

# Paremata Residents Association

## Update re Mana Esplanade May 2022

### The context

Thank you to all who have engaged in this important issue for our community. As previously posted, the Paremata Residents Association has been monitoring the safety and livability of Mana Esplanade since the opening of the new Transmission Gully route (TGM), in order to report to residents and perhaps to encourage Waka Kotahi to trial the closing off of the clearways as promised.

Since our earlier monitoring period, the morning peak flows have increased by a small amount, while northbound volumes at evening peaks have increased reasonably significantly. This was to be expected as school holidays finished and people returned to work in their offices after Covid restrictions, but some of the increase also seems to be attributed to what has become an excess of capacity on SH59 with the opening of TGM.

**Despite these increases, however, the highest traffic volumes recorded by us at present are still only about 1,150 vehicles per hour during the evening peak (between 4pm and 5.30pm) and that is significantly below the volume that would normally warrant more than one traffic lane in each direction. We understand that a single traffic lane is usually capable of handling somewhere in excess of 1400 vph and all other counts during clearway hours were less than 900 vph.**

This situation may not last for long, however, if drivers continue to choose the existing SH59 instead of TGM. There is also a tendency for traffic to arrive in waves, which may affect the ease of merging into single lanes and therefore makes it difficult to assess the practical carrying capacity of a single lane in this situation.

Our counts and observations also confirm that between 23% and 37% of vehicles (including trucks) are currently using the kerbside lanes outside of clearway hours, in contravention of the designation conditions which require Waka Kotahi to discourage drivers from travelling in the kerbside lanes. Speed limits are also constantly being exceeded, sometimes by huge amounts.

**In summary, the Paremata Residents Association's view is that the most satisfactory way to assess whether two traffic lanes (one in each direction) would be adequate and workable at present is to close off the clearway lanes (as committed to by Transit NZ) on a trial basis. And there is real urgency to do so, not just for health and safety reasons but also to ensure that TGM is used as planned and expected.**

### A little background

Residents Associations represent a wide range of resident issues and try to support projects that will benefit the community. The opinions of our community and residents are of course diverse. On this particular issue, in October 2020 we prepared a paper containing our "Initial Thoughts" on matters that Waka Kotahi is required to consult on relating to the future ownership and operation of what is currently SH59. That paper was discussed at the Association's AGM and put on our website, and all households in our area were invited to send us their feedback on it. Those that responded with feedback almost unanimously supported our proposed stance. This gave us confidence that residents in our area generally supported the removal of the clearways.

To get more detailed feedback, however, the Association recently canvassed (by way of a letterbox drop) the views of residents adjoining Mana Esplanade. Replies representing approximately 50 households were received, and all but one indicated support for closure of the clearways in conjunction with the opening of TGM, as promised. Many of the respondents outlined their experience and observation of the dangers, anxieties, hostility, and inconvenience associated with the clearway operations. It is understandable, therefore, that those residents do not support the present plan to continue this dangerous and unhealthy situation for what seems likely to be more than 12 months, when there appears to be no good reason to do so.

### **Transit New Zealand's commitments in relation to Mana Esplanade**

The reasons for the commitments made by Transit NZ (presented in front of the Environment Court and confirmed in a "Heads of Agreement" signed by PCC and GWRC) - especially the commitment to "remove the clearways through Mana in conjunction with the opening of TGM" - have not changed and are probably even more important now because of the government's climate change obligations. In particular Transit NZ and the Environment Court were aware of the substandard (but temporary) nature of the clearways and recognized "that additional traffic capacity is not desirable in the community once TGM is completed". For a government agency or local authority to ignore such important commitments without offering any prior consultation or valid reasons, we believe is unacceptable – **regardless of how long ago the commitments were made.**

For more than 50 years the Association (initially on its own, then with strong support from the Plimmerton Residents Association, TRANSMAC and PCC) has fought to save our harbour and beaches from government roading proposals and to reduce the community severance caused by SH1 running through the coastal communities. Mana residents have also played a major role in keeping the highway workable over the last 16 years or more, by supporting increases in the clearway hours and generally following the Association's advice to avoid parking in the kerbside lanes at any times when there was a likelihood that traffic volumes could be heavy.

It needs to be understood, however, that providing parking is not the most important function of the kerbside lanes outside clearway hours. The reason for creating the clearway lanes through Mana was to provide extra traffic capacity on this section of road at peak times "during the interim period pending construction of the Inland Highway route". Outside of clearway times, the kerbside lanes were intended to **allow for parking and safer cycling, as well as providing a buffer for those using the footpaths and occupying adjacent properties in terms of noise, vibration, fumes, and safety of access.** These important roles are emphasized in the designation conditions requiring Waka Kotahi to encourage and instruct all vehicles to use the centre lanes whenever the clearways are not in operation.

Failure to follow or enforce those instructions has many obvious but also many insidious adverse effects on health and safety **which are not visible to passing motorists or even many of those being affected.** When approximately one third of all motorists (including truck drivers) are ignoring the instructions, it is clear that the intent of the conditions is not being complied with.

### **What we have been seeking**

**The opening of Transmission Gully has gone a long way towards achieving the goals sought by the coastal communities but the chances of gaining all the expected benefits from Transmission Gully are**

**now being put at risk because of an unwillingness to honour past commitments or to understand the reasons for them. As a result, this opportunity to evaluate the benefits of reverting to two traffic lanes, even on a trial basis, is being denied due to misplaced fear and muddled perceptions of the future.**

What we have been asking for is very simple and we believe needs to be done as soon as possible. It involves closing off the kerbside lanes to through traffic with temporary stakes or kerb extensions, leaving room for cars to park against the kerb and for cyclists to ride on the outside of any parked cars but not in the traffic lanes. (Changes to the phasing of the traffic lights should also be trialled now to, for instance, reduce the build-up of cars exiting the Ngati Toa Domain.)

The prospect of increased traffic from future developments is not relevant at this stage and we believe closure of the clearway lanes is the only reliable way to assess whether two traffic lanes are likely to be sufficient now. It will also provide the most robust basis for making informed decisions and forecasts both for now and for the future. And, at the same time, it will provide the opportunity to evaluate a number of other questions that need to be addressed before any long-term decisions are made. As noted in our requests to Waka Kotahi and feedback to Esplanade residents, questions remain about whether just two traffic lanes will, for instance:

- Lead to more stopping and starting at the lights (with or without changes to the light phasing)
- Cause shorter or longer waits for vehicles entering or exiting properties
- Improve or worsen sight lines for drivers, cyclists, scooters, and pedestrians
- Help or hinder the efficiency of rubbish collections
- Improve or worsen access to adjacent shops or businesses
- Provide sufficient capacity in times of emergency

Answers to these questions will allow identified downsides to be weighed against the health, safety and other benefits of closing the clearways. The danger of leaving things as they are will be that more and more motorists (including truck drivers) will move back to using what they now consider an even more attractive option than TGM, more people will use their own vehicles rather than the train, and some commuters will change their travel times and increase peak flows. **We have no doubt that trialling closure of the clearways now (particularly when we know the clearways have been a factor in so many crashes and other incidents) is the most responsible thing to be doing.**

### **Whose responsibility is it?**

This brings us to the parking exercise carried out by residents a few weeks ago. What that exercise confirmed for us was that **residents are not generally prepared (for many reasons) to park on the road to do (only partially) the job that Transit NZ and the Environment Court expected Waka Kotahi to do by removing the clearways in conjunction with the opening of TGM.** For many residents, there is no need to park on the road because they have sufficient parking space on their properties. Others prefer to park elsewhere because experience has told them that there is a high risk that vehicles parked on Mana Esplanade will be damaged, or they will be abused by passing motorists. Others face insurance or other issues. And for all of them, having to shift their vehicles at clearway times would be a real hassle.

The responsibility for closing off the kerbside lanes lies with Waka Kotahi at present and should be a very quick and simple job if the will were there. At the same time, we believe that the PCC has a responsibility to ensure that the designation conditions are being met by Waka Kotahi and with about

one third of traffic using the clearway lanes outside of clearway hours, it is clear that Waka Kotahi's encouragement and instructions to that traffic are not sufficient. It is obvious that physical closure of the lanes is the only measure that will work, and PCC should be insisting that Waka Kotahi trial that now.

### **So where does this leave us?**

For most local people, a major expected benefit of TGM was **to reduce community severance in the coastal communities**. This was also the major benefit identified by the 2006 Hearing Sub-committee into the Western Corridor Plan which found that:

*“in the longer term, the status of the current SH1 alignment from Mackays Crossing to Linden should be reduced to meeting local traffic needs and providing a scenic route in which lower speeds and traffic volumes will prevail after the opening of TGM. The new environment would also facilitate safe cycling along the route”.*

While traffic volumes have reduced considerably with the opening of TGM, if they continue to build up again because of excess capacity and if traffic is encouraged to travel at greater speeds through the communities (as is the case now), that will have defeated the main purpose of building TGM. Moreover, if Mana Esplanade needs to stay as four lanes for resilience reasons, that is an admission that TGM has failed to achieve yet another of its major objectives.

It is important that communities can trust government agencies and every day the clearways remain open further undermines that trust. It is also another day that the extra health and safety risks that come with the clearways will continue; and another day in which motorists are likely to switch from using TGM to SH59 or start using their cars instead of the train. Every day wasted now reduces the chances of ever realizing all the other promises and expectations that were meant to accompany the building of TGM and which formed the basis for the Porirua Growth Strategy, produced after extensive research and widespread community consultation in 2019.

Continuing the existing substandard four lanes of traffic through Paremata has never been our vision for the future. Now is probably the only chance we will get to protect the coastal communities from increased through traffic in the future and to ensure that even worse community severance is not here to stay.

**We continue to welcome community engagement on this and the many other issues that the Association is involved with.**