

CITY CENTRE SECTION SCOPING REPORT



HUTT RIVER FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT PLAN

JULY 2013



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Images

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Format

This report has been formatted to print at A3 to ensure clarity of text and images.

Executive Summary

The Project

The Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) Hutt River (Te Awa Kairangi) flood protection project for the City Centre section is a combination of stopbank raising and widening on both banks of the river, as well as river channel widening. The project stretches some 3 kilometres from Kennedy Good Bridge to the Ewen Bridge downstream and completes an upgrade to the level of protection for the more intensively urbanised river plain contiguous with the Hutt City town centre.

This project's urban interface also gives rise to opportunities for additional 'layers' of public benefit to be realised over and above flood protection. These additional benefits can be gained from combining the projects of stakeholders, particularly Hutt City Council's (HCC) town centre improvements called Making Places, and the New Zealand Transport Agency's (NZTA) Melling Bridge and highway intersection improvements, with the flood protection project.

A collaborative design process and commitment to other public agency investment in parallel with that from GWRC will be required to secure those public benefits. There are substantial economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits to be gained by considering and implementing these public projects together.

Project Purpose

The flood protection works, including those proposed for the City Centre section, have long been planned for in the Hutt River Floodplain Management Plan (2001) (HRFMP). The HRFMP establishes a strategy of both structural and non-structural measures to reduce the risk of the Hutt River flooding the urbanised area of the floodplain.

The design standard established for protection is that it is sufficient to protect the urban areas from a 2,300 cumec (cubic metres per second) river flow with stopbanks high enough to contain a 2,800 cumec flood in the Hutt River. On average a 2,300 cumec flood event can be expected to occur once in every 440 years, the equivalent of a 20 percent chance of occurring in the next 100 years.

Since flood protection works have been established there has not been a flood event of this magnitude in the Hutt Valley. In 1898 a flood in the order of 2,000 cumecs brought extensive flooding and damage to the valley. The level of protection provided by the existing stopbank is sufficient for approximately a 1 in 100 year event (1,900 cumecs). It has been previously estimated that a 2,300 cumec flood today would cause damage to property and assets in the valley in excess of \$1.7billion. The risk of these damages has been progressively reduced by upgrading of stopbanks, including those in Boulcott and Strand Park.

Project Implementation Timing and Cost

GWRC's Long Term Plan (2012 -2022) allocates a budget of \$26 million to implement the flood protection works by 2022. The programme includes a planning, consultation, consenting and design process of 4 years and a construction period of 6 years. There is some potential for flexibility in the project timing if additional public benefits (such as infrastructure improvements or better public amenity) can be secured by an agreed alternative process for planning and construction. Implementation delays will extend the period that the urban area is at risk from flooding, but the benefits on balance of extending the timing in order that additional public benefits can be realised may be acceptable.

Issues and Opportunities

Over time the Hutt River has been incrementally 'channelised' to a corridor, constricting the floodway, within the now mostly urbanised valley floodplain. The corridor is defined by stopbanks (or high ground) on either side. Urban development has come close to, and even sits up against, the stopbanks in some places and this in itself is an issue in terms of limiting options for stopbank changes. It also fails to recognise that despite flood protection, the risk of flooding remains.

Being within an urbanised area, the open space of the river corridor has a high level of public use as well as accommodating infrastructure and car parking. The river itself and the vegetation it supports on its edges are also habitat for wildlife including fish and birds. In the context of the valley the river corridor is a green spine that provides for bird movements between hills east to west as well as linking to other green spaces across the valley floor.

Because the project seeks to increase the stopbank's height and breadth, as well as to widen the river channel, the physical changes as well as the way in which people use and experience the river corridor will generate issues to be addressed in the planning and design process. Many of these issues can also be converted to opportunities to generate new or improved public benefits through deliberate consideration and collaboration with stakeholders.

The stopbank works will require the acquisition of residential property at Mills Street and commercial land upstream of the Melling Bridge. GWRC has contacted all the landowners directly affected. The sensitivity of this loss of property for directly affected owners as well as the changes for those adjacent will need consideration. Raising and widening the stopbanks, as currently proposed, will generate interface issues with properties close to the stopbank (such as Harvey Norman) and also the street edges in some places (such as at Daly Street). There could be some utilisation of the Daly Street road space to enable stopbank broadening. This would require changes to the street configuration in terms of parking, lanes, and services. Accesses across the stopbank (steps and ramps) and the existing car parking areas on the broader

open spaces will also be removed. These car parks prevent uses occurring that have broader open space public amenity, but the area is also used for a well patronised weekly market and for other informal purposes too (such as by learner drivers). The repositioning of any car parking will require consideration as to the future uses of the river corridor land and the optimum locations for access from the city centre.

In the area closest to the urban edge of the Hutt city centre there is an issue in how best to achieve the Making Places project in terms of the elements that interlock, or overlap, with the river and its corridor. One of the significant opportunities is to integrate the design and combine resources for implementation of both HCC and GWRC's projects together. This would enable the issues raised above in terms of uses of the floodplain, Daly Street edge, connections to the city centre, parking, event spaces, river access, and open space amenity to be addressed holistically. In this way a combination of flood protection and a great new asset for the city could be generated as one project. This may in turn assist to catalyse HCC's desire to see increased private investment in the city centre.

In the more upstream areas, river channel widening will reduce the width of some of the broader open grassed areas which are utilised for staged events, dog exercising and other informal activities. The river corridor as a whole offers a range of spaces which can be used for these purposes. The proposed stopbank works may require a change to the way the corridor is used and may redirect some users to different places.

The existing lower level walking and cycling tracks that run parallel to the river will also be subsumed by the channel widening in some areas. These paths have been established by volunteers to a large extent and although they will be replaced with new tracks, there are changes and some sensitivity about this loss. The design of new tracks will need to recognise the use patterns and should include the utilisation of the wealth of knowledge of the volunteers.

At the Melling Bridge, the river flow is restricted due to the narrower width of the river between banks/abutments and the height of the bridge above flood water levels. The HRFMP identifies replacement of the bridge as an element of the protection works to achieve the recommended standard and NZTA have investigated this recently in combination with a grade separated interchange at the highway. However, there is no progress on the bridge replacement and less substantial highway intersection upgrades are now proposed as an interim measure.

The issue is that because the bridge is not proposed to be replaced in the NZTA's current planning period, the best that can be achieved for flood protection is widening the banks at the bridge as far as possible.

There is some effect on the west side of the river in terms of Block Road and parking areas. As with the city centre Making Places project, there is an opportunity to work with NZTA to develop the opportunities for achieving intersection improvements and flood protection together.

The channel widening will also affect areas of the river and gravel beaches currently used for swimming, fishing, picnicking, and staged events. To some extent, if the changes are timed to avoid fish spawning/whitebaiting periods and with design consideration to providing fish habitat, then the issue of effects can be made to be positive. For activities such as swimming, the popular places have been identified and if unable to be retained can be replaced in different locations. With some design consideration groynes (like those used in Waikanae River for example) can improve the swimming amenity offered in the river. Maintaining access to the river will be important and with channel widening the current tracks down to the river will be lost. Access can be reinstated and consideration given to the optimum positioning and form of connections to meet various needs.

The loss of existing river edge vegetation will also be an issue in the sense of a visual change and the limited habitat value this provides. When complete, the channel widening will see reinstatement of some new river edge willow replanting and other areas of rock revetment in combination with native or exotic planting. If designed with biodiversity improvement in mind, rock areas can be excellent habitat for fish and a greater use of native vegetation can support bird and other wildlife. Vegetation can also be used to form discrete areas of open space. The willows themselves may be seen as an issue given the river views obstructed from public places (such as roads) and land adjacent. Related to habitat value are the existing stormwater discharges to the river. There is an opportunity for these to be improved in terms of capacity and water quality (through debris catching) as well as potential for those that relate to lateral streams to be reconfigured as more natural wetlands, or vegetated areas that can intercept and filter water prior to discharging to the river.

The Hutt River floodway is highly constricted in the CBD area, particularly at the Melling Bridge and the stretch of the river along Daly Street. Beyond the immediate project period, a longer term issue for consideration is how to address currently unknown future needs to change or increase flood protection. The effects on flood risk from changes in climatic conditions, or changes in expectations of urban area protection may influence the future need for further improvements in flood protection planning and design.

This project is an opportunity to consider what any future protection works might be. For example, the need to retreat stopbanks further away from the river may be a consideration for the future. It will also be an expectation of the consenting process under the RMA that alternatives and future hazard risk has been addressed.

Stakeholders

The process of understanding the project stakeholders' interests (those with assets in the river corridor) has commenced and continues the relationships established in the development of the HRFMP. Meetings have been held with stakeholders to discuss the project specifics; these include HCC, NZTA, service providers (Transpower, Capacity, Wellington Electricity, Power Co) and GWRC officers including those with specific knowledge of use of the river corridor. The range of matters raised by stakeholders include those addressed in the summary discussion on issues and opportunities. Separate meetings were held with iwi representatives to discuss issues, opportunities and their potential involvement in the governance and management of the project. It is recognised that there are adjacent residential property owners and other people in the community that will also be affected by, or have an interest in, the project. A planned process of engagement and consultation will occur through the project's design, planning and implementation phases to ensure that these people's interests are well understood and provided for as appropriate.

Governance and Project Management Process

It is intended that the current Hutt Valley Flood Management Subcommittee that governs the implementation of the HRFMP will continue to do so for the city section protection improvements project. This Subcommittee has representation from asset stakeholders and has an understanding and overview of the HRFMP context.

In order to progress an understanding of, and preferably gain essential commitment towards, a combined project that incorporates the public and private benefits of Making Places, Melling intersection improvements and flood protection works, it is proposed that a new Project Steering Group be established. That group, comprising senior officers, would have representatives from key stakeholders, primarily HCC and NZTA.

The initial brief for that group would be to manage a nine month process to investigate and develop an integrated project 'master plan' for the subject area that incorporates the known plans of stakeholders. This process would include public input. It is anticipated that a Design Team would be appointed by the Steering Group to lead and produce the master plan. At the conclusion of this process, decisions would be made by the respective stakeholders as to whether to commit to invest in a share of the integrated master plan, or not. If the decision is to proceed collectively, the Project Steering Group (or similar) would continue to steer the delivery of the whole project with appropriate programming, cost sharing and responsibility. If the decision of stakeholders is not to invest, then GWRC will continue with the flood protection works as currently planned with the Steering Group providing a narrower focus as a point

of reference only. To expediently advance this collective design process GWRC will lead the process beginning with formulating a project plan with stakeholders before advancing its implementation.

There is some risk that the time spent may be 'lost' if resolution cannot be reached over the integrated master plan, or the required investment confirmed by the respective stakeholders. However, the potential opportunity to deliver multilayered public benefits should be embraced because of the extensive collective benefits beyond just improving flood protection. If successful, an integrated project can reasonably be expected to deliver benefits for Hutt City and the region through increased flood protection, regionally significant open space with recreational improvements, river environment with habitat improvements, as well it being a catalyst for private investment in the city together with improved highway and local road performance.

The risk of 'lost time' could be reduced by carrying out some of the investigations required for flood protection works during this period such as additional modelling, geotechnical investigations and so on. However, the additional time for the master planning process is expected to be relatively short and any preemptive investigations may prove to be wasted if the master plan identifies new propositions for the project that the investigations are not attuned to.