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Dear Sir/Madam

NZ Automobile Association (Waikato District Council) Submission – Draft 2021-2051 Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan

Overview

This submission is made by the Waikato District Council of the NZ Automobile Association (NZAA or AA). Firstly, the AA takes this opportunity to thank the Waikato Regional Transport Committee (RTC) for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan 2021-2051 (RLTP) which AA believes is a robust and well balanced transport plan for the region going forward.

The AA's Waikato District Council is the 'local voice' for the NZAA which has a national membership in excess of 1.6 million members, and a regional membership in excess of 58,000 personal members. The Council advocates on behalf of the NZAA membership on matters relating to motoring legislation, policy and local, regional and national transport issues.

In light of the above, this submission gives reference to the significance of the Waikato transport network regionally, and to the country as a whole. With 16% of the national state highway network and 10% of the national local roading network the Waikato region plays a vital role in the movement of motor vehicles and the distribution of freight in the Upper North Island.

At a national level the AA has a list of priority areas known as the *2020 Election Calls*. The purpose of the *Election Calls* is to bring into prominence transport and safety matters which will benefit all

transport users. The AA believes that many of the *Election Calls* are relevant for the Waikato region transport network, and how it is used. At a national level, the NZAA priorities include: reviving essential road maintenance; lifting the standards of regional highways; improving road safety (targeting cellphone use behind the wheel and more testing of drunk/drugged drivers); enhancing mobility; and having a clear road map for safer, greener vehicles (including boosting electric vehicles).

Looking back to the AA's submissions to the 2012-15, 2015-18 and 2018-21 RLTPs, greater recognition of the role the Waikato region transport network plays in a national context, and the interaction with other regions was sought. This included:

- Greater recognition of the inter-regional corridors which play a key role in the Upper North Island
- A greater emphasis on the need for route security and resilience, and
- The need to establish a regional transport hierarchy which through investment will encourage the 'right traffic on the right roads'.

Since our submission to the draft 2018-21 RLTP, the NZAA acknowledges the progress that has been made on:

- Improving safety on a number of high-risk corridors through the Road to Zero safety programme (including safety interventions and speed management)
- The opening of the Huntly and Long Swamp sections and further progress made on developing the Waikato Expressway, in particular the Hamilton section.

While many of the previous issues remain across the Waikato region, the AA **endorses** the approach taken by the Waikato RTC in the draft RLTP 2021-51 to prioritise investment going forward, in particular the Section 4 - Regional Policy Framework and high-level objectives below:

- Strategic Corridors and Economic Development
- Road Safety
- Access and Mobility.
- Supported by the underpinning objectives of Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability and Integrated land use and transport planning.

Further, the AA has reviewed and **endorses** the general direction spelt out in the document and **supports** the contents of the policy templates (refer sections 4.3 to 4.7) including the 10-year priorities.

AA Member feedback

The content of this submission is informed by the results of AA Member surveys, in particular the nation-wide AA District Concerns survey carried out in February 2021. The survey touched on a wide range of general and local transport issues, and received 361 complete responses from AA Members in the Waikato region.

Road safety is far and away the leading transport priority for AA Members in Waikato. When asked to rate the importance of different transport priorities/objectives, 75% rated road safety very important or extremely important, while two thirds considered increasing the efficiency of the network and increasing transport options very important or extremely important, and just under 60% considered environmental friendliness and contributing to health outcomes very important or extremely important.

In response to a set of general concerns with the transport network, AA Members in Waikato highlighted:

- Road maintenance (road surface quality, wasted money through repeat or poor quality work, and damage by heavy vehicles)
- Mobile phone use behind the wheel
- Congestion
- Parking supply and cost (particularly at the Hospital)
- Boy racers
- Red light running

Around half of the respondents to the survey indicated that they “hardly ever” see road police in their area.

AA priorities

In endorsing the regional policy framework, the NZAA seeks assurance that the draft Waikato RLTP (2021-2051) will result in the Waikato RTC advancing delivery of the region’s priorities in an effective and timely manner. The top priorities for the AA being:

- Completion of the Waikato Expressway (Hamilton Section) and associated network improvement projects by 2021
- Advocating for fast tracking the long-term improvements to SH 1 south of the Waikato Expressway Cambridge Section, extending to Tirau, the confluence of two significant state highways (SH1 and SH27). The AA sees this as a nationally important project and **supports** Implementation Measure M1. AA seeks that the RTC advocates strongly to Government and Waka Kotahi to bring this project forward. This section of SH1 will come under intense pressure once the Hamilton section of the Expressway is opened later in 2021 and traffic moves over from SH1b, SH 27 and other corridors. The large volumes of heavy vehicles moving between the ports poses extra risk to motorists on the SH1/29 corridor, particularly over the Kaimai range.
- Maintaining the focus on upgrading inter-regional strategic corridors including but not limited to; SH 1 south to the Horizons region, SH 5 from Taupo to Napier, SH 3 to Taranaki and the key SH 29 link to the Bay of Plenty.
- Improving transport corridors around Hamilton and in particular delivering Hamilton Southern Links to ensure efficient traffic movement around the Greater Hamilton area. AA **supports** Implementation Measure M9 which proposes advocacy for funding and implementation of this work.

- Improving the region's poor safety record and the implementation of a speed management plan across the Region. The AA recognises that not all roads are the same and acknowledges that some roads have speed limits that are not appropriate. AA seek to have a regionally consistent approach to speed limit setting in the region as at present the road controlling authorities working on speed limit setting in the region are taking different approaches. In addition many authorities are waiting for Waka Kotahi to progress sections of state highway speed limit changes before committing to changing speed limits on connecting local roads. AA **supports** Implementation Method M19 (pg 57).
- Optimising public transport, and improving access for all. AA **supports** Section 4.5.
- Developing collaborative planning and optimising existing networks
- Ensuring route security and resilience. AA **supports** P3 in this respect.
- Maintaining and operating the region's transport system using a regime that puts the 'customer' at the forefront of every decision.
- Ensuring that Road Policing in the region is highly visible and targeted at main strategic corridors. The lack of Police presence on the roads, as noted in the member survey, is of concern to AA.

The AA notes that the Draft RLTP (2021-51) makes reference to all of the matters outlined above and have noted our support for particular policies and Implementation measures.

We recognise the critical role played by the Waikato transport network in the wider national transport system, and the additional pressures this places on road controlling authorities in the region. This includes the costs associated with maintaining and operating the road network at a time of ever-increasing expectations of efficient use of public funds. Over the last decade our roads have not had the maintenance they need to stay safe and fit for purpose – the quality of the road surface has a real impact on safety. AA **supports** the increased funding planned to go into road maintenance (as outlined in Section 6.5 10 year funding forecast).

The AA **acknowledges** the priority ranking of projects in the draft RLTP (Appendix 7), and endorses the committed finding for the completion of the Waikato Expressway project. The completion of the Expressway in its entirety is the NZAA District Council's number one priority.

Overall the AA considers the draft programme to be well balanced in targeting the key regional issues.

In reviewing the issues outlined in the draft RLTP 2021-51, the NZAA is of the belief that the completion (and extension) of the Waikato Expressway project on its own will contribute significantly to improving the region's productivity, addresses the region's poor road safety record and certainly will assist in the management of the increasing freight demand across the region.

The AA **strongly supports** the completion of the various Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency led safety projects including both the short and long term improvements planned through the Road to Zero package.

The AA acknowledges that the 2021-2051 RLTP has continued to take a balanced approach to considering freight demand and logistics, including recognising the role rail plays in moving large volumes of goods inter-regionally. We **support** the further development of the rail network in the Upper North Island particularly the movement of large volumes of freight.

The AA **endorses** the works planned on SH 1 South of Cambridge (to Tirau), and the SH 29 corridor, as outlined in Table 4 (pg 104) and Table 6 (Pg 110) being a key link to the Bay of Plenty region. Investment in these routes must be prioritised to ensure that all benefits from investment in the Waikato Expressway are maximised, and that these routes are fit for purpose with the correct safety performance rating prior to the completion of the Waikato Expressway, when it is envisaged that there will be further increases in vehicles using these routes. The increase in vehicles will be attributed to the increasing transport demand in the Region, and the increase in traffic using SH 1, and SH 29.

The AA **seeks** that greater regional and national priority be given to shorter term improvements (travel reliability, route security and safety) on:

- SH 1 Tokoroa to Taupo and Taupo to Waiouru to deliver on recent business case planning
- SH 3 linking Waikato and Taranaki
- SH 21 (Airport Road).

Closing remarks

In closing, the AA would like to thank the Waikato Regional Transport Committee for the opportunity to have input into the Draft RLTP (2021-51), and acknowledges the strategic approach that has been used by the RTC to develop the document.

The AA wishes to acknowledge the partnership we have with Regional Council staff and those from Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency and all the local authorities in the Waikato region.

The AA wishes to present on this submission, and we are very happy to meet at any point with the team overseeing the RLTP to discuss the findings of the District Concerns survey in more detail.

Yours sincerely

Cathy McDonald
District Manager - NZ Automobile Association