

Horizons Regional Council and Regional Transport Committee Submissions

My name is Phil Hindrup and I am the Manager of the Transport Services Team at Horizons Regional Council, a role I have held for the past five years. I have been tasked with speaking to transport related matters on behalf of the two submissions put forward by Horizons Regional Council and the Regional Transport Committee.

As part of those submissions I would like to provide the following:

- An overview of the Land Transport Planning Framework;
- A brief overview of the Regional Transport Committee and its role;
- An overview of the Regional Land Transport Plan 2015-2025 (2018 Review) ;
- The key Regional Land Transport Plan 2015-2025 (2018 Review) provisions as they relate to the Notice of Requirement (NOR) proposal.
- Our thoughts on walking and cycling including the aspirations of the Regional Land Transport Plan 2015-2025 (2018 Review) and how they may relate to the NOR proposal.

Land Transport Planning Framework

The land transport legislative requirements are set out in Appendix Six (page 84) of the Regional Land Transport Plan 2015-2025 (2018 Review) (RLTP). In summary, the relationship within that framework is depicted by Figure 1 below.

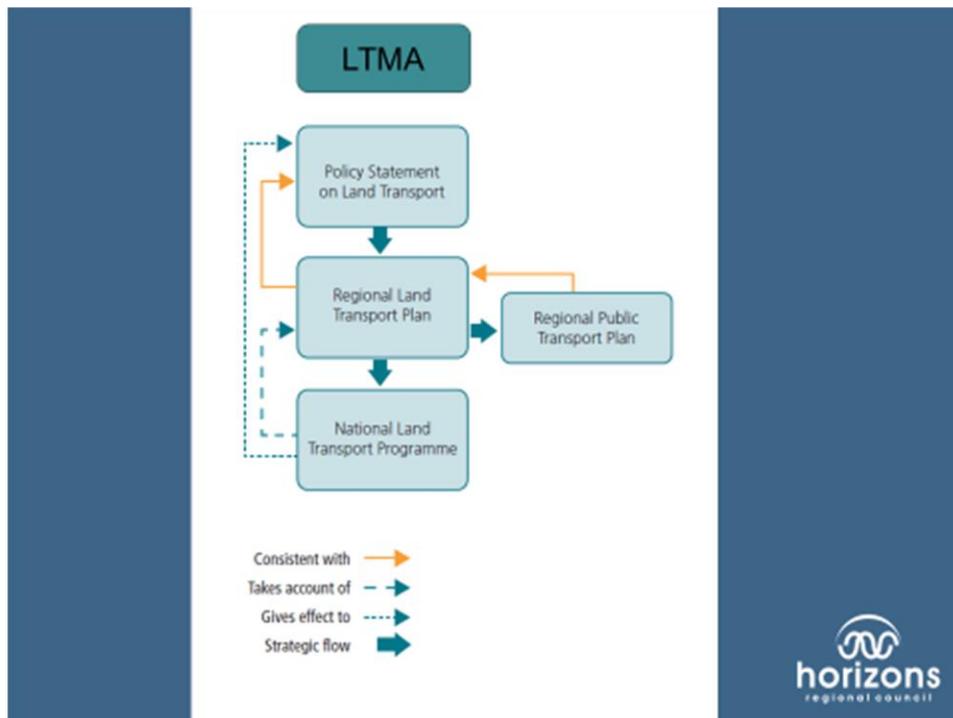


Figure 1: Land Transport legislative hierarchy

Horizons Regional Council is required by the Land Transport Management Act (LTMA) under section 105 to have a Regional Transport Committee (RTC) whose statutory functions include the preparation of an RLTP as required under section 13.

Regional Transport Committee

The Regional Transport Committee's membership is made up from the Regional Council Chair and one other councillor, the Mayors of the seven territorial authorities, and an NZTA representative. These organisations have voting rights as per the RTC's Terms of Reference. The RTC is also supported with advisory members supporting land transport user groups (i.e. active transport, road users, freight and rail).

Regional Land Transport Plan 2015-2025 (2018 review) (RLTP)

Before highlighting the key provisions of the RLTP relevant to the NOR, it is useful provide some background as to its origins and overarching direction, having been reviewed in 2018.

The RLTP in section 1.1 explains the purpose of the plan which is as follows:

"The Horizons Regional Land Transport Plan sets out the strategic direction for land transport in the Manawatu-Whanganui (Horizons) Region over the next 10 years. It describes what our region is seeking to achieve in land transport in order to contribute to an effective, efficient and safe land transport system in the public interest as required under the LTMA. It also focuses on enabling economic growth as well as providing social benefits and environmental sustainability throughout the region."

During the 2018 review, for which work commenced in 2016, the region was well into its economic growth journey under its Regional Economic Growth Action Plan known as Accelerate25. Mr Nash will provide more detail on Accelerate25 and how it underpins much of the land transport work that has and is being carried out across the region. However for the purpose of my submission, Accelerate25 identified nine key opportunities and four enablers to unlock and support economic growth within the Horizons region. One of those enablers is Distribution and Transport which was identified as having huge potential to drive many of the work outcomes identified in the Accelerate25 Action Plan.

It was following the release of the Action Plan that work commenced on identifying transport's role as an enabler of economic growth. This work consisted of carrying out a stock take of prior strategic transport planning work undertaken within the Horizons region, most notably the 2010 Joint Transport Study. Pages 71-74 of the RLTP summarise this work and the map on page 74 shows the proposed roading hierarchy within the Manawatu and Palmerston North Districts. This roading hierarchy spawned the Regional Freight Ring Road (depicted by the red inter-regional routes) around Palmerston North which is now known as the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Improvements project. Importantly this ring road concept, shown as inter-regional routes, connects the region to the north, south, east and west. As you can see to the far right of the diagram, the then Manawatu Gorge Road formed the east-west link connecting to the ring road.

The 2010 Joint Transport Study strongly underpins the work that has been carried out over the past three years under Accelerate25 and informed 2018 review of the RLTP. What followed was the birth the Accessing Central New Zealand Governance Group (ACNZ) being a subgroup of the RTC, and whose membership consists of the region's Mayors, Chair of the Regional Council, NZTA officials, KiwiRail officials and senior staff from all councils. Mr Shirley is the Chair of the ACNZ governance group. The purpose of that Group is:

“A subgroup of the RTC to meet and to facilitate/hear updates on the work being undertaken to give effect to the A25 Transport Enabler Action Plan announcements, specifically relating to Accessing Central NZ (this has been broadened in recent times to widen the discussion to reflect key projects such as Wellington Northern Corridor and Manawatū Gorge alternative that connect to this)”

The ACNZ story is told in pages 10-11 and 68-70 of the RLTP. In summary, this group and the work undertaken is focused on using the region's geographical strategic advantage to achieve a strategic and integrated land transport system through investment. Looking at Figure 1 on page 10, the Horizons region sits in the lower central North Island and has key freight ports to the north (Tauranga), south (Wellington), east (Napier) and west (New Plymouth). The four broad sweeping arrows indicate the key strategic connections to these ports with the underlying vision being to provide efficient, safe and resilient connections from the region to these areas, which is seen as being vital to unlocking economic growth opportunities.

Commissioners, the reason for taking you through the above is to highlight that for some time there has been a strategic plan to deliver a land transport system for the region, in particular around the Manawatu and Palmerston North Districts, that is based on strategic connections to neighbouring regions and key freight ports.

Key Provisions of the Regional Land Transport Plan

As described above, much of the RLTP's overall direction is to support economic growth and the Accelerate25 Action Plan, while giving effect to the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport and the LTMA. The RLTP is essentially a strategy and a project funding plan. The strategy component is where the key issues, objectives and strategic priorities are identified. These set out and guide how to achieve an effective, efficient and safe land transport system, primarily through funding from local rates and the National Land Transport Fund. It also sets out a suite of policies and actions/measures which define the work programmes the RTC and its members will undertake to achieve the strategic front end of the Plan.

As a priority the RTC should be focused on achieving the underlying direction of the RLTP. This is what is driving much of the project prioritisation in Section 8 of the RLTP as well as the six objectives identified in Section 4.

The six objectives identified on page 25 of the RLTP have equal weighting. Having said that, the first three really do inform the high level direction set by the RLTP. That direction is to maximise the region's strategic geographical advantage for economic growth opportunities through creating and optimising a land transport system that efficiently and safely moves people and product within and outside of our region.

Regarding the five strategic priorities identified in section 5 of the RLTP, these set out the focus of the future work programmes to achieve the six objectives. Like the objectives they are of equal weight. Because funding is finite, the strategic priorities guide investment into the land transport system to projects which best holistically deliver on the six objectives. This is a key point. A balanced approach must be taken with project identification, prioritisation and delivery to ensure all of the RLTP's objectives are achieved. The priority projects are shown in section 8.1 of the RLTP. The State Highway 3 Manawatu Gorge Improvement (Manawatu - Tararua Highway) has been identified as the first equal most important land transport activity in the Horizons Region. Furthermore the Accessing Central New Zealand Business Cases (being the ACNZ Programme Business Case and the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Improvements Detailed Business Case) are identified as the joint second most important programme of activities within the region. Delivery of these projects are key to realising the RLTP strategic vision.

Walking and Cycling

On the walking and cycling topic, the Regional Council and RTC's position is that walking and cycling as a transport mode needs to be provided for as part of the region's land transport system. Objective 4 of the RLTP directly mentions walking and cycling as part of the multi-modal transport system. Furthermore, Objective 3, which seeks to achieve a safe land transport system increasingly free of death and injury, is also important in this context as having a safe land transport system includes providing for a safe multi-modal transport system that includes walking and cycling. Through our submissions we therefore put the following question to NZTA and the Commissioners: *is the walking and cycling proposal, being a 2 meter wide shoulder on the carriage way and reduced traffic on the Pahiatua Track and Saddle Road, in keeping with these key provisions and with the first strategic priority of the GPS?*

We note it is a strategic priority of the RLTP to achieve an integrated walking and cycling network for the region that delivers the Plan's objectives 1, 3, 4 and 6. Again we question whether the current proposal to provide for walking and cycling in the manner described in the NOR gives effect to the RLTP and GPS.

We note there are a number of policies identified on page 43 that look to achieve strategic priority 5.4 and the associated action/measures required to give effect those policies. Provision of an integrated and safe walking and cycling network is key to meeting these policies.

Our position is that a safer, more effective integrated walking and cycling proposal than what is currently proposed to support the Manawatu - Tararua Highway is required. We do appreciate the time pressures associated with completing the new highway and so understand that the applicant may not have had time to fully explore and plan for collaboratively with key stakeholders, a preferred walking and cycling package across, and to access the southern extent of the Ruahine Ranges. This is why as a minimum, we are seeking to futureproof current and existing walking and cycling opportunities through the provision of a separated and safe walking and cycling lane across the proposed new Manawatu River crossing, similar to what is now being proposed across the Ashhurst Bridge (which we note is listed as the 6th most important project within RLTP). By committing to this NZTA would have committed to further exploring opportunities and ultimately delivering a safe, integrated walking and cycling network, whilst not delaying construction of the highway.

In conclusion, the re-establishment of a safe, integrated, resilient and strategic east-west connection across the Ruahine Ranges is critical to maximising the strategic advantage of the Palmerston North and Manawatu District's hubbing and distribution potential. It is also a fantastic opportunity to provide a safe and integrated walking and cycling opportunity that provides for recreation and tourism opportunities. Given the criticality of delivering the new highway, we are not supportive of further work that delays construction of the highway. It is our view that a separated walking and cycling lane across the new Manawatu River crossing should be provided to allow for further collaborate work to be undertaken.

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