

Media Release: SH1B Telephone Road Closure Extended

The closure of the railway crossing at the southern end of State Highway 1B Telephone Road will be extended while the long-term future of this intersection is decided.

The rail crossing was closed in early April after a truck dislodged a section of the tracks. A repeat of this incident could cause one of the approximately 38 daily trains on this line to derail so the intersection was closed for safety reasons.

The decision to close the crossing was made by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency in conjunction with KiwiRail and Waikato District Council for the safety of all road users as well as trains, Waka Kotahi Waikato Systems Manager Cara Lauder says.

"We realise that this is inconvenient for local residents and through traffic that uses SH1B and we'd like to thank the community for their patience," Ms Lauder says.

"Safety is our first priority and until we can be satisfied that both the road and rail are safe for road users and trains, Telephone Road will remain closed".

The current manned closure will be replaced with barriers at the intersection of Telephone Road and Amber Lane and at the intersection of Telephone Road and Holland Road on the southern side of the rail crossing soon.

Traffic on SH1B will continue to be detoured around Seddon Road, Waverley Road, and Holland Rd while the closure is in place.

It was hoped that the intersection could safely reopen while its long-term future is decided, however this is not possible due to the considerable safety risk.

Discussions will continue on the future of the rail crossing between Waka Kotahi, KiwiRail and Waikato District Council.

Once the Hamilton section of the Waikato Expressway opens in a few months' time, it is expected that volume of traffic using SH1B, particularly trucks, will fall.

We have a number of ways that you can keep up to date with what's happening on state highways:

- Traffic updates: journeys.nzta.govt.nz/traffic
- Facebook: facebook.com/NZTAWaikatoBoP
- Twitter: twitter.com/WakaKotahiWaiBP
- Journey planner: journeys.nzta.govt.nz
- Phone: 0800 4 HIGHWAYS (0800 44 44 49)

SH1B Telephone Road rail crossing closure Q&A

Q: Why was the rail crossing closed?

The rail crossing was closed due to repeated incidents where low vehicles have damaged the railway tracks, raising the risk of a derailment for the approximately 38 trains a day which use this line.

The railway line is higher than the road on either side of it and this has caused some longer and lower trucks to scrape and dislodge sections of track as they cross.

Waka Kotahi, KiwiRail and Waikato District Council together made the decision to close the crossing while the long-term future of this intersection is decided.

This rail crossing is currently rated the 3rd most dangerous of 1300 in New Zealand by KiwiRail, using the Australian Level Crossing Assessment Model (ALCAM).

Q: What are the options and why is it so difficult to fix?

To keep the intersection open we considered in person monitoring, however this is complex to arrange in a way that is safe for trains and cars, and for staff that have to remain on site. Also, it has proved hard to provide a guarantee against a potential future derailment, as track damage may occur that would not be picked up unless a close-up inspection took place by qualified staff.

Carrying out any inspection on the track is difficult to do safely as staff would need to be skilled in rail and road safety, and few people are available who work across both industries.

Potential engineering solutions are based around raising the level of Holland and Marshmeadow Roads so that they are at the same level as the railway crossing. This would be an expensive and highly disruptive project, complicated further by how close the intersection of Telephone Road and Holland Road is to the railway line.

A permanent solution would take some time to design and build, and it would be hard to keep traffic moving through the site during construction. Delays caused by any construction would be similar to the current detour delay, but traffic on all approaches would be delayed, not just Telephone Road traffic.

Q: Why can't you let residents and/or light vehicles use the crossing?

Allowing partial access is risky as this is difficult to enforce. Both Waka Kotahi and KiwiRail believe this solution will not provide the necessary levels of safety to allow the rail crossing to reopen.

Q: What is the future of SH1B when the Hamilton section of the Expressway opens?

After the Hamilton section is open Telephone Road will undergo a process known as revocation, where a state highway becomes a local road and is returned to the local road controlling authority, in this case Waikato District Council.

As part of this process, Waka Kotahi and Waikato District Council need to be in agreement about the current condition of the road. Waka Kotahi and Waikato District Council are in discussions about the intersection and its future once it becomes a local road and any future decisions will take this into account.

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