



**Wanganui Regional Office
Media Release**

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Bell Block Bypass tops Transit's list

The Bell Block Bypass and Mangaone Hill Four-laning projects remain Transit's top priorities for the Taranaki region in Transit New Zealand's 10-year State Highway Forecast 2005/06 – 2014/15, released today.

The projects are forecast for a construction start in 2005/06.

Transit regional manager Errol Christiansen said negotiations to purchase the two remaining properties required for the project were near completion and he expected work to get underway during the next summer construction season.

The forecast also sees the indicative construction start dates of three major projects in Taranaki brought forward by taking account of regional distribution funding. Construction of the Rugby Road Underpass is forecast for construction beginning in 2008/09, five years earlier than was indicated in Transit's 2004/05 10-year plan.

The Normanby Overbridge Realignment will be designed in 2005/06 and is forecast for construction in 2010/11, and the Tangarakau Gorge Seal Extension on SH43 moves into the 10-year period.

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

Mr Christiansen said Transit's forecast sought to address the key transport issues for Taranaki, which include: residential development to the north of New Plymouth; secure and efficient transport corridors; road safety; and tourist traffic

"More than \$32 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 over \$300 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.

Other projects planned for design and construction in the next three years are:

- Whareroa Road Passing Lane, Tangahoe Bridge Widening and the Muggridge South Realignment projects, all on SH3 south of Hawera
- Waitotara North Curve Improvements on SH3 south of Waverly
- Safety improvements at the SH3 Mangaorei Road intersection in New Plymouth
- Pilot Road South Realignment on SH3 south of Mokau

- Kapuni Bridge Improvements on SH45 near Manaia

Transit will also investigate the construction of a cycleway for SH3 between Bell Block and Fitzroy. Three new passing lanes will be constructed on SH3 between Te Kuiti and Mokau as part of Waikato 10-year forecast.

Transit will continue to focus strongly on the ongoing maintenance and operation of the state highway network, including resealing nearly 80 kilometres of highway in 2005/06, and improving road condition information to travellers at critical points on the network.

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. Large projects are forecast over 10 years and small and medium-sized projects with construction costs of less than \$3 million have been planned over three.

“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.”

The 2005/06 – 2014/15 State Highway Forecast is the first prepared under the full provisions 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.

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