

5.3 Wakefield Street Bridge - update February 2026

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform elected members of the status of the Wakefield Street Bridge including actions to date and the ongoing work with Waka Kotahi NZTA in terms of applying for funding to replace the bridge.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

The Operation and Performance Committee receives the report - Wakefield Street Bridge - update February 2026.

KEY INFORMATION

Background

A Point of Entry business case was submitted to NZTA in January 2019, and replacement of the Wakefield Street Bridge was included in the Whanganui District Council forward works programme in subsequent Land Transport Programme bids. Funding was granted as a Low-cost Low-Risk (LCLR) project, which does not require detailed designs or substantiation for the project, but does have a \$2M spending threshold. Once preliminary design and estimates were completed the price estimates exceeded the \$2M threshold meaning the project could no longer be funded by NZTA from within the LCLR work category.

As an aside, and for clarity, the funding via the LCLR programme was not then swapped from Wakefield Street Bridge over to Ernie's Bridge. Wakefield Bridge was no longer eligible for the funding due to breaching the \$2M cap. Ernie's Bridge, as a separate project, was then considered on its own merits and accepted by NZTA for LCLR funding as it was within the \$2M cap.

In that earlier phase a detailed design for a new Wakefield Street bridge was near completed, including;

- A ground investigation and a factual report by WSP in 2022.
- Interpretive Geotechnical Report by GeoCivil in 2023.
- A detailed design by Robert Bird Group for a new bridge was close to completed in 2024.

The Wakefield Bridge had not been included under the new Activity Management Plan that sought funding for the 2025-28 period as the Present Value End of Life (PVEoL) process was required to validate the project and then subsequently be funded in the 2028-31 period if approved.

Current Status

In recent months council engineers and external parties have completed and submitted:

- **A variation request for a Wakefield Street Bridge replacement**

The Regional Land Transport Committee accepted the request in September 2025, with inclusion in the Regional Land Transport Plan. This means the project can be considered at the national level for NZTA funding that may be available prior to the next NLTP round 2027/30.

- **Point of Entry (PoE) to NZTA.**

The PoE phase focuses on discussion and critical thinking to ensure fit-for-purpose effort and readiness to progress, (see this NZTA [link](#) for more detail). The PoE recommendation was:

That the National Manager, System Planning and Investment, System Leadership:

- *endorse:*
 - *the Wakefield Street Bridge Renewal point of entry, and*
 - *approve proceeding to a Single stage Business Case - light phase*
 - *varying the 2024–27 NLTP to include Wakefield Street Bridge Renewal*

recommend that the CFO approve funding for a Wakefield Street Bridge Renewal and Single Stage Business Case - light with a total shared project cost of \$2.7 million; NLTF = \$1.674 million at a FAR of 62% from the Structures Maintenance and work category WC114 Structures Maintenance

- **Present Value End of Life (PVEoL) evaluation to NZTA**

PVEoL ensures NZTA investment decisions reflect the value left in an asset after the analysis period ends, not just what is spent upfront. Its purpose is to avoid undervaluing long-life assets, allow fair comparison between options, support whole-of-life costing, and improve accuracy of the benefit/cost ratio and the net present value. The attachment to this report titled "Bridge Replacement at end of life" (NZTA document) provides more detail relating to the PVEoL and broader process.

The three options evaluated were:

1. Demolition
2. Heavy Maintenance
3. Renewal

SP2 Structural Bridge Renewals to NZTA.

SP2 procedures are used as a simplified method to appraise the economic efficiency of renewing or replacing a bridge for structural reasons — this includes considering costs (like replacement cost) and benefits such as reduced heavy commercial vehicle user costs ([link](#)).

The three options evaluated were again:

1. To demolish the bridge and upgrade the existing routes to reflect current standards and necessary reconfiguration of the existing network;
 - a. Holyoake Street/Eastown Road, including upgrade to railway crossing
 - b. Wakefield Street/Number 3 line
 - c. Turning head on Wakefield Street x2
2. Heavy maintenance of the existing structure, noting that the original design was to 70% Class I loading and improvement beyond that is uneconomic and possibly not feasible;
3. Demolish the structure and replace it with a new structure that fully complies with current standards.

The above documents are now being reviewed by NZTA, with council seeking a bridge renewal and investment proposal for NLTP funding. NLTP funding equates to a split in agreed costs with NZTA share of 62% and WDC share of 38%.

NZTA have been working with council and are evaluating the application, seeking further information if or when needed, and aiming to have a recommendation in the autumn of 2026.

Further information on WC 216: bridge and structures renewals can be found [here](#).

Current Works

All inspections and works on the bridge have been suspended.

The traffic management bypass is monitored to ensure that the signage and barricades are functional. Customer requests and feedback around increased speeds in the area have been received and measures are in place such as additional speed restriction signs, as well as deployment of a speed advisory/radar trailer to assist in compliance. Local Police are also aware and the public are encouraged to call Police if they observe any driver related offending in the area.

The opening of the bridge to restricted traffic, such as one-way, was considered, however an inspection confirmed a failure of a brace on pier 4 which deemed the option not safe. The investigation confirmed that the bridge has reached its point of failure.

The bridge has critically deteriorated and is no longer considered safe for traffic.

NEXT STEPS

Ensure public communications reflect this update.

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References:	1. Bridge-replacement-at-end-of-life
