



# **Muswellbrook Bypass – New England Highway**

Community Consultation Report

September 2021

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1. Background

Transport for NSW (Transport) has identified a preferred option for the New England Highway bypass of Muswellbrook (the bypass).

A preferred route corridor for the bypass was published in July 2018. This also included potential bypass connections. In 2019, the NSW Government announced full funding to complete planning and construction of the bypass.

Transport carried out further investigations to refine the preferred alignment of the bypass and identify connection options. Developing the preferred option included:

- site investigations to identify geotechnical and environmental constraints to minimise potential impacts
- consultation and investigations to better understand any potential heritage impacts
- producing design options for the alignment and connections to the existing New England Highway.

Selection of the preferred option took into account technical, social, environmental and economic factors.

The preferred option was deemed to provide the best value for money offering improved travel time savings, enhanced safety outcomes, and increased amenity for the township of Muswellbrook.

The preferred option was displayed for community comment from 23 November to 18 December 2020.

## 1.2. The proposal

The preferred option included:

- about nine kilometres of new highway (the bypass) with a single lane in each direction and a wide centreline treatment
- full southern and northern connections with the existing New England Highway which provide for all traffic movements
- a refined alignment south of Coal Road, with the bypass shifted further to the east to reduce environmental impacts and improve the road alignment
- property access and local road adjustments including at Burtons Lane, Koolbury Flats Row, Milpera Drive and Muscle Creek Road.

## 2 Consultation approach

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### 2.1 Previous Consultation

Consultation with community and stakeholders on proposed routes for a potential bypass has been carried out since the Australian Government first announced a preferred option for a Muswellbrook bypass in 2005. Feedback has been considered as route options have been further developed and refined.

In 2016, community consultation was carried out on a draft corridor strategy for the New England Highway, including the Muswellbrook bypass.

A preferred route options report was published in 2018. This report identified a preferred route corridor and included potential bypass connections.

### 2.2 Consultation objectives

Transport consulted with the community and key stakeholders on the bypass to:

- inform the community and stakeholders of the proposal
- seek feedback on the proposal and issues of concern for consideration in further developing the bypass and connection designs
- build a database of interested and concerned community members with whom Transport can continue to engage with during development of the bypass.

### 2.3 Values

Our values underpin our decisions and behaviours when working with customers, colleagues, stakeholders and partners.

- **Customer focus** - Transport place the customer at the centre of everything Transport do
- **Collaboration** - Transport value each other and create better outcomes by working together
- **Solutions** - Transport deliver sustainable and innovative solutions to NSW's transport needs
- **Integrity** - Transport take responsibility and communicate openly
- **Safety** - Transport prioritise safety for our people and our customers.

### 2.4 How consultation was carried out

Transport consulted with the community from 23 November to 18 December 2020 on the preferred route for the bypass and connection options. Transport encouraged the community to provide their feedback via mail, email or by phone contact with the proposal team.

The proposal team also consulted directly with key stakeholders to seek feedback on the proposed design of the bypass, including:

- meetings with landowners and local businesses
- consultation with government agencies, including directly consulting with Muswellbrook Shire Council and local Members of Parliament
- meetings with Muswellbrook Coal Company, Ausgrid and Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC).

Our key consultation tools are listed below.

**Table 1 – Consultation Tools**

Consultation Tool	Description
Project update	Delivered via mail to residents, businesses and stakeholders in the Muswellbrook area with 7000 updates distributed. A copy of the project update is provided in Appendix A.
Direct mail	Delivered to properties where road access to the property was proposed to be modified.
Webpage	Webpage updated with latest proposal information.
Media release and launch event	Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, the Hon. Paul Toole, Transport for NSW Regional Director, Anna Zycki, and the Member for the Upper Hunter launched the preferred option at an event in Simpson Park, Muswellbrook on 23 November 2020.

## 3 Consultation summary

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### 3.1 Overview

A preferred option for the bypass was displayed for community and stakeholder feedback between 23 November and 18 December 2020 and 22 submissions were received in response to the display. Some submissions included multiple comments and raised multiple issues.

The submissions received included the following key issues:

- support for the proposal.
- suggestion for a bypass connection at Coal Road to link to the Muswellbrook town centre and to provide emergency services access.
- suggestion for the bypass to be dual carriageway with two lanes in each direction.
- suggestion for bypass to include overtaking/ passing lanes.
- concern that the project impacts on the safety of accesses between the New England Highway and local roads, including Milpera Drive, Burtons Lane and Koolbury Flats Row.

After considering all submissions, along with the proposal objectives, design requirements, and site constraints, Transport have carried out additional investigations and considered design changes to address community feedback. Any changes made will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal which will be displayed in late 2021.

### 3.2 Summary of submissions

Table 2 below provides a summary of all issues raised in the submissions received and Transport's responses.

**Table 2 – Response Summary Table**

Issue category	Number of submissions	Issue raised	Our response
Support	Seven	Support for the proposal.	Seven submissions were received outlining their overall support for the proposal.
Lane arrangement	Four	Suggestion for the bypass to be dual carriageway with two lanes in each direction.	<p>Transport have carried out detailed traffic investigations and modelling to understand likely future traffic volumes on the existing highway and proposed bypass. The modelling indicates traffic volumes on the bypass would not reach levels where a dual carriageway would be justified. The predicted maximum peak hourly traffic flow in 2044 is only about 20 per cent of the total capacity for the proposed single lane carriageway. This demonstrates a single lane in each direction can meet the forecast demand long term.</p> <p>This issue will be addressed in the environmental impact assessment to be displayed in late 2021.</p>
	Four	Suggestion for bypass to include overtaking/ passing lanes.	<p>Transport assessed the need for inclusion of overtaking or passing lanes as part of the development process.</p> <p>The traffic volume on the bypass at the year of opening is approximately 5000 vehicles per day which is considered to be a low traffic volume. Transport have reviewed the grades on the bypass and completed an analysis of associated truck speeds. Based on Australian Road Design Guidelines (Austroads) the bypass does not meet the requirements for providing climbing lanes.</p> <p>Existing overtaking opportunities (single broken line) are available immediately north and south of the bypass. In addition, within about two kilometres north and three kilometres south of the bypass there are northbound and southbound overtaking lanes.</p>

Coal Road connection	Nine	Suggestion for a bypass connection at Coal Road to link to Muswellbrook town centre and to provide emergency services access.	<p>Following feedback on the preferred option display, the NSW Government committed to include a connection to Coal Road in the concept design.</p> <p>Transport have updated the design to include a full connection at Coal Road that allows for all traffic movements to be made. These updates will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.</p>
Northern connection	Two	Concern that the project impacts on the safety of access between the New England Highway and Burtons Lane.	<p>Following feedback on the preferred option display, the proposal has been amended so that Burtons Lane connects to the proposed roundabout at the northern connection. This arrangement provides safer access to and from Burtons Lane.</p> <p>This update will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.</p>
	One	Concern that the project impacts on the safety of access between the New England Highway and Koolbury Flats Row.	<p>Transport have moved the connection of Koolbury Flats Row with the New England Highway further north. Moving the intersection further north provides greater separation from the merge on the New England Highway providing increased safety for both New England Highway motorists and those entering Koolbury Flats Row. Transport have updated the design to include a dedicated left turn deceleration lane for traffic entering Koolbury Flats Row.</p> <p>This update will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.</p>

	One	Concern regarding property acquisition impacting an agricultural business.	<p>The need for some property acquisition has been identified as part of the proposal. Efforts have been taken in the development of the design to reduce the extent of property acquisition required.</p> <p>The environmental assessment will consider impacts on the local community and businesses, as well as address potential mitigation measures primarily through a socio-economic assessment. This will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.</p>
	One	Concern regarding amenity (noise and dust) impacts on residential areas due to closeness of the northern connection (during operation and construction).	<p>Environmental studies, including noise and vibration and air quality impact assessments, will be completed as part of the environmental assessment. The studies will also address potential mitigation measures.</p>
	One	Suggestion to amend bypass route to use land on eastern side of the New England Highway.	<p>The proposed design alignment at the northern connection is constrained by existing infrastructure such as the Main North railway line, the New England Highway, property accesses, flooding impacts and road design requirements. Due to these constraints, the alignment for the bypass impacts land on both the eastern and western sides of the existing New England Highway.</p> <p>This proposed design alignment at the northern connection is consistent with the 2005 preferred option alignment for a bypass of Muswellbrook which was included in the Muswellbrook Local Environment Plan 2009 (Muswellbrook LEP).</p>

	Two	Suggestion for an additional bypass connection at Sandy Creek Road.	The proposal development included consideration of exit and entry ramps at Sandy Creek Road. All traffic movements are proposed to be provided at the northern connection, which provides greater benefit to the overall road network than exit and entry ramps at Sandy Creek Road. A connection at Sandy Creek Road was assessed as providing minimal benefit to the overall road network and has not been included in the design.
Southern connection	Five	Concern that the project impacts on the safety of access between the New England Highway and Milpera Drive.	The proposed connection of Milpera Drive with the New England Highway is to the south of the existing connection to provide a safer intersection arrangement. Right and left turning lanes have been provided to assist vehicle turning movements and improve the safety of access between the New England Highway and Milpera Drive.  This will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.
	One	Supports the proposed southern connection location near Muscle Creek Road.	Transport acknowledges this support for the proposed southern connection.
Environment	One	Concern regarding water flow runoff impacts to Muscle Creek.	The environmental assessment will include a Surface and Groundwater Assessment taking into consideration potential impacts on Muscle Creek, as well as address potential mitigation measures.  This will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.

Design features	One	<p>Suggestion for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a 3.0 m shoulder</li> <li>• acceleration lanes at the northern and southern connections</li> <li>• application of safety in design principles</li> </ul>	<p>The proposed design has been developed with 2.5 metre shoulders and a one metre centre line. Together these features will provide space to comfortably pass other vehicles stopped on the shoulder. The shoulder width is consistent with the design of nearby Scone and Singleton bypasses.</p> <p>Transport have carried out detailed traffic investigations and modelling to understand likely future traffic volumes at the connections. The investigations indicate very low traffic volumes for both the northbound left turn onto the bypass at the southern connection and the southbound left turn movements onto the bypass at the northern connection. Acceleration lanes were not deemed to be justified at these locations, given the low traffic volumes and significant increase in scope and cost required to provide.</p> <p>The proposed design has been developed with application of safety in design principles, and in accordance with relevant design standards and guidelines.</p>
	One	<p>Suggestions to cater for Over Sized Over Mass vehicles on the bypass.</p>	<p>The proposal caters for Oversize Over-Mass (OSOM) vehicles on the bypass.</p> <p>A one metre wide line marked centreline has been provided for the full length of the proposal to provide greater separation of opposing traffic reducing the likelihood of a head-on crash, without restricting OSOM vehicles. Further information will be provided as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.</p>
Other	One	<p>Suggestion to accelerate the proposal timeline.</p>	<p>Transport is finalising the concept design and environmental assessment for the proposal which will be displayed for feedback in late 2021. Transport will then carry out the final stage of design, incorporating feedback, with construction planned to start in late 2022.</p>
	One	<p>Suggestion to seek Federal government funding for the proposal.</p>	<p>The NSW Government has committed to fully fund the Muswellbrook bypass. Federal funding is not required for the proposal to progress.</p>

	Two	Requests for information on employment opportunities.	The proposal is likely to facilitate economic opportunities and growth for the local area. This may include opportunities for employment to work on the project following approval and appointment of a contractor to carry out the work. Further information will be provided as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal to be displayed in late 2021.
	One	Request for additional information on the proposal.	Transport has provided the information requested.
	Two	Request for ongoing consultation with Muswellbrook Shire Council.	Transport will continue to consult Muswellbrook Shire Council during the development of the proposal.
	One	Request for the reclassification of local roads and consideration of the impact of Oversize Over-mass vehicles on local roads	Consideration of local road reclassifications including OSOM movements will be carried out by Transport in consultation with Muswellbrook Shire Council.
Out of scope items	One	Suggestion for upgrade of Sandy Creek Bridge.	While this is out of scope for the proposal, the issue has been raised with the appropriate Transport department for investigation.
	One	Suggestion to remove the Sandy Creek Road level crossing.	While this is out of scope for the proposal, the issue has been raised with the appropriate Transport department for investigation.

### **3.3 Recommendations**

After considering all submissions, along with the proposal objectives, design requirements, and site constraints, the following design features will be incorporated into the proposal to address community feedback:

- a connection at Coal Road that allows for all traffic movements to be made, to improve access to and from the bypass for residents, businesses and emergency services
- connection of Burtons Lane with the New England Highway has been amended to join to the proposed roundabout at the northern connection providing improved safety
- connection of Koolbury Flats Row with the New England Highway has been moved further north providing improved safety
- connection of Milpera Drive with the New England Highway is to the south of the existing connection to provide a safer intersection arrangement. Right and left turning lanes have been provided to assist vehicle turning movements and improve the safety of access.

The above features will be included as part of the design and environmental assessment for the proposal which will be displayed in late 2021.

### **3.4 Next steps**

The environmental assessment will include more detailed information about the design features, potential benefits and impacts, and will be displayed for community feedback in late 2021.

Transport will continue to keep stakeholders and the community updated as the proposal progresses.

## **Appendix A – November 2020 Project Update**

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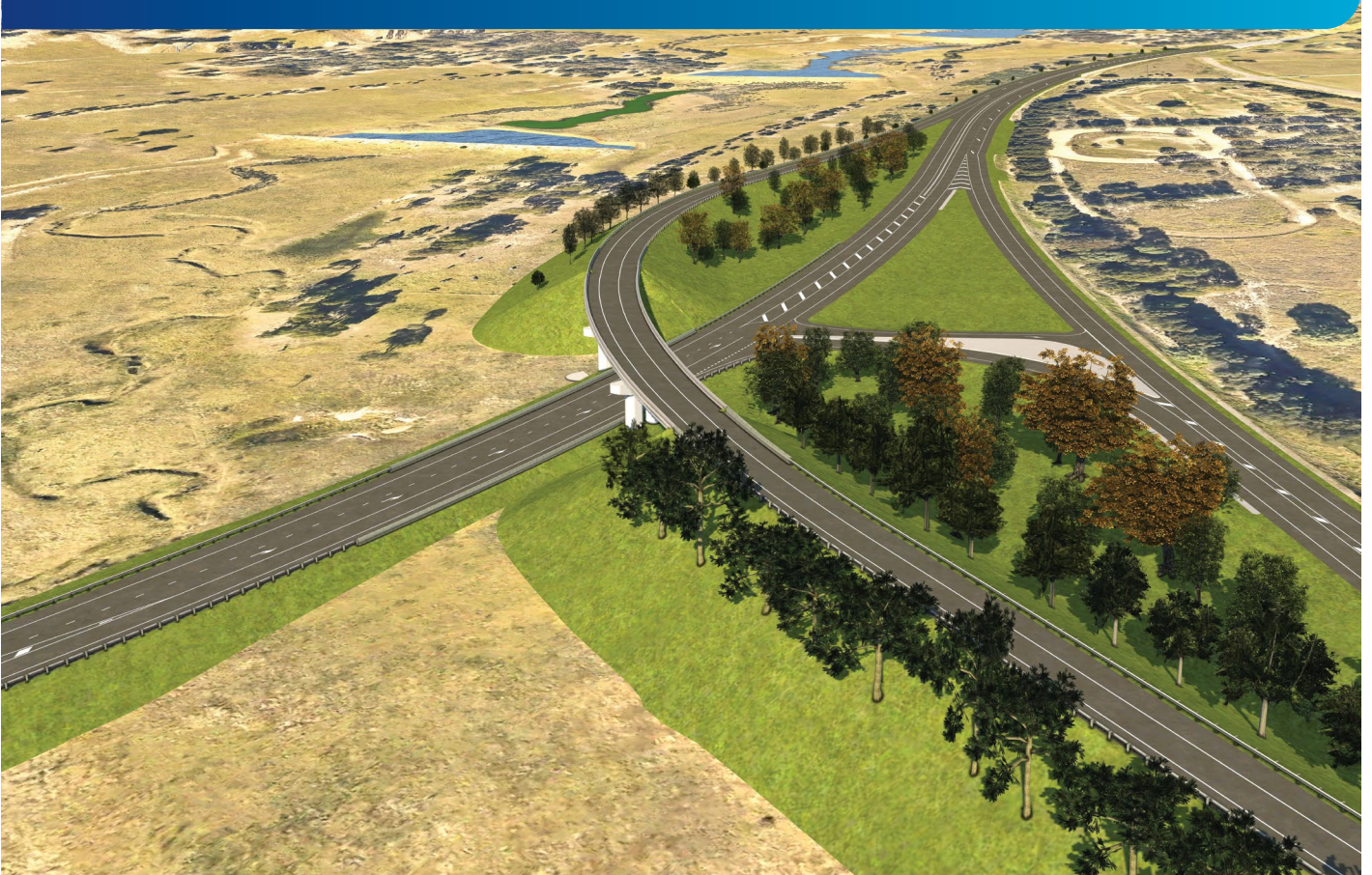


Transport for NSW

# New England Highway – Muswellbrook bypass

Project update – Preferred Option

November 2020



Artist impression of the proposed Muswellbrook Bypass southern connection, looking south

## Have your say on the latest design of the Muswellbrook bypass

The NSW Government is delivering a New England Highway bypass of Muswellbrook.

The bypass would improve travel times, freight efficiency and safety for all road users.

Transport for NSW has identified a preferred option for the bypass. The proposed design includes a refined alignment and connections to the existing New England Highway.

### Project background

The New England Highway is part of the inland Sydney to Brisbane National Land Transport Network and the primary route connecting the Upper Hunter with Maitland and Newcastle.

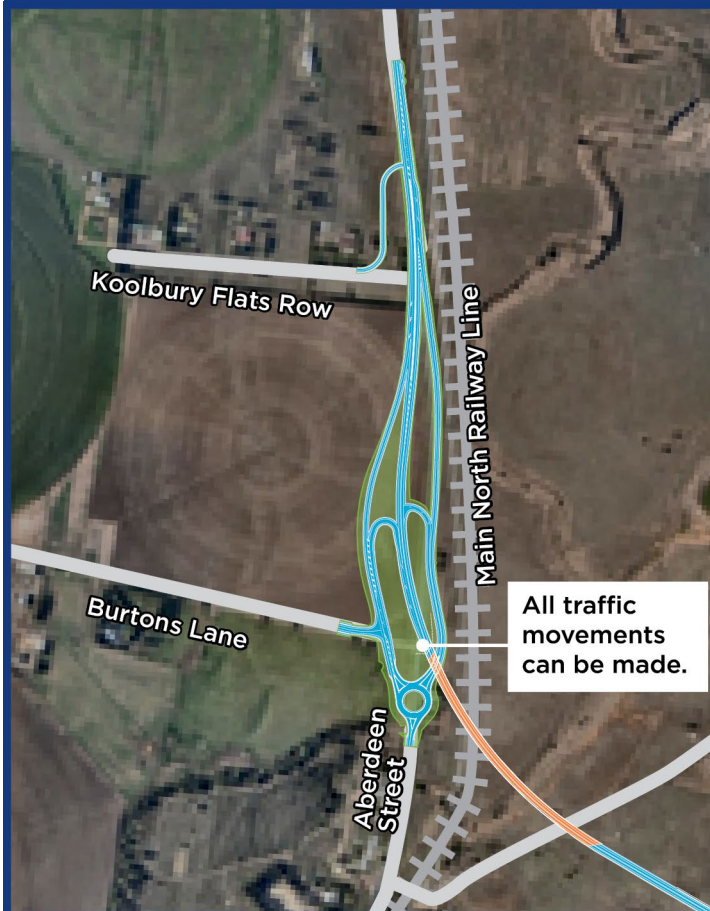
The highway currently passes through the centre of Muswellbrook. It is a two lane road, restricted by numerous intersections and nearby buildings with minimal setback from the road.

The highway carries between 11,000 and 20,000 vehicles through the township each day, about 13 per cent being heavy vehicles.

New England Highway – Muswellbrook bypass preferred option



## Northern connection



## Southern connection



## Preferred option development

The preferred route corridor for the bypass was published in July 2018. This also included potential bypass connections.

Transport for NSW has since carried out further investigations to refine the preferred alignment of the bypass and identify connections to the New England Highway.

Developing the preferred option included:

- site investigations to identify geotechnical and environmental constraints to minimise potential impacts
- consultation and investigations to better understand any potential heritage impacts
- producing design options for the alignment and connections to the existing New England Highway.

Selection of the preferred option took into account technical, social, environmental and economic factors.

## The preferred option includes:

- about 9.1 kilometres of new highway with a single lane in each direction
- a refined alignment south of Coal Road, with the bypass shifted further to the east to reduce environmental impacts and improve the road alignment
- full southern and northern connections with the existing New England Highway which provide for all traffic movements.

### Key benefits

The proposed bypass would:

- improve network efficiency on the New England Highway, particularly travel times for long haul freight movements
- improve safety for all road users in the town centre, particularly relating to heavy and light vehicle interactions
- improve amenity of Muswellbrook township.

## Additional bypass connection options

As part of the development of the preferred option, additional bypass connection options were considered.

### Sandy Creek Road

- The northern connection included consideration of exit and entry ramps at Sandy Creek Road.
- All traffic movements are proposed to be provided at the northern connection, which provides greater benefit to the overall road network than exit and entry ramps.
- It is not proposed to provide a connection at Sandy Creek Road, as this was assessed as providing minimal benefit to the overall road network.

### Coal Road

- Consideration was given to a connection at Coal Road.
- A Coal Road connection would result in traffic, including heavy vehicles, accessing Muswellbrook via local residential streets.
- The connection would result in potential noise, air quality and road safety impacts through local residential streets, and to sensitive noise receivers such as the hospital.
- It was identified that additional upgrade work would be required along Coal Road and adjoining residential streets of Muswellbrook to cater for additional traffic, which would be the responsibility of Council.
- A Coal Road connection would increase the project footprint, environmental impacts and cost.
- It is not proposed to provide a connection at Coal Road, as this was assessed as providing low value for money, with additional residential and environmental impacts, and would not be able to access the adjacent coal mining operation.
- While the preferred option does not include a connection at Coal Road, the project is being designed so a connection could be built at this location in the future if needed.



**Save travel time**



**Keep trucks off local streets**



**Improve safety on the existing highway**

## Have your say

Transport for NSW is inviting feedback from the community about the Muswellbrook bypass preferred option.

There are a number of ways you can get involved, including visiting the project website or by calling or emailing the project team.

Feedback closes on **Friday 18 December 2020 at 5pm.**

### Contact us

For more information on the Muswellbrook bypass or to join our mailing list (email or post), please contact our project team:



1800 517 222



Muswellbrook.Bypass@aecom.com



nswroads.work/muswellbrook



Muswellbrook bypass project team  
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Newcastle NSW 2300

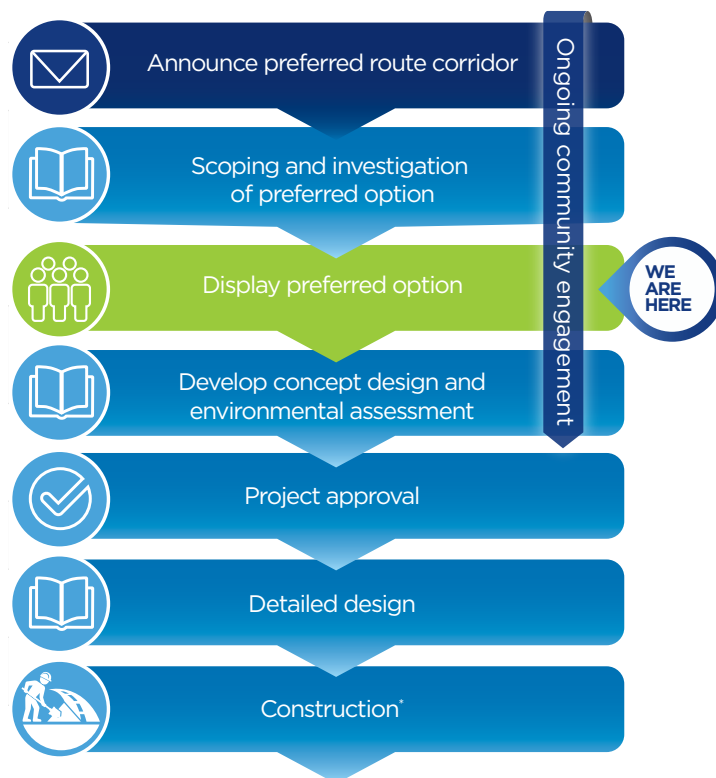


If you need help understanding this information, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask them to call us on 1800 517 222.

## Next steps

Feedback received on the preferred option will be considered to further refine and prepare the concept design and environmental assessment for the bypass.

The environmental assessment will include more detailed information about the design features, potential benefits and impacts, and will be displayed for community feedback in 2021.



\* Timing for construction of the bypass has not been confirmed and is subject to project approval.



[nswroads.work/muswellbrook](https://nswroads.work/muswellbrook)



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