

18. WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT TRANSPORT STUDY

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the Waimakariri District Transport Study (WDTS), which is at a public consultation stage, and to consider, with a view to approving, a submission on this study. The public consultation stage is inviting submissions until 31 July.

Attached to this report are the Executive Summary and the proposed District Land Transport Plan (expressed in tabular form) of the WDTS, and the draft City Council submission on this study.

BACKGROUND

The WDTS is one of a series of district development strategies being undertaken by Waimakariri District Council, and is focussed on the eastern part of the District. The objective of the study is to identify the land transport improvements likely to be required to meet the current and future needs in the eastern part of the District over the next 20 years. While the study focuses mostly on the strategic links and route upgrades that may be required, the study also addresses more general transport issues and deficiencies, such as those associated with public transport, cycling and intersection safety.

The WDTS does not cover detailed matters inside the townships, which are being dealt with via individual studies for Rangiora and Kaiapoi. It does acknowledge the presence and interaction with the NROSS process.

Most of the issues dealt with in this study do not impact directly on Christchurch. However there are a small number of issues that are directly of interest, such as the roading connections (and associated capacity), cycle links and public transport issues (including rail).

The study has proposed a District land Transport Plan, which outlines all the key improvements grouped into broad time bands (short term: 0-5 years, medium term: 5-15 years and long term: over 15 years). The study has also identified the top 12 priority projects, which are all the short-term projects and a small number of medium term ones.

ROADING CONNECTIONS

The study brief required the consultants to review options for an additional road bridge over the Waimakariri River. This issue had also been raised during the NROSS work and was been discarded for economic and development reasons. WDTS reviewed three alternative locations for a crossing during its stage one, initial assessment of options. The conclusion reached at that stage of the WDTS was consistent with the NROSS conclusion, that none of the options were economically viable. Consequently no options were not taken through to later stages of the study.

The study gives considerable attention to the Northern Motorway and its interchanges. The key matter of interest to the City Council with regard to the Motorway is the proposal to provide six lanes between the Chaney's interchange and initially the Tram Road interchange and then latterly the Ohoka interchange. The case for six lanes is based principally on the operation of the interchanges. There are currently minor deficiencies and in the future, there are predicted significant deficiencies at all three interchanges. With the volumes of traffic on the motorway, particularly toward the southern end, traffic entering the motorway from the southern two interchanges would have considerable difficulties merging. To address the merging problem an additional southbound lane is proposed to the Motorway from the interchanges, so initially for example the Tram Road on-ramp would feed onto its own motorway lane. There does not appear to be a justification given in the text of the consultation report for the additional north bound lane. However, the Level of Service diagrams indicate congested levels in the peak directions during peak hours, particularly south of Tram Road Interchange (with or without the Pegasus Bay development).

The study states that "*even if the motorway is not extended to the south (i.e. into Christchurch), we have assumed that improvements to the current northern Christchurch arterial roading network would be able to accommodate the two additional lanes.*" The key of course is the balancing of the capacity of the networks. There are currently six lanes of traffic crossing the Waimakariri River and six lanes in a screen line across Belfast/Marshland. If any additional lanes are added to the Christchurch network, such as constructing the rural Northern Arterial, then six lanes crossing the Waimakariri River can be balanced or directed appropriately into the Christchurch network.

An alternative view of the six laning of the motorway could be that of the Wellington situation, where there is a deliberate stance taken to not upgrade motorway capacity at certain pinch points on the approaches to Wellington. This seeks to control the rate and volume of traffic entering the Wellington CBD.

However, the Wellington situation differs from here at least in terms of the Waimakariri Bridges are the only convenient roads to gain access to other areas of Christchurch and its by passes from north of the river. The motorway forms an important part of the region's strategic road network, which is needed to provide efficient movement of goods and services to support the regional economy. It has been identified as such in the (currently) draft Regional Land Transport Strategy. It is also worth noting that the Northern Motorway is a State Highway (by reason of being a motorway), and as such the decisions regarding its management and construction rest with Transit NZ.

This six-laning has been allocated a medium term time frame for both sections (Tram Road Interchange to Chaney's and Ohoka Interchange to Tram Road Interchange) and neither is assigned a priority within the top 12 projects.

CYCLE LINKS

Given that the focus of the report is on the strategic network elements of Waimakariri District, there is not a great deal relating to cycling. There are two key matters worth reviewing.

The study report states "*The Waimakariri District does not currently have a strategic cycle network and it is recommended that such a network be identified, and be incorporated into the national cycling network.*" As the City Council has supported cycling as a sustainable transport mode, it is appropriate that the concept of a district cycle strategy be developed in our neighbouring district should be supported and encouraged. This project has been assigned a short term time frame, with a priority rating of 5.

The report also identifies that the "*main constraint to commuter and touring cyclists is the narrow Old Waimakariri River Bridge. ... The key to making cycling from the Waimakariri District to Christchurch more attractive is to construct a cycle lane bridge across the Waimakariri River, probably as a tack-on to the existing Old Waimakariri River Bridge.*" This project has been assigned a medium term time frame, with a priority rating of 9.

The City Council has a 50% responsibility for the Old Waimakariri Bridge. Consequently, any improvements are normally a joint initiative between the Councils (usually this involves only maintenance matters). There is support amongst the cycle planners in the City Council for this network improvement to occur at some stage. The project does not feature in the current 5-year cycle budget programme. Nevertheless, dialogue between the Councils is warranted if the project becomes supported by both.

The District Land Transport Plan also lists "*signage and localised shoulder widening around pinch points on Main North Road, north of Waimakariri River*" as a medium term, non-prioritised work and "*shoulder widening on other rural cycle routes*" as a long term work.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT ISSUES

The report comments on passenger rail between Waimakariri District and Christchurch, but largely dismisses it, as it is considered too unlikely that the main hurdle to starting up a service can be overcome, which is the absence of a railway station in the centre of Christchurch. It concludes that until such a time as rail access into the central city is provided a passenger service to Rangiora or Kaiapoi is not an option, even if there was sufficient demand to justify such a service.

The study states that buses are the best public transport option for the District, but acknowledges that the service levels are pretty poor and that improvements to the routes would improve matters significantly. There is little other comment regarding public transport in the study report, but it does then list in the District Land Transport Plan in relation to improving bus patronage levels "*Encourage introduction of express bus services to Rangiora, along motorway and Lineside Road*". This is listed as a short-term work with a priority rating of 6.

No other public transport projects are discussed in the report, other than a suggested review (with appropriate implementation) of bus stop layouts on rural roads. This however does not feature in the District Land Transport Plan project list.

CONCLUSION

The Waimakariri District Transport Study has assessed a wide range of non-urban transport matters in the district, some of which are relevant to Christchurch City Council. It is appropriate that the City Council makes a submission on those matters. A draft submission is attached covering items outlined earlier in this report, principally expressing views on the increase in capacity of the northern motorway, and supporting and commenting on the initiatives relating to cycling and public transport.

Recommendation: That the submission on the Waimakariri District Transport Study be approved and forwarded to the Waimakariri District Council by 31 July 2001.