

What's happened at Telephone Road

In April, a truck crossing the railway line on Telephone Road dislodged a section of track - the third time this has happened in the past three years. Dislodging a section of track raises the risk of derailment.

Waka Kotahi and KiwiRail together made the decision to immediately close the rail crossing to all traffic until it could safely re-open. This meant diverting State Highway 1B traffic around Holland Road, Waverley Road and Seddon Road.

The challenge

- Both the rail crossing and the intersection in its current configuration are rated as highly unsafe.
- The rail crossing is above the level of Telephone Road on either side, meaning that low and long trucks can scrape across the line and damage the tracks.
- There are more than 30 trains a day passing across this rail crossing and KiwiRail is expecting this number to increase.
- The very short distance from the rail crossing to the intersection can lead to vehicles sitting across the rail line while they wait to turn from Telephone Road into Holland Road which is dangerous if a train approaches.
- Over the past ten years there have been eight deaths or serious injuries at this intersection.
- The slight offset of Marshmeadow Road to Telephone Road makes it challenging for vehicles negotiating this intersection.
- Our roads are busier - over the past two decades traffic on Holland Road has increased significantly.



Safety is the number one priority for Waka Kotahi, KiwiRail and Waikato District Council when it comes to this intersection and its future.

We need to solve both the issues of damage to the rails and the dangerous intersection layout before we can re-open the road safely.

What options have been looked at?



A range of track monitoring options were looked at for both the short and long term in a bid to reopen the intersection. This includes both in person and remotely.

- The obstacles to this were the challenge of getting suitably qualified staff and establishing systems that would guarantee that any damage would be detected before a train passed through.



Signs, barriers and other physical barriers to high-risk vehicles accessing the crossing.

- Very difficult to exclude all high-risk vehicles from accessing the rail crossing and intersection. Relies on self-compliance which does not fully address all the safety risks.



Engineering works to either lower the level of the rail tracks, or raise the level of the road and reconfigure the Telephone/Holland/Marshmeadow intersection.

- While possible, engineering works to make this intersection safe would be very expensive and take a long time to design, engineer and build. The level of investment required is not likely to be prioritised as it is not aligned with expected future use of the intersection once the Hamilton section of the Waikato Expressway has opened.

The conclusion reached by Waka Kotahi, KiwiRail and Waikato District Council:

- Permanent closure of the rail crossing. This option provides the most comprehensive answer to the safety concerns. It also allows investment to be diverted into improving the quality of the roads on the current SH1B detour route.
- In our view, this is the most realistic option, but we want to ask you whether there is any further information you can share with us that may affect how we see the future of this intersection.



The bigger picture

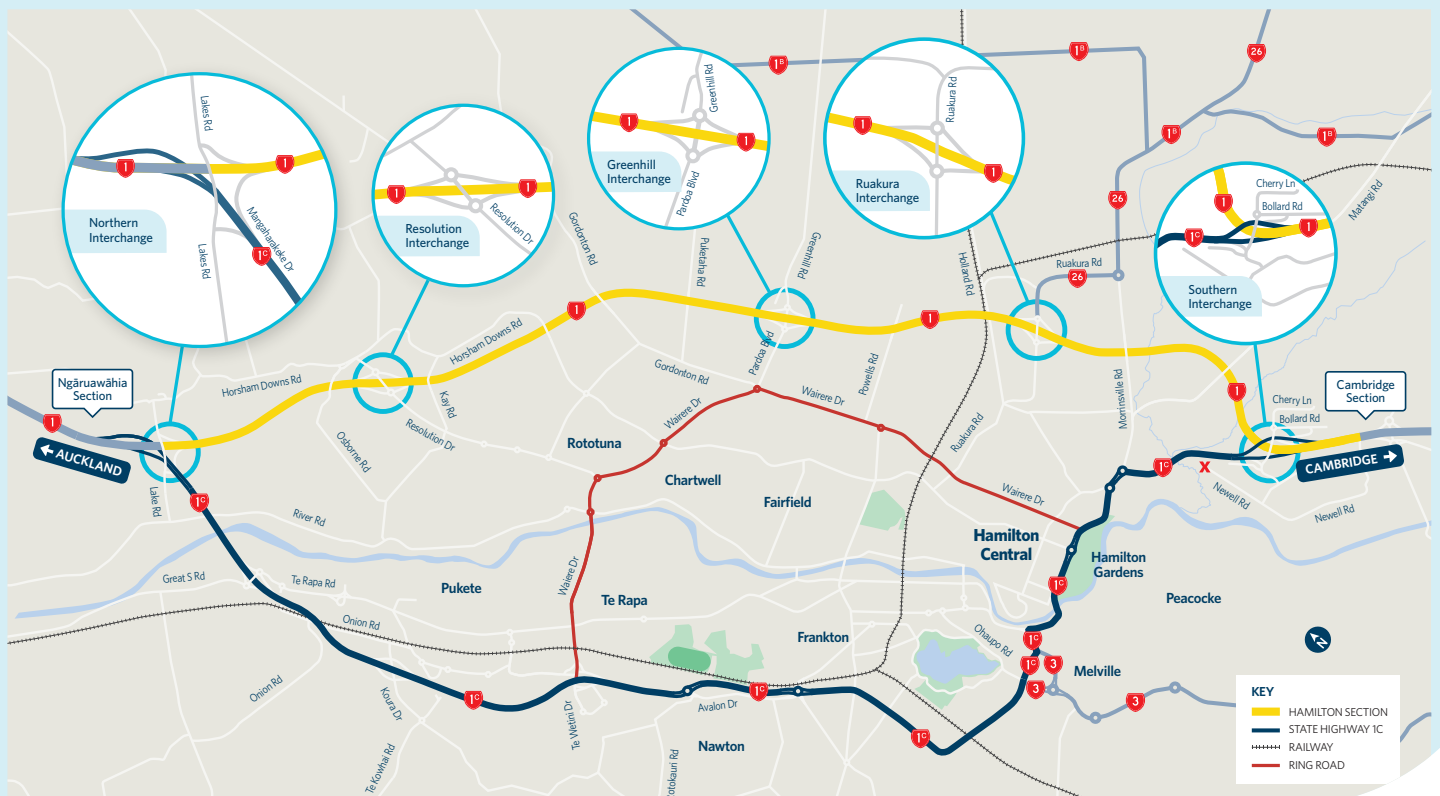
There have been eight death or serious injury crashes at this intersection since 2012. The majority of these crashes have occurred on Telephone Road which has the existing railway line on its approach to Holland Road. The intersection has both high collective and personal risk therefore it has been assessed as a high-risk intersection. An Intersection Speed Zone (ISZ) was installed in 2017 to assist in reducing speeds thereby reducing the likelihood of crashes.

This rail crossing is currently assessed by KiwiRail as being one of the most dangerous of 1300 public road crossings in New Zealand, using the Australian Level Crossing Assessment Model (ALCAM).

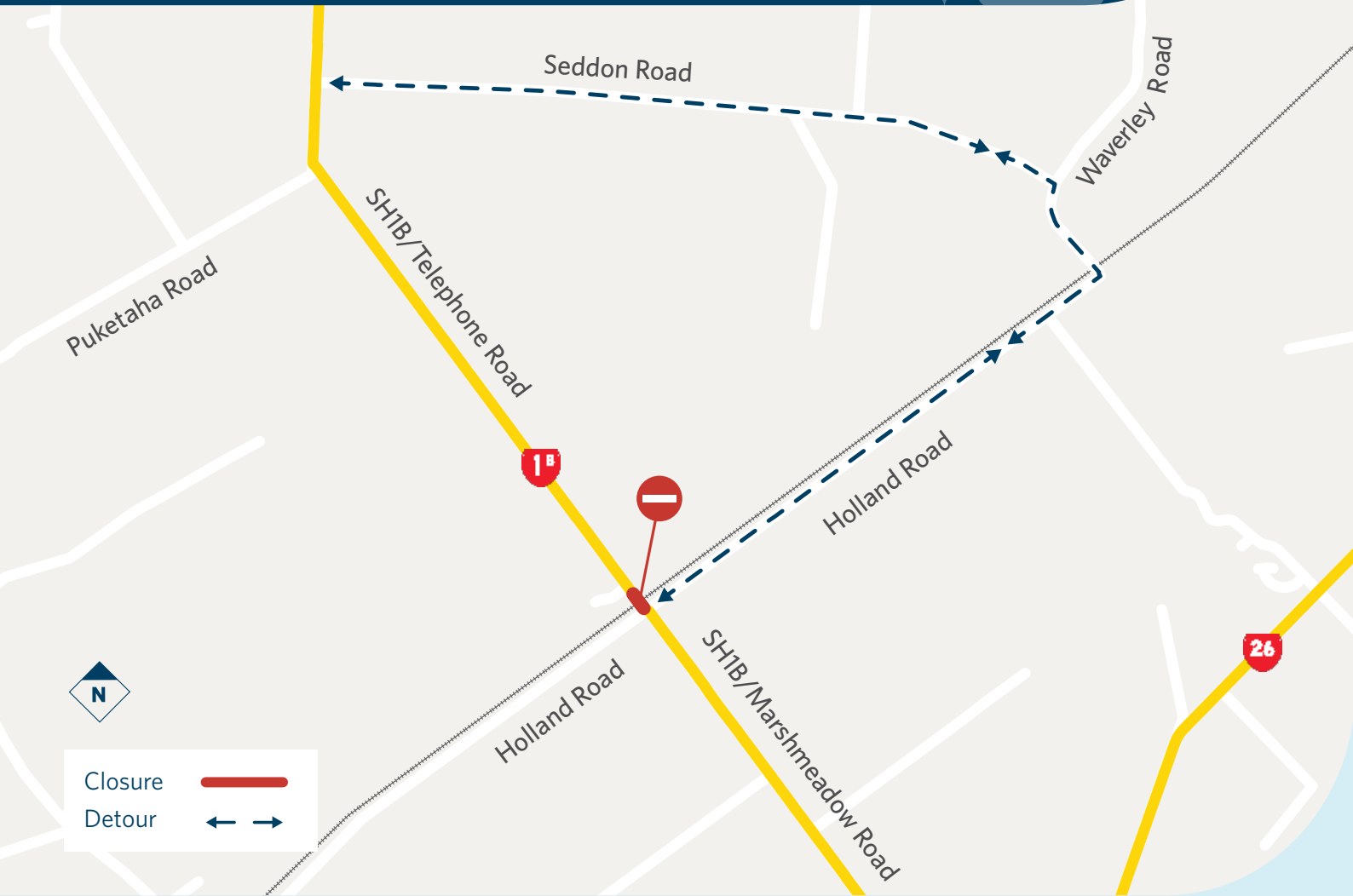
In July the Hamilton section of the Waikato Expressway will open. This will have a big impact on traffic and travel patterns east of Hamilton. We expect that this will greatly reduce the heavy traffic on SH1B. We understand this will still be an important route for local traffic so we will monitor the impact following the Waikato Expressway opening.

Once the Hamilton section opens, SH1B will become a network of local roads once more and be returned to Waikato District Council to manage. It's important that any decision about the future of this intersection takes this into account.

We know that the prolonged detour has had an impact on Holland, Seddon and Waverley Roads and we will continue to work on keeping these roads safe and up to standard. Much of this work will take place after the Hamilton section is open and traffic volumes are lower, we expect most heavy vehicles to take the Expressway instead.



Is there anything else we need to consider?



Please use the space below to share your thoughts.