

MAYORAL COLUMN



Mayor Craig Little

NEW ZEALAND'S ROADING NETWORK

New Zealand's roading network is going backwards rather than meeting the needs of the future.

Recently, I travelled on State Highway 38, SH5 and SH2, specifically so I could compare these national state highways.

SH38 from Wairoa to Rotorua would have to be the worst State Highway in the country. How appalling that our people have to drive on a State Highway that has single lanes and is not tar sealed

in many places. How can the government expect communities to thrive when their health and safety is compromised because of a substandard highway that does not give them parity with the rest of New Zealand? SH38 is the road of NZTA's broken promises. It is like travelling through a third world country, and despite all attempts and efforts from the councils at either end of the SH38, Waka Kotahi NZTA still refuse to tarseal the road.

I also travelled on SH5, Taupo to Napier, where I was interested in the road conditions and safety aspects, particularly considering the controversial changes to the speed limits. I honestly thought I was driving on a motorway. There were a couple of spots that could benefit from speed restrictions, but personally, I felt there were enough warning signs in the places that motorists needed to reduce their speed, to then be able to travel the rest of the road at the 100km national speed limit. A blanket speed reduction on an entire stretch of road is just nonsensical.

The last leg of my journey was the notorious SH2 Napier to Wairoa. This journey was a patched quilt of potholes and orange road cones. And I know State Highway 2 from Wairoa to Gisborne only gets worse. If SH5 is the benchmark for a reduced speed limit, then I shudder to think what SH2 should be reduced to - based on the condition of SH5 I would suggest 60km and perhaps a speed limit of 40km for SH38.

Now, NZTA has announced, with no engagement with the community, it will close State Highway 2 this weekend, February 12 and 13 for repairs. Of course, the road needs repairing, and I am pleased this is occurring, but to block a State Highway for 11 hours each day is just ridiculous. There is no detour available during the closure which will take place between 7am and 6pm over the two days. The closure is a 30km section between the highway intersections with Aropoanui Rd, at Tangoio, and Haliburton Rd, at Kotemaori. The section of road will reopen overnight from 6pm Saturday to 7am Sunday, with a 30km/h temporary speed limit.

I am assuming there have been allowances made for emergencies for if a plane or helicopter can't fly? How can you treat our people like this? Are Wairoa people really that low on the NZTA priority list?

We really have to ask ourselves what has gone wrong within NZTA? It is not meeting its obligations and rather than building roads for the future it is stepping backwards by totally isolating communities - that is not connectivity.

There seems to be a real disconnect between NZTA Waka Kotahi and Central Government and I am sick and tired of Wairoa bearing the brunt of it. The substandard condition of SH38 and entire weekend closures of SH2 certainly do not meet the Government's requirements of the four wellbeings for our Wairoa people.

Generations of people have travelled these State Highways. We have gone from 100-years ago, when a journey from Wairoa to Napier took two days, to nowadays taking barely two hours. Unfortunately, under this present regime we seem to be turning the clock backwards.

THE REALITY OF COVID

I know we are all sick and tired of hearing about COVID and managing our lives around the pandemic. In New Zealand we have

now been living with COVID-19 for around two years. People are tired of the restrictions and requirements that are being placed on them. However, now is not the time to be complacent. Now is the time to remain resilient and do everything we can to keep ourselves and others safe.

Omicron is getting closer and closer every day. The only defences we have are to be vaccinated and be prepared. I urge everyone who is eligible for a booster to get one. I have been told that the booster gives people an 80-90% protection compared to just 40% with double vaccination.

It is important that people have their whānau and whare plans in place. Stock up as much as you can and think about the necessities you will need in your house, especially medical and baby supplies, if you need to stay home for an extended period of time.

We only have to look overseas to Australia and see the supply and service disruptions that have occurred because of people being unwell and unable to work because of Omicron. We need to be mindful of these issues and do everything we can while we can to protect our community. Be safe Wairoa, be kind Wairoa and look after yourselves and others, particularly our vulnerable.

'Kia ū tonu Te Wairoa'
'Remain resilient Wairoa'

EROSION OF LOCALISM

It astounds me that at a time where our communities and regions are pulling together to look after our people in these challenging COVID times, that the Government is working behind the scenes to centralise everything it possibly can.

At a regional level we have seen a massive response to COVID-19 from the country's District Health Boards- yet our government is holding a Health Reform and doing away with District Health Boards.

The Government's Three Waters Reform will also see a centralised approach with the provision of three waters services taken away from local authorities. Wairoa will become part of 'Entity C', which would be made up of 21 councils of which Wairoa would make up around 1% and no structures in place for our tiny voice to be heard.

Locally the Wairoa District Council has been providing advocacy and support, well above our business as usual, and yet the Government is holding a Local Government Reform.

Now the Government is having yet another crack at taking away localism through the accreditation and registration of Consentium, New Zealand's first accredited and non-registered non-Territorial Building Consent Authority (BCA).

Consentium was established by Government Department Kāinga Ora - Homes and Communities, to process building consents for public housing. So, this centralised authority is a stand alone and independent division of Kāinga Ora. Previously these Building Consent Authorities would have been processed by territorial authorities - like the Wairoa District Council. I would have thought Kāinga Ora would have been concentrating on 'building' houses as I haven't yet seen any evidence of new Kāinga Ora homes built in Wairoa - despite the demand.

For small districts like Wairoa, centralisation just does not work. For me this is not about dollars and cents. This is about local knowledge and information. Protecting and enhancing our district and ensuring we can continue to do things in our own unique Wairoa way rather than being swallowed up. We have highly skilled staff who know our district, and an uninformed centralised approach that does not draw on local knowledge is when issues occur. We have seen time and time again that 'one size fits all' does not fit Wairoa.

I encourage everyone to speak up, talk to your local MPS and express your concerns over losing the local character that is the fibre of our community.



OUR COMMUNITY PLAN

FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Committee Tuesday, February
15, 1.30pm

MAORI STANDING COMMITTEE

Thursday, February 17, 1.30pm

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, February 22, 1.30pm

YOUTH COUNCIL

Monday, February 28, 3.30pm

Due to COVID restrictions, all meetings will be held by video conference, the link will be available on Council's website.



CONTACT US

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