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Tēnā koutou

RE: Okere Falls to Morea Dual Pathway

Thank you expressing your views and concerns about the proposed works by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency in the vicinity of your communities. As you are aware Waka Kotahi is the Crown Authority responsible for managing State Highways and are fully funded by the Government. Their safety works undertakings in the vicinity of the Okere Falls area are subject to their own consultation processes and must meet relevant safety considerations arising from the responsibility as the Road Controlling Authority. However we continue to interact with them wherever possible to assist in getting the best possible outcomes for our communities.

I appreciate and note your views regarding their responsiveness to your feedback. It is my understanding that Waka Kotahi, in arriving at their current proposals to be implemented have undertaken consultation on the proposed State Highway 33 shared path between Hamurana Road and Ōkere Falls.

During the consultation period, Waka Kotahi received 28 emails and two phone calls submitting feedback on the proposed shared path. Nineteen were in support, three did not support and others had questions about the design and pedestrian/cyclist safety. There were also requests for an underpass, and for the path to be extended to Maniatutu Road and Mourea.

Waka Kotahi have completed a review of the submissions and the proposed design and a decision has been made to move forward with the proposed shared path and pedestrian refuge islands.

They acknowledge that they faced a number of challenges when designing the shared path in this area. They have arrived at the final conclusion based on safety grounds that an at-grade (road level) option, with a median pedestrian refuge island is much safer than what is currently available.

The shared path is expected to be completed by mid-2021.

Key points noted in their investigations were:

Road and roadside safety improvements have been underway since late 2017 as part of the State Highway 33 Te Ngae Junction to Paengaroa safety improvements project. This road has been identified as a high-risk rural road, and these safety improvements are part of the Safe Network Programme. Feedback was captured via a number of different ways, from various groups. They received feedback from iwi/hapū partners via regular hui. Concerns were raised regarding speed through the villages of Mourea and Ōkere Falls. The local community (Ōkere Falls Store, rafting operators, local property owners, Whangamarino School community, community boards and ratepayer associations) concerns are summarised as follows:

- Traffic is going too fast through Ōkere Falls, Mourea and Paengaroa.
- It's unsafe to cross the road at Ōkere Falls.
- Ōkere Falls gets busy over the summer – both traffic increases and tourism/rafting activity.
- Some drivers aren't following the speed limit.
- Requests to lower the speed limits, especially through the villages along the road.

Part of the SH33 Te Ngae Junction to Paengaroa safety improvements project was to investigate options to make it safer for people to walk and bike between Hamurana Road and Ōkere Falls. After hearing concerns from locals about it being unsafe to cross the road at Ōkere Falls, Waka Kotahi investigated options and proposed a shared path and pedestrian refuge islands to improve safety while working within the constraints of a rural state highway environment.

In their assessment, the benefits for the shared path and pedestrian refuge islands between Hamurana Road to Ōkere Falls include:

- Improved safety for residents, school children and families walking/biking alongside SH33.
- Pedestrians and cyclists are separated from state highway traffic.
- Better connectivity between Mourea and Ōkere Falls.
- Pedestrian refuge islands provide a safe place in the middle of the road to wait before crossing the road.
- The shared path and pedestrian islands provide visual reminders of other potential road users in the area.

Waka Kotahi faced a number of challenges when designing the shared path in this area. These include limited space to work within (restricted land area and lakeside location), geometry of the road (sweeping corners at either end) and vehicle movements.

The shared path will be constructed within designated road space and will not encroach or narrow the existing state highway. There is room for the shared path. The layout of the shared path will use some of the existing road shoulder between Hamurana Road and the Waipuna Bay boat ramp. By reducing some of the current shoulder widths will help reinforce the new lower 60km/h speed limit in this area.

The scope and funding for this project is for a shared path between Hamurana Road and Ōkere Falls Road. If there is any remaining funding after completing the Ōkere Falls Road to Hamurana Road shared path, Waka Kotahi will use it to complete this section. Alternatively they will be seeking further funding in the next National Land Transport Programme. This will be prioritised along with all other projects around Aotearoa and we will receive confirmation of the status either late-2021 or early-2022.

An underpass

There are a number of important safety projects around the country, and Waka Kotahi need to prioritise the timing and funding available for these so they can make the biggest difference in reducing deaths and serious injuries. The cost of an underpass at this location is beyond the funding scope of this project. There is currently no funding available to investigate or construct an underpass and an underpass at this location is unlikely to be prioritised high enough to be funded.

An at-grade (road level) option, with a median pedestrian refuge island is much safer and more attractive to people than what is currently available. Waka Kotahi's assessment is that people would likely still cross the road as it is more direct as opposed to using an underpass at this location, and now the speed limit has been lowered to 60km/h it is much safer.

Waka Kotahi is not ruling out the possibility of an underpass for Ōkere Falls in the future, if it was technically feasible.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve Chadwick', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hon Steve Chadwick JP
Mayor