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MINISTERIAL BRIEFING NOTE

Subject	State Highway 25A Taparahi site visit
Date	7 August 2023
Briefing number	BRI-2838

Contact(s) for telephone discussion (if required)				
Name	Position	Direct line	Cell phone	1 st contact
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Action taken by Office of the Minister

- ☐ Noted
- ☐ Seen by Minister
- ☐ Agreed
- ☐ Feedback provided
- ☐ Forwarded to
- ☐ Needs change [please specify]
- ☐ Withdrawn
- ☐ Overtaken by events

7 August 2023

Hon David Parker Minister of Transport

STATE HIGHWAY 25A TAPARAHİ SITE VISIT

Purpose

1. This briefing provides you with information about the State Highway 25A Taparahi bridge project, between Kōpū to Hikuai, which is being constructed to replace the old road embankment that slipped away after a wet spring, combined with unprecedented weather, saturated the ground.
2. The site visit will be held during Transport Week, on Friday, 18 August 2023, between 9:30am and 11:10am at the slip site, along State Highway 25A.

Project funding and costs

3. The project cost is expected to be under \$50 million.
4. Reinstatement of State Highway 25A is part of the recovery and rebuild following the severe weather events of early 2023 and is funded through National Land Transport Fund Emergency Works funding.
5. When a bridge was announced for State Highway 25A in early May 2023, the announcement stated that it would cost between \$30 million and \$40 million and would be funded from the recent \$250 million National Land Transport Fund Emergency Works top-up.
6. As the additional \$250 million National Land Transport Fund Emergency Works funding from the Crown was OPEX funding, the appropriation finished on 30 June 2023, meaning the bridge could not be funded with this. In addition, the bridge is going to be capital in nature and should be classified as CAPEX. The bridge will therefore be funded through the more recently announced \$567 million of Crown Funding (which includes both CAPEX and OPEX funding).
7. The capital appropriation reflects a contingency of 20 percent across all works, including the State Highway 25A bridge. This does not mean that the bridge is going to cost \$48 million but given there is considerable uncertainty across the required works, a 20 percent general contingency is reasonable.
8. In addition to the bridge funding, Waka Kotahi is seeking to carry out additional resilience works on State Highway 25A while it is closed and where this doesn't impact on construction vehicles accessing the bridge site. The cost estimate for this is yet to be finalised; however, a portion of the \$567 million would be used for this in the first instance.

Project features

9. Based on the options assessment report, a bridge has been selected as the best solution to reconnect the Coromandel. It will be constructed on the same alignment as the existing highway,

have three spans, and will be 124-metres-long. It will feature 2.1-metre-deep steel beams, which are currently being fabricated in Napier.

10. A bridge was selected as it would be the quickest and lowest cost option to build and provides a resilient solution. The earthworks component is small, allowing work to start in winter, and many of the bridge components can be built offsite, allowing an accelerated programme.

Project benefits

11. Key benefits of the State Highway 25A Taparahi bridge include:
 - Restoring vital access for Coromandel locals, businesses, visitors, and communities.
 - Creating a more resilient roading network across the Coromandel Peninsula by restoring this crucial link between Kōpū and Hikuai.

Project context

12. The State Highway 25A Taparahi rebuild project is part of the North Island 2023 storm and cyclone recovery projects.
13. A number of state highways were impacted following Cyclone Hale, the Auckland Anniversary Weekend floods and Cyclone Gabrielle, which has affected access for surrounding communities. These major storms followed unprecedented rainfall over January 2023, at two and a half times the average monthly total in this region.
14. State Highway 25A has been closed since Friday, 27 January 2023, after cracks widened and a significant section of State Highway 25A collapsed, causing the road to be impassable.
15. On Friday, 5 May 2023, the bridge option was endorsed, and on Tuesday, 9 May 2023, this was publicly announced.
16. On Friday, 9 June 2023, the preferred tenderer, a joint venture between McConnell Dowell and Fulton Hogan (supported by Beca and Tonkin and Taylor), was announced.
17. Typically, a bridge of this nature would take 15 to 18 months to design and construct. However, we hope to have the road open by the end March 2024.
18. While contract negotiations have been underway, and to ensure momentum is maintained, the contractors have operated under two letters of intent and were advised to continue with the enabling works and to order pile casings from China. As of 1 August 2023, commercial negotiations are nearing completion for the main contract works.
19. Although progress is being made on the bridge, the road closure has put a strain on the local economy and has left some people feeling anxious and frustrated, especially as the bridge may not be completed in time for Christmas – Coromandel's high season for tourism.
20. As part of our assessment of the contractor, we evaluated its ability to deliver from an expedited programme perspective and whether it has the appropriate resources to ensure this is achievable. Examples of this include the contractor agreeing to working shifts, achieving seven

day working weeks where necessary on the critical path items, and the requisitioning of materials from other projects to enable these works to be accelerated.

21. There have been two petitions related to the project; one in favour of allowing [temporary access](#) (3,465 signatures), and the other supporting a [bypass](#) being formed (438 signatures).
22. A bypass was one of the first options considered in detail; however, it was determined to be more expensive and would take longer than a bridge. The steep topography in this location, both above and in the slip area, requires considerable earthworks and retaining work to form traversable slopes for cars and trucks. Disposal of the large quantity of dirt required to be excavated was a significant problem, with nowhere available in the Coromandel to take it.
23. It is not possible to provide a 'quick fix'. The access tracks that have been formed around the slip site are very steep and only suitable for vehicles with tracks, particularly if rain has fallen recently and softened the surface further.
24. Temporary staging can be built across the face of the slip; however, this is not a quick fix as it would take several months to construct, with a considerable amount of piling work required to support it.

Key messages

25. Key messages for the State Highway 25A Taparahi rebuild project include:
 - We are focused on getting this highway open as quickly as possible, while prioritising the safety of our crew and the community.
 - We are aware locals, businesses, and communities are anxious about the state of their roading network and uncertainty of the rebuild timing and the sacrifices they are having to make while State Highway 25A is closed.
 - There is a dedicated team of project managers and consulting engineers focused on delivering this bridge as quickly as possible, and on time.
 - Many roads on the Coromandel Peninsula have been compromised and are vulnerable following the storm events earlier in 2023. Waka Kotahi recognises how important it is for communities, businesses, and visitors to keep State Highway 25 open. It is a priority and includes long-term solutions so that State Highway 25 and State Highway 25A remain accessible and resilient.

Other matters

26. The slip also affected neighbouring Māori owned land, with scouring of the gully extending for some length. Waka Kotahi has contacted a representative for the owners and will provide regular updates on progress with the bridge. The owners main concern was that we would need to do work on their land, and we have reassured them that this is not the case.
27. Old photos from the original road, built circa 1965, show that bare areas of land naturally regenerated back into bush over time and this is the plan for the land with this project.

28. An accelerated 12-week programme of work, which has specifically considered the long-term resilience of the Peninsula, is currently under internal review before it will be presented to the Waka Kotahi Board later in 2023.
29. The programme recommends undertaking a range of work, which aims to reduce the time the highway would take to recover following large climatic events in the future and increase the overall resilience of the transport network (local and state highway). This work has been undertaken in a collaborative way with Thames-Coromandel District Council, Hauraki District Council, the Department of Conservation, Waikato Regional Council and other key stakeholders.
30. To keep the State Highway 25 network open, the following work has been completed or is ongoing:
 - repair of the State Highway 25, McBeth-Opoutere, under slip – this is now open
 - regular monitoring of significant slip sites, with geotechnical inspections every two months
 - prioritisation of clearing drains and culverts, and continuing to clear vegetation to maintain a clear space for heavy vehicles
 - monitoring of traffic and truck volumes, and travel times around the Peninsula so any causes of significant delay are identified and quickly acted on
 - destination signage has been updated so visitors can find the best way to their destination
 - temporary safer speed limits have been implemented on State Highway 25 while State Highway 25A is closed and there is an increase in traffic around the Coromandel
 - continual assessment of the safety and capacity of one-lane bridges and critical intersections
 - careful planning of the timing and type of maintenance work to minimise impacts on road users, landowners, and communities.

Your office received the following briefings on this subject:

31. BRI-2710, Ministerial visit to Coromandel, 14 February 2023
32. BRI-2762, Taparahi, Kōpū to Hikuai, Rebuild Announcement, 5 May 2023

Ministerial site visit

33. You will meet Waka Kotahi Director Regional Relationships, David Spiers, in Kōpū. David will travel with you up to the State Highway 25A slip site.
34. Media interviews will follow the site visit up at the slip site.
35. Following your site visit, Waka Kotahi will also be hosting close to 80 key stakeholders from around the Coromandel for a separate visit to the slip site. This will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to see the slip site first-hand and how work on the bridge is progressing. Key stakeholders invited include Thames-Coromandel District Council leadership and Councillors,

community board chairs, local business and ratepayers' associations, representatives from freight and road user groups, school principals, and the Coromandel Recovery Advisory Group.

Key attendees to acknowledge

36. The key attendees invited to join you on this site visit include:

- **Section 9(2)(a)**, Ngāti Maru representative
- Len Salt, Thames Coromandel District Council Mayor
- Aileen Lawry, Thames Coromandel District Council Chief Executive

Media

37. Local and national media have a high level of interest in this project and the national recovery response. It is expected multiple media outlets will attend the site visit.

38. Back pocket questions and answers will be provided to you by Waka Kotahi.

It is recommended that you:

39. Note the contents of this briefing.



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David Speirs, Director Regional Relationships (Waikato/Bay of Plenty)

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Hon David Parker, Minister for Transport

Date: August 2023