Hawke’s Bay’s largest roading project gets underway

Transport Minister Steven Joyce turned the first sod marking the start of construction on the State Highway 2 Matahorua Gorge Realignment project in October.

Nine months ahead of schedule, construction has started on the NZ Transport Agency’s (NZTA) largest project in the Hawke’s Bay region. Its planned completion date is January 2011.

This project was one of five advanced by the Government’s Jobs and Growth stimulus package announced earlier this year.

“The work will come as a relief to those who travel this section of State Highway 2,” says Transport Minister Steven Joyce.

“This work will result in improved visibility and increased road widths along the new alignment. It will bring real benefits in terms of safety, efficiency and route security.”

“It is our expectation that the majority of suppliers and subcontractors for this project will be regionally based. Using a regional workforce and material, local contractors and their communities will benefit from the increase in work,” says Mr Joyce.

The $30M project will employ around 60 people on site and more than 45 more involved in supplying materials and providing support services.

Located between Napier and Wairoa, this section of SH2 currently sees around 4000 vehicles using it each day. Many of these are logging and farming trucks on their way to and from Napier’s port.

The project will shorten the route from 4.5km to 3.1km and will feature a 137m long bridge crossing the 40m deep gorge and a road over rail bridge. This will replace some 4km of narrow and twisting state highway and two ageing bridges.

As the realignment is constructed off the route of the existing SH2, changes will generally not be obvious to motorists until approximately May next year when the bridge is being constructed.

Please see page 3 for more information on measures the NZTA and our contractors are taking to minimise disruption to the surrounding communities and motorists using this section of SH2 while the project is underway.

The NZTA has been working closely with the local community and iwi and is looking forward to strengthening these relationships as the project continues.
Sod turning marks start of construction

On October 2, NZTA’s Central Regional Director, Jenny Chetwynd, joined Minister of Transport Steven Joyce, in turning the first sod on the project.

The Hawke’s Bay turned the weather on with a bright spring morning for the celebration which was opened by Bevan Taylor, representative for Taiwhenua iwi, who conducted a blessing.

Some 30 guests attended the event including Mayor of Hastings Lawrence Yule, Mayor of Wairoa Les Probert, and local community members.

The sod was turned on the hillside along the route of the new alignment, towards the location of the new gorge and road over rail bridges. This land used to be part of the Matahorua Station which was formerly owned by Mr Probert.

Ms Chetwynd says the NZTA is pushing the boundaries in their innovative approach to the project.

“We’ve been able to save millions of dollars on the project thanks to the innovative and cost effective design of the viaduct proposed by our contractor Downer EDI Works. This means the project will be significantly less disruptive to motorists, while retaining all of its benefits.”

Mayor Yule commented that “It is great to see this strategic investment in Hawke’s Bay roads. Many Hawke’s Bay people pass through the gorge on the way to and from Wairoa and Gisborne”.

Following the ceremony, guests enjoyed morning tea in the newly built wool shed on the Matahorua Station which has been constructed as part of the advance enabling works due to the project dividing this section of land.

First stages of work

The contract for the detailed design and construction of the realignment was awarded in late September to contractors Downer EDI Works, who had already maintained this section of highway for many years.

Between January and October this year, the NZTA undertook enabling works to give the contractor a clean worksite. This included relocating a large section of the Matahorua Station farm buildings and access roads.

Since then, environmental protection and site clearance work has been underway. Silt ponds are being installed to protect waterways from potential silt run-off resulting from construction activities. Buildings, trees and stumps have also been removed in preparation for the road to be built.

Earthworks operations, targeted to be substantially complete by next winter, have started on both sides of the gorge.

Construction of the gorge bridge and road over rail bridge will begin in the New Year.

Protecting the environment and the community

Traffic Management

Most of the construction work will take place away from the existing SH2, so motorists’ journeys will generally not be disrupted. A detailed traffic management plan will be in place throughout the project to maintain traffic flow through the work.

For motorists’ safety, speed restrictions will be in place in the gorge while work is being carried out on the bridge overhead. The intention is to maintain the use of the existing SH2 at all times. We have set up a freephone 24 hour hotline for motorists wishing to call about anything regarding the project, 0800 628 246.

When the new gorge bridge spans are being lifted into place, the road will likely be closed for short periods of time (up to 10 minutes). Lifting operations are not due to start until approximately May 2010 and will be timed to minimise disruption and inconvenience to motorists. NZTA and its contractors will continue to liaise closely with the community, regional partners and the Road Transport Authority on this issue.

We will provide more detail of the closures in the next newsletter in the first quarter of 2010.

Conveniences to motorists will be timed to minimise disruption and inconvenience to motorists. NZTA and its contractors will continue to liaise closely with the community, regional partners and the Road Transport Authority on this issue.

Noise monitoring

Noise levels will be monitored throughout the project to ensure they are kept in line with the project’s environmental monitoring plan. Working hours will be from Monday to Sunday 6.00am – 7.00pm, with no major works at night and no work on public holidays currently envisaged.

Environmental measures

Environmental protection measures will be put in place before starting earthworks operations. These will be regularly inspected and maintained throughout the project. All of the local waterways will also be protected to avoid any pollution from nearby groundwater.

Picture perfect

In an NZTA first, construction monitoring cameras are being installed for use on this project.

These cameras take several photos an hour, which are then regularly sent via the internet to a remote database. The photos can be accessed off-site to watch work taking place in real-time and also to review older photos. As the project is located in a remote area, this will be a useful tool to all involved in the project to watch the project progress. The public will also be able to access some photos on the project website.

The system has the ability to run a time lapse video using various images taken from each day, so eventually a short video can be produced to show the bridge construction sequence sped up.

One camera will monitor work on the new gorge bridge with other cameras moved around site as necessary to capture different parts of the work throughout the project.
Frequently asked questions

What are the benefits of the project?
The realignment will provide a shorter, safer, easier and more reliable route across the gorge.

When does work start and finish?
The first sod was turned on October 2 marking the start of construction and the road is scheduled to open to motorists around January 2011.

Where is the project located?
The SH2 realignment is located between Napier and Wairoa, approximately 50 km from Napier and 66km from Wairoa. Please see pages 2 and 3 for a graphic of the realignment.

How will traffic be affected?
Most of the construction work will take place away from the existing SH2, so motorists’ journeys will generally not be disrupted. For the safety of motorists, and workers, speed restrictions and traffic management plans will be in place throughout the project. There may be some times when the road needs to be closed for short periods of time. Please see page 3 for more information.

What is the project cost?
The estimated cost is around $30m.

Who can I contact for more information?
For more information you can contact NZTA’s Project Manager Robert Strong on 09 928 8762 or robert.strong@nzta.govt.nz or visit the project website at www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/matahorua

More about the Gorge Bridge

The gorge bridge comprises a 137m long, three-span combined superstructure with twin supporting steel beams and a concrete slab in a ladder deck arrangement. Four steel piers will be embedded into the rock on the upper slopes of the gorge.

More about the road over rail bridge

The rail bridge comprises a 37.4m long, rectangular frame structure with a span of 8.45m with pre-cast concrete walls. The walls are supported by strip footings founded onto rock. Wingwalls, which act as rail impact walls and retaining walls, are provided at each corner of the box structure. This bridge is mainly a pre-cast concrete structure, so the construction of this bridge on site will be relatively quick.