SUBMISSION

Submission: Manawatū Regional Freight Ring Road

To: Palmerston North City Council

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About Ia Ara Aotearoa Transporting New Zealand

Ia Ara Aotearoa Transporting New Zealand (Transporting New Zealand) is a national membership association representing the road freight transport industry. Our 1,200 members (with a combined fleet of 14,000 heavy vehicles) operate urban, rural and inter-regional commercial freight transport services throughout the country.

As the peak body and authoritative voice of the road freight sector, Transporting New Zealand helps trucking operators drive successful, safe, sustainable businesses. Our strategic priorities are:

- Providing one industry voice for advocacy
- Promoting the road freight transport industry
- Attracting talent and promoting workforce development
- Supporting our members and customers
- Sustainability, safety and responsible emissions reduction

New Zealand's road freight transport industry employs 33,000 people (1.2% of the total workforce), and has a gross annual turnover in the order of $6 billion. This is part of a wider transport sector that employs 108,000 people and contributes 4.8 percent of New Zealand's GDP. Road freight transport accounts for 93% of the total tonnage of freight moved in New Zealand.

Summary of our position

1. The Manawatū Freight Ring Road is an important long-term infrastructure investment for the region. We support the development of a purpose-built regional freight route, and of the shortlisted routes, **Option 6 is our preferred route.**
2. Our position has been informed by feedback from our members. They strongly favoured bypassing Kairanga School and constructing a new Manawatū River crossing, and most considered the proposed SH57 and Old West Road upgrades adequate for now. While members preferred upgrading the existing route through Bunnythorpe, we consider the southern grade-separated bypass to be the stronger long-term solution given expected freight growth associated with the KiwiRail Freight Hub.
3. We also support progressing targeted safety and intersection improvements earlier where they can deliver immediate benefits without compromising the preferred long-term corridor.
4. There is nothing confidential in this submission, and we permit it to be published in full.

Why the project matters to us

5. The Manawatū sits at the centre of several nationally important freight corridors and linehaul routes. The local network is highly influential on freight movements across the lower North Island and connects many major industrial areas and distribution facilities with the state highway network.
6. The freight task in and around Palmerston North is also expected to grow. We note the Council itself identifies the Freight Hub, Northeast Industrial Zone and Te Utanganui Central New Zealand Distribution Hub among the key growth areas the ring road is intended to connect. An effective ring road would help ensure this growth does not place increasing pressure on residential streets, town centres and unsuitable local roads.
7. It would also provide greater certainty for freight operators, who depend on safe and predictable journeys. Our preferred route is selected on its ability to meet the region's long-term freight needs, provide resilience and deliver value for money, rather than simply being the least expensive option in the short term.

Our approach and member feedback

8. Our position has been informed by a targeted survey of our members, alongside the Council's technical assessment of the shortlisted options. The survey provided practical operator perspectives on the choices before the Council.
9. We have not treated the survey as a vote on the preferred route. Rather, it is evidence informing our position alongside the Council's technical assessment and the longer-term strategic requirements of the regional freight network. Where our preferred option differs from the majority of surveyed members, we have endeavoured to explain our reasoning.

Assessment of route components

Section 1: Existing Ashhurst route with targeted improvements (1A)

10. For Section 1, the improvements to the existing Ashhurst route (1A) are probably the best option available. Feedback from our members on this section was evenly mixed and there was no clear preference.
11. We recognise community concerns about heavy vehicles travelling through Ashhurst. However, the existing alignment is already reasonably efficient, and the bypass options provide limited additional network travel-time benefits. Improving the existing route could therefore deliver similar transport benefits at a lower cost.

Section 2: Southern grade-separated Bunnythorpe bypass (2E)

12. We consider 2E the stronger long-term solution because it is better aligned with the future freight task. The Council's technical assessment supports a southern bypass, finding that most traffic passing through Bunnythorpe is travelling between Feilding and Palmerston North and that the benefits of a bypass would increase as the KiwiRail Freight Hub and surrounding industrial areas develop.
13. The corridor decision should anticipate future freight demand, rather than respond only to current traffic patterns. Option 2E provides a purpose-built connection that would remove freight traffic from the township, address the rail crossing, and provide a safer and more resilient route as the surrounding freight and industrial area develops.

Section 3: Kairanga School bypass (3B)

14. Our preference is 3B, the Kairanga School bypass with realignment and a connection to Rongotea Road. This was also supported by surveyed members, with 64% preferring 3B compared with 21% supporting the lower-cost 3C option.
15. Separating a freight route from a school is a better long-term outcome for road users and the school. It removes the conflict between regular heavy vehicle movements and the school environment, rather than simply managing it through an intersection upgrade.
16. We note that the assessment indicates that the bypass could save just under a minute. While the saving may appear modest for an individual journey, the cumulative efficiency and financial benefit across thousands of daily trips is significant.

Section 4: Manawatū River crossing (4C)

20. We support 4C, the hybrid central bridge connecting Shirriffs Road, Walkers Road and Camp Road. We consider this the most strategically important component of the proposed ring road. Our member survey showed unanimous support for a new river crossing, with 67% supporting 4C and 33% supporting 4D.
21. A new bridge would provide an alternative to SH56 and strengthen the resilience of the regional network. The Council's assessment similarly identifies significant network and resilience benefits from another river crossing and finds the Camp Road location performs better than the southern bridge locations because of its proximity to key destinations. While it would be a significant investment, a new bridge would improve freight efficiency while adding to network resilience**.**

Section 5: SH57 and Old West Road improvements (5A)

22. We support 5A, involving upgrades to SH57 and Old West Road, and consider these sufficient for now. This is supported by 57% of our surveyed members, while 29% preferred the more comprehensive 5C option, which should remain under consideration as freight volumes and surrounding development increase.
23. A staged approach is particularly appropriate here and some larger improvements may be a longer-term priority so that targeted initial safety and intersection improvements could be progressed first.

The route must be fit for high-productivity and overdimension loads

24. We think it is important to highlight that the completed ring road needs to accommodate High productivity motor vehicles and heavy haulage, including overdimension loads. We recognise this will require a significant amount of enabling work along parts of the corridor.

25. Several bridges are likely to require strengthening or replacement, which we would expect to form part of the necessary route upgrades. Road geometry, bridge capacity, overhead utilities and other clearance constraints will also need to be addressed to provide the height and width clearance required for overdimension movements.

ENDS