

More congestion coming to The Hub

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CONGESTION at The Hub will increase next summer as another 2000 vehicles a day are detoured over Whakatane's Landing Road Bridge.

NZ Transport Agency is planning a \$5 million upgrade of the Pekatahi Bridge at Taneatua that will increase its load capacity, the speed of crossing traffic and, potentially, its width.

The re-decking will require the bridge to be closed for about three months at the height of the tourist season, raising concerns about the increase in cars and heavy traffic forced to travel through Whakatane.

At a presentation to Whakatane District Council's projects and services committee yesterday, NZTA journey manager Nigel D'Arth and Beca regional bridge consultant Andrew Ball were grilled by councillors and staff about the logistics and timing of the project, given its potential to cause "chaos and confusion".

Following community consultation the project has been timed for a three-month period over summer when schools are on holiday, providing for a natural reduction in traffic, and contractors have the benefit of summer working conditions, including long hours of daylight.

However, it does not take account of the increased number of tourists holidaying in the Eastern Bay.

George Johnston said traffic was already backed up half-way to the Thornton Road turn-off at peak times over the summer and this would make it worse.

"I'm going to make a prediction that this will be an absolute disaster for traffic going through the district," he said.



UPGRADE: The Pekatahi Bridge will be re-decked and its railway lines removed in a \$5 million upgrade planned for next summer.

File photo C6067-05

Bridge upgrade detail

NZTA says existing steel girders on the Pekatahi Bridge are in "good" condition and the hardwood sleepers are "okay", but the timber deck has deteriorated, requiring regular replacement.

NZTA plans to close the bridge for three months over the summer of 2016-17 to minimise disruption to schools.

Railway lines will be removed from the deck to make it safer and to allow

for an increase in speed from 30kmh to 50-plus kmh, and the traffic lights will be upgraded.

The bridge will be upgraded to carry high productivity motor vehicles (those weighing more than 40-tonne) to improve freight efficiency.

Subject to tender pricing, the bridge deck may be widened by 500mm to accommodate wider vehicles.

Full replacement of the bridge is planned for 2035.

Infrastructure general manager Tomasz Krawczyk is encouraging NZTA to work with the council on "the science of traffic management through The Hub."

"It is too late to do anything major but at least we can check traffic counts and arrangement of traffic around the bridge."

The main problem was school traffic coming from Hinemoa Street and turning right into town, and once all the big trucks started coming through these problems would double.

According to NZTA traffic vol-

ume figures, 2000 vehicles crossing the Pekatahi Bridge daily.

This includes 80 milk tanker movements a day along with forestry trucks, freight trucks and agricultural machinery.

Opotiki Mayor John Forbes, who attended the meeting, said 70 percent of the freight carried from Poverty Bay crossed the bridge.

While the bridge is closed, NZTA plans to re-route traffic from Awakeri, through Whakatane and out to Taneatua. This will increase the daily traffic count through Whakatane to 14,000.

Mr D'Arth expects the detour to add 10 to 12 minutes to the journey but acknowledges it could be longer, given the issues at the Keepa Road roundabout.

"It is predicted that the main area of concern will be around The Hub and across the Landing Road Bridge.

"The main tools we have at our disposal are trying to educate the public of what the potential impacts could be and encourage people to travel as much as possible outside the peak times."



MORE DELAYS: Traffic building up at The Hub.

File photo