

PAREMATA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION INC

A detailed case for closure of the Mana Clearways (at least on a trial basis) in conjunction with the opening of Transmission Gully

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The Context

It is clear that Waka Kotahi officers have convinced themselves that waiting for at least 6 months after the opening of the Transmission Gully route (TG) before starting formal consultations about the future of SH59 is a good idea – and the Porirua Mayor and Chief Executive have chosen to go along with that stance.

It so happens that the Paremata Residents Association also agrees that any final discussions and decisions should not be made until a reasonable period after the opening.

In the case of the clearways, however, a commitment was made by Transit NZ that they would be removed on the opening of TG, and there are obvious health, safety, and strategic/planning reasons for their removal as soon as possible - even if only on a trial basis as part of highway optimization and to gather data on the impact of their removal. We believe that it would be irresponsible to let the clearways remain.

The situation at the time of writing this is that the Paremata Residents Association has been told by Waka Kotahi officers that the Association will not be consulted and the clearways will remain in place until at least 6 – 12 months after the opening of TG; both the Porirua Mayor and Chief Executive have declined our request that they meet with the Paremata, Pukerua Bay and Plimmerton Residents Associations or that PCC should support removal of the clearways; a complaint has been lodged with the Ombudsman about Waka Kotahi's conduct; and the Chairperson of the Waka Kotahi Board has been asked that his Board review the situation.

Please note that this paper refers primarily to removal of the Mana clearways, but we believe that there is an equally strong case for removing some of the four-laning on St Andrews Road through Plimmerton and around Goat Point as well.

Reasons for Removal of the Clearways

Health, safety, and other factors

If the clearways are not removed, we will continue to have a highway which:

- Because of its uniqueness within NZ, causes confusion and much anxiety for motorists and others. Nowhere else, for instance, are heavy vehicles requested to use the right-hand lanes and need to change lanes twice while also coping with vehicles swerving in and out of the kerbside lanes beside them. Nowhere else is there such misunderstanding and hostility between those motorists who observe the signs and those who don't.
- Bears little resemblance to what was expected by the Environment Court when it approved the use of "interim" clearways "pending the construction of Transmission Gully".
- Is clearly much more dangerous, unhealthy, and divisive than a two-lane highway catering for safer parking and cycling in the kerbside lanes. And although some believe that use of the kerbside lanes allows traffic to move faster, that is not usually the case if there are parked cars and vehicles changing lanes. (See more details about safety below.)



Reducing incentives to use SH59

Continuing with clearways and four-laning will detract from the objectives of building TG and reduce the incentive to use it, thereby increasing the likelihood that motorists will:

- Continue using the existing highway rather than TG. With the possibility of some congestion at the southern end of TG, the lack of toilets, food outlets and service stations on the TG route, and the extra steepness and similar length of TG, there is a strong likelihood that many motorists (including truck drivers) will prefer to continue using SH59.
- Change their patterns of travel and increase the possibility of congestion at peak hours.
- Be induced to use motor vehicles rather than other forms of transport such as trains, buses, cycling and walking.

It is very important that through traffic is encouraged to make use of the new TG motorway, so it will be essential to "de-tune" SH59 as soon as possible after TG is opened, to avoid it being seen as a good alternative route to using TG. This would involve closing off the clearways and adjusting the traffic signals along the route to improve side road priority (as envisaged by the technical experts). It can be done – if the will is there – very quickly, cheaply, and simply by installing flexible PVC road stakes ("traffic separators") nailed to the road surface where needed to prevent all live traffic from using the kerbside lane. There is an example of this type of installation (for road management) on the, now closed, uphill passing lane, east of the Moonshine intersection on SH58. This would allow for roadside

parking, safer entrance to private driveways and commercial entrances, intersection turning lanes, and a safe corridor for cyclists outside the parked cars, but inside the road stakes. No other changes would need to be made initially except some minor sign changes and removals. The changes could be made virtually overnight and could be easily reversed if found to cause significant problems.

Distortion of Strategic and Planning Information

Continuation of the clearways after TG is opened will continue to distort travel patterns and related behaviour, thus corrupting the data needed to form the basis for future management of the highway and development of the coastal communities. It is not sensible, for instance, to be assessing present and future demand for such things as parking and cycling while the clearways remain in place, because people will still not park or cycle on the street due to the risk from traffic continuing to use those lanes. The data will also be distorted by those who – if the clearways and four-laning were removed – would behave quite differently (e.g., using TG or public transport or travelling at different times).

Conflict with the principles and directions of the Porirua Growth Strategy

This Strategy was published just 2 years ago (2019) after extensive consultation with the Porirua communities. Principle 4 aimed to achieve “A connected and active city” and directed present and future Councils to (inter alia):

- *Make walking, cycling, and public transport, viable choices for more people of varying abilities.*
- *Change the function of SH1 and SH58 (below Whitby) through the revocation process to prioritise local connections for people, places and businesses.*
- *Improve safety for pedestrian and cyclists as well as other transport network users, to eliminate death and serious injury.*

An artist’s impression of “Mana Esplanade post revocation” with just 2 lanes provided an indication to the many who provided feedback on the Strategy of what the authors had in mind.



It is clear that continuation of the clearways after TG is opened does not meet the intentions of the Growth Strategy.

The importance of honouring commitments

Transit's Commitments to the Local Community" made in evidence to the Environment Court included a commitment "to demolish the existing Paremata Bridge and remove the Clearways through Mana in conjunction with the opening of TGM, and following appropriate public process". Transit's Regional State Highway Manager also specifically promised that the commitments would be honoured "whether imposed as conditions of the requirement or not" and said that the funding would be included in "the cost of construction of the TG Project".

Normally if a government agency no longer wanted to honour its commitments, we would expect the agency to feel obliged to approach the groups to whom the commitment had been made (in this case, the residents associations) to explain the reasons for wanting to dishonour the commitments and to seek their agreement. Waka Kotahi has chosen instead to stonewall the residents associations by not even acknowledging the existence of the commitments or answering any queries that we have raised about them.

The Association is not averse to reviewing commitments made in the past. For instance, in the case of Transit's commitment to demolish the old bridge "in conjunction with" the opening, we have accepted that a decision on that should wait and, in the meantime, more information about the bridge's effects on tidal flushing of the harbour should be gathered to allow better informed consultations.

In the case of the clearways, however, we believe that it is imperative that they are closed off as soon as TG is opened, as promised, for the reasons outlined in this paper. Legal advice we have received suggests that there would be a strong case for judicial review of Waka Kotahi's position on the basis of legitimate expectation. Certainly, removal of the clearways in conjunction with the opening of TG has been the expectation incorporated in virtually all community consultations and planning exercises since the commitment was made. However, we have chosen not to seek such a review, primarily because of financial and time restraints.

We believe that Waka Kotahi should be doing all it can to honour its commitments in order to avoid further erosion of the public's trust in government agencies – and we do not believe that PCC should be seen to condone or support the dishonouring of such commitments either.

Community Feedback

Over the years, the views of Paremata residents on roading issues have been sought many times – at one stage, we were being described as the most surveyed community in New Zealand.

More recently, in October 2020, we prepared a paper containing our "Initial Thoughts" on matters that Waka Kotahi is required to consult on relating to the future ownership and operation of what is now SH59. That paper was discussed at the Association's AGM and put on our website, and all households in our area were invited to send us their feedback on it. Those that responded with feedback almost unanimously supported our proposed stance. This gave us confidence that residents in our area (including Papakowhai, Golden Gate, Mana, and part of Camborne) generally supported the removal of the clearways.

To get more detailed feedback, the Association has recently canvassed (by way of a letterbox drop) the views of residents adjoining Mana Esplanade. The views of residents living next to St Andrews Road are also now being sought. To date replies representing approximately 50 households have come in, and all but one have indicated support for closure of the clearways in conjunction with the opening of TG.

Many of the responses outline their experience and observation of the dangers, anxieties, hostility, and inconvenience associated with the clearway operations. A lot of anger can be expected from the local community if the present plan to continue this dangerous situation for what seems likely to be more than 12 months, goes ahead. We have cut and pasted the feedback received to date into a list (with names and addresses deleted for privacy reasons), and this can be viewed on our website.

How dangerous are the clearways?

Obviously, it is not just local people who are affected by the clearways. They also have an impact on:

- All the motorists who use the route and face the associated risks and anxiety every time they pass through Paremata and Plimmerton,
- All the truck drivers from all over the country who have to face the same risks but also have to change lanes at least twice each time they go through.
- All the visitors to the area, including tourists, and including the many people who come from around the region (sometimes every day) to exercise their dogs or swim at our beaches.

We have had some difficulties and delays in getting crash data from Waka Kotahi recently and what we have eventually been given does not really allow for in-depth analysis. However, the following data from the Road Traffic Crash Database as at 18/11/21 relates to SH1 between (and including) the roundabouts at Paremata and Plimmerton.

- During the last 5 years (2017 – 2021), 217 crashes had been reported so far, involving 46 injuries (including 1 fatal and 1 serious).
- The last 2 years (2020 and 2021) data is incomplete and would also have been affected by the Covid 19 lockdowns during both those years.
- The data is accompanied by a warning that “Due to the nature of non-fatal crashes, it is believed that these are under-reported, with the level of under-reporting decreasing with the severity of the crash”. Because the crashes reported were almost all minor crashes, it is probable that many others were not reported.

For these reasons, and knowing of many minor incidents not reported, we would guess that the real number of crashes over 5 years would more likely be around 600.



From the information received, the 3 major crash factors (by far) for this stretch of highway were identified as "*poor observation*", "*failure to give way or stop*", and "*incorrect lanes or position*". If we

have interpreted these factors correctly, these are also the most obvious problems caused by the clearways and four-laning - so closure of the clearways and reducing the extent of four-laning can be expected to reduce the number of crashes significantly.

We would also, of course, expect the number of crashes to fall with the decrease in traffic volumes when TG is operating. At present, our rough counts suggest that, on average, approx. 28 % of light vehicles and 32% of heavy vehicles are using stretches of the kerbside lanes outside of clearway hours during the day. While traffic volumes will drop significantly when TG opens, if the clearways are not closed, we wouldn't expect those percentages of the remaining traffic to change. And if the clearways remain open, the expected fall in crashes because of the lesser traffic volumes could largely be offset by the likelihood of more crashes because of increased vehicle speeds.

Many of the crashes through Mana result from vehicles changing lanes. Certainly, there are a lot of instances of trucks colliding with vehicles in their blind spot when changing lanes. Retaining the clearways will not do away with lane changing. Neither will it remove the need for many residents or workers to cross 4 lanes on foot (perhaps several times a day) to access their vehicles, and nor will it stop the crashes and near misses between residents accessing or exiting their properties and vehicles using the kerbside lanes. And it won't stop vehicles speeding along the kerbside lanes creating danger for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vehicles.



How much traffic will remain on SH59 when TG opens?

We know that some people think that the current growth in traffic was not forecast when the Environment Court approved the clearway option and therefore Waka Kotahi would be justified in dishonouring Transit's commitments. Others have fears that two traffic lanes will not provide sufficient capacity when proposed developments north of Plimmerton take place. And others think that SH59 should remain as four lanes so that it can cope with extra traffic if/when TG is closed in emergencies.

The only figures provided to us by Waka Kotahi on this matter estimate that traffic volumes will reduce on Mana Esplanade from 31,200 to 17,800 vehicles per day when TG opens - a drop of 13,400 vehicles. The residual traffic volumes being forecast now are not as high as was being forecast when Transit's commitments were made – so that is not a reason for Waka Kotahi not to honour its commitments.

In fact, we have queried the forecasted drop in traffic volumes for Mana Esplanade (13,400 vehicles per day) because the volumes between Paekakariki and Pukerua Bay are forecasted to drop by 20,300

(from 25,700 to 5,400) - which would suggest that a residual volume of 11,000 at Mana should be nearer the mark. We asked for the opportunity to discuss this and other matters with Waka Kotahi but were turned down. Perhaps the modellers believe there is an extremely high suppressed demand for further vehicle trips along Mana Esplanade - in which case the importance of avoiding excess capacity by closing the clearways is all the more important.

As far as future developments are concerned, these will take a considerable time before potentially having any significant effect on traffic volumes – and the first increases are likely to involve vehicles associated with developing the subdivisions, many of which should not be using the kerbside lanes. Some forms of transport may also have changed by the time the planned developments near completion. Nevertheless, we suggest that options for increasing the roading capacity through the coastal communities should be being assessed at this stage too, because of the difficulties that will be encountered in creating a highway that meets expected standards and is “fit for purpose” in the future, if needed.

And we certainly don't believe that what is expected to become primarily a local road should be compromised for the sake of potential emergencies. Removal of the clearways will also hopefully allow for a safer and wider median strip for turning vehicles, which could be used as an additional traffic lane in such circumstances if ever needed.

As far as we can tell, there is no evidence that more than one lane in each direction will be needed when TG opens, and those future fears should not be used as a reason for retaining the clearways.

Conclusions

There is no doubt from the crash data we have received and from the experiences of local residents that the clearways are dangerous, unhealthy, and divisive. We believe that it would be **IRRESPONSIBLE** for Waka Kotahi (and PCC) not to:

- Close off those dangerous clearways, when it would be so simple to do so (even if only on a trial basis) as soon as TG opens. It is clear that the number of crashes and other incidents will be significantly reduced if the clearways are closed.
- Listen to the local residents who are overwhelmingly convinced that the clearways should be removed (and may well feel forced to take direct action if the clearways remain).
- Avoid a situation which does nothing to encourage use of the new TG route and does not provide the most relevant information for future planning.
- Comply with the principles and directions of the Porirua Growth Strategy.
- Honour the “*Commitments to the Local Community*” made by Transit NZ.

Paremata Residents Association
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