



SH7 Maruia Springs to Reefton speed review

Summary of community engagement

14 November 2022

--

Copyright information

Copyright ©. This copyright work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. In essence, you are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work, as long as you attribute the work to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency and abide by the other licence terms. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Disclaimer

Waka Kotahi has endeavoured to ensure material in this document is technically accurate and reflects legal requirements. However, the document does not override governing legislation. Waka Kotahi does not accept liability for any consequences arising from the use of this document. If the user of this document is unsure whether the material is correct, they should refer directly to the relevant legislation and contact Waka Kotahi.

More information

If you have further queries, call our contact centre on 0800 699 000 or write to us:

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency
Private Bag 6995
Wellington 6141

This document is available on Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's website at www.nzta.govt.nz

Background

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency is identifying roads where safer speed limits can make a big difference in saving lives, and where communities are calling for change.

New Zealand's road safety strategy, Road to Zero, has a vision of an Aotearoa where no one is killed or seriously injured on our roads – Vision Zero.

One of the ways in which we support this strategy is by setting safe speed limits and improving road infrastructure to make our roads and transport network safer.

Between 2011 to 2020, there were a total of 112 crashes on State Highway 7 (SH7) between Maruia Springs and Reefton. Sixty of these crashes caused some form of injury, with one person killed and 17 people seriously injured.

People dying and being seriously injured on our roads should not be accepted as a price we are willing to pay for getting around. Everyone who uses our roads should be able to get to where they're going safely, and to help achieve this we can set safer speed limits.

Through the speed review process, we are working with the community to gather and share information and make sure we understand people's concerns along this road.

The road between Maruia Springs to Reefton is rural state highway that passes through remote farmland and woodland areas and through two small townships, Springs Junction and Blacks Point. SH7 is in the Buller District, in the West Coast Region.

The road is two-lane and generally curved with some winding sections and some difficult corners. There are very few intersections or accessways to houses or businesses along the road (except within the townships). This road also contains one passing lane and six slow vehicle bays. It is considered a typical rural highway.

On 27 July 2020 we received a petition from some members of the Blacks Point community asking us to make the speed limit safer through the Blacks Point town.

This report describes the process used to seek feedback from the community and organisations within the region from 10 November to 24 November 2021. The report also summarises the feedback we heard about their thoughts on the current speed limits and safety concerns for SH7 Maruia Springs to Reefton.

Below is the map of the current speed limits on this road.

7 Maruia Springs to Reefton speed review



Figure 1: Current speed limits on State Highway 7 Maruia Springs to Reefton

How we heard from you



Drop-in session at Blacks Point Museum 16 November 2021.

We held three drop-in sessions in Reefton, Blacks Point Museum and Springs Junction, asking people what they thought of the current speed limits, how they use the road and how they thought it could be made safer. We ran two online webinars for people to hear more about the project and to ask us questions about the review and the road. We invited people to give feedback online using our interactive map, and

spoke to residents, businesses and councils. We also gave police, emergency services, the AA and other road user groups the opportunity to share their views.

We had many useful conversations and received more than 222 pieces of feedback including:

- 141 total online visits from 57 unique online visitors
- 55 Social Pinpoint Comments from 47 unique users
- 26 letter/email feedback from stakeholder organisations and individual residents



Drop-in session at Blacks Point Museum 16 November 2021.

Feedback was also received from the following organisations:

- Buller District Council
- West Coast Regional Council
- West Coast Regional Transport Committee
- Canterbury West Coast District Council of NZ Automobile Association (AA)
- Road Transport Association New Zealand
- Blacks Point Residents and Ratepayers Association

What we heard

There were strong views about speeds on the road between Maruia Springs and Reefton. Over half the submissions did not see a need for any changes to current speed limits, while a third of the submissions were mixed. The mixed responses could see the need for lower speed limits in some township locations,

but not in other sections of the road. The remainder said it would be safer to introduce lower speed limits across the state highway.

Many comments from people also highlighted other areas of safety concerns and some did not think lowering speed limits would make a difference to the severity of crashes.

Feedback showed people felt that lower speed limits would lead to driver frustration and inefficiency for commercial transport operators. Many mentioned that road maintenance and investment in improving road design and infrastructure would be a greater safety improvement than speed limit changes.

“I have had one accident on this road. It was a large Birch tree which fell in front of me and I didn't have time to stop. Luckily, I was driving well below the speed limit as I was seeing how many MPG I could get out of this car as a test. This tree was an accident waiting to happen, as it was rotten and should have been felled if the road maintenance had been carried out correctly.”

Some comments indicated that driver behaviour was a greater contributor to crashes, with excess speed, drug and alcohol use and cell phone use being the major causes. There were calls for more policing of this behaviour.

“Reducing open road speed limits only creates further hazards - driver disengagement, driver frustration, on the road longer so more driver fatigue, confusion as to what speed limit we should be doing as it changes so much between springs and Christchurch already. Built up areas 50-70km/h, major intersections 80km/h, open road 100km/h. Fix the actual issues as cars are the safest they have ever been - Driver education, cell phone use - increase the fines, better road quality and condition.”

There were also comments that drivers from outside the area are at greater risk of crashes as they are unfamiliar with the roads and the effect of seasonal conditions on the road surface (for example ice during winter). Many comments mentioned an increase in people visiting in recent years, increasing the pressure on traffic in local hot spots.

“When vehicles are traveling across the Rahu Saddle from Springs Junction to Reefton they spend much of the drive winding through beautiful beech forest. Once they get to the first farm the scenery opens up, the road levels out and straightens so vehicles naturally tend to speed up. Then just past Crushington there are a couple of tight bends which become icy in winter months. Over the years these corners have caught many drivers unawares. There is a need for clear signage to encourage drivers to slow down to safer speeds as they approach this potentially treacherous section of the road from the east.”

There were a few key areas where the feedback showed concerns around speed. These were focused on the Blacks Point township with specific locations identified as hazardous due to increased pedestrian and cyclist use, greater traffic and the nature of the road itself with reduced visibility from the road curvature.

There was also concern around the areas frequented by cyclists and pedestrians and a call for more walking and cycling tracks.

“Support speed reduction in Blacks Point. The particular areas of concern are the speed around the museum and whirlpool corner which are frequented heavily by tourists in summer and the intersection of SH7 with Frankton St. They would like to see warning signs about cyclists and ideally cycling/walking tracks from Whirlpool corner to Reefton. On Springs Junction to Blacks Point there is concern about icy conditions. They feel locals have been fighting for safety improvements for a long time and would like to see limits in place to keep them safe.”

Areas of concern with current speed limits

Blacks Point Museum and Whirlpool Corner (between Blacks Point and Reefton)

The section of road outside the Museum and Whirlpool corner were raised as people believe there are tourists and visitors accessing these locations who may be unfamiliar with the roads. As the area becomes more popular for holidays, the number of people accessing these locations increases and they felt this increased danger on the road.

There are people walking across the road to access places like the museum and Whirlpool corner including people in wheelchairs and children.

The school bus pick-up and drop off point is outside the museum, so children are crossing the street at this location during school terms.

Entrance to Reefton on Broadway

The entrance to Reefton township on Broadway was mentioned by many people. They are concerned that it is a busy business district with people driving, walking, cycling, and moving around frequently to access local business as well as driving through the town. People thought that lower speed limits within the Reefton township would make it easier and safer for everyone. People wanted to see the speed review extended to include this section of road.

Inangahua Swing Bridge and other cycling/walking tracks

There are many people who use the Swing Bridge and cycling and walking tracks. People walking and cycling within these areas, feel vulnerable when entering and exiting the tracks onto the main road.

SH7 intersection in Springs Junction

People felt there is a large volume of traffic using this intersection, including trucks and cyclists. Due to this, they felt speed limits should be lower to ensure everyone can move through the intersection safely.

Feedback themes

Below is a table summarising the main themes we heard from people, divided into the different sections of the road.

Section of road	Community feedback
<p>Section 1 - Maruia Springs to Springs Junction</p> <p>Current speed limit 100 km/h</p>	<p>Many people did not see the need for changes to the speed limit along this section of road. They felt the current speed limit of 100km/h was safe due to the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car safety has improved and can handle the speeds • Speed limit changes would increase driver frustration and confusion leading to more accidents • Driver behaviour, such as speeding and cell phone usage, would not be affected by a speed limit change <p>Some people did bring up some safety or road concerns along this area, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed limits being too high around townships and major intersections • Speed limits being too high in the forested areas where there is reduced light and winding roads • Conditions during winter being more unsafe due to ice • More maintenance of the road required.
<p>Section 2 - Springs Junction township</p> <p>Current speed limit 60 km/h</p>	<p>Feedback from people indicated they thought the current speed limit within this section of road was safe for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the speed limit along this section of road was to be lowered, then there would not be enough time for heavy vehicles to safely pass coming down Lewis and Tourists Springs • Signage in the area was felt to be adequate to warn drivers of the seasonal conditions and curves <p>People also mentioned the following concerns they had with this section of road:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More maintenance is needed, particularly around the pull off areas, and vegetation alongside the road needs clearing • Seasonal conditions (icy in winter) • People felt the speed limit should be reduced when exiting the Springs Junction until they get past the winding sections of the road, with many corners, and then the speed limit could go back to 100km/h at Garvey's Creek. • Heavy vehicles in the area servicing local businesses • Lots of people crossing the road and businesses in the area.

<p>Section 3 - Springs Junction to Blacks Point</p> <p>Current speed limit 100 km/h</p>	<p>People thought the current speed limit was safe on this section of road due to the low crash rate and so could not understand the need for any changes.</p> <p>People thought more maintenance on this section would make it safer at the current speed limit.</p>
<p>Section 4 - Blacks Point township</p> <p>Current speed limit 70 km/h</p>	<p>In general, people were concerned about the current limit through the township. Road Transport Association would like to retain the current speed to ensure transport operators can conduct business efficiently in the area.</p> <p>People raised the following safety concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The speed of trucks coming into town is too high to feel safe • The speed at the intersection at Museum on Franklyn Street to High Street is too fast to feel safe • The speed around the school bus pick up/ drop off opposite the museum is too high for children who are crossing the road or near the road. • The speed around the township is too high, with concern for people crossing the road in area (suggestions for a 50-60 km/h speed limit) • The need for more walking access and footbridges to allow safe crossing • The increase in traffic in recent years • The narrow and winding roads around the township • Visibility in the area with blind corners • Whirlpool Corner as a particularly dangerous area.
<p>Section 5 - Blacks Point to Reefton</p> <p>Current speed limit 100 km/h</p>	<p>Many people provided feedback, which suggested that this section of road did not feel safe at the current speed limit of 100km/h. Reasons people mentioned included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a number of people walking and cycling along this section of road. • There are many heavy vehicles in this area, which make it feel less safe for people walking and cycling. • The current speed limit coming into Reefton township felt too high to be safe. • The road has many winding and narrow pathways with blind corners. <p>The West Coast Regional Council has advised it prefers to have a dedicated separated walking/cycling track built along this route instead of changing or lowering the speed limit.</p> <p>Some comments felt the speed limit at Blacks Point should be lower than the section from Blacks Point to Reefton and some people felt that the road layout, passing lanes and signage from Blacks Point to Reefton made it safe at its current speed limit and if people drove to the conditions then the speed limit did not need to be changed.</p>

Some responses to feedback

- **Investment in state highway maintenance**

Improving safety on New Zealand's roads is a priority for us. A major shift is needed on many fronts to reduce deaths and injuries on our roads, from speed to driver education to road maintenance and safer vehicles. It's not a matter of choosing one solution over another. We are taking action in all these areas. Waka Kotahi spends approximately \$19 million annually on state highway road maintenance in the West Coast. This includes pothole repair, shoulder restoration, lifting road slumps and replacing sections of highway that are in poor condition. However, making sure speed limits are safe is one of the quickest and most effective ways we can prevent people from dying or being seriously injured on our roads.
- **Nature of the road already constrains speeds**

Crashes that are happening are spread out along state highway 7 - at the straight sections of road as well as on curved sections. Unforgiving roadside conditions and narrow shoulders mean there's little margin for error if simple mistakes are made. Although drivers are expected to drive to the conditions, we want the posted speed limit to signal to drivers that they need to take more care in these sections. If you are involved in a crash and are driving at a more safe and appropriate speed for the road, you're much more likely to walk away unharmed.
- **Reducing speed limits and the impact this will have on inefficiencies for businesses, particularly for the movement of freight**

Each death and serious injury have a devastating and wide-reaching impact. It also has a social cost to New Zealand of \$84 million per week, or nearly \$4.7 billion a year. That includes things like loss of life, quality of life, medical costs, legal costs and damages to vehicles. So, while lower speed limits would have a small impact on travel time, this pales in comparison with the potential to save lives, prevent serious injuries and reduce the economic cost from crashes.
- **How this speed review fits in with speed management for the West Coast region**

There is work underway to review and change the current speed limit setting rule. Consultation on a proposed new rule enabling an improved approach to speed management planning on New Zealand roads, called the Land Transport Rule: Setting of Speed Limits 2021, closed in June 2021. The new proposed rule does look at a regional approach. The Blacks Point community provided us with a petition in 2020 and so taking this into consideration we started the speed review slightly earlier for this road. We appreciate that Blacks Point people were mostly concerned about the speed through their town, however we thought it was practical to do a review of the full corridor (e.g. Maruia Springs to Reefton) as this better aligned with our speed management principles, where we look at journeys instead of isolated sections of road.
- **Provision of walking / cycling tracks along the route, including foot bridges**

We received lots of feedback from the community and councils regarding the need to make it safer for people to walk and cycle between Blacks Point and Reefton. This has been passed onto our Waka Kotahi Walking and Cycling team who will be investigating a path between these two settlements.
- **Including entrance to Reefton on Broadway in the speed review**

The feedback received during engagement requesting for the speed review to include the town of Reefton has been taken onboard and if we are to go to formal consultation on proposed speed limit changes, we will extend this to include the western entrance of Reefton town.
- **Seasonal conditions on the road**

Our research shows that travelling too fast for the conditions contributes to the cause of about a third of all fatal crashes. Driving slowly is not a significant cause of our poor crash statistics. The posted speed limit is a maximum not a target. Drivers are expected to show patience and adjust

their speed depending on the conditions of the road and weather. The faster you're travelling, the less time you have to react to a mistake. As your speed increases there is a greater probability that you will be going too fast if you meet an unexpected change in road conditions. Having speed limits that are safe and appropriate is one of the most important ways we can help people get to where they need to go safely.

The comments regarding the need for more warning signage will be passed onto our road safety team to determine whether the existing signage needs to be reviewed.

- **Will speed limits work or is it driver behaviour that is the problem**

Any proposal to reduce speed limits is being driven by one objective – reducing harm and saving lives. This isn't just about protecting drivers. The changes we are proposing are also about protecting passengers, the tamariki crossing the road, the residents waiting for a bus, the motorcyclists without the same protection as someone in a car, and the many people who walk, run, cycle or scoot on our roads and footpaths. The higher the speed, the less likely they are to survive a crash. This applies even if the driver isn't speeding.

On top of this, everyday pressures can influence how we drive. For example, running late for work, getting home, getting to an appointment or getting our kids to school on time. Even if we aren't bad drivers, everyone makes mistake. But these simple mistakes shouldn't cost lives. This is why we're working to improve every part of New Zealand's transport system. This means safe drivers, roads, vehicles and speeds. There isn't just one solution, we need to look at all of these areas.

Together with NZ Police, ACC and the community, Waka Kotahi supports driver training, education and advertising campaigns such as DRIVE, BikeReady and Respect every Ride, targeting high risk groups. Our Community Road Safety Fund helps fund community-based initiatives like Students Against Dangerous Driving (SADD).

Actions to improve people's skills and behaviour and to deter risk-taking behaviour - such as wearing seatbelts, not drinking and driving, and not being distracted while travelling at safe speeds - are critical to our success, but alone they will not fix the problem. Everyone has a role to play to keep themselves and others safe.

- **Rule breaking**

Encouraging people to make good choices is a key focus for Waka Kotahi under New Zealand's Road to Zero road safety strategy. Together with NZ Police, ACC and the community, Waka Kotahi supports education and advertising campaigns targeting high risk groups as well as driver training and education programmes include DRIVE and BikeReady, and our motorcyclist safety campaign 'Respect every Ride'. Actions to improve people's skills and behaviour and deter risk-taking behaviour - such as wearing seatbelts, not drinking and driving, and not being distracted while travelling at safe speeds - are critical to our success, but alone they will not fix the problem. Everyone has a role to play to keep ourselves and others safe.

Next steps

Changing speed limits is a legal process and there are steps to follow under the Speed Management Guide and the setting of Speed Limits Rule. You can learn more about the speed review process here: www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/driving-safely/speed/setting-safe-speed-limits/deciding-speed-limits

We have considered all the feedback we've received alongside our technical assessments.

Proposed speed limit changes are included in the Interim State Highway Speed Management Plan. Consultation is open from 14 November to 12 December 2022. Visit www.nzta.govt.nz/ISMP

You can find out more about this speed review at:

<https://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh7-maruia-springs-to-reefton-speed-review/>