

15 July 2016

New Zealand Transport Agency
East West Link

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The East West Link¹

Dear NZTA,

The New Zealand Council for Infrastructure Development (NZCID) considers the East-West Link (the Link) to be a vital part of Auckland's strategic road network and a critical enabler of economic and social opportunity across the region.

NZCID has contributed to and supports the submission of the Auckland Business Forum but wishes to make the following additional comments underlining concerns about the need for a more strategic solution to East West connections in the context of an overarching strategic road network for the region.

While we remain strong supporters of a Link, we are concerned that the existing proposal does not adequately account for Auckland's future travel needs and requires significant modification to reflect the corridor's function within the regional network.

Connectivity between state highways 1 and 20 is currently extremely weak. There is only limited ability to move between the two corridors at any point north of Manukau and south of Waterview (once the Waterview Connection is completed) – a distance of some 20km. Access into and out of the economically critical Onehunga-Penrose commercial area is impeded at present, being heavily congested through large parts of the day, and there are safety and resilience concerns on and around the Neilson St corridor.

An East-West Link will improve economic productivity, resilience and safety and is a regional and national priority. We therefore support the earliest possible delivery of an efficient and effective East West Link. However, we retain previously submitted concerns about the long term effectiveness, flexibility and operation of the proposed option.

We note analysis undertaken as part of the landmark Auckland Transport Alignment Project which shows rapidly deteriorating congestion and accessibility to employment from the 2020s. This modelling shows unacceptable congestion across Auckland into and through interpeak periods from the 2020s, but also shows an East West Link which continues to operate without constraint, even in peak periods in the 2040s.

This finding strongly suggests that the current Link proposal is constrained at one or both ends and is not facilitating movement across Auckland. It appears to be effective in reducing congestion in and out of Onehunga-Penrose, which we welcome, but it is performing little more than local function. In our view, the Link as currently proposed is operating well below its potential and its limited impact on regional mobility in relation to its high cost is a factor in rapidly declining transport outcomes in Auckland.

¹ This submission represents the views of NZCID as a collective whole, and may not necessarily represent the views of individual member organisations.

The Link, as evidenced by its cost, NZTA leadership and high priority, is a nationally important project. Yet the project purpose statement and regional modelling all suggest a much less ambitious and more localised impact.

We do not support an East-West Link which does not link the east of Auckland (including the eastern suburbs, Tamaki, Pakuranga, Howick and East Tamaki) to the west. The value of a true East West Link is enabling connectivity and movement across Auckland and it is this objective that we support.

As the only planned new addition to the Auckland strategic road network until an Additional Waitemata Harbour Crossing proceeds, potentially in the 2030s, the Link must play a leading role in the movement of people and goods in and around Auckland over the medium term. It must do more than improve congestion results in and around the Onehunga-Penrose area. It must also facilitate movement between Auckland's eastern and western suburbs, employment centres and industrial land and provide connectivity between Auckland's state highway corridors.

In order to achieve this, significant changes are required to the proposal.

Most urgently, a regional strategic corridor plan or strategy is required to understand the optimal form and function of the Link. ATAP modelling suggests severe congestion will impede movement in the area to the east of State Highway 1 from next decade. The Link must be capable of being integrated with a subsequent solution for the Howick-Pakuranga-East Tamaki area. What is this solution, when will it be required and how will the proposed Link support it?

We anticipate any such solution, either as an expansion of the Link or as a separate corridor, potentially to the south of the Manukau harbour, will provide grade separated connectivity between state highways 1 and 20 and full north-south on and off ramps at state highways 1 and 20. If the Link cannot provide this connectivity, what is the solution which can?

If there are no viable alternatives to the East West Link corridor, which has now taken five years of extensive investigation to reach this point, NZTA must be able to demonstrate how the existing solution will link across State Highway 1 towards East Tamaki and beyond, will support greater-than-local movement through Onehunga-Penrose and provide north and south access to state highways 1 and 20.

NZCID considers that the Link should comprise the first stage of a much more comprehensive eastern transport solution linking the Onehunga-Penrose area to the port and CBD through the designated Eastern Corridor. This complete corridor could be linked to a revised Additional Waitemata Harbour Crossing between Grafton and Northcote in the north and expanded in the south to connect Pakuranga, East Tamaki and Flat Bush to the Mill Rd corridor, effectively creating an Eastern Ring Route. ATAP modelling shows such a corridor would have a material impact on congestion and accessibility across Auckland.

The East West Link in its current form further reinforces our ongoing concerns with project-by-project decision making independent of a well-developed strategic network plan designed to deliver acceptable outcomes for Auckland. We remain seriously concerned that incremental development of the strategic road network is failing to deliver acceptable performance standards and is severely lagging behind the pace of growth.

Accordingly, notwithstanding our desire to see a suitably designed East West corridor to proceed with urgency, we are unable to lend support for this project in its current form.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit.

Stephen Selwood
Chief Executive
New Zealand Council for Infrastructure Development