

Manawatū/Whanganui regional transport update – August 2019

Overview

As a key freight and transport hub for the central North Island, transport in the Manawatū/Whanganui region is important for regional and national economic prosperity as well as having strategic value for the whole of New Zealand. Improving safety, resilience and access at these transport 'crossroads' is a focus.

SH1 and SH3 intersect in the region, as do the main north/south and east/west rail lines. Several major distribution centres are operating or being developed in the region, which rely on good access to a number of ports and/or airports.

A key priority for the Transport Agency is the development of the SH3 project Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū Tararua Highway to connect the Manawatū, Tararua District, Hawke's Bay and northern Wairarapa. It replaces the highway through the Manawatū Gorge, now indefinitely closed by mass land movement caused by instability above the road.

The need to use alternative routes since the closure of the Gorge has caused inconvenience and disruption for many residents and travellers. Increased maintenance and improvements on these roads has been carried out and mitigation measures are underway to address safety and noise issues in Ashhurst.

The Manawatū-Whanganui region was identified by the Safety Boost Programme as having a number of regional state highways that would benefit from a range of low-cost safety improvements. Several of the improvements have been completed, and more are planned.

The long-distance commuter rail service from Palmerston North to Wellington (the Capital Connection) will see additional support through the National Land Transport Programme (NLTP) for the next two years, while strategic work is carried out on the Future of Rail.

Keeping the land transport system well maintained and safe is a large part of the investment from the NLTP in the Manawatū/Whanganui region. Over the 2018-21 NLTP period, local roads will receive about \$247 million and state highways around \$90 million for maintenance.

Reconnecting Manawatū and Tararua

A key project for this region is the replacement route for the closed SH3 through the Manawatū Gorge. SH3 through the Manawatū Gorge has been closed since major slips caused damage on 25 April 2017. A safe, resilient and efficient replacement route - the Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū Tararua Highway project - is a top priority.

In the last 18 months

- We designated the transport corridor for the new state highway in mid-2019. Subsequently, the Environment Court received three appeals to the designation, we are meeting with appellants to understand their appeals and work towards a quick resolution.

- We have lodged the first round of applications for regional consents for enabling works. The enabling works are set to begin this summer, and main construction is due to commence in the summer of 2020/21. The new road is expected to open in 2024, though this is dependent on the final construction programme.
- We have taken over management of three Manawatū Gorge detour routes from local councils.
 - In addition to maintenance, significant improvement work has been carried out on Saddle Road, the main alternative route. Work is complete on road widening between Ashhurst and the Saddle Road bridge and Woodlands Road improvements at SH3 and Oxford Road.
 - Safety improvements are planned for the Pahiatua Track alternative route, including seal widening and signage.
 - We have taken over management of Ballance Valley Rd. Patching repairs have been carried out while our plans for ongoing maintenance and improvements programme are worked through with Tararua District Council.
- With a significant volume of Manawatū Gorge detour traffic travelling across the Saddle Road, a sharp increase in vehicle numbers has led to safety and noise issues for Ashhurst residents. A package of mitigation measures to address noise and safety concerns is being implemented. The total package is \$7 million with \$2.5 million of this already spent.

Safety

Safety is a major focus across the region, with ten Manawatū-Whanganui roads being made safer as part of the Safety Boost Programme, in addition to other safety improvements.

In the last 18 months

- Safety improvements on the 18km stretch of SH57, from SH1 to Shannon, has been completed. The \$8.6 million project delivered 13.8km of side barriers and 14.3km of road markings and rumble strips.
- Work is completed on five sections of road through the Safety Boost Programme, with safety interventions including side barriers, road marking and rumble strips:
 - SH4 Taumarunui to National Park – installation of rumble strips and improved signage
 - SH2 Ngawapurua to Manawatū-Whanganui boundary - rumble strips, improved signage and barriers at high risk locations
 - SH4 Tōhunga Junction to Whanganui - rumble strips, improved signage and barriers at high risk locations
 - SH3 Whangaehu to Bulls - rumble strips, improved signage and barriers at high risk locations
 - SH1 Bulls to Foxton – rumble strips.
- In December 2018 interim safety works, including flexible posts on flush medians, were carried out from Ōtaki to Levin. High risk signage from Levin to Foxton was also installed in early 2019.

Underway or about to start

- Work to install rumble strips, signs, road safety barriers or a widened shoulder is now underway on the following five sections of Manawatu-Wanganui highways as part of an extension of the Safety Boost Programme:
 - SH4 Whanganui to Raetihi
 - SH54 and SH3 to Feilding
 - SH56 Makerua (SH57) to Palmerston North
 - SH57 SH3 to SH56
 - SH3 Palmerston North to Ashhurst.
- Further short and medium-term safety improvements for the SH1 corridor from Ōtaki to north of Levin are being investigated now for implementation as part of the national Safe Network Programme.

Urban Centres

As well as being a major population centre, Palmerston North holds a strategic location in the region. Walking, cycling and public transport options are being improved to ensure a resilient multi-modal transport network.

- The He Ara Kotahi 7.1km off-road pathway and bridge over the Manawatū River provides an important walking and cycling connection from Palmerston North to Linton and Massey University for the over 18,000 people who live, study or work on the southern side of the Manawatū River. Our expected contribution towards the \$18.4 million project is \$10.9 million. The bridge and pathway were opened in June 2019.
- To maintain the Capital Connection rail service from Palmerston North to Wellington for the next two years we have committed funding assistance for operational and capital costs. We are continuing to work with KiwiRail, Horizons Regional Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council to maintain the service, and also consider the Future of Rail work before committing longer term funding.
- On regional connectivity, as part of the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Improvements (PNITI), work is underway to complete a detailed business case for roading initiatives required to support the freight hub and distribution potential of the region. This work is being informed by KiwiRail plans to construct a new freight hub in Manawatū.
- In Whanganui, the Upokongaro to City Cycleway, including a new pedestrian and cycling bridge at Upokongaro, is under construction. The cycleway is part of the Mountains to Sea cycleway, which begins in Ohakune and continues through National Park to Whanganui, ending at Castlecliff's North Mole.

Regional Development

Other projects underway across the region will provide improved connectivity and resilience for journeys within and through the region. These projects are significant given the placement of the Manawatū-Whanganui region and its role for travellers and commuters as well as for the movement of freight.

The importance of resilience for these journeys has been highlighted by the closure of SH3 through the Manawatū Gorge, as well as by shorter-term closures of other roads as a result of weather events or accidents.

Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) investment in Manawatu-Whanganui

PGF transport investment in the region has focused on improving rail freight service. In Palmerston North, investigations are underway into a Regional Economic Growth Hub for transport, part of which would be a rail-enabled container transfer facility.

In Dannevirke, the PGF is investing in a rail hub at Taupiri Siding as part of the Hawke's Bay Transport Package; while in Whanganui, investment is targeted at improving the condition and resilience of the rail track on the Whanganui and Castlecliff lines and the connection between Palmerston North and New Plymouth.

Underway or about to start

- Whirokino Trestle and Manawatū River Bridge: The wider traffic lanes and shoulders on the new Whirokino Trestle and Manawatū River Bridges will improve safety and the ability to carry heavier trucks, and will save these trucks from long detour routes. Construction is on schedule for completion in early 2020. The new bridges will have a 1.5m wide shoulder for cyclists to use. Community members have recently raised the possibility of preserving the existing Whirokino Trestle bridge for use as part of the walking and cycling path or considering a clip-on to the new bridge for walking and cycling – our discussions are continuing.
- The Ōtaki to north of Levin project has been re-evaluated, and a new approach has been agreed. Some short-term safety improvements have been completed, and further work is being considered. We have announced a preferred corridor for the new route. The next step for the Ōtaki to north of Levin project is to undertake the Detailed Business Case and further investigate and progress design of the road, within the preferred corridor. However, there is no funding currently available for this work. We are working alongside the Horowhenua District Council as they develop a multi-modal Horowhenua Integrated Transport Strategy (HITS).
- Emergency repairs to SH4 (Paraparua): A programme of work from Whanganui to Raetihi is underway, to complete the more challenging sections of road that were impacted by the 2015 flood event. This will see an intense programme over the coming summer months.
- The Rangitikei District Council has asked that the Transport Agency considers whether the Taihape-Napier road should be re-designated as a state highway. A point-of-entry case is being developed to determine whether this should be progressed further.
- The Ruapehu District Council is working with DOC, iwi and the Transport Agency to explore options for managing tourism-related traffic, including safe parking and additional bus services to key attractions, such as the Tongariro Crossing and Mt Ruapehu ski fields.

Investment in Manawatū-Whanganui

| NLTP | 2015-18 | 2018-21 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Forecast total investment | \$527 million | \$755 million |
| Forecast maintenance and operations | \$386 million | \$337 million |
| Forecast public transport investment | \$17 million | \$26 million |
| Forecast walking and cycling | \$6 million | \$15 million |
| Regional network improvements | \$110 million | \$369 million |
| Total Provincial Growth Fund | | \$47 million |