

Opinion Piece on Mana Clearways

Trouble ahead if Mana Clearways remain

The Paremata Residents Association is angry that Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency is not honouring "*Commitments to the Local Community*" made by Transit NZ (Waka Kotahi's predecessor) in 2000/01 when the Environment Court was being asked to approve four-laning and "*interim*" clearways on SH1 through Paremata and Plimmerton.

One of those commitments was to "*remove the Clearways through Mana in conjunction with the opening of Transmission Gully Motorway*", and this became an important factor in eventually securing the Court's approval. However, Waka Kotahi has now decided (without any agreement from the local community) that the clearways will remain open, and no decisions relating to their future will be made until after consultations with various organisations are held between 6 and 12 months after Transmission Gully opens.

The commitment, and the intention to honour it, were specifically acknowledged at the time by the Porirua City Council and Wellington Regional Council in a "*Heads of Agreement*" with Transit. Despite that, however, the Porirua City Council is currently encouraging Waka Kotahi to dishonour the commitment and to ignore the views of its coastal communities on the issue.

In the meantime, a complaint to the Ombudsman about the conduct of Waka Kotahi is being held up while it goes through "*NZTA's Complaints Escalation Process*", and the Association is getting no response from the Waka Kotahi Board Chairman or CEO to requests that they review the situation.

Unless the situation changes, this means that after having already put up with the clearways for over 16 years, road users, visitors, pedestrians, cyclists and local residents will have to face the extra dangers and other issues associated with the clearways for what is likely to be at least another year. That is totally irresponsible when – according to past and current traffic forecasts - there is no reason to believe that the clearways should be necessary when Transmission Gully initially opens.

There is no doubt that the existence of the clearways is a major contributor to the number of crashes and other incidents on this stretch of highway. Even with the expected fall in traffic volumes when Transmission Gully opens, this will not change if the clearways remain open. The remaining heavy vehicles will still have to change lanes twice and cars and vans will continue to weave in and out of the kerbside lanes, probably at even greater speeds than at present. The safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists will continue, along with the insidious effects of noise, vibration and fumes. Parking will remain unsafe and hostility between road users will continue.

Residents are not averse to reviewing commitments that were made in the past. In this case, however, we continue to respect the reasons behind Transit's commitment which anticipated just 2 lanes through Mana immediately after the opening to avoid providing excess traffic capacity and to discourage traffic from continuing to use the existing route. If the objectives of building Transmission Gully are to be realised, it is imperative that as much traffic as possible is diverted to the new route, and that data required for future planning is gathered with the clearways closed.

Closure of the kerbside lanes could be carried out – if the will is there – very quickly and cheaply, requiring just installation of flexible PVC road stakes ("*traffic separators*") nailed to the road, allowing for roadside parking, safer entrance to private driveways and commercial entrances, turning lanes at intersections and a safe corridor for cyclists outside the parked cars. No other changes would probably need to be made initially except some minor sign changes and some adjustments to

traffic signals. The changes could be made virtually overnight and could be easily reversed if found to cause significant problems.

Feedback from residents on this matter has been sought many times over the years, including for the Porirua Growth Strategy published in 2019. Invariably the feedback has supported the legitimate expectations that the clearways would go. The views of residents adjoining the existing highway were canvassed again several weeks before Christmas, resulting in replies representing 50 households. All but one of those households indicated support for closure of the clearways in conjunction with the opening of Transmission Gully.

People expect Transit's legal commitments to be honoured - or at least discussed with those involved. They expect health and safety issues to be addressed when traffic planning decisions are being made. And they expect the concerns of residents to be respected by their Council representatives. We hope that Waka Kotahi and PCC will change their current positions to avoid this becoming an even greater matter of contention in the next few weeks.

(Copies of the complaint to the Ombudsman, the feedback from residents, and a detailed case for closure of the Clearways can be viewed on the Association's website at www.paremataresidents.co.nz)

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