KEY TRANSPORT ISSUES

Transit, along with local and central government are working together to achieve a sustainable land transport system in new ways.

Transit will work closely with regional and district councils to ensure that any substantial upgrading in the next 10 to 20 years is properly considered and planned, in order to relieve congestion and support regional growth strategies. This requires agreement on amendments to road and public transport plans and shared funding responsibilities for both local and national infrastructure and services.

Planning activities such as Waikato's Regional Land Transport Strategy, Long-Term Council Community Plans, and Transit's State Highway Forecast all help in this process.

In meeting the objectives of the NZTS and LTMA, the key regional transport issues for the Waikato Region include:

- Safety: the Waikato state highway network has the highest fatal crash densities in the country, 20 percent higher than any other region. It has 20 of the nation's 100 worst "black routes", with a high frequency of serious and fatal crashes
- Long-haul routes: the Waikato is part of a growth triangle linking major export hubs, population centres and tourist attractions in Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty. A number of the country's strategic corridors with high proportions of heavy vehicles go through the Waikato, contributing to a complex mix of local, inter-regional and tourist traffic
- Congestion and bottle necks: rapid population and development growth in and around Hamilton, and to a lesser extent Cambridge and Taupo, is causing congestion and increasing travel delays and transport costs for long-haul travellers, as well as a deterioration of environmental and amenity values for the communities that these long-haul routes pass through

  Large volumes of vehicles are diverting onto unsuitable alternative routes to avoid delays, with resultant impacts on safety and economic development
- Forestry traffic: over the next 5 to 10 years forestry harvesting is expected to increase from 10 to 12 million tonnes from Central Plateau forests, with much of the product to be exported through the Port of Tauranga
- Hamilton growth: there is significant pressure for commercial access and growth in northern and western Hamilton, and this combined with the development of the Crawford Street rail freight village, is putting significant pressure on the Hamilton Western Corridor, which also has a local road function. Transit will work closely with its transport partners to build on the Access Hamilton Strategy, which seeks a balance between roading, rail, passenger transport, and active modes to manage demand
- Tourist traffic: particularly in Taupo and on the Coromandel Peninsula (where the number of domestic holidaymakers is also a significant issue), and on the routes linking Auckland, Waitomo Caves, Lake Taupo, and Rotorua
- Route Security: interruption of the state highway network because of bad weather and slips, particularly on the SH1 Desert Road and on SH3 through the Awakino Gorge, has a significant economic impact nationally as well as on the Taranaki region and the local communities
- Spillages from stock trucks.

How we plan to address these key issues

The Waikato Expressway is the highest priority transport issue for the region. A significant component of this Expressway between Mercer and Longswamp will be completed in 2006/07 and further progress will be made on the remaining components over the next 10 years. This will in time, reinforce SH1 as the preferred long haul route, together with SH29 to the Bay of Plenty from Auckland.

The SH2 Maramarua Corridor and SH27 are expected to remain as attractive routes for long haul traffic in the short to medium term and Transit will undertake any safety work necessary on this corridor, together with passing opportunity improvements.

Improvements are proposed to the Hamilton Western Corridor in partnership with Hamilton City Council. This will include the identification and protection through the planning process of the strategic transport corridors in south Hamilton. Transit will also consider a number of projects on the existing routes in the meantime to relieve congestion and improve efficiency.

Transit is also considering improvements to route security for the region on the Thames Coast and on SH3 between Taranaki and the Waikato.

A number of walking and cycling activities are also planned to complement the strategies and work of the various territorial authorities.

Studies are currently underway to look at increasing safety on the black routes. Further studies have also been identified and will be undertaken in the coming year. Projects identified from these studies will be added to future forecasts. The study areas are:

- Hamilton City Urban Area
- SH27 Mangatarata to Tatuanui
- SH1 Taupiri to Hamilton South
- SH39 Whatawhata to Otorohanga.

Large improvement activities (with construction costs of more than $3.4M), have been indicated for 10 years, while activities with construction costs of less than $3.4M are proposed over the next three years and are shown in the table. The locations of Waikato projects in the 10-year State Highway Forecast are shown on the map.

Congestion and Strategic Corridor Improvements

Transit expects to design and commence the Rangiriri Bypass within five years as well as making significant progress with the Cambridge and Ngaruawahia Bypasses within 10 Years. We are planning to progress the design of the Huntly and Hamilton Bypasses within the five-year period. Transit will work with the region to consider tolling opportunities and through the development of the Regional Land Transport Strategy to determine whether the next priority will be the Huntly Bypass or the Hamilton Bypass.

The Church to Avalon 4-lane project and the Avalon Drive Bypass project will be completed within five years. Construction of the Te Rapa Bypass will commence, subject to completion of the planning and land purchase requirements and also subject to the agreement of a funding package with Hamilton City Council. The strategic routes for Southern Links in the south Hamilton area will also be identified and designated within five years.

A number of small intersection improvement projects are also proposed in Hamilton City, together with one in Cambridge to relieve congestion and improve the efficiency of the existing network in the meantime.

Transit will continue to work with Taupo District Council on the East Taupo Arterial and has included the construction of Stage 4 within five years to complement stages 1, 2 and 3, which the council is proposing to construct. This is dependent on planning and land acquisition issues being resolved.

A replacement for the single lane Kopu Bridge is currently being designed and its construction will be progressed to assist with the high volumes of traffic visiting the Coromandel Peninsula, particularly on weekends and public holidays.

A number of strategic studies will be undertaken to determine strategies for a number of other corridors in the Waikato.

Safety

The Maramarua Deviation has been designated in 2005/06 and the design will be carried out within five years and the construction started within five years. This will complement the work commencing in 2006/07 on the Mangatawhiri Deviation and the double passing lanes to the east at the Heavens rest area that have just been completed.

The Piarere to Oak Tree Bend safety project on SH1 south of Cambridge will also commence as soon as the land purchase issues are resolved.

A number of small safety projects will be constructed in the next five years, together with the continued "black route" safety work, including removal of roadside hazards, between Tokoroa and Taupo and at new identified sites around the Waikato.

Route Security and Availability

Design and construction is planned to follow the investigation work already undertaken for the replacement of bridges at Te Puru, Tararu and Kirikiri on SH25, Thames Coast, as part of Project Peninsula, a multi-agency flood protection package.

The Taranaki region has agreed to the utilisation of their $R funding for the construction of improvements in the Awakino Gorge, including the Awakino North Realignment and the Awakino Tunnel Widening. These will be carried out within the next five years.

Three projects are planned to provide better road information to the travelling public on the Coromandel Peninsula, in North Waikato on the SH1 and SH2 Corridors and in Taupo.

Passing Opportunities

A passing lane on SH1 at Kinleith North will be completed in 2006/07 and this will be complemented by two more north of Taupo and one south of Turangi, while another, at Motuoapa south of Taupo, will be developed ready for construction. Extensions to the north and southbound passing lanes on SH2 at Campbell Road near Waihi are also planned, as is a passing lane and a slow vehicle bay on SH25A.

The Taranaki region has agreed to use their $R funding for the construction of a passing lane at the Awakino Tunnel on SH3.

Stock Effluent Disposal Facilities

As part of a national programme to provide a safe and convenient network of stock effluent disposal facilities, new facilities will be constructed on SH1 at Putaruru and on SH3 at Te Kuiti.

Walking and Cycling

Improvements for walking and cycling are proposed in Hamilton City, Cambridge, Taupo and Te Awamutu.

Strategic Studies

Transit proposes to undertake a number of strategic studies to improve our long-term planning and assist good decision-making, together with studies that lead to sustainable environmental outcomes. These studies include a Lake Taupo Stormwater Runoff Environmental Scoping Study, corridor studies of SH2/29 Pokeno to Hairini, "Ruapehu around the mountain", and Tokoroa to Turangi, and passing lane strategies for SH1/5 and SH27.

Maintenance and Operations

The safe operation of the state highway network is a key function for Transit. Processes are in place to manage traffic efficiently, provide consistent and reliable information for road users, undertake maintenance work on the highway in the safest and least disruptive way, monitor locations where crashes occur and, where appropriate, take corrective action.

The state highway network is a $15 billion transport infrastructure asset that demands sophisticated and effective management. Transit has systems in place to do this, ranging from infrastructure and traffic databases to natural features inventories, long-term deterioration modelling tools, and annual condition data collection supported by advanced contract delivery methods and regular performance reporting.

Further, improvements to the way traffic is managed at incidents and in congested urban areas are being investigated and implemented.

Maintenance activities make up a large proportion of the forecast expenditure in the Waikato region.

In addition to preserving the highway network and undertaking maintenance and improvements to meet future levels of service, we propose to:

- Undertake 216km of resurfacing, including 20km with low noise surfacing
- Strengthen 40km of highway
- Continue improving techniques to manage highways in winter
- Improve the management of Kopu Bridge holiday traffic and bridge openings for river users
- Target noise reduction works for specific problem areas
- Improve traffic and travel demand management by upgrading signals and dynamic signage to provide real time information for road users in Hamilton
- Implement plant pest strategies and use special plant pest eradication programmes to target hotspots
- Implement planting to reduce future maintenance on steep slopes or batters next to highways
- Continue to implement and maintain special safety programmes in areas or corridors with poor road safety records, including identified “black routes”
- Introduce thermal mapping of the inland network to better predict where ice will occur.