

MEDIA RELEASE

26 October 2017

For immediate release

Manawatū-Whanganui leaders send joint Manawatū Gorge solution submission

A submission in support of NZTA's Manawatū Gorge option four has been made by Horizons regional leaders through Accelerate25's Lead Team Facilitator Michael McCartney.

Accelerate25 is a regional economic growth programme which aligns people, policy and funding in priority areas to drive growth and create a more prosperous Manawatū-Whanganui Region by 2025. Led by a governing Lead Team representing business, iwi, central government and seven local territorial authorities, Accelerate25's aim is to realise the opportunities and enablers identified in the Manawatū-Whanganui Economic Action Plan.

One of the plan's key enablers is distribution and transport, involving a large integrated project team working on enhancing infrastructure around the Central New Zealand distribution hub, including the regional freight ring road that is currently underway.

Mr McCartney says based on the information currently available, and in order to meet the submission timeframe, the Lead Team acknowledges that NZTA's option four alignment is the best solution.

"While further details and analysis of the proposal is needed, the southern Manawatū Gorge replacement route shows closer connection to Palmerston North and key freight hubs such as the city's North East and Feilding's industrial areas, the distribution hub and airport, through to Tararua and Hawke's Bay," says Mr McCartney.

"Option four is also preferred as it will directly connect with the regional freight ring road which central government announced funding towards last year and forms part of the Regional Land Transport Plan.

"Connecting the regional freight ring road closer to Palmerston North provides the opportunity to remove parts of the Ashhurst Road section and portions of SH3 and SH57 from the original ring road plan – ultimately saving costs.

"Another key benefit of option four is that it proposes central government funds a second bridge over the Manawatū River as part of SH1, diverting traffic around Palmerston North's city centre. This will create a more direct, resilient, and efficient 100km p/h link to the Roads of National Significance in the south and the majority of road users from either Palmerston North or transiting points north to the east.

“As well as removing heavy trucks through urban areas, the Defence Force will be able to drive their large vehicles around the city rather than through it. This is something the NZ Army have requested several times due to safety concerns.”

Mr McCartney says in addition to the Accelerate25 Lead Team other signatories of the submission agreed that option four would provide a long term solution for the region's economy.

“Not only will it help unlock Central North Island freight and passenger movements through the region, it will bring traffic back to Woodville, and create jobs.

“Perhaps the most important thing our respective communities will note is that option four includes significant funding from central government. The other three options would require a substantial ratepayer contribution.”

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