

Report pursuant to s 42A Resource Management Act 1991

In the matter of:

A Notice of Requirement to construct, operate, use, maintain and improve approximately 11.5km of new State highway connection between Ashhurst and Woodville.

And:

A hearing by Manawatū District Council, Palmerston North City Council and Tararua District Council pursuant to s 102.

Requiring Authority:

New Zealand Transport Agency

Hearing date:

25 March 2019

Section 42A Technical Evidence Addendum: Recreation & Tourism

By: Jeff Baker

NJ-015652-992-952-V1-e



1 Introduction

1. My name is Jeffrey Alan Baker and I am a Senior Planner at Palmerston North City Council.
2. I prepared evidence on Recreation & Tourism aspects of the Proposal on behalf of the s 42A reporting team. I describe this document as my Evidence in Chief ('EIC').
3. I reiterate I have read Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014 and that I agree to comply with it.
4. For ease of reference I include my speaking notes in Appendix 1 along with a Te Apiti area Resource Map in Appendix 2.

2 Scope

5. In this addendum I provide comment on the following:
 - a. Identification of one additional recreation effect;
 - b. Two matters arising since preparation of my s 42A report in response to the submission of expert evidence and associated oral statements at the hearing;
 - c. Two issues in relation to recreation that remain in contention; and
 - d. the draft conditions.

3 Identification of Effects

6. I have one further recreation effect to comment on which relates to the point made as part of the Build the Path (submission #360) oral presentation about the inability for cyclists to turn-around under the proposed shoulder arrangement in the Project. Ms Fraser has commented on the inherent safety issues around that.

7. However, I do wish to note from a recreation point of view that not being able to turn-around at any point mid-route will further diminish the experience. That is because it removes the element of doing shorter ‘there and back’ rides to a destination along the route, like a lookout point for example. In other words, at the outset of the journey you are faced with a choice. Either you do the entire 11.5km route in one ride or else do not attempt it for fear of getting stranded.

4 Matters Arising since preparation of the s 42A report

8. I note for Meridian Energy Limited their planning consultant, Lyndsay Daysh, at paragraphs 110-112 of his EIC comments that permission for a mountain bike track through their land would be unlikely to be given due to health and safety reasons around public access to their windfarm.
9. At the time I was unsure whether this comment applied to a shared path facility as well, distinct from a mountain bike track, although the same concerns would apply in any case. I note that with a shared path such as the one that has been recommended, there does not appear to be a great concern, subject to health and safety issues being worked through (based on my understanding of the comment noted at the hearing by Meridian’s legal counsel).
10. I note for NZTA one of their Rangitāne representatives, Siobhan Lynch-Karaitiana, at paragraphs 19-20 of her EIC comments that they firmly oppose a full walk/cycle route across the Ranges without further consultation. She also notes tourism opportunities ‘*should build upon a Rangitāne narrative with benefits first directed back to Rangitāne*’.
11. On the first point I understand one of the key concerns is that it could provide an unintended consequence of potentially providing easier access to waahi tapu sites and/or burial grounds. I completely understand this concern and would make the point in response that in the detailed design of any such path ensuring this issue (and others of concern to iwi) could be either ‘designed out’ or

otherwise attended to with a different technique that is satisfactory to iwi. There is no intention to place a shared path through waahi tapu or burial grounds. I am confident this is not a 'deal breaker' as such and can be worked through with an open consultation approach with iwi, based on my experience with working with them over many years.

12. On the second point around tourism, my observation is this matter can be worked through as part of the separate process I am leading for the preparation of a masterplan for the Te Apiti area. I note that Rangitāne are also an active member of the Manawatū Gorge Governance Group; who will ultimately be the determining body on the scope, content and administration of the masterplan.

5 Issues that remain in contention

13. NZTA have not provided a safe walking and cycling option along or near the alignment of the new road. Ms Fraser addresses this. I maintain that a separated path will encourage cycle usage along the road and provide recreation and tourism benefits.
14. NZTA have proposed a new condition (5 e) viii) to provide for pedestrian access across the new Manawatū River bridge, which would 'if reasonably practicable, be developed as a shared facility'. I am not clear what is envisaged by this, but my recommendation would be that a separated facility should be provided for both pedestrian and cycle access across the new bridge.

6 Draft Conditions

15. I am happy with the draft conditions as proposed by Mr Percy and Ms Copplestone.
16. I welcome the inclusion of the 'Source to Sea' group (submitter 360) into the Community Liaison Group (proposed condition 8 of Ms McLeod's set). I am familiar with the work of many of the parties represented by the group and consider their skills and experience would add considerable value to the process.

7 Conclusions

17. My overarching observations set out in my EIC all still apply.
18. I am confident walk/cycle access issues identified by Meridian Energy Ltd and Rangitāne can be resolved through open consultation in the detailed design process.
19. I would welcome the inclusion of the 'Source to Sea' group in the Community Liaison Group required to be set up in proposed condition 8.



Jeff Baker

4 April 2019

APPENDIX 1: SPEAKING NOTES

1. The Te Apiti area is one of the region's most popular recreation areas due to its close proximity to Palmerston North, Ashhurst and Woodville. Visitors of all ages and abilities come here annually to walk, jog or run the tracks within the Manawatū Gorge Scenic Reserve. They enjoy an immersive native bush experience and the fantastic views of the Gorge, Manawatū and Pohangina Rivers, Te Apiti Windfarm and the rural hinterland beyond. Refer to the 'Te Apiti Resource Area Map' in Appendix 2.
2. NZTA's Project will deliver positive recreation benefits to users of the Te Apiti area as follows:
 - it will make access to and over the Ranges much easier than the current arrangement across the Saddle Road or even the old Gorge Road shut in mid-2017;
 - a separate pedestrian/cycle facility has been committed to over the Ashhurst Bridge including a shared path through to the Gorge carpark thereby completing a long-standing 'missing link';
 - a 500m+ footpath extension to the existing footpath extending from Woodville along SH3 across the eastern roundabout is a step closer to linking the township with Ferry Reserve;
 - a separated shared facility across the new Manawatū River bridge;
 - it provides opportunities for the public to engage on walk/cycle opportunities through the construction phase;
 - full public access will be retained to the walking tracks during the construction phase via a temporary carpark; and
 - the existing Gorge carpark, including all associated features currently within it, will be reinstated by the end of the Project.
3. These benefits are in line with the local, regional and national policy setting for the Te Apiti area where they promote recreation and tourism opportunities. However, the Project falls short in one specific area from a recreation point of view. There is no separated shared path proposed along the full route, thereby missing a

significant opportunity to extend a connection at least between Woodville and Ashhurst to benefit those communities. Furthermore, there are additional potential benefits for a much larger user group through the connectivity benefit of linking into the existing and planned shared path along the Manawatū River from Palmerston North (which leads directly to the Project site).

4. In addition, a wider benefit with an eye to the national and international 'bike-packer' market is also available with a connected shared path. There is a logical opportunity to re-route the 'Manawatū Cycleway' section of the NZCT Heartland Ride across the Ruahine Ranges. A shared path presents an excellent safe alternative to the Saddle Road or Pahiatua Track (where NZCT riders are currently advised not to use on the NZCT website due to safety issues).
5. It is my position the Project should provide a shared path as this will address cycle safety concerns expressed by Ms Fraser and Mr Read and hundreds of public submissions on the point.
6. The path provides a safe opportunity for walkers to experience the northern side of the Manawatū Gorge affording iconic views of the Tararua and Manawatū regions, the Te Apiti Windfarm and the new road, all of which will be of significant interest to users. I note they could then achieve a 30km+ loop around both sides of the Gorge. This would extend from Ashhurst to Woodville, utilising the other walk/cycle connections NZTA have committed to as part of the Project and the Gorge Track traversing the Tararua Ranges. In time, other connections, not associated with, or required of the NZTA Project, could then stem from this shared path to showcase elements of the natural and built landscape.
7. A key element in my assessment is that there would be a poor recreation experience for cyclists using the proposed shoulder arrangement in the Project. For the moment I put aside the issue of safety as this is already covered by other experts and numerous submitters. As noted in my EIC I strongly reiterate my concern that this noisy shoulder strip, which will accumulate general rubbish and road debris, and will be shared with broken down vehicles from time to time, will not provide a pleasant riding experience and hence suppress user demand. With

the high quality experience planned for people in cars and trucks on the new road, I find this juxtaposition is telling of the relegated status of vulnerable users adopted by NZTA in this Project.

8. During the hearing there have been many comments, generally in response to Panel questions, made around the location of a separated facility relative to the carriageway. As noted in my EIC, I have been frustrated with a lack of any detailed assessment by NZTA of any other options for cyclists or pedestrians, except for written or verbal commentary provided late in the process. It would have been very helpful to have been provided actual design options so that all parties could best understand the merits or otherwise of the different options available.
9. I wish to close with two points around expected users of the Te Apiti area. In my EIC I comment that there is currently a broad range of users of all ages and abilities visiting the area in large numbers. Clearly a shoulder based facility, only suitable for very fit and experienced cyclists, sits uncomfortably with this situation.
- 110 I note that if a shared path is developed as part of the Project it could provide for a much wider user base, with careful design in the detailed design phase. Of course, the relatively steep nature of the climbs at either end of the Project area, and the 11.5km length will restrict some use but as noted by submitters during the Hearing (for example James Jefferies #245 and Robert Gibb #157) the increasingly popularity of Ebikes is having the effect of 'flattening hills'. In addition, I note that a contra-flow shared path provides easy opportunity for users to simply turn-around at any point and go back, based on their age, fitness level, or interests on the day.
11. In short, I recommend that a shared path facility is provided to encourage use, not discourage it.

APPENDIX 2: TE APITI RESOURCE AREA MAP

