

26 October 2009

KAPITI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SUBMISSION TO NZTA BOARD ON PROPOSED STATE HIGHWAY 1 EXPRESSWAY ROUTES THROUGH KAPITI

Executive Summary

This submission from the Kapiti Chamber of Commerce deals primarily with the way in which the road can assist regional and Kapiti in maximising economic development.

The Chamber believes there is a worthwhile regional economic case for designing the roading solution that creates an environment for the strongest economic growth and health in Kapiti, while meeting the needs for an expressway in the area.

People are choosing to move to Kapiti and consequently the area has some 50,000 people and is one of the fastest growing areas in the country. Large numbers of residents commute from the area for work, however this is fundamentally inefficient. The Airport development is just commencing and is significant by regional standards. Kapiti can contribute more economically, and providing the right environment for business growth in Kapiti is therefore important from a regional (and national) economic perspective.

The Paraparaumu Airport in particular provides a valuable alternative regional airport to the already at capacity Wellington airport, yet that development is conditional upon easy access to SH1.

Taking the long term view, there are a number of key factors which will drive Kapiti's economic health and growth. The roading option chosen, and its design, must deliver these factors. Chief among these from a roading perspective are:

- Local road connectivity between current and future commercial and residential districts;
- Good access to SH1, especially from the Airport development, surrounding commercial areas and the Town Centre / main retail area;
- Planning certainty and rapid construction of roading;
- Kapiti is a good place to be. This will attract businesses and help retain a quality workforce.

The Chamber makes its submission on the following points:

- 1. Local roading connectivity** – good links between new and planned residential and commercial areas are vital to long term economic health. In particular this means building the full 2 lane WLR as a 70 km/h local road if the Eastern corridor is chosen. Alternatively local traffic access to a 4 lane WLR would be crucial if the Western corridor were to be chosen.
- 2. Good access to SH1** – there needs to be an interchange at Kapiti Rd or Ihakara St providing efficient access to the Airport development, main commercial and retail areas and planned Town Centre. Other access points are also needed depending upon the corridor chosen.

- 3. Timing and certainty** – a much needed local road and second bridge over the Waikanae River was on the verge of being built, both for local needs and to take traffic off SH1. The airport development is at a critical phase. Many people affected by the roading issue have their lives on hold. For these and other reasons, a prompt decision is required and roading delivered as soon as possible.
- 4. Mitigation** – prompt and fair purchase of properties and businesses affected. Extensive environmental mitigation no matter the route chosen is essential.

Conclusion

The Chamber is aware that as with the local population in general, business people are divided over the choice of corridor. There has been much confusion and misinformation. An early September meeting held by the Chamber for business people showed strong support for the inclusion of 'Option 3' in the NZTA options available for public comment.

A recent Chamber workshop concluded that the Eastern corridor together with prompt construction of a 70 km/h, 2-lane local WLR is more likely to deliver long term economic health and growth. This view was reiterated at the Chamber AGM held 8 October 2009.

On balance the Chamber therefore recommends a suitably cost effective Eastern option with the full WLR as a 2-lane 70k/h local road be adopted as the way forward by NZTA. The current (Council) design of the WLR requires some straightening to reduce costs and make it an efficient route, capable of traffic travelling at this speed. Currently, it appears to be designed to inhibit in the future, extending it to 4-lanes if and when needed; this needs to be rectified.

Kapiti and Regional Economic Growth

The Kapiti area is growing. With a population of some 50,000 and with one of the highest growth rates in the country, there are substantial new developments underway and planned, and no end to this growth in sight. The simple fact is that people are choosing to move to 'the Coast'.

The area has a relatively low amount of business per capita. There is a large commuter population. While commuting is a perfectly valid choice and benefits businesses elsewhere in the region, it is inefficient from a macro economic perspective as it introduces costs which make the region (and New Zealand) less competitive. There are also negative environmental and social aspects.

The Kapiti area is in the early stages of substantial business growth. Notably, the Paraparaumu Airport has been cleared for development, providing the region with a second airport and a large commercial park development. The airport land development is the largest ever development in Kapiti, and significant by regional standards. Irrespective of the airport development, in recent years businesses have also been moving into or starting up in the area and this trend is also set to accelerate.

Aside from business development, the Paraparaumu Airport will also provide an important alternative to Wellington Airport for the region. Wellington Airport is already at capacity. This gives passengers a choice, takes congestion from the Wellington Airport but more importantly it gives options and reduces risks for the whole region. The Paraparaumu Airport development consents are conditional upon easy access to SH1.

Overall, there is opportunity and economic advantage to the wider Wellington region (and therefore to New Zealand) to encourage businesses to develop in the Kapiti area. The Kapiti Chamber of Commerce submits that this is an important economic point for the NZTA Board to consider – the roading option and its design must support increased business growth in Kapiti.

Kapiti's long term economic health has increasing importance from a regional viewpoint.

Kapiti Key Economic Growth Factors

The Kapiti Chamber of Commerce submits that certain factors are critical in allowing long term economic growth in Kapiti, and that potential roading options should be assessed in light of their ability to deliver these factors.

In approximate order of importance to growth, these critical factors are seen as being:

- Kapiti being perceived by residents to be an even better place to be than it is now
- The existence of an excellent Local Roothing Network providing local connectivity
- Good access to/from SH1 to town and commercial areas
- Planning certainty - which roading option can be delivered quickest?
- A strong Kapiti Economic Growth Strategy
- Good Town Planning and appropriate land zoning supporting the growth strategy
- Positive perception of Kapiti by people who live outside the area

The regional economic benefit case for designing the road in such a way that businesses are encouraged to start or stay in Kapiti is strengthened by the following:

- If Kapiti retail businesses suffer significantly due to poor local roading connectivity or access to SH1, then this will result in more traffic on SH1 as larger numbers of Kapiti residents travel further to find “decent shopping”.
- A similar scenario applies to commuters. If businesses are discouraged, then larger numbers of people will remain commuters, leading to increased demand for rail services, and increasing congestion on SH1 especially around commuting times.
- Current emergency services are located around Kapiti Road and Te Moana. Rapid connectivity to the chosen route by these services is critical. There are obvious significant savings to be made if these services do not have to be relocated to provide this access.

Submission Points for NZTA Board to Consider

Barring the last point about 'mitigation' which applies throughout Kapiti, these points all relate to economic growth and the roading options in the Raumati to Peka Peka area, unless specified otherwise.

The Chamber notes that, as with the rest of the community, the opinion of its members is split as to which option is best. Some prefer the western option as they see it removes uncertainty and risk during construction, others still remain undecided. The Chamber's ultimate objective is to ensure that the implications of the final road design and its placement are clearly understood.

On balance, given the choices on offer, the Chamber sees an Eastern route complemented by a 2-lane, 70 k/h WLR which has the capacity to be widened to 4-lane in the future, should this be required, as offering the best long-term economic health and growth benefits to the region.

For simplicity the submission assumes that the NZTA 'Western' option is not in contention.

The Kapiti Coast District Council has questioned, based on traffic flow modelling, whether an Expressway is needed? The Chamber submits that NZTA examine this carefully, in the light of overall objectives. If an improved SH1 and 2 lane Western Link Road would meet foreseeable needs, then it seems best to build the full 2 lane WLR (as a 70km/h road, able to be upgraded to 4 lane), substantially improve SH1 and use the money saved on other important projects with a greater ROI. Certainly a 2 lane, 70 km/h WLR from Peka Peka to Raumati would take significant traffic off the current SH1.

Point 1 – “Local Roding Connectivity”

Local roading connecting current and future commercial and residential areas is a critical factor for long term economic health and growth.

Put simply, this allows local people to move to and from work, leisure and retail areas, and goods and services to move between retail, commercial and residential areas. Poor local roading connectivity creates delays which introduces cost (inefficiency) and harms economic growth.

The principal submission here is the need for a second bridge over the (lower) Waikanae River that is available for local traffic.

Because of the geographic division of the Waikanae River (East/West) and the 2 roading corridors (current SH1/rail and WLR) it is quite possible for the area to be left with poor local connectivity, leading to reduced economic outcomes for the foreseeable future, if sub-optimal roading decisions are made.

If the NZTA eastern corridor is chosen:

- **2 Lane Western Link Road completion essential** – If the Eastern corridor is chosen, then a full two lane ‘local’ road should be built immediately by NZTA in the existing WLR designation from Poplar Ave / 200 Main Road South as applicable, at least to Te Moana Road and preferably to Peka Peka. The current design needs to be amended to provide for a 70 km/h road; upgradeable to 4 lanes should this ever be required in the future. This road should be commenced and completed as soon as possible to:
 - Provide a ‘backbone’ local connectivity through the middle of the district, contributing to economic health.
 - Provide an alternative route to the current SH1 in the event of blockage or road works.
 - Provide the most rapid relief to the current pressure of local traffic on SH1.
 - Give a degree of certainty allowing the Airport to develop.
 - A 70 km/h design and speed limit gives the 2 lane WLR road a far greater effectiveness in moving traffic efficiently throughout the district. This reduces travel times and therefore costs, and makes the road more effective at taking traffic off SH1 and also off surrounding 50km/h residential roads.
- **Township Integration** – If the eastern corridor is chosen, then design should include the linking of the commercial areas split by the road. For example; in Paraparaumu there are businesses to the West of the current SH1 which need to be easily linked to the main town centre area; whilst in Waikanae a similar situation exists.
- **Rail and Bus Integration** – if the eastern corridor is chosen, then Chamber submits NZTA work closely with local bodies and rail and bus authorities to ensure roading, rail, bus and local community needs are all met.

If the NZTA western corridor is chosen:

- **Local Traffic Access to the Expressway essential** – If the Western corridor is chosen for an Expressway, then exits and entrances must permit the Expressway being used by local traffic as a second crossing of the Waikanae River:
 - The community need for a second bridge has been well established over the years and there is a strong expectation of one within the community. The rate of the predicted population growth means it is unacceptable for the community to remain divided by this river.
 - This will allow internal commuters, goods and services to move within the district without having to travel many kilometres out of their way to the existing SH1 road bridge. The cost of this extra travel in lost time, kilometres travelled and traffic generated is large. Likewise there are also environmental and social costs.

Overall, it is concluded by the Chamber that the eastern corridor option appears to provide the greatest long term economic benefits because (in conjunction with a 2 lane, 70 km/h WLR) it delivers better local roading connectivity. This is based on the assumption that a 4 lane WLR option does not allow/encourage significant local connectivity.

Point 2 – “Good Access to SH1”

With a population of nearly 50,000, one of the highest growth rates in the country, and a significant airport and business park development just commencing, Kapiti is not an area to be by-passed. Interchanges at the extremities of the district may seem good for through traffic flow, but the Chamber submission is that the Kapiti economy is too significant to the region not to have more direct access.

If the NZTA eastern corridor is chosen:

- **Interchange at Kapiti Rd or Ihakara St** – The Chamber believes Ihakara Street is better as most airport traffic will then be kept off Kapiti Road. If the eastern corridor is chosen for an Expressway, then a full interchange at either Kapiti Road or Ihakara Street is critical to long term economic health. This will:
 - Reduce impact on local roads from the large numbers of trucks servicing Coastlands and Kapiti Rd commercial precincts.
 - Reduce impact on local roads of goods and services moving north or south, improving Kapiti position as a hub to service the Lower North Island.
 - Result in ease of access to the Airport to/from SH1 which is a condition of the Airport’s development. The Airport will not be able to develop within its current consents without this access.
 - Provide access to the designated Town centre for people from the wider Kapiti and adjacent areas.
 - Improve long term area cohesiveness by encouraging growth in already designated and vibrant retail and commercial areas and reduce long term commercial pressures on town planning for ‘big box’ and other commercial developments areas which are essentially town fringe residential areas.
- **Access to/from the South at 200 Main Rd South** – if the eastern corridor is chosen as an Expressway, then access to and from the south at the south end of the 2 lane Western Link Road is again essential. It provides for:
 - Reduced pressure on the main Kapiti/Ihakara Interchange by removing the need for south-bound traffic originating/terminating in Raumati to travel north on local roads to access the Expressway.
 - Removal of local traffic from the Expressway by diverting through district traffic onto the 2 lane WLR (another reason why the 2 lane WLR must be built along the full deviation). In this configuration, most of the residential areas would be serviced by the 2 lane WLR, not the Expressway.
- **Interchange at Waikanae North** – Some form of access at Waikanae is needed, and whether it is Waikanae (central) or Waikanae North is an issue. While Te Moana Rd may be preferable from a simple and purely economic perspective, Waikanae North is likely to be favourable to encourage Waikanae to Paraparaumu traffic to use the old SH1 route which would become a local road.

- **Access to/from the North at Peka Peka** – A full interchange is not recommended as this would encourage fringe commercial developments in a rural area.

If the NZTA western corridor is chosen:

- Access to/from the South at 200 Main Rd South / Poplar Ave
- An Interchange at Raumati Road would be required for Raumati traffic.
- There needs to be an interchange at either Kapiti Road or Ihakara St. In the interests of current traffic flow, Ihakara St would appear to be the better choice.
- Both Kapiti & Ihakara St have the capacity to be 4 laned.
- Interchange at Mazengarb/Otaihanga Road required for North Paraparaumu traffic
- Interchange at Te Moana Road required for Waikanae traffic
- Interchange at Peka Peka.

Overall, either the Western or Eastern corridor options could provide good access to SH1.

- **Otaki Access to SH1** – Otaki has a number of substantial and well-established businesses that together with ‘outlet shops’ on the current SH1 require good access to SH1 to thrive. The Chamber submits that the design of the access points from SH1 to/from Otaki needs to include provision for the following aspects:
 - Easy access to/from commercial areas
 - Designed to encourage visitors to the Outlet shop area by being close and easy to navigate to/from the Expressway.

Point 3 – “Timing & Certainty”

The Chamber already has anecdotal evidence of businesses deciding not to come to Kapiti because of the recent uncertainty around roading. As the airport development enters its crucial early growth stages, certainty is crucial.

Congestion and safety on the current SH1 are already an issue at peak times, and the 2 lane WLR and downstream crossing of the Waikanae River have been long-awaited by the community.

Many people are currently being subjected to considerable stress and doubt because their houses and/or livelihoods are potentially affected by the roading issue.

The Chamber submits that the decision be made and communicated to the public without delay, and that work is programmed to commence within the shortest possible timeframe.

In this regard, the Eastern corridor may be the preferred option, as it would permit the start of work on the 2 lane WLR in a shorter time frame, providing both planning certainty and practical relief to SH1 congestion.

Point 4 – “Mitigation”

The Chamber submits that mitigation is an essential element of the roading project and be accorded a high priority by NZTA:

- **Prompt and Fair Purchase of Property and Businesses** – Home and business owners must not be out of pocket. This needs to include legal and moving costs.
- **Environmental Mitigation** – Whichever option is chosen, the design must include extensive environmental mitigation. This includes minimising visual and auditory signs of the road, particularly where it passes through residential areas.

‘Kapiti as a good place to be’ may sound trite, but is nevertheless a key factor in economic growth and health. Most people who have moved to Kapiti and fuelled the areas enormous growth, have done so at least partly if not significantly because of lifestyle considerations.

More businesses will likely be attracted to Kapiti in the future if it is perceived as being a ‘good place to be’. For this reason (and many others), environmental mitigation is crucial in the design of the road.

The Eastern corridor with 70 km/h 2 lane WLR as described above, is the roading option that would appear most likely to lead to long term economic growth and health.