



New Ōpaoa River Bridge



Construction is now underway on the New Ōpaoa River Bridge near Blenheim. The new bridge will improve safety and journey times on State Highway 1.

Planning for the project started in 2015, with investigations showing the existing bridge, built in 1917, was too narrow and unsuitable for current traffic, particularly heavy vehicles, and vulnerable in an earthquake.

In July, Downer New Zealand Ltd was formally appointed to carry out the construction, with completion scheduled for mid-2020, including road realignment and landscaping.

The start of work was commemorated with a special sod-turning and blessing event on 4 September, with neighbouring residents, iwi, business and local community representatives in attendance, alongside the project team.

A total budget of \$21 million has been allocated to cover the cost of bridge construction, professional services and moving the telecommunications cables in the vicinity.

The existing bridge, a Heritage NZ Category 1 Heritage Place, will be retained for pedestrians and cyclists.

PROJECT BENEFITS:

- Improved traffic flow for freight and light vehicles with greater certainty of travel times.
- A safer bridge structure that is more resilient to natural hazards – making State Highway 1 more secure as New Zealand's key freight route connecting the North and South Islands.
- Easier access for people in Marlborough to travel into central Blenheim.

Hui with iwi

Before the sod-turning and blessing event on 4 September, a hui was held with local iwi at Ūkaipō, Rangitāne Cultural Facility in Grovetown, to discuss potential landscaping and artwork. Representatives were invited from Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Rārua and Te Rūnanga a Rangitāne o Wairau.

Discussions focused on elements of landscaping, particularly the area to the north of the bridge that presents the opportunity for an attractive 'gateway' to Blenheim. Stories that will inform landscaping and interpretation panels were shared; as was the potential for a pouwhenua to stand at the 'gateway'. Iwi are supportive and keen to be involved in the creation of a pouwhenua.

Members of the project team look forward to continuing working with iwi throughout the course of the project.

The new bridge

The design for the New Ōpaoa River Bridge takes account of both practical considerations and community input. The feedback included the community's desire to retain the heritage bridge and have a simple design for the new bridge so as not to detract from the heritage bridge, nicknamed the Banana Bridge.

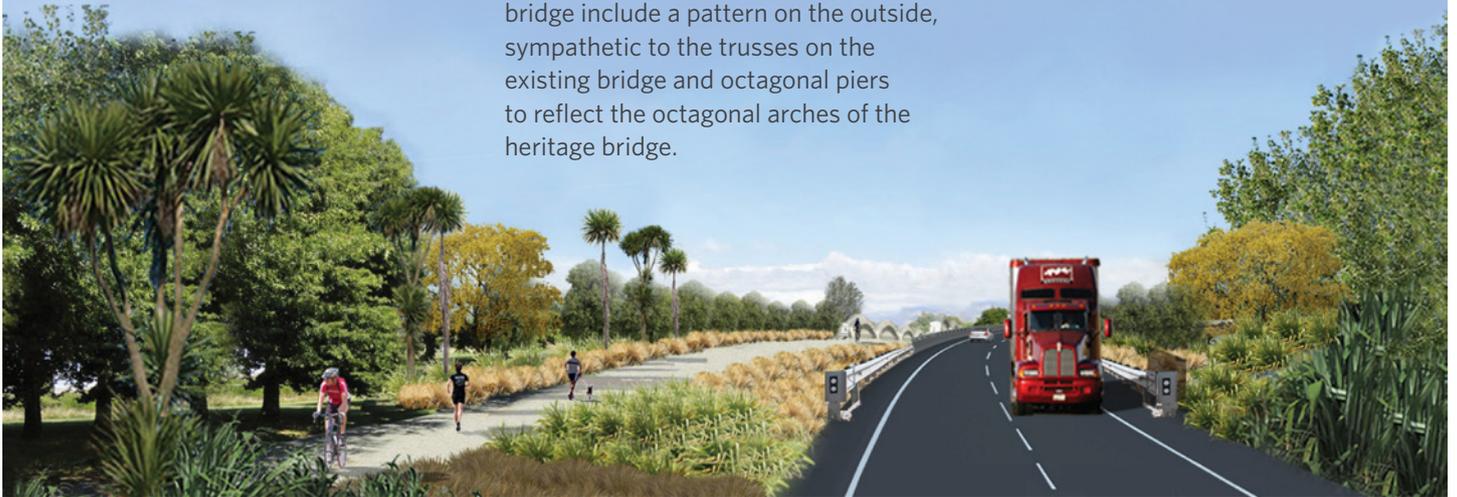
The new bridge will sit alongside and to the west of the existing concrete arched bridge over the Ōpaoa River.

It will be simple, have low sides to maintain views of the existing bridge and, most importantly, be functional and safe.

Architectural features of the new bridge include a pattern on the outside, sympathetic to the trusses on the existing bridge and octagonal piers to reflect the octagonal arches of the heritage bridge.

The new bridge is 188 metres long with a carriageway 10 metres wide, and curved for a third of its length at the southern end.

Its continuous slender deck has only two joints at the abutments to reduce noise and vibration effects on neighbouring residents.



Construction plan

Work has been planned to limit disruption to neighbouring houses and businesses, traffic flows and the environment as much as possible, with restricted access to the river at times to prevent disturbing fish during the spawning season. However, due to the nature of the works, there will be some disturbance to the surrounding area during this significant construction project.

In early October, work began relocating and re-laying underground communication cables, in preparation for the construction of the new bridge. Single lane traffic management was in place on State Highway 1 for the first week of this work. We thank road users, particularly neighbouring businesses for their patience. We appreciate the inconvenience traffic management on an already busy road can have and are exploring ways to further minimise disruption during construction as best we can.

When services have been diverted out of the way, foundation work for the new bridge will start. Major ground improvements on both sides of the river to improve the performance of the two bridge abutments in earthquakes will take several months to complete. This involves excavation and boring approximately 500 columns between six and ten metres deep, which will be filled with compacted stone aggregate to densify the soil, and the installation of 10 H piles at each abutment that are 25m deep.

Starting later this year, steel casings will be sunk for the intervening seven piers up to 22 metres deep to gravel layers with sufficient strength to carry the necessary loads, taking some seven months to complete.

With the new bridge being built adjacent to an existing road, traffic disruption should mostly be kept to a minimum, aside from when the connection from State Highway 1 to either end of the new bridge is built, starting in mid-2019. More details on traffic management for this phase will come closer to the time.

When construction is complete, a landscape plan will be carried out to beautify the area and create an attractive gateway to Blenheim that clearly marks the northern entrance to the town.



Visit the project page on our website, for more information about this new bridge: www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/new-opaoa-river-bridge

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