

Our Reference: Wakefield St Bridge Variation RLTP
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8th August 2025

Mark Read
Manager Transport Services
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Dear Mark

VARIATION TO REGIONAL LAND TRANSPORT PROGRAMME – Wakefield Street Bridge

Whanganui District Council seeks support from Horizons Regional Council, through the Regional Transport Committee, for a variation to the confirmed 2024-27 Regional Land Transport Programme in respect of the Wakefield Street bridge replacement programme. This request arises from the failure of the structure and consequent closure to vehicular traffic. It would be appreciated if this request could be considered at the next meeting of the Regional Transport Committee.

Background

Whanganui District Council is the responsible road controlling authority for a rail overbridge located in Wakefield Street, Whanganui East. The bridge was constructed in the 1950's and is a 4-span structure of timber construction supported by piers, with railway lines running beneath the bridge. The overbridge has operated as part of the established roading network for approximately 70 years. The bridge connects Wakefield Street with Eastown Road and No 3 Line, all of these roads form part of the strategic roading network and are classified as primary collector roads or higher.

The bridge is located in the urban suburb of Whanganui East, a suburb which covers approximately 4.41 square kilometres. The area contains approximately 2508 households and a population of 6,360 (as at 2024 NZ census). The area comprises approximately 15% of the Whanganui total population.

Whanganui East is a generally flat urban area that is divided by the presence of the Marton to New Plymouth Railway Line. The railway lines extends for 2 kilometres from Wakefield Street to Anzac Parade (SH4), effectively dividing the suburb in two. There are two grade separated railway crossings at Anzac Parade (rail over road) and Wakefield Street (road over rail). There are also 2 level crossings, located at Kitchener Street and Holyoake Street. Typical vehicle volumes on the Wakefield Street bridge prior to its closure are between 1500 and 2000 vehicles per day.

Current Situation

Wakefield Street bridge was closed to vehicular traffic in February 2025 after a failed beam was reported and confirmed during an inspection. Repair options were explored and ruled out due to the

overall condition of the structure. The bridge was originally constructed with re-used timber beams from another structure and these had reached the end of life. Council had been aware the structure was approaching the end of its life cycle. A Point of Entry business case was submitted to NZTA in January 2019 and replacement of the structure was included in Council's forward works programme in subsequent Land Transport Programme bids. The bridge had operated for a number of years with a weight and speed restriction in place. Travel speed was restricted to 30 km/h and the prescribed weight limit was 4,500 kgs.

Whanganui District Council has a preferred option for replacement of the structure and has allocated \$2.5 million to its capital programme in the 2025/26 Annual Plan. It now seeks a variation to the Regional Land Transport Programme so that an NZTA funding subsidy can be formally sought. The bridge forms a vital community connection for vehicular traffic and pedestrians and there is strong support from the local community for its replacement. Preliminary modelling confirms that the bridge is still a much-needed part of the local transport network. The benefit-cost analysis for the bridge replacement is expected to exceed 6.

Community impacts

Wakefield Street bridge addresses the severance issues in the suburb as it provides grade separation and ultimately the best level of service for local trips for pedestrians and vehicles. While vehicle trips are, on average, only affected by an additional travel distance of 520 metres, the effects on some pedestrian and cycle trips are significantly longer, up to 2.0 kilometres in some cases. Since the closure traffic loadings on the Holyoake Street level crossing have increased significantly, a sub-standard level crossing that currently lacks any pedestrian facilities. Loss of a grade separated rail crossing is inconsistent with national objectives that seek to reduce the number and utility of railway level crossings over time.

Planning and Procurement

Work on procurement of a new structure is underway, subject to approval of NZTA funding. The bridge replacement was not confirmed in the 2024-27 National Land Transport Programme, hence a variation is needed as a first step towards confirming funding. In preliminary planning Council has considered 4 options, though two of those options involved strategies to extend the life of the defunct structure and are now considered unworkable. The do-minimum option is thus considered to have the following components:

- Do Minimum option – expected cost \$1.0m to \$1.25m
 - Demolish the existing structure and remove from site
 - Reconfigure intersection of Eastown Road and No 3 Line to reflect changed travel pattern
 - Install a cul de sac bowl in Wakefield Street
 - Install a new pedestrian, cycle bridge; or
 - Upgrading of Holyoake Street level crossing to reflect increased usage
- Preferred option – full replacement with HN compliant structure
 - Two lane road bridge
 - Single footpath/shared path for pedestrian and cycle journeys
 - Current cost estimate \$2.5m

Whanganui District Council is currently awaiting a formal response from NZTA with regards its Point of Entry business case. Further work is being done to support that business case and will be submitted to NZTA as it becomes available. Council's preferred option is to replace the bridge under a capital renewal budget. It is noted, however, that significant decommissioning work is still required if NZTA decline funding for a new structure. The current timber structure is derelict and must be removed to reduce risks to the rail corridor below. Road connections have been configured for 70 years emphasising Wakefield Street as the predominant route, hence significant changes would be needed to address these traffic flows. Decommissioning and network reconfiguration work is expected to cost up to half the cost of replacing the overbridge and would need a variation to the RLTP of up to \$1.25 million if that were the NZTA preferred option.

Recommendation

It is recommended that this report be submitted to the Regional Transport Committee seeking approval for a variation to the regional land transport programme for \$2.5 million for replacement of Wakefield Street overbridge.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Lane', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Lane
Whanganui Alliance Performance Manager
Whanganui District Council