

7 November 2024

9(2)(a) - Privacy

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Cc Chris Bishop MP

I am writing on behalf of Hutt City Council to express our strong disappointment that KiwiRail's planned maintenance work on the Ava Rail Footbridge will result in the permanent closure of the pedestrian walkway. This walkway has long been an important link across the river, relied upon by residents, in particular school students, for daily access from the east to the west side of the city. With no other pedestrian river crossings between Waione Street Bridge and Ewan Bridge, a distance of approximately 2.5 km, its closure will significantly impact pedestrian movement and accessibility in our community.

The bridge's location within the centre of a designated yellow tsunami evacuation zone raises additional concerns. In the event of a significant earthquake, residents are advised to evacuate by foot or bike to higher ground to avoid potential tsunami risks. This footbridge is an important evacuation route for residents in the surrounding areas. If it will no longer be available, it is crucial that alternative routes are clearly communicated to ensure the safety of our community in the event of an emergency.

Had we been informed earlier, Council could have considered funding options to replace the walkway in our Long Term Plan (LTP) for 2024-2034. Government funding for rail renewals work in Wellington was only announced in late May 2024, with KiwiRail confirming the inclusion of this bridge work in July. By then, our LTP had already been agreed, and we were unaware of the need to remove the pedestrian walkway. Consequently, no funding was allocated to replace this critical link across the river.

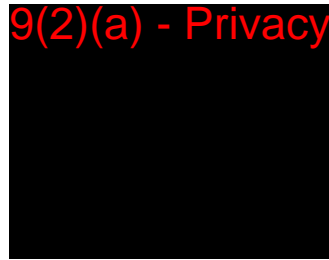
While we understand that this maintenance work is essential, we would appreciate further information on its urgency and timing. Given that the bridge may be included within the scope of the Cross Valley Connections programme, we believe there may be benefits to coordinating these efforts. Aligning the timing of this bridge maintenance with the physical works planned for Cross Valley could help reduce disruption to residents and avoid potential duplication of efforts.

Finally, effective communication and engagement will be essential in managing this transition. We expect that KiwiRail will ensure thorough and timely public communication with residents, school students, and local businesses in the area. This must include targeted outreach, well-placed signage, and a proactive presence on social media to reach all members of the community who depend on this route.

We look forward to hearing back from you on the points raised above.

Ngā mihi nui,

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Campbell Barry