



THE NEW ZEALAND
AUTOMOBILE
ASSOCIATION
INCORPORATED

AA Centre Timaru

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Submission from the South Canterbury District Council of the NZ Automobile Association on the Draft RLTP 2023-2024

Introduction

The NZ Automobile Association (AA) is an incorporated society with 2.1 million Members, including approximately 16,000 personal Members who live in South Canterbury. South Canterbury AA Members are motorists, but they are also public transport users, cyclists and, of course, pedestrians. Consequently, the collective views of AA Member reflect all modes of travel.

The AA's advocacy role in South Canterbury is focused on articulating our Members' views on transport matters and ensuring that these views are factored in to transport planning and decision making.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit to the Draft Regional Land Transport Plan 2023-2024 (Draft RLTP). This submission draws on discussions between the AA South Canterbury District Council and local AA Members, and the AA's national policy team in Wellington.

There are five projects that the South Canterbury AA would like to see included in the Draft RLTP. These are:

- Timaru four-laning
- Inland Port at Washdyke
- An inter-regional resilience/lifeline initiative, centred on the Rangitata River
- Two-laning the SH 79 Upper Orari Bridge
- MyWay public transport system

Timaru four-laning

This project is critical for the future of Timaru, and our firm view is that it should be included in the RLTP (currently, it does not appear in the Draft RLTP in any form). Preliminary work has been carried out on the future requirements through the Timaru Transportation Study (TNZ 61812) as described below.

Over many years, there has been discussion about the need to create four lanes on SH1 through Timaru from Sefton Street to Washdyke. The discussion culminated in a strategy study report prepared by Transit NZ in 2007 which recommended a variety of upgrades that would be required in Timaru to meet the expected transport demands up to 2031. Many of these recommended upgrades have been carried out on the local road network but the key project of four-laning SH 1 has not been done. Many people still refer to the Timaru Transportation Study when discussing the issues faced on SH1.

A key statement in the published strategy is: **“The urgency of the state highway four laning option is highlighted by most of the road sections along SH1 (Evans St) reaching capacity by 2016 and undue delay will lead to congested conditions”.**

While no dates were attached to the recommended interventions, it is clear that a project of this size and complexity needs many years of preparation (design, consenting, land purchase, funding, etc) before physical works can commence. The planning work therefore needs to start as soon as possible.

Many of the report’s assumptions regarding future levels of urban growth have already become reality, with examples being industrial growth at Washdyke, urban residential growth in Gleniti, and growth of Port of Timaru (since a controlling interest was taken by Port of Tauranga). The Showgrounds Hill retail development has recently been consented and will generate traffic soon. This will be a major driver of future changes in travel patterns.

Anecdotally, it would appear that the poor levels of service predicted by the report for 2031 are already being experienced. Overflow queues are a regular occurrence at traffic signals on SH1 throughout the day. Figure 4 below is a copy of the projected levels of service from the report.

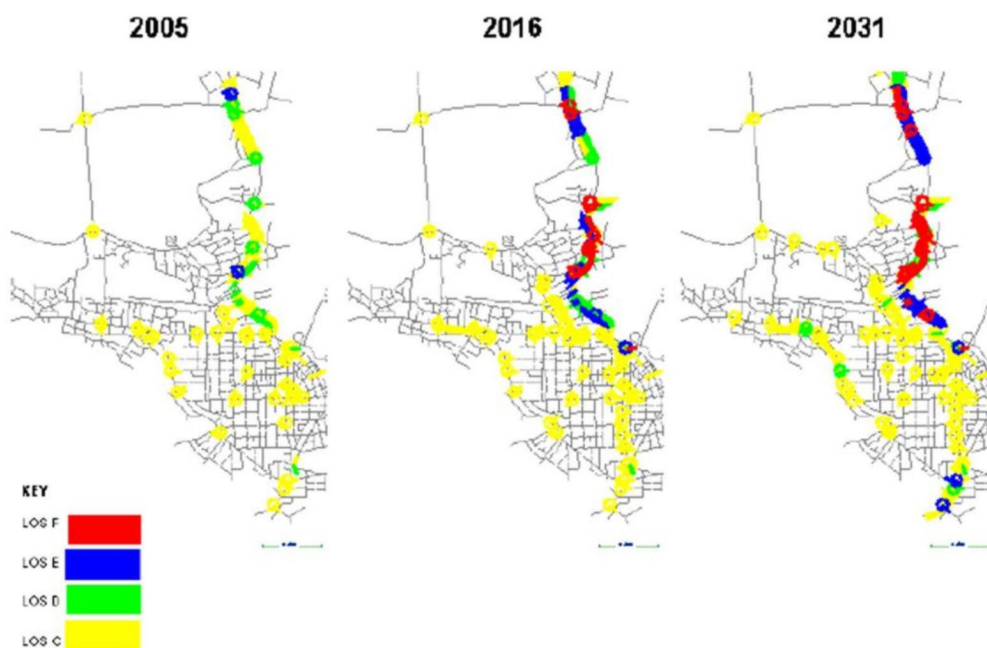


Figure 4 A comparison of the base network Level of Service (PM Peak)

otes:

Our view is that the report made recommendations that we considered appropriate at that time and the conditions that justified those recommendations have already been met. **We would recommend that the report now be reviewed and updated**, taking into account current demand pressures and setting out a roadmap for these pressures to be mitigated.

Inland Port at Washdyke

Allied to the four laning of SH1 above, we would also recommend that the potential for an inland port at Washdyke should be investigated.

We consider that the rail in Timaru is poorly utilized. An inland port in Washdyke would have the advantage of using rail through Timaru more efficiently with shunting between the Port of Timaru and the inland port being possible in the long gaps between regular train movements. The section of single lane track is relatively short. It is understood that a similar but smaller option was tried using a hub in Temuka but this has now been abandoned.

An inland port in Washdyke would have the advantages of heavy vehicles from north of Timaru being able to stop at Washdyke to unload/load. This would reduce the pressure on the congestion experienced currently through the urban area as well as the physical network. It is noted that the current percentage of heavy vehicles between Timaru Port and Washdyke is around 9% of the 18000 vpd from MobileRoads estimates. Much of this is likely to be associated with the Port of Timaru.

It is known that there are capacity constraints for heavy vehicles accessing the Port from Marine Parade with heavy vehicles queuing on Marine Parade itself.

An inland port is expected to improve efficiency for both the transport network by allowing heavy vehicles to avoid the low speed congested urban area and the rail network by proving more activity on the section between the Port and Washdyke. There is likely to be a reduction in carbon used with heavy vehicles not negotiating the hilly, low speed urban area to be replaced by trains over this section. Safety is likely to be enhanced with fewer heavy vehicles on the urban roads and fewer vehicles entering the Port directly.

We would recommend a project considering the economic, environmental and social impact of an inland port in Washdyke be funded.

Inter-regional resilience/Lifelines (Rangitata River)

We are pleased to see the Draft RLTP's strong focus on resilience (which aligns with the prioritisation of resilience at a central government level). However, resilience can mean different things to different people. In the case of roading infrastructure assets, the Draft RLTP's interpretation appears to be that the asset should be designed to a higher standard so that it can survive an event of a higher return period. While this is appropriate, our concern is that when an event occurs that is at the limit of what the asset can sustain, all assets could be compromised together because they are of the same standard. It is essential for our network to have at least one route – a lifeline – that can continue to function in the case of any foreseeable event.

Without predetermining a solution, an example to draw on could be the Taieri Flood Free concept where a road (that's to say, a bridge and its approaches) could be increased in level to always be above any foreseeable flood. This could even be achieved over time through maintenance overlays.

We note that, in the case of the recent Rangitata event, it was the southern approach around Arundel that failed after the stopbank breach rather than the bridge itself.

As the Draft RLTP notes, there was a major rainfall event in late 2019 that closed both of the road bridges over the Rangitata River and/or their approaches, as well as the rail bridge, for a number of days. As well as this, the Haast Pass was closed. If the defences for these assets were designed for a larger event, that larger event would still eventually come and the effects of the event breaching the defences could be greater, potentially resulting in a longer closure, if the surrounding network did not have a river crossing (and approach roads) that could withstand the higher flows.

In 2019, there was no operational route between north of the Rangitata River and all of the communities to the south including the Timaru, Waimate and MacKenzie Districts within the ECAN region, as well as the Otago and Southland Regions.

The result was massive social and economic disruption for the lower South Island: supermarket shelves could not be stocked; healthcare could not be accessed; tourists were stranded; export crops were at risk of perishing in store houses.

It is our view that a resilience project should be undertaken to ensure that a route to link Christchurch to the Southern regions as far as Bluff should be available in all situations. Since it covers a number of regions, this may be best managed by a third party such as Civil Defence. It should be approached as a lifeline project, focusing not only on rainfall events but also other one-off and ongoing natural events (such as earthquakes and climate change effects). While the Rangitata River flooding has brought this issue into focus, we believe other potential asset failures exist and should be included in the lifeline project. This approach aligns well with the focus on inter-regional network resilience of the Draft RLTP.

SH 79 Upper Orari Bridge

Two laning of the Upper Orari Bridge is identified in the RLTP as a priority with the project being “on the horizon”. We believe that we have well and truly reached that horizon.

This is a one-lane bridge on an increasingly busy highway. We have observed that temporary traffic control measures are required at peak times like holiday weekends to control the traffic. We do not consider that a one-lane bridge is an appropriate standard of infrastructure on a main road such as SH79 – it should only be reserved for secondary or minor roads with low traffic flows.

We are aware of many attempts by the local Geraldine community and the Timaru District Council to progress this project that have been ignored.

It is our view that the bridge has passed its use-by date and must be upgraded to two lanes as soon as possible. This process could be staged by controlling the bridge with traffic signals in the meantime while a design is being prepared and construction funding sought.

MyWay public transport

The MyWay public transport system has been operating in Timaru for a number of years as a trial. We are of the opinion that by now the trial should have run long enough to have sufficient data to

carry out a full analysis of the trial and recommend that this analysis should be undertaken as soon as possible.

We note that many other Councils around the country are actively considering systems similar to MyWay and it is important to allow these Councils to make an informed decision about the costs and benefits of the MyWay system and ensure any lessons that can be learnt are included in their development proposals.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit. The AA would very much like to be part of the RLTP process as it moves forward and, to that end, we are very happy to meet to discuss the issues identified above.

Yours sincerely,

Antoni Facey

Chair – NZAA South Canterbury District Council