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Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024/25–2033/34

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (GPS). We don't wish to appear to speak to our submission.

The Western Bay of Plenty District Council generally supports the submissions of Taituarā and the Bay of Plenty Regional Transport Committee. There are several additional comments we wish to raise and emphasise for your consideration.

Background

Western Bay of Plenty District Council is a territorial local authority covering approximately 195,000 hectares. The population of the district is currently around 58,000. Towns in the district include Te Puke, Ōmokoroa, Katikati, Waihī Beach, Maketu and Pukehina. We are a fast-growing district, and our population is expected to exceed 70,000 by 2041.

The district has approximately 915km of sealed roads, 157km of unsealed roads and 1073km of network connections to state highways. We provide a significant amount of roading infrastructure and have experienced first hand the impact of recent weather events on our network. In the year-to-date, emergency works alone have cost upwards of \$20 million well above the annual average of less than \$1 million.

Council has an integral role in responding to the needs of our communities and the burden of increasing costs coupled with a constrained labour market has resulted in additional pressure being felt. Local government needs support from central government in order to provide the necessary levels of service to our communities and ensure safe access is maintained across the network.

Submission points

The below sets out in more detail our individual submission points.

Strategic priorities

We are supportive of the strategic priorities set out in the plan. These align well with the current Bay of Plenty Regional Land Transport Plan and also reflect Council's strategic goals agreed through the development of our Transportation Activity Plan. However, as also mentioned below, it is recommended that further thought is given to aligning the strategic priorities and activity funding classes. We would prefer to see a more direct correlation between the two to increase visibility of where the funding is going.

Strategic Investment Package

The plan sets out the strategic projects to guide National Land Transport Programme (NLTP) development. It is disappointing to see most of the key transport routes in the Western Bay of Plenty excluded from this list.

State Highway 29

While it is encouraging to see Tauranga to Tauriko – SH29 included as a key project, these enabling works sit primarily outside of our roading network and it is recommended that this project be extended to consider the entire SH29 corridor over the Kaimai Ranges and connecting to SH1.

Capacity improvements on SH1 network in the Waikato have caused an increase in the volume of traffic on SH29 with more people choosing to travel via this route. This is expected to continue to increase with the signalling of Cambridge to Piarere – SH1 as a key project.

Increased volumes of traffic on this nationally strategic route have raised concerns in terms of safety, access, and economic productivity. This route

provides an essential link for economic access given its role connecting the Port of Tauranga to the areas of production in the region and inter-regionally to the Waikato and wider country. We wish to see improvements made to this route to mitigate these concerns including treatments to support the strategic status of this route. By way of example this would include, but is not limited to, capacity and safety improvements such as four laning, intersection upgrades (including safety treatments for intersections with local roads) and separated lanes.

State Highway 2

State Highway 2 is deemed one of the least safe stretches of road in New Zealand and we would hope that the continued prioritisation of safety through the strategic priorities would result in the appropriate investment being made to improve this. We acknowledge the works undertaken so far and are pleased to see the safety improvements made or underway, however there is still much needed to be completed.

We seek assurance that SH2 projects between Tauranga and Waihi, that address safety and capacity issues, continue to be prioritised and funded. In particular stage 2 of the Takitimu North Link including the Ōmokoroa Road/SH2 Interchange, SH2 Ōmokoroa Intersection improvements, SH2 Waihi to Ōmokoroa (Safer Corridor) and SH2 Katikati Urban (previously Katikati Bypass).

These projects should not be considered as just four-laning projects, but projects to deliver safety and facilitate modal shift in the wider peri-urban environment. They will support the introduction of reliable public transport to growth areas, enable housing, improve freight reliability and increase community wellbeing.

Rail

We are supportive of further investment in rail networks and the utilisation of rail corridors for the movement of freight in order to help remove heavy vehicles from the roading network. While efforts have been made to expand the activity class to include freight utilisation, we wish to see greater emphasis and more funding allocated to this. Investigation of passenger rail (both inter-regional and commuter services) in our district is also important to support longer term growth and modal shift.

We also recommend that funding be assigned to improving the safety of level crossings across New Zealand.

Investment in land transport

We strongly support the proposed substantial increase in the funds available in the National Land Transport Fund (NLTF) and that Network maintenance and asset renewal activities be undertaken to minimise future costs.

We suggest that it would be helpful for the previous year's level of funding to be included in the draft document in order for a comparison of funding levels to be undertaken.

Activity Class – Funding ranges

We are supportive of the NLTF activity classes largely following on from the GPS 2021, with the addition of the new activity class of inter-regional public transport. However, we seek further clarification on two aspects.

Firstly, guidance is sought on how it is envisioned that the partnerships between entities would work for this new activity class. It is submitted that a consistent approach across the country must be taken and therefore further guidance is required.

Secondly, clarification is sought on who will be able to access the funding under the new activity class. Typically, we have been able to access funding for public transport infrastructure such as bus shelters through the low-cost low-risk work category under the local road improvements activity class. Assurance is sought that we will still be able to access funding for these types of projects with the creation of the new activity class.

In addition, as mentioned above it is recommended that further thought is put around aligning the strategic priorities and activity funding classes in order for there to be a direct correlation between the two in order to increase visibility of where the funding is going.

Safety activity class

We are supportive of funding being reallocated from Road to Zero to the state highway and local road improvements activity class. This change will

make it easier for Council to undertake safety improvements alongside other pieces of work which leads to a more efficient work programme.

Resilience

We are supportive of resilience being included as a strategic priority and further investment to enable the transport system to be better placed to cope with natural and anthropogenic hazards. However, we seek clarification on where in the NLTF activity classes resilience sits and confirmation that it is the intention for it to span multiple activity classes.

It is also recommended that consideration is given to the creation of a well-defined work category for resilience investment. This would enable resilience improvements funding to sit alongside other work categories and be used on preventative interventions before an event takes place (or for non qualifying emergency works post events). This proactive approach would result in efficiencies across the network and equip the network to be better prepared for the types of weather events we have recently experienced instead of reacting and undertaking emergency work after the event.

Activity class spend – local road

We are strongly supportive of the increased funding made available for local road improvements and local road maintenance. We welcome any additional funding made available to enable us to deliver the customer levels of service necessary for our district. While we are supportive of and work to facilitate the provision of public transport, however we note that the proposed funding range for public transport infrastructure (improvements) is significantly higher than the local road improvements activity class.

It is suggested that further consideration is given to the many rural communities who do not receive the full benefit of public transport services in their areas and request increased funding be allocated for local road improvements and maintenance as opposed to public transport infrastructure.

Walking and Cycling Improvements

We continue to support and recognise the role walking and cycling plays in land transport and the opportunities it presents. We request that this continue to be prioritised.

We are pleased to see continued development of the New Zealand Cycle Network included in the GPS as its own activity class. We continue to progress projects in our district. Projects such as these not only connect communities, but also develop healthier communities and bring economic growth.

We are more than happy to discuss any matters for clarification or to expand further.

Yours sincerely,



James Denyer

Mayor

Western Bay of Plenty District Council