

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

May 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.

We support the process agreed at the Regional Transport Committee meeting on 13 May 2014 for a collaborative regional partnership between NZTA and the region's councils as the project progresses, through the establishment of the Chief Executive steering group. This group will provide direction for the project managers and resolve conflicts, and will ensure community and other issues are addressed through the project design.

## 2. Greater Wellington Regional Council feedback on the proposal

### 2.1 Improving east-west connectivity

GWRC supports in principle the provision of a new east-west link between State Highway 2 (Petone) and State Highway 1 (Grenada). The need for a new connection 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 (subject to addressing congestion issues within the Hutt City local road network).
- *Improved network resilience* by providing an alternative route that could be used in the case of an unplanned event on SH1, SH2, or SH58.
- *Reduced 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 Proposal to increase north-south capacity

GWRC does not support the additional north-south road capacity currently proposed through 6-laning State Highway 1 north of Tawa (as included in option C) or a through construction of a new two-lane north-south slip road through Takapu Valley (option D).

GWRC seeks further investigation and consideration of the range of multi-modal options for addressing the north-south congestion/capacity issues associated with the proposed Petone to Grenada Link Road.

The scale and capacity of the Petone to Grenada 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 make the scale of investment needed to remove all congestion at peak times. The investment proposed for further north-south capacity at Tawa may effectively undermine efforts to get people to use public transport in peak times.

Additional investment in measures to encourage and facilitate public transport use is also critical. Encouraging more northern commuters travelling to/from Wellington City to the train in the peak period would free up space on SH1 north of Tawa for other trips such as freight and vehicles accessing the Petone to Grenada 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.

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 Petone to Grenada Link Road would not 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 road capacity as part of the Petone to Grenada Link Road project. We believe the next phase of investigations should look at other options for addressing this issue as part of a wider approach to maintaining a balanced transport network.

Possible options might include accepting a certain level of congestion on this part of the network, additional public transport and/or park and ride investment, and other travel demand management tools (for example, looking at the merits of tolling the Link Road).

### **2.3 Proposed 6-lanes on the steep sections of the Petone to Grenada Link Road**

GWRC is concerned about the proposed 6-lane sections of the proposed Petone to Grenada Link Road. This is a larger scale road than what was anticipated through earlier planning phases.

We understand that the 6-lane sections of the Petone to Grenada Link Road are primarily proposed on the steep sections where heavy vehicles will be moving more slowly and overtaking by general traffic will be required.

However, we seek further information and evidence about the need for 6-lanes, including whether this is necessary for safety reasons or if it is driven by a desire for unconstrained traffic flows. Consideration should also be given to whether 6 lanes would be required if the forecast traffic volumes using the route were managed through tolling or other wider network interventions.

## **2.4 Alignment options for Section 1: Petone to Crest**

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 Options 2 and 3 alignments which would have an unacceptable impact on Belmont Regional Park and the Korokoro Valley.

The area within Belmont Regional Park that would be directly impacted by Options 2 and 3 exhibits the park's key characteristics and has high recreational and ecological values.

The GWRC Parks Network Plan, the statutory management plan for GWRC's regional parks, identifies Cornish Street as a major entrance to the Belmont Regional Park. From here visitors can access short walks or rides near the urban edge of the park or longer, more challenging traverses within the park. A projected change for the park is improved recreational links between the park and the Hutt River and Petone Foreshore via the Cornish Street entrance.

In 2009, the majority of the Korokoro Valley was gazetted as Scenic Reserve under the Reserves Act. This reserves classification recognises the significant indigenous flora and fauna present and the intent to protect these values. The Korokoro Valley includes original forest remnant and regenerating native bush and is a significant site for community restoration projects. The Korokoro Stream, once an historic food source for Maori (Te Korokoro o te Mana – the food supply of mana) holds important in-stream and downstream values and habitat for native fish.

Most recently, the Belmont-Korokoro area has been assessed by GWRC as an example of the region's best ecosystem types. Sites with the highest biodiversity values have been identified and then prioritised for management. The 2014 draft GWRC Belmont-Korokoro Key Native Ecosystem Plan describes the area as uninterrupted ecological sequence between different habitats, in this case incorporating areas of coastal, riverine and lowland forest habitats, from near sea level to 457m altitude at Belmont Trig.

We seek to ensure that Belmont Regional Park and the Korokoro Stream catchment are not adversely affected by the proposal and would likely oppose the location of fill associated with construction of the link road being sited within the stream catchment area.

We note that the Petone to Grenada Link Road and Petone Interchange project provides 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.

## **2.5 Alignment options for Section 2: Crest to Tawa**

We do not support Options C and D. We consider that these alignment options focus primarily on delivering additional north-south road capacity.

In addition, Option D is not supported for the following reasons:

- It involves a large new road footprint through a relatively unspoilt rural area for what we consider to be no additional strategic benefit.
- It would further compromise access to the Belmont Regional Park for recreational and farming purposes, at the northern end (Porirua access). This northern access will already be affected by construction of the Transmission Gully project.
- It would undermine investment in the SH1/Transmission Gully interchange at Linden. It would impact on the Grenada North Park which is an important sport and recreational facility for the north Wellington suburbs and is earmarked for potential future expansion.

GWRC is not in a position to support any particular option at this stage. We note that all current alignments have some level of impact on existing and future residential properties and we ask that NZTA take into account the issues raised by local communities before deciding on a route alignment for the link road. Our preferred route alignment would seek to minimise the impact on existing residential properties as far as possible, while ensuring the strategic benefits of the Link Road are not compromised.

We note that Wellington City Council has provided feedback to NZTA with a summary of the views of local communities affected by the Petone to Grenada link road proposal, including Takapu Valley, Horokiwi, Tawa, and Grenada Village.

## **2.6 Land use and transport integration – Lincolnshire Farms**

We note that it is critical that the chosen option provides good access to Lincolnshire Farms Structure Plan area 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.

## **2.7 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. Our support, though, is contingent on a commitment from the Agency to work closely with Hutt City Council to address consequential congestion issues on Hutt City's local road network (see 2.11 below).

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.

## 2.8 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 north Wellington/Porirua and the Hutt Valley by bike.

GWRC requests that the link road be classified as highway (with at least 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.

## 2.9 Public transport issues

GWRC notes that the Petone to Grenada 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 Petone to Grenada 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.

## 2.10 Improving State Highway 58

GWRC considers that improving road safety along SH58, the primary existing east-west connection between SH1 and SH2, must be a high priority in the short term, including better provision for cyclists and pedestrians.

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.

## 2.11 Access through the Hutt Valley

We believe the full benefit from the Petone to Grenada Link Road will not be realised until the links from State Highway 2 through to Seaview and Gracefield are improved. Many of the benefits of the Link Road are related to regional economic growth, particularly increased jobs and economic activity in the Hutt Valley. The cross valley link road has for some time been

identified as a key project for the region to improve connections to the Seaview/Gracefield area.

We very strongly encourage NZTA to work with Hutt City Council to progress this work, including consideration of packaging the Hutt Valley link road with the Petone to Grenada Link Road project.

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