

20 February 2025

Campbell Barry

Mayor of Lower Hutt

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CC

Transport Minister Hon Chris Bishop

Greater Wellington Regional Council Chair Daran Ponter

Dear Mayor Barry,

Deferring closure of the Ava Bridge pedestrian walkway

It was a pleasure to meet with you on 10 February about the planned closure of the Ava rail bridge pedestrian walkway. It was very useful to understand your position and what it means to your community.

My team have discussed with Greater Wellington Regional Council and their metro operator Tranzdev deferring the bridge renewals, which require the pedestrian walkway to be removed. Understandably they had some reservations about continuity of service, given the current poor state of the rail and sleepers on the bridge, but they have agreed to defer the renewals work until Christmas 2025.

This is excellent news but I do want to note that KiwiRail, GWRC and Tranzdev are all agreed that the work cannot be deferred beyond our annual Christmas network closure.

There is already a 40kmh speed restriction on the rail bridge and over the rest of this year KiwiRail will be taking steps to reduce the risk of stricter restrictions being imposed. Beyond Christmas, the risk of restrictions, which would impact journey times and likely timetables for Hutt Valley and Wairarapa passenger services, would become too great.

As discussed, we have commissioned an options study for the walkway, which we expect to receive from the consultants in the next two weeks.

The study will look at a replacement walkway on one side or the other of the Ava bridge, as well as a standalone structure. We have already had confirmation that Ava bridge is structurally sound and can accommodate the weight of an attached walkway structure.

Hydrological assessments we had already commissioned, related to scaffolding we need to erect on Hutt Valley bridges as part of track renewals work, have found that in a 1 in 100 year flood event, water levels would be above the underside of Ava bridge. In a 1 in 440 year event



(the design parameters of the Hutt River flood protection embankments) the entire bridge would be underwater.

This poses a regional council consenting issue for any attached walkway, which is why the options study will look at an attached but raised walkway. Ideally this will meet consenting requirements and adequate (minimum five metre) safety separation from the tracks.

We look forward to receiving the completed options study and, given time is of the essence, we will get this through to you and your council staff quickly.

The study will give estimated, not market tested, costings for the different walkway options but it will be a start that will allow your council to engage with the community and take decisions.

A detailed design / market costing of the preferred option will then have to be undertaken, which could be factored into your discussions around funding.

We will also work with your staff to plot out the sequence of work and how the track renewals and walkway replacement may align. My team remain available to help where they can.

My team have advised that while the bulk of the track renewals work will be carried out over the Christmas network closure, which often starts on Boxing Day and continues into January, the walkway will have to be closed up to two months earlier so that preparatory work, including erecting scaffolding, can begin. This was the same timing as the previous plan, with the walkway to close on 23 February, while the bulk of the renewals work is carried out between Easter and ANZAC Weekend.

Hopefully, by then the council will already have engaged with the community on replacement options and timing.

On a final note, I just want to clarify that while the existing walkway remains opens to the public, its maintenance and safety remains the council's responsibility. The walkway is in a fairly poor state and I understand your staff had plans to make improvements, which are on hold.

Thank you again for your time and understanding.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter Reidy", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Reidy

Chief Executive

KiwiRail

