

NEWS

## Gas industry calls for passage through Coffs Bypass tunnels



Dangerous goods trucks are prohibited from travelling through tunnels in NSW, if there is an alternative route around the tunnel available.

GAS Energy Australia has posed questions of Roads and Maritime Services over the likely ban on dangerous goods trucks using the three proposed tunnels of the Coffs Harbour Bypass.

The peak body, representing the Liquefied Petroleum Gas and Compressed Natural Gas industries, has raised its concerns in a submission to the Environmental Impact Statement for the 14km Pacific Highway upgrade.

AEG represents key industry players such as Elgas, BOC and Supgas.

With three tunnels to be built on the \$1.8 billion project - Roberts Hill, Shephards Ln and Gateleys Rd - trucks carting dangerous goods, known as 'placarded loads' would under current NSW laws be banned for the tunnels and continue to drive through the city centre.

As the community campaigned for a revised bypass design to incorporate tunnels instead of land bridges, the fate of dangerous truck movements was commonly raised as an impediment to tunnels during the recent State and Federal Election campaigns.

"GEA members strongly supported the bypass design released by NSW planning authorities in October, 2018 which had no tunnels and no restrictions on dangerous goods (DG)," GEA CEO John Griffiths explained.

"GEA's position is that the bypass design should accommodate the carriage of all goods, and if the preferred route requires tunnels, the tunnels should be designed to accommodate the carriage of DG and not exclude them," he said.

Mr Griffiths said the industry was eager to work with the NSW Government to discuss the tunnel designs.



Three tunnels will be built on the Coffs Bypass for a combined length of just under a kilometre.

The Bypass EIS notes that Coffs Harbour is a destination for dangerous goods deliveries such as Class 2.1 (flammable gases) and Class 3 (flammable liquids) and that significant numbers of dangerous good trucks would continue to use the existing Pacific Highway in order to service customers in the city centre.

While there's almost a blanket ban on placarded loads using tunnels across NSW, Mr Griffiths pointed to NSW's Cudgen Rd tunnel, which dangerous goods trucks can travel through given there is no other alternative route.

He said tunnels internationally, like the Big Walker Mountain Tunnel in the US state of Virginia - a 1289m long structure - had been designed to accommodate the carriage of DGs.

By comparison the tunnels for the 14km Coffs Harbour Bypass are estimated to be 190m at Roberts Hill, 350m at Shephards Lane and 450m at Gatelys Rd.

A common estimation raised publicly by politicians is that up to one truck carting dangerous goods passes through Coffs Harbour every hour.

The EIS also states that many of the placarded loads are required to stop in Coffs Harbour, but Mr Griffiths refutes that claim, saying only a minority of the long haul trucks on the Pacific Highway with gas on-board actually stop locally.

"GEA is concerned that the EIS has also not adequately assessed the volume and travel patterns of DG transport or considered the risks to those using and living near roads," Mr Griffiths said.

He said figures from GEA members indicated the number could be much higher, in calling on Transport NSW to undertake a full assessment.

"GEA is extremely concerned that this statement is misleading and inconsistent with information and advice provided to NSW transport authorities by GEA members, which show 95% of the roughly 4,400 LPG tanker movements along the Pacific Highway each year do not make deliveries into Coffs Harbour.

If denied access to the Coffs Bypass tunnels, Mr Griffiths said the Pacific Highway's 12km of low speed road, complete with 12 sets of traffic lights, passing through the Coffs Harbour city centre would add considerable cost and time to long hauls freight trips.

"Moreover, drivers of large tankers carrying gaseous fuels along the Pacific Highway do not take rest stops in Coffs Harbour area, because there is a lack of adequate rest facilities for large DG vehicles in the town," he said.



GEA states that drivers instead stop at Clybucca to comply with their fatigue management breaks, as required by law.

Currently, drivers carting dangerous goods trucks report up to 40-minutes being added to their trips in driving around the Pacific Motorway tunnel at Tugun.

"(We) note the ongoing consultation stated in the EIS with the NSW Environment Protection Agency, SafeWork NSW and Fire and Rescue NSW to confirm the project would be able to accept any classes of dangerous goods during operation," he said.

"GEA is keen to work with the NSW Government to investigate the use of tunnels by DG vehicles and how tunnels can be design to accommodate their passage."



Motorists will save about  
**11 minutes**  
in travel time



Bypass  
**up to 12 sets**  
of traffic lights



Remove about  
**12,000 vehicles**  
per day  
from CBD



Build  
**3 tunnels**



**Ease congestion**  
and deliver better,  
more reliable trips



**Improve safety**  
on the existing highway



Create roughly  
**12,000**  
direct and indirect jobs

## **FAST FACTS**

- Under the Roads Rules 2014 NSW regulations, trucks carrying dangerous goods such as gas bottles, or what the industry refers too as a 'placarded load' must not use tunnels in NSW.
- Prohibited tunnels currently include the Cahill Expressway in Sydney, the Sydney Harbour Tunnel, Cross City Tunnels.
- On the M1 Pacific Motorway, placarded loads are also prohibited in the St Helena tunnel at Bangalow and Tugun Bypass Tunnel near Tweed Heads.
- Dangerous goods trucks transporting 'placarded loads' can access the Cudgen Rd Tunnel as there is no other road alternative.

## **THE DEFINITION**

Dangerous goods listed and classified in the Australian Dangerous Goods Code, are substances and articles that can harm people, property and the environment.

Legislation on dangerous goods includes:

Dangerous Goods (Road and Rail Transport) Act 2008, and

Dangerous Goods (Road and Rail Transport) Regulation 2014.

The act is administered by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and SafeWork NSW.