


NEWS

Tunnels the safest option says leaked report



 The report was prepared by engineering and design consultant Aurecon for the RMS.

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A draft report obtained by the Advocate clearly states tunnels will be the safest option for dangerous goods travelling on the Coffs Harbour Bypass.

The report was prepared by engineering and design consultant Aurecon for the RMS and was submitted to them in April last year.

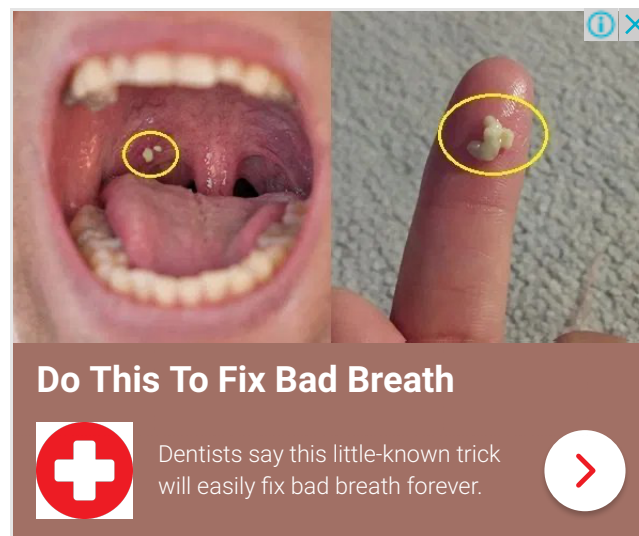
It states there would be a lower risk in terms of "life safety" with flatter gradients and tunnels through the ridge lines, than steeper gradients and shallow cuttings.

Of the three options presented, the safest route is to use the bypass (through tunnels) and the least safest option would be through the CBD.

Dangerous goods have long been a key component of the bypass narrative, particularly in relation to the vexed issue of cuttings as opposed to tunnels.

Some politicians and senior bureaucrats have indicated tunnels are not safe for vehicles carrying goods such as chemicals or flammable gas and the better option would be cuttings.

The Coffs Harbour community has been waiting decades for a bypass. It's the last major section of the Pacific Highway upgrade to be complete.



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In late 2019 the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was finally released but there was a bitter backlash when it was realised that large open cuttings would replace the three tunnels that had long been anticipated.



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The fight to see tunnels returned to the preferred concept plan led to much division in the community.

Opposing groups were formed and divisions escalated between Coffs Harbour City Council and the State and Federal Governments.

Mayor Denise Knight feared Coffs Harbour was getting an "el cheapo" bypass and Councillors voted unanimously to form a working group to fight for tunnels to be reinstated.



📷 In September 2018 Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack, Member for Cowper at the time Luke Hartsuyker and then Minister for Roads Melinda Pavey announced a preferred design with cuttings. Picture: Rachel Vercoe

State Minister for Roads at the time Melinda Pavey described it as grandstanding and Federal Member for Cowper Luke Hartsuyker, who has since retired, called it a stunt and waste of ratepayers' money.

It was considered a win for people power when the EIS was eventually released in September last year showing tunnels.

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(<https://www.coffscoastadvocate.com.au/news/bypass-changes-outlined-in-correspondence/3606551/>)

The Aurecon risk analysis report outlines a number of factors which make the tunnel option safer including the fact that if an incident occurs in a tunnel: 'no people in a building in an adjacent area are exposed'.

It goes on to say: 'more residential buildings are shielded for the tunnel option than the cutting option'.

The report also states there is a lack of data on the issue as incidents are very rare.



📷 A concept drawing for the Coffs Harbour Bypass

The 14-kilometre, fourlane project will bypass 12 sets of traffic lights, remove about 12,000 vehicles from the CBD and saving more than 10 minutes in travel time.

The \$1.8 billion project is being jointly funded by the State and Federal Governments.

Industry groups representing Dangerous Goods Vehicles (DGV) operators are currently lobbying at federal and state level to have the tunnel restrictions changed for the various classes of DGV in NSW.

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