

11 June 2021

Hon Michael Wood
Minister of Transport
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6011
New Zealand

Email: m.wood@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister Wood

Re: Takitumu Northern Link (State Highway 2) between Te Puna and Omokoroa

The State Highway 2 (SH2) corridor connects Tauranga, Bay of Plenty and the Coromandel Peninsula to Auckland and is one of the Upper North Island key transport routes. The highway is a busy commuter, agribusiness, horticulture, freight and tourism route. SH2 between Katikati and Tauranga is no longer fit for purpose. It cannot sustain the increase of traffic caused by the population increase the Western Bay of Plenty has experienced over recent years and projected growth in the years to come.

More than half of New Zealand's population lives in the combined areas of Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty with 41% of New Zealand's exports being sent from the Port of Tauranga¹. Population and traffic volumes look set to significantly increase with an additional 43,000 houses being required in the Western Bay of Plenty by 2048 to cater for population growth². The communities of Bethlehem, Omokoroa, Katikati and Waihi Beach are indicated to expand from 21,000 to 35,000 people by 2040. Consequently, as more vehicles travel this route, the efficiency and safety levels of services will be further compromised.

16,000 to 18,000 vehicles per day travel on SH2 at or immediately south of the Omokoroa intersection while 8583 vehicles travel daily on Omokoroa Road. College aged children in Omokoroa are all zoned to attend schools that require them to be transported out of town and along SH2, either by car or school bus.

The Omokoroa/SH2 intersection is a standard give way intersection with visibility reduced for left and right turn due to the gradient of the road. The speed has been recently reduced from 100km to 80km however remains a high speed for a standard give way intersection. Stage two would have provided a separated interchange over bridge at the intersection of SH2 and Omokoroa Road.

¹ <https://www.smartgrowthbop.org.nz/media/2079/fds-26-9-2018-notification-final-for-print-9mb.pdf>

² <https://www.smartgrowthbop.org.nz/media/2079/fds-26-9-2018-notification-final-for-print-9mb.pdf>

Picture: SH2 and Omokoroa Road intersection



In 2018, the AA announced that SH2 between Katikati and Tauranga was one of New Zealand's most dangerous roads³. In the 10 years from 2009 to 2018, 27 people lost their lives and 77 were seriously injured in crashes. This is not unexpected due to the 43 intersections and over 100 driveways that have direct access onto the road that drivers need to consider and navigate.

The area between Katikati and Tauranga is kiwifruit intensive with orchards and post-harvest facilities. There are:

- 767 orchards and seven post-harvest facilities between Katikati and Tauranga
- 234 orchards between Tauranga and Omokoroa.
- ~350 staff working full time in post-harvest facilities
- 4208 seasonal staff working in post-facilities and on orchards.

Although there is some accommodation provided on site, the majority of workers would be travelling on SH2 to get to and from work.

Industry peak traffic volumes are between harvest which is March to June and the shipping period of April - October. There are 15,000 truck movements to the Port of Tauranga over the course of a year. The industry trucks fruit to the Port because of the short haul nature of the trips. There is only one packhouse in the Bay of Plenty (on SH2) that has a rail head, and this has only been used once. It is more cost effective and time efficient to truck rather than rail.

In April 2016 funding was approved for the Tauranga Northern Link which included \$286 million for stage one - a 6.8 km highway to connect Tauranga's Takitumu Drive Toll Road with SH2 at Te Puna. An additional \$150 million was funded to extend the project to Omokoroa (stage two). Construction on stage one was to begin in 2016 and stage two in 2018. If the road had progressed as intended the simple reality is that the road would have likely been built by now and would have cost significantly less than the proposed

³ https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11899543

funding of \$655 million for stage one and fatal crashes and serious injuries would likely have been reduced.

NZKGI understands that stage one land purchase is not complete (which includes kiwifruit orchards) and therefore the road may be further delayed because of this. It is unclear why it has taken so long to complete the purchasing of land to progress this road.

Omokoroa is a sought-after area for coastal living in the Western Bay. By 2045, the Omokoroa peninsula will be fully developed and home to an estimated 12,000 residents. To cater for this significant growth and the need for continuing improvements to the peninsula's infrastructure, Western Bay of Plenty District Council is undertaking a series of infrastructure projects between now and 2022. The total projects are estimated to cost \$50 million. An application for a privately funded \$75 million Omokoroa town center development has been submitted to the Western Bay of Plenty District Council for resource consent.

The government has encouraged growth in Omokoroa by supporting housing and infrastructure improvements. Examples include:

- Encouraging first home buyers to take up residence in Omokoroa, with the announcement of 27 kiwibuild houses available for purchase⁴
- Announcing an infrastructure package to transform Omokoroa which included \$14 million towards roading and water infrastructure which would allow for the increase from 4000 to 12000 residents⁵.

While the community is appreciative of government support to grow Omokoroa it defies logic why the government has cancelled the roading improvements that would have made it safe for new and existing residents to commute, via the only exit out - a treacherous intersection on to SH2 with just a stop sign and a thin, painted white line.

The government decision making to prioritise roading projects was supported by you saying, 'Recognising the need to decarbonise our transport system, we're rebalancing the package to increase investment in rail, public transport and walking and cycling'. It is important to note that kiwifruit cannot be transported to the Port via bikes or by people, workers are unable to cycle or walk along SH2 and except for the one, there are no rail heads along SH2 therefore the industry is reliant on a safe and efficient roading network.

While NZKGI is supportive in mitigating climate change effects, the methods to do so must be practical and realistic. SH2 is a congested road with a poor safety record. There would need to be an enormous uptake of people moving from vehicles to alternate methods of travel to make a difference to emission rates. Further to this, congestion means productivity and economic loss as people wait in traffic.

⁴ <https://www.hud.govt.nz/news-and-resources/news/first-kiwibuild-homes-in-the-bay-of-plenty/>

⁵ <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/infrastructure-transform-omokoroa>

We ask that the decision to cancel stage two funding is reconsidered with urgency and we extend an invitation to you to visit NZKGI to discuss the future of SH2.

Yours sincerely



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Chairman
NZKGI Executive Committee



Colin Bond
Chief Executive
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NZKGI is a levy funded organisation that was established to advocate, protect and enhance the commercial and political interests of New Zealand kiwifruit growers. NZKGI is independent of Zespri and is regulated under the [Commodities Levies Act](#)

The kiwifruit industry is a major contributor to regional New Zealand returning \$2.2 billion directly to rural communities in 2020/21. There are ~3000 growers, 14,000 hectares of orchards, 10,000 permanent employees and up to 25,000 jobs during the peak season. The industry is expected to grow its global sales to \$4.5 billion by 2025 which is an increase from \$3.5 billion in 2020/21.

The Bay of Plenty 2019 season produced 124 million trays and contributed \$1.5 billion to the Bay of Plenty economy. Approximately 80% of New Zealand's kiwifruit crop is grown in the Bay of Plenty. In the 2019/20 season there were 8,095 permanent employees and 16,426 seasonal employees.