

Greater Wellington Regional Council's Submission on NZ Transport Agency's Petone to Grenada Link Road

March 2014

1. Introduction

Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the NZ Transport Agency's Petone to Grenada Link Road proposal February 2014.

2. Greater Wellington Regional Council feedback on the proposal

2.1 East-west connectivity

Greater Wellington Regional Council supports the provision of an east-west link between State Highway 2 (Petone) and State Highway 1 (Grenada). The need for a new link between these destinations is identified in the Regional Land Transport Strategy, the Western and Hutt Corridor Plans and the Regional Land Transport Programme 2012. The key regional objectives for a new link road can be summarised as follows:

- *Improved connectivity* between the Hutt and Western Corridors, particularly at the southern end between the communities of Lower Hutt and North Wellington/Porirua.
- *Improved freight efficiency* by providing a more direct link for freight trips between industrial/manufacturing/distribution hubs in Seaview/Gracefield and North Wellington/Porirua.
- *Improved network resilience* by providing an alternative route that could be used in the case of an unplanned event on SH1, SH2, or SH58.
- *Alleviates severe congestion* on SH2 (between Petone and Ngauranga) and SH1 (between Grenada North and Ngauranga) by removing a proportion of trips that currently use these routes to make an indirect east-west trip.
- *Improved land use integration* by providing strategic access to the Lincolnshire Farm development, a future mixed use growth area.

2.2 Scale and capacity

GWRC is not convinced that the scale of the Link Road is justified in relation to:

- the additional north-south capacity proposed under some options (6-laning State Highway 1 north of Tawa or a new parallel north-south link through Takapu Valley); and,
- the proposed 6-lane sections of the Link Road

The capacity of the Link Road needs to be considered in the context of the wider transport network, including other modes. An unrestricted, free-flowing highway may be beneficial for vehicles and freight but will work against the objectives of increasing public transport patronage and maintaining affordable public transport. The Regional Land Transport Strategy is clear in its support for removing *severe* congestion at key bottlenecks and improving travel

time reliability on the strategic road network, but this does not mean that it is necessary or desirable to attempt to remove all congestion at peak times.

Analysis completed by GWRC suggests that the forecast level of service on the section of SH1 north of Tawa as a result of the new Link Road is unlikely to result in severe congestion (Los F) over the next 20 years - as such we believe that there is a strong case to avoid or defer any increased north-south state highway capacity.

We accept that, due to steep gradient along parts of the Link Road, general traffic will often need to overtake slower heavy vehicles by using an outer lane. However, we question whether the proposed 6-lane sections of the Link Road are necessary to address safety concerns or if they are being driven by a desire to allow for unconstrained flows of general traffic. Further information and discussion around this issue would be useful.

Consideration must be given to the impact of significantly increased road capacity as part of this project. Providing additional north-south capacity may effectively undermine efforts to get people to use public transport in peak times. It is the view of the GWRC that constructing a 4-lane only Petone to Grenada Link Road, without additional north-south capacity upgrades – ie. alignment options A, B, or C (without the 6-laning of SH1 at the northern end) - could safely and effectively provide the strategic benefits sought without some of the undesirable impacts such as reduced public transport patronage and induced traffic. This could be supported by using additional travel demand management measures, for example the merits of tolling could be considered to manage traffic volumes on the Link Road.

Additional investment in measures to encourage and facilitate public transport use is also critical. Encouraging more commuters travelling to/from Wellington City to use public transport in the peak period would free up space on SH1 north of Tawa for other trips such as freight and vehicles accessing the Link Road to travel east-west. There has been a \$600M investment in rail upgrades over recent years since commencement of the regional rail upgrade programme. This has resulted in steady growth in rail patronage. However, the demand for park and ride spaces at many rail stations in the region exceeds the available capacity and is considered a significant constraint to growth in public transport use. Investing in extensions to park and ride facilities at particular railway stations, Porirua station for example, should be a key measure to optimise north-south network capacity.

We therefore ask that further consideration be given to how future demand for the Link Road and the state highway between Tawa and Transmission Gully could be managed as part of a wider approach to maintaining a balanced transport network. We would appreciate the opportunity to work with NZTA further to better understand the analysis that has informed the proposed scale of the link road and the need for additional north-south road capacity (for example, forecast traffic volumes using the link road, levels of congestion on the wider state highway network and associated timing) and to consider what other wider network measures might achieve the desired outcome.

2.3 Options for Section 2: Crest to Tawa

Consistent with our comments set out above, we do not support the proposed Option D (Petone to Transmission Gully) alignment as we consider it is primarily focused on delivering additional north-south capacity, which we do not consider to be necessary. In addition, from

a land use and environmental impacts perspective, Option D involves a large new road footprint through an existing unspoilt rural area for what we consider may be limited additional strategic benefit.

Our preference is for Options A, B, or C (without SH1 widening) a choice which should be informed further by local issues/feedback and more detailed network design issues.

2.4 Land use transport integration

We note that it is critical that the chosen option provides very good access to Lincolnshire Farms as this is a key regional objective for the link road. This development area includes a substantial future employment area that will be important for the regional economy.

2.5 Petone interchange

We strongly support the proposed new Petone interchange. Work completed as part of the Hutt Corridor Plan development suggested that a new grade separated interchange at Petone is expected to have a number of positive benefits for traffic flows in the vicinity in addition to significant safety improvements. It will be important that safety for all modes (including pedestrians and cyclists) is a key consideration in the design of this interchange.

This project also presents an important opportunity to provide a pedestrian and cycle link between the Belmont Regional Park and Petone foreshore. The Hutt Corridor Plan identifies the desire to provide this 'Beach to Bush' walk/cycle link following a high level of local community support for it through submissions to the Hutt Corridor Plan. This link is strongly supported.

2.6 Walking and cycling on link road

The location and gradient of the link road would suggest that any demand from pedestrians would be limited to recreational walkers. Maintaining or enhancing existing links for recreation walking and running (through Belmont Regional Park up to Horokiwi Rd, via Korokoro Valley and the Bridle Track) might be more important than building a footpath alongside the new road.

While cyclist demand on the link road may be relatively low on average, and primarily recreational, we suggest that not providing cyclist facilities would be a missed opportunity, and would likely lead to safety issues. With the improving technology and increasing uptake of electric bikes the link road could provide a more feasible connection for trips between Lincolnshire Farms and destinations in North Wellington or Lower Hutt by bike.

GWRC requests that the link road be classified as highway (with a shoulder of adequate width to provide safely for cyclists) rather than a motorway which would prohibit use by cyclists. We ask that further detailed consideration be given to cyclist facilities as part of the link road design.

2.7 Public transport issues

GWRC notes that the link road will provide the opportunity for direct public transport services between Porirua/North Wellington and Lower Hutt. The demand for this is likely to

increase with future development in the area, including at Lincolnshire Farms. The feasibility of future services is something that GWRC will need to investigate further in the future.

We note that there may be some minor rail re-alignment required as part of the link road proposal, with further re-alignment work enabled if the fill from the link road is used in the harbour alongside the existing rail corridor to provide a walk/cycle link and resilience benefits. GWRC supports any re-alignment work and notes that this would have a positive impact on rail journey times through this part of the corridor.

2.8 Impacts on Belmont Regional Park

GWRC supports the Option 4 alignment for the Petone to Crest Section 1 of the proposed link road. This option avoids Belmont Regional Park and improves resilience to earthquakes. We oppose the Options 2 and 3 alignments which would have an unacceptable impact on Belmont Regional Park and the Korokoro Valley.

We seek to ensure that the Korokoro stream catchment is not adversely affected by the proposal and would oppose the location of clean fill associated with construction of the link road being sited within the catchment area. Our preference is for clean fill to be re-located off-site, to support other potential projects for the region.

We note that the link road and Petone interchange project provide an opportunity to significantly enhance access to the Belmont Regional Park from the southern end at Cornish Street. We encourage NZTA to consider this opportunity as part of developing the link road design.

Access to the Belmont Regional Park at the northern end (Porirua access) is already partly compromised under the Transmission Gully project and could be impacted further under Option D. We ask that NZTA works with GWRC to ensure any design developed for this option takes account of the need to maintain access to the park for recreational and farming purposes.

2.9 State Highway 58

GWRC would like to take this opportunity to remind NZTA that improving the safety of SH58, the primary existing east-west connection between SH1 and SH2, must be a high priority in the short term.

However, we recognise that the proposed new Petone to Grenada Link Road would serve a different role to that of SH58 by providing direct connectivity between communities at the southern end of the Hutt Valley and communities in North Wellington/Porirua, by providing an efficient link between key freight destinations, and by improving transport network resilience by providing an alternative east-west route.