



State Highway Classification

Developing a roading hierarchy

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Dear Sir/Madam

DRAFT STATE HIGHWAY CLASSIFICATION

Introduction

The New Zealand Automobile Association (NZAA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the New Zealand Transport Agency's (NZTA's) State highway classification consultation draft.

As the largest member-based organisation in New Zealand, representing 1.3 million vehicle owners and drivers, the NZAA has a strong interest in transport issues in New Zealand.

As well as a national overview on the draft classification system proposed, this submission also includes local feedback from our AA District Councils regarding how the state highways within their geographical areas have been classified in the draft document.

Overview

The NZAA has long been supportive of New Zealand developing a roading hierarchy, so we congratulate the NZTA on releasing a draft state highway classification system for consultation.

We understand that following the finalisation of a classification system, the NZTA will consider and consult on the appropriate levels of service for each category. The AA, as part of its survey programme, would be happy to work with the NZTA in surveying our Membership to help provide road user input.

Rather than a bottom up approach of looking at the current condition of the state highways and classifying roads based on their current level of service, the classification system attempts to look at the purpose of each state highway currently, and how this may change in the future. The NZAA is very supportive of a top-down approach; however we are not convinced that the current way of measuring against the criteria is visionary enough.

Because the consequences of which category a particular state highway falls into are likely to become significant over time, it is imperative that the classification criteria and measurement are as visionary and forward looking as possible. In addition, the AA would like there to be opportunities to review the category of each state highway scheduled into the future to ensure that they remain current and keep up with changes. Perhaps a frequency of 10 years would be appropriate.

Our local AA District Councils have raised some concerns with the way particular highways have been categorised, and in addition raise some issues regarding non-state highway routes

which would meet the criteria. We would be interested to know if the NZTA or the Ministry of Transport intend to undertake a state highway review.

A consequence of the classification approach is that some regions will have a number of higher priority routes and others will perhaps have very few, or perhaps even none. While from a national perspective this is an efficient way to prioritise spending, at a local level it is unlikely to be well received.

Many Regional, District and City Councils have developed their own hierarchy for their local roading network – the national classification should be able to integrate with these as much as possible, or at least not preclude this happening in the future. It would also be useful to consider how the state highway classification could best be supported by a local road hierarchy.

How to best communicate the state highway classifications should be considered following the determination of levels of service for each category. Communication will need to be carefully considered along with other information that is provided to road users (e.g. KiwiRAP star ratings). It will be important to carefully manage expectations in this process.

The remainder of the submission answers the consultation questions in the discussion document and goes into further detail on these issues raised above.

1. Do you have any comments about the way the state highways have been categorised?

We have some concerns with the way the following state highways have been categorised using the proposed classification approach:

- We consider that the Bluff-Invercargill-Queenstown highway should receive a higher category than it does. It is the main fuel route supplying Southland, Central Otago and Queenstown (including Queenstown airport). We would be interested to know which criteria of a *Regional Strategic Route* it fails to meet.
- SH 5 between Napier and Taupo is classed as a *Regional Strategic* route, and we propose, based on the criteria it should be considered as a *National Strategic* route. It appears very similar to the Napier/Hastings to Levin route as measured against the criteria.
- We query the application of the criteria to SH 2/SH2A from Pokeno to Tauranga. On the information provided it appears to meet *Centre of population*, *Port access for freight* and *freight volume* criteria for a *National Strategic* rather than *Regional Strategic* route, and is part of the Golden Triangle of population growth.
- Consideration should be given to upgrading the link from Nelson to Christchurch (via SH 6, 65 and 7) from *Regional Distributor*. This road, through the Lewis Pass provides the main route to and from Nelson to Christchurch for private vehicles, freight and tourists, and is considered a significant inter-regional lifeline.
- SH 8 (from coastal to Central Otago) should be more appropriately classed as a *Regional Strategic* road. It meets the Criteria for freight volume and international tourism flows.
- Dunedin to Port Chalmers is *National Strategic*, while Invercargill to Bluff is *Regional Distributor*. It is difficult to determine on the heavy vehicle map in the consultation document what the number of heavy vehicles are, but SH 1 from Invercargill to Bluff should be at least a *Regional Connector*, and perhaps even a *Regional Strategic* status. The port at Bluff has an annual tonnage of more than 1 million.
- We consider the section of SH 1 between Dunedin and SH 86 should warrant a higher classification, due to the heavy vehicle traffic and AADT.

- The status of SH 2 between Napier and Gisborne should be monitored as it could become a major transport link, especially with the possible closing of the rail link.

The classification system is only looking at the state highway network, not all New Zealand roads. Whilst not part of this classification process, our AA District Councils have suggested there are some local roads which could meet these criteria and therefore could be declared state highways. We are interested to know if there are any plans to undertake a State Highway Review, or similar process, to determine if the current state highway network is still relevant. Such a review would appear to be a natural extension of this process.

2. Do you have any comments on any of the criteria or thresholds that have been used to develop the proposed classification approach?

Criteria

We agree with the 7 criteria headings that are proposed, as they appear to tease out the majority of the functional reasons why state highways may be considered differently from each other in terms of function. However, we think that a new criterion should also be included, and that is alternate/detour/lifeline routes that are used by traffic when higher level state highways are closed (for example SH46/SH47/SH4/SH49 when the Desert Road is closed for snow). This function needs to be considered to ensure the routes are of a standard to cope with the higher traffic volumes (including heavy vehicles). The measurement could be around the number of times per year, on average, the detour has been necessary. This one is difficult to future-proof if it is due to weather-related concerns.

Thresholds

It is important that the thresholds used for measuring the criteria are future-proofed. While the *freight volume* and *population* criteria appear to include growth predictions in them, the AADT criterion appears to only be measured by the current NZTA traffic volumes, which do not take into account how future traffic growth rates might vary between state highways. The AA considers that the AADT criterion should incorporate projected changes in traffic volumes.

The AA would also like there to be scheduled opportunities to review the category of each state highway into the future to ensure that they remain current and keep up with changes. Industries come and go and sometimes the use of a given piece of road may change quite quickly – a highway may soon no longer be fit for purpose if surrounding land use changes, for example intensive dairying or intensive logging with significant increases in heavy vehicles. Perhaps a frequency of 10 years would be appropriate, with a process for considering individual changes in the interim if necessary.

3. What road user experience or level of service do you think is appropriate for each category of road? How important are the following to you? Travel time, predictable trips, safety, good quality roadside facilities like rest areas, road signage, road maintenance, road design (passing lanes, etc), environmental impacts of a road (noise pollution, stormwater runoff, etc), pleasant landscape

The AA, as part of its survey programme, would be happy to work with the NZTA in surveying our Membership to help input into determining how road users feel about different aspects of levels of service. This could feed into the levels of service consultation being undertaken by NZTA later in 2011. The design of this type of survey could become quite complex, so we would need early advice of timelines to incorporate this into our work programme.

The AA can also provide relevant past survey results. For example, Member survey results have indicated that those motorists that experience congestion value travel time highest, and those that don't experience congestion value safety as their highest priority. Members also highly value passing lanes.

4. Do you have any other comments on this classification approach?

This classification process focuses solely on the state highway network. Many Regional, District and City Councils have developed their own hierarchy for their local roading network – the national classification should be able to integrate with these as much as possible, or at least not preclude this happening in the future

As an extension of this work, consideration should also be given to looking into whether the current state highway network is appropriate. Perhaps some of the roads in the regional distributor category are less justified as state highways than some local roads currently under the authority of district and city councils. It has been ten years since the last state highway review was undertaken, and it is possible that function of some roads may have altered over that time to an extent that their status should be revisited.

There is also an opportunity to look further than the current state highway network to where new links could be provided to stimulate economic development. For example the North and South Islands could be better connected through a new ferry terminal at Clifford Bay.

It will be important to integrate the classification system with the State highway integrated planning process.

We are concerned that some levels of service decisions are currently being developed/made outside of this classification approach. For example the development of new approaches to the setting of speed limits. In line with this classification approach, the function of a particular road should be one of the guiding influences on the levels of service the road should provide, including travelling speed.

In terms of how best to communicate the different categories of state highway to road users, we think this is best determined following the confirmation of the levels of service that will apply to each category. Careful attention will need to be paid to the other information that is communicated to road users, such as KiwiRAP star ratings. The classification system will eventually be able to communicate to road users what level of service they should expect on particular state highways. There is a need to make the best use of all of the information in order to provide it to road users in the most simplistic and effective way. The AA would like to work with the NZTA to help ensure we get the best possible outcome.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft state highway classification approach.

Yours sincerely



Mike Noon
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