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OBJECTIVE

The Great North Road Conservation Management Plan gives an overview of its physical condition, discusses issues of the management of this hugely important cultural asset and provides advice to guide all stakeholders in its future management.

POLICY

The Great North Road - Conservation Management Plan

Background

The Great North Road Conservation Management Plan has been prepared by consultants Siobhan Lavelle, Dr Grace Karskens and RTA Technology funded by both a 1997-98 grant from the NSW Heritage Office and assistance from the RTA.

The Road

The 240 km Great North Road between Sydney and the Hunter Valley meets all international conservation criteria to be listed as an item of National significance; historic, aesthetic, scientific and social.

Being the first made-road north of the Hawkesbury, the Great North Road was built by convict gangs between 1826 and 1836. It has association with historical figures such as Governor Darling and Surveyor General Sir Thomas Mitchell. It is tangible evidence of the development of the colony at Sydney and of British colonial and penal policies which had convict gangs working on major public works during the first 50 years of Australian settlement by Europeans. It is a major material record of convict labour and of road technology as well as giving access to tracts of relatively unspoilt country and settings still evocative of the environment of frontier life in the 1830's.

The Management Plan

The Great North Road Conservation Management Plan gives an overview of its physical condition, discusses issues of the management of this hugely important cultural asset, and, provides advice to guide all stakeholders in its future management. The plan however does not, and could not, provide a detailed assessment of every site and item within the corridor of the Great North Road.

Key Recommendations of the Plan

As well as the practical aspects of conserving the Great North Road as summarised below, the Plan provides advice on appropriate management structures for implementing the conservation strategy.

Management Co-ordination and Responsibility

A more holistic or comprehensive planning and management approach is required. This should be facilitated through all relevant management agencies. Whilst the Great North Road and parts of it have been recognised as significant, this is the first plan to consider the overall context for managing the entire length of the Road.

A central agency, an individual or group is therefore recommended to implement the Conservation Management Plan, co-ordinate works and monitor the condition and use of the Great North Road.

A single statutory planning instrument focusing on key issues and values of the Great North Road is highly desirable as well as the incorporation of all significant Road sections, Precincts and Items in local planning instruments.

The consultant examined a number of management models for similar linear, large scale environmental assets:-

- Catchment Management Trusts
- Crown Land Reserve Trust (Specific Purpose)
- Advisory Committee
- Regional Environmental Plan

Method

All existing relevant material was assembled. Information gaps were identified. Associated tracks and roads were considered including Finch's Line, Mr Sharp's Track, the Simpson Track and related sites eg. Wiseman's/ Warner's Well, convict stockades and buildings at 10 Mile Hollow and Frog Hollow.

On the basis of these initial investigations, the Great North Road was divided into a series of 8 Inventory Sections. This was done to reflect the changes of character over the length of such a long heritage item. Sections were then subdivided into 39 Precincts. Each precinct may include specific inventory items which are notable and significant features along the Great North Road corridor.

The Inventory

The 8 Sections are:

Baulkham Hills to Wiseman's Ferry
Branch between Abbotsford and Dural (the 'New Line').
Wiseman's Ferry to Mount Manning Junction
Mount Manning Junction to Wollombi)SECTIONS WITHIN
Wollombi to Maitland) CESSNOCK
Wollombi to Broke) LGA
Broke to Patrick's Plains
Broke to Warkworth

Sections 4, 5 and 6 within Cessnock City are discussed in turn below under headings of Description, Responsibility, Significance, History, Precincts and Specific Items, Threats to the Heritage and Conservation Action Recommended by the Plan.

Mount Manning Junction to Wollombi- Section 4

The Great North Road in this section is variously known as St Albans Road, Wollombi Road and George Downes Drive.

Description

Commencing at the junction of the Great North Road with St Alban's Road (MR 181), the road surface is unsealed for 5 km but is sealed for 30 km from its intersection with George Downes Drive. This 30 km section has several individually valuable and unique structures (precincts are listed below) and it passes and links surviving historic and archaeological sites and other landscape elements including early depots, rural homesteads and land grants, and the historic village of Wollombi itself. Several items have been isolated by road realignments in recent years and this has assisted with their potential longer term preservation. Repairs to some structures have been effected by local community groups.

The Convict Trail Project has also placed interpretative material (signs, plaques) at several locations.

Responsibility

The road is owned by Cessnock and Hawkesbury Councils and managed by those Councils and the RTA.

Significance

Section 4 has a wide variety of features providing tangible evidence of convict road engineering and construction. It also contains several individually significant structures including uniquely constructed culverts and flumes as well as cuttings, side drains and pavements. Parts of the road are still in use. Its interpretive value is high.

History

Construction of much of this section north of Mount Manning was supervised by Heneage Finch; assistant surveyor responsible for the selecting the original line for the road in 1825. In 1830 Finch replaced Lt Percy Simpson as supervisor of the road north of Mount Manning to the Hunter Valley.

After a dispute, Finch was summarily dismissed in 1831 and succeeded by L V Dulhunty (1831-1834) and Peter Ogilvie (1835-1836). Finch had aimed to complete the section north of Mount Manning equal in quality to that between Wiseman's Ferry and Mount Manning. Similar construction was used; cut and fill, extensive blasting and quarrying combined with massive embankments and retaining walls and including culverts and bridges over numerous small creeks between Mount Manning and Wollombi.

Precincts and Specific Items

Precincts	No.	Major Items
Mt Manning	4.1.0	Quarry site and ramp on St Alban's Road
Bucketty/ Mount McQuoid	4.2.0	Abandoned section at Bucketty (stone culverts & bridge)

Ramsays Leap	4.3.0	Retaining wall and Flume, Ramsay's Leap/ Mt Simpson
Stone Causeway	4.4.0	Stone Causeway
Fernance's Crossing	4.5.0	Stone Culvert
Murrays Run	4.6.0	Stone arched culvert and Retaining Wall
Thompson's Bridge	4.7.0	Stone Bridge (still in use)
Finch's Depot/ Laguna House	4.8.0	House, Former Outbuildings, Archaeological Sites
Laguna	4.9.0	Abandoned Formation at Laguna Shop
Milson's Arm Road	4.10.	Abandoned Loop(s)
	0	

Threats to the Heritage

Unsympathetic road upgrading. Inappropriate maintenance practices, eg damage to road cuttings at Mt Manning. Further development. Curtilage (definition) is an issue at some precincts, in particular Laguna House.

Conservation Action Recommended by the Plan

Much of this section remains in use as a trafficable main road. Localised upgrading, reconstruction and realignment may pose a threat to some of the older structures still in use. Project Engineers, Council Staff and Contractors need to be fully briefed concerning the significance of the road in order that this becomes the main influence on future works decisions.

Wollombi to Maitland - Section 5

Description

The Great North Road splits at Wollombi's main intersection with Section 5 branching to Maitland and the other (see Section 6 below) to Broke. The road is two sealed lanes from Wollombi to Cessnock.

There are several creek crossings and bridges between Wollombi and Cessnock but field inspection did not show any early features remaining. Some areas of side-cutting through sandstone ridges appear to have been affected by later upgrades and widening works (c 1940s/50s style cuttings now evident).

3.5 km north of Cessnock the earlier Old Maitland Road (west branch), partly unsealed, retains an important precinct of culverts, cuttings and a bridge at Sawyers Gully. Further north near Bishops Bridge the road is again named Wollombi Road. 13.5 km from Cessnock the road intersects with the road named Old Northern Road, an 1820s alternate track/route from Allandale, now lacking early features.

The Wollombi Road (Great North Road) continues, joining the New England Highway (Mitchells Hunter Valley Road) 2 km west of Maitland.

Responsibility

Cessnock City Council is owner and manager of this section.

Significance

Section 5 of the Great North Road remains in use as current main rural road. Due to an overall lack of development this section presents the contemporary road-line in a setting approximating that envisaged at the time of its construction. It also retains a precinct with early construction features.

History

The Great North Road was to provide a link to the entire Hunter Valley and so it was planned by Mitchell with three major branches at Wollombi, at Broke and at Maitland (to Newcastle).

After initial survey in 1825, gangs were sent to Newcastle in 1827 and by July were around Maitland and Ironbark Creek. By early 1829 the Maitland to Wollombi branch was *opened, burned-off and cleared to within 18 miles of young* (Richard) *Wiseman's*, and later that year gangs were working on the ridge points.

The line appears to have been complete by 1831. Beyond Cessnock a newer diversion proceeds via Neath, Weston and Kurri Kurri to Maitland.

Precincts and Specific Items

Precincts	No.	Major Items
Sawyers Gully	5.1.0	Stone culverts, abandoned bridge and side cutting (2 km unsealed road section)

Threats to the Heritage

Unsympathetic upgrading. Inappropriate maintenance practices. Surviving structures have only been preserved as they have been largely superseded by later road deviations and have not required upgrading.

Conservation Action Recommended by the Plan

Most of this section remains in use as trafficable main rural roads. Project Engineers, Council staff and Contractors need to be fully briefed concerning the significance of the road in order that this becomes the main influence on future works decisions.

Additional interpretation is desirable to communicate the historic links and importance of this road Section.

Wollombi to Broke - Section 6

Description

The Great North Road splits at Wollombi with Section 6 proceeding to Broke; a length of 30 km. The road is sealed for 2 km then an unsealed section featuring some side cutting with scattered jumper marks and pick marks. Some masonry walling is also reported to be present on *The Grange* property nearby. Previous surveys in the 1980s reported upon several 1860s structures. On the later road realignment to the west side of Wollombi Brook, however, these appear to have been either removed or heavily modified in the intervening years.

One older timber bridge was located at a previous crossing location. The present structure is not of colonial origin.

Fieldwork also indicated that some isolated older structures survive on this section, including sandstone culverts at 4.2 km, 8.1 km and 9 km north of Wollombi.

A timber bridge with rubble masonry abutments also survives at 21.5 km north of Wollombi, near the *Summerville* property.

Responsibility

Owner and management agency are both Cessnock City Council.

Significance

Sections 5 to 8 of the Great North Road remain in use as current main rural roads. Due to an overall absence of development these sections present the current road line in a setting approximating that envisaged at the time of its original construction. They also retain some occasional precincts with early construction features.

History

Construction history is not as well documented as those of the sections further south. Major construction activity apparently occurred in 1833. Road Parties No.13 and No.14 were assigned the whole area from

Wollombi to Warkworth in April of that year. Assistant Surveyor L V Dulhumty who was responsible for supervising construction work reported that gangs were *cutting through rocky points north of Wollombi* and McDougall's Bridge Party were working on a bridge at the northern entry to Wollombi. GB White's 1833 Map shows Mitchell's straight road line across the meandering Wollombi Brook which resulted in 9 creek crossings between Wollombi and Paynes Crossing. It appears that only the first three of these were bridged, the others were left unfinished or possibly served by simple fords only. In 1860 part of this section of the road was *realigned to avoid the numerous crossings of the Wollombi Brook*. This new alignment removed 3 older road loops and six crossings.

Precincts and Specific Items

Precincts	No.	Major Items
Wollombi Brook	6.1.0	Foamier crossings of the Wollombi Brook, including Item 6.1.1 Timber Bridge
Stone Bridge	6.2.0	Bridge with masonry abutments, 21.5km north of Wollombi

Threats to the Heritage

Unsympathetic upgrading. Inappropriate maintenance practices. Structures reported in prior surveys were found to have been removed and/or rebuilt/upgraded during current fieldwork. Future works need assessment.

Conservation Action Recommended by the Plan

Most of this section remains in use as trafficable rural roads. Project Engineers, Council Staff and Contractors need to be fully briefed concerning the significance of surviving older road precincts or individual structures. Some interpretation to communicate the historic links of this road Section is desirable. Further research and more detailed fieldwork is also needed.