

Wairarapa Corridor Plan

Proposal to Develop the Transport Network to Meet User Needs

1. Introduction

There is an expectation that the demand to transport logs and timber products and to provide for tourists travelling to and from the Wairarapa may significantly increase in future years. Commuter and educational trips may also increase in the near future but their requirements should be insignificant when compared to the needs of transporting logs, timber products, and tourists.

If the Wairarapa and the Wellington region is to gain the economic benefits of logs, timber products, and tourists then adequate transport links in and between the Wairarapa and Wellington must be provided. This paper considers the adequacy of the current road and rail links between Wairarapa and Wellington and proposes ideas to meet future transportation needs.

2. Constraints on the current state highway network

Current constraints on travel of people and goods from the Wairarapa to Wellington include SH2 south of SH58 and the Kaitoke and Rimutaka Hills.

Strategies have been developed for SH2 south of SH58 although a significant increase in logging trucks may require revisitation of these strategies. A strategy for Kaitoke Hill is underway which will implement improvements with design speeds of 95 kph (with up to 105 kph where possible).

On the advice of Transit New Zealand in 1997 the current RLTS provides a strategy for upgrading the Rimutaka Hill progressively over 15 years to a 70 kph design speed. Transit New Zealand now advise that they do not intend to do this and will implement their state highway strategy which provides for a 50 kph design speed (with 60 kph in locations where this is easily achieved). There are no opportunities for the development of further passing lanes without the expenditure of significant sums of money. In fact they are proposing to shorten some of the existing ones for safety reasons.

In this situation if the expected growth of logging and timber products is transported by road then the Rimutaka Hill will be a serious constraint. This will be further exacerbated by a growth in road based tourist numbers as Transit New Zealand's strategy for Rimutaka Hill will not provide for additional capacity and will provide only a modest operating speed enhancement.

3. Constraints on the current rail network

A significant volume of freight used to be moved from the Wairarapa to Wellington or Napier by rail until recently. This practice stopped because Tranz Rail Limited had a need for the wagons used in this operation elsewhere.

If a rail operation was contemplated for the movement of forecasted levels of forestry and timber products then the economics of that operation are likely to be favourable. It is possible that the economics of such an operation may even be favourable under current demands if ATR or Regional Economic Development funding was available from Transfund.

Such a proposal would require wagons and a log transfer site. There may be a problem at CentrePort in providing sufficient land to stack logs until they are shipped. This may be solved by further reclamations, release of railway land by relocating Aotea Quay or storing them at the log transfer site and transporting them by rail on a “just in time” basis for shipping. The logical sites for the log transfer site are Waingawa and in the longer term just outside Featherston.

There is sufficient capacity available in the passenger services to provide for tourist and commuter demands. Depending on the actual tourist and commuter growth, additional carriages may be required, and significant quality upgrade of carriages is essential.

4. Comments on the capacity of the existing transportation links

Current proposals to upgrade SH2 south of SH58 and over the Kaitoke and Rimutaka Hills are likely to be sufficient for future travel demands except for those demands created by logging, timber products, and tourism. There are no real options that are viable to transport anticipated future levels of logs, timber products, and tourists between the Wairarapa and Wellington using an exclusively road based strategy.

It is apparent that rail transport will be an important component in future transport solutions if the Wairarapa and the Wellington region are to receive the full economic benefits of these industries.

5. Conclusions

In order to meet anticipated demand for transport of logs, timber products, and tourists between the Wairarapa and Wellington, a rail based proposal needs to be developed. This proposal needs to include the siting of a log transfer station, the provision of rail transport, the integration of road log and timber product transport and the adequate provision of passenger rail services.

This proposal can only be viable if it has the support of key service providers and commercial players. This will require the cooperation of CentrePort, the rail operator, road transport companies, forest owners, passenger rail service providers and tourism businesses.