

S H 2

RULING TE PUKE ???????



Richard Powdrell
2009 Kelloggs Rural Leaders Programme

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR 2009 KELLOGG RURAL
LEADERS PROGRAMME

SH 2 – RULING TE PUKE ??????

This report aims to identify the roading issues of SH 2 that place barriers on the future development of Te Puke. By identifying the problem areas, created by high traffic volumes and high heavy vehicle percentages, it will stimulate discussion and debate resulting in a more unified approach to achieving solutions. It recommends a more unified approach by all parties, highlighted by the necessity to have short and long term future strategic plans for this section of highway.

BACKGROUND TO TOPIC SELECTION

Why does a Te Puke dry stock farmer want to study the effect of a section of state highway on its town and surrounding community?

Having lived in Te Puke all my life I have a strong attachment, a sense of belonging, and a desire to be involved in the future betterment of Te Puke for future generations.

Over many years I have had a belief that Te Puke's location in the centre of the Bay of Plenty is a strength which should be capitalised on for the benefit of the town and surrounding district. As well as a central BOP location it is close to the port, presently SH 2 passes through the town, likewise the rail link through the district bisects the town, has land for all forms of development and already has many existing industries. There are benefits of cheaper housing, favourable lifestyle options, and Te Puke has most amenities necessary to sustain a community, yet is still close to the major city of Tauranga.

For a number of years I felt Te Puke was not proactive in promoting itself as a favourable location for business, industry and lifestyle. In recent years with the advent of bodies like Smartgrowth, Te Puke Fast Forward and the like, these options are now being investigated and promoted, and plans made accordingly.

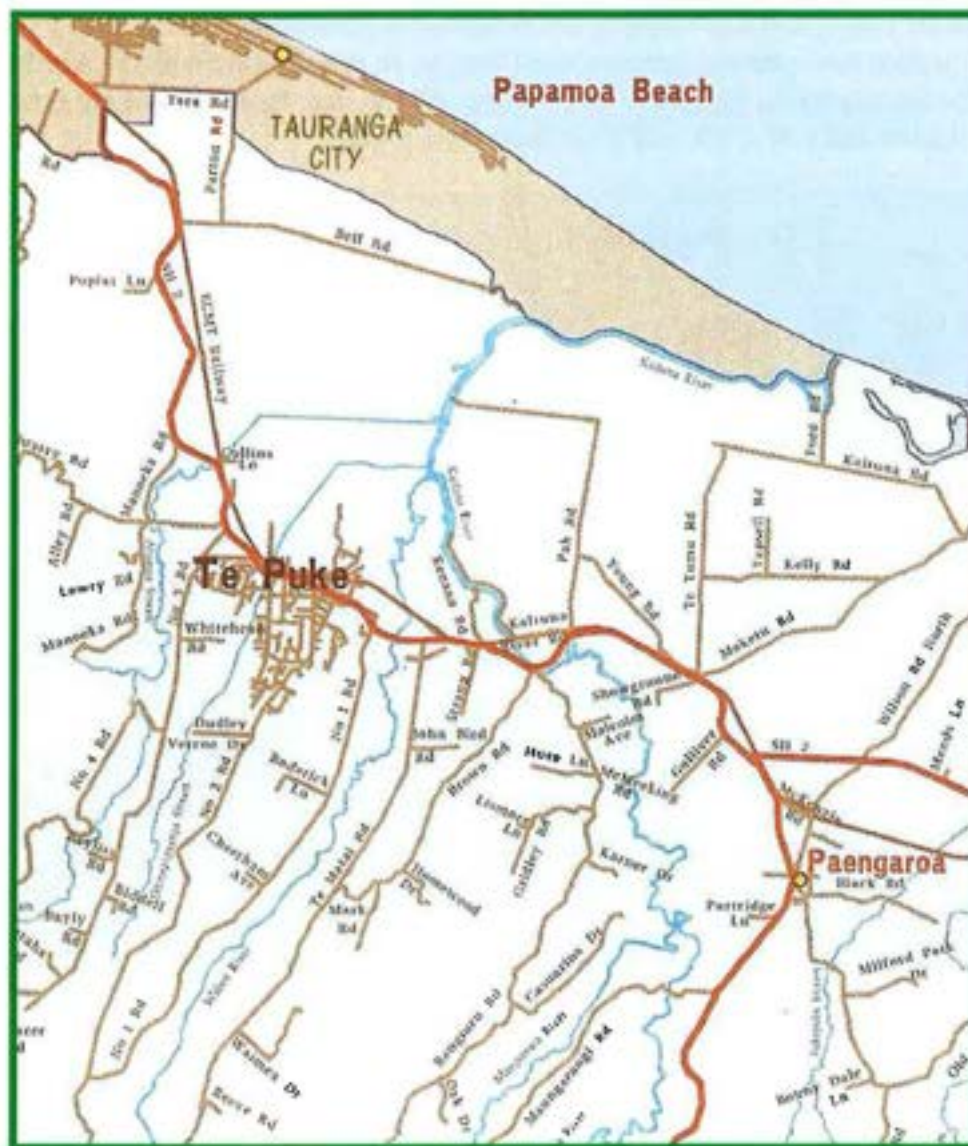


However, it was at this point that SH 2 began to attract my and other people's attention. Over the years the Bay of Plenty region has not only become a desirable place to live, but also a number of industries have flourished, notably agriculture, kiwifruit, forestry, tourism and the associated support industries.

As this development was occurring basic infrastructure requirements were lagging behind, particularly roading, which has led to the present day situation. It is at this point important to understand the section of road through the district and the Te Puke township from Paengaroa to Papamoa.

The key points to note are:

1. It is the only road presently traversing the area.
2. Side roads from it take a fish skeleton formation.
3. Construction wise it is difficult because of soils and terrain.



GOALS OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of my research was not to lay blame at any group or groups door for the existing situation but to try and reach an understanding of the factors that have created the present issues and identify positive directions the community can target to develop practical solutions.

I believe that there has been a great deal of misunderstanding of all the different bodies roles in managing the roading infrastructure with the existing position a reflection of how most of those bodies have behaved.

This research was made rather interesting and challenging as developments with the highway programme in the region has produced a field on which the goal posts have frequently moved.

RESEARCH METHODS

Information was gathered by:

1. Individual and group interviews.
2. Library research.
3. Attending Regional Land Transport Committee Meeting.
4. Reading of various reports on issues effecting topic.
5. Attending various meetings, both public and individual organisations.

FINDINGS AND THE ISSUES

So what are the issues SH 2 creates for Te Puke:

1. Congestion and traffic delays.
Current average vehicle count is 21,000 per day, of which, 14 % classed as heavy vehicles. Congestion caused by volume of traffic, high numbers of trucks and agricultural and horticultural machinery, lack of passing opportunities, and many intersections and private entrances.
2. No. 2 most dangerous section of highway in New Zealand.
Leads to numerous crashes, particularly during Kiwifruit harvest season, when traffic volumes higher, many foreign drivers, higher numbers of fatigued drivers. Also many dangerous intersections and entrances, few passing opportunities and the terrain of road.
3. Loss of productivity and inefficiencies of freight and personnel passing through this section of highway. The importance of the Port of Tauranga, and other industry, and the efficient movement of freight to and from was seen as crucial to the BOP region as a whole.
4. Kiwifruit industry.
This industry is recognised as a corner stone player of the Te Puke community, where a fully functioning SH 2 would greatly assist the movement of staff and product within the industry. In the present form SH 2 is far from ideal, struggling to cope with the seasonable traffic influx, causing notably disruptions in all areas of the harvest programme.
Future plantings and new variety development will only see more pressure applied to the network. Recent years has also seen the demise of small fruit handling facilities with a limited number of major players developing large specialised facilities often encompassing packing, cool storage and worker accommodation. The large influx of foreign workers has added to the danger on the roads as those that drive struggle to cope with strange driving conditions, heavy traffic volumes and often fatigue.
5. Opposing and blocking of development by groups and individuals, notably the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA).
A major cost to the Te Puke community in recent years has been the influence from planning objections to development of economic benefit. The major contributor in this process has been the NZTA (previously Transit NZ), who because of the inability of SH 2 to cope with increasing traffic volumes, have sort to limit the effects of developments on the highway. This has had large financial impact on developers through the consent process, crucial time is lost often leading to missed opportunities and often restrictions are placed on the developer in the final judgement. It was seen as a positive to have a state highway through the district so long as it was capable of handling traffic flows and future development.

6. Environmental issues in Te Puke's main street.
Te Puke has a beautiful main street and with this street being SH 2, the previously mentioned traffic volumes create problems with fumes, odours, effluent, vibration, and noise. These factors do not enhance the main CBD area as a pleasant and vibrant shopping experience.
7. Tauranga Eastern Link (TEL).
This new section of road will benefit the wider BOP region immensely providing a more direct route through the Te Puke district to Tauranga and the port. With the change of government and this new road being listed as one of seven roads of national significance (RONS), it has increased the chances of this construction taking place sooner.
Presently the submission phase for the tolling of this new road is being conducted which if approved could see construction start during 2010, allowing the TEL to open in 2016.
Participants generally supported the tolling of this project as the option of an almost immediate start was seen as very favourable.
For the residents of Te Puke and the immediate surrounding land, the TEL would have the effect of removing a large percentage of heavy vehicles and some regional through traffic from the existing section of SH 2. This would reduce traffic volumes, ease the main street environmental issues and hopefully free up development opportunities along this stretch of road. There is no direct link from Te Puke to the TEL so residents and immediate rural dwellers will still use the existing highway to move east or west.
8. SH 2 pre TEL.
There was overwhelming agreement that waiting for the TEL to open to resolve issues on the existing highway was not acceptable. Those interviewed felt some interim works need to be planned and work done, with the aim to ensure solutions for the worst problems were achieved. It must also be remembered that, at best, the TEL will open in 2016, by which time traffic volumes will be higher than now.
9. SH 2 post TEL opening.
The future of the existing portion of SH 2 bypassed by the TEL has some interesting scenarios once the TEL is opened.
Should the TEL be a free to use state highway, then it would be highly likely the bypassed portion of SH 2 would be returned to the local district council, Western Bay of Plenty District Council. Participants in the study were greatly concerned as to whether the council would financially be able to maintain and perform future upgrading. It should be remembered that in a short space of time, perhaps seven to ten years, this section of road would have traffic volumes at levels seen today, the only difference being a lower percentage of heavy vehicles.
Should the TEL be a toll road the same scenario could arise, however, because a tolled road has to have an alternative untolled route, it is possible it may stay under control of the NZTA. There was general consensus that if the TEL is tolled it would be preferred to have the bypassed section of SH 2 remain a state highway, due to the traffic volumes, its importance to industry and the cost of maintenance and future upgrading.

10. Communication.

Very early in this research it became apparent that the communication between the various parties, whether they be providers or users of the highway, was at best limited and quite disjointed. Since the highway is part of an infrastructure network which is lagging behind the ideal present day requirements, you tend to see parties addressing present problems with not as much thought to the future, or other users and providers, as would be ideal.

Too often the various industry groups are not providing the highway providers with well researched detailed information as to how changes within their industry could alter traffic flows or traffic mix on the highway. These changes could be increased or decreased demand and as a result of any number of different factors. A good example would be the increase in future kiwifruit plantings, increased production from better management practices, and down stream flow from the introduction of new varieties.

It must be remembered that the highway planners and providers can only work with the information that they can obtain from industry, hence the importance of individual industries to produce as accurate data as to future requirements as possible. It is vitally important that the planners then consult with industry on future programmes and layouts to ensure desirable outcomes are achieved for all.

11. Government Policy.

The change of government has seen a significant change of emphasis toward transportation and roading.

The new policy has identified seven roads of national significance (RONS), with one of the key drivers being that the development of these RONS produce significant economic benefit to that particular region.

The naming of the Tauranga Eastern Link as one of the seven will bring forward its construction as previously mentioned and have a direct benefit to how the existing SH 2 affects Te Puke.

12. New Industrial Parks.

As detailed on the earlier map there are two proposed industrial parks along the existing portion of SH 2.

The West Industrial Park has been granted consent to proceed with a portion of their proposal subject to conditions relating to its interaction with SH 2. All traffic associated with this park will directly use the existing highway.

The Rangiuru Park is proposed to access both SH 2 and the TEL with no consents as yet granted or firm plans finalised.

Both these projects are seen to be extremely beneficial to both the Te Puke and regional economies.

13. Merger of Transit and Land Transport New Zealand.

The combining of these two former agencies into the now New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) has been seen as a positive development. However, for the Te Puke region and the present roading position, it has seen a period of delay as the new agency has bedded down. Like any merger the period from announcement to full completion sees the organisation endure a period of flux, with loss of experienced staff familiar with the region and its issues, loss of working relationships and confidences, personal in temporary positions and a general period of unease and delayed progress.

14. Te Puke Town Business District.

For many years the retailers of Te Puke and the wider community have had visions of developing the main street into a purpose designed shopping precinct. The stumbling block has always been the fact that the main street is SH 2 and to successfully achieve this goal the heavy vehicles would need to be rerouted. Desirably, the light through traffic would be retained to maximise exposure for business, however this option has been over shadowed by the pending TEL. To what degree the light traffic will diminish once the TEL opens depends on whether it is tolled or not and motorists attitudes to paying tolls on the new link. Even with the TEL built, the nature of industry, horticulture and agriculture in the Te Puke region, there will still be a significant volume of heavy traffic having to pass through the centre of town. In the plans for the central shopping precinct an around town heavy bypass was proposed, however, the \$34 million price tag and the TEL have put this option very much on the back burner.

15. Local Interdistrict Roading.

The fish bone skeleton nature of the roads in the Te Puke area means the majority of traffic movements are required at some point to enter and exit SH 2. Due to the topography of the area to vastly improve inland cross routes would be extremely expensive, so in the view of most study participants, emphasis and serious consideration needs to be given to creating more cross routes within the town area. Many of these possible future roads have already been identified and would give traffic options which in turn would ease congestion on some of the worst SH 2 intersections.

16. Development in BOP region to east and south.

The growth in the east and south of the wider BOP region is, and increasingly will, put greater volumes of traffic on to SH 2 and the proposed TEL. This increase will be generated by increased forestry cargo, proposed aquaculture ventures, expanding industrial, increased movements with Rotorua Airport becoming international and the general trend of population increase in the region.

17. Pedestrian and cyclist safety.

There is only one uncontrolled pedestrian crossing in the main street which as well as delaying traffic, encourages pedestrians to jay walk along the length of the shopping area. With the volumes, and mix of traffic, cycling is hazardous and less people are prepared to take the risk.

18. Social and cultural issues.

Te Puke residents have had a long tradition of using the main street for community events such as parades on Anzac day, Xmas Float day, Kiwifruit Festival etc. With traffic volumes and traffic control measures these sorts of events are becoming increasingly difficult and costly to hold. Along this section of highway there is also marae and a school, all of who encounter these problems.

19. Inadequate alternative routes in the case of road blockages.

With the fish bone nature of roading in this area should there be a diversion needed the available routes are limited and are not particularly suitable for heavy traffic. The single crossing of the Kaituna River makes this bridge a highly vulnerable piece of infrastructure for the wider Bay of Plenty region. In the event of road blockages on SH 2 traffic queues and delays can be very long and costly to the region.

20. Economic cost of all above.

Many of the points 1 – 19, have ever increasing costs to the community whether they be productivity losses, cost of compliance, accident and health costs, and environmental cost. To my knowledge these costs to the district have not been calculated as a whole but those spoken to, were in agreement it would amount to a significant figure.



CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent that SH 2 has high levels of impact on the lives of members of the Te Puke community, both of a positive and negative nature.

There is a widely supported view that the issues highlighted will continue to restrict the efficient functioning of the Te Puke community for some years.

It is predicted the construction of the TEL with tolls will remove 9000 vehicles daily in 2016, many of which would be trucks. Without tolls a total of 15700 would be choosing to use the TEL rather than the existing SH 2.

The problem is that without tolling the construction of the road will be many years further away. This has meant the recent submission process regarding the tolling of the TEL has received submissions, 80% of which favour the proposal to toll. Even though many people feel a government rated Road of National Significance should not be tolled, the importance to the region far out weighs that sentiment.

The feeling that the Te Puke community have to improving issues created by the existing highway is the fact that for most they will rarely use the TEL, yet they have submitted in favour in large numbers.

It has become very evident through this study, and the TEL tolling submission process, that people see long term issues, as previously mentioned, still being generated by the existing highway after the opening of the TEL.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As this study has progressed many issues have been identified by the participants, which I have analysed and endeavoured to look at possible courses of action for the betterment of the Te Puke Community. Since beginning the project, and with the progression of roading action in the Te Puke area, some of the recommendations below are being implemented, or being considered for implementation.

1. Roothing Network Users Group.

This would be a committee formed from members of the major industry players in the region where by they would present a united approach to transport infrastructure issues in the region. It would be the responsibility of each member of the group to bring their well researched requirements and issues forward so areas of similar needs and issues were discussed as a group and actions formulated. This group would need to be very well led and establish, and adhere to, a clear direction of what outcomes were to be achieved.

I envisage the member groups would include representatives from the likes of Port of Tauranga, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, major industry, emergency services etc.

2. Pre TEL Strategy SH 2.

It is important that a strategy is developed to address the many issues plaguing this section of SH 2 between today and the opening of the TEL. At best this is a six to seven year period but if not tolled the time frame is unknown. NZTA has begun this strategy planning and hopefully locally affected groups have, or will have, the opportunity to have input. Those affected groups need to lobby hard to ensure the outcomes are solution based resulting in tangible improvements.

3. Post TEL Strategy Existing SH 2.

Once the TEL has become a confirmed signed off work it is imperative that affected groups lobby vigorously for NZTA to develop a strategy to address longer term issues that will arise after the TEL opening. The existing section of SH 2 bypassed by the TEL is too important to the well being of Te Puke to be allowed to be treated as a minor rural road. Its role in servicing the Kiwifruit industry, Te Puke CBD, local agriculture and forestry, and the local community must be recognised and given the necessary level of attention.

It is my view that this section of road should remain a state highway because of the above mentioned role it serves and the community should strongly lobby for this result. This may be difficult to achieve as it appears that the government is attempting to divest many roads to local government where possible. Should this be the likely outcome it would be important that a significant ongoing government subsidy be paid to the local council. With no government input the ability of the council to maintain and upgrade this road to the required level would be severely tested, more than likely with an unacceptable cost to local rate payers.

4. Te Puke CBD

There has already been a great deal of work carried out to create a plan of development for the town centre and it is important this plan is progressed forward. At the present time the future forward movement of this plan is clouded by the focus on the TEL. It is important that the Te Puke retailers organisation, Focus Te Puke, don't lose sight of the town centre plan goal and continue to push the project forward. Part of that moving forward phase is for Focus Te Puke to identify Te Puke's points of difference and have a branding and marketing strategy relevant to those identified uniquely Te Puke points of difference.

In the Te Puke Town Centre plan a round town heavy vehicle bypass was proposed allowing for the main street to be developed in to an attractive and safe shopping precinct. It is my view that this proposal should remain as a future option and serious attention be given to how it can be achieved. If the TEL was not to proceed in the near future then it may be feasible to really push this bypass as an alternative solution to solve some of the immediate issues in the main street.

5. Improved Interdistrict Connection Roading.

While understanding the difficulties of creating new cross district link roads, because of topography restraints, there are some link roads within the town boundaries that could be built which would alleviate some problem intersections. The Oxford Street / No. 1 Road link and the No. 3 Road / Quarry Road link are two which have been identified and planning done. It is important that the council, and associated persons, attempt to move these projects forward as they can become a small piece in a total jigsaw helping to alleviate the roading issues.

On a wider district approach some serious consideration to cross district connections would involve a serious investigative study to identify future cost effective options.

6. Combined Industry Strategies.

In this field I see opportunities for industry to liaise with each other to attempt to ease high traffic loadings at certain times of the day. During the study it became apparent that the Affco Rangiuru plant labour force movements had little influence on traffic disruption because of their off peak shift change over times. I see an opportunity for the kiwifruit packhouses to communicate and negotiate different shift change times to ease volumes at peak traffic times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank all the people who so willingly gave their time and support to this study. Through your input, I hope the issues identified, the conclusions drawn from them, and the recommendations suggested will instigate further discussion and investigation for the betterment of the Te Puke community.

APPENDIX 1 – Glossary of Acronyms

SH	State Highway
BOP	Bay of Plenty
NZTA	New Zealand Transport Agency
CBD	Central Business District
TEL	Tauranga Eastern Link
RONs	Road of National Significance

APPENDIX 2 – People Interviewed

Te Puke Community Board

Te Puke Fast Forward

Andrew Coker

Priority One

Ross Paterson

Mayor Western Bay of Plenty District Council

Glenn Snelgrove

CEO Western Bay of Plenty District Council

Gary Main

Bill Wasley

Smartgrowth

Ken Tremaine

Smartgrowth

Jane Nees

Chairperson Regional Transport Committee

Bill Miller

Bluhaven Management

Graeme Marshall

Port of Tauranga

Tony Reynish

Port of Tauranga

Steve Butler

Trevelyan's Pack & Cool Ltd., Post Harvest Working Group

Todd McLay

MP Rotorua

Ian Champion

Head Traffic Police Western Bay of Plenty

Greg Delaney

Balance

Rod James

New Zealand Transport Agency