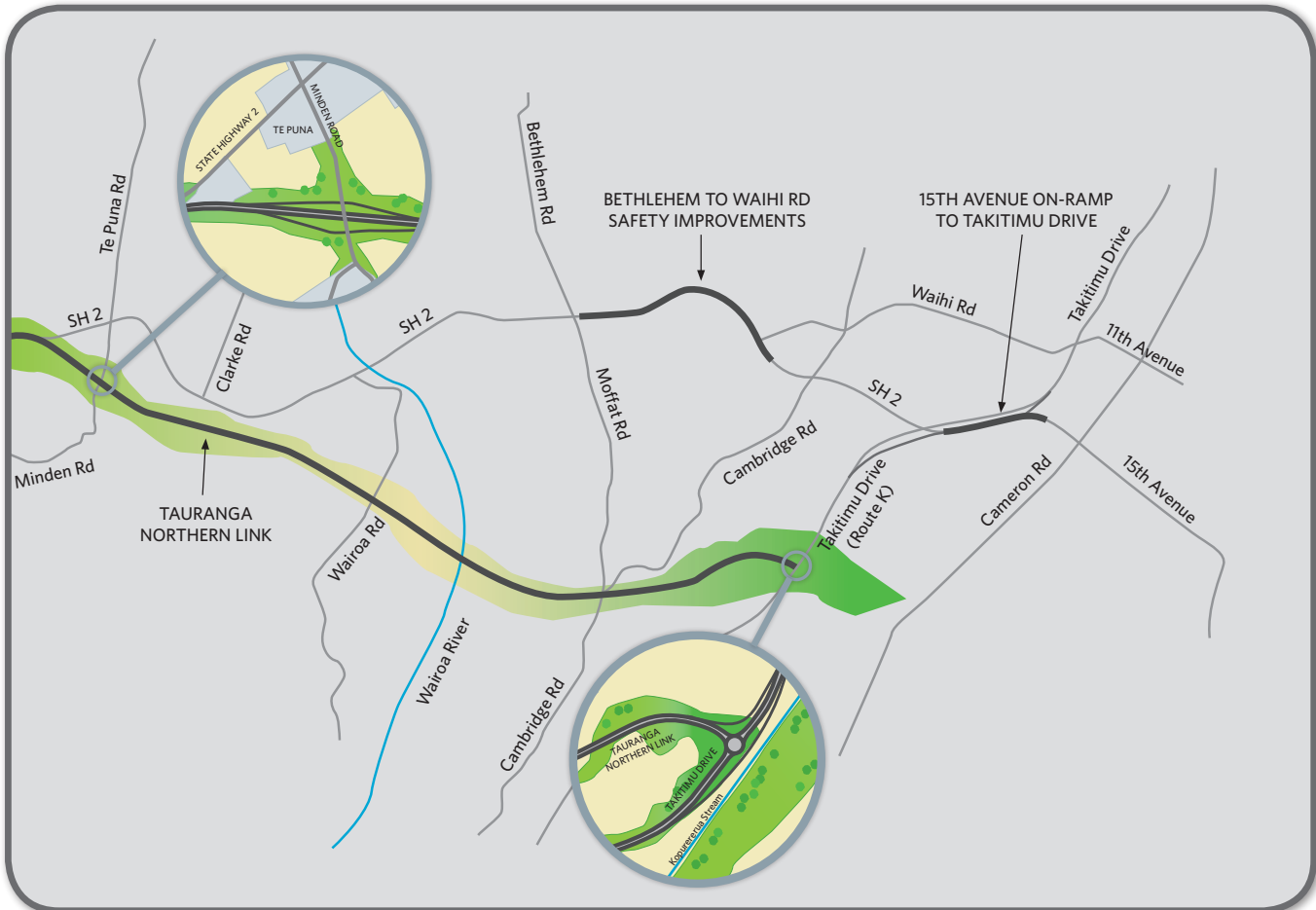




## Tauranga Northern Link secondary investigation



### Project overview

The Tauranga Northern Link (TNL) is a 6.8km inland highway route which runs from just west of Te Puna to Takitimu Drive (Route K toll road).

Once built, the TNL will separate local and state highway traffic. It will reduce travel time, improve trip reliability, freight movements and safety, as well as relieve congestion. It will also improve access and support public transport, cycling and walking on the current state highway route through Bethlehem and Te Puna.

The TNL sits within what is called the Northern Corridor that is a nationally significant tourist route known as the Pacific Coast Highway and is a regionally strategic commercial and freight link for the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA). It is also a busy local commuter link for residents.

Approximately 18,500 vehicles currently travel on State Highway 2 (SH2) at the Wairoa River Bridge each day. Nine percent or 1700 of those are heavy commercial vehicles. As commercial and residential development continues in areas north of Tauranga, traffic volumes are predicted to reach nearly 40,000 vehicles per day by 2031. As traffic increases, safety and congestion issues need to be taken into consideration.

The NZTA looked at two other projects along the Northern Corridor - the first was a possible link from Fifteenth Avenue to Takitimu Drive (Route K) and the second involved improvements to SH2 between Bethlehem and Waihi Road.

## Progress

Since the two February open days, the project team has been carrying out extensive ground investigations and analysis, traffic modelling and reviewing the economic viability of the alternative designs. Through this process and review of the feedback received from the open days, the NZTA has identified that the following adjustments to the designations are necessary in order to meet predicted traffic demands, current design standards and to reduce the overall capital cost of the project.

### The western connection – Minden Road interchange

At the last open days two options were presented for the western connection which links the TNL to SH2. These were:

- Loop Road interchange
- Minden Road interchange.

Both options would be grade separated and will provide a continuous flow of traffic along the TNL. It was identified that the two options would have differing traffic flows. The Minden Road interchange attracted a 5% higher traffic flow than Loop Road and it is expected that those living in the Te Puna area will be more likely to use the TNL instead of Te Puna Station Road, hence the higher traffic volume at the Minden Road interchange. Feedback received at the open days indicated that the majority preferred the Minden Road interchange over the Loop Road interchange because it captured more traffic and provided a more direct route.

Taking that feedback into consideration and the assessment from the investigations, the NZTA will look to create a diamond shaped interchange with on and off-ramps at Minden Road and remove the proposed on and off-ramps at Clarke Road. The Minden Road ramps will link to a new bridge along Minden Road which will pass over the TNL. In the near future, the NZTA intends to proceed with an alteration to designation to accommodate the interchange.

### The eastern connection – Takitimu Drive and 15th Avenue

The eastern connection will see the connection of the TNL to Takitimu Drive. Two options were investigated by the NZTA and presented at the last two open days. These were:

- a three-leg roundabout
- grade separated movements .

The investigations concluded that a grade-separated interchange was not required until well into the future. It is expected that changes to the original designation, including an alteration at 15th Avenue link to Takitimu Drive and the removal of the Cambridge Road on and off-ramps, will be reviewed again at the detailed design phase. Access to the Smiths Farm Reserve will still be provided from Cambridge Road.

## What happens next?

Funding for the TNL project is yet to receive approval for design and construction. However, the project will be reviewed on an annual basis alongside other projects in terms of its national priority.

### SH2 Bethlehem to Waihi Road safety improvement project

The desired realigning and widening to four lanes on SH2 from Bethlehem to Waihi Road is unlikely to proceed in the near future due to the high cost of improving weak ground conditions. However, in the near future, the NZTA will look to provide safety improvements, including barriers (median and roadside), painted median, improved signage, speed threshold treatment and shoulder widening. The improvements being considered are all within the current road reserve. Once the investigation is complete, the NZTA will be in a position to apply for resource consents.

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