Media Response: s 9(2)(a) , s 9(2)(a)

4 May 2023

The following statement can be attributed to Robyn Elston, National Manager System Design

Query:

Following the closure of SH6/Whakatū Drive last week and recent comments by Christopher Luxon, local discussion around the Southern Link (a new Inland Route), a third arterial road for Nelson, has resurfaced. I thought I would do an article exploring the topic and so I had a few questions for Waka Kotahi on the subject.

- I frequently hear comments from community members that the Southern Link should have been built years ago. Is Waka Kotahi able to explain why the project has, at this stage, never come to fruition?
    - I assume factors include cost/benefit analyses and the impact on the Victory/Toi Toi communities?

- Would the Southern Link reduce congestion along the main arterial routes of Waimea and Rocks Roads?
    - I've seen modelling from a Nelson Future Access project reference group (meeting 4, dated 3/9/2020) that indicates that the Southern Route/new Inland Route would make congestion worse in the long-term (in 2048), compared to the 'do minimum' approach – I've attached this modelling for your clarity.
    - Can Waka Kotahi confirm if this modelling data is accurate/up to date?
    - If it is accurate, does the data influence how Waka Kotahi's approaches the Southern Link in its planning?

- How would the Southern Link affect congestion once traffic leaves the main arterial routes?
    - As I see it, further congestion would be unavoidable in the city centre around the Haven Road-Rutherford Street area, and around the northern end of Whakatū Drive, where the three arterials (Southern Link included) consolidate once again. Is this assumption accurate?

- Am I correct in understanding that the Southern Link is essentially the last option for Waka Kotahi to alleviate congestion at this stage? How does the Southern Link fit into the Nelson Future Access project?

  Does Waka Kotahi have any plans to help address resilience issues in Nelson's traffic network? As we've seen before, traffic crawls to a stand-still when one of these main routes are shut, and extended closures due to potential natural events could have significant and prolonged repercussions for the city.
    - What are the plans, and when would they be expected to begin?

- Does Waka Kotahi have any data or thoughts on what impact connecting Richmond's Hill Street with Nelson's Suffolk Road, connecting the two centres behind Saxton Field, might have on regional traffic?
    - It appears if a route was created linking those two, it would allow for two routes into Nelson if Whakatū Drive or Main Road Stoke had to close in the future. Is this route viable for increasing resilience?

    - Would it aid in reducing congestion? Or would it likely result in similar effects shown by that Southern Link modelling, increase congestion long-term?
    - If local councils make investments into improving their local road networks that create minor improvements to congestion and resiliency, does that impact when the same regions could see significant investment from Waka Kotahi into the State Highway network if it passes through/near impacted areas?
- I've heard from Nelson MP Rachel Boyack that the location that has the greatest effect on regional traffic is the intersection of State Highway 6 with Richmond's Queen Street. Is this a view that Waka Kotahi would agree with?

- Any other comments Waka Kotahi wants to make about the topic of the Southern Link and transport network resiliency in Nelson would be welcomed.

If Waka Kotahi was able to supply any comments by the end of Thursday 4 May, that would be greatly appreciated.

Response:

Inland Route/Southern Link background:
Building the Inland Route/Southern Link is not in our 30-year programme, nor is it on our current funding or planning schedule.

In 2004, the Environment Court declined the project's Notice of Requirement for reasons including social severance, the proximity of the route to schools, air quality degradation and a lack of evidence that the route would improve safety and efficiency. Since then, three further investigations have found no immediate need for a new route.

How the Inland Route/Southern Link relates to the Nelson Future Access Plan:
The land parcels covered by the Inland Route/Southern Link proposal are in the Nelson Future Access Plan (NFAP) but only as a future resilience route option.

This is because there are significant risks in consenting in the coastal marine area and uncertainty over future sea level rise and earthquakes in the long term (beyond 2050). This particularly applies to coastal routes like State Highway 6, Rocks Road. These risks mean the Inland Route/Southern Link is retained as a potential long term transport corridor.

The Inland Route/Southern Link will only be considered once the 30-year programme for NFAP is delivered after 2050.

Inland Route/Southern Link modelling and potential impact on traffic flows/congestion:
The latest modelling for Inland Route/Southern Link was done in 2020. It uses 2018 census data and 2019 future development strategy data. It is also a land-use-based model.

Regarding its potential impact on congestion along the main arterial routes of Waimea and Rocks Roads, congestion can be looked at in two parts, travel time delay and overall traffic volumes.

Travel times on the Inland Route/Southern would result in similar travel times on the two main arterials in 2028 compared to the 2018 do-minimum. With the inland route option, in 2048, the inbound direction (Annesbrook to Hardy) has longer travel times (all time periods modelled) compared to 2018, with two to four minutes of additional travel time in the morning peak. For the outbound direction (Hardy to Annesbrook) in the afternoon peak, it has similar or shorter travel times than 2018.

If Inland Route/Southern was built, it would increase morning peak travel times on Rocks Rd and Waimea Rd over the do-minimum by 2048. This is typical of projects that provide higher capacity into an area (in this case, the Nelson City Centre) but do not provide capacity downstream in the

local road network for additional traffic to disperse. The Southern Link project lets vehicles get to the city faster. But because it would concentrate more traffic at intersections entering the city, it would delay them at this point for longer.

Richmond connections and infrastructure (Hill St/Suffolk Rd & SH6/Queen St:
Nelson City Council is looking at connecting Richmond's Hill Street with Nelson's Suffolk Road. We would recommend you approach the Council for further information.

Most growth has occurred in Richmond, putting significant strain on the transport network and creating traffic congestion at the intersection of State Highway 6 and Queen St in Richmond. We are investigating the current phasing of the traffic signals at the lower Queen Street/McGlashen intersection and if other possible efficiency improvements are available. Waka Kotahi is also pursuing the renewal of the Hope Bypass designation and is working on the recommended program in the endorsed Richmond Transport Programme Business Case.

If the Hope Bypass is deemed necessary after the short and medium-term programmes have been completed, Gladstone Road would become a local road (not a State Highway), and cycle lanes could be added to it. If the bypass is needed, the main intersections on Gladstone Road will be reviewed to ensure the intersection and surrounding roads are more attractive and more accessible for people to walk or cycle.

More information on the Richmond Transport Programme Business Case can be found on our website:

Richmond Transport Programme Business Case

Other resilience work and congestion control initiatives:
Under the Nelson Future Access plan, priority lanes on Waimea Road and State Highway 6 are the preferred options. We also retain the existing land holdings identified in the Inland Route/Southern Link for walking and cycling routes.

Waka Kotahi is working on improving the resilience of the local traffic network. This includes the Richmond Transport Programme Business Case. Here we are investigating the current phasing of the traffic signals at the lower Queen Street/McGlashen intersection.

Other initiatives to improve the region's roading network include the Transport Choices Programme and the Road to Zero Programme. More details on these can be found at the links below.

Transport Choices programme
Road to Zero

We are also working with local partners to progress various other planning documents, such as the Regional Public Transport Plan.

In addition, improvements for active transport users are also being implemented to help reduce congestion on the local network. Public transport travel will become substantially more reliable due to having dedicated lanes during peak periods. This, in turn, will help increase mode shift to public transport.

Some of these details were previously provided to you in the media response sent to you in March.

Funding for local roads/network improvements:

Waka Kotahi already works with and funds local councils to improve local road networks via Funding Assistance Rates (FARs). This funding covers many projects, including congestion and resilience measures.
FARs are part of a co-investment system that recognises there are national and local benefits from investing in the land transport network. Funding for local roads is normally split 51%/49%, while state highways are funded 100% by the National Land Transport Fund. Please see the link below for more information:

Funding assistance rates (FAR)

Recent SH6 closure and its network impact:
The fatal event that closed State Highway 6, Whakatu Drive, on 21 April was a serious incident. While inconvenient and frustrating for drivers, the road closure was necessary to allow police to conduct a thorough scene investigation. It is essential police can carry out such investigations safely and efficiently, and sometimes full road closures are necessary to allow this.