

1. NORTHERN PEGASUS BAY COAST VEHICLE ACCESS STRATEGY

Officer responsible	Author
Ivan Thomson, Planning Policy Team Leader and Richard Holland, Acting Parks and Waterways Manager	Jenny Ridgen, DDI 941-8407 and Kay Holder, DDI 941-8797

The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's support for the preparation of a submission on the Vehicle Access Strategy for the Northern Pegasus Bay Coast and to consider potential responses to the strategy.

BACKGROUND

An increase in the recreational use of 4-WD vehicles in recent years has led to increased pressures from vehicle traffic on northern Pegasus Bay beaches. This has led to sand dune and habitat degradation and safety concerns created by the conflict between pedestrian and vehicle use. Much of this vehicle traffic is believed to originate from within the Christchurch City Council boundaries.

In response to the growing concerns about vehicle activity on beaches between the Waimakariri and Waipara Rivers, Environment Canterbury, Waimakariri and Hurunui District Councils and the Department of Conservation have combined to prepare a Northern Pegasus Bay Draft Vehicle Access Strategy. This non-statutory document will be released for public submissions in June 2002.

Christchurch City Council beaches have for some time been subject to restricted vehicle access. Most vehicles can only gain access to the stretch of coastline north of Spencer Park along to the Waimakariri River Mouth. Even this access is by permit only and is controlled by a locked gate and ranger surveillance.

The success of this approach has impacted on beaches to the north and south (Kaitorete Barrier) of Christchurch. Similar responses of closing vehicle access to the north have created a "ripple" effect, forcing owners of vehicles, who wish to access beaches, even further north with subsequent impacts on these beaches.

PROPOSED ACCESS STRATEGY

The proposed management objective for the strategy is:

"To significantly reduce the access of vehicles to areas where they are considered inappropriate, while at the same time allowing access to areas where vehicle access is considered desirable or at least appropriate for the time being."

The strategy recognises that either a total ban, or allowing completely open access, would be inappropriate. Following consultation with local residents, beach users and other parties, the following access provisions will be recommended (a map of these areas will be provided with the Strategy):

1. Kairaki Beach (north of the Waimakariri River Mouth) to Waikuku Beach (including Woodend)
 - the main beach between Kairaki and Waikuku will be closed to public vehicle access. Managed vehicle access will be provided at both Kairaki Beach and Waikuku Beach, to allow managed access for fishing and related activities at the Waimakariri and Ashley river mouths.
2. Ashworths Beach
 - closed access at Ashworths Beach (key access in some instances)
3. Leithfield Beach
 - closed areas at southern end of Leithfield Beach with open access at northern end
4. Amberley Beach
 - one open access, others to be closed

PEGASUS BAY COAST CARE CONCEPT

Parallel to the development of this strategy discussions have been held, which included City Council staff, with the aim of addressing coastal access issues within the whole of Pegasus Bay in a unified manner. This has led to the development of a Pegasus Bay Coast Care concept and proposals for a series of pamphlets and a format for signage for use throughout Pegasus Bay. Signage has already been erected at access points in the Waimakariri District, at Ashworth Beach and at Spencer Park.

PROPOSED MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The strategy recognises that success will depend on educating users and enforcing compliance with any rules or bylaws, and states that consideration should be given to establishing or extending some form of ranger service. The strategy suggests that *'it would be appropriate for all the local authorities, including Environment Canterbury, Department of Conservation and City Council, to contribute to the funding of this position.'*

The strategy also promotes a unified approach to signage and education, and the development of a Pegasus Bay identity.

POSSIBLE CITY COUNCIL RESPONSES

The increasing pressure on beaches north of the city is undoubtedly due in part to the use made of these beaches by Christchurch residents. This has been exacerbated by the success of controlled vehicle access to Christchurch beaches. As such it would be reasonable for the City Council to accept some responsibility for seeking solutions to the problems that have arisen.

Alternatively, it may be considered that the issue has been dealt with successfully within City Council boundaries and the Council has thus fulfilled its obligations. However, such an approach may not be in keeping with the direction implied by one of the key objectives of the Local Government Act 2001 Bill, ie *"provide the necessary flexibility for councils to work co-operatively and collaboratively with other public bodies and private concerns with common interests in advancing community goals"*

Taking the view that it is reasonable for the Council to accept some responsibility for helping to find solutions, there are a number of ways that this aim can be advanced. These include, but are not limited to:

- supporting a unified approach for the whole of Pegasus Bay through the Pegasus Bay Coast Care concept, and joint signage and educational initiatives such as pamphlets,
- providing support, whether by direct funding or provision of facilities and resources, for a ranger service,
- exploring ways of relieving recreational vehicle pressure along the coast eg by providing alternative sites in areas where the impact would be less detrimental.

Any of the above measures could be taken individually or in combination with others, and it is likely that they are presented in order of increasing cost and time taken for implementation.

PREPARATION OF SUBMISSIONS

In preparing a submission it is important that the views of the Council are understood. As a starting point for discussion it is proposed that all three measures be supported and that the Parks and Waterways Unit be requested to address the issue of providing alternative areas, away from the coast and other sensitive ecosystems, for recreational use by drivers of 4-WD, motorbikes and other similar vehicles.

- Recommendation:**
1. That a submission be prepared on the North Pegasus Bay Coast Draft Vehicle Access Strategy.
 2. That the submission support a unified approach to addressing vehicle access issues along the whole of Pegasus Bay, in conjunction with Environment Canterbury, Waimakariri District Council, Hurunui District Council and the Department of Conservation.
 3. That the submission support the proposed management measures including unified signage, educational projects and a ranger service.
 4. That the Parks and Waterways Unit be requested to address the issue of providing alternative areas, away from the coast and other sensitive ecosystems, for recreational use by drivers of 4-WD, motorbikes and other similar vehicles, in partnership with Environment Canterbury, Waimakariri District Council, Hurunui District Council and the Department of Conservation, as applicable.