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Report 01.474

29 June 2001

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Report to the Policy and Finance Committee
from Susan Edwards, Manager, Parks and Forests (Strategy & Marketing)

State Highway 2 Underpass, Kaitoke

1. Purpose

To seek Council approval for the construction of a pedestrian underpass on State Highway 2 (SH2) at Kaitoke and agree to incorporate the project, with associated funding from the Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve, in the 2002/03 Annual Plan.

2. Underpass Proposal

This report follows on from the report prepared by Peter O'Brien on the *Proposal to Sell Land : Te Marua to Kaitoke - Transit New Zealand*, also on this Order Paper (refer Report 01.479). The underpass proposal was discussed informally at the June Landcare Committee meeting.

As part of the negotiations on the SH2 upgrade, Council officers have been seeking construction of a culvert underpass to facilitate safer recreational access between the Hutt River Trail/Kaitoke Regional Park and the Pakuratahi Forest (Tunnel Gully and Rimutaka Incline Recreation Areas). **Attachment 1** shows the proposed location for the underpass at Kaitoke summit. The underpass would be for walking, mountain biking and horse riding access and would be constructed during the highway upgrade work programmed for 2002.

3. Benefits

At present, the difficulty in crossing the highway discourages recreational access between Kaitoke Regional Park and Pakuratahi Forest. The linking tracks are not signposted and only used by a few mountain bikers, runners and trampers.

Officers consider that the underpass is highly desirable to provide a safe highway crossing, linking Council lands. It will enable people to travel off-road from the Petone foreshore and Belmont Regional Park, along the Hutt River to Kaitoke Regional Park, then into the Pakuratahi Forest and over to the Wairarapa (via the Rimutaka Incline Walkway).

Although some parts of these linear trails are not used extensively at present, they provide long-term recreational opportunities and links. The underpass can be readily created now at a reasonable cost while the road upgrading work is undertaken. It is unlikely that the opportunity to create a safe crossing/underpass will occur again for many years until further work is required on the highway.

4. **Costs**

Transit New Zealand's consultants, Opus, have costed the underpass at around \$70,000 - 80,000. Initially Transit New Zealand stated that they expect the Regional Council to pay the cost of the underpass. During the Landcare Committee meeting, Councillors expressed a view that Transit should be contributing because of the safety benefits. Officers have since expressed that view to Opus and Transit New Zealand. At the time of writing this report, we have not received a response from Transit New Zealand. We hope to have this response at the meeting next week.

There will be some additional costs linking the underpass to the existing walking tracks in Kaitoke Regional Park, although these costs are expected to be minor at the preferred location. Transit New Zealand expressed the view that the Council should pay for this work. They are also asking the Council to take responsibility for maintaining the underpass.

Officers accept that the costs associated with track formation and underpass maintenance should lie with the Council.

5. **Long-term Financial Strategy/Annual Plan Implications**

The project is not included in the 2001/02 Annual Plan or in the remaining years of the Long-term Financial Strategy. Officers only received advice from Opus in June that construction of the underpass is feasible and the likely costs of the work. Therefore, it was too late for inclusion in the Plan.

The Long-term Financial Strategy notes the provision of links between the Council's regional parks and forests as projects to consider *beyond 2010*.

6. **Timeframe**

Transit New Zealand needs a commitment now from the Council if the underpass is to be installed during the road upgrading. Detailed design work is starting within the next month and contracts will be let towards the end of the calendar year. However, the Council is unlikely to be required to fund the underpass until the 2002/03 financial year.

7. Funding Options

Potential funding sources are:

- compensation from Transit New Zealand for loss of land through roading work (loss of regional park land valued at only \$2,114);
- rates or debt funding;
- Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve.

Compensation Funding

Officers consider that the \$2114 compensation from Transit New Zealand for loss of land at Kaitoke Regional Park should be put towards the underpass project. This will return the benefit back to the area affected by the roading upgrade. Clearly the funding from this source alone will be insufficient.

Rates or Debt Funding

If the project is funded from rates, there will be a one off impact. Alternatively the work could be loan funded over 20 years, impacting on rates in the order of \$12,000 per annum (assuming no contribution from Transit).

Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve

The Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve currently contains around \$680,000; accumulating interest of about \$40,000 per annum.

In April 2000, the Landcare Committee considered a report on the Reserve (refer Report 00.277, **Attachment 2**). The report noted that the contributions made by the territorial authorities to the Reserve prior to April 1984 have been spent on land purchases in the regional parks. The remaining money had been directly rated by the Regional Council, appearing to have no limitations on the use. The report outlined that the Council had resolved (Report PE – 85.657) *..that the land purchase fund accumulated since 1 April 1984 be available for land purchase for recreational use outside the regional parks...*

The underpass proposal will result in the acquisition of an interest in land as an access right. This is a form of land purchase. This would be similar to the walkways across Landcorp land at Belmont Regional Park, which were also paid for from the Reserve.

The April 2000 report (00.277) outlined the future uses and priorities for using the Reserve. One of the first priority uses noted under the *Pakuratahi Forest* heading was *better links to Kaitoke Regional Park may also be facilitated with the proposed highway realignment works.*

Other first priority uses outlined in the April 2000 report included:

- Belmont Regional Park - Takapu Block, Cannons Creek (Maara Roa proposed reserve), Porirua access improvements, Kilmister Block.

- East Harbour Regional Park - public access to Baring Head and Pencarrow Lakes Block, possibly taking over control of Department of Conservation and Hutt City Council land.
- Pakuratahi Forest - possibly taking over control of Department of Conservation land on Rimutaka Incline Walkway from Summit to Cross Creek, connections from the Walkway to Tunnel Gully through Station Drive.

Second priority uses related to the new regional parks at the Wairarapa Wetlands and Whitireia Park. Third priority areas included the Coastal Trail, river corridors and Te Araroa - North Island Foot Trail.

There is also another underpass project being considered at State Highway 58; linking Belmont Regional Park with Keith George Memorial Park. This project is likely to be jointly funded with Transit and may cost the Regional Council around \$20,000, if it is feasible.

Officers favour using the Reserve to cover the Regional Council's contribution towards the underpass. If approved, Officers will include the construction and maintenance costs in the next update of the Long-term Financial Strategy/Annual Plan.

9. **Communications**

The communication opportunities will arise if, and when, the underpass is constructed.

10. **Recommendations**

That the Policy and Finance Committee recommends that the Council:

- (1) *receives the report and notes the contents;*
- (2) *agrees there are long-term recreational benefits by linking the Hutt River Trail/Kaitoke Regional Park with the Pakuratahi Forest;*
- (3) *agrees there are safety benefits from the State Highway 2 Kaitoke Summit underpass proposal;*
- (4) *notes the opportunity to provide the underpass during the highway upgrade work proposed to occur during 2002;*
- (5) *notes that links between the parks and forests are provided for in the Long-term Financial Strategy as issues for consideration beyond 2010;*
- (6) *approves the Council contributing a share towards construction of the underpass up to a total cost of \$80,000;*
- (7) *approves Council funding for the project from a combination of the sale of the land and withdrawal from the Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve;*

- (8) *authorises the Divisional Manager, Landcare to approve a cost share agreement with Transit New Zealand for the project;*
- (9) *that the Council Common Seal be affixed to the documents outlining the agreement with Transit NZ to achieve the underpass.*

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

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Attachment 1 : Proposed Location of Underpass
Attachment 2 : Report 00.277