

Taranaki regional transport update – August 2019

Overview

For New Zealand's sixth most densely populated region, access within the Taranaki region and connections between neighbouring regions need to be safe, reliable and resilient to support the region's strong export-based economy. Taranaki relies on natural resources, such as forestry, oil and gas and farming, for its economic wellbeing. With New Plymouth being the economic heart of the region, particularly through the port and airport, there is increased commuter traffic along SH3 to Hawera.

Our investment in the region recognises the critical importance of ensuring the land transport system is well-connected and resilient, while also ensuring safety for trucks that travel more than 75 million kilometres on Taranaki roads each year. Safety and resilience improvements are well underway on the stretch of SH3 from Awakino Gorge to Mt Messenger, and work is progressing through detailed design and consenting for construction expected to begin later this year on the Awakino Tunnel Bypass and the 6km-long Mt Messenger Bypass. Both projects will help with safer journeys and resilient connections, which is important given the region's relative isolation.

New Plymouth's urban growth is spreading north through Bell Block, Waitara and Urenui. Safety improvements planned for SH3 Waitara to Bell Block will reduce deaths and serious injuries by at least 70% along this stretch of highway. This work includes intersection upgrades, turning bays and median strips.

In the region's urban communities, population growth pressures remain steady, with the New Plymouth district classified as a high-growth area. New Plymouth District Council has made the most of their opportunities to embed walking and cycling into their transport system, becoming a truly multi modal city.

Collaborative land use and transport planning for future growth will be critical in creating desirable urban spaces and liveable communities, as well as providing and promoting improved access through more affordable, safe and convenient travel choices.

Safety, resilience and choice

Together with local government bodies including the New Plymouth District Council (NPDC) and Taranaki Regional Council (TRC), we developed the Keeping New Plymouth Moving and Growing business case to provide a balanced transport system.

This balanced transport system has three key priorities or areas of focus for transport in the Taranaki region – improving safety, ensuring resilience and providing more travel choices.

In the last 18 months

- We have completed the first stage of safety and resilience improvements covering 58km from Awakino Gorge to Mt Messenger, including new roadside safety barriers in high-risk areas, rumble strips, electronic warning signs, new formalised pull-over areas and a new slow vehicle bay at Awakau Road.
- We have completed the preparation of a business case for improvements to SH43, including the sealing of a 12km gravel section through the Tangarakau Gorge, commissioned by through the Provincial Growth Fund.

- We have completed a preliminary stage of safety improvements to SH3 between Waitara and Bell Block, with the removal of the northbound passing lane between Mahoetahi Road and Raleigh Street.
- We have invested more than \$17 million into our Taranaki Network Outcomes Contract, completing several upgrades and safety improvements including structural asphalt projects on SH3 at New Plymouth Boys High Hill and SH44 near St Aubyn Street, and works on SH45 near Powderham Street.
- We have invested in our Low Cost/Low Risk Safety Programme, with recent highlights including completion of the SH3 Miro Street crossing in Inglewood and SH44 Pedestrian Links to City Walkway, from Elliot to Liardet Street.
- We have invested in completing significant repairs to a rain-damaged culvert beneath SH3 near Lake Mangamahoe. We have also repaired an under slip on SH43 at Hospital Hill in Taumarunui that was threatening access to Taumarunui Hospital.
- We have completed a major asphalt resurfacing upgrade on the urban area of SH3 between Vickers Road and Smart Road.

Underway or about to start

- Work is underway to complete the remaining stages of SH3 Safety and Resilience improvements from Awakino Gorge to Mt Messenger. This includes construction of a passing lane at Ladies Mile which began in early 2019 and is expected to be completed in mid-2020. Work on the Awakino Tunnel Bypass, expected to cost \$37.5 million, is planned to start in October 2019 and scheduled for completion in May 2021.
- We're currently nearing the end of the detailed design and consents process for the \$200 million 6km-long Mt Messenger Bypass Project, with construction expected to start in late 2019 and occurring over a 4-year period. The project includes both 120m-long bridge over the edge of a significant wetland and a shorter bridge to reduce freshwater effects, as well as a 230m-long tunnel under the ridgeline south-east of Mt Messenger, creating a journey that is a kilometre shorter than the existing route. Of the total project budget, \$109 million is allocated.
- A contract for the detailed design of the pre-implementation phase of the \$29 million SH3 Waitara to Bell Block safety improvements project is expected to be awarded in September 2019. The proposed improvements will include a combination of intersection upgrades, with roundabouts likely at the airport, Mountain Road, Waitara Road and Princess Street intersections, turning bays and median barriers. Once complete, the improvements are expected to reduce deaths and serious injuries along the highway by at least 70%.

Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) investment in Taranaki

- Through the Provincial Growth Fund, we're investigating the feasibility and cost of establishing rail hubs in the neighbouring Whanganui/Manawatū region to consolidate the transportation of logs to the Port of Taranaki.
- The PGF is also funding a business case looking at investment in SH43 the 'Forgotten Highway', one of the last state highways with unsealed sections. This road provides both a key link for tourism and from Taranaki into the central North Island.

Investment in Taranaki

NLTP	2015-18	2018-21
Forecast total investment	\$232 million	\$349 million
Forecast maintenance and operations	\$139 million	\$158 million
Forecast public transport investment	\$8 million	\$10 million
Forecast walking and cycling	\$3 million	\$1 million
Regional network improvements	\$38 million	\$102 million
Total Provincial Growth Fund		\$0.7 million