



Office of Hon Steven Joyce

Minister of Transport
Minister for Communications
and Information Technology
Minister for Tertiary Education

Associate Minister of Finance
Associate Minister for Infrastructure

27 SEP 2010

Cr Christine Rose
Chair, Transport and Urban Development Committee
Auckland Regional Council
Private Bag 92012
AUCKLAND 1142



Dear Christine

Thank you for your letter of 18 August 2010 outlining the views of the Auckland Regional Council on the key principles of the Puhoi to Wellsford Road of National Significance (RoNS).

I acknowledge the Council's views about the current proposals for the Puhoi to Wellsford RoNS and your concern that the decisions made are the most prudent in terms of expenditure, timeframes and the safety and efficiency of roading in Auckland and neighbouring regions.

While upgrading an existing road would appear to be the cheaper option, this is not actually the case. The initial investigations and route development work undertaken by the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) show that upgrading the existing road to a four-lane motorway standard would actually be the same or more expensive than constructing a new, purpose-built road. The topography of the existing State Highway 1 route means it is poorly aligned. This limits the speeds at which traffic can travel safely. Any upgrade to the existing road would for the most part therefore need to be located away from the existing alignment in order to meet user expectations. An upgrade would also potentially need to include a number of additional interchanges to service existing connections.

By comparison, a new purpose-built road would provide a separate second route, and based on current investigations, for equal or less cost. A new road would also provide additional benefits which are not included in a traditional cost benefit analysis. These include reduced traffic disruption during construction, management of existing access points and greater network resilience.

While all these reasons favour a new purpose-built road, the project is of course only in its planning stages. Current proposals may change as more investigations are undertaken and the outcomes of the consultation process are considered. The project team's primary objective will always be to ensure value for money while meeting the project objectives.

The NZTA informs me that the cost of constructing a new road for the Puhoi to Wellsford RoNS is comparable with completing the Auckland CBD inner rail loop (without the significant upkeep costs). The number of users is also greater with an estimated 22,000 users per day for the Auckland rail network and 25,000 per day for the Puhoi to Warkworth section.

The Puhoi to Wellsford RoNS has additional benefits as it caters for the movement of both passengers and freight – a key priority for the government. As you may be aware, the National Freight Demands Study 2008 forecast that freight volumes between Auckland and Northland will double over the next 10 years.

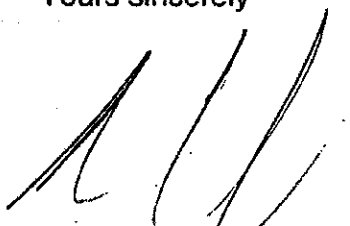
The Puhoi to Wellsford RoNS is a national priority and this has been recognised in the National Land Transport Programme. Other Auckland transport projects have also been included in this plan as we move towards developing better regional links.

I note the Council's views on access to Puhoi and Mahurangi West from the new road. You will no doubt be aware of the strong views of the Puhoi and nearby communities on retaining access. Feedback from all parties will be one factor in the decision about the access points. This will be considered alongside the usual evaluation factors for a project of this nature such as the operational efficiency of the road network, safety and value for money.

It is anticipated that construction of the Puhoi to Wellsford RoNS could start as early as 2014. The NZTA is currently investigating the potential to stage the project to best deliver on the project objectives and address current concerns such as the need to bypass Warkworth and the safety concerns with the route over the Schedewys Hill and through the Dome Valley.

If you would like to talk to us at the NZTA directly about these matters, please contact Amanda Cosgrove, Communications and Stakeholder Liaison Manager, by email to amanda.cosgrove@nzta.govt.nz or by phone on 0800 729 6982.

Yours sincerely



Steven Joyce
Minister of Transport