



# SH56 PALMERSTON NORTH TO ŌPIKI SPEED REVIEW

Community Engagement Summary

JUNE – JULY 2022

# 1. BACKGROUND

The Government's Road to Zero strategy sets out a vision of an Aotearoa where no one is killed or seriously injured on our roads.

Too many people are being killed and seriously injured in crashes on State Highway 56 between Palmerston North and Ōpiki. The five-year period between January 2017 – December 2021 saw a total of 113 crashes along this route, which resulted in five deaths and 17 serious injuries (Table 1 below). To help us fully understand the issues on the road, in June and July 2022 we asked locals to give us their views on speed on this road.

## Speed report – key findings

Crash Analysis System (CAS) is New Zealand's primary tool for capturing information on where, when, and how road crashes occur.

CAS data outlining the number of reported crashes, and death and injuries that resulted from these crashes is presented in the table below:

5-year SH3 Crash Statistics – Palmerston North to Ōpiki	
5-year Period Start	2017
5-year Period End	2021
Total crashes	113
Total Injuries – All	72
Total Injuries – Fatal	5
Total Injuries – Serious	17
Total Injuries – Minor	50

*5-year SH3 Crash Statistics – Palmerston North to Ōpiki*

## 2. ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Community engagement took place between 13 June to 11 July 2022 with a range of methods to engage with stakeholders and the community being used. These methods included:

- A project email address
- Project webpage with information, online survey and link to Social Pinpoint interactive map
- Information pamphlet
- Two community drop-in sessions
- Media releases and stakeholder updates
- Online workshops

Thank you to everyone who came along to one of the events or who used the online feedback opportunities. We had many useful conversations and received over 250 pieces of feedback including:

- 84 comments and suggestions on the Social Pinpoint interactive map
- 98 pieces of feedback from drop-in sessions (including verbal comments that were recorded on post it notes)
- 63 email submissions
- Six online survey responses

We spoke with Ngāti Whakare, who are in support of safer speed limits on SH56 between Palmerston North and Ōpiki.

Additionally, Rangitāne o Manawatū have let us know they have concerns about the speed limit being 100km from Palmerston North to just out of Palmy heading to Levin.

Two online stakeholder workshops were attended by representatives from:

- Palmerston North City Council
- Horowhenua District Council
- The Automobile Association (AA) NZ
- Fire and Emergency NZ
- Bus and Coach Association of New Zealand and Rental Vehicle Association
- St Johns Ambulance NZ
- National Road Carriers
- Heavy Haulage Association
- Electra District Fleet
- Fonterra
- NZ Post
- National Rod Freight Association
- HDC Waste Management

Community drop-in sessions were held at Longburn School and Ōpiki School to talk to people face to face and invite them to give feedback online. At these sessions we talked to residents living on the road, members of the school communities and representatives from businesses and organisations based along the road.



Figure 1: Drop-in session held at Ōpiki Primary School Library

### 3. SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

#### Main themes

We received a lot of feedback from community members about their experiences driving along this road and where they felt the safety concerns were.

The main feedback themes were:

#### Road improvement and upgrades

People told us that they would like to see improvements to the road as well as regular maintenance. As a large part of this roadway is on swamp land, it does tend to be bumpy in places. People would also like to see safety features installed such as median and side barriers, widening of the shoulder and passing lanes.

#### Safety around schools

With schools along this section of SH56 we received a lot of comments around the speed and safety around schools. Children are needing to cross the busy road for pick up and drop offs and there is concern about the speed limit in these locations and children not being able to judge gaps correctly. Schools shared their desire for safer crossing options. There were calls for speed reductions around schools and suggestions for a Variable Speed Limit (VSL) for school hours where there isn't one already.



## **Intersection safety**

There were many comments about the intersections along the state highway with council roads. People felt that the speed differential between the two causes problems.

**Tiakitahuna/Jackeytown Road intersection** was mentioned most frequently as a dangerous intersection, with the difficult turning movements in and out of the side roads. There were calls for a speed review for this intersection as well as some infrastructure improvements, such as a roundabout, to improve safety. Other intersections of concern include the SH56/57 intersection and Te Wanaka intersection.

## **Suitability as a state highway**

People told us about their concerns for large vehicles/trucks on this road, which can further deteriorate the bumpy road. It was noted that often there are floods and traffic must be diverted on to side roads which are not suitable for heavy vehicles. There was some feedback about the suitability of this section of road as a state highway and suggestion that SH57 or SH1 be used as the main route instead.

## **Signage**

We received suggestions for more signage to warn drivers of upcoming hazards, such as speed changes, intersections, and uneven surfaces, especially in relation to the existing speed limits, around the **Longburn Bridge** and from **Longburn to Palmerston North** where it was felt the speed limit was sometimes misunderstood. There were also calls for more prominent signage around Longburn and Ōpiki schools to remind drivers to slow down. Existing signage for the schools is seen by some to be insufficient and it was noted that the electronic signs are often not working correctly.

## **Potential delays or driver frustration**

Some people felt that a speed reduction in the area would lead to travel delays and drivers becoming frustrated, which could increase the risk of dangerous behaviour e.g., attempting an unsafe passing manoeuvre. There were also concerns about potential productivity loss from delays.

## **Possibility of traffic diverting to side roads**

There was concern that a slower speed limit on the state highway would drive people to use the side roads instead. People thought that this could cause accidents as these roads are not suited for heavy traffic use and may have tractors and livestock movement as an unfamiliar hazard to newcomers.

## **Driver behaviour and education**

Many people commented on dangerous driving by other drivers – such as driving while fatigued or under the influence, breaking the existing speed limits or risky overtaking behaviour. There were suggestions on increasing the amount and quality of driver training for those learning as well as those already licensed.

## **Safety in the area**

Many people felt that this section of the state highway was generally safe. However, there were some concerns around speed especially in the following areas:

- Around Longburn School, and Carey Road
- Around Ōpiki School
- Longburn Bridge
- Tiakitahuna Road / Jackeytown Road Intersection

- Tane Road
- Rongotea Road
- Karere Road
- Te Wanaka Road
- Outside Totally Vets



Figure 2: Feedback recorded during community drop-in session

## Stakeholder submissions

Email submissions were received from the below organisations.

### Palmerston North City Council

Palmerston North City Council noted that the new Kikiwhenua residential area fronting the Mangaone Stream requires a speed limit reduction on SH56 and safety improvements to the SH56 / Te Wanaka Road intersection before development can take place. Council also foresees urbanisation of most of SH56 between Longburn and the Mangaone Stream in the future which could warrant 50 or 60km/h speed limit. It suggested that in the interim, an 80km/h speed limit for this section is implemented along with a 60km/h variable speed

limit at the Te Wanaka Road intersection. There is council desire for an urban speed limit through Longburn to reflect the nature of a township.

Council also noted that under the Palmy Transport System Improvement Plan (PTSIP), the goal is to prioritise SH56 as the primary route for freight prior to implementation of a downstream bridge connection to enable periodisation of SH57, however if speeds are reduced on SH56 freight may choose not to use it.

Council urged consistency with the speed limits without sudden drops i.e. 100-50km/h at the Mangaone Stream, to encourage compliance and reduce confusion.

### **Horowhenua District Council**

Horowhenua District Council recognises the importance of the SH56 to the region and suggests that 100km/h should be retained along the corridor with further investment in safety infrastructure. It noted that exceptions would be for the Ōpiki and Longburn townships where a speed review would be welcomed. Council is concerned that a lower speed limit outside of the townships would lead to risky overtaking and increase the number of head on crashes. It noted that a lower speed would not feel appropriate to many drivers due to the long and straight alignment.

### **AA Manawatū District**

AA Manawatū does not believe the crash data provides a case to reduce speed limits on this road. The AA is committed to reducing death and serious injuries on our roads and believe in some circumstances the use of a reduced speed limit may be appropriate but would like to see other measures in place to reduce the risk.

The AA suggested that physical works improvements to the SH56/SH57 intersection and the Tiakitahuna intersection would reduce the number of accidents, and that a speed limit reduction is not warranted. The AA would support a variable speed limit of 70km/h at this intersection in the meantime.

### **Cycling Action Network**

Cycling Action Network strongly supports setting speed limits that increase safety on SH56. It recommends a limit of 80km/h, with Ōpiki and Longburn town centres at 50km/h as well as design changes to slow down speeds. Cycling Action Network believes these changes will improve safety and reduce serious deaths and injuries with negligible travel time increases.

### **Federated Farmers**

Federated Farmers are concerned that speed reviews are planned in lieu of highway improvements and maintenance. It noted that the exception to this is in school areas where it understands the need for speed reduction. Federated Farmers is concerned that slower speed limits on the corridor will lead to driver frustration and risk-taking behaviour as well as causing people to drive on side roads which they believe are less safe and have less Police presence. It is also concerned that lowering speed limits without providing other safety improvements would increase driving time for rural contractors and service teams.

### **Longburn School**

Longburn School requested that the status of SH56 outside their school should be that of an Urban School and set to 40 km/h. There is a car park and entrance to school off SH56. With school bus and parent/caregiver pick up and drop off zones in the area, Longburn School said there are risks to children crossing the state highway to enter school and

currently they need to be supervised by a teacher. Longburn School would like a proper crossing installed, and better school zone signage. The school is experiencing roll growth and more and more cars are parking on SH56. It also noted that many people need to cross SH56 to access village facilities where the shared path currently ends, and there is a high volume of traffic passing through and sometimes stopping suddenly for pedestrians, causing collisions. Sunstrike was raised as an issue in the mornings affecting visibility of signage.

### Bainesse / Rangiotu Community Committee

The Bainesse / Rangiotu Community Committee believes that the road from Longburn to Rangiotu Road does not need a speed reduction. The Committee noted that this is because the road is straight with good visibility. The Committee feels that safety improvements that were installed over the last three years (a speed camera, guardrails and the merge lane from Rangiotu Road) have been successful in improving safety. It believes that the planned shared pathway can be built safely along the route without a reduction in speed being necessary.

## Area specific feedback

Area	Current Speed	Community Feedback
<b>Entrance to SH56 - Ōpiki</b>	100 km/h	In general people felt that this section of the state highway is straight and therefore safe to be travelled at the current speed of 100 km/h. The intersection with SH57 is seen by some as dangerous.
<b>Ōpiki township</b>	80 km/h	Most comments, including those not in support of a speed reduction on the open road sections, recognised a speed reduction through Ōpiki township was appropriate. There were some suggestions to drop the permanent speed around Ōpiki township to 50-70 km/h, specifically around the school.
<b>Ōpiki to South of Rangiotu Rd Intersection</b>	100 km/h	Most comments for this section mentioned that they felt the current speed is appropriate as it is relatively straight and safe. There were some comments in support of a reduction in speed to around 70km/h to 80 Km/h south of Alve Road due to the bumpy road in this area. Suggestions were to pull down the existing sign to extend the 80 km/h zone.
<b>Rangiotu Rd Intersection to Longburn</b>	100 km/h	Most people felt that the current speed of 100km/h is appropriate for this section, except for at the Tiakitahuna intersection, which was mentioned as unsafe and in need of interventions.
<b>Longburn township</b>	70 km/h	Comments around Longburn township were generally that 70 km/h is too fast and there were suggestions that 50 km/h would be more appropriate due to the homes and community venues in the area.
<b>Longburn to Palmerston North</b>	100 km/h	Many people mentioned that the 100km/h speed from Longburn to Palmerston North section is too fast, especially considering the amount of traffic coming in and out of Palmerston North. There were suggestions



		of changing to 80 km/h from Palmerston North to the bridge, then returning to 100 km/h.
--	--	---

## 4. SOME RESPONSES TO FEEDBACK

### Investment in improvements and maintenance

Setting and enforcing appropriate speeds and improving infrastructure are two ways we can create a transport system that enables everyone to get to the people and places important to them. But not all roads can be easily improved – for example, where there are funding constraints, or the surrounding environment limits the options for infrastructure improvements. Safety cameras and police enforcement also play a key role in speed management, by reminding and encouraging everyone to drive at the appropriate speed.

Waka Kotahi spends \$20 million annually on road maintenance in the Manawatū-Whanganui region. This includes pothole repair, shoulder restoration, lifting road slumps and replacing sections of highway that are in poor condition. SH56 has been made safer in recent years through infrastructure improvements. In 2018 we addressed the roadside hazard of deep open drains by installing approximately 6570 metres of guardrail. We have also widened sections of the road where possible. There are some sections of SH56, due to their challenging characteristics, that make infrastructure mitigation options such as widening the road difficult and expensive.

Managing speeds so they're right for how people use our roads and the environment around it is part of delivering Road to Zero, Aotearoa New Zealand's road safety strategy.

### Safety around schools / signage

30km/h variable speed limits were proposed for outside both Longburn and Ōpiki schools in the [Interim State Highway Speed Management Plan](#).

Consultation on the [Interim State Highway Speed Management Plan](#) closed in December 2022 and we expect to be able to confirm the plan in June 2023. If new speeds are implemented outside the schools, we will review the location and quality of signage.

### Intersection safety

The SH56/57 intersection is included in the [Interim State Highway Speed Management Plan](#) (outlined above), with a 60km/h variable speed limit on SH57 at the SH56 intersection. There are a substantial number of people who turn at this intersection, and this area would benefit from an intersection speed zone (ISZ) to reduce the risk and severity of any crash.

We have previously done some work in the Tiakitahuna intersection area to protect road users from roadside hazards. We have also investigated infrastructure improvements; however, the intersection could not be easily further improved.

Regarding the Te Wanaka intersection, we are aware of the residential development planned in the area and we will work with Palmerston North City Council in the future to ensure the intersection is fit for purpose.

## Driver behaviour / frustration

Road to Zero outlines a plan to build the safest road system we can, and work towards zero deaths and serious injuries on New Zealand roads. Road to Zero actions are guided by the four key principles of a Safe System—the international gold standard in road safety management. Road to Zero has five focus areas to guide our efforts towards improving road safety in New Zealand.

1. Infrastructure improvements and speed management
2. Vehicle safety
3. Work-related road safety
4. Road user choices

The Waka Kotahi Education programme aims to influence road user behaviour and encourage the correct behaviours on our roads. In the Manawatū-Whanganui region we work in partnership with Horizons Regional Council to deliver road safety initiatives in the region. In 2020-21 we helped deliver 43 road safety programmes addressing issues such as impaired driving, intersection crashes, older road users, driver distraction, young and high-risk drivers, vulnerable road users and car restraint use.

There is no evidence that we are aware of that shows a reduction in speed leads to an increase in unsafe overtaking manoeuvres.

## Use of side roads

If speeds were reduced on SH56, we don't expect many people would use the local roads instead because there isn't significant benefit of doing so. The state highway would still be the most direct route and safer than some of the side roads.

# 4. NEXT STEPS

## Managing speeds

To put people, and the diverse ways we use our roads and streets at the heart of how we plan and maintain our transport system, the way we manage speeds has recently changed.

A new Land Transport Rule: Setting of Speed Limits 2022 came into effect in May 2022, requiring road controlling authorities to develop speed management plans with a whole-of-network approach every three years, aligning with the National Land Transport Programme (NLTP) cycle.

As this legislation took effect during the current 2021-24 NLTP period, we took a step towards the new approach by developing the Interim State Highway Speed Management Plan which includes remaining speed-related activities within the current NLTP.

We're considering feedback from consultation on the Interim Speed Management Plan alongside existing information to finalise the plan. Once the plan has been certified, we'll publish it online, and implement speed limits during the time periods proposed in the plan.

Our full State Highway Speed Management Plan is a broader piece of work we are required to do next, and we will share a draft of this when it's ready.