

Before the Independent Commissioners at Palmerston North

Under: the Resource Management Act 1991 ('Act')

In the matter of: An application by KiwiRail Holdings Limited ('KiwiRail') under section 168 of the Act for a Notice of Requirements for the Palmerston North Regional Freight Hub

and: **Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency**
Submitter 65

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF SARAH LOUISE DOWNS



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1 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 My full name is Sarah Louise Downs.
- 1.2. I am the Regional Manager, System Design for the Central North Island (Manawatū -Wanganui, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Gisborne) regions at Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency ('Waka Kotahi'), based in Wellington. I have been employed by Waka Kotahi in a variety of roles since November 2015. I am responsible for the planning, securing investment funding, design and delivery of transport system outcomes in the Central North Island region.
- 1.3. I hold the qualification of BA (Hons) Geography from London Metropolitan University, Postgraduate in Education from Manchester Metropolitan University.
- 1.4. I am giving evidence in my capacity as a Waka Kotahi employee, looking at the statutory role and function of Waka Kotahi. I rely on my experience and knowledge of working for Waka Kotahi for the last 5 and a half years. My evidence is informed by high level strategies and government policy relevant to Waka Kotahi, the Horizons Regional Land Transport Plan, the collaborative work with stakeholders (including Councils and Kiwirail) on the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Initiative and discussions with colleagues on various aspects on this project.
- 1.5. My evidence relates to the Notice of Requirements by KiwiRail for the Palmerston North Regional Freight Hub (Freight Hub) on the western side of Railway Road and the North Island Main Trunk Line between Palmerston North airport and Bunnythorpe.
- 1.6. I have authority to give this evidence of behalf of Waka Kotahi.

2 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 2.1 The purpose of my evidence is to outline the statutory roles of Waka Kotahi in relation to the road network and provide information about the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Initiative (PNITI). PNITI is a project underway with regional partners to develop

transport system changes which support ongoing government investment in the region¹ and encourage economic development. I explain the importance of alignment between PNITI and the Freight Hub, given the significance of the Freight Hub and PNITI to the Government's wider objectives in the region, and the expected impacts on the transport system.

2.2 Waka Kotahi's submission on the Notice of Requirement for the Freight Hub largely supported the proposed conditions relating to the transport network but sought some amendments which primarily related to consultation between the parties and having certainty of outcomes from that consultation.

2.3 KiwiRail and Waka Kotahi have continued to work together to refine the proposed conditions. As a result, Waka Kotahi agrees with, and endorses, the amendments to the conditions attached to Ms Bell's evidence. In particular, the amendments to the Road Network Integration Plan, Construction Traffic Management Plan and Operational Traffic Management Plan are supported by Waka Kotahi and Waka Kotahi considers that the amended conditions appropriately address the matters raised in its submission.

2.4 Accordingly, the scope of my evidence does not encompass further comment on the proposed conditions, rather the focus of my evidence provides the context and drivers behind Waka Kotahi's position on the proposed Freight Hub. This position informed the agreement reached on the proposed conditions, as referred to in paragraph 2.3 above.

3. **WAKA KOTAHI'S STATUTORY FUNCTIONS, POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

3.1. Waka Kotahi's statutory objective under the Land Transport Management Act 2003 (LTMA) is to undertake its functions in a

¹ Including Te Ahu a Turanga Manawatū Taranua Highway, Linton and Ohakea regeneration, Turitea windfarm, Massey University expansion, Mid-Central DHB investment and the Freight Hub.

way that contributes to an effective, efficient, and safe land transport system in the public interest.

- 3.2. Waka Kotahi must carry out its functions in a way that delivers on transport outcomes set by the Government which are provided in the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2018/2019-2027-2028 (GPS)
- 3.3. The GPS 2021 took effect from 1 July 2021. It builds on the strategic direction set out in the earlier GPS and has four strategic priorities:
- Safety
 - Better travel options
 - Improving freight connections
 - Climate change
- 3.4. The Ministry of Transport (MOT) has issues its 'Outcomes Framework' to define the long-term strategic outcomes for New Zealand's transport system and explain how government and the transport sector should work together towards these outcomes.
- 3.5. The MOT framework sets out an overall purpose of a transport system that improves wellbeing and liveability, which is achieved by the following five long-term outcomes sought for the transport system:
- a) Inclusive access
 - b) Economic prosperity
 - c) Resilience and security
 - d) Environmental sustainability
 - e) Healthy and safe people
- 3.6. Figure 1 below (extracted from 'A framework for Shaping Our Transport System'²) shows the outcomes and sets out what they mean.

² A framework for Shaping Our Transport System: Transport Outcomes and Mode Neutrality, page 3.

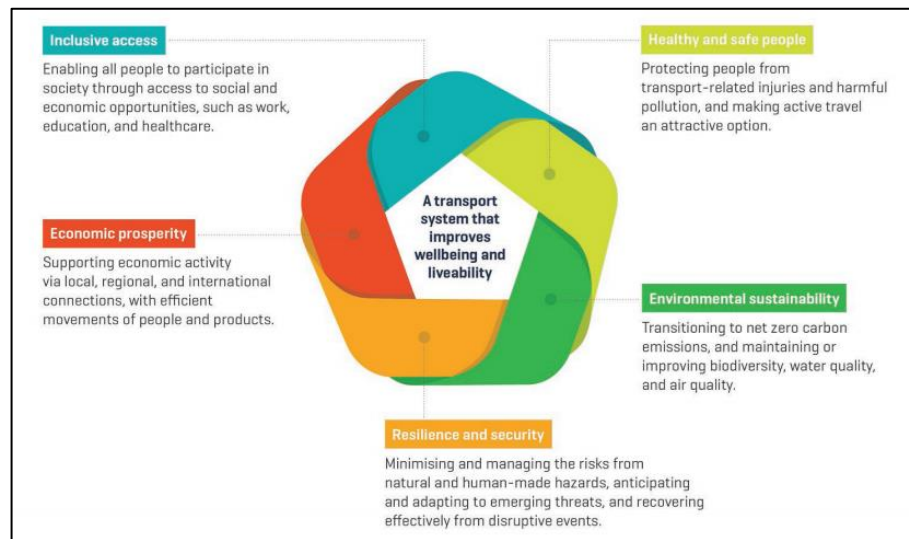


Figure 1: Transport outcomes

3.7 In considering the GPS and the clear direction provided by the Ministry of Transport, Waka Kotahi has an obligation to promote the integration of transport systems and modes, working in partnership with other organisations to give effect to the desired transport outcomes. PNITI is a key method Waka Kotahi is using to achieve these outcomes in the Horizons region.

4 THE PALMERSTON NORTH INTEGRATED TRANSPORT INITIATIVE BACKGROUND

4.1 The PNITI business case was endorsed by the Waka Kotahi board on the 5th February 2021. This endorsement confirms the strategic direction for transport investment in the region for the next 30 years.

4.2 The PNITI is a thirty-year package of interventions to work towards the outcomes sought by the GPS and Transport Outcomes Framework by managing planned economic growth, supporting the freight and distribution potential of the region, addressing safety issues and improving the liveability of the residential areas and city centre.

4.3 Investment objectives that have guided the development and assessment of the PNITI programme options relate to:

- Improving freight access - including strategic connections to the proposed Freight Hub and the Te Ahu a Turanga Manawatū Tararua Highway project
- Improving road safety across the network
- Improving amenity in urban areas through transport improvements

4.4 In collating the interventions identified in the business case, it was clear that improving freight access and movements in isolation would not realise all the benefits and opportunities available.

4.5 Interventions to improve safety and amenity within the central city were identified as needed and therefore included, along with land use and regional transport route planning interventions. These further interventions still require assessment and development as the programme is implemented. Combining these interventions with improvements to freight access and movements, PNITI will maximise the potential opportunities available and provide balanced and effective programmes of investment for the region.

5 THE PALMERSTON NORTH INTEGRATED TRANSPORT INITIATIVE

5.1 The thirty-year PNITI implementation plan consists of a comprehensive package of staged improvements, with the first ten years focussed on delivering safety, access and land use changes across the network. Longer term and more complex investments, including detailed investigation and development of a regional freight ring route, will be staged to align with wider economic drivers, including development of KiwiRail's Freight Hub.

5.2 The recommended PNITI programme will support Government investment in the region over the next 30 years and regional aspirations of being a strategic freight hub in the national supply chain.

5.3 The programme has been staged in line with modelling analysis which shows a number of transport and urban amenity benefits can be achieved in the shorter term through lower levels of investment.

This includes online corridor and intersection upgrades for safety and access, together with safer speeds, and land use changes across the network. These activities will be complemented by longer term interventions to support KiwiRail's Freight Hub, including development of a ring route and a future downstream bridge over the Manawatū River to reduce trips through the city and enhance mode shift through placemaking and amenity improvements

- 5.4 The PNITI programme sequence enables partners to focus on the optimal interventions in response to the identified problems when key investment decisions (such as the KiwiRail regional freight hub) are confirmed, in conjunction with other growth triggers. In this regard, the programme sequence is well aligned to the Waka Kotahi intervention hierarchy through the focus on integrated planning interventions and making best use of the existing transport system first.

PNITI PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATION

- 5.5 PNITI has been developed in partnership with key agencies, including Manawatū District Council, Palmerston North City Council, and Horizons Regional Council. There is clear alignment on the outcomes to be achieved through investment in the transport system, and the required packages of work to deliver these outcomes.
- 5.6 The project partners support the principles of the programme and the recommended programme of work developed in the PNITI business case. This sets the scene for future transport system change for this region. With several agencies across the public and private sectors involved in PNITI, a collaborative governance and management structure overseeing the PNITI programme has been proposed. This structure will provide shared direction and advice while preserving the ability for asset owners and/or investors to maintain their approval and decision-making processes. It is expected the PNITI will be an ongoing focus of any multi-agency governance discussions.

6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PNITI AND THE FREIGHT HUB

- 6.1 Enabling and supporting strategic transport connections to KiwiRail's proposed Freight Hub is a key priority for the PNITI.
- 6.2 The development of the KiwiRail freight hub supports the PNITI strategy seeking to move heavy vehicles from urban roads; enabling environmental, safety and the city's future strategic development plans to be realised.
- 6.3 Due to interdependencies between PNITI and the Freight Hub, Waka Kotahi staff have been involved in the Freight Hub development process, including participation in multi-criteria assessment workshops. I myself participated in the workshop which assessed the short-list of location options.
- 6.4 The proposed development of the Freight Hub will enable rail to play a greater role in the movement of freight and for the growth of distribution industries around an important node in NZ's transport network. Waka Kotahi is supportive of the conversion of more freight to rail to provide relief to the road network.
- 6.5 The proposed re-location of the existing KiwiRail terminal from Tremaine Avenue to the proposed site and the associated construction and operation of the Freight Hub will have a significant impact on the form and function of the transport network.
- 6.6 The development of the proposed Freight Hub is fundamental to shift freight movements from Tremaine Avenue. Several PNITI programmes were tested to see how freight flows on Tremaine Avenue would change as a result of improvements or speed changes. This analysis highlighted that although routes to access Tremaine Avenue may change as a result of these improvements or changes, it is still a key origin and destination for trips across the network.
- 6.7 Preliminary modelling of the Freight Hub development shows that the proposal will result in a significant reduction in freight volumes along Tremaine Avenue, the scale of which will relate to the replacement land use of the existing facility. Therefore, flow

reductions on Tremaine Avenue are dependent on KiwiRail and any subsequent land use of the existing facility.

- 6.8 Given the significance of the Freight Hub to the wider PNITI programme, and the expected impacts of the facility on the wider transport system, ongoing engagement and collaboration with KiwiRail will be integral to the development and implementation of the PNITI programme, and to maximise the safety, accessibility and efficiency of the transport network as both the PNITI interventions and the proposed Freight Hub develop and operate.

NEXT STEPS IN ALIGNMENT BETWEEN PNITI AND THE PROPOSED FREIGHT HUB

- 6.9 Consequentially to the Notice of Requirements being confirmed and the Freight Hub concept plans being further developed, there is a need to undertake further investigations to finalise the pre-cursor transport system activities essential to support the safe construction and operation of the Freight Hub. These investigations will be timed to complement KiwiRail's decision pathways to confirm its investment and construction commitments which will provide sufficient certainty to warrant Waka Kotahi's transport investment.
- 6.10 The programme of investigation includes several subsequent business case phases to investigate the sections that make up the ring route. These business cases phases will enable the planning stages to be complete ready for when implementation is needed to deliver the right transport outcomes and benefits, including helping to support appropriate levels of accessibility to the Freight Hub and other key destinations within the region.
- 6.11 As well as the business case investigations, a number of the dependent PNITI components can start being developed, following the proposed Freight Hub's statutory approvals being confirmed. This is due to a greater level of certainty in the proposed Freight Hub occurring, and the provision of a clearer evidence base and associated monitoring of key performance indicators. This again emphasises the importance and need for collaboration and

information sharing between KiwiRail and the PNITI Project Partners to build the necessary evidence base required.

- 6.12 The timing of the Freight Hub development will impact on the timing of the projects that are recommended in the PNITI programme. As KiwiRail progress through the development of the proposed Freight Hub, a review of the preferred PNITI programme will need to be undertaken. Waka Kotahi will continue to work closely with KiwiRail as the proposed Freight Hub progresses to ensure PNITI programme alignment, and to provide safe, accessible and efficient transport network outcomes.

Sarah Downs

23 July 2021