

Hotwire

Newsletter of the Wanganui Rural Community Board

Whanganui River Road sealing



Wanganui Rural Community Board Chair Alan Taylor reports on the official opening of the fully sealed Whanganui River Road.

Sealing of the last 35km stretch of the Whanganui River Road was completed in February and officially opened at Patiarero Marae in Hiruharama (Jerusalem) in March. I joined River Road locals, Wanganui District Mayor Annette Main, Ruapehu District Mayor Don Cameron, the Hon. Tariana Turia and other officials and supporters for a day of celebrations.

The day, which began with a daybreak karakia at various points up the awa with kaumatua John Maihi and Wanganui District Councillors and staff, was a chance to get to know people from the Whanganui River Road community as well as the opportunity to hear from local hapu about their issues and achievements. After our early morning wake up, we were grateful for the warm welcome and cooked breakfast we received at Patiarero Marae.



Mayor Annette Main and Hon. Tariana Turia before unveiling the kohatu (stone) to celebrate the completion of the Whanganui River Road sealing

The official ceremony, later in the day, involved unveiling a commemorative kohatu (stone) by Minister Turia and Mayor Annette Main. We then visited the pit on the riverbank, near the marae, from which gravel was taken and crushed by the Ngati Hau Trust to create the road.

The sealing of the Whanganui River Road is an asset for the whole district as well as for tourists who want to see this majestic and special part of the world.



- Alan Taylor

A European tourist enjoys the newly-sealed road
Photo: Bevan Conley/Wanganui Chronicle

The entire day was a lovely, colourful and insightful experience and I was glad I got the chance to join with others to celebrate the completion of the road, as it has been a long time in the making.

The sealing will make a huge difference to local people who use the road for work, to travel to town and to see friends and whanau. It is also an asset for the whole district as well as for tourists who want to see this majestic and special part of the world.

The River Road community paid an additional rate for the sealing of the road for many years before it was confirmed in 2007 that the gravel section would be sealed. Funding for the final 11km stretch of the road was allocated in 2012, with the sealing completed in February 2014.



Check out our new Facebook page

We have got on board with social media and have created our own Facebook page. This page aims to get the rural community engaged in events, meetings, sports and special offers. You can share your posts and photos on the page to inform others about what's going on in your community. Hedge trimming to fundraising to school fairs and functions...we want to hear what you are up to. Please email Board Member Erin Reeve at erin.reeve@wanganui.govt.nz for suggestions about the page.

Also in this issue...

- Options for Wakefield Street Bridge
- The Council's new online services
- Whanganui River Valley Hunt and Food Festival



Regional Growth Study

In July 2014 the Government announced a Manawatu-Whanganui Regional Growth Study which will prioritise investment and economic development opportunities for our region. The Manawatu-Whanganui Regional Growth Study is being managed in partnership with the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. The study will draw on public and private sector expertise from across the region and will provide a comprehensive analysis of the regional economy, its current comparative and competitive advantages, the constraints that need to be addressed and the opportunities for development.

Whanganui Mayor Annette Main is pleased to see that the potential for an enhanced contribution by our region to the productivity of New Zealand will be recognised in the study.

"I look forward to the opportunities it will identify to use the existing assets of our area in a way that enhances and strengthens our local and regional economy."

Options for Wakefield Street Bridge



Board Deputy Chair Tex Matthews offers his suggestion about how funding for a new Wakefield Street Bridge could be generated.

After the recent round of submissions about Wanganui East's Wakefield Street Bridge in the Wanganui District Council's Annual Plan, it is obvious there is a desire to keep it.

The bridge was built by New Zealand Rail (now KiwiRail) with its ownership transferred to the Wanganui District Council in 2005 under the Railways Act.

Now, the bridge structure is rotting from the inside out and its life expectancy is around three years. The estimated cost of a rebuild is \$1.8 million.

On the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA)'s benefit/cost ratio scale, Wakefield Street Bridge comes in at a '10'. In order to get funding the bridge would need to score at least a four or less. The roundabout proposed for Heads Road scored a seven and was not even considered by NZTA.

Wyley's Bridge, in Mangamahu, scored a four on the scale. It was looked at by NZTA and turned down. At a meeting held in the Mangamahu hall in July 2013, the residents of the valley unanimously decided to put \$200,000 from a targeted seal extension rate towards the geo-technical work for the bridge. Wyley's Bridge then got the go ahead from NZTA and received 72% funding.

Under the new Funding Assistance Review, all road works, either capital or repair, will only get 65% funding if they met the criteria.

If the Council spends \$1.8 million on the bridge with no subsidy, it would miss out on \$5.4 million worth of subsidised roading work. If the Council decided to close the bridge it would get a 65% subsidy from NZTA for funding toward an alternative route.

When members of the public spoke to their submissions at the Draft Annual Plan meeting in May this year, Cr Hamish McDouall asked many of them if they would consider a targeted rate to fund a new bridge. Everyone asked said they would consider it. At a meeting in the Okoia Hall after the Draft Annual Plan meeting, the people present were not in favour of a targeted rate.

The Council has said they will consult on the future of Wakefield Street Bridge as part of the 10-Year Plan, but in reality, I reckon the bridge probably won't get built.

I also have a bridge to my property. I doubt that if I needed a new one it would get NZTA funding. When it was built, the National Roads Board funded half of it, under a backblocks access grant. Wanganui County paid a quarter of the cost and our family paid the other quarter. It cost 13,000 pounds at the time in 1965, when I was 18 months old. The Wanganui County got their share of the cost back from us over 10 years with the extra rates as the land value went up.

If the residents of Okoia and Wanganui East want a new bridge then the time to start saving for it is now.

My suggestion is that a targeted rate could be collected from everyone living on the Okoia side of Wakefield Street, over and above their rates, while a slightly lower amount could be collected from Wanganui East residents. The rest of the ratepayers in the district could contribute an even smaller amount. In three or four years these targeted rates could generate enough to build a new bridge.

In the words of the late Captain Phil Harris, from the fishing programme *Deadliest Catch*, "you can either make something happen, watch something happen, or wonder what the hell happened".

This speed hump leading up to the Wakefield Street Bridge was installed in June to slow traffic. Tex Matthews suggests a targeted rate will help fund a new bridge



Whanganui River Settlement

At least 500 people met at Ruaka Marae in Ranana for the historic Whanganui River Treaty settlement on August 5. Amongst the guests were local and visiting iwi, Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations Minister Hon. Chris Finlayson, Mayor Annette Main and Wanganui District Councillors. The river settlement focuses on the health and well-being of the Whanganui River, which will become its own legal entity under the settlement.

Bylaws under review

Both the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dog Control Bylaw are currently being reviewed by the Council and will soon be open for public submissions. The suggested changes to the bylaws will be published on the 'Have your Say' page of www.wanganui.govt.nz and we will also keep you informed through notices in the Community Link page of the Wanganui Midweek.



One for the Road



Cr Hamish McDouall, Elected Member appointed to the Wanganui Rural Community Board, reflects on the upcoming changes to the way roading in our district is funded.

Since I was elected onto the Wanganui District Council I have driven around the district extensively. I've been over the Burma Hill and around the Kauarapaoa Loop. I've seen the damage from forestry trucking on the Tokomaru roads and driven under the Aranui bluff. It has been a lesson on how fragile the roading system is and how much primary product comes off the hills that surround us. When these links are at risk it becomes a serious matter that all the district, not just the rural community, should be concerned with. The entire country should treasure these infrastructure links.

Take Wyley's Bridge for example. With the generosity of the people of Mangamahu, the hard work of the Rural Community Board and the efforts of a lot of people in gathering data and lobbying the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA), a subsidy was finally obtained after many months of uncertainty for the valley. But should the community have had to fight so hard for this vital transport link that carries well over 100,000 head of stock every year?

Sadly, the problem of funding local roads has just become even more difficult.

Recently the Government and NZTA undertook a review of their 'policy statement' on Land Transport (GPS 2015) and their Funding Assistance Rate (FAR). The GPS 2015 could significantly affect the amount of Government funding allocated to our district. The review looked at:

- The Government's future direction for roads in New Zealand
- The amount of Government funding councils will receive for any particular type of road work
- The level of service for our roads
- Consequent funding allocation

The new FAR model proposed means one subsidy level will be applied across all the Council's roading activities, including maintenance, operations, renewals, emergency works and special purpose roads. NZTA has set the new base rate for funding for Wanganui at 64% for the coming 2015/16 year, down from a current overall effective base FAR of 65%, which is a reduction of \$120,000 per annum.

The 64% FAR is a 'starting point'. The Council will be engaged in discussions with the NZTA to settle a final rate that will be decreasing at 1% per year for at least the next nine years, resulting in a probable annual reduction of over \$1 million from the Government to develop and maintain our roads.

The Council sees that the decision puts our core roading infrastructure at risk and has banded together with Ruapehu and Rangitikei District Councils and others to lobby and explain to the politicians the importance of retaining the subsidy at the current rate.

With less than 1% of New Zealand's population, this district generates around \$2.1 billion in regional Gross Domestic Production (GDP) and our road network accounts for \$405 million in primary value from forestry, meat and dairy alone.

This excludes any value added from processing primary products or tourism and is a huge injection to the New Zealand economy. The key to making an even bigger contribution to the economy is opening up further productive potential for our primary producers, forestry and tourism sectors, which are all dependent on having access to an efficient and effective road network.

The proposed changes in Government funding will affect the Council's ability to develop and maintain roads. This could mean either more local funding will be required from your rates, or a lower standard of roading will need to be introduced. What can be guaranteed is that the Council and the Rural Community Board will be lobbying to keep up the pressure on the Government.

Those ribbons of roads cut into papa cliffs might not shift as many people as an urban bypass does, but they move a lot of New Zealand's inherent wealth. We are pulling our weight in the district but the funding for roading is being redistributed towards the big cities. This seems short-sighted. As a friend put it, would there be any flat whites drunk on Ponsonby Road or medium rare steaks ordered at Bellamys without our milk and meat?

To give the Wanganui District Council your feedback about changes to road funding, please visit www.wanganui.govt.nz/haveyoursay.

Online services on Council website

In July the Wanganui District Council website, www.wanganui.govt.nz, got a 'makeover' to make it brighter, more user-friendly and easier for people to provide feedback. The website is also designed to take online payments. Dog registrations and infringements are the first online payment services, with more to be progressively added. Stock grazing permits are also available by visiting www.wanganui.govt.nz/animalcontrol.



The homepage of www.wanganui.govt.nz

Of the 530 people who registered their dog online, one of the first was Linda Andratic. Linda lives in town but used to live in a fairly isolated rural area. She says that for rural people it's not always easy to make the journey into town to pay over the counter.

"Paying online is quicker and easier. It's about how people live these days. You've got to be able to fit it into your day."

For people who do not have internet access at home, the Davis Central City Library and Gonville Café Library provide free internet facilities.

The Rural Community Board's Strategic Plan, **Rural Directions 2014-2023**, is on also on the new website. Check out www.wanganui.govt.nz/communityboard to read the strategy and find out more about your Board members.

Whanganui River Valley Hunt and Food Festival

In late March the small village of Matahiwi on the Whanganui River came alive for the Whanganui River Valley Hunt and Food Festival. One of the festival organisers, Siobhan Marshall, reports.

A small paddock in the heart of Matahiwi (population approximately 21) was transformed into a hive of activity full of locals, tourists, food stalls and demonstrations, live music and plenty of games for the tamariki (children) on Saturday, March 29.

This is the second year the Whanganui River Valley Hunt and Food Festival has been held, with both gate sales and hunt registrations up on last year. Hayden Church took out the 'best hunter' title this year, earning himself a prestigious carved trophy. The food stalls featured a number of traditional delicacies including smoked eel, hangi, rewana bread and paua as well as 'the classics' which included homemade baking, iced chocolate drinks, preserves and even good ol' Southland cheese rolls.

Organiser Bubby Tamakehu says "hitting the bush and hills for both fun and to put food on the table" is a regular weekend activity for many people in the River community but having a local hunting competition puts a "cheeky spin" on it.

"This was an opportunity for people to be named top hunter or hunters during the weekend and at the same time, be in to win some awesome prizes."

Another organiser, Daryn Te Uamairangi, who is the Tamaupoko iwi representative on the Rural Community Board, says the event would not have come together without support from local sponsors and the community.

"Whether you are from Whanganui, from up the river or a tourist travelling along the River Road, it's about coming together for a common cause, which is bringing the community together whilst at the same time showcasing the Whanganui River and the beautiful people along it."

The next Festival is scheduled for the summer of 2016 and with the time we have up our sleeves to organise another event, it will be bigger, better and jam packed full of even more fun! The proceeds from the Festival went to the development of Atene Marae.



Matahiwi, on the Whanganui River, where the Whanganui River Valley Hunt and Food Festival will be held again in 2016

Wyley's Bridge update

Thanks to funding from the Mangamahu community, who unanimously decided to contribute \$200,000 toward the cost of the new bridge to replace Wyley's Bridge (which crosses the Whangaehu River at the commencement of Mangamahu Road), the next step in the project is under way.

Tenders for the design and construction of the bridge were called for at the end of August. We will keep you informed about the outcome of the tendering process through our Community Link page in the Wanganui Midweek, on www.wanganui.govt.nz and in the March 2015 edition of Hotwire.

Want to talk about rural issues?

Wanganui Rural Community Board represents the interests of our rural sector within the community and at the Wanganui District Council table. The Board members invite you to contact them to discuss matters affecting the rural community.

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www.wanganui.govt.nz/communityboard



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