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23 October 2024

s9(2)(a)

REF: OIA-16517

Dear s9(2)(a)

Request made under the Official Information Act 1982

Thank you for your email of 21 September 2024 asking a number of questions about the proposal to toll Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū Tararua Highway and requesting the release of the tolling assessment under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

In view of the public interest surrounding the proposed toll for Te Ahu a Turanga, NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) has released the Tolling Assessment Report (the assessment), undertaken by Mobility Lab, and the NZTA-produced Tolling Assessment Summary (the summary). Both documents are available on our website at: www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/te-ahu-a-turanga/consultation/te-ahu-a-turanga-tolling-consultation.

In particular, I note that the summary addresses the gates found in the NZTA Tolling Policy (the policy) for the 2024-2027 National Land Transport Programme.

As the assessment and the summary you have requested are accessible on the NZTA website, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(d) of the Act which allows for a request to be refused if the information is, or is soon to be, publicly available.

> *Please take note of the first point stating the toll is to be assessed during the Business Case stage.*
>
> *Please take note of the second point reference to "on approval for construction"*
>
> *If you believe the above criteria have been met, can you please confirm alignment with the Gates and state how this is the case.*

The policy is a guide and states that NZTA "may" assess a project for tolling at either the business case or construction approval stages. This does not prevent NZTA from considering tolling a new road at other points in time before a road is opened to traffic.

In this case, the introduction of the new Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2024 (GPS 2024), which contains a specific Ministerial Expectation that NZTA should consider tolling for all new roads, triggered our consideration of a toll for Te Ahu a Turanga.

You can read the GPS 2024 at:
www.transport.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Government-Policy-Statement-on-land-transport-2024-FINAL.pdf.

> *The Business Case for the highway states the Saddle & Pahiatua track combined traffic volume is 10,039 at time of writing.*
> *To pass Gate 1, all traffic will need to move off these roads to the new highway.*

The summary notes that the forecast traffic volumes for when the highway opens in 2025, are 10,902 per day, increasing to 14,250 per day in 2048. This is based upon 2016 counts from the Manawatu Gorge, pre-closure, and applying a 3 percent annual growth rate. Please refer to section 2.1 of the assessment for more detail.

- *The toll rate is reasonable and does not result in a traffic volume change that unduly impacts the wider network.*

Can you please provide the assessment to support this.

- *Tolling infrastructure costs no more than 20% of anticipated toll revenue.*

Can you please provide the cost analysis details to support this.

- *Tolling does not significantly reduce project outcomes.*

Can you please advise how the toll will not reduce project outcomes.
One thing in particular I am interested in is how a toll may affect the Benefit Cost Ratio of 1.8

These matters were considered on page 2 of the tolling assessment summary, which is available at: www.nzta.govt.nz/assets/About-us/docs/oia-2024/oia-16383-attachment-1.pdf.

The summary confirms that infrastructure costs do not exceed 20 percent. I am withholding the cost analysis information under section 9(2)(j) of the Act, which allows for information to be withheld in order to enable a Minister of the Crown or any public service agency or organisation holding the information to carry on, without prejudice or disadvantage, negotiations (including commercial and industrial negotiations).

With respect to the information that has been withheld, I do not consider there are any other factors which would render it desirable, in the public interest, to make the information available.

Further, the summary affirms that the proposed toll will not significantly or unduly reduce the benefits of the project. Further explanation of this is available on page 3 of the summary. Benefit cost ratio calculations are separate to the tolling assessment process, however we do look at the impact on project outcomes, as detailed in the summary.

Approval Process
In order to elevate this proposal to the minister, a tolling assessment must be completed. Can you please provide this assessment to the public.

Timings
Given the road is due to open in the first half of next year, can you please confirm the toll infrastructure would be in place at time of opening.

Proactive release of information
Can you please confirm you have released the Toll Assessment to the public.

NZTA has publicly released the assessment and the summary in relation to the proposal to toll Te Ahu a Turanga.

NZTA will consider the feedback gathered from the community through the consultation process and compile the engagement report, which will also be published on our website.

The NZTA Board will consider the results of the consultation, and the Board may then recommend tolling to the Minister of Transport. The final decision on whether or not to toll each road rests with the Minister of Transport.

Until a decision is made by the NZTA Board and the Minister, we are unable to confirm exact timings for the possible tolling of the road. The decision on tolling will not impact the opening of the road itself, which will open when it is complete and ready for traffic.

Under section 28 of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review my decision to refuse part of your request and to withhold some information. The contact details for the Ombudsman can be located at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

In line with NZTA policy, this response will soon be published on our website, with personal information removed.

If you would like to discuss this reply with the Ministerial Services team by email to official.correspondence@nzta.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely

Robyn Elston
National Manager System Design