

Congestion likely from bridge closure

New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) staff will work closely with the Whakatane District Council to find ways of easing traffic congestion issues during a planned three-month maintenance closure of the Peketahi Bridge at Taneatua.

An NZTA briefing on the re-decking of the bridge provided at last week's Council Projects and Services Committee meeting indicated a planned start to the project before Christmas, with the closure extending until mid-March 2017. The closure will require all SH2 traffic to be re-routed through Whakatane via the Landing Road bridge, Hinemoa Street, Arawa Road and Taneatua Road.

NZTA said up to 14,000 vehicles currently cross the Landing Road bridge each day and closure of the Peketahi Bridge will

add an additional 2000 vehicles a day, including about 400 heavy vehicles.

With congestion at peak commute times already a significant issue, elected members and staff expressed concern about the potential impact of the project on traffic flows. Transportation Manager Martin Taylor said the additional vehicle volume will exacerbate the delays experienced by motorists exiting the State Highway into the urban area.

"The congestion at The Hub is the area of greatest concern, both from commuters' and the Council's perspective, but the increased heavy traffic flow also raises a number of issues which will need to be addressed," he said.

NZTA Journey Manager Nigel D'Ath confirmed that the Agency



Work will begin on the Peketahi Bridge before Christmas.

PHOTO/SUPPLIED

would look into the traffic flow issues and work with the Council Transportation team to identify possible solutions.

Constructed in 1927, the Peketahi road/rail bridge is a

370m-long, one-way structure controlled by traffic lights. The \$5 million project will remove the existing, deteriorating timber deck and railway lines and replace them with a new deck. The plans do not include widening the deck to two lanes, but if tender prices were favourable, the bridge width may be increased, providing improved access for agricultural machinery. The new bridge deck will also be strong enough to carry high productivity vehicles, allowing heavier truck and trailer units to serve the Ōpōtiki area. An improved traffic light system will also reduce delays and the existing 30km/hour speed limit on the bridge is likely to be raised.

The project will extend the bridge's useful life to 2035, when construction of a new, two-way structure is planned.