


Recreation Assessment

December 2017

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Technical Report 6



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Executive Summary

This report considers the potential effects of the NZ Transport Agency's Mt Messenger Bypass on recreation and tourism values.

The recreation setting is:

- walking access to Mt Messenger from SH3, and the relatively large area of road reserve around it;
- walking access along the unformed legal road between Mt Messenger and the Waipingao peak¹;
- walking access to the Kiwi Road track which leads from SH3 to the Mt Messenger Conservation Area;
- the rest area at the summit of the Mt Messenger section of SH3; and
- recreational whitebaiting on the Tongaporutu and Mimi Rivers.

The proposal affects an area with relatively low levels of recreation activity, but there is a need to ensure that existing recreation facilities are maintained or replaced. The proposal will maintain the current track access areas, with opportunities to consolidate the track access areas for better amenity for the start of both the Kiwi Road and Mt Messenger Tracks.

The net effect of the proposal on recreation is positive, considering also the removal of a substantial noise source from the eastern end of the Mt Messenger Track.

The proposal is consistent with regional and national desires for improved regional roading connectivity for regional tourism.

Effects on whitebait are considered in the freshwater ecology assessment (Technical report 7b) and are anticipated to be managed via, for example, the control of construction activities, culvert design and habitat restoration.

¹ The New Zealand Geographic Board's approved name for the peak, as shown in the Topographic Map series, is Waipingau. Waipingao is the name preferred by Ngāti Tama and is used here.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope of this report

This report forms part of a suite of technical reports prepared for the NZ Transport Agency's Mt Messenger Bypass project (the Project). Its purpose is to inform the Assessment of Effects on the Environment Report (AEE) and to support the resource consent application and Notices of Requirement to alter the existing State Highway designation, which are required to enable the Project to proceed.

This report assesses the effects of the Project on the publicly accessible recreation facilities and opportunities potentially affected by the Project Alignment as shown on the AEE report Project Drawings in Volume 2: Drawing Set. These areas are:

- walking access to Mt Messenger from SH3, and the relatively large area of road reserve around it;
- walking access along the unformed legal road between Mt Messenger and the Waipingao peak;
- walking access to the Kiwi Road track which leads from SH3 to the Mt Messenger Conservation Area; and
- the rest area at the summit of the Mt Messenger section of SH3.

This report also considers the potential effects on recreational whitebaiting. Trout fishing has not been identified as an activity in the study area.

1.2 Project Description

The Project involves the construction and ongoing operation of a new section of State Highway 3 (SH3), generally between Uruti and Ahititi to the north of New Plymouth. This new section of SH3 will bypass the existing steep, narrow and winding section of highway at Mt Messenger. The Project comprises a new section of two lane highway, approximately 6km in length, located to the east of the existing SH3 alignment.

The primary objectives of the Project are 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.

A full description of the Project including its design, construction and operation is provided in the Assessment of Effects in the Environment Report, contained in Volume 1: AEE, and is shown on the Drawings in Volume 2: Drawing Set.

1.3 Assessment of recreation effects approach

This assessment focuses on recreation activities (things to do when recreating) and recreation values (those factors which make recreation activities valuable or desirable). Recreation activities are enabled by recreation facilities, including access, and resources, such as whitebait. Recreation values include such things as sense of place and personal

development and are facilitated by such factors as challenge, companionship, excitement and silence.

Tourism is a subset of recreation. Tourists are people recreating while they are staying away from home, generally at least overnight.

This report also considers the ability of the Project to deliver beneficial outcomes for tourism, particularly in the Taranaki region, but only in a broad manner. Review of the Mt Messenger route as a recreational cycleway is included.

Use of private land for recreation is not considered in this assessment. Potential effects on landowners are personal and cannot be generalised (that is, some landowners might like a nearby development, from a recreation perspective, and some might not or not care, and their opinions are represented in their submissions to a proposal). This includes the use of Ngāti Tama land by its owners, or by others who access the Ngāti Tama land. The use by Ngāti Tama of their land is covered in their cultural assessment.

This report does not consider the relative merits of the existing and proposed routes from a tourism and landscape perspective. That is, it does not consider which route gives a better visitor experience of the Mt Messenger area, as this is, in this case, not a determinant of the effect of the proposal on tourism. Landscape effects are considered separately. However, this report notes that the proposal is consistent with a stated desire to ease road access into Taranaki to encourage tourism.

1.4 Project Features

Cycle access will be possible though the proposed tunnel, and the new road will have sufficiently broad shoulders to allow for road cycling, although there are no proposed upgrades to the Highway north and south of the new section to allow for safe cycling beyond the upgraded road.

This assessment recommends the development of a rest stop, preferably combined with accesses to the Mt Messenger and Kiwi Road Tracks near the current track entry points. Re-routing one of the tracks – most likely the Kiwi Road Track – under a bridge on the new route will obviate walkers having to cross SH3.

The status of the section of SH3 to be bypassed will be decided as part of a future and separate revocation process and does not form part of this assessment.

1.5 Expertise

This report has been authored by Rob Greenaway, a consultant recreation and tourism planner with more than 25 years' experience. Rob is a graduate of Lincoln University with qualifications in parks and recreation management. He is an Accredited Recreation Professional and Fellow of the NZ Recreation Association and a member of the New Zealand Association for Impact Assessment. In 2011 he was appointed an inaugural Board member of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Recreation Council to assist Sport New Zealand with the implementation of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, amongst other things.

Since 1990 Rob has worked throughout New Zealand and in the Pacific on more than 300 recreation and tourism projects and has presented evidence for community groups and applicants at more than 80 resource management hearings. He has worked for approximately 30 territorial authorities and has completed a full range of recreation and tourism planning projects including primary social science research, business plans, feasibility studies, management plans, open space strategies, contract reviews, event management and assessments of effect.

2 Statutory and strategic framework

2.1 Resource Management Act and Statutory Plan documents

This assessment responds to the high-level directive of Section 7(c) of the Resource Management Act 1991 which requires particular regard – “in relation to managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources” – to “the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values”. Amenity values are defined by the Act to mean “those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes” (Section 2).

Section 10.3 (“Maintaining and Enhancing Amenity Values”) of the Taranaki Regional Council’s *Regional Policy Statement for Taranaki* responds to this directive with AMY Objective 1:

To recognise the positive contributions of appropriate use and development in terms of providing for the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values in the Taranaki region, while avoiding, remedying or mitigating the adverse effects of inappropriate use and development on amenity values.

The subsequent AMY Policy 1 seeks to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects of resource use and development on rural and urban amenity values while promoting any positive effects, stating that:

Those qualities and characteristics that contribute to amenity values in the Taranaki region include:...

(b) scenic, aesthetic, recreational and educational opportunities provided by parks, reserves, farmland, and other open spaces, rivers, lakes, wetlands and their margins, coastal areas and areas of vegetation;

Issue 8 in the Management Strategy section of the operative New Plymouth District Plan (District Plan) addresses “Activities which reduce or detract from the amenity of open space areas” which provide (amongst other things) “recreational opportunities, from organised sports and informal active use, through to playgrounds and walkways to scenic and conservation reserves.” Relevant policies relate to zoned Open Space Environment Areas, of which there are none in the area affected by the proposal. There are also no considerations relevant to access to and along the coast, rivers or lakes.

The route is wholly within an area zoned Rural in the District Plan. Rule Rur77 (30) requires consideration of, for subdivisions for network utilities and roads:

The extent to which public space areas for recreation, conservation, or pedestrian/cycle access purposes are provided for.

Accordingly, this report considers the effects of the roading proposal on recreation amenity values.

2.2 Strategic context

The Department of Conservation's *Conservation Management Strategy for Wanganui 1997–2007* (CMS) (which has not been updated) notes, with regard to the North Taranaki Ecological District (p158):

The district's scenic coastline, extensive areas of native forest and bush-lined rivers offer significant potential for recreation. Existing facilities are few and not well developed, although track upgrading and bridge replacement has been carried out in some areas. Large, undeveloped backcountry areas are available for 'wilderness' tramping and hunting. ... The Whitecliffs Walkway provides a major walking opportunity close to New Plymouth, offering coastal views and access through an important conservation area. A marked route, suitable for more experienced trampers, links the walkway with Mt Messenger and Kiwi Road, further inland.

The CMS identifies no 'key issues' or 'management objectives' of relevance to recreation in the study area, besides the 'management of whitebait fisheries' (p161) and 'maintaining the Whitecliffs Walkway to a high standard' (p164). The Department administers no land in the study area but maintains the Whitecliffs Walkway, Mt Messenger Track and Kiwi Road Track by agreement with Ngāti Tama where relevant.

The Taranaki Regional Council *Regional Walkways and Cycleways Strategy for Taranaki* (2007) seeks to develop a regional network of walk and cycleways but has no reference to recommendations for the Mt Messenger section of SH3. It refers to the Kiwi Road Track and Mt Messenger Track as existing walkways. Proposals include a coastal walkway and long-distance cycle touring routes south from New Plymouth to Hawera and Wanganui and inland to the Central Plateau, and from New Plymouth to Mt Taranaki (the Mountains to sea route).

The *New Plymouth District Cycle Strategy* (2007) notes that (p22):

The current network for cyclists is mainly made up of roads shared with motorised traffic, with designated cycle lanes in some instances but more often without. The majority of the main routes outside the urban area have generous shoulder widths, but more minor routes and sections of SH3 and SH45 lack adequate shoulder room in places to safely accommodate cyclists.

Development proposals in the Strategy for enhanced or new cycleways are within or adjacent to urban boundaries.

More relevant to the roading proposal is the Venture Taranaki Trust's *Taranaki Regional Visitor Strategy 2010 – 2015*. A replacement strategy is in preparation but will not be available until later in 2017. The Strategy notes that (p12):

The majority of visitor flows to Taranaki are made by road, through one of three main entry points on State Highway 3 from the north and the south or State Highway 43 (Forgotten World Highway) from the east.

Much work has been done in recent years to improve aspects of SH3 both north and south, but further work particularly on the northern gateway through the Awakino Gorge and Mt

Messenger are required to enable this route to be considered a viable alternative to SH1 for visitors travelling south from Auckland.

Perceptions of isolation and poor access via all modes (road, rail, air and public transport) are considered important weaknesses to developing regional tourism potential (p24).

Venture Taranaki's 2012 *Economic Development Study On State Highway 3 North* indicates industry perceptions are that transport and tourism stand the most to gain from a SH3 upgrade.

The intention to encourage additional tourism in Taranaki is consistent with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment November's 2016 *Regional and Seasonal Dispersal of International Tourists* assessment which notes (pp2, 4 and 5):

While there has been strong growth in international tourism spending, this growth is not equally distributed across New Zealand. International tourists' spending remains skewed towards the four main 'gateway' regions: Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Queenstown (covering 65 per cent of overall tourism spending in the June 2016 year). And this doesn't appear to be changing ...

Whether or not a visitor will leave a main visitor centre depends on a number of interrelated factors. Chief among these is their perception of the distance to the other destination.

This has four elements:

- » Geographical distance – the actual travel distance from the centre to the new location;*
- » Travel time – how long it takes to get to the new destination (particularly if it can be done as a one-day round trip which enables the tourist to return to the 'main' centre);*
- » Amount of money – how much it costs to cover the distance and how that compares with the cost-effectiveness of other routes, how 'valuable' the attraction at the destination is, and generally whether or not they can afford the journey within their travel budget;*
- » Cognitive distance – the perception that the tourism product will be sufficiently different to overcome a preference to remain in the main centre...*

Successfully creating new destinations outside of the key tourist centres requires planning and effort on the part of national and local governments. In particular it needs:

- » co-operation between the regional and the main centre to work to overcome the distance issues described above. The ideal is to create a tourist route, e.g. a regional wine trail, that guides tourists, engages the attention of the winemakers, and opens opportunities for other entrepreneurs (bus tour companies) to offer services that encourage the utilisation of the route; ...*

While the Project does not in itself create a tourist route as described, it improves the actual and perceived accessibility of Taranaki from the north. Without an accessible roadway, a tourist route is a far harder prospect, and without ease of access generally, Taranaki will miss some tourism traffic. This report does not quantify the potential scale of increase in

regional tourism activity, but considers this a benefit of the proposal in general terms, and consistent with regional strategic directions for tourism development.

3 Existing environment

3.1 Public access opportunities

Public recreation opportunities directly affected by the Project are located on:

- legal road in the case of: the rest area at the summit of the existing Mt Messenger route; the eastern end of the Mt Messenger Track; and the western end of the Kiwi Road Track; and
- a short – approximately 100m – easement in favour of the public for access across Ngāti Tama land at the western end of the Kiwi Road Track.

An easement on Ngāti Tama land to the west of the route enables access to and along the Mt Messenger Track where it does not align with the unformed legal road which leads west from Parininihi / Mt Messenger to the Whitecliffs Track (also on an easement) near the coast.

Figure 3.1 shows public lands along the proposed route. Figure 3.2 shows the easements on Ngāti Tama land to enable access to the Mt Messenger Conservation Area in the east via the Kiwi Road Track and to the west and the Whitecliffs Walkway via the Mt Messenger Track. The eastern end of the Mt Messenger Track is not on the alignment shown on the topographical map and intersects SH3 approximately 50m north of the Kiwi Road Track

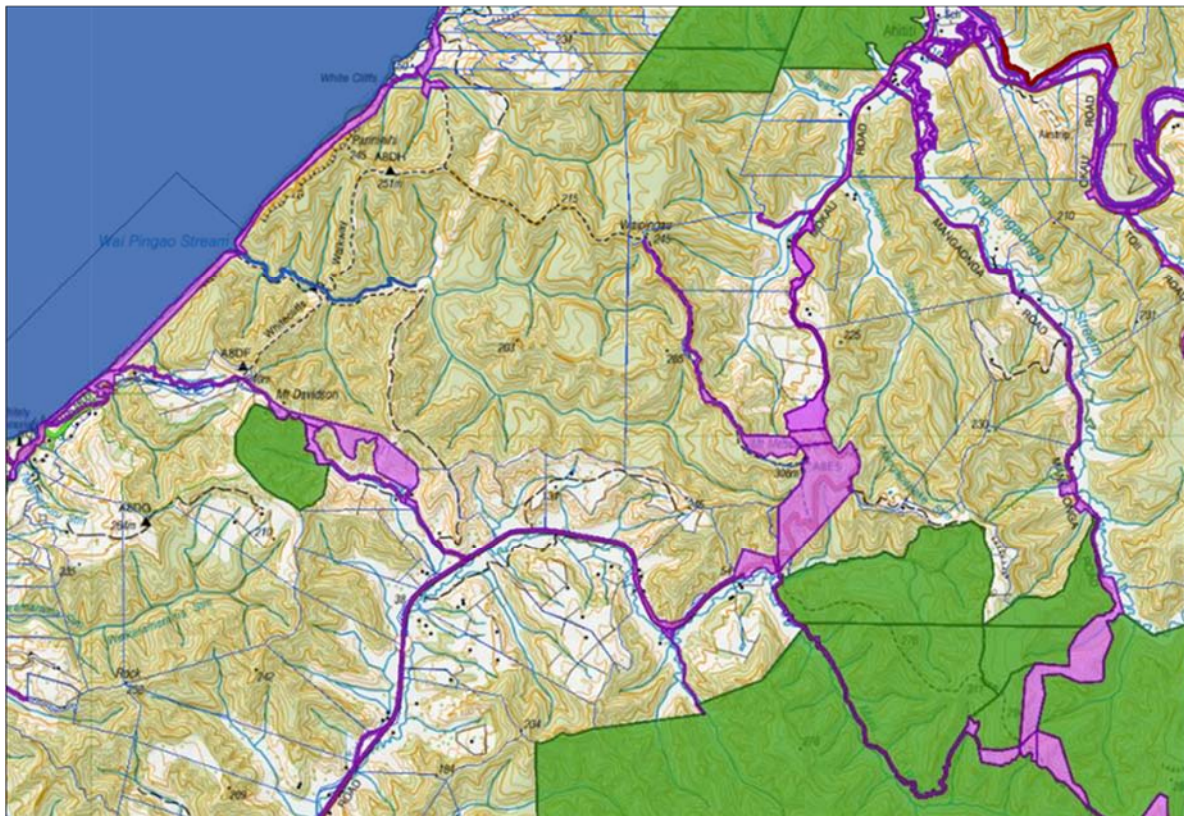


Figure 3.1 – Public land and proposed route. Source: Walking Access Commission

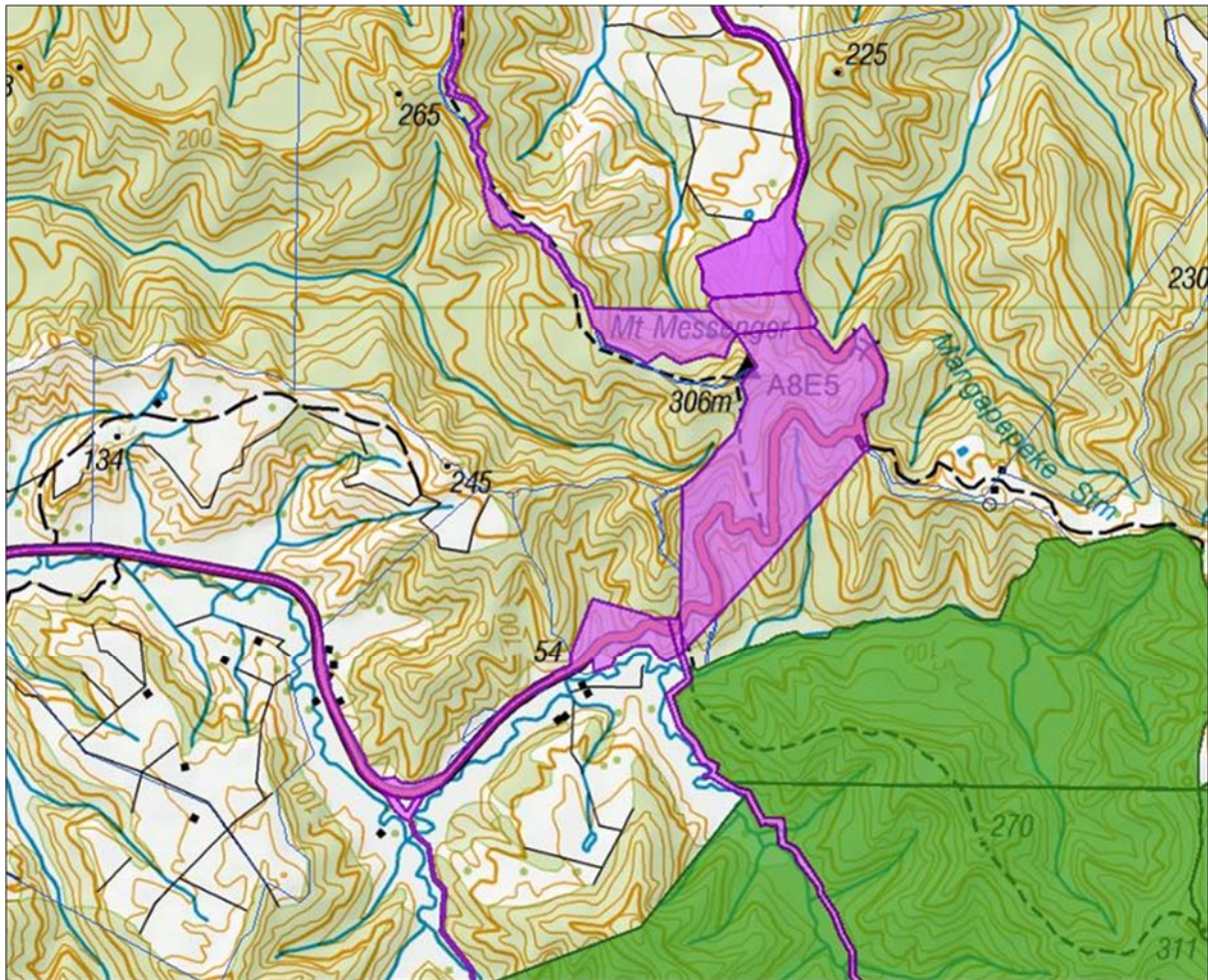


Figure 3.2 – Public access points. Source: Walking Access Commission

Photos of these locations are shown in Appendix A.

The Mt Messenger area is a low use recreation setting. There are no use data available for either the Kiwi Road or Mt Messenger Tracks, and the Department of Conservation estimates annual recreational use to be in the low hundreds of visits.

The Mt Messenger Track is used primarily to access trapping lines on Ngāti Tama land and is cleared approximately twice yearly by the Department. The track is suitable for fit trampers with tramping shoes and has several significant precipices directly adjacent to the track. The length of the track between Mt Messenger and the Waipingao peak is heavily subject to road noise from SH3 and borders farmland for approximately half the distance. Views south over Ngāti Tama land are largely obscured by vegetation.

The Department of Conservation promotes the Mt Messenger Track online as an ‘advanced tramping track’ with the text:²

This track climbs through tawa forest up a steep ridge to the summit of Mt Messenger (310 m). It then continues along the ridge through tawheowheo and kamahi forest. Rata

² <http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/taranaki/places/white-cliffs-and-mount-messenger-conservation-area/things-to-do/mount-messenger-to-whitecliffs-walkway-track/>

are visible on the slopes below, and their flowers, in December/January, attract tui and bellbirds. The western slopes are damper, with tawa, ponga and the occasional pukatea tree.

Although the track follows a defined ridgeline it may be overgrown in places and navigation may be difficult.

Waipingao, the second highest point of the route, is reached approximately 1 hr 30 min after the start and is marked by an old iron survey peg. From here the track descends to the coast. Approximately 30 min before reaching Whitecliffs the track crosses the Maui gas pipeline. A short section through nikau forest leads to the Whitecliffs Walkway.

From Whitecliffs Walkway you can return to Mt Messenger, or with prior transport arrangements, follow the Walkway in either direction.

The track begins on SH3, 50 km north of New Plymouth and approximately 1 km from the base of the southern side of Mt Messenger.

The Kiwi Road Track is used mostly by pig hunters accessing the Mt Messenger Conservation Area to the east. It crosses private land and is closed from 1 September to 30 November for the lambing season. The track quickly distances itself from the existing road and is within heavy bush with few views.

The Department of Conservation promotes the Kiwi Road Track online as an 'advanced tramping track' with the text:³

This track crosses private farmland – before setting out you need to contact Rerekapa Station to gain permission to cross their land: phone +64 6 752 6995.

This route descends to a regenerating kahikatea swamp and then continues up the ridge above the Mimi River valley.

The track may be overgrown in places and there may be missing track markers making navigation difficult.

The open mixed tawa/kamaha forest on the ridge is interspersed with small patches of hard beech forest. The route continues over several ridges and then descends and levels out.

The route skirts around Oenone trig (351 m) and continues along the ridge towards Rerekapa Station. Beyond Rerekapa Station you can see the forest of the Makino Conservation Area. The route then climbs over several steep peaks to Huanui trig (353 m) and then descends into a gully with a small stream.

A steep climb leads onto an easier section, which follows the ridge out to the open farmland of Rerekapa Station and on to Kiwi Road.

Either arrange to have a car waiting at Kiwi Road, or return to Mt Messenger. The track is not marked where it comes out onto the Kiwi Road in the vicinity of an airstrip.

³ <http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/taranaki/places/white-cliffs-and-mount-messenger-conservation-area/things-to-do/mount-messenger-to-kiwi-road-track/>

The track begins on SH3, 50 km north of New Plymouth and approximately 1 km from the base of the southern side of Mt Messenger.

There is no pull-over area at the intersection of SH3 and the Mt Messenger Track, with the route entering directly onto the Highway. The Kiwi Road Track has a small pull-over area suitable for parking two to three vehicles. See **Error! Reference source not found.**

The rest area at the SH3 summit of the Mt Messenger provides access to private property at the rear and features two picnic tables, a small pull-over area, a Heritage Trails information sign, rubbish bin, and a surrounding fence intended to reduce the potential for the fly-tipping of rubbish over adjacent banks. Behind the fence is plenty of thrown household rubbish and other waste materials. Fly-tipping is a major problem along the existing route as well as in other rest areas and reserves north and south.

3.2 Recreational and tourism road use

There are no counts of recreational use of the Mt Messenger section of SH3 for walking, running or cycling.

Relative popularity data for running and cycling can be provided by “Strava” heatmaps. These show an accumulation of 2015 activity data relying on subscribers to the popular run and ride (mostly) online recording and comparison service, called Strava. The data are based on GPS records from smartphones uploaded to a central database, allowing speed and time comparisons with others, and monitoring of individual progress. There were more than 17 million subscribers internationally in 2016, although there are no public data for national membership. Some caution needs to be applied to the use of these data as they show participation by only Strava members, and some data accumulates from users staying logged in when they are driving or are on a ferry. However, they give a good indication of, particularly, the relative levels of use of different settings (no absolute data are provided publicly by Strava).

Figure 3.3 shows Strava biking activity for northern Taranaki for 2015. The Mt Messenger route – and SH3 north of New Plymouth generally – has relatively little use. While there are no data to indicate why, the route is narrow with very little or no shoulder space for cycling, many blind and tight corners, and is well-used by heavy vehicles. Safety for cycling is very poor.

In 2007 the Ministry of Tourism (now the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) released a report on tourism travel modes and frequency throughout the country, including by road – the *Tourism Flows Model*. This showed SH3 to be a relatively low-use tourism route but provided insufficient detail for any reasonable analysis for the Taranaki Region.

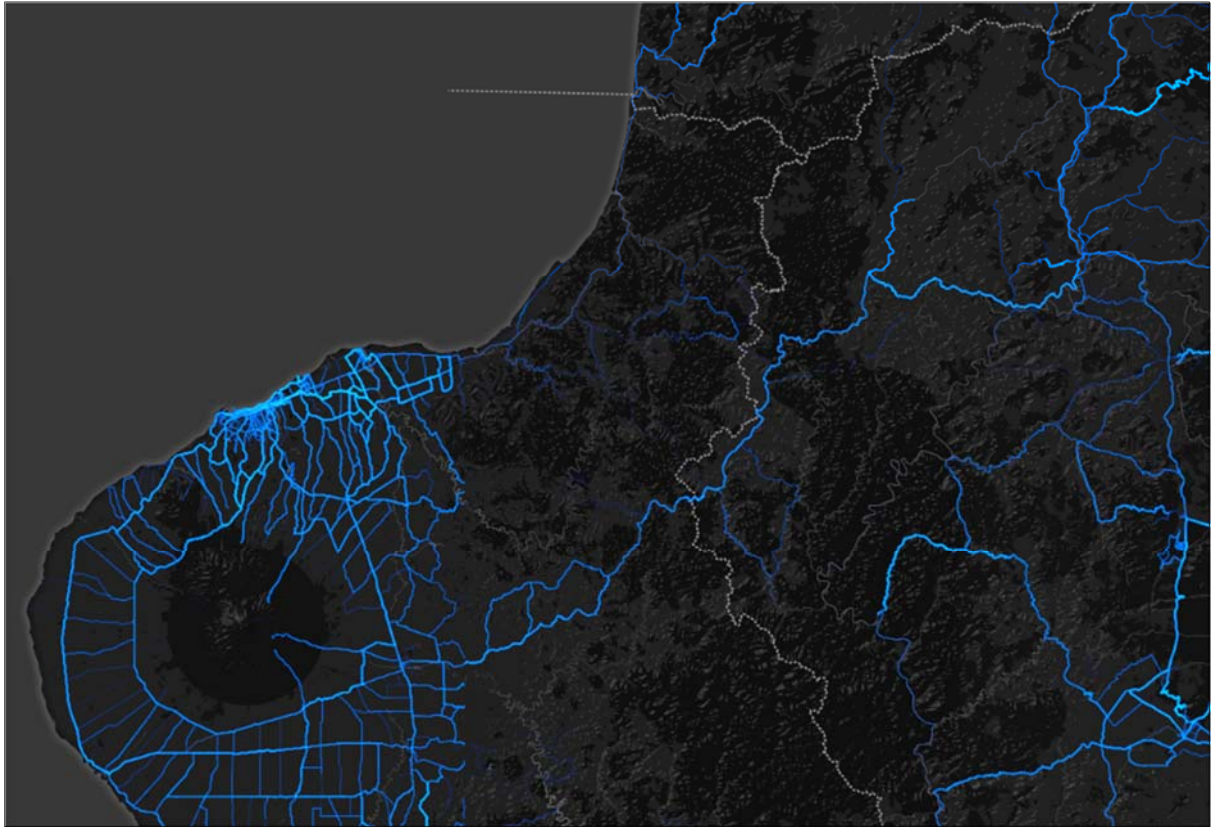


Figure 3.3 – Relative bike activity in Taranaki 2015. Source: Strava

3.3 Waterways

No waterways in the Mimi River or Tongaporutu River catchments are identified as trout fisheries in the Fish & Game Council national angler surveys⁴ or in the most comprehensive popular trout fishing guides.⁵

The Tongaporutu River is identified in two reports⁶ from last century as an important recreational and commercial whitebait fishery. There has been little recent national research into recreational whitebaiting activity (with more focus on whitebait habitat, mostly for inanga, a *Galaxias* species). However, this older research is quite useful as it shows the capacity for recreation amenity prior to more recent habitat change and increased fishing pressure.

The Taranaki Catchment Commission noted in 1981:

⁴ Unwin, M. 2009. *Angler usage of lake and river fisheries managed by Fish & Game New Zealand: results from the 2007/08 National Angling Survey*. Niwa client report.

⁵ Such as Kent, J. 2006. *North Island Trout Fishing Guide*. Reed. and <http://www.nzfishing.com>

⁶ Taranaki Catchment Commission, 1981. *The Recreational Whitebait Fishery in Taranaki*. Stratford. and Boubée J.A.T. West D.W. Mora A.L. 1991. *New Zealand Freshwater Fisheries Miscellaneous Report No.129 Awakino River Whitebait Fishery*. Report to the Department of Conservation by MAF Fisheries.

The Tongaporutu River is a significant recreational and commercial whitebait fishery. It is fished constantly throughout the whitebait season from the river mouth to approximately 18 kilometres upstream. Most whitebaiters fish upstream of the State Highway 3 bridge. River access by road extends a considerable distance inland, although only a few amateur whitebaiters fish more than 18 kilometres upstream. Ease of access along the banks of the lower river adjacent to State Highway 3 makes this area particularly popular among amateur fishermen. However, relatively few people whitebait at the mouth of the estuary with between eight and ten whitebaiters being the most observed in any one day. The shallow and open nature of the estuary means that major tidal currents are concentrated towards the centre of the estuary and river during the incoming tide. Consequently, during the rising tide, whitebait migrate at a considerable distance from the river banks.

The Tongaporutu River is fished frequently by local residents although whitebaiters travel from throughout Taranaki to fish this river. The holiday accommodation available and the river's reputation for providing good whitebait catches ensure moderate to heavy use during school holidays and weekends. Day trips by whitebaiters travelling 70 kilometres from New Plymouth are infrequent.

The Tongaporutu River is also a significant commercial whitebait fishery, Local residents claim that 22 regular commercial whitebaiters fish the river (often using small power boats to fish upstream locations) and a smaller number (between six and ten) sell the surplus of large catches, These latter amateur whitebaiters do not fish specifically for commercial gains but are known to sell quantities of whitebait perhaps four to six times each per season.

Tongaporutu River is also identified as a whitebait resource in Boubée *et al* 1991.

There is no existing public access to the Mangapepeke Stream – a tributary of the Tongaporutu River – which lies adjacent to the proposed route – and no indication of whitebaiting activity on the tributary.

The Taranaki Catchment Commission described the Mimi River as:

not a significant whitebait river, although it is fished for approximately 10 kilometres upstream (to the Uruti township) by residents of the Waihi, Pukearuhe and Whitecliffs districts. ... Catches are low compared with those from the Tongaporutu and Mokau rivers (generally one cup of whitebait per day is classed as excellent), However, this does not deter local residents, many of whom fish the river up to four and five times per week during the whitebait season.

The proposed route lies adjacent to the Mimi River but well upstream of the area described as fished.

The Taranaki Regional Council, in *Freshwater bodies of outstanding or significant value in the Taranaki region Review of the Regional Fresh Water Plan for Taranaki* (January 2016), identifies the Tongaporutu and Mimi Rivers as having 'significant whitebait fishery values' (p43). Canoeing values in the Tongaporutu River were also identified, and while the relevant reach was not identified, the form of the River confines this activity to the lower reaches

beyond the Project area. Contact recreation and trout fishing were not identified as 'outstanding or regionally significant freshwater values' in either river (pp 84–85).

The freshwater ecology assessment (Technical report 7b) indicates the presence of inanga (*Galaxias* species) in both waterways, and, in the main, high quality fish habitat. The whitebait season is open between 15 August and 30 November (inclusive).

4 Assessment of effects

4.1 Assessment methodology

The assessment is based on:

- Identification of the recreation settings potentially affected (section 3 of this report),
- A site visit by the author,
- Interviews with the Department of Conservation,
- Reviews of construction and operational effects with the Mt Messenger Alliance team members.

4.2 Assessment of construction effects

The existing SH3 route over Mt Messenger will remain operational during the construction phase and so there are no construction effects on access to the summit rest area or the track entry points for the Mt Messenger and Kiwi Road Tracks.

The proposed bypass route crosses the Kiwi Road Track immediately east of the track start, and without the provision of temporary access, the Mt Messenger Conservation Area will not be accessible from the west; and recreational access (mostly pig hunting) would be limited during the construction period. The nearest alternative access to the Conservation Area is via Mangaonga Road in the north, but this has no maintained track.

Construction noise effects are temporary but may displace some pig hunting in the nearby Mt Messenger Conservation Area. This is a very minor effect considering the scale of the setting.

The Tongaporutu and Mimi Rivers are fished for whitebait. While there are no effects of the Project on access to whitebaiting areas, water quality needs to be managed during construction to avoid effects on whitebait habitat. This effect is considered in the freshwater ecology assessment (Technical report 7b). This report advises that with suitable controls in place, construction effects on instream values can be minimised.

Construction effects can otherwise be managed to be neutral for recreation amenity.

4.3 Assessment of operational effects

The proposal will maintain accesses for the Mt Messenger and Kiwi Road Tracks. This report recommends that the Kiwi Road Track be re-routed under the closest road bridge to remove any need to cross the new highway. Replacement track signs will need to be installed in consultation with the Department of Conservation.

There are opportunities to replace the picnic facilities currently located at the summit with new in an appropriate location. These should be designed to limit the potential for fly-tipping via maintaining visibility from SH3 if possible and limiting the ability for vehicles to access any steep banks or vegetated areas from where rubbish removal would be difficult.

Consolidating activity in one setting (with the track accesses at the rest stop) would improve passive surveillance and reduce the likelihood of fly-tipping – and, although it will undoubtedly continue, good design can improve the means of removing rubbish.

The location of the new road will remove a substantial source of noise for users of the Mt Messenger Track between Mt Messenger and Waipingao; although much of this section of track will remain within sight of neighbouring rural land.

The redevelopment of the route is consistent with the desire from a regional tourism perspective to improve the standard of road access to Taranaki.

Provisions for cycling on the new route are positive and feature suitable shoulder areas, including within the tunnel. Sight lines will be much improved, and therefore the visibility of cyclists by drivers. Additional uptake of cycling on the SH3 route will be limited by the quality of the roads to the north and south, although the proposal improves the potential for future additional cycleway provision.

The freshwater ecology assessment for operational effects on instream values (Technical report 7b) indicates that while there is the potential for adverse effects on fish habitat due to the rerouting of waterways and the use of culverts, and changes to water quality from stormwater, the remediation of natural river values within the Mangapepeke Stream and Mimi River catchments can balance these adverse effects. Changes to whitebait numbers are therefore not anticipated.

Operational effects on existing recreation amenity, including tourism, are therefore positive.

5 Mitigation

5.1 Construction

This assessment identifies the need to maintain access to the Kiwi Road Track during construction if recreation effects during the construction period are to be neutral. Construction activity in the Track area will not occur for the full duration of the project. Public access to the Kiwi Road Track during construction should be provided when possible and as safety permits during working hours, and during weekends and after work hours. The Track may need to be diverted during the works in the immediate vicinity of the construction site.

Advice about access should be advised to the Department of Conservation for it to be added to the relevant on-line track information web page; and directly to the New Zealand Pig Hunting Association and the Tainui Pig Hunting Club (the latter based in Awakino).⁷ This will enable adverse construction effects to be virtually neutral.

Management of construction effects on whitebait, and other fish, are considered in the freshwater ecology assessment (Technical report 7b).

5.2 Operation

The proposal can provide opportunities to secure a positive outcome for recreation amenity, including providing a combined rest area and parking and entry points for the Kiwi Road and Mt Messenger Tracks; improved management options for fly-tipping; improved passive surveillance; and improved amenity for road cycling. No further mitigations are required.

Management of operational effects on whitebait, and other fish, are considered in the freshwater ecology assessment (Technical report 7b).

⁷ <http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/taranaki/places/white-cliffs-and-mount-messenger-conservation-area/things-to-do/mount-messenger-to-kiwi-road-track/>

6 Recommendations and Conclusions

The Project directly affects an area with relatively low levels of recreation activity, but there is a clear need to ensure that the existing recreation facilities are maintained or replaced. This assessment recommends for the current track access areas to be improved with improved amenity for the start of both the Kiwi Road and Mt Messenger Tracks. There are opportunities to combine these accesses with a rest area which would improve passive surveillance, and with good design could limit the potential for fly-tipping.

Communication with users of the Kiwi Road Track and the maintenance of access as far as possible during construction and at all times in the weekends and after work hours will minimise short-term access restrictions.

The net effect of the Mt Messenger Bypass project on recreation can be positive, considering also the removal of a substantial noise source from the eastern end of the Mt Messenger Track.

The Project is consistent with regional and national desires for improved regional roading connectivity for regional tourism.

Effects on whitebait habitat are anticipated to be managed via, for example, control of construction activities, culvert design and habitat restoration.

Appendices



Appendix A: Site Photos

- All photos taken by the author in July 2017



Mt Messenger route summit rest area



Mt Messenger Track access at SH3. Access to the Kiwi Road Track is immediately to the right of the distant chevron sign



Kiwi Road Track access onto SH3



View north from Mt Messenger Track 350m west of Mt Messenger. The existing SH3 route is at the far edge of the pasture. This road section would be bypassed by the proposed route.



Typical local track standard - in this case the Kiwi Road Track