

## Engagement Plan

Project Name: Special Rate Variation (rate increase) ratepayer consultation  
 Project Approved: TBA Council resolution sought October 2015  
 Project Owner: Executive/Councillors  
 Project due for Delivery: November – December 2015

<b>Objective</b>	<p>We are seeking ratepayers response to a proposal to increase rates as follows: 6% over 6 years (excl. rate peg), after which to remain in the base rate.</p> <p>The SRV is proposed for distinct road infrastructure improvements.</p> <p>Ratepayer response is sought, recognising that response may be in the form of support or objection.</p>
<b>Scope</b>	<p>Prior to lodging a Special Rate Variation (SRV), the determining body (IPART) requires Councils to provide evidence of community consultation that gauges support or sound objections. The process calls for Council to notify IPART of their intent to lodge an SRV application in December, consult and determine whether the application will be lodged prior to the closing date in February.</p> <p>The consultation element of this SRV proposal is proposed to be intense over a short period of time. The period of consultation will commence early November and conclude mid December (7 weeks).</p> <p>We have a story we wish to tell the rate payer, before proposing a solution to the problem that requires an increase in property rates. Ratepayer response to the proposition will then be sought. Response is likely to be one of two things, support for the proposal or objection to the proposal. Objection may be accompanied by alternative solutions, which need to be assessed on merit.</p> <p>While Council's notification to IPART in December 2015 may indicate that it intends to lodge an SRV, Council is not compelled to submit an application. The nature of ratepayer response, may influence Council's decision to make an SRV application in 2016.</p> <p>Ratepayer response to this consultation may influence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the proposed SRV percentage;</li> <li>the time frame for increase; and/or</li> <li>the period over which any increase is applied.</li> </ul> <p>In addition feedback may also influence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the priority and implementation order of improvement aspects;</li> <li>the quantum allocated to improvement aspects; and/or</li> <li>the proposed service levels for road infrastructure.</li> </ul>
<b>Non-negotiable elements</b>	<p>The SRV proposes an improved level of service for road infrastructure and it is not intended that feedback received from ratepayers can influence a changed focus about a different service type provided by Council, or about a service type that is not currently provided by the Council.</p> <p>This is because the proposed SRV is underpinned by significant data that is drawn from asset plans that indicates a need to improve service levels on road infrastructure to make them safer for community use. Improved road infrastructure management has been a focus of Council for five years.</p>
<b>Timing</b>	<p>The engagement will commence in early November (WB 2/11/2015) and conclude (WB 14/12/2015). And includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media stories</li> <li>Open shop front in CBD</li> <li>Radio slots</li> <li>Handouts</li> <li>Surveys</li> </ul>

<b>Key Stakeholder/s</b>	Ratepayers are the key stakeholders in this engagement, as they are directly impacted financially.
<b>Communities of interest</b>	Road users are the communities of interest, as any improvement in road infrastructure is a benefit in which they share, but do not contribute to financially.
<b>Engagement Methods</b>	<p>The planned approaches of engagement are in two phases:</p> <p><b>Inform:</b> Create the story hub on our website and push that story out through face to face public presentation, targeted presentations to interest groups, media, social media and electronic distribution lists. The intent is to draw an audience to the story hub to ensure an accurate understanding of our infrastructure issue.</p> <p><b>Seek:</b> Conduct a week long presence in the CBD that seeks feedback from the community through a survey in addition to engaging an independent survey company to conduct a phone survey, in accordance with the IPART recommended sample size for a local government area of this size (450).</p>
<b>Communications Channels</b>	GTCC Website Face to face Media representation GTCC Social media GTCC email distribution lists CBD shop front Independent survey
<b>Risk</b>	<p>The most significant risk to the engagement project is that response from the key stakeholders cannot be discerned from the response from communities of interest.</p> <p>Any survey of community needs to identify ratepayers as a distinct group, as they are financially impacted.</p> <p>It is critical that there be a single source of truth for the story and this will be controlled through the story hub created on the GTCC website.</p>
<b>Key messages</b>	<p>The proposal involves an investment of \$10m per annum with \$2m going to improved maintenance to maintain a safe road network and \$8m going to renewal of roads through appropriate interventions that are generally not full reconstruction.</p> <p>The \$10m will be raised through additional rates by a 6% increase on top of the statutory cost of living increase each year for six years. At the end of the six years the level of rates paid by Greater Taree residents will be similar to those of surrounding communities. The \$10m will be locked in for this purpose in perpetuity and Council will report annually on how this money has been spent and what the performance is against agreed service level benchmarks.</p>
<b>Outcome / Next Steps</b>	<p>Following the engagement period, collation of the responses will be required. This will occur in late December early January. It is then intended that the collated responses be reported to Council either in January or to an extra ordinary meeting of Council in early February. This report will require the Council to resolve whether to make an SRV application. The timing of this meeting is dependent on the IPART SRV submission date, yet to be advised, but believed to be mid February. Key stakeholders and communities of interest will be informed of the recommendation of the report through the story hub created on the website and pushed through the identified communication channels.</p>