

## CATEGORY

## Infrastructure (Planning and Design Stage)

### Transport for NSW

#### Involving community in the design of the Princes Highway upgrade in the face of bushfire and COVID-19 crises

**The NSW South Coast community play a vital role in helping us shape the future of a safer, better connected and more sustainable Princes Highway.**

**Despite the challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic and 2019/2020 bushfire season, the Princes Highway upgrade project team demonstrated agility and innovation to involve south coast communities in the development of transport solutions that will define their region for future generations.**

**To achieve positive and sustainable outcomes for the community, we adapted our engagement approach in response to the limitations of the coronavirus pandemic and learnings from the bushfire season. Positive communication outcomes were achieved despite the widespread hardships by ensuring our engagement strategy remained firmly grounded in our core belief that those affected by an outcome to a decision have the right to be involved in the decision making process.**

The Princes Highway forms the critical link between Sydney, the NSW South Coast and Victoria. It helps drive the state's third largest regional economy, is relied upon by over five hundred thousand locals and welcomes almost four million tourists each year.

In March 2019, the Australian and NSW governments committed more than \$1.5 billion to upgrade the Princes Highway between Nowra and the Victorian border, completing the full upgrade of the Princes Highway.

#### **Putting the customer at the centre of the decision making process**

One of Transport for NSW's core values is placing the community at the centre of our decision making process. A key component of the early stages of planning for the Princes Highway Upgrade projects, was seeking to understand the customer's movement in and around their community and the value they put on their place. These questions were central to our engagement approach.

#### **Overcoming the challenges of bushfires and COVID-19 to effectively involve community**

The communities we're engaging in are still dealing with the trauma and hardship of an unprecedented bushfire season. Hundreds of homes and livelihoods were lost on the NSW South Coast.

To achieve optimal community participation in our program, we needed to adapt our plan through innovation to effectively involve a traumatised community. This included:

- delaying consultation to enable the community to focus on their bushfire recovery
- providing TfNSW regional staff with bespoke training opportunities, to better equip them with dealing with traumatised communities
- Working with emergency services to understand which community members and stakeholders have been affected to inform how we both involve them and then how we communicate with them using sensitivity and empathy.

Further adaptation was required during the consultation period, when the evolving COVID-19 impacted the circumstances we could engage. We rapidly moved the planned face to face drop in sessions onto a Facebook Live format; a first for Transport for NSW. Planned briefings with stakeholder group were also moved to video conference. Our agile response to unprecedented challenges resulted in positive engagement outcomes for the program and was widely appreciate by the community and stakeholders.