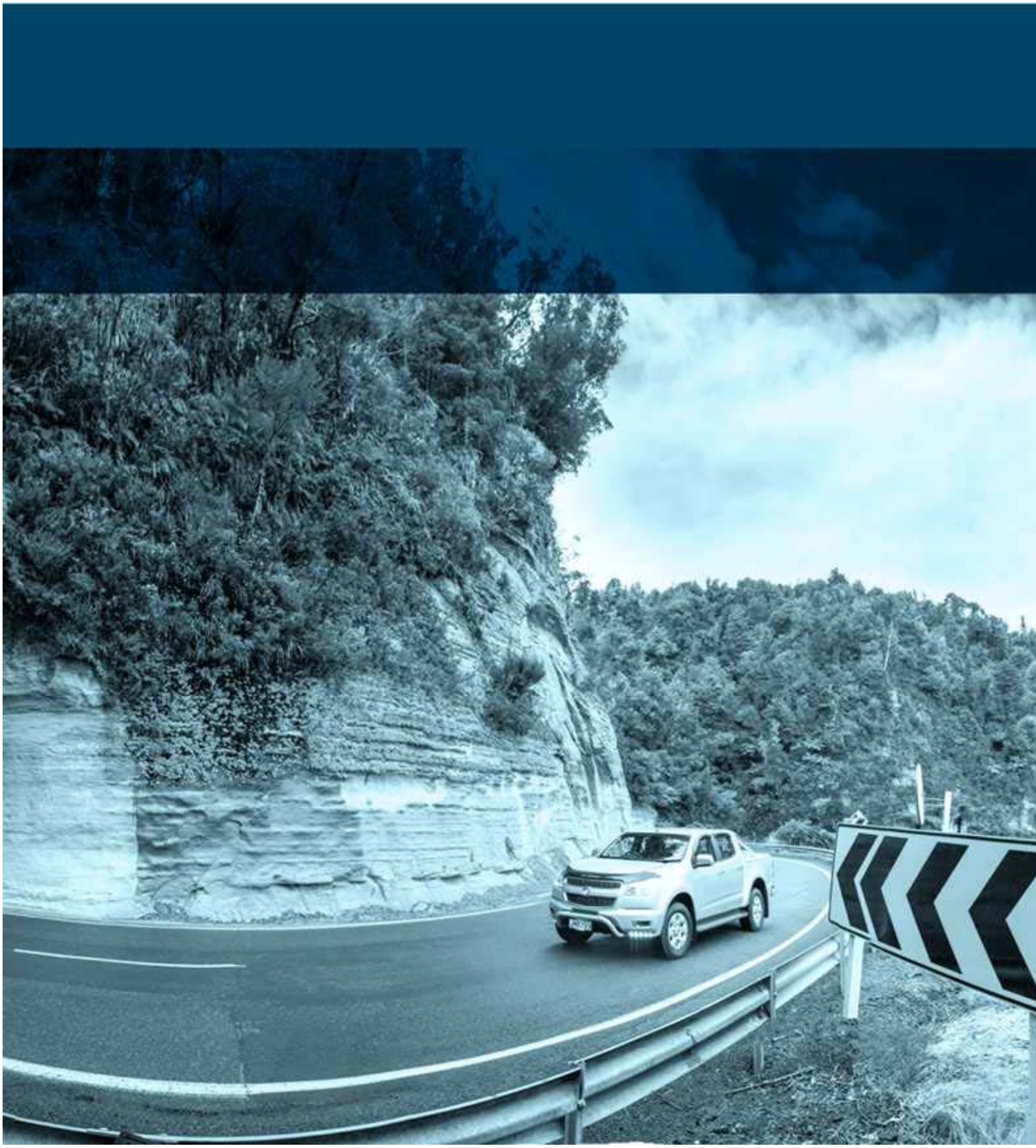
Section 1 - Introduction



1 Introduction

The NZ Transport Agency (Transport Agency) has lodged a Notice of Requirement (NoR) and applications for resource consent for the Mt Messenger Bypass (the Project). This Assessment of Effects on the Environment (AEE) has been prepared to support the NoR and resource consent applications.

1.1 The New Zealand Transport Agency

The Transport Agency is a Crown entity established on 1 August 2008 under the Land Transport Management Act 2003 (LTMA) and is responsible for providing an integrated approach to planning, funding and delivering transport in New Zealand.

The objective of the Transport Agency, as set out in s94 of the LTMA, is to "undertake its functions in a way that contributes to an effective, efficient, and safe land transport system in the public interest".

The Transport Agency's Statement of Intent 2017-2021 (SOI) identifies its core value as delivering Great Journeys that are easy, safe and connected, through an integrated land transport system that helps people get the most out of life and supports business. The SOI identifies key focus areas, which include connecting and developing New Zealand's regions, and keeping people safe.

1.2 State Highway 3

State Highway 3 (SH3) north from New Plymouth serves as the principal transport route joining the Taranaki region through to the Waikato and on to Hamilton, Tauranga and Auckland. Taranaki's only arterial route connecting directly to and from the north, SH3 is of particular strategic importance to the economic well-being and future of Taranaki.

Most of the 240km length of SH3 between New Plymouth and Hamilton traverses open country with average travel speeds between 75 and 85km/h. However, the route through the Awakino Gorge and over Mt Messenger is to a markedly different standard, characterised by a tortuous alignment, narrow widths, steep grades, limited overtaking and restricted visibility.

The need to improve this section of SH3 was recognised through the Government's Accelerated Regional Roading Package (ARRP),[1] announced in January 2016. The ARRP identified the following three projects as part of a programme of works aimed at addressing safety, resilience and network performance issues of the Mt Messenger and Awakino Gorge corridor of SH3:

- Awakino Tunnel Bypass;
- Corridor Safety Improvements; and
- Mt Messenger Bypass.

[1] http://www.transport.govt.nz/land/accelerated-regional-roading-package/

1.3 The Mt Messenger Bypass

On 31 August 2017 the Minister of Transport announced that the Transport Agency would be progressing the Project. The Project will be funded through the ARRP and the National Land Transport Fund.

The Project involves the construction and ongoing operation of a new section of SH3, generally between Uruti and Ahititi to the north of New Plymouth. This new section of SH3 will bypass the existing approximately 7.4km steep, narrow and winding section of highway at Mt Messenger.

The Project comprises a two lane highway, approximately 6km in length (including the tie-ins to the existing SH3 alignment), located to the east of the existing SH3 alignment (refer Figure 1.1).

The Project will include the following key aspects:

- A two lane road alignment (one traffic lane in each direction) with tie-ins to the existing SH3 corridor at the north and south of the alignment;
- A tunnel (approximately 240m in length) through the ridgeline near the existing Mt Messenger rest area, with an associated tunnel control building and emergency water-supply tanks;
- A 120m long bridge over a wetland on a tributary of the Mimi River;
- Ten rock cuttings up to a depth of about 60m and along a combined distance of approximately 2.6km (including the tunnel portals);
- Thirteen earth embankments up to about 40m in height (but typically less than 5m high), along a combined distance of approximately 2.5km;
- Retaining walls and mechanically stabilised earth (MSE) embankments;
- Stormwater treatment and attenuation facilities (including stormwater retention ponds, swales and road drainage network); and
- Comprehensive environmental mitigation and biodiversity offset measures.

The Project is being undertaken to enhance the safety, resilience and journey time reliability of travel on SH3 and contribute to enhanced local and regional economic growth and productivity for people and freight.

The Project will remove a corridor of native vegetation to the east of the existing SH3 alignment. To address effects on habitats and flora and fauna, the Project includes a package of mitigation and biodiversity offsets. The biodiversity offsets include pest management over a substantial area (560ha) of native forest, along with restoration planting.

Ngāti Tama are mana whenua for this area and also own a significant proportion of the land through which the Project will be constructed. There have been detailed discussions between the Transport Agency and Ngāti Tama in developing the Project, including during the assessment of alternative route options for the Project and during the development of the Project designs described in this AEE.

1.4 Purpose and structure of the AEE

The purpose of the AEE is to describe the Project, the alternatives considered, the consultation undertaken and the potential effects arising from the construction and operation of the Project. The AEE also assesses the Project against the relevant statutory documents.

The AEE is part of the overall suite of application documents, which has been prepared in accordance with the relevant provisions of the RMA (in particular Schedule 4) and provides information in support of the NoR and resource consent applications. The scope of the NoR and resource consents sought are set out in detail in Section 2 of the AEE.

The AEE comprises five parts as listed below:

Mt Messenger Bypass – Assessment of Effects on the Environment			
RMA Application Forms	**Notice of Requirement**	**NoR forms, including designation plans, property schedule, conditions**	
	Resource Consent applications	**Resource consent application forms**	
Volume 1	**Assessment of Effects on the Environment**		
	Appendix A – D	Appendix A: Objectives and policies assessment; Appendix B: Schedule of properties; Appendix C: Planning maps; Appendix D: Draft designation and resource consent conditions	
Volume 2	**Drawing Set**		
Volume 3	**Technical Reports**		
	Technical Report 1	Strategic Transport Assessment	
	Technical Report 2	Traffic and Transport Assessment	
	Technical Report 3	Resilience Assessment	
	Technical Report 4	Economics Assessment	
	Technical Report 5	Social Impact Assessment	
	Technical Report 6	Recreation Assessment	
	Technical Report 7	Assessments of Ecological Effects	
		Technical Report 7a	Vegetation
		Technical Report 7b	Freshwater Ecology
		Technical Report 7c	Invertebrates
		Technical Report 7d	Herpetofauna
		Technical Report 7e	Avifauna
		Technical Report 7f	Bats
		Technical Report 7g	Marine Ecology
		Technical Report 7h	Ecological Mitigation and Offset
	Technical Report 8a	Landscape, Natural Character and Visual Assessment	

Mt Messenger Bypass – Assessment of Effects on the Environment		
	Technical Report 8b	Landscape and Environment Design Framework
	Technical Report 9	Historic Heritage Assessment
	Technical Report 10	Environmental Noise & Vibration Assessment
	Technical Report 11	Air Quality Assessment
	Technical Report 12	Contaminated Land Assessment
	Technical Report 13	Construction Water Assessment Report
	Technical Report 14	Geotechnical Appraisal
Volume 4	**Consideration of alternatives** – Options assessment reports	
Volume 5	**Draft Management Plans:** Construction Environmental Management Plan Dust Management Plan Contaminated Land Management Plan Accidental Discovery Protocol Construction Traffic Management Plan Construction Water Management Plan and Specific Construction Water Management Plans Construction Noise Management Plan Ecology and Landscape Management Plan	

The Project is described in the following sections of the AEE and is shown on the Drawings in Volume 2: Drawing Set. (referred to hereafter as "**the drawing set**").

1.4.1 Structure of AEE

The structure of this AEE report is as follows:

- **Sections 1 and 2** provide an **Introduction** to the Project and describe the **NoR** and **Resource Consent Applications**.
- **Section 3** describes the **Project Background**, including an overview of SH3 and its strategic importance to Taranaki, the problems at the Mt Messenger section, the development of the Project, and an overview of Ngāti Tama and their cultural values and the natural environment values of the Mt Messenger area.
- **Section 4** provides the **Project Description** and details the design and characteristics of the Project.
- **Section 5** describes the **Construction** methodology.
- **Section 6** summarises the **Alternatives Assessment** process.
- **Section 7** summarises the **Consultation and Engagement** completed by the Transport Agency to date and the outcomes from this engagement.
- **Section 8** describes the **Existing Environment** of the Project area.
- **Section 9** provides a detailed **Assessment of Effects of the Project on the Environment.**

- **Section 10** describes the **Management of Effects**, including how effects have been avoided, remedied, mitigated or offset, the proposed draft consent conditions and proposed management plans.
- **Section 11** describes the **Statutory Context and Assessment** of the relevant statutory documents.

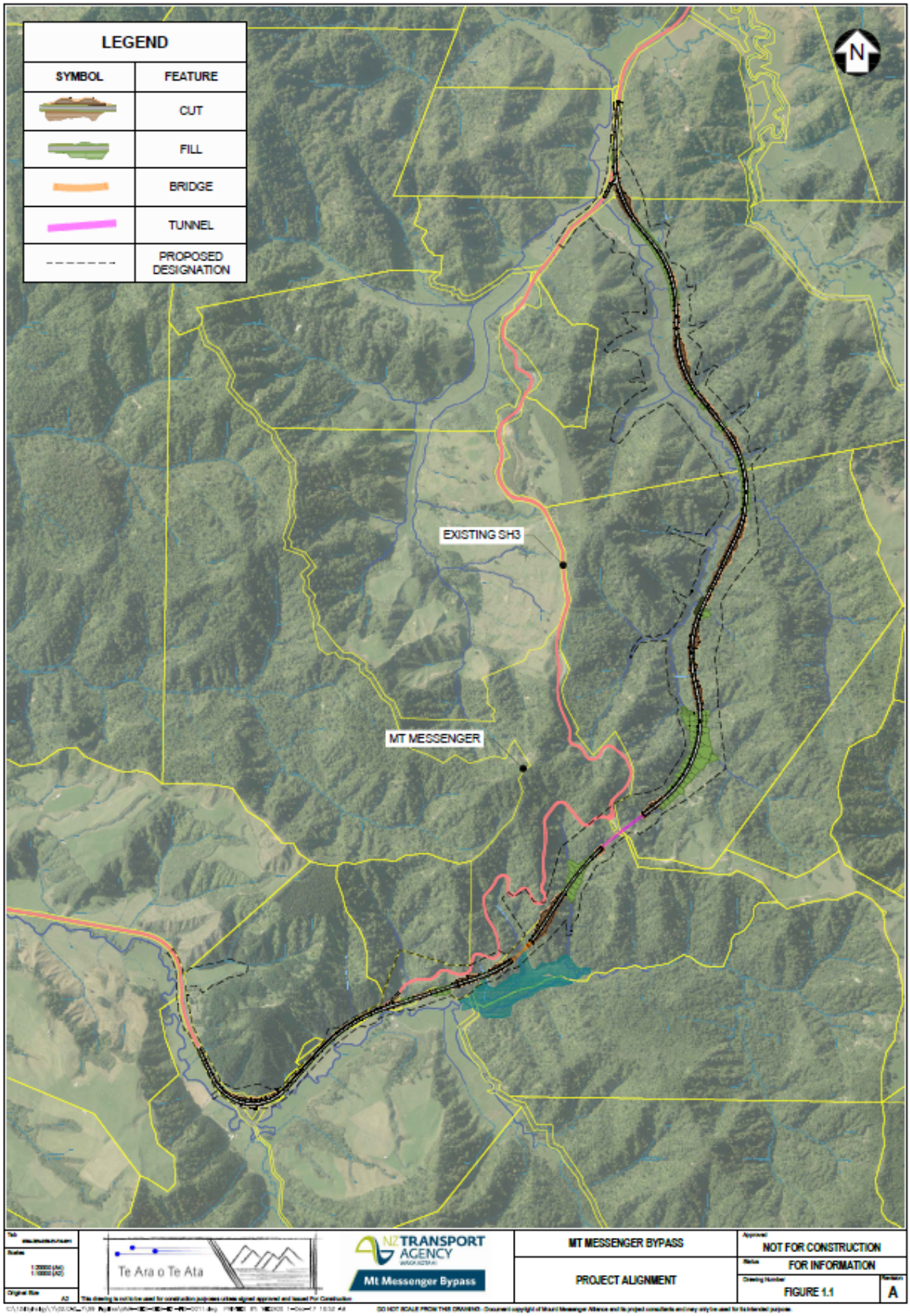


Figure 1.1 – Project alignment