

OC231050

15 January 2024

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

I refer to your email dated 4 December 2023, requesting the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

“...the talking points used by Minister David Parker to Cabinet on 28 July 2023 regarding the Waitemata Harbour Connections progress update.”

On 12 December 2023, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet transferred your request under section 14 of the OIA, as the information to which your request relates is believed to be more closely connected with the functions of the Ministry of Transport.

I have found one document that falls within the scope of your request and have listed it in Table 1 below. Certain information has been withheld under the following section of the Act:

9(2)(j) to enable a Minister of the Crown or any public service agency or organisation holding the information to carry on, without prejudice or disadvantage, negotiations (including commercial and industrial negotiations)

Table 1: Document schedule

#	Date	Title of Document	Decision on release
1	28/07/23	Talking Points – Waitematā Harbour Connections: Progress Update	Withhold some information under section 9(2)(j)

Please note the Minister presented an oral item to Cabinet on 31 July 2023 regarding the announcement on the emerging preferred option for the Waitematā Harbour Connections project. However, there was no accompanying Cabinet paper lodged for discussion, and no minute, talking points or notes that were documented from the meeting.

As explained in the paragraph above, while there were no papers taken by the former Minister to the Cabinet meeting, we have attached the final version of the paper, titled ‘Talking Points - Waitematā Harbour Connections: Progress Update’ that were sent by officials at the Ministry of Transport on 28 July 2023 to the Minister’s office for the Cabinet meeting.

With regard to the information that has been withheld under section 9 of the Act, I am satisfied that the reasons for withholding the information at this time are not outweighed by public interest considerations that would make it desirable to make the information available.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review of this response by the Ombudsman, in accordance with section 28(3) of the Act. The relevant details can be found on the Ombudsman's website www.ombudsman.parliament.nz

The Ministry publishes our Official Information Act responses and the information contained in our reply to you may be published on the Ministry website. Before publishing we will remove any personal or identifiable information

Nāku noa, nā



Karen Lyons
Director Auckland



Cabinet Background Information and Talking Points

Cabinet Committee: Cabinet (CAB)

Paper Title: Waitematā Harbour Connections: Progress Update

Portfolio: Transport

Background Information:

- The purpose of this item is to update Cabinet on the Waitematā Harbour Connections (WHC) project, ahead of a public announcement.
- The previous Minister of Transport gave an oral update to Cabinet on WHC in May 2023, which included background context and outlined the five scenarios that were publicly consulted on from March – May 2023.

Talking Points:

- I am speaking to you today to provide an update on the Waitematā Harbour Connections (WHC) project, ahead of a public announcement.

Background

- The Auckland Harbour Bridge was constructed in 1959, when the population of Auckland was 430,000. The bridge is now at capacity at peak times. There have been numerous studies regarding the need for additional road and mass transit connections across the Waitematā Harbour, including a business case in 2020.
- There are several key drivers for the WHC project:
 - Projections by Statistics New Zealand and Auckland Council show the population of Tāmaki Makaurau is expected to grow significantly in the next few decades, with particularly high growth expected in Albany. This will require intensification of existing urban areas on the North Shore, and appropriate transport infrastructure investment to support this growth.
 - The approaches to the Auckland Harbour Bridge are increasingly being flooded due to storm surges and sea level rise, particularly on the northern side, including during the significant weather events earlier this year. Flooding from the coastal storm tide occurs on the busway lane approximately once per year and four to five times per year on the Northern Busway shoulder. Without raising SH1 between the Auckland Harbour Bridge and Esmonde Road, flooding is expected to occur much more regularly (up to as frequently as every 2 weeks in the next 50+ years).

- The existing Auckland Harbour Bridge is in good condition, but will require increasing closures for maintenance. The bridge also closes due to high winds and traffic accidents. This poses a resilience risk to this critical SH1 corridor, as increased frequency and severity of weather events are expected to mean more regular bridge closures in future.
- The Northern busway is regarded as one of New Zealand's most successful transport infrastructure investments. Pre-COVID, patronage grew at an average annual rate of 25% from 1,600,000 trips in 2009 to 8,000,000 in 2019, consistently outpacing expectations and the rate of growth seen on the rest of the Auckland rapid transit network. However, without further investment, the busway is expected to reach capacity in the 2040s. Waka Kotahi advise that converting the busway to light rail would be highly disruptive and would not deliver sufficient capacity improvements.
- Te Waitematā, including the harbour and its edges, has high cultural, environmental and social significance. Valuable features include:
 - Historic heritage sites including parts of Victoria Park and Northcote Point;
 - Outstanding natural features including the Onepoto explosion crater and Tank Farm volcano;
 - Significant terrestrial and marine ecological areas including significant wading bird areas in Shoal Bay and Smiths Bush;
 - Areas of high natural character including Watchman Island, Kauri Point, and Shoal Bay chenier shell spits;
 - Regionally significant viewshafts and height sensitive areas including Rangitoto and Mount Eden; and
 - Sites and places of significance to Mana Whenua.
- Several of these features are recognised and protected through current national policy including in the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement. I consider protecting the environmental and cultural integrity of the harbour to be a bottom line for this project.

Indicative Business Case (IBC)

- In 2022, Cabinet requested that work on WHC be brought forward to better align with the work on Auckland Light Rail and to ensure a fully integrated transport network.
- Waka Kotahi is leading the work, with an IBC scheduled for completion in late 2023 and for Cabinet consideration in early 2024.
- The most recent public engagement was in March 2023. This showed support for crossings for all modes including public transport, a preference for tunnels rather than a bridge for greater resilience, and the importance of relieving congestion.
- Since then, we have made multiple public statements that there would be an announcement on this project in mid-2023.

Emerging Preferred Option

- On July 6th, the Waka Kotahi Board endorsed presenting Cabinet with an emerging preferred option, but stopped short of endorsing the option at this stage. They noted the

constraints on the work, the significant risk in identifying an emerging preferred option at this stage and the remaining work required to complete the IBC.

- The emerging preferred option includes separate road and rapid transit tunnels, reallocating lanes on Auckland Harbour Bridge to walking and cycling, and includes two rapid transit lanes on the North Shore, with both light rail and the Northern Busway on the North Shore to Albany.
- Based on the analysis to date, of the shortlisted options, this option has the greatest benefits and performs best against the investment objectives and assessment criteria. However, this option is also the most expensive, with an indicative cost of \$35-\$45 billion. There is no benefit-cost ratio at this stage.

Further work is required before any decisions are made

- On direction from the previous Minister, the Ministry of Transport commissioned an independent review of the work to date. This review found there is insufficient analysis and partner alignment to determine the emerging preferred option at this stage with reasonable certainty and without considerable risk. This aligns with the view of the Waka Kotahi Board, project partners (Auckland Council, Auckland Transport, and Mana Whenua), a recent Gateway Review, and the advice I have received from officials.
- The report highlighted several areas where further work is required before a decision on a preferred option can be taken. These include affordability and sequencing with other significant investments in Auckland, carbon emissions, and the impact of lower cost interventions such as tolls, congestion charging, and options to improve land use.
- While the precise route alignment of the crossing is yet to be determined, any additional crossing structure would need to connect with the existing transport network in the Auckland CBD, south of the bridge. s 9(2)(i)

[Redacted text block]

Progress Announcement

- This is a project of national significance, and it is important that the public are kept informed, and have a clear sense of the Government's intentions. While it is too early to commit to the emerging preferred option, there are some aspects of the project that can be communicated with relative certainty, including:
 - While construction is still expected to commence in 2029, it will occur in stages over a long timeframe (likely multiple decades).
 - Initial stages will include enhancing the Northern Busway to improve capacity ahead of light rail on the North Shore.
 - Work will continue to confirm how and when this project will be delivered as part of an integrated and affordable plan to meet urban growth and transport needs for Auckland over the long term.
 - Decisions on staging different components of the rapid transit network (including Auckland Light Rail and the Northwest) should consider population pressures, urban development opportunities, alternative transport options available to the people impacted, affordability, emissions reduction goals, and the capacity of the construction market.

- Officials will develop s 9(2)(j) [REDACTED]
- Protecting Te Waitematā is a bottom line, as communicated by Mana Whenua throughout the project and by the wider public in the latest round of public consultation.

Next Steps

- Work will continue on the project, with the IBC scheduled for completion later this year. Cabinet will have an opportunity to consider the IBC and the preferred option or options in early 2024, ahead of the detailed planning phase.
- I am asking Cabinet to note the progress of the project, ahead of a public announcement.

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OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT 1982