

Good afternoon

Saturday will mark six months since the start of this historic closure. It's been a long haul already—and as you know we still have a ways to go—but I can report it's been another week of cracking progress up on the slip. Crews are hard out on Bench #4, and we expect to get started on Bench #5 in the next week or so. The weather's been cooperating, our [grass seed is taking hold](#) and I'm confident that we're on track and that good progress will continue.

### Up on the slip

As I mentioned, the guys are powering away at Bench #4.

They've reached the final level for Bench #4 on the Ashhurst end, and grading and bulldozing are now underway. Once this work is finished, we'll get going on a similar operation at the Woodville end. By next week, we expect to begin cutting Bench #5.

Here's the latest cross-section diagram—we've come down another 16 meters since 9 February and continue to go full tilt:



And here's what it looks like side-on:



When you look back at where we started—it's amazing how far we've come. Check out this early shot from back in December—what an amazing difference.



And here's a shot from on the slip itself:



Here you can also see the grass coming down the edge ("batter") of Bench #1, and we've hydroseeded half of Bench #2's batter as well. The hydroseeded areas are settling well into cracks within the batters, and we

expect to see strong growth over the coming weeks. This may seem a small thing, but successful hydroseeding will help jump-start the regeneration of plant life on the slope—an important step towards repairing the environment.

We are still hitting some pretty tough areas of hard greywacke, which is doing its best to slow us down. Luckily, the rock breaker is still on the job, so the crew just keeps powering through!



Rock on!

And while the weather's been on our side, the elements are still giving us plenty to contend with. Surface conditions are pretty wet and muddy down from the gorge track to the start of Bench #1, reminding us all of just how thankful we are not to have to deal with this sticky stuff on the benches themselves. Fingers crossed that the fine weather holds...



Glad it's just muddy on the path

### **Visit from the Minister of Transport**

Yesterday we welcomed new Minister of Transport Gerry Brownlee to the slip site. It was great for him to see the enormity of the job for himself, and we were all glad to hear that re-opening the road is a top priority for the government. I was also personally impressed by his supportive comments about our work, and I know everyone involved really appreciated the Minister making the effort to see it all for himself.



Transport Minister Gerry Brownlee (centre) with NZTA Chief Executive Geoff Dangerfield (left)

The Minister also reinforced that SH3 through the gorge is still the best option as a link between Manawatu and Hawke's Bay, and said that government would look at what was needed to upgrade the Saddle Road and Pahiatua Track to accommodate traffic from any future long-term closure.

Here's a sample of some of the media coverage generated by the Minister's visit:

Manawatu Standard: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/manawatu-standard/news/6435323/Minister-MP-at-odds-over-Gorge>

Dominion Post: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/6434917/Compo-possible-for-gorge-linked-losses>, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/6430511/Manawatu-Gorge-still-best-option>

TV3: <http://www.3news.co.nz/Brownlee-a-road-block-to-the-Manawatu-Gorge/tabid/423/articleID/243164/Default.aspx>

### **Alternative routes**

Maintenance crews remain busy on the detour routes, with a heightened work programme in place. We are doing as much upgrade work as possible while still keeping these roads open, and any decisions on future upgrades will have to happen once we have re-opened the gorge. But as the Minister said, this will still be a while off, and for now our top priority remains getting the gorge road re-opened safely.

### **The Gorge-ous Ball**

If you're looking for something fabulous to do next weekend, why not "rock up" to the Gorge-ous Ball at the Woodville Racecourse on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup>? The event is being organised by the good people of the Kumeroa Hopelands School committee and will serve as a fundraiser for both the school and the Woodville Fire Brigade. You can dress up to the nines (or not—your choice), dance to Palmy band Flip, and enjoy supper and a full bar, all for only \$35. Tickets are available by emailing [gorgeousball@gmail.com](mailto:gorgeousball@gmail.com)

What a great way to bring the community together—good luck to the organisers for a really successful evening.

And that's it from me this week. Keep a good thought for the boys up on the slip, and let's hope this spell of good weather holds. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me on 06 953 6072 or at [david.mcgonigal@nzta.govt.nz](mailto:david.mcgonigal@nzta.govt.nz)

All our updates and media releases, plus more photographs and diagrams, are on our dedicated web page – <http://nzta.govt.nz/manawatu-gorge>

If there's any other information you'd like, or anything more we might be able to help you with, please get in touch. If there's some way we can help you, we'll be happy to do it.

Have a wonderful weekend and please drive safely.

David