experiences and ‘Game Changer’ projects described in the DMP and discussed in more detail in the Tourism paper, will rely on enhanced access to rural areas. This may include for example, improving road conditions, providing public facilities, and/or improving signage and trail markers along certain road corridors.

Local-level rural transport infrastructure related and dependent priorities identified in the DMP are summarised below:

- Provide access to natural areas generally, but particularly waterways, rivers and wetlands.
- Identify and promote 'themed trails', focusing on cycling tours, horse-riding and farm gate experiences. Specific reference is made to the farm gate trail at Wootton.
- Destinations underpinning the initiative to establish the MidCoast as a World-class equestrian destination, leverage existing horse studs, racing and rodeo facilities.
- The NABIAC Agricultural Hub (economic development initiative) is understood to centre on the showground, which is home to events such as the Agricultural Show, rodeos and farmer’s markets¹⁴.

4.4.3 Bucketts Way Route Access Strategy Upgrade Program (2015)

The Bucketts Way Route Access Strategy Upgrade Program was a joint project between Port Stephens Council and the former Gloucester and Great Lakes Councils. The Strategy identified sections of the route that required collaborative Council and State funding to prioritise upgrades including reconstruction, widening and resealing.

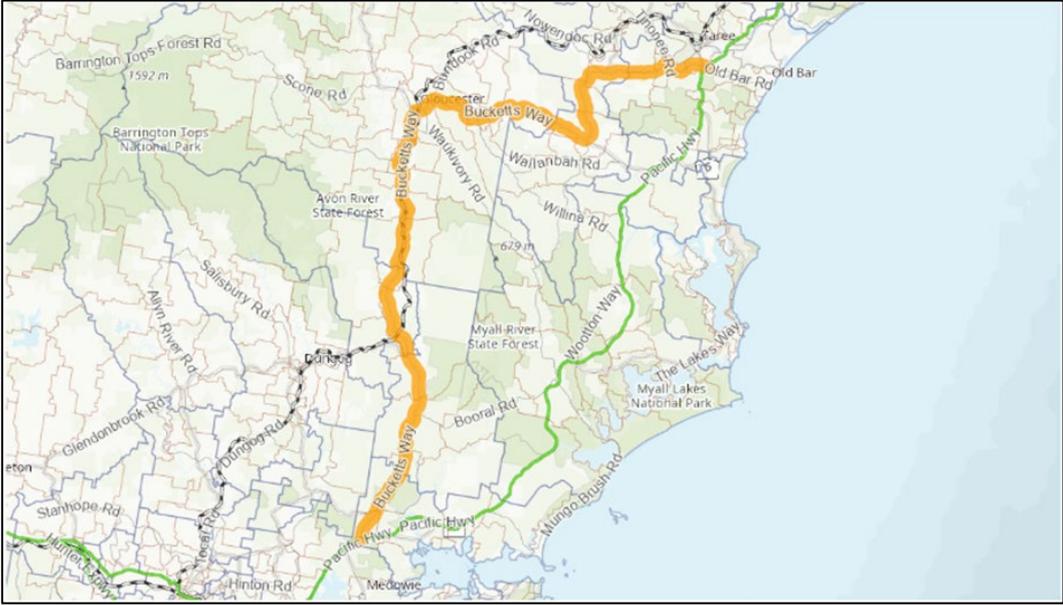
The primary aims of the project are to improve freight efficiency and road safety; improve connectivity between people to jobs; and improve movement of goods to market.

The first priorities, as identified by the three councils are three passing lanes to be located in the Limeburner’s Creek area, near Weismantel’s Road and Craven Flat. Later stages of the strategy identified the need for upgrading bridges and other safety upgrades

¹⁴ <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Part-of-your-every-day/Council-Projects/Tourism-Destination-Management-Plan>

The Australian Government's contribution is capped at \$20 million under the NSW Government's Fixing Country Roads Program.^{15,16}

Figure 6. Bucketts Way routes from Gloucester to the Pacific Highway



4.4.4 Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy 2018-2023

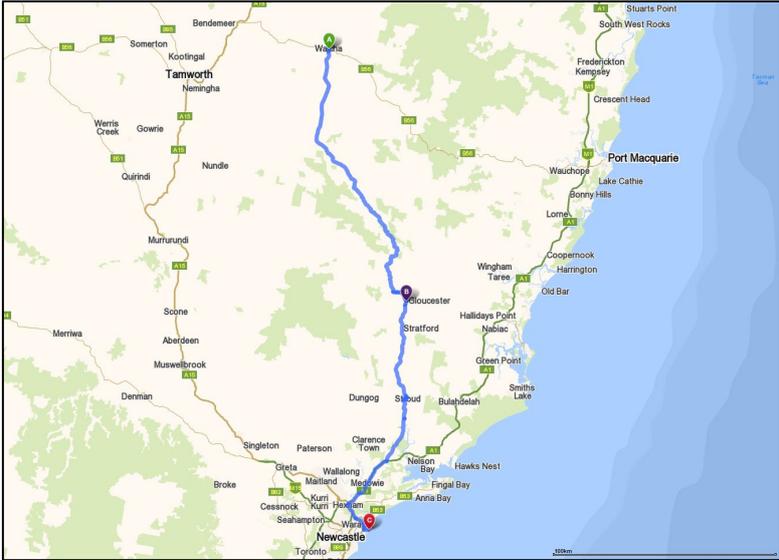
The [Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy](#) is a joint initiative with Walcha Council which will see an investment of over \$20 million in upgrades and improvements along this key route between now and 2023.

The Thunderbolts Way is a 290-kilometre regional road and transport route, linking Walcha in the north with Gloucester and The Bucketts Way, and providing a strategic link to Newcastle and Sydney. The road is fully bitumen sealed along its length and has very steep terrain on its southern sections near Gloucester.

¹⁵ https://investment.infrastructure.gov.au/projects/ProjectDetails.aspx?Project_id=101328-19NSW-RSI

¹⁶ <https://www.newsofthearea.com.au/10842-10842>

Figure 7. Regional Transport Route Walcha-Gloucester-Newcastle



The Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy 2017 is focussed on five key objectives:

- Aligning with local, regional, state and national plans
- Achieving Productivity Benefits
- Facilitating Growth and Economic Benefits
- Ensuring Deliverability
- Improving road safety
- Increasing Tourism

These objectives will be achieved by:

- Improving safety by upgrading priority sections of deteriorated road pavements
- Identifying and prioritising key upgrade projects across three local government areas that allow the Thunderbolts Way to move towards having access for higher productivity vehicles in the future
- Providing passing lanes to improve safety and benefit to all road all users
- Reduce heavy vehicle accidents through various safety treatments including truck arrestors and road realignments
- Reducing travel times through provision of a superior driving surface • Reducing operator costs and maintenance costs to all vehicles
- Providing bridge upgrades where required to suit current geometric and structural standards

Currently Thunderbolts Way is a designated 19m B-double route, is classified as a Regional Road on the NSW roads network and provides a strategic link to the Newcastle Port from the Northern Tablelands and hinterlands of the north coast of NSW. The aim of the upgrade project is to increase access for higher productivity vehicles, resulting in reduced traffic numbers, more efficient freight transport, decreasing heavy vehicle impact to roads and improving safety for all users. The project is a staged project with:

Stage 1 prioritised pavement works deemed urgent;

Stage 2 prioritised bridge works subject to future structural investigations

Stage 3 additional passing lanes and road widening

The road also provides the key link for agriculture including local and export, milk, dairy, and beef. It also provides a strategic link to Newcastle Port Terminal from northern tablelands, crucial for the forestry industry hauling timber to Newcastle Port for direct overseas export. The timber industry has foreshadowed significant increases in the harvesting and transportation of softwoods from the region Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy 4 within the next 10 years, using Thunderbolts Way via The Bucketts Way as the haulage route, placing further focus on the need for upgrade works to accommodate the increased output.

This road is also the main tourist link from Gloucester to Armidale via the towns of Walcha and Uralla linking to the Northern Tablelands region. It is an increasingly popular route for recreational motorcyclists and motorists, with local businesses developing around and relying upon the expanding tourist trade. The Thunderbolts Way is a significant route for freight destined for the New England/Northern tablelands area, supplying agricultural businesses with fertilizers direct from the Newcastle Port.

It is currently estimated that to bring Thunderbolts Way to an acceptable road condition standard that approximately \$23.72m is required for various deteriorated pavement sections located within the 150km section of road between the towns of Gloucester and Walcha¹⁷.

4.5 Environmental Planning Instruments and other regulatory considerations

The manner in which transport infrastructure is considered through various State and Local environmental planning instruments, is relevant to long-term planning and plan making considerations.

These environmental planning instruments are: State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPP) and Local Environmental Plans (LEP). The content and format of an LEP is required to be consistent with the Standard Instrument Principal Local Environmental Plan (2006) and not inconsistent with, or repetitious of, the provisions of any relevant SEPP.

This section briefly describes how these types of activities are permitted (with or without consent), and relevant considerations relating to the assessment and determination of development applications within the MidCoast.

4.5.1 State Environmental Planning Policy (State & Regional Development) 2011

Transport infrastructure can be classed as state or regionally significant developments under the [State and Regional Development SEPP](#).

Two consent authorities may assess and determine infrastructure development projects under this SEPP – the Independent Planning Commission for certain State significant development; and the Joint Regional Planning Panel for certain Regionally significant development.

Schedule 1 identifies a broad range of State Significant transport and infrastructure development categories:

- air transport facilities that has a capital investment value of more than \$30 million;

¹⁷ <https://www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/Roads/Thunderbolts-Way-Corridor-Strategy>

- port facilities or wharf or boating facilities (not including marinas) that has a capital investment value of more than \$30 million;
- Rail and related transport facilities that has a capital investment value of more than \$30 million including:
 - heavy railway lines associated with mining, extractive industries or other industry, and
 - railway freight terminals, sidings and inter-modal facilities;
- Development within a rail corridor or associated with railway infrastructure that has a capital investment value of more than \$30 million for any of the following purposes:
 - commercial premises or residential accommodation,
 - container packing, storage or examination facilities,
 - public transport interchanges.

Schedule 3 identifies additional categories of State significant infrastructure, undertaken by or on behalf of a public authority:

- General public authority activities
- Port facilities and wharf or boating facilities (not including marinas) that has a capital investment value of more than \$30 million.
- Rail infrastructure by or on behalf of the Australian Rail Track Corporation that has a capital investment value of more than \$50 million.

Schedule 5 identifies specific Critical State significant infrastructure. Pacific Highway projects are mentioned however, only development for the purposes of upgrading the segments of the Pacific Highway located within the Ballina, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Port Stephens and Richmond Valley local government areas, to achieve at least four lanes of dual carriageway are identified.

Schedule 7 allows for Regionally significant development in broad categories including:

- General development that has a capital investment value of more than \$30 million.
- Council related development that has a capital investment value of more than \$5 million if Council is the applicant, owner of the land to be developed, the developer or party to an agreement relating to the development.
- Development carried out by or on behalf of the Crown that has a capital investment value of more than \$5 million.
- Private infrastructure and community facilities that has a capital investment value of more than \$5 million for specific purposes including but not limited to: air transport facilities, electricity generating works, port facilities, rail infrastructure facilities, road infrastructure facilities, sewerage systems, telecommunications facilities, waste or resource management facilities, water supply systems, or wharf or boating facilities.
- Designated development for specific purposes including but not limited to marinas or other related land and water shoreline facilities.

These activities may also be permitted to be undertaken in whole or part, by a public authority without consent or going through the normal development assessment processes, if permitted under the Infrastructure SEPP, discussed below.

4.5.2 State Environmental Planning Policy (Infrastructure) 2007

The [Infrastructure SEPP](#) is a major consideration for local strategic planning and plan-making relating to rural transport in that it makes certain transport related development permitted without consent when undertaken by or on behalf of a public authority. These exemptions, among others, apply to certain:

- air transport facilities
- port, wharf or boating facilities
- railways and rail infrastructure facilities
- road and road infrastructure facilities
- travelling stock reserves
- facilities for electric vehicles.

Certain sections also indicate requirements for development in or adjacent to road and rail corridors and the notification requirements to the public authority for such development.

Schedule 3 of the SEPP also requires certain traffic generating development proposals, based on minimum thresholds and potential impacts on access to a classified road, or road that connects to a classified road, to be referred to Roads and Maritime Services for assessment.

4.5.3 Standard Instrument Principal Local Environment Plan

The [Standard Instrument LEP](#) contains the following relevant definitions relating to transport infrastructure, the most broadly relevant being that of a “road”:

road - means a public road or a private road within the meaning of the [Roads Act 1993](#), and includes a classified road

The [Roads Act 1993](#) provides the following definitions for roads:

classified road means any of the following -

- (a) a main road,
- (b) a highway,
- (c) a freeway,
- (d) a controlled access road,
- (e) a secondary road,
- (f) a tourist road,
- (g) a tollway,
- (g1) a transitway,
- (h) a State work.

private road means any road that is not a public road.

public road means -

- (a) any road that is opened or dedicated as a public road, whether under this or any other Act or law, and
- (b) any road that is declared to be a public road for the purposes of this Act.

road includes -

- (a) the airspace above the surface of the road, and
- (b) the soil beneath the surface of the road, and
- (c) any bridge, tunnel, causeway, road-ferry, ford or other work or structure forming part of the road.

tourist road means a road that is declared to be a tourist road by an order in force under section 51.

Section 51 Tourist roads

The Minister may, by order published in the Gazette, declare to be a tourist road—

- (a) any public road, or
- (b) any other road that passes through public open space and joins a main road, highway, freeway, tollway, transitway or controlled access road, being, in either case, a road that provides access to places that are visited, or are likely to be visited, by tourists.

Other related transport-related definitions in the Standard Instrument LEP include (at the time of this report), but is not necessarily limited to:

air transport facility means an airport or a heliport that is not part of an airport, and includes associated communication and air traffic control facilities or structures.

airport means a place that is used for the landing, taking off, parking, maintenance or repair of aeroplanes, and includes associated buildings, installations, facilities and movement areas and any heliport that is part of the airport.

Note. Airports are a type of air transport facility—see the definition of that term in this Dictionary.

airstrip means a single runway for the landing, taking off or parking of aeroplanes for private aviation only, but does not include an airport, heliport or helipad.

boat launching ramp means a structure designed primarily for the launching of trailer borne recreational vessels, and includes associated car parking facilities.

charter and tourism boating facility means any facility (including a building or other structure) used for charter boating or tourism boating purposes, being a facility that is used only by the operators of the facility and that has a direct structural connection between the foreshore and the waterway, but does not include a marina.

freight transport facility means a facility used principally for the bulk handling of goods for transport by road, rail, air or sea, including any facility for the loading and unloading of vehicles, aircraft, vessels or containers used to transport those goods and for the parking, holding, servicing or repair of those vehicles, aircraft or vessels or for the engines or carriages involved.

helipad means a place not open to the public used for the taking off and landing of helicopters.

heliport means a place open to the public that is used for the taking off and landing of helicopters, whether or not it includes—

- (a) a terminal building, or
- (b) facilities for the parking, storage or repair of helicopters.

Note. Heliports are a type of air transport facility—see the definition of that term in this Dictionary.

highway service centre means a building or place used to provide refreshments and vehicle services to highway users. It may include any one or more of the following—

- (a) a restaurant or cafe,
- (b) take away food and drink premises,
- (c) service stations and facilities for emergency vehicle towing and repairs,
- (d) parking for vehicles,
- (e) rest areas and public amenities.

marina means a permanent boat storage facility (whether located wholly on land, wholly on a waterway or partly on land and partly on a waterway), and includes any of the following associated facilities—

- (a) any facility for the construction, repair, maintenance, storage, sale or hire of boats,
- (b) any facility for providing fuelling, sewage pump-out or other services for boats,
- (c) any facility for launching or landing boats, such as slipways or hoists,
- (d) any car parking or commercial, tourist or recreational or club facility that is ancillary to the boat storage facility,
- (e) any berthing or mooring facilities.

passenger transport facility means a building or place used for the assembly or dispersal of passengers by any form of transport, including facilities required for parking, manoeuvring, storage or routine servicing of any vehicle that uses the building or place.

port facilities means any of the following facilities at or in the vicinity of a designated port within the meaning of section 47 of the Ports and Maritime Administration Act 1995—

- (a) facilities for the embarkation or disembarkation of passengers onto or from any vessels, including public ferry wharves,
- (b) facilities for the loading or unloading of freight onto or from vessels and associated receipt, land transport and storage facilities,
- (c) wharves for commercial fishing operations,
- (d) refuelling, launching, berthing, mooring, storage or maintenance facilities for any vessel,
- (e) sea walls or training walls,
- (f) administration buildings, communication, security and power supply facilities, roads, rail lines, pipelines, fencing, lighting or car parks.

public utility undertaking means any of the following undertakings carried on or permitted to be carried on by or by authority of any Public Service agency or under the authority of or in pursuance of any Commonwealth or State Act -

- (a) railway, road transport, water transport, air transport, wharf or river undertakings,
- (b) undertakings for the supply of water, hydraulic power, electricity or gas or the provision of sewerage or drainage services,

and a reference to a person carrying on a public utility undertaking includes a reference to a council, electricity supply authority, Public Service agency, corporation, firm or authority carrying on the undertaking.

service station means a building or place used for the sale by retail of fuels and lubricants for motor vehicles, whether or not the building or place is also used for any one or more of the following—

- (a) the ancillary sale by retail of spare parts and accessories for motor vehicles,
- (b) the cleaning of motor vehicles,

- (c) *installation of accessories,*
- (d) *inspecting, repairing and servicing of motor vehicles (other than body building, panel beating, spray painting, or chassis restoration),*
- (e) *the ancillary retail selling or hiring of general merchandise or services or both.*

transport depot means a building or place used for the parking or servicing of motor powered or motor drawn vehicles used in connection with a business, industry, shop or passenger or freight transport undertaking.

truck depot means a building or place used for the servicing and parking of trucks, earthmoving machinery and the like.

wharf or boating facilities means a wharf or any of the following facilities associated with a wharf or boating that are not port facilities -

- (a) *facilities for the embarkation or disembarkation of passengers onto or from any vessels, including public ferry wharves,*
- (b) *facilities for the loading or unloading of freight onto or from vessels and associated receipt, land transport and storage facilities,*
- (c) *wharves for commercial fishing operations,*
- (d) *refuelling, launching, berthing, mooring, storage or maintenance facilities for any vessel,*
- (e) *sea walls or training walls,*
- (f) *administration buildings, communication, security and power supply facilities, roads, rail lines, pipelines, fencing, lighting or car parks.*

4.5.4 Land use permissibility within a Local Environmental Plan

The Standard Instrument-Principal Local Environmental Plan ('Standard Instrument LEP'), mandates that roads must be included as either "Permitted without consent" or "Permitted with consent" in all zones except the SP1 Special Activities and all Waterways Zones.

In this regard, Council has some discretion as to whether or not any or all of the above land use activities as defined, are permitted with consent across the majority of the LGA.

It is important to note that even when Council nominates that these activities require consent, the Infrastructure SEPP may still allow public authorities to undertake these activities in whole or part, as exempt development.

4.5.5 Council as Consent Authority

In most circumstances private transport infrastructure in rural areas, where development is not triggered by state significant or regional development under the State and Regional Development SEPP, Council will be the consent authority. Applications would be assessed against:

- any relevant considerations in the LEP, including any zone objectives
- any Development Control Plan
- any relevant Council Policy.

4.5.6 Development controls

Transport infrastructure is often proposed in conjunction with an application to establish a primary land use activity on a site such as a new dwelling, commercial building or rural industry. As a result, most infrastructure components are assessed under separate legislation or Australian Standards, and specific development control plan objectives and controls are not required.

5 Road Transport Infrastructure

This section provides high-level considerations for how roads within the MidCoast are managed. Separate considerations are provided for the following, recognising each is subject to distinct administration, funding and operational frameworks:

- State roads
- Regional roads
- Local roads
- Crown roads
- Touring routes; and
- Heavy vehicle routes.

Roads are managed and funded by State or Local government depending on the specific classification, which then determines the management and funding systems applicable to that road. The NSW Government has two systems for classifying the road network under the Roads Act 1993 ('the Roads Act'), as follows:

- An administrative system which simplifies the administration of the various legal road classes by organising the roads into a three-tiered classification system of State, Regional and Local roads.
- A legal system that allows NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) to exercise authority over some, or all, aspects of legally classified roads and to provide financial assistance to Councils. This system classifies roads into several categories, including: Highway (HW); Main Roads (MR); Secondary Road (SR); Tourist Road (TR) and Transitways (TW).

Figure 8 illustrates the administrative road categories as these apply within the MidCoast and surrounding areas, including identification of those State roads that are also part of the national (Auslink) network.¹⁸ Legal classifications within this network are described later within this section.

5.1 State Roads

State Roads form the major arterial links throughout NSW and serve as the primary traffic carrying and linking routes for the movement of people and goods. State Roads within the MidCoast are limited to:

- HW10 - The Pacific Highway (Auslink); and
- MR692 - The Lakes Way/Failford Road: incorporating Macintosh Street and Head Street, Forster; Manning Street, Tuncurry; Wallamba River Bridge, North Tuncurry; and Failford Road, Darawank-Failford, through to the highway intersection north of Nabic.

RMS has the following roads authority functions for State Roads under the Roads Act:

- Overseeing funding and determining priorities
- Regulating road and adjoining land access by third parties
- Promoting road safety and traffic efficiency

¹⁸ <https://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/business-industry/partners-suppliers/lgr/documents/map-regions.pdf>

- Protecting the road asset

Figure 8. State and Regional classified roads within the Hunter Region (Roads Act 1993)



Aspects of these functions can be outsourced to Council or private contractors. Councils retain the responsibility for the management of road reserves including service paths, footpaths and weed management.

RMS, with Transport for NSW has recently initiated a Road Network and Corridor Planning program to provide a consistent approach to these strategies for every State-operated road in NSW. These are intended to address current and future transport needs and challenges with key road users in mind, to provide a basis for long-term planning for road corridor usage, including surrounding land uses. To date, a corridor strategy has not yet been prepared for the Pacific Highway.

5.1.1 Pacific Highway

The Pacific Highway is a nationally significant road corridor connecting Sydney to Brisbane, and is the primary transport corridor connecting the Hunter, MidCoast and North Coast regions of NSW. It serves the highest volume and diversity of traffic in the region including freight, visitors and commuters.

The Pacific Highway is Highway 10 and is classified as a State Road by RMS. It is zoned SP2 Infrastructure and passes primarily through land zoned RU1 Primary Production, RU2 Rural Landscape, RU3 Forestry and E1 National Parks and Nature Reserves.

The major upgrade of the Pacific Highway is targeted for completion in 2020 and will provide a four-lane divided road from Hexham to Queensland. Other benefits include significantly reduced travel times, safer travel and improved amenity for local communities¹⁹. Upgrades to

¹⁹ NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2018a

the section of the Pacific Highway that passes through the MidCoast LGA have been completed.

Commuter data recorded by the RMS (shown below), indicates that whilst the Pacific Highway is an important transit route for passengers travelling through the MidCoast, few passengers are ending their journey here. Better service and amenity provision at strategically located towns such as Bulahdelah, which is 3 hours from Sydney, could increase commuter lay-overs.

Table 3. Daily All Vehicle Traffic Flow - Pacific Highway, MidCoast LGA (2017)²⁰

Traffic Counter Location	Northbound	Southbound
Jones Island 2430	8,051	8,183
Kiwarra 2430	10,265	10,445
Nabiac 2312	8,349	8,460
Twelve Mile Creek 2324	N/A	9,709

Freight

The Pacific Highway is the most important freight route servicing the MidCoast and surrounding regions and is identified as a national key freight route by the Australian Government. It can accommodate up to 26m B-double Vehicles, however it cannot accommodate road trains (B-triples).

The RMS Traffic Volume data shows that the daily average number of heavy vehicles travelling the Pacific Highway is between 1,500 and 2000²¹. The highest volume of traffic is recorded at the Kiwarra Traffic Counter, which is located between the northern entrance of The Lakes Way and the northern entrance of The Bucketts Way/ Manning River Drive. This shows that many heavy vehicles are entering and exiting the Pacific Highway at The Lakes Way or The Bucketts Way.

Table 4. Daily Heavy Vehicle Traffic Flow - Pacific Highway, MidCoast LGA (2017)²²

Traffic Counter Location	Northbound	Southbound
Jones Island 2430	1,664	1,659
Kiwarra 2430	1,802	1,935
Nabiac 2312	1,693	1,677
Twelve Mile Creek 2324	N/A	1,347

Vehicle Rest Areas

There are a number of rest areas along the Pacific Highway, and within the MidCoast LGA that provide both light and heavy vehicle access²³. These are (from north to south):

²⁰ NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2018b

²¹ NSW Roads and Maritime 2018b

²² NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2018b

²³ NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2018c

- Tom Cat Creek (Johns River) accessible to vehicles travelling northbound and is located 194km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include both light vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities
- Four Mile Hill Rest Area (Pacific Highway, Purfleet): accessible to vehicles travelling northbound and is located 162km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include upgraded light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, a playground, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.
- Talawahl Creek Rest Area (Pacific Highway, Nabiac): accessible to vehicles travelling southbound and is located 152km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include upgraded light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, a playground, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.
- Wang Wauk Rest Area (Pacific Highway, Coolongolook): accessible to vehicles travelling in both directions and is located 134km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include both light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, a playground, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.
- Kennedys Gap rest Area (Pacific Highway, Bulahdelah): accessible to vehicles travelling northbound and is located 123km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include both light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.
- Chapmans Rest Area (Pacific Highway, Bulahdelah): accessible to vehicles travelling in both directions and is located 110km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include both light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, BBQ and picnic tables, a playground, emergency phone, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.
- Nerong Waterholes Rest Area (Pacific Highway, Nerong): accessible to vehicles travelling in both directions and is located 77km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include both light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, emergency phone, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.
- Browns Flat Rest Area (Pacific Highway, Nerong): accessible to vehicles travelling in both directions and is located 76km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include both light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, emergency phone, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.
- Station Creek Rest Area (Pacific Highway, Karuah/ North Arm Cove): accessible to vehicles travelling northbound and is located 67km from Newcastle. The responsible authority is RMS. Facilities include both light and heavy vehicle access, shelter, picnic tables, emergency phone, litter bins and wheelchair accessible amenities.

The existing rest areas are considered sufficient to accommodate heavy vehicles, noting that access and road widths and surfaces within the rest areas vary considerably.

Service Centres

There is one highway service centre (by definition) located just off the Pacific Highway at Manning River Dr, Taree, zoned RU1 Primary Production. There are many service stations accessible from the Pacific Highway, including but not limited to:

- Johns River Rd, Johns River, zoned SP2 Special Infrastructure
- Wallanbah Rd, Nabiac, zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Bengal St (part of Pacific Highway), Coolongolook, two sites, both zoned RU5 Village
- Wootton Way, Bulahdelah, zoned SP2 Special Infrastructure

- Bulahdelah Way, Bulahdelah, two sites both zoned RU5 Village
- Gooreengi Road, North Arm Cove, zoned RU2 Rural Landscape

Bulahdelah is considered an important servicing town as it is located approximately 3 hours from Sydney and is a frequent stopping point for long distance commuters and was identified as a Highway Service Town in the Great Lakes Highway Service Strategy (2004).

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Preserving the Pacific Highways primary use as a nationally significant road corridor serving a diversity of traffic.

Ensuring sufficient ancillary road uses such as highway service centres and heavy vehicle rest areas that serve long distance commuters

Ensuring, where possible, that key infrastructure in the region is well connected to the Pacific Highway

Challenges

Many commuters are using the Pacific Highway to travel through the MidCoast but are not terminating their journey in the MidCoast LGA.

Opportunities

Good condition of road due to recent upgrades which have reduced travel times and improved safety

The Northern Gateway Transport Hub has the potential strengthen the freight network within the MidCoast and other regions by providing a significant transport hub that is well connected to the Taree Airport and the Pacific Highway.

Provides an efficient transport link between coastal areas of the MidCoast and Newcastle including Newcastle Airport and the Port of Newcastle

Is well serviced with rest areas for both heavy and light vehicles within the MidCoast LGA

Recommendations

Investigate opportunities to increase commuter layover in the MidCoast leveraging on the through-traffic along the Pacific Highway.

Continue planning process to realise the Northern Gateway Transport Hub at Cundletown.

5.1.2 Crown Roads

Crown Roads comprise land corridors set aside for legal access and were established during the settlement of NSW, they can also be referred to as 'paper roads' or 'road reserves'. When they were first established, they provided legal access routes to parish portions and allotments established in the subdivision of the Crown estate²⁴.

The MidCoast LGA is replete of many 'paper roads', many associated with subdivision and land use in the 1800s and early 1900s by the Australian Agricultural Company. Crown Roads

²⁴ NSW Department of Industry – Land and Water 2018(a)

were also created as laneways for the provision of sanitary services (“dunny cart” laneways) in many towns and villages.

Presently, many of the residue Crown Roads provide access to leasehold or freehold land where little or no subdivision has occurred.

Crown Roads are the management responsibility of the NSW Department of Industry – Lands and Water and are primarily managed through both the [Roads Act 1993](#) and the [Crown Land Management Act 2016](#).

Crown Roads can also be transferred to another roads authority to manage if it is considered the most suitable option. This could occur when the intended use of a Crown road has changed and by transferring the road over to another responsible authority, such as a Council, the road can be maintained to a suitable standard thereby providing access to local communities and the public.

The criteria for determining whether a Crown Road is suitable for transfer to Council or another roads authority are outlined in the Requirements section of Administration of Crown Roads Policy and each proposed transfer is considered on a case by case basis²⁵.

Crown Roads may also be sold or closed. Roads may be sold in two ways. Firstly, the department administers Crown road sales in accordance with Section 152B of the Roads Act (‘Road purchases’). Sale of a Crown road under this section is suitable when the purchaser of the road is an adjoining landholder. Alternatively, when a person wants to purchase a Crown road does not own the adjoining land, the department may consider closing the road under Section 37 of the Roads Act before administering the sale of the land (‘Road closure and purchase’)²⁶. The sale of a closed road would then be administered in accordance with the Crown Land Management Act 2016.

The NSW land registry guidelines also state that’s roads in the Australian Agricultural Company’s land grant (former Shires of Gloucester and Great Lakes) may only be closed if they have been dedicated to the public as public road by means of a notice in the Government Gazette or by prescription. Roads not dedicated as public roads remain in the name of the Company. Title to these lands may only be obtained by the preparation of a Primary Application claiming the road by possession.

Most Crown Road sales will be road purchases—that is, to adjoining landholders, in line with Section 152B of the Roads Act. Before determining when a road is suitable for sale (under Section 152B) or closure (under Section 37), the department will consider the access needs of surrounding properties to establish whether a road must be retained within the public road network. The option to purchase Crown road/s can give the purchaser benefits such as the termination of their associated enclosure permit or the ability to use the land for purposes other than grazing. Other benefits resulting from purchase of a Crown road may include²⁷:

- consolidation of a property;
- certainty of ownership, where a private residence or other infrastructure encroaches on the road corridor;
- the ability to comply with conditions of an approved Development Consent;
- driveway or road construction, to service low-level traffic requirements or private developments; and
- facilitation of land management or environmental improvements.

²⁵ NSW Department of Industry – Land and Water 2018(a)

²⁶ NSW Department of Industry – Land and Water 2018(a)

²⁷ NSW Department of Industry – Land and Water 2018(a)

As with Crown road transfers, each proposed sale or closure is considered on a case by case basis.

Community conflict can arise over public use of Crown Roads that traverse otherwise private property. An example within the MidCoast is the ongoing conflict over public access of the Barrington River via Crown Roads intersecting private property in the Gloucester area. There have been discussions regarding the potential sale or transfer these Crown Roads. Those resisting public access would prefer these Crown Roads to be sold to the adjoining land owners, while those who regularly use the roads for tourism-related activities, would prefer for the Crown Roads to be transferred to MidCoast Council to maintain and manage the roads for public access.

5.2 Regional Roads

Regional Roads, as shown in Figure 8, tend to provide important links between State Roads and a transition between State and Local Roads. Together with State Roads they provide the connection to strategic centres and larger towns within rural areas.

Four routes within the MidCoast have clear legal classifications, including:

- MR506 - 'Myall Way' connecting the HW10 Pacific Highway to Tea Gardens-Hawks Nest;
- MR111 - 'The Lakes Way', over two sections this connects the Pacific Highway just north of Bulahdelah to Forster, and MR692 from Darawank to the HW 10 Pacific Highway at Kiwarrak;
- MR90 - connecting from the Pacific Highway near 12 Mile Creek via Booral, Stroud and Gloucester to the Pacific Highway at Nabic via The Bucketts Way/Avalon Road/Wallanbah Rd;
- MR192 - connecting MR90 from Krumbach to Manning River Drive Taree via The Bucketts Way/Gloucester Road/Wingham Rd/Commerce Street.

Three routes within the MidCoast currently do not have a clear legal classification, including:

- Regional Road 7719 'Gloucester - Walcha Road' connecting Gloucester to the Oxley Highway at Walcha via Thunderbolts Way';
- Regional Road 7761 - Old Bar Road from the Pacific Highway at Purfleet to Old Bar; and
- Regional Road 7776 - the Old Pacific Highway to Taree, from the HW10 Pacific Highway at Purfleet via Commerce Street, Victoria Street, Crescent Avenue, Oxley Street, Taree.

While Council is responsible for determining priorities for, funding and carrying out works to Regional Roads; these routes do attract a higher level of funding assistance from the NSW and Australian Governments than Local Roads. NSW Government funding programs specific to roads in rural areas include:

- Bridges for the Bush Program - which seeks to improve road freight productivity by replacing or upgrading bridges across NSW, and
- Fixing Country Roads Programs which provides funding to local councils to upgrade regional NSW roads.

Access to funding for these programs relies on Council providing a business case.

5.2.1 Thunderbolts Way

Thunderbolts Way is an inter-regional road corridor of approximately 290km, linking Gloucester to Inverell. It serves as an important freight link connecting the MidCoast and the Port of Newcastle to towns in the Northern Tablelands including Nowendoc, Walcha, Uralla, Inverell and Armidale. It is also the shortest travel route connecting Sydney and Newcastle to the Northern Tablelands. It primarily services the tourism, livestock and timber industries.

Thunderbolts Way is an unclassified Regional Road (Gloucester - Walcha Road RR7719) under the RMS classification. It is zoned the same as adjoining land and in non-urban areas is primarily zoned RU1 Primary Production and RU3 Forestry. Thunderbolts Way is in very poor condition relative to its importance as an inter-regional road corridor. It is also considered a dangerous road with frequent crashes involving heavy vehicles along the steep and windy section near Giro Road²⁸. Given this, the road is regularly put forward to receive state and federal funding.

The NRMA, which is one of the largest transport and tourism companies in the nation has identified the Thunderbolts Way, from Gloucester to Walcha, as requiring continuing upgrades in their 2018-2019 budget submission²⁹.

In 2019 \$19.7M was secured to fix priority sections of deteriorated road pavement identified in the 2017 Thunderbolts Way Corridor Strategy. As part of the MidCoast Council additional \$100M road funding program, an overtaking lane is also being constructed in the vicinity of Rookhurst.

RMS are currently upgrading the Barrington Bridge at the Barrington River along the Thunderbolts Way as part of the “Bridges for the Bush” funding program. This will result in a new two-lane bridge that will improve traffic efficiency and safety by providing an additional lane, dedicated pedestrian and cyclist facilities. It will also improve freight productivity on Thunderbolts Way for Higher Mass Limit vehicles, which are currently restricted from accessing the existing bridge due to weight restrictions.

Freight

Agriculture and forestry are the key industries that use Thunderbolts Way as a freight route. Cattle, sheep and wool are transported from Northern Inland NSW via Thunderbolts Way to the Port of Newcastle. The road also passes through large areas of State Forests making it an important route to transport timber from native forests and pine plantations³⁰. Thunderbolts Way also serves as a route for general freight services supplying local communities in the Northern Tablelands.

Freight access along Thunderbolts Way is restricted to 19m B-doubles (over 50 tonnes) therefore larger B-doubles and Road Trains instead use the Pacific and New England Highways to travel between Sydney, Newcastle and the Northern Tablelands³¹. The steep grades along sections of Thunderbolts Way, such as around Giro Road, also deter heavy vehicle access. The Australian Livestock and Rural Transporters Association have noted that unsafe road design on Thunderbolt's Way has resulted in alarmingly regular fatalities often involving heavy vehicles.

Tourism

²⁸ Councils of New England et al. 2013

²⁹ NRMAa 2017

³⁰ Councils of New England et al.

³¹ NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2018d

Thunderbolts Way has become a popular tourist route for those seeking a different and more scenic journey from Sydney or Newcastle to Brisbane or the Gold Coast. It provides an alternative route to the busier Pacific and New England Highways. The road has also become an internationally recognised motorcycle route and large numbers of motorcyclists are now travelling the road³². However, the poor condition of the road deters some people from choosing this route.

Commuter

Thunderbolts Way is the preferred route for residents in the New England and northwest who need to travel to Newcastle for specialist medical treatment. John Hunter Hospital is the base for the Hunter New England Local Health District which is responsible for health services throughout the Region³³.

Service Stations

Thunderbolts Way commences at Park Street in the Gloucester Town Centre where a service station is located. There is also a service station at Barrington, approximately 8km from Gloucester and a small general store providing fuel in the settlement of Nowendoc. Walcha is approximately 140km from Gloucester where the next accessible fuel stations are located.

The freight and vehicle numbers suggest that the fuel stations either at the commencement of Thunderbolts Way in Gloucester or at Barrington could be upgraded to accommodate heavy vehicles. Additional service stations would not be warranted along this route.

Vehicle Rest Areas

Gloryvale Reserve Camping Area on Thunderbolts Way, Tibbuc: accessible to larger vehicles such as buses and caravans although access and parking are not sealed.

Carsons Lookout on Thunderbolts Way, Bretti: accessible to larger vehicles such as buses and caravans, noting access and egress may be challenging and only a limited area is available for parking.

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Supporting the Thunderbolts Way's primary use as a west-east state significant freight route linking the northern tablelands to the global gateways of Newcastle

Ensuring sufficient ancillary road uses such as service centres and heavy vehicle rest areas that serve long distance commuters

Recognising the Thunderbolts Way's role as a 'gateway' to the MidCoast region, in particular the Barrington Tops and Gloucester area

Recognise the Thunderbolts Way's role as a scenic route for travel between major cities such as Sydney and Brisbane

Challenges

There is restricted heavy vehicle access as the corridor can currently only accommodate 19 metre B-doubles

³² Councils of New England et al.

³³ Councils of New England et al.

Sections of Thunderbolts Way have significant bends and steep declines and have been reported to cause frequent crashes. Safety ramps are unsafe for heavy vehicles.

The poor condition of the road with steep winding sections and limited overtaking opportunities currently deters tourist, freight and commuter traffic use

Opportunities

It is the fastest and shortest route linking urban settlements in the Northern Tablelands to Sydney and Newcastle, including the Port of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport

It is considered an alternate, more scenic route from Sydney or Newcastle to Brisbane or the Gold Coast through the granite belt wine country

Recommendations

Improve access and safety for heavy vehicles along Thunderbolts Way, in particular around Giro Road

Thunderbolts Way is also a significant inter-regional tourist route and improving road conditions such as providing more overtaking lanes, should be prioritised to reduce the safety risks associated with tourists driving slowly along important road corridors.

Investigate the need for any additional ancillary road uses along Thunderbolts way such as an additional service centre or heavy vehicle rest areas

Prevent ribbon development and preserve the scenic amenity and rural landscape along Thunderbolts Way recognising its importance as a tourist drive

Thunderbolts Way is also a significant inter-regional tourist route and improving road conditions such as providing more overtaking lanes, should be prioritised to reduce the safety risks associated with tourists driving slowly along important road corridors.

Progress further funding partnerships with Walcha Shire Council to ensure connectivity

5.2.2 The Bucketts Way

The Bucketts Way (comprised of The Bucketts Way South and The Bucketts Way East) is a regionally significant two-lane road corridor of approximately 160km that connects several regions and towns. With links to Thunderbolts Way at Gloucester, it is a key freight route linking the Northern Tablelands through the MidCoast to the Port of Newcastle.

It also connects the towns of Gloucester, Taree and Stroud and the villages of Barrington, Krumbach and Stratford to the Pacific Highway for inter-regional travel. A renowned tourist drive, The Bucketts Way, provides access to the Barrington Tops and other nature-based destinations such as the Devil's Ark conservation site and passes through many historic village settlements.

RMS classifies The Bucketts Way as gazetted Regional Road 101 comprising of MR90 and Gloucester - Taree Road MR192. The RMS Regional road description excludes the link between Taree and Krumbach where instead, the classification includes the link between Krumbach and Nabic comprising of Avalon Road.

The Bucketts Way is zoned the same as the adjoining land and in non-urban areas is primarily zoned RU2 Rural Landscape from Limeburner's Creek to Craven, and RU1 Primary Production and E3 Environmental Management from Craven through to Thunderbolts Way, north of Gloucester.

The Bucketts Way is generally considered to be in poor condition and does not meet current transport needs. Community, industry and government bodies frequently identify The Bucketts Way as a candidate for funding and road upgrades due to its significance as a road corridor.

\$8.4 million in funding has been announced to deliver The Bucketts Way Access Strategy as part of the NSW Government 'Fixing Country Roads' funding program³⁴. NRMA has also identified the Bucketts Way, from Twelve Mile Creek to Gloucester, as requiring continuing upgrades in their 2018-2019 budget submission³⁵.

Due to the lack of a suitable detour to the east The Bucketts Way also serves as a critical detour for Pacific Highway traffic where any closures occur on the Pacific Highway between Limeburner's Creek and Nahiac.

Freight

Agriculture, forestry and mining industries all rely on The Bucketts Way to transport goods between towns, regions and transport hubs such as the Port of Newcastle. Beef and dairy are important regional industries and the saleyards on The Bucketts Way at Gloucester, continues to provide a regional meeting place for producers³⁶.

Timber harvesting occurs in local NSW State Forests, accessed via The Bucketts Way, and product from this industry is transported to the Port of Newcastle for export. Poultry farming is concentrated in the Stroud Valley as the area suits the requirements for chicken grow-out farms and this industry is heavily reliant on efficient freight connections to processing facilities³⁷. Extractive industry and quarry products are also carted along The Bucketts Way. As with Thunderbolts Way, the poor condition of The Bucketts Way is a barrier to the growth of these industries³⁸.

Existing transport limits along this road only allow for 19 metre B-Double heavy vehicle access rather than full size 26 metre B-Double access. The current weight and size restrictions increase transport costs for industries that rely on high volume transport such as timber, beef and poultry. These transport costs reduce local producer's abilities to stay competitive in the broader market.

Improving heavy vehicle access along The Bucketts Way to accommodate 26 metre B-Double vehicles will provide opportunities for growth in these sectors and, more broadly, is likely to grow the logistics and freight industries in the region.

Tourism

The Bucketts Way is one of three numbered tourist drives in the MidCoast. It is recognised as Tourist Drive 2, the second oldest tourist drive in NSW. As it provides a scenic loop with access to the Pacific Highway at both ends, it is popular to both day-trippers and longer-term tourists visiting the area.

Key attractions include access to the Barrington Tops National Park, the Barrington River and the towns and villages that line The Bucketts Way including historic Stroud and the scenic villages of Krumbach and Tinonee. Gloucester also serves as a base for those engaging in outdoor activities such as kayaking or mountain biking.

³⁴ Infrastructure NSW 2018a

³⁵ NRMA 2017

³⁶ Gloucester Shire Council 2015

³⁷ Gloucester Shire Council, Great Lakes Council & Port Stephens Council 2015

³⁸ Gloucester Shire Council 2015

Tourist signposting along The Bucketts Way to key destinations such as the Barrington Tops National Park should be a priority action to enhance the tourist experience along the popular tourist drive and to tell the story of the area. Signposting for the Barrington Tops National Park has caused some confusion with visitors and may need to be addressed³⁹.

Tourist and visitor traffic share The Bucketts Way with a variety of other traffic including agricultural produce freight, school transport and daily commuters. This variety of traffic, in combination with the poor road condition, creates unsafe road conditions with speeding, overtaking and pedestrian safety of key concern⁴⁰.

Given that The Bucketts Way is a main tourist route in the MidCoast, improving road conditions such as providing more overtaking lanes, should be prioritised to reduce the safety risks associated with tourists driving slowly along important road corridors.

Service Stations

There are several service stations in the township of Gloucester and other facilities are located in:

- Krambach, zoned RU5 Village
- Stratford, zoned RU5 Village
- Stroud Rd, zoned RU5 Village
- Stroud, zoned RU5 Village
- Booral, zoned RU5 Village
- Taree, zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Tinonee, B1 Neighbourhood Centre

No additional service stations are required along the Bucketts Way as there already are a sufficient number of service stations within the urban settlements along the Bucketts Way.

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Supporting The Bucketts Way's use as a state significant freight route and an important heavy vehicle corridor for local industry.

Recognising The Bucketts Way's role as a numbered tourist route that serves as the 'gateway' to the Barrington Tops and Gloucester area, which is a popular tourist area.

Recognising that The Bucketts Way serves as an important road corridor for a variety of road users which has implications for road safety.

Recognising The Bucketts Way as a critical detour when closures to the Pacific Highway occur.

Recognising Avalon Road between Krambach and Nabiac as a crucial link for The Bucketts Way to the Pacific Highway.

Challenges

The restricted heavy vehicle access which currently only accommodates 19 metre B-double vehicle access.

³⁹ Tourist Attraction Signposting Assessment Committee (TASAC) 2015a

⁴⁰ MidCoast Council 2018b

The road is in poor condition and unsafe in areas, although the standard is increasing.

Opportunities

The corridor is a renowned tourist drive with high scenic amenity that provides access to the Barrington Tops and other nature-based tourism activities such as mountain biking and kayaking.

It is the fastest and shortest route linking urban settlements in the Northern Tablelands to Sydney and Newcastle, including the Port of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport.

Recommendations

Prevent ribbon development and preserve the scenic amenity and rural landscape along The Bucketts Way recognising its importance as a tourist drive.

Improve access and safety for all vehicles using The Bucketts Way.

Consider road infrastructure investment including signage and road upgrades to enhance access and experience to key tourist attractions such as the Barrington Tops National Park, this may involve consulting with TASAC to determine eligibility for tourist signposting for key tourist destinations.

5.2.3 Gloucester - Scone Road

The Gloucester-Scone Road connects the two regional towns of Gloucester and Scone via the Barrington Tops and comprises of Scone Road and Barrington Tops Forest Road within the MidCoast LGA. The road is zoned the same as the adjoining land and in non-urban areas is zoned RU1 Primary Production, E1 National Parks and Nature Reserves and RU3 Forestry.

Only part of the two-lane road is sealed from Gloucester to Cobark. The remainder of the road from Canningtons Road, Cobark is unsealed. Given this, the road may only have limited significance for interregional interaction, however this needs to be assessed using traffic volume data.

It is an important haulage road for the forestry sector as it provides access to RU3 Forestry Zoned land within the Barrington Tops. A 30km stretch of the Gloucester-Scone Road has received a major upgrade, carried out in partnership by the Forestry Corporation of NSW and the NPWS⁴¹.

However, the road cannot accommodate B-Double vehicle access which limits its significance as an inter-regional linking road for this and potentially other, industries. Due to the inability of the road to accommodate B-Double vehicles and lack of traffic data, it is also unclear if the road provides an intra-regional linking road for other rural industries.

It is also an important scenic road for visitors and locals alike as it provides direct access to lookouts, walking trails, camping and picnic spots within the World Heritage Barrington Tops. This is a significant asset for the region as there are limited UNESCO World Heritage Listed sites within NSW and the status is internationally recognised. Currently, the quality of the road is likely to restrict visitor access to key attractions within the Barrington Tops. However, expected growth in the nature-based tourism sector has the potential to increase usage along this road corridor. Peak periods primarily occur in the winter months due to the popularity of camping and “snow chasing”, the Barrington Tops being the only part of the

⁴¹ Forestry Corporation 2105

MidCoast that observes snowfall. This is also the access road for the Tasmanian devil conservation program (Devil's Ark) within the Barrington Tops National Park, which attracts many visitors annually.

Council's Destination Management Plan also discusses equine activities as a potential growth area. The road corridor could support the growth of this industry as it provides the fastest link to Scone, known as one of the equine capitals of Australia⁴².

Service Stations

There are no existing service stations along the Gloucester-Scone Road within the MidCoast LGA although the NPWS has previously considered the development of an isolated National Parks visitor centre at the eastern entrance to the Barrington Tops National Park.

Key management Outcomes to Consider

Recognising the Gloucester-Scone Road as providing direct access to key attractions within Barrington Tops National Park.

Recognising the Gloucester-Scone Road as a potentially important regional road corridor for freight, tourist and commuter traffic.

Challenges

Current poor road conditions and rapidly changing weather conditions limit visitor and inter-regional access.

Opportunities

The corridor provides access to the world heritage listed Barrington Tops National Park and is the only location in the MidCoast LGA that receives regular snow fall.

It is currently the fastest route connecting Gloucester and Scone

It is an important haulage route for the timber industry

Recommendations

Investigate traffic volume data along the Gloucester-Scone Road to assess the significance of the road for regional interaction.

Consider road infrastructure investment including signage and road upgrades to enhance access and experience to key tourist attractions such as the Barrington Tops National Park, this may involve consulting with TASAC to determine eligibility for tourist signposting for key tourist destinations.

5.2.4 The Lakes Way

The Lakes Way is a regional two-lane coastal road of approximately 77km, east of the Pacific Highway route. It serves as both an important commuter route and tourist drive connecting several towns and villages between Bulahdelah, the strategic centre of Forster-Tuncurry and Hallidays Point. It also provides access to the Great Lakes - Myall Lakes, Smiths Lake and Wallis Lake; and numerous National Parks including Booti Booti, Wallingat and Myall Lakes National Parks; and many popular swimming and surfing beaches.

⁴² MidCoast Council 2017c

The Lakes Way holds two separate RMS road classifications along different sections. The Lakes Way is a:

- Regional Road (Main Road No. 111) from the Pacific Highway (HW 10) just north of Bulahdelah to Breese Parade Forster, where it turns into a State Road⁴³. This section of the road in non-urban areas is generally zoned the same as the adjacent land and is zoned a combination of RU2 Rural Landscape, RU3 Forestry, E1 National Parks and Nature Reserves, E3 Environmental Management and E2 Environmental Conservation. The section of The Lakes Way that passes through Booti Booti National Park is not zoned E1 National Parks and Nature Reserves and instead the road and road reserve is zoned RU2 Rural Landscape or E3 Environmental Management.
- State Road (Main Road No. 692) from Breese Parade, Forster to the Pacific Highway (HW10) approximately 5km north of Nahiabac, incorporating Macintosh Street and Head Street, Forster, Manning Street, Tuncurry, Wallamba River Bridge, North Tuncurry and Failford Road, Darawank. This section of road is zoned SP2 Classified Roads.
- Regional Road (Main Road No. 111) from Failford Road, Darawank to the Pacific Highway, Kiwarra (HW 10). This section of road is zoned the same as the adjacent land, RU2 Rural Landscape.

The Lakes Way is identified as an important transport corridor in both state and regional strategic plans. The NSW Government's Future Transport Strategy 2056 lists The Lakes Way as a regional corridor for investigation within the 0-10-year time frame⁴⁴. It has also been identified in the Draft Greater Newcastle Future Transport Plan as needing corridor improvements to support the visitor economy⁴⁵. The Hunter Regional Plan also recognises the importance of the Lakes Way to grow the economy of the MidCoast.

Tourism

Tourism is a significant industry within the Great Lakes area of the MidCoast and The Lakes Way is the primary road servicing visitor traffic in this area. The industry is highly seasonal with the area experiencing a mass influx in visitor numbers over summer, and overall experiences almost 1 million visitors a year⁴⁶.

Over this period the road and associated infrastructure, such as parking and rest areas, are extremely busy and can become congested, particularly around the most well-known areas. Currently the area is a popular spot for visitors travelling from Sydney and the Hunter Region, however with the commencement of international flights at Newcastle Airport and increasing domestic flights there is potential to grow the international and interstate visitor market to the area.

The Lakes Way will provide access to a number of 'game-changer' projects outlined in Council's Destination Management Plan including the Great Lakes Walk and Aquatic Trails project, Great Lakes Eco-lodge, and Smith's Lake Eco-Village⁴⁷. The NRMA outlines in their 2018-2019 budget submission that road corridors leading to projects featured in destination management plans should be eligible for funding in order to improve access and mobility in and around these attractions⁴⁸.

The Lakes Way also forms part of the 'Great Lakes Food Trail' which is a food trail event held a few times a year to provide an opportunity for the community to visit and purchase from

⁴³ NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2017

⁴⁴ Transport for NSW 2018b

⁴⁵ Transport for NSW 2017b

⁴⁶ MidCoast Council et al. 2016

⁴⁷ MidCoast Council 2017c

⁴⁸ NRMA 2017a

local farmers and producers along the trail. In respect to land zoning, roadside stalls and cellar door premises activities should occur in the rural zones (RU1, RU2 and RU4) but not in the environmental zones (E2, E3 and E4) to facilitate these paddock-to-plate initiatives.

There is currently inconsistent marketing and numbering of The Lakes Way as a tourist drive. The Lakes Way is recognised as Tourist Drive 6 by the Tourist Attraction Signposting Assessment Committee (TASAC)⁴⁹. Manning Valley Tourism also refers to The Lakes Way as Tourist Drive 6, however Great Lakes Tourism refers to the road as Touring Drive 1 in their tourist guides⁵⁰⁵¹.

Ensuring consistent tourism and directional signage throughout the region will assist visitors in navigating the road network, destinations and attractions that are easy to find help to grow the tourism sector⁵².

Commuter

The northern arm of The Lakes Way linking Forster-Tuncurry to Taree is an important commuter route as it serves as the most direct route between the two strategic centres. This section of the road is likely to experience high traffic volume and the condition of the road along this stretch should be prioritised.

Currently State Road classification applies to a section of The Lakes Way from Forster up to and including Failford Road. Investigating traffic volume data between the northern arm of The Lakes Way and Failford Road is recommended to assess whether State Road classification should also be considered for the northern arm of The Lakes Way.

Service Stations

Service stations along The Lakes Way include:

- The Lakes Way, Bungwahl, zoned RU5 Village
- Several service stations in Forster/ Tuncurry

In addition to the above there are other service stations that are easily accessible from The Lakes Way including:

- Charlotte Bay St, Charlotte Bay, zoned RU5 Village
- Godfrey Hill Rd, Rainbow Flat, zoned RU1 Primary Production

No additional service stations are required along The Lakes Way, noting the frequency of re-fuelling stations in several towns and villages near the corridor to service traffic.

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Recognising The Lakes Way's role as a numbered tourist route that serves as the 'gateway' to the Great Lakes and popular coastal beaches.

Recognising The Lake's Way's role as an important commuter route linking the two strategic centres of the MidCoast – Forster-Tuncurry and Taree.

⁴⁹ Tourist Attraction Signposting Assessment Committee 2015b

⁵⁰ MidCoast Council 2018f

⁵¹ Great Lakes Tourism 2018

⁵² NRMA 2017a

Challenges

The Lakes Way experiences peak traffic volumes during summer and at peak-commuter times due to its popularity as a tourist and commuter route

The Lakes Way, during peak periods, has a number of congested related traffic locations particularly in the vicinity of the Forster-Tuncurry Bridge.

The Lakes Way from its northern to southern entrances only has two other exits, at Wattle Hill Road to Wootton and Failford Road.

Opportunities

The corridor is a renowned tourist drive with high scenic amenity that provides access to the Great Lakes; Myall Lakes and Booti Booti National Parks and popular beaches.

It is the only corridor providing access to Pacific Palms which is a popular holiday location for visitors from Sydney and the broader Hunter Region.

It is only one hour from Newcastle Airport to the beginning of The Lakes Way at Bulahdelah.

Recommendations

Prevent ribbon development and preserve the scenic amenity and environmental/coastal landscape along The Lakes Way recognising its importance as a tourist drive

Apply environmental planning zones and controls to protect the road reserves along the Lakes Way in locations with high biodiversity value

Prioritise tourist signposting along The Lakes Way (Tourist Drive 6) to ensure that it is well maintained and provides sufficient signage to National Parks, lakes, wetlands and other nature-based attractions. This may involve consulting with TASAC to determine eligibility for tourist signposting for key tourist destinations. Ensure consistency between the signposting and marketing of Tourist Drive 6

Work with state and regional agencies to investigate opportunities for road corridor improvements to support the visitor economy as per the state and regional strategic plans.

5.2.5 Manning Valley - Port Macquarie Road

The Manning Valley – Port Macquarie Road is a regional two-lane road of approximately 145km in length. It serves as a tourist route and also a commuter route connecting smaller settlements to the strategic centres of Taree in the south and Port Macquarie in the north.

The road passes through both the MidCoast and Port Macquarie-Hastings LGAs, beginning at Manning River Drive at Taree South and finishing at Port Macquarie on the Oxley Highway. Approximately 70km of the road is within the MidCoast LGA and includes sections of The Bucketts Way, Tinonee Rd, Murray Road, Bulga Road and Colling Road.

The portion of the Manning Valley – Port Macquarie Road located within the MidCoast LGA is zoned the same as the adjoining land and in non-urban areas is primarily zoned: RU1 Primary Production along Bulga Road; U4 Primary Production Small Lots along Tinonee Rd; and a combination of RU1 Primary Production and E3 Environmental Management along Colling Road.

MidCoast Council are upgrading two timber bridges (at the time of writing) along Bulga Road, one at Bobin Creek and one at Bulga Creek, to provide all weather access from Wingham

through to Elands and further north-east to the Oxley Highway⁵³. Existing timber bridges along the road are likely to have low load limits of approximately 10 tonnes.

Tourism

The road is numbered Tourist Drive 8 and is one of only three numbered tourist drives in the MidCoast. Within the MidCoast it passes through the settlements of Tinonee, Wingham, Bobin and Elands. It provides access to a number of renowned tourist sites including the Flying Fox colony at Wingham Brush, and Ellenborough Falls just north of Elands, which is one of the longest single drop waterfalls in the Southern Hemisphere⁵⁴.

The Manning Valley – Port Macquarie Road is in poor condition in parts. The road is sealed until Bobin where it becomes unsealed. Consultation with the community during Rural Strategy workshops have identified the condition of Tourist Drive 8 as being unsuitable for caravans⁵⁵.

Destination North Coast's tourist drive website also states that the road from Comboyne through to Bobin is unsuitable for caravans⁵⁶. Given that the road is marketed as a significant tourist drive providing access for tourist vans, such as caravans, should be a priority.

Service Stations

There are existing service stations in Wingham along the Manning Valley – Port Macquarie Road. There is also a service station along Comboyne Road but outside of the MidCoast LGA.

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Recognising Manning Valley – Port Macquarie Road's role as a numbered tourist route that provides access to a number of key attractions in the MidCoast

Challenges

The poor condition of the road and bridges along the corridor currently restricts vehicle access

The road falls within two different LGAs, the MidCoast and Port Macquarie-Hastings, therefore management is shared.

Opportunities

A renowned tourist drive with high scenic amenity that provides access to key tourist attractions within the MidCoast.

Recommendations

Prevent ribbon development and preserve the scenic amenity and rural landscape along Manning River – Port Macquarie Road recognising its importance as a tourist drive

Work with Port Macquarie Hastings Council to investigate opportunities for road infrastructure investment such as road upgrades and signage to enhance access and experience to key tourist attractions such as the Ellenborough Falls. These investigations

⁵³ MidCoast Council 2018d

⁵⁴ MidCoast Council 2018e

⁵⁵ Rural Strategy Tourism Workshop Community Feedback

⁵⁶ Destination North Coast 2018

may involve consulting with TASAC to determine eligibility for tourist signposting for key tourist destinations.

5.3 Local Roads

Local roads comprise the remaining Council controlled roads and therefore form the majority of the road network. They provide for local circulation and traffic.

Council is responsible for managing all Local Roads including determining priorities, funding and carrying out work. The NSW Government may provide limited assistance funding local roads through specific programs. Historically, the Australian Government has played a greater role in road funding assistance to Councils through programs such as the Roads to Recovery Program. Generally, Council has the discretion to use Australian Government funding for works on any classification of road e.g. State, Regional or Local.

5.4 Touring routes

The Tourist Attraction Signposting Assessment Committee (TASAC) includes representatives from RMS, Destination NSW, regional tourism organisations and local government, and is responsible for the identification of 'Touring Routes'. Tourist routes are numbered tourist drives that may occur along State, Regional or Local roads. TASAC makes provisions for associated tourist signposting and can be used for marketing/branding purposes.

The State Government does not make touring route nominations; these must be made by third parties e.g. Councils or private parties. TASAC is responsible for assessing the eligibility of nominated routes and, if successful, planning and implementing tourist signposting along the route.

The specific assessment criteria for a touring route and tourist signposting eligibility is outlined in the Tourist Signposting Manual⁵⁷. Specifically, touring route nomination applications must demonstrate that the nominated route has:

- Attractions and experiences;
- A management structure;
- Sound financial backing; and
- A route marketing strategy.

Funding to maintain nominated tourist routes, including tourist signposting, is the responsibility of the applicant who has nominated the road for tourist route status. This is generally the local council. There are three numbered tourist drives within the LGA, including

- Tourist Drive 2 - The Bucketts Way,
- Tourist Drive 6 - The Lakes Way and
- Tourist Drive 8 - Manning Valley to Port Macquarie.

Other routes that have not yet been identified as Touring routes have been identified as popular tourist drives in feedback provided as part of the Rural Strategy engagement, in particular:

⁵⁷ NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2012

- Wootton Way, which is a scenic drive starting north of Bulahdelah and reconnecting to the Pacific Highway south of Coolongolook.
- Gloucester Tops Road, which is a popular access route to the Barrington National Park and Devil’s Ark conservation site.

In early 2019 a new edition of *Motorcycling in the Hunter* was also published. First published in 2014 the guide is a collaborative initiative between Hunter Council’s to showcase motorcycling routes with the aim of boosting tourism. The guide features three popular rides in the MidCoast LGA illustrated in the figures below:

Figure 9. The Bucketts Way Loop

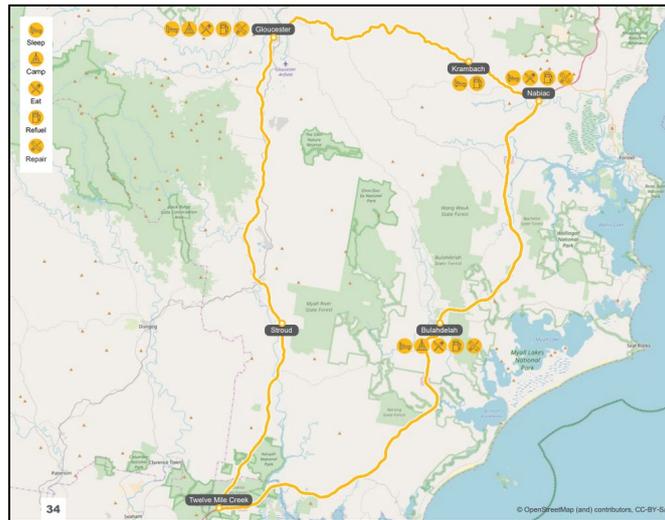


Figure 10. The Lakes Way Loop

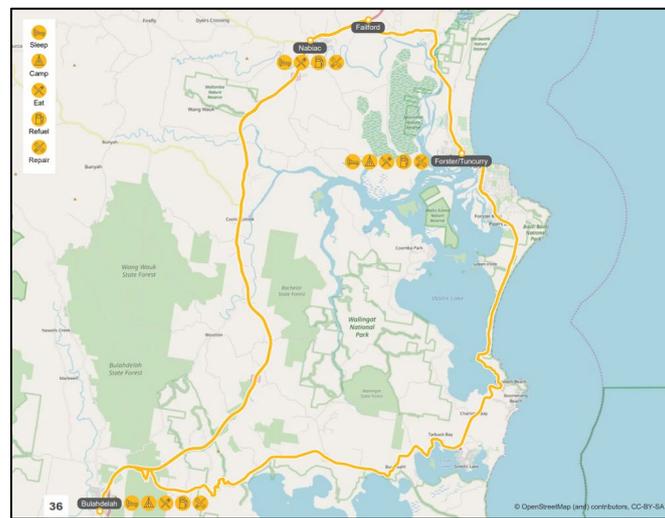
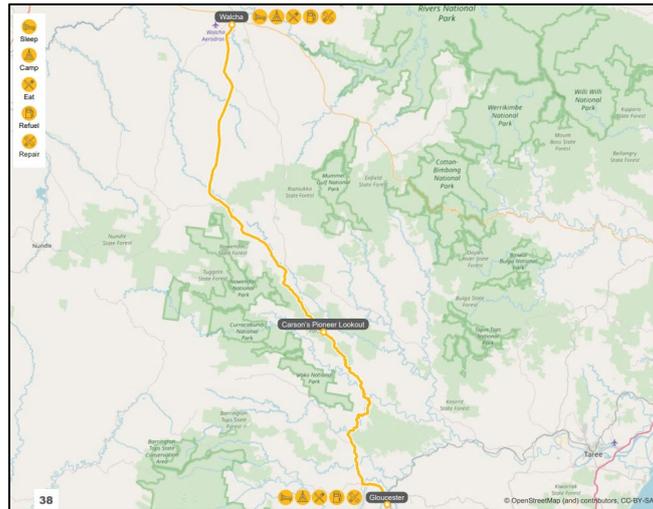


Figure 11. Thunderbolt's Way

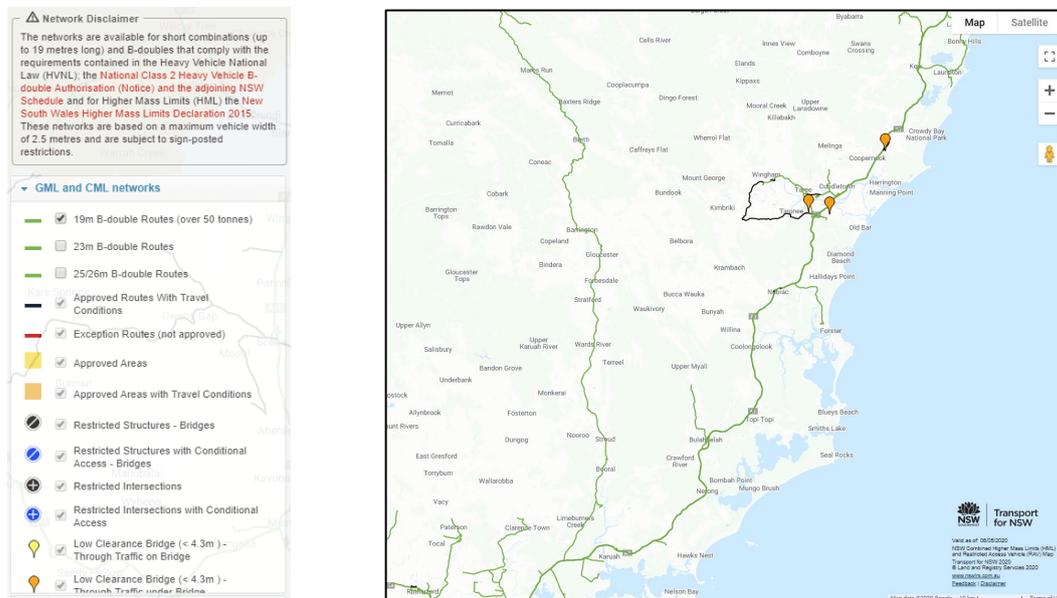


Road conditions and other considerations in relation to safety, amenity and wayfinding have been raised by the community as key concerns along various recognised and un-recognised touring routes⁵⁸.

Heavy vehicle routes

Heavy vehicles are restricted to certain routes, as approved by RMS. Approved routes within the MidCoast are shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13⁵⁹. The Pacific Highway is the predominant route for heavy vehicles, accommodating the heaviest classification of B-doubles. It also demonstrates the capability of The Bucketts Way/Thunderbolts Way route from the Pacific Highway to Walcha, through Stroud and Gloucester.

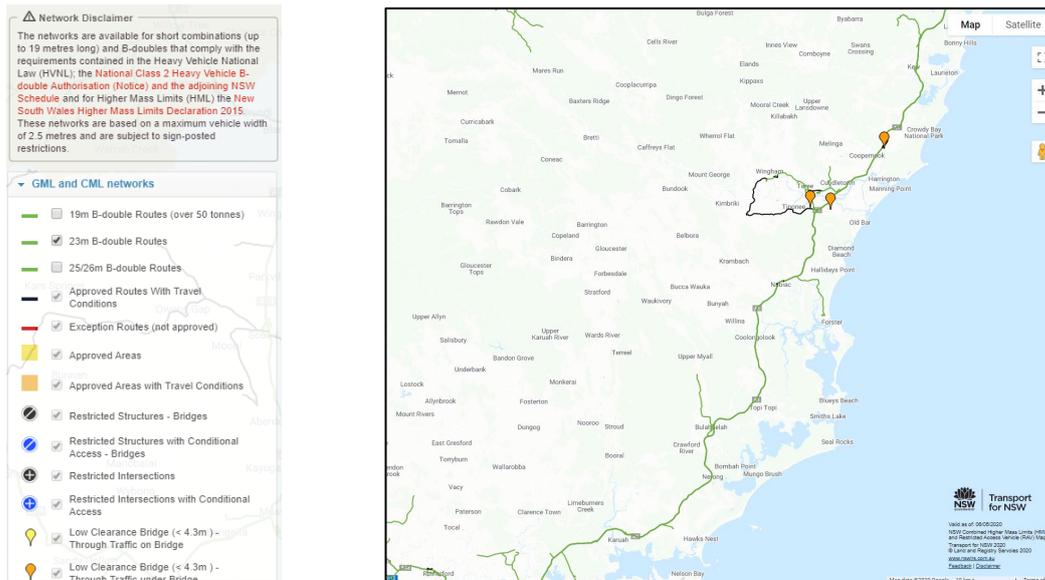
Figure 12. RMS Heavy vehicle routes for 19m B-double (over 50 tonnes)



⁵⁸ Motorcycling in the Hunter (2019)

⁵⁹ <https://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/business-industry/heavy-vehicles/maps/restricted-access-vehicles-map/map/index.html>

Figure 13. RMS Heavy vehicle routes for 23m B-double



These existing routes are generally reflective of the inter-regional road connections identified by the Hunter Regional Plan, with one exception: there is currently no link supporting heavy vehicle traffic on The Bucketts Way (east) between Gloucester and Taree via Krumbach.

5.5 Road management and funding

The road network currently accounts for approximately three-quarters of Council's asset base. Council relies on several funding sources to maintain and improve road assets within the LGA. Funding sources are generally made up of a combination of traditional revenue streams and government-funded grants.

Traditional revenue streams include⁶⁰:

- council rates and charges;
- council user charges and fees;
- operating grants; and
- other ad hoc payments

Government funding grants include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- The Roads to Recovery Program (Australian Government);
- Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants (Australian Government)
- Regional Road Block Grant Program (Australian Government)
- Repair and Improve Regional Road Program (REPair) (NSW Government)

Additional road funding sources are discussed within this Report, where relevant. Council is currently undertaking a significant Road Care Program across the MidCoast⁶¹. The program is funded by a \$50 million grant from the NSW Government, a Council-implemented special rate variation, and addition funding borrowed from the NSW Government. Maintaining and

⁶⁰ NRMA 2017b

⁶¹ MidCoast Council 2018c

improving road infrastructure is a core issue for Council, which has a current funding backlog of \$180 million⁶².

Road condition

The MidCoast community has highlighted improving the road capacity and condition as a number one priority. Council's Road Care Program is intended to improve the transport network throughout the region. Council's Capital Works Program specifically outlines the planned road construction projects currently underway and planned for the near future⁶³.

From a strategic planning perspective, there are two stand-out issues in respect to road conditions in rural areas that have been raised throughout community consultation and in various reports, these are:

1. The condition of roads in rural areas is a barrier to tourists accessing nature-based tourism opportunities. Many of the MidCoast's notable nature-based destinations are only accessible via unsealed roads, including the Barrington Tops National Park and Dingo Tops National Park.

This can lead to unsafe or unpleasant experiences for visitors. Anecdotally there was also strong commentary that rental cars, the primary option for tourist access to and within the region, are not insured for travel on unsealed roads.

2. Most of the MidCoast's road network does not readily accommodate heavy vehicles, which may lead to higher transport costs for some rural-based industries. The Bucketts Way/Thunderbolts Way route from the Pacific Highway through Stroud and Gloucester to Walcha, was consistently raised as a priority freight route in need of improvement.

Although it is identified as an 'inter-regional connection' in the Hunter Regional Plan, this road is currently classified as a Regional Road for administrative purposes, with joint responsibilities shared between Council and State Government.

This results in uncertainty for prioritising, funding and delivering road maintenance and improvement works along the route. Compounding this situation is the use of the route by some rural industries e.g. State Forest and private forestry operations, that do not contribute to the maintenance and upgrade of rural roads as no development application process is required and therefore development contributions to rural roads cannot be sourced by Council.

Note: prior to amalgamation, the former Gloucester Shire Council did place a Development Contributions - Heavy Haulage Plan on public exhibition. The plan sought to recover costs for the damage incurred on rural roads by rural industries, through the development approval process. Many other local government areas have successfully adopted similar plans.

5.6 Road related transport services and facilities

Several transport-related services and facilities support or otherwise rely on the road network, including activities associated with the movement of freight, commuters and local traffic use, and rural-based tourism. This subsection considers these in more detail.

⁶² NSW Government 2018b

⁶³ MidCoast Council 2018

Intermodal Terminals and Logistics Hubs

Intermodal terminals are places that provide for freight connections between different modes of transport. They serve as important infrastructure for rural industries such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries as they facilitate the successful movement of freight and have the potential to reduce freight costs while expanding access to national markets.

Transport for NSW identifies no operational or proposed intermodal terminals within the MidCoast⁶⁴. However, several roads within the MidCoast provide important corridors between regional areas to intermodal terminals and global gateways.

As relevant, these include:

- Port of Newcastle – is one of Australia’s largest ports and the world’s largest coal export port⁶⁵. While the port will continue to be a primary coal export facility it will also continue to diversify into other commodities. Improving roads along key freight corridors will improve the efficient movement of freight from regional areas to the Port.
- Newcastle Airport – there is significant potential to increase air traffic freight at the airport. Increasing freight transport by air will be particularly beneficial to agricultural industries in the MidCoast including those producing seafood, aquaculture and meat (beef and chicken) products, as it would decrease the travel time for perishable goods nationally and internationally. The Newcastle Airport Masterplan 2036 outlines the vision for the airport including plans to build a new freight terminal in the short-term⁶⁶. A trial is also currently underway to determine long-term viability and demand for international flights to New Zealand from the Newcastle Airport

Outside of Transport for NSW’s consideration, the MidCoast also offers:

- Taree Airport - recently completed works at Taree Airport's Aviation Business Park provides development opportunities within the SP2 Infrastructure Zone suitable for a variety of business uses including but not limited to: freight depots, warehousing and light manufacturing⁶⁷.
- Northern Gateway Transport Hub – located at Cundletown this development will be adjacent to the Pacific Highway and close to the Taree Airport⁶⁸. Stage 1 has involved the rezoning of over 7 hectares. This project has the potential to strengthen the local economy by integrating the airport into the surrounding freight network. A Planning Proposal is currently progressing for Stage 2 which will result in a further extension to this precinct of over 30ha.
- A potential “southern” gateway in the Glenthorne Industrial precinct will also realise a significant industrial rezoning adjacent to the Pacific Highway, at the southern entrance to Taree.

⁶⁴ Transport for NSW 2017a

⁶⁵ Transport for NSW 2018a

⁶⁶ Newcastle Airport 2018

⁶⁷ MidCoast Council 2018a

⁶⁸ MidCoast Council 2017b

6 Rail – Passenger and Freight Networks

This sub-section provides high-level considerations for where rail networks are located or proposed within the LGA, recognising each is subject to distinct administration and operational frameworks:

- The North Coast Railway
- The Hunter Valley Coal Freight Network
- Proposed inland rail
- The proposed high-speed rail

6.1 North Coast Railway

The North Coast Railway Line is the predominant rail corridor that passes through the MidCoast. The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), which is a federal government owned statutory corporation, manages and maintains the rail corridor with government funding and profits from passenger and freight distribution.

Passenger trains are operated by the NSW Government under NSW TrainLink, while freight trains are operated by various private organisations including coal producers and other freight rail operators.

Passenger railway stations are located at Taree, Wingham, and Gloucester. The XPT passenger service is operated by the NSW Government under NSW TrainLink and runs three times each way/per day between Sydney and Brisbane, the service stops at each of the three stations in the MidCoast.

The Taree railway station site also has the capacity for major freight loading facilities.

Figure 14. North Coast Railway Line – MidCoast route and stations



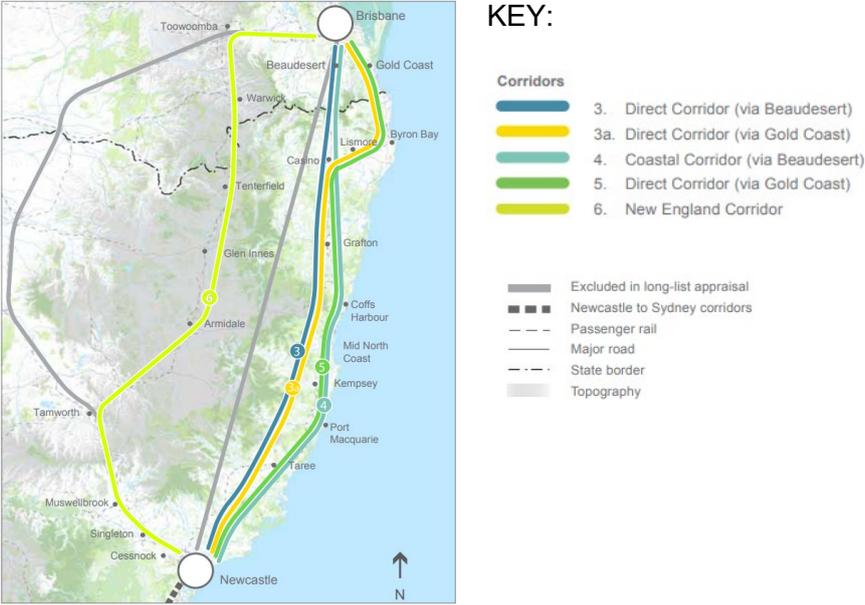
6.1.1 Proposed High Speed Rail

The Australian and NSW Governments are also investigating opportunities to provide a high-speed rail network to reduce travel times between capital cities along the east coast.

⁶⁹ http://www.railsnw.com/tours/australia/countrylink_map.htm

The report from phase 1 of the High Speed Rail Study, released by the Australian Government in August 2011, considered five possible corridor alignments between Newcastle and Brisbane within the nominated study corridor, four of these corridors, including the recommended (least costly) corridor, traversed the MidCoast LGA as illustrated in Figure 15.⁷⁰

Figure 15. High Speed Rail Study Phase 1 Report (2011) Corridor Options through the MidCoast



The Phase 2 Report of the high-speed rail study, released by the Australian Government in April 2013, includes an indicative alignment for the currently recommended high-speed rail corridor, as well as station concepts and layouts. The indicative corridor relies heavily on development of rural lands within the MidCoast, following assessment comments outline in particular, environmental constraints⁷¹ associated with the rail alignment and high speed rail station location within the MidCoast, as illustrated in Figure 16 and Figure 17.

The blue alignment is preferred from Port Macquarie to Johns River

While both alignments are equal in terms of operational and infrastructure considerations, the blue alignment is preferable in terms of sustainability and land use planning outcomes, because it has less impact on existing communities and planned urban release areas than the red alignment. While both alignments impact on state forests and national parks, the blue alignment avoids a direct impact on Middle Brother State Forest (albeit by traversing part of Watson Taylor Lake). Two privately owned airfields would be affected by either alignment.

The red alignment is preferred from Johns River to Rainbows Flat:

The reduced train transit time (approximately 45 seconds) and the resulting additional user benefits for the red alignment effectively offset the additional capital cost (approximately \$0.3 billion) when compared to the blue alignment. The red alignment includes a very long viaduct across the Manning River Floodplain, due to the soft soil ground conditions in the lower floodplain area.

⁷⁰ https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rail/publications/high-speed-rail-study-reports/files/HSR_Phase1_Report_Appendices.pdf
⁷¹ https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rail/publications/high-speed-rail-study-reports/files/HSR_Phase_2_Chapter_4.pdf

The red alignment would have less impact on Taree and settled areas in general. By comparison, the blue alignment would impact on the planned urban release area and employment area at Kundle (identified in the Mid North Coast Regional Strategy).

Figure 16. High Speed Rail Phase 2 Report (2013) Port Macquarie- Twelve Mile Creek options



The blue alignment is preferred between Rainbow Flat and Twelve Mile Creek:

The Ramsar Wetlands within Myall Lakes National Park are a prominent feature in this sector. Both alignments avoid major impacts on the Ramsar Wetlands. The blue alignment would pass beneath the narrowest part of the catchment of Ramsar Wetlands in a tunnel and provide a fairly direct route.

Diverting around the Ramsar Wetlands with a route further to the west of the red alignment would add to the length of the route, train transit time and capital cost.

Figure 17. Preferred Taree High Speed Rail station location and rail alignment



Environmental constraints also reflect the potential location of a new high-speed rail station:

The Manning River provides the greatest constraint to locating an HSR station around Taree, and its branches would necessitate multiple crossings. As a result, the alignment was moved about five kilometres to the east of Taree and the Pacific Highway. The floodplain of the Manning River would require a 15-kilometre-long viaduct from just north of Old Bar Road to around Coopernook to provide flood immunity and avoid the risks of settlement due to the soft soils.

A ground level station north of the viaduct would be approximately 20 kilometres by road from Taree, compared with ten kilometres for a station south of the viaduct, close to Old Bar Road. An HSR station south of Taree would also provide better access to the coastal communities of Old Bar, Diamond Beach, Forster and Tuncurry.

Taree has a regional airport and a conventional rail station, both of which would be approximately ten kilometres by road from the proposed HSR station. From a sustainability and land use perspective, this location avoids any significant impacts on environmental or heritage areas.⁷²

More recent NSW Government initiatives have continued investigations for high-speed corridors within the State, including the potential for a Taree station forming part of this network⁷³.

Although there is still a high-level of uncertainty as to the final alignment of infrastructure, the Rural Strategy should identify how Council can facilitate the development of this network, including through the application of planning controls and other suitable mechanisms required to safeguard this corridor.

6.2 Hunter Valley Coal Rail Network

The Hunter Valley Coal Rail Network illustrated in Figure 18 is the heavy rail network that serves haulage of coal in the NSW Hunter Valley Coal Chain. The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), which is a federal government owned statutory corporation, and the NSW Government RailCorp, manage and maintains the rail corridor with government funding, profits from coal operators and railway operators other freight distribution.

The Hunter Valley Coal Chain provides about one-fifth of Australia's thermal and coking coal from 35 coal mines owned by 11 coal producers, under the auspices of the Hunter Valley Coal Chain Coordinator (HVCCC). The HVCCC was a concept created in 2003 to streamline production through a centralised planning model for the production, transport and export of coal from sub-regions of the Hunter Valley. Coal is delivered from mines through four main rail haulage providers; Pacific National, Aurizon, Glencore and Southern Shorthaul Railroad⁷⁴.

The Stratford and Duralie Mining Complex is operated by Yancoal which utilizes private entities for coal freight transport to the Port of Newcastle for bulk loading.

⁷² https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/rail/publications/high-speed-rail-study-reports/files/HSR_Phase_2_Chapter_4.pdf

⁷³ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/projects/a-fast-rail-future-for-nsw>

⁷⁴ <https://australianminingreview.com.au/features/the-hunter-valley-back-to-black/>

Freight

The North Coast Regional Train Line is currently the only rail corridor to transport freight between Brisbane and Melbourne making it a nationally significant freight corridor. Rail operators compete strongly with road-based transport operators for freight use and generally, as distances increase rail transport's competitiveness increases⁷⁶.

In general, the north-south rail corridor remains uncompetitive due to slow transit times and poor reliability. Consequently, it only accounts for 20% of all goods transported between Melbourne and Brisbane, and only 10% between Melbourne and Sydney, and Sydney and Brisbane⁷⁷. It is important to note that while road and rail compete, they also accommodate different freight requirements within the market:

- Rail is often the preferred mode of transport for bulk non time-sensitive commodities such as coal and non-perishable agricultural products such as grain. These goods are often transported interstate to ports and distribution centres via rail.
- In contrast, the road network predominantly caters for commodities that are time sensitive such as fresh food and livestock. The road network is also far more extensive than the rail network making road freight the preferred choice from areas with limited rail infrastructure, and also for products travelling shorter distances.
- Within the MidCoast, the North Coast Regional Train Line is primarily a through corridor for commodities travelling interstate between Sydney and Brisbane. There is very little publicly available information that discusses the significance of the rail corridor to local industries. However, there are a number of likely factors which ensure roads are the primary freight corridors for commodities travelling to and from the MidCoast, these include:
 - Many commodities produced within the MidCoast are 'time sensitive' products such as livestock, dairy products and eggs;
 - There is limited rail infrastructure within the MidCoast, for example, there are no publicly operating intermodal facilities located within the region that cater for rail freight; and
 - The primary markets for many commodities produced within the MidCoast are located in Sydney and Newcastle making road freight more efficient.

The notable exception is coal. Currently, there are only two operating coal mines within the MidCoast, the Stratford Coal Mine and the Duralie Coal Mine, which are both located along the heavy rail corridor between Stratford and Stroud.

Both coal mines have privately owned and operated coal loading facilities that feed into the heavy rail corridor to transport coal to the Port of Newcastle for export. It is likely that any future coal mining development within the MidCoast would be located nearby (due to the location of existing natural resources) and use the same rail corridor.

Historically, there were severally locally based industries within the MidCoast that produced and transported goods via rail. Intermodal facilities located along the Manning River provided former local businesses such as the Dairy Farmers and Allowrie butter factories, to load and transport products via rail. However, these facilities have since closed and are no longer operational.

The Figtrees on the Manning local area masterplan proposes that these rail assets will be retained in the new masterplan as a cycle and pedestrian pathway. This vision aligns with the NSW Tourism and Transport Plan which proposes to re-purpose regional train stations and

⁷⁶ Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities 2018

⁷⁷ National Transport Commission Australia 2016

rail assets that are not being used for transport in ways that contribute to great places including for heritage, food and coffee and entertainment tourism⁷⁸. There is an opportunity to undertake a review of additional rail assets currently not in use and consider how they could be repurposed.

There is also a former rail-manufacturing site in Kundle Kundle (Brimbin) which provides a rail siding to transport goods manufactured on site via rail. The site, previously owned by UGL Ltd has not been operational since 2013 and is currently (at the time of writing) for sale. This site has considerable potential for future industrial use given its direct connection to the rail line.

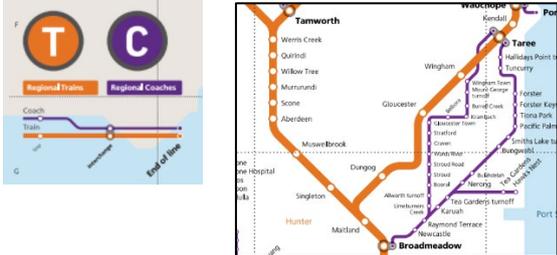
Infrastructure upgrades of alternative transport corridors such as the Pacific Highway and Inland Rail Corridor are likely to reduce the volume of freight movement along the North Coast Regional Train Line. For example, once complete, the Inland Rail Corridor will provide a more efficient option for freight travelling between Brisbane and Melbourne.

The Inland Rail Corridor is expected to be operational by 2024-2025. Future freight volumes will also be affected by other operational factors such as imposed curfews and interchange capacity both in Sydney and Brisbane.

Commuter and Tourism

The NSW Government, under NSW TrainLink, operates passenger services connecting regional areas of Australia. Within the MidCoast there are three operating train stations at Gloucester, Wingham, and Taree, situated along the North Coast corridor connecting Sydney and Brisbane as shown in Figure 19 below.

Figure 19. NSW Trainlink Regional Services in MidCoast LGA: North Coast Line⁷⁹



Three services run each day along the North Coast corridor, with the specific services and annual patronage numbers shown in the table below. Each service stops at all three operating train stations within the MidCoast, although only at Wingham on demand.

Table 5. Train Passenger Journeys by Corridor by Service (Financial Year 2012-13)⁸⁰

Services	Total
Sydney to Casino XPT	85,786
Brisbane to Sydney XPT (Day)	80,491
Sydney to Brisbane XPT (Night)	79,325
Grafton to Sydney XPT (Day)	70,695

⁷⁸ Transport for NSW 2018e
⁷⁹ <http://ontheworldmap.com/australia/state/new-south-wales/nsw-train-and-coach-network-map.html>
⁸⁰ NSW trainlink 2014

Casino to Sydney XPT (Night)	64,106
Sydney to Grafton XPT (Day)	57,790

While the patronage numbers above indicate the number of journeys taken by people using the service between Sydney to Brisbane within the 2012-2013 financial year, there is no data available to indicate the number of people starting or finishing their journey within the MidCoast. Likewise, other comparative data is limited, so it is unclear if passenger numbers for these services have been increasing or declining.

However, regional patronage on NSW TrainLink services declined from 1.86 million journeys in 2012-2013 to 1.76 million journeys in 2014-2015⁸¹. This is because of the declining quality of long-distance services, including reliability and frequency, which has made train travel uncompetitive with car travel⁸².

Future passenger numbers will be heavily influenced by future infrastructure upgrades. The current regional rail fleet is old and the NSW Government plans to replace all XPT passenger cars used for this service⁸³. The new trains will come into service progressively with the first trains intended to be delivered in the early 2020s. The replacement of the train fleet will likely increase passenger number due to enhanced comfort, reliability, accessibility and safety.

The NSW Government also continues to investigate high-speed rail options with the latest feasibility study announced in December of 2018. This study included a station in the Taree-Old Bar region as one of four stops along the proposed high-speed rail corridor.

Infrastructure upgrades will provide better connectivity to the region, which can facilitate new opportunities. For example, the Transport and Tourism Plan states that the new rail fleet will be able to transport bicycles. When this occurs, there is the potential to market rail as a convenient travel option for cycle tourists to explore the natural assets and cycling trails of the MidCoast.

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Supporting the heavy rail corridor's use as a nationally significant freight route for bulk commodities travelling between Brisbane and Melbourne.

Recognising the heavy rail corridor's use as an important tourist and commuter train for passengers travelling the East Coast of Australia

Challenges

The limited rail infrastructure, such as intermodal terminals, means that rail freight is a less practical option than road freight for many sectors within the MidCoast.

There are limited passenger services and stops provided along the rail corridor making travel by road a more convenient and desirable option for many rural commuters/passengers

Operational factors, such as imposed curfews and interchange capacity, affects network frequency and efficiently along the entire rail corridor

Opportunities

⁸¹ National Transport Commission Australia 2016

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ Transport for NSW 2018e

Unused rail assets that provide opportunities for new tourism uses including for heritage, food and coffee and entertainment tourism

Opportunities for adaptive re-use of heavy coal rail network servicing the Stratford Heavy Industrial Precinct

Recommendations

To investigate potential adaptive re-use options for rail assets that are currently not in use

Prevent inappropriate development in rural areas directly adjoining the rail corridor to preserve the scenic and rural character of the corridor, recognising its potential as a significant tourist and commuter route.

Promote route identification for the proposed high-speed rail corridor.

To promote the development of the Stratford heavy Industrial precinct and former UGL site in Brimbin leveraging of their access to heavy rail freight facilities.

6.4 Taree Regional Airport

The Taree regional airport in addition to a number of private and public airfields have the potential to provide freight and transport linkages in addition to supporting the rural economy.

Freight

The Taree Regional Airport is predominantly a passenger airport does not provide any significant air freight transport connections in the MidCoast.

Commuter and Tourism

The tourism aspects of air transport are variable but include:

- Connections to and from Sydney with the potential for further expansion of the Taree Airport carrier services;
- Good linkages to the Newcastle Airport.

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Recognising the importance and need of private airfields and helipads for the rural economy, particularly for agricultural spraying and property surveillance.

Recognising rural industry connections to potential airside industries at the Taree Regional Airport.

Challenges

Improving and increasing tourism potential for the Taree Airport.

Recognising the limitations and impacts on private airfields and helipads.

Opportunities

Opportunities to leverage off the Taree Airport as a potential growth area in terms of industry and connectivity.

Recommendations

Investigate the opportunity for private airfield and helipad infrastructure to support rural enterprises including the transport of time-sensitive produce and tourism activities and access.

Investigate opportunities for rural industries that may benefit from airside access as part of the Taree Regional Airport Park, including the transport of time-sensitive produce and tourism activities and access.

6.5 Waterways

A number of waterways in the MidCoast have the potential to provide freight and transport linkages. These water ways include Port Stephens and the Manning River. Historically the Manning River in particular was utilised by steamers and barges for the timber industry.

Rural Waterways are discussed in the Rural Waterways discussion paper in more depth however it is relevant to discuss waterways as they relate to transport infrastructure.

Freight

There are no particular marine freight or marine transport related service distribution or connections in the MidCoast with most waterways being used for recreational purposes due to navigable depth issues. It is noted however that boat building has often located close to the Manning River.

The MidCoast also lacks a port facility capable of marine freight distribution.

Commuter and Tourism

The tourism aspects of waterway transport are variable but include:

- The relative protected safety of both Port Stephens and Crowdy Head for travelling boats along the Australian east coast;
- A daily passenger ferry service from Tea Gardens to Nelson Bay across Port Stephens.

Key Management Outcomes to Consider

Supporting the existing commercial fishing, aquaculture and tourism activities in Port Stephens, Crowdy Head and Cape Hawke Harbour at the entrance to Wallis Lake and the inter-modal transport requirements of these industries.

Challenges

The recognition of the MidCoast waterways to lack critical marine transport infrastructure to support growth and diversification of existing industries and tourism.

Opportunities

Opportunities to leverage off the Crowdy Bay mooring area as a renowned recreational mooring location and access point for commercial fishing and whale-watching tours.

Opportunities for utilisation of the Manning River for marine transport within the MidCoast upstream and downstream

Opportunities for increased visitation from the Port Stephens Area from passenger ferry services

Opportunities for increased growth and diversification of existing commercial fishing, aquaculture, fishing and whale-watching tours from Cape Hawke Harbour, the entrance to Wallis Lake.

Recommendations

Expand the identification of land within the IN4 Working Waterfront and W3 Working Waterways zones to enable growth and diversification of industries and tourism activities requiring direct access to navigable waterways

Explore opportunities for the establishment or upgrading of existing land-based infrastructure to enable inter-modal transport hubs in close proximity to commercial fishing, aquaculture and water-based tourism facilities at Port Stephens, Cape Hawke Harbour and Crowdy Harbour.

Expand public access to recreational moorings and jetty/pontoon facilities and associated land-based facilities and access across the MidCoast.

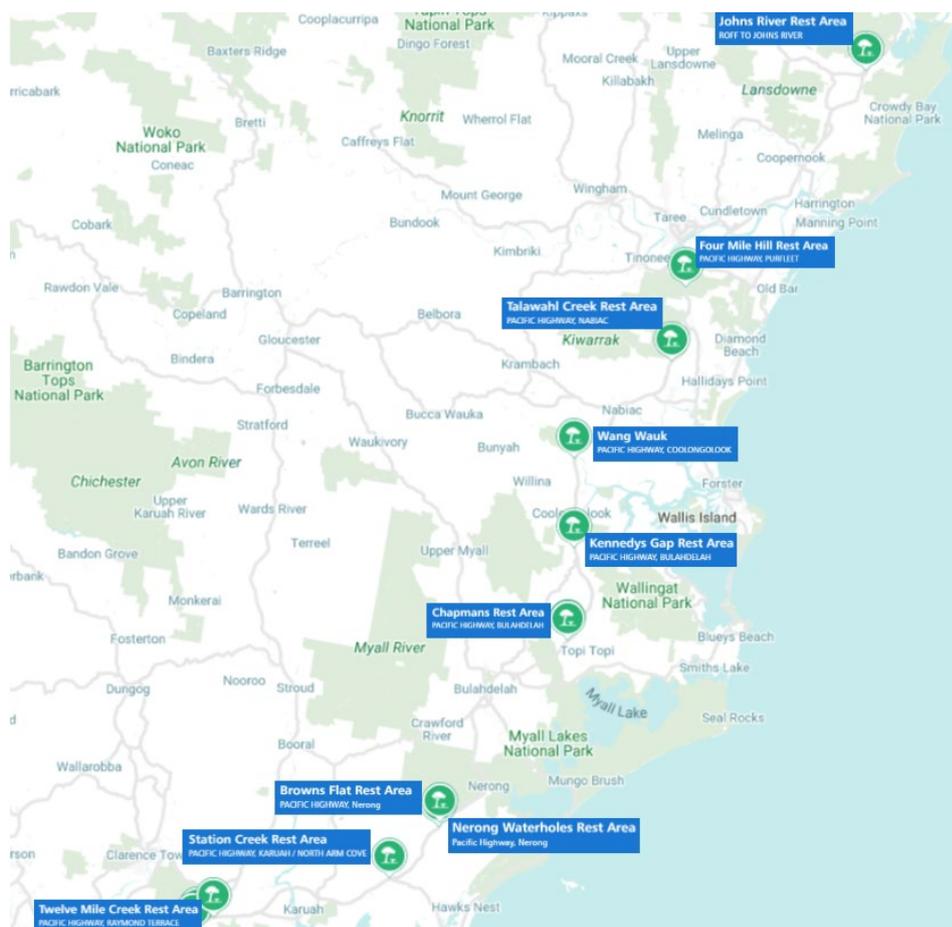
7 Ancillary transport facilities and services

7.1 Highway Service Centres and Rest Areas

Highway Service Centres and rest areas provide opportunities for drivers to stop and revive. They typically include a vehicle parking area, rest areas and public amenities; and may offer commercial uses, such as restaurants and cafes, take away food and drink, service stations and vehicle repair facilities. Highway Service Centres differ from Service Stations in that they must comply with additional requirements from the RMS which include:

- The centre is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week,
- All traffic arrangements are safe and efficient,
- At least 25 heavy vehicle parking spaces are provided,
- A number of parking spaces for recreational vehicles and coaches,
- The provision of children's play-areas and tourist information,
- Toilets and amenities that are free to use,
- Separate undercover fuel areas for heavy and light vehicles, and
- No alcohol can be sold on site.

Figure 20. Highway Rest Areas within the MidCoast LGA⁸⁴



⁸⁴ <https://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/roads/using-roads/trip-information/rest-areas/map/>

There is currently one Highway Service Centre within the MidCoast located at Taree South. A second Highway Service Centre has been approved near Nahiabac. A number of additional sites for Highway Service Centres are proposed near Bulahdelah (Planning Proposal), Coolongook (Development Application), and Tea Gardens (Planning Proposal).

Rest areas are not defined in the Standard Instrument Principal LEP or the Roads Act, however they can broadly be defined as roadside areas designated for long rest breaks, offering a range of facilities to take rest and sleep breaks⁸⁵. Some rest areas can only accommodate light vehicles such as cars and caravans; while other rest areas can accommodate both heavy vehicles, such as b-doubles and road trains, and light vehicles.

Heavy vehicle rest areas are especially important, as truck drivers journey long distances and must stop regularly to check their load and manage their hours of work and rest. Heavy vehicle drivers in NSW must also conform with the Heavy Vehicle (Fatigue Management) National Regulation which requires drivers to rest at least once in 5 and a half hours and more frequently with additional hours worked⁸⁶.

RMS provide and manage rest areas along nationally significant transport corridors within NSW. The Pacific Highway is the only nationally significant transport corridor within the MidCoast. There are currently eight RMS rest areas providing both heavy and light vehicle access along the MidCoast stretch of the Pacific Highway.

7.2 Livestock Saleyards

Saleyards provide stockyards for the commercial sale of livestock and are important to the livestock industry within the region. While important to the rural economy, the saleyards within the MidCoast are located within or adjacent to existing urban areas. This can ensure convenient access to saleyards, suitable for accommodating heavy vehicles, and can help reduce transport costs for producers, but does increase the potential for land use conflict within these towns and villages.

Saleyards in the MidCoast LGA are listed below:

- Gloucester Saleyards - on the corner of The Bucketts Way and Cemetery Rd, is the primary saleyards in the MidCoast region and is Council owned. There is no B-double access to the saleyards from the majority of the MidCoast. When Taree saleyards closed, business was lost to Kempsey outside of the LGA rather than to Gloucester. A 19m B-double access is provided along The Bucketts Way south of Gloucester and on Thunderbolts Way north of Gloucester.
- Taree Saleyards also known as Town Head Saleyards is located on The Bucketts Way, Taree South and is a privately owned and managed saleyard. The current road network provides 25m B-double access via the Pacific Highway making it the most accessible saleyard for coastal areas within the MidCoast. It has been the subject of recent closures, however at the time of writing, it appears to be open.
- Nahiabac Saleyards accessible from Showground Lane and Nahiabac St, Nahiabac is a Council owned saleyard located at the Nahiabac Showground which is not accessible to B-doubles. Council has undertaken improvement works at the saleyard to ensure compliance with EP&A requirements. These works were undertaken in response to on-going community support for its ongoing operation.

⁸⁵ NSW Roads and Traffic Authority 2010

⁸⁶ <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/current/sl-2013-0078>

7.3 Aircraft

Ministerial Direction 3.5 - *Development near regulated airports and defence airfields* requires Council to prioritise safety and amenity around registered aerodromes. There are two within the MidCoast:

- Taree Airport – 1 Lansdowne Road, Cundletown. Operated by MidCoast Council this airport provides regular scheduled passenger flights in and out of Taree.
- Gloucester Airfield – Off Maslen’s Lane, Gloucester. This is a privately-operated airfield that provides a landing and take-off point for smaller privately-operated aircrafts. The airfield is a popular destination for glider pilots due to the soaring conditions created by the Mograni landscape. A gliding event for enthusiasts occurs annually at the airfield.

There are also a few small operational airfields and airstrips, including at Old Bar and on significant farm holdings where large-scale agricultural spraying takes place, such as Curricabark, north-west of Gloucester.

Long-term planning considerations for Taree Airport will be set through a range of strategic planning initiatives, including master planning for the Airport and broader precinct-planning for the Northern Gateway Transport Hub.

Long-term planning considerations for Gloucester Airfield have not been reviewed by the consultant team.

7.4 Tourist Gateways

Tourist ‘Gateways’ are places that provide an entry point or ‘gateway’ for visitors arriving to the region from interstate and abroad. They are important for local tourism development. While these facilities are normally located within or adjacent to urban areas, providing good road connectivity to these gateways can help to grow tourism across the region by facilitating easier access to key destinations for visitors. Current gateways include:

- Taree Airport – Scheduled passenger flight services operating out of the airport currently provide connections to Sydney and Newcastle. Taree airport is operated by MidCoast Council and upgrades valued at \$705,000 were completed in 2017. There is currently no publicly available master plan for the airport. *Pelican Airlines* is the current regional carrier operating from the Taree airport.
- Port Macquarie Airport – Scheduled passenger flight services and a diverse general aviation sector including pilot training, aircraft maintenance and repair work, freight and charter operations, emergency aero medical (patient transfer), search and rescue and bushfire fighting services (both fixed wing and helicopters), joy/adventure flights, private and recreational flying, and skydiving.

The Airport is owned and operated by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and serves the Greater Port Macquarie and wider Mid North Coast region. The airport caters for approximately 230,000 passengers per year, making it the 5th largest regional airport in NSW.⁸⁷

- Newcastle Airport (in the Port Stephens LGA) – Scheduled passenger flight services operate out of the airport providing connections to Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney,

⁸⁷ [About Us - Port Macquarie Airport](#)

Canberra, Adelaide, Gold Coast, Dubbo, Taree and Ballina. The airport is also trialling international flights to New Zealand.

Over 2016-17 more than 1.25 million passengers used the airport, which was a 6 per cent increase in patronage from the previous year⁸⁸. The airport could expand the international offering and provide direct flights to south-east Asia in the future which would help support tourism opportunities in the MidCoast. However, improved transport links and services would need to be established between the Newcastle Airport and the MidCoast to capitalise on these opportunities.

- Port of Newcastle – identified as an important tourist gateway to the Hunter region, including the MidCoast, should the Newcastle cruise terminal concept be realised.

7.5 Visitor Information Centres

Visitor information centres also play an important part in the regional tourism landscape as they are hubs of local knowledge and experience than can shape the plans of visitors to the region. There are both accredited and non-accredited visitor information centres.

Those that are accredited are generally Council-operated, with assistance from volunteers, while those that are non-accredited are run solely by volunteers or tourist groups. Accreditation ensures that the information provided within these centres is accurate and that they meet a high standard of service delivery.

There are currently three accredited visitor information centres within the MidCoast at: 2 Little Street, Forster; 21 Manning River Dr, Taree North; and 27 Denison Street, Gloucester.

There are also four non-accredited visitor information centres located at:

- Tea Gardens: 245 Myall Street, Tea Gardens
- Pacific Palms: Boomerang Drive, Blueys Beach
- Bulahdelah: Corner Pacific Highway and Crawford Street, Bulahdelah
- Harrington/Crowdy Head: 85 Beach Street, Harrington

It is noted there are very limited visitor information centres or alternative facilities on major transport routes or at the northern and southern entrances to the MidCoast LGA, with the majority of centres being located within towns and villages.

7.6 Caravan Parks and camping grounds

Caravan parks provide important tourist accommodation in towns and villages popular to holidaymakers. There are many caravan parks located in environmental or rural zonings within the MidCoast, they are generally located on the outskirts of existing towns or villages but can also be found in isolated areas with single road access. It is expected that over the peak-season summer period these roads will experience a high volume of caravan traffic.

It is important to note that some caravan parks are not tourist parks but are 'residential' parks, providing permanent low-cost housing. The following is a list of caravan parks, correct at the time of writing:

⁸⁸ Newcastle Airport 2018

- Reflections Holiday Parks Jimmys Beach (Coorilla St, Hawks Nest), adjoining an existing urban area and zoned E3 Environmental Management
- Reflections Holiday Parks Seal Rocks (Kinka Rd, Seal Rocks), in a relatively isolated area surrounded by National Park, although close to a small general store at Seal Rocks, zoned E3 Environmental Management
- Sandbar Caravan Park (Sandbar Rd, Sandbar), in an isolated area with single road access and zoned E3 Environmental Management
- Bushland Holiday Park and Golf Course (Sandbar Rd, Sandbar), in an isolated area with single road access and zoned RU2 Rural Landscape
- Discovery Parks Forster (Aquatic Rd, Darawank), providing both holiday and residential living, adjoining existing large lot residential estate and zoned RU2 Rural Landscape
- Great Lakes Riverside Living (Mill Rd, Failford), a residential living park adjoining an existing large lot residential estate and zoned RU2 Rural Landscape
- Hallidays Point Caravan Park (Blackhead Rd, Tallwoods Village) adjoining the residential Tallwood Village area, zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Big4 Happy Hallidays (Blackhead Rd, Hallidays Point), a tourist park adjoining a residential area and zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Beachfront Hallidays Point Holiday Park (Red Head Rd, Hallidays Point), a tourist park adjoining a residential area and zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Diamond Beach Holiday Park (Jubilee Parade, Diamond Beach), a tourist park adjoining a residential area and zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Weroona Caravan Park (Manning Point Rd, Manning Point), a tourist park adjoining a village and zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Big4 Colonial Holiday Park (Harrington Rd, Harrington), a tourist park adjoining a residential area and zoned RU1 Primary Production
- Discovery Parks Harrington (Crowdy S, Harrington), a tourist park adjoining a residential area of Harrington, zoned E2 Environmental Conservation and RE1 Public Recreation
- Bulahdelah Cabin and Van Park (Bulahdelah Way, Bulahdelah), a residential living park adjoining the village area of Bulahdelah, zoned RU2 Rural Landscape
- Gloucester Holiday Park (Denison St, Gloucester), a tourist park adjoining the rural centre of Gloucester and zoned SP1 Special Purposes
- Gloucester Tops Riverside Caravan Park (Gloucester River Rd, Invergordon), a tourist park in an isolated area and zoned RU1 Primary Production

A diverse range of camping grounds also exist within National Parks, State Forests and on private lands. Camping grounds can operate in a similar manner to caravan parks or can have limited services, facilities and sites if operating as 'primitive' camping grounds. The access, service and infrastructure requirements for camping grounds are therefore site-specific and dictated by the location and public versus private management arrangements.

The large number of camping grounds across the MidCoast are not listed, but generally operate at a smaller scale and lower impact on surrounding land uses, whether these activities are conservation, agriculture or 'residential' occupation of rural lands.

Additional consideration of caravan parks and camping grounds is documented within the Tourism paper.

7.7 Public Transport

Roads also provide the basis for people to access bus, rail and community transport services within the MidCoast. Rural areas typically have limited public transport options. Consequently, people living in these areas experience a higher level of public transport disadvantage.

Buses are the primary method of public transport servicing the MidCoast region. There are five private bus companies servicing rural areas within the MidCoast which are: Busways, Buslines, Tinonee Bus Co, Eggins Coaches and Newcombes. Each bus route generally provides between one and four services each way/per day, with fewer services on the weekends. More remote areas such as Elands, typically only have one or two bus runs each way/per day.

Buses servicing rural areas generally stop once in each town and village e.g. Route 308 between Gloucester and Forster stops at eight locations, and alternative pick-up locations along the route can be pre-arranged. On some school routes in rural areas, it is likely that the school bus will stop as needed to collect children along the route.

Public transport bus routes that service rural areas within the MidCoast include:

Busways	Buslines	Eggins Coaches	Tinonee Bus Co
150 – Taree to Newcastle via Forster, Hawks Nest and Tea Gardens	307 – Coomba Park to Forster	309 – Forster to Taree via Blackhead and Diamond Beach	316 – Taree to Krumbach via Tinonee (Loop)
151 – Taree to Newcastle via Forster and The Rock	308 – Gloucester to Forster via Nabic and Failford	310 – Forster to Taree	
152 – Hawks Nest to Newcastle		311 – Taree to Cundletown via Taree North and Chatham (Loop)	
153 – Bulahdelah to Upper Myall (Loop)		312 – Cundletown to Taree	
154 – Bulahdelah to Taree (Loop)		314 – Taree to Old Bar (Loop)	
		315 – Taree to Manning Point (Loop)	
		318 – Elands to Wingham	
		319 – Wingham to Taree	
		320 – Harrington to Taree via Cooperook and Cundletown	
		321 – Lansdowne to Taree	

The NSW Government also provides a regional coach service that connects Taree to Newcastle, as part of the Countrylink network, on weekdays. The service travels via The Bucketts Way and stops at each town along the route. The routes are:

136 – Taree to Broadmeadow (once per day)

135 – Broadmeadow to Taree (once per day)

Persons with a disability living in rural and regional communities are not always able to access public transport services. Limited community transport options are available for a significant portion of the MidCoast community, in particular: persons that are frail, older and still living at home; living in isolated or remote areas; people with disabilities and their carers; or the financially disadvantaged.

Community transport services within the MidCoast include the Manning Valley and Area Community Transport Group Incorporated, which services the entire MidCoast LGA, Monday through to Friday for eligible residents.

7.8 Taxis and Ride Sharing

Only Forster-Tuncurry and Taree-Wingham are serviced by taxis in the MidCoast LGA. These taxi services are provided by a number of different companies and may extend to other urban areas on request, but at considerable cost, due to metered fees by the kilometre.

Taxis in other locations provide a critical service in urban areas given their capacity to transport people of all abilities in wheelchair taxis, and large groups in maxi-taxis.

The increase in the popularity for peer-to-peer ride-sharing services such as Uber, DiDi, Ola, GoCatch, Taxify and Scooti has not yet reached the MidCoast LGA. Uber was launched in Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour in 2019.

A NSW Transport initiative for “On Demand” public transport, seeks to improve the efficiency of regional public transport by increasing flexibility for services and to improve connections to transport hubs and popular destinations and services. The aim is to decrease the under-utilized standard bus runs and replace this with a combination of pre-booked services that pick residents up from their home and daily runs⁸⁹.

There are currently a number of “On demand” services operating throughout regional NSW as a trial including in the Moree, Tamworth and Dubbo areas. These trials are currently part funded by the NSW government in partnership with communities and existing private bus companies already operating in the subject areas.

7.9 Walking and cycling

Cycling infrastructure can help to encourage healthy and active communities. In rural areas there are a number of barriers to community uptake of cycling. In rural areas there are often few safe cycling routes and cyclists must share the road with vehicle traffic at speeds of more than 60 km/hr. A lack of cycling awareness among drivers can also make cyclists feel unsafe on the road. Poor integration with public transport can also be an issue in rural areas as distances between destinations can be further than in urban areas.

The NSW government is focused on improving cycling connections within urban centres in order to reduce congestion and free up capacity on public transport. However recreational cycling is also important to rural areas, particularly with the growth of cycle tourism in scenic rural areas. More than half of the international cycling tourists who visit Australia choose NSW as their riding destination⁹⁰. The MidCoast features outstanding natural assets and tourist drives that could capitalise on cycling tourism within NSW.

⁸⁹ <https://transportnsw.info/travel-info/ways-to-get-around/on-demand>

⁹⁰ NSW Government 2010

There is little publicly available data on bicycle networks in non-urban areas of the MidCoast however a one-year action outlined in the 2018-2021 Delivery Program & 2018-2019 Operational Plan is to 'review existing bike plans to develop a single MidCoast Council Bike Plan'⁹¹.

The updated bike strategy should consider cycle tourism bike routes in rural areas and potential bike routes to better connect rural villages to larger urban settlements. This consideration aligns with the MidCoast Destination Management Plans which states there is a need to increase cycling touring trails, both on and off road, within the region⁹². It is understood that a significant cycling project is underway in the MidCoast, the cycleway from the Pacific Highway to Old Bar and then to Wallabi Point⁹³.

Council is currently also in the process of preparing a Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan (PAMP) which will consider wider and specific priorities for pedestrian access management in the MidCoast. These strategic plans should consider and integrate with the NSW Coast Cycleway routes to ensure increased awareness and patronage by residents and visitors.

7.10 Horse Riding

There are a variety of different horse-riding disciplines including dressage, hacking, trail riding, cross country eventing, horse racing and show jumping. Horse-riding generally occurs on private property and nominated areas for horse riding including local show grounds, eventing courses and equestrian centres.

However, some horse riding, particularly trail riding, seeks out nature-based routes that can pass through selected National Parks and Reserves, State Forests, Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs), beaches and even along some roads.

Horse riders and horse drawn vehicles are legally entitled to share roads with other modes of transport. However, the unpredictability of horses and drivers that are not familiar with sharing roads with horse traffic can result in accidents.

In some roadside locations throughout Australia, appropriate signage is installed to enhance driver awareness of potential horse traffic. If particular roads form part of a popular trail ride, installing appropriate signage could be considered alongside other options such as adjacent horse trails.

There are two known companies within the MidCoast that offer trail riding experiences to the public, these are:

- Camp Cobark based in Cobark - accommodates up to 1,000 guests and offers horse riding and pony camps including multi-day trail rides exploring the Barrington Tops on horseback; and
- Horse About Tours, Tuncurry - offer daily bush and beach trail rides within the Great Lakes area of the MidCoast.

The MidCoast Destination Management Plan notes that growth in nature and adventure-based tourism activities including horse riding, should be encouraged to grow the visitor economy⁹⁴. However, like cycling, there is little publicly available information on the location and popularity of trail riding routes within the MidCoast. There is the opportunity to investigate, and better plan for nature-based trail rides within the MidCoast. This would

⁹¹ MidCoast Council 2018c

⁹² MidCoast Council 2017c

⁹³ NSW Roads and Maritime Services 2018e

⁹⁴ MidCoast Council 2017c

include investigating potential trail routes and their popularity, and what infrastructure may be needed to better support trail riding. Specific considerations include:

- National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) will allow horse riding in selected parks within the NPWS estate, subject to conditions. Appropriate locations are generally identified during the development of a Plan of Management or Statement of Management for a park.

Horse riding within the NPWS estate should be carefully managed in order to prevent any negative impacts on the natural and cultural environment within the park. To determine the best locations for horse riding within the NPWS estate it is necessary to consult with the NPWS and the Environment Division of the Department of Planning, Infrastructure & Environment. The Environment Division (formerly the NSW Office of Environment) has published a Code of Practice for Horse Riding in Parks to provide practical details to help manage the use of horses within the NPWS estate⁹⁵.

- State Forest roads provide a host of exploration opportunities for horse riding along forestry roads and fire trails. However, horse riding is not permitted in all State Forests.

Within the MidCoast LGA the Barrington Tops State Forest allows horse riding. Permits are required from the Forestry Corporation for commercial activities and organised events such as trail ride operations. To determine the best locations for horse riding trails within State Forests, it is necessary to consult with the Forestry Corporation.

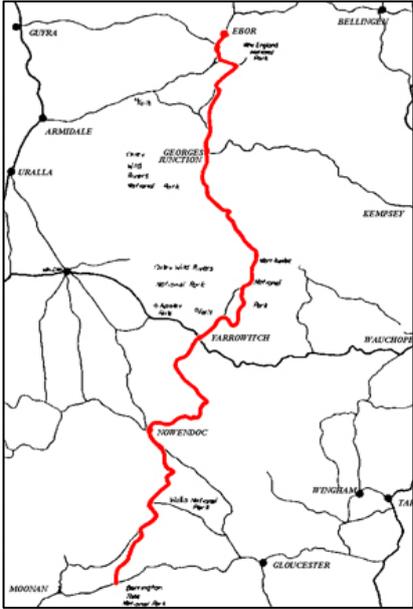
- Travelling Stock Reserves are parcels of Crown land reserved under the Crown Land Management Act 2016 for use by travelling stock⁹⁶. They also provide public open space for passive recreation such as bush walking and horse riding and can often pass through areas of high natural and rural amenity. There are many TSRs located within rural areas of the MidCoast with some more appropriate for trail riding than others⁹⁷. To determine the best locations for horse riding trails within TSRs it is necessary to consult with the Hunter Local Land Services.
- The Bicentennial National Trail is Australia's premier long distance, multi-use recreational trekking route, stretching 5,330 kilometres from Cooktown in tropical far north Queensland to Healesville in Victoria. Various known as 'the BNT', the National Trail or simply 'the Trail', the Bicentennial National Trail follows the foothills of the Great Dividing Range and the Eastern Escarpment offering self-reliant distance trekkers a uniquely Australian adventure. The Trail traverses the western edges of the MidCoast LGA through the Woko and Barrington Tops National Parks.

⁹⁵ NSW OEH 2014

⁹⁶ NSW LLS 2018a

⁹⁷ NSW LLS 2018b

Figure 21. Section 8 of the Bicentennial National Trail



Overview - Rugged and remote, the Trail here follows the rivers and gorges of the Demon Fault line, picks up the historic stock route through Nowendoc then climbs through the forests into Barrington Tops. Much of this section is State Forest or National Park and includes Oxley Wild Rivers, Werrikimbe, Woko (World Heritage listed) and Barrington Tops National Parks. At 1600 metres, the Barrington Tops is an area of breathtaking beauty with snowgums, snowgrass and snow in winter. Even in summer both extremes of weather can be experienced at the higher altitudes. There is unlimited scope for walking and horse riding in this region, but provisions are only available at the very small villages of Ebor and Nowendoc.

Rating - **Challenging**. This section should not be travelled alone.

8 Recommended Planning Framework

This section describes the recommended local planning framework, based on a corridor planning approach to establish a hierarchy of key transport corridors based on their comparative relevance (e.g. National, State, Regional or Local) to freight, commuter and visitor traffic, collectively. In addition to this, separate recommendations are also provided to categorising freight routes and tourist routes, based on their comparative relevance within the LGA.

Proposed key transport corridors are generally reflective of RMS road classifications described previously in this Report. The classifications prescribed are based on the consultant's review of information currently available and specific services and facilities within these corridors previously discussed in this report.

The key transport corridors proposed are not intended to be reflective of all corridors within the MidCoast. These have been identified as corridors anticipated to accommodate the highest order of traffic within the LGA, and where planning should be prioritised to establish suitable management arrangements.

8.1 Identifying and categorising 'key' transport corridors

The NSW Government generally supports a taking a corridor-based approach to long-term planning. This framework can provide a basis for decision-making, including the review of planning controls to support desired outcomes within each corridor.

As a first step for local strategic planning, Table 6 describes the recommended four-tiered category system that could apply to identify and describe, key transport corridors within the MidCoast as a basis for long-term planning.

The four category types generally relate to the comparative 'relevance' of a corridor within the National, State/Inter-regional, Regional and Local contexts. The proposed categories of existing transport corridors for long-term planning is then illustrated in

Figure 22.

Corridors generally describe a route taken between two key destinations and may contain one main road or sections of several individual roads.

The categories described are not intended to override or otherwise replace classifications prescribed by existing legislation. Instead, they are intended to provide a common terminology and reference point for long-term strategic planning by, for example, providing a basis for establishing goals based on desired future outcomes or character, and monitoring progress towards these goals.

Transport infrastructure must be zoned via Council's local environmental plan⁹⁸. Roads are permissible in all land use zonings and in practice, most local roads are zoned the same as adjoining land to prevent the need for spot rezoning due to road changes e.g. re-alignments or closures.

It is recommended that 'key transport corridors' are zoned SP2 Infrastructure to prevent incompatible development occurring adjacent within the road corridor⁹⁹.

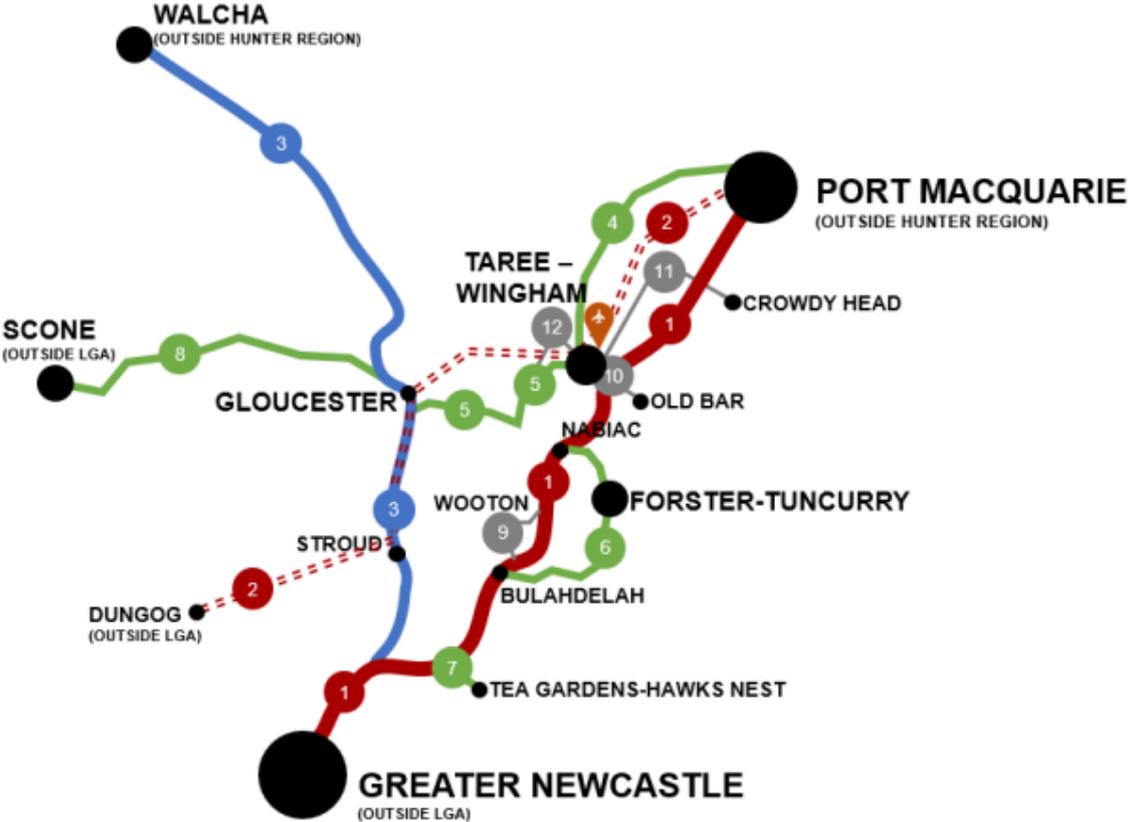
⁹⁸ NSW Department of Planning 2008

⁹⁹ *ibid*

Table 6. Recommended categories for key transport corridors

Category	Characteristics	Key Transport Corridors
National 	<p>Links capital cities interstate Usually bypasses cities and towns Primary freight route (heavy vehicles/trains) Primary interstate commuter route Connections to 'global gateways' and key industrial locations Sealed to a standard that caters for high traffic volumes and heavy vehicles (roads specific) Generally dual carriageway (roads specific)</p>	<p>Existing: Pacific Highway (1) Heavy Rail (2)</p> <p>Under investigation: High-speed rail (once identified) (not mapped)</p>
State and Inter-Regional 	<p>Inter-regional link Secondary freight route feeding the primary freight network Higher-level of commuter / visitor traffic</p>	<p>Existing: Pacific Highway to Walcha link (via The Bucketts Way/ Thunderbolts Way) (3)</p>
Regional 	<p>Strategic importance to regional and local economies Freight movement connecting with national and interregional roads High volume of tourist traffic, particularly in peak season High volume of commuter vehicle traffic Links urban settlements and key attractions with national or inter-regional road networks</p>	<p>Existing: Wingham to Port Macquarie (via Bulga Rd and Colling Rd) (4) Gloucester to Taree (The Bucketts Way) (5) The Lakes Way (6) Pacific Highway to Tea Gardens (Myall Way) (7) Gloucester to Scone (via Barrington Tops Forest Road) (8)</p>
Local 	<p>Predominantly local area movements including travel between urban and rural settlements Can link to major tourist destinations Heavy vehicle access may not be required</p>	<p>Existing: Wootton Way (9) Taree to Old Bar (Old Bar Rd) (10) Taree (Cundletown) to Crowdy Head via Landsdowne and Coopernook (11) Burrell Creek to Taree via Wingham (via Gloucester Rd, Manning River Drive, Commerce St and Wingham Rd) (12)</p>

Figure 22. Transport corridor categories for long-term planning



8.2 Identifying and planning for freight routes

Freight routes may exist across one or more key transport corridors within the overall network, or may exist outside the key transport corridors. Identifying these routes separately will assist with establishing suitable measures to prioritise road safety and efficiency based on the anticipated nature and scale of freight movements.

Table 7 sets out the recommended three-tiered category system that could apply to describe freight routes within the MidCoast as a basis for long-term planning. This recognises a primary and feeder network system, supported by more localised routes in more remote locations (e.g. forest roads) or serving single industries, as illustrated in

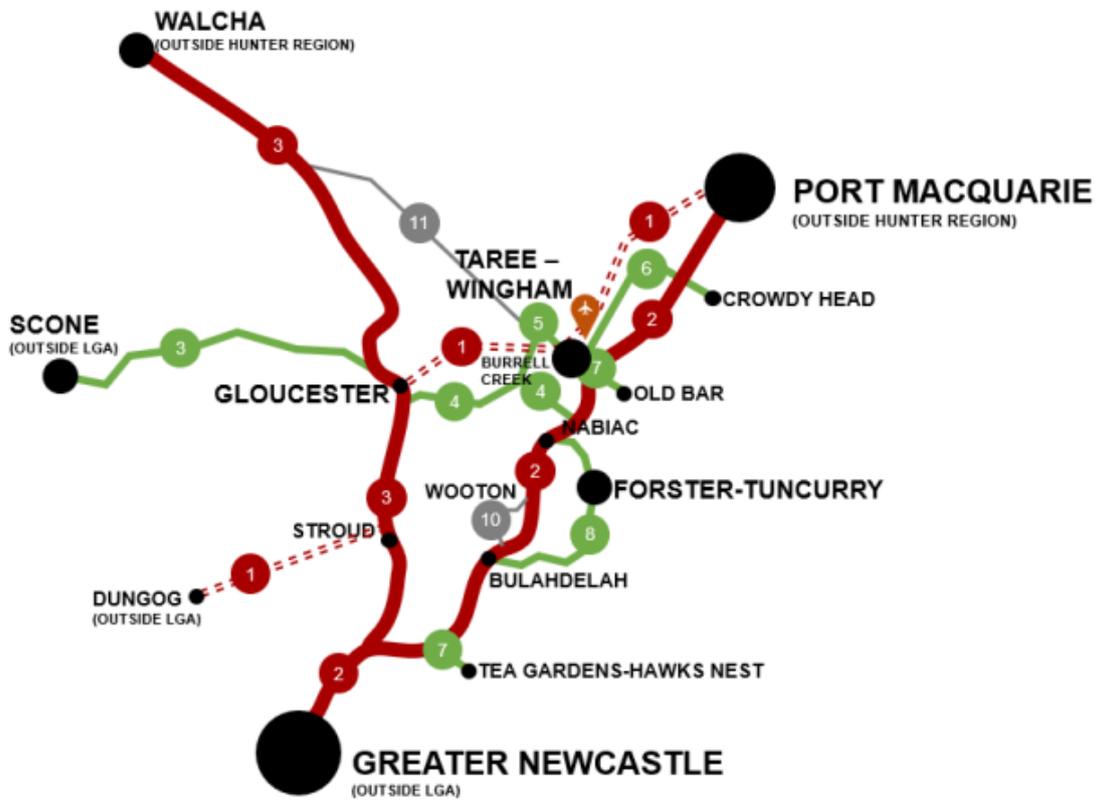
Figure 23.

Table 7. Recommended categories for key freight corridors

Category	Characteristics	Key Transport Corridors
Primary network 	Primary freight route for heavy vehicles/ trains to travel between major cities and regions Heavy inter-regional freight movement Primary freight route for localised industries Connects major sea and air ports and key industrial locations Road carriageways can generally accommodate the heaviest vehicle class (B-doubles) Roads are generally dual carriageway to allow safe vehicle passage Roadside services cater for heavy vehicles	Existing: Heavy Rail Corridor  Pacific Highway  Newcastle-Walcha  Under investigation: Inland rail (once identified) (not mapped)
Feeder network 	Provides a sealed road along all of route Feeds into the Category 1 primary freight network, or connecting between major urban and industrial areas Roads can accommodate heavy vehicles along all or part of the route, depending on industry needs Roads accommodates safe vehicle passage (e.g. passing lanes and suitable shoulder widths)	Gloucester to Scone (Barrington Tops Forest Road)  Gloucester to Pacific Highway (The Bucketts Way)  Burrell Creek to Taree via Wingham (via Gloucester Rd, Manning River Drive, Commerce St and Wingham Rd)  Taree (Cundletown) to Crowdy Head via Landsdowne and Coopernook  Taree South to Old Bar (via Old Bar Rd)  The Lakes Way  Pacific Highway to Tea Gardens (Myall Way) 

<p>Local network</p> <p>10</p>	<p>Strategically important to a single industry or industry location (e.g. forest roads serving the timber industry)</p> <p>Attracting a lower-level or highly variable volume of traffic</p> <p>Routes may be fully or partially unsealed</p> <p>Heavy vehicle access may not be required</p>	<p>Existing:</p> <p>Wootton Way (10)</p> <p>Killawarra to Nowendoc (Nowendoc Road) (11)</p> <p>Investigate:</p> <p>Forest Roads (e.g. Lansdowne Forest, Johns River and Knodingbul Rd) (not mapped)</p>
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Figure 23. Freight corridor categories for long-term planning



8.3 Identifying and planning for tourist routes

Similarly, tourist routes may exist across one or more key transport corridors within the overall network or may exist outside the key transport corridors. Identifying these routes separately will assist with establishing suitable measures to provide a safe and pleasant experience for visitors.

Table 8 sets out the recommended two-tier category system that could apply to describe tourist routes within the MidCoast as a basis for long-term planning.

Table 8. Tourist route categories for long-term planning

Category	Characteristics	Key Transport Corridors
Major touring route	<p>State-recognised numbered tourist route</p> <p>Extends beyond LGA, or otherwise caters for highest volume of visitor traffic within LGA, providing access to major attractions or destination districts (e.g. clusters of attractions)</p> <p>Offers a safe and pleasant experience for visitors, including a high level of scenic and visual amenity supported by appropriate infrastructure (e.g. public amenities, lookouts, etc.)</p> <p>Coordinated provision of wayfinding and visitor information services, with signs provided from Category 1 and Category 2 key transport corridors</p> <p>Provides a sealed road along entire route</p> <p>Roads accommodate safe vehicle passage (e.g. passing lanes and suitable shoulder widths)</p>	<p>Existing:</p> <p>Tourist Drive 6: The Lakes Way</p> <p>Tourist Drive 2: The Bucketts Way</p> <p>Tourist Drive 8: Manning Valley to Port Macquarie</p> <p>Investigate:</p> <p>Wootton Way</p>
Local touring route	<p>Caters for more moderate-level volumes of visitor traffic than Category 1.</p> <p>Typically contained entirely within the LGA, but may extend to adjoining LGAs</p> <p>Provide access to important tourist landmarks or scenic drives</p> <p>May offers roadside amenities, experience or trading opportunities (e.g. lookouts, and roadside stalls)</p> <p>Coordinated provision of localised wayfinding and visitor information services</p> <p>Provides a sealed road along majority of route</p>	<p>Bucketts Mountains Loop (Barrington West Road/ Faulkland Road/ Stanton Lane/ Bucketts Road)</p> <p>Barrington Tops Scenic Drive (via Barrington Tops Forest Road)</p> <p>Crowdy Bay / Diamond Head Loop (Harrington Road/ Crowdy head Road/ Diamond Head Road)</p> <p>Manning Point Scenic Drive (Manning Point Rd/ Old Bar Rd)</p> <p>Three Brothers Region Loop (Forest Road/ Hannam Vale Road/ Stewarts River Road)</p> <p>Gloucester Tops Road</p>

<p>Alternative transport touring routes</p>	<p>Integration of the NSW Coastal Cycleway into Council's strategic planning for infrastructure and tourism game-changer projects Identification of alternative walking, cycling and horse-riding connections through the MidCoast LGA to increase awareness and patronage of alternative touring routes</p>	<p>Great Lakes route of NSW Coastal Cycleway Great Lakes Walks and Trails Horse-riding tours of stock routes Heritage trails and walking tours of historic train routes Walking tours exploring Aboriginal cultural heritage</p>
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