

SH3 Waitara to Bell Block

NZ Transport Agency

August 2017

Community feedback report



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PROJECT BACKGROUND

The NZ Transport Agency is looking at ways to help improve road safety, reduce crashes and ease congestion on State Highway 3 between Waitara and Bell Block. The project is split into two sections: Waitara to State Highway 3A (near Mahoetahi Road) and State Highway 3A (near Mahoetahi Road) to Bell Block.

Waitara to Bell Block is an important corridor along State Highway 3. It is one of the busiest corridors in the region and carries a combination of commuter and long haul freight traffic. It provides access to residential and community areas, light and heavy industrial areas, and to the New Plymouth Airport and Port. It is also a key link between Hamilton and New Plymouth.

Initial investigation work has confirmed the need to address safety problems and to understand and cater for the rapid growth in Bell Block and around the airport. We have also carried out some community engagement to find out more about local peoples' knowledge and experience of using this stretch of road.

Over the course of the project, we'll keep people informed about our proposals and make sure they're aware of opportunities to be involved.

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

As locals know the road better than anyone, we wanted to give people an opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences of using the Waitara to Bell Block route, how safety could be improved, and help us find solutions that will work best for everyone.

We held two community open days and invited people to come along to hear about the project, and to provide input and ideas. For those who couldn't get to the open days there was an opportunity to provide input using a feedback form on the website.

About 270 people attended a community open day session in either Waitara or Bell Block. People's comments were captured in printed feedback forms available on the day and using post-it notes on a large aerial map. We also received 95 comments via online feedback forms and email.

Raising awareness and promoting participation

People found out about the open day sessions through a mail drop to households, advertisements in the local papers, a media release and targeted Facebook posts. Information was distributed through New Plymouth District Council communications channels. Community groups, schools and key stakeholders were also directly informed via email.

Community open days

Two community open days were held which provided an opportunity for the public to meet and talk with members of the project team.

The first was held in Waitara at the Waitara Library on Thursday 30 March 2017 (1pm – 7pm). Approximately 120 people attended.

The second open day was held in Bell Block at Fred Tucker Memorial Hall, Bell Block on Friday 31 March 2017 (7.30am – 2pm). Approximately 150 people attended.

Display board posters

A series of large posters were used to outline different safety improvement measures that could be considered, for example side and median barriers and rumble strips. As attendees viewed the posters, the project team were able to explain and answer questions about the project.

Map and post-it notes

A long aerial map of the project location was available at the open days. Attendees were invited to place post-it note comments and suggestions directly onto the maps. Input from post-it notes has been integrated into the overall findings.

Newspaper advertising

We promoted the open days in a newspaper advertisement.

Feedback form

Feedback forms were made available in printed and electronic formats. The feedback from the forms and via emails has been included in the overall findings.

Media

A media release was issued on 23 March 2017 providing information about the project, promoting the open days, where to find information and how to provide feedback.

Social media

We ran a series of Facebook posts to promote the open days and encourage feedback.

FEEDBACK

What did we ask people?

- What is your current experience of the Waitara to Bell Block section of State Highway 3?
- How do you, or people you know, use this road?
- What problems have you experienced or are you aware of?
- Describe what you believe your experience should be like?

Current experiences and problems

"I think we should be able to drive along SH3 without too many holdups and in a safe environment. Improving some intersections would solve most of the problems. Having roundabouts also generally slows traffic down."

The map shown in Appendix 1 is a visual summary of comments made by people who attended an open day or provided feedback via a form or email.

Following is a summary of feedback which covers both general comments about the whole route, and also comments about areas around specific intersections.

General comments about the whole route

Driver behaviour

There were many comments on people's experiences of other drivers' poor behaviour. Poorly designed intersections, signage and lane markings cause risk taking and impatience. There were also reports of people not knowing how to use some of the access and turning lanes. People cited speed, either being too fast or too slow, as causing extra problems. Also, drivers using mobile phones are causing near misses and accidents along the route.

"People not using turning in lanes properly and it creates danger e.g. pulling out of Airport drive."

"Too much speed, lane changing (in and out of lanes). Drivers impatient. Always need to leave earlier, just in case of mishaps."

Work-arounds

Several people told stories of how they avoid certain intersections by taking back roads, short-cuts and work-arounds, because they know they face congestion or feel unsafe at some points trying to join State Highway 3.

"[We] use local roads as a work around to avoid certain junctions."

Poor signage

People mentioned speed signage and the need for other instruction signs.

"Not able to read the speed environment, needs electronic speed signs to grab attentions of drivers."

Near misses and accidents

People at the open days recounted many stories of close calls, near misses and accidents.

"We had a very close call unfold in front of us, at Princess Street. We were turning right heading north, a truck turned crossed in front of another car heading north. They managed to miss the truck and us as they went on the wrong side of the road behind the truck then missing a ute heading south and back onto their north bound lane."

Speed

There was some desire to see 80km/h all the way along the whole route – stating that safety has improved on parts of the route that are now 80km/h. Other people mentioned the varying speed limits cause issues.

"I would like to see the 80KM/H speed limit start at Bayly Street Waitara, and continue fully through to Egmont Road, New Plymouth."

"Too many speed zone changes. Confusing and hard to remember what correct speed."

Four lanes

Some feedback focused on having four lanes for the whole length of the route or having longer turning lanes at certain locations. People also mentioned future proofing for four lanes.

“The ideal long term solution for easier traffic flow, maximum safety and minimum delays for everyone is for the whole stretch between the Bell Block flyover and Waitara to be a four-lane dual carriageway with flyovers and safe access and exit points.”

Walking and cycling

There was talk about not forgetting pedestrians and cycling. The community feedback said to ensure solutions catered for them, either by providing off road facilities elsewhere or over/underpass on the state highway for all users.

“At minimum smooth shoulder provision for cyclists.”

“Pedestrian overpass or underpass for all users.”

Comments for each intersection along the route

There was strong support for improving various problem intersections along the whole State Highway 3 Waitara to Bell Block route – as outlined below.

Mangati Road

“Mangati Road lane too short for merging.”

23 people commented on this intersection. Safety related to lighting, and to people ignoring current road rules. 52% people made a comment about lanes, which included turning lanes, extra lanes, passing lanes and widening.

Corbett Road / Wills Road

“I slow down and feel a bit scared every time I go through the Wills Road / Corbett Road intersections. All sorts of cars are coming and going, turning and pulling out. It is dangerous, and visibility is not good.”

159 people commented about these intersections. 24% of comments referred to realigning and/or providing a roundabout at Corbett/Wills. Safety feedback was about poor visibility, people ignoring road rules, and u-turns. When people talked about lanes, they wanted to see additional turning lanes, and passing lanes. Other comments referred to congestion, speed, signage, growth, providing an interchange, and walking provisions.

Airport Drive / De Havilland Drive

“Airport Drive, De Havilland Drive, and SH3 = roundabout.”

161 people commented about the Airport Dr and De Havilland Dr intersections. 63% wanted to see a roundabout here from realigning the two intersections together. Other comments talked about an increase in lanes, speed, signage, closure of roads, constructing new roads, tidiness, and the need for a traffic island.

De Havilland to Mahoetahi Road (north of SH3a)

“Bring back the passing lanes on Big Jim’s Hill.”

110 people commented about the SH3/SH3a (Mountain Road) intersection. 42% of the people who gave feedback on this part of the road suggested a roundabout, and there were comments referring to wanting a four-lane road. Many people gave feedback relating to ‘Big Jims’, comments refer to turning, passing lanes, access, and road markings. A lot of the feedback mentioned speed, signage, cars for sale on roadside, cyclists, removal of car parking, and alignment.

Mahoetahi Road (north of SH3a) to Richmond Road

53 people commented on this section. Suggestions to improve visibility by cutting back trees were made.

“At Richmond Road cut back trees/bushes right hand corner to aid visibility.”

Richmond Road to Waitara River

82 people commented on this section. Comments (49%) noted that this is another problem intersection that could be altered by having a roundabout at Raleigh St / Waitara Rd / SH3. Some comments focused on closing Raleigh St and opening Tate Rd, with the possibility of then placing a roundabout at Tate Rd / Waitara Rd / SH3.

“Open Tate Rd and close Raleigh St. Roundabout at Waitara, Tate Rd & Devon.”

Waitara River to Bayly Street

168 people commented on this section. There were many comments and suggestions about having a roundabout (47%) at Princess Street. People also thought that improvements to visibility on Princess St could be achieved by cutting back trees (8%). Turning lanes and wider access would also increase the safety of this intersection (22%). There are several concerns about the amount of school traffic using this part of the road too, and concerns for pedestrian safety.

“There isn’t enough room for vehicles to pass safely on the left if another vehicle is wanting to turn up Princess Street. The simplest answer is a roundabout with speed restrictions either side of it.”

“I am a regular user of the Princess St. intersection, driving from Waitara township, straight through to Tikorangi, and turning to New Plymouth (and returning). The reduction of the speed limit to 80km and the provision turning lane into Princess St., have both greatly improved the safety and traffic flow of the intersection, but, there need to be right hand turning bays each way into Princess Street from the main highway.”

Several suggestions were made to ban right turns at Bayly Street. However, there were also suggestions that this intersection is not very well used.

NEXT STEPS

The feedback received from the public will be taken into consideration as we develop and assess potential options to improve road safety and travel times along State Highway 3 between Waitara and Bell Block.

We're looking at the route in two parts as outlined below:

SH3: Waitara to SH3A (near Mahoetahi Road)

With the primary focus for this section on safety improvements, we expect to be able to share our thoughts and seek your feedback later this year with early construction activities likely to begin during 2018.

SH3: SH3A (near Mahoetahi Road) to Bell Block

The anticipated future volume growth means this section requires some traffic modelling, which is already underway. Once we have a 'big picture' view, we will then be in a position to seek further feedback.

Over the course of the project, we'll keep people informed about our proposals and make sure they're aware of opportunities to be involved.

More information is available at www.nzta.govt.nz/w2bb.

APPENDIX 1: COMMUNITY COMMENTS ON SH3 MAP

