

Auckland Harbour Bridge update

In confidence/Commercially sensitive

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Purpose

This paper updates the Board on temporary walking and cycling options across the Auckland Harbour Bridge (AHB), and the history and next steps in the Additional Waitematā Harbour Connections (AWHC) investigations.

Strategic relevance

The Minister of Transport has recently requested advice on options for providing interim walking and cycling options across the AHB. The Minister of Transport has also requested an update on AWHC.

Background

There is a long history of planning work for improvements to cross-harbour transport connections in Auckland, with at least ten major studies progressed over the past 30 years. In 2013, there was a cabinet decision and announcement from the Government in support of a tunnel in preference to a bridge.

In 2018 the Auckland Transport Alignment Project (ATAP) outlined an urgent need to confirm the mode, alignment and function of future cross-harbour improvements, which led to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, Auckland Transport (AT) and Auckland Council working in partnership between 2018 and 2020 to develop a business case for AWHC.

This work analysed the current and future problems faced in Auckland's northern motorway corridor (including the AHB and the Northern Busway), assessed a number of options for addressing these problems, and recommended a way forward to provide a platform for a comprehensive and long-lasting response. The business case (referred to as the AWHC Business Case) was approved by the Waka Kotahi and AT Boards in 2020. A key assumption in this study was that a dedicated walking and cycling facility would be in place alongside the existing AHB.

In June 2021, as part of the NZ Upgrade Programme, the Government confirmed funding of \$785m to deliver the walking and cycling across the Waitemata Harbour via the Northern Pathway Westhaven to Akoranga project.

Key issues

Interim Walking and Cycling options across the AHB

The preferred option for the Waitemata Harbour crossing section of the Northern Pathway is a standalone bridge alongside the existing AHB. The soonest construction is expected to be able to begin in mid-2022, subject to the approval process, and will take four to five years to construct. Waka Kotahi is now working hard to deliver the Northern Pathway, with a project team engaged on design, consenting and construction planning.

In the meantime, Waka Kotahi has been asked by the Minister of Transport to investigate an interim solution to provide a suitable walking and cycling connection across the Waitematā Harbour until such time that the Northern Pathway is completed. This includes the use of buses or ferries, as well as the reallocation of lanes on the AHB to provide a shared path for walking and cycling.

A range of options (Attachment 1) has been provided to the Minister, for repurposing lanes on the AHB, as well as an assessment of the outcomes, challenges and costs for each option.

The objective of the investigation to date was to consider the health and safety implications for people on the bridge and those working on it, what could be accommodated without impacting the overall structural integrity, operational considerations and implications across the wider transport network. Waka Kotahi has not provided a recommendation to the Minister

While use of lanes on the AHB is an operational matter and decisions ultimately fall with the Waka Kotahi Board, Waka Kotahi recognises the significance of this upcoming decision for the Government and community. We have therefore advised the Minister that we would wait for his feedback on the interim options before a decision is sought from the Board.

History and next steps in AWHC investigations

Following the Government's recent announcement to fully fund the Northern Pathway there has been a mixed public reaction to this decision with resulting media and political interest in bringing forward the long term AWHC project as an alternative to the Northern Pathway.

The recently completed 2020 AWHC business case had assumed that the Northern Pathway project would be required and delivered as a standalone connection adjacent to the AHB. This finding was further tested as part of the strategic review undertaken by Waka Kotahi on Northern Pathway options in early 2021.

These findings of these reviews confirmed that the Northern Pathway, as currently proposed, is an integral part of addressing the future cross harbour accessibility issues regardless of any future additional harbour connections for public transport and roading. This assessment also concluded that for a number of reasons it was not advisable to include other modes as part of the Northern Pathway project.

Given these findings, a briefing (Attachment 2) has been prepared to update the Deputy Prime Minister and the Transport Minister on the 30 year strategy for the AWHC programme, including how the Northern Pathway fits in as an early deliverable in the programme, alongside further enhancements to the Northern Busway.

Health & safety, customer/stakeholder & environmental impact

As this paper is not seeking a decision at this time, the impact is considered by Waka Kotahi to be neutral in terms of health and safety, the public and other stakeholders, and the environment.

Attachments

- Attachment 1** Presentation provided to Transport Minister on AHB Shared Path Interim options
- Attachment 2** Presentation to be provided to Deputy PM and Minister of Transport on AWHC investigations