



**Transit National Office
Media Release**

30 June 2005

Large projects move forward in Transit forecast for state highways

Earlier indicative construction start dates for several large projects are the highlights of Transit New Zealand's 10-year State Highway Forecast 2005/06 – 2014/15 for Manawatu/Wanganui, released today.

Transit regional manager Errol Christiansen said the Manawatu Hill Realignment on SH2 north of Norsewood now had an indicative construction start date of 2008/09, five years ahead of last year's predictions.

Another three projects that were previously outside the 10-year period were now forecast for a construction start by 2012/13 – the SH1 Ohingaiti – Makohine Realignment, the Papatawa Realignment on SH2 north of Woodville and the Foxton Curves project on SH1.

In addition, a number of small and medium-sized projects with construction costs less than \$3 million would be constructed within the next three years, including passing lanes, intersection improvements and stock effluent disposal facilities.

"Nearly \$30 million will be spent on maintaining and improving state highways in the region in 2005/06, and the forecast total for the 10-year period is nearly \$275 million," Mr Christiansen said.

The forecast does not take account of the extra \$500 million for land transport announced by the government last week.

"This additional land transport funding is excellent news and comes on top of an already record level of investment nationally in state highways for 2005/06 and the years to come. Transit is working on proposals for how the extra funding could be spent and will release an update incorporating the necessary changes to the state highway forecast in the coming weeks," Mr Christiansen said.

2005/06 would see Transit continue the \$18.5 million realignment of the Hihitahi Bluffs, on SH1 south of Waiouru.

"We've made excellent progress on earthworks and bridge construction since work got underway late last year. This project will significantly improve safety on a highway that is severely out of context with the rest of SH1 in the region.

"Work will also continue of the \$3.1 million SH57 Tennent Drive/Old West Road Realignment near Palmerston North."

Mr Christiansen said Transit's current 10-year forecast is divided into a firm one-year programme for 2005/06, which Transit is fully committed to delivering. The first three years will be known as the State Highway Plan and contains the best estimates of time and cost for the listed projects and activities. For the rest of the decade the forecast is less certain due to the potential for issues in the planning stages to affect timing and costs.

"The timeframe for the development and construction of the projects in the forecast is likely to change depending on the use of regional distribution funding, which comes from the increase in petrol tax from April 2005 and will be allocated regionally on a population basis.

“Ultimately, Land Transport New Zealand decides which projects are funded using regional distribution funding. The level of regional distribution funding it is making available is reduced in early years, but gears up in later years to ensure all regions receive their full entitlement over the 10-year period. As a result, Transit has had to take a national view of the state highway asset when recommending projects for regional distribution funding in the first few years.”

Mr Christiansen said passing lanes made up a large chunk of the small and medium-sized projects for the next three years, with four planned for SH3 between Wanganui and Palmerston North, three for SH1 between Himatangi and Hunterville, one for SH1 between Himatangi and Levin and one for SH2 north of Woodville.

“Transit has already constructed a significant number of passing lanes in Manawatu/Wanganui and Tararua in recent years, in line with passing lane strategies developed for the areas. The completion of the passing lanes by the end of 2007/08 will mark the full implementation of these strategies.”

Transit also plans to carry out safety improvements at six intersections within the next three years. They are:

SH3 Awahuri Intersection; SH56/57 Makerua Intersection; SH54 Newbury Line; SH56 Opiki T-Junction; SH3 Stewart Road Intersection and Seal Widening; SH1 Makomako Intersection.

Stock effluent disposal facilities are planned for construction near National Park, Taihape and Dannevirke.

Mr Christiansen said as well as undertaking capital improvements, Transit would continue to carefully target maintenance on the region’s state highways. Key features of the maintenance programme for the year include resealing 55 kilometres of highway, continuing to monitor slope stability in the Manawatu Gorge and continuing to improve the ability to forecast ice conditions that occur in critical locations by further developing existing weather stations in the Rangitikei and Ruapehu Districts.

The 2005/06 – 2014/15 State Highway Forecast is the first prepared under the full provision of the Land Transport Management Act and Transit consulted more widely than in the past on its draft plan. Over 900 written submissions were received and the views of 100 organisations or individuals were heard at hearings in 17 locations nationwide.

For more information contact:

Transit regional manager Errol Christiansen – 0274 531 647

Transit communications advisor Janice Wilson – 04 496 6643