

5.4 – Third party issues

5.4.3 Vegetation

5.4.3.1 Introduction and issues

Context

Vegetation such as trees, shrubs and other planting on land in the vicinity of a state highway can have beneficial effects on the state highway. Vegetation adds to the amenity value of state highways and assists in defining the alignment of the road. It also assists in erosion control, slope stabilisation and sediment runoff prevention.

However, vegetation can also have adverse effects on state highway infrastructure and road users, for example where it obstructs sight lines for drivers on the road, obscures official signs, reduces the effect of road lighting, or shades the road resulting in icing. These effects can be greater in rural areas where traffic speeds are higher. Control of the location and type of vegetation can reduce these effects. Consideration must also be given to subsequent growth and the need for maintenance.

Accident damage

Vegetation in state highway “clear zones” that is not “frangible” (refer Glossary in Appendix 1) can increase the risk of damage and injury arising from a collision.

Damage to road formation

Damage to the road or services in the road reserve can result from falling trees and branches, tree roots under the pavement or tree roots impeding drainage.

Guidelines for State Highway Landscaping

Transit sets out its guidelines for planting within the state highway reserve in its Guidelines for Highway Landscaping, which address issues such as safety, biodiversity, visual quality and maximising value. Transit undertakes planting on the road reserve in accordance with these Guidelines. The Guidelines are also a useful tool for landowners, occupiers and developers when considering planting in the vicinity of state highways.

Reactive controls

The TNZA (s55), Public Works Act 1981 (s133 and s135) and Local Government Act 1974 (s355) give Transit and local authorities the authority to control existing vegetation. However, such provisions are remedial rather than preventative.

Proactive RMA controls

RMA plan provisions can provide an opportunity for these matters to be addressed in a proactive way so as to avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse effects of vegetation on a road.

5.4 – Third party issues

5.4.3.2	Vegetation policy <i>Transit will give effect to the Integrated Planning Policy by implementing this supporting policy:</i>
	Transit will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• undertake landscaping and planting within the state highway road reserve in accordance with the Guidelines for Highway Landscaping;• seek to control the planting, growth and maintenance of vegetation in the vicinity of state highways to maintain safety standards including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- adequate visibility and clearance at accessways and road intersections;- the visibility of official signs; and- minimising vegetation as an accident hazard;• control vegetation that is damaging road formation or roadside structures or impeding drainage;• encourage vegetation planting, control and removal that enhances the operation and aesthetics of the state highway environment and does not compromise safety; and• manage planting of vegetation on land in the vicinity of state highways in frost-prone areas to reduce the incidence of winter ice on those state highways.

5.4.3.3 **Methods**

5.4.3.3.1 **Method 1 – Provisions in RMA plans**

RMA plans

Transit will advocate for the inclusion of objectives, policies and rules in district plans, regional coastal plans and, where appropriate, other regional plans that:

- restrict vegetation planting and impose requirements on the maintenance of vegetation where such vegetation may:
 - restrict driver visibility and sight-lines;
 - cause unreasonable shading to state highways in frost and snow-prone areas;
 - introduce non-frangible vegetation or structures into clear zones;
 - cause damage to the state highway pavement or structures; or
 - impede drainage or damage drainage devices; and
- identify Transit as an affected party in respect of any applications for resource consents for activities in the vicinity of state highways where the above performance standards are not met.

Suggested objectives, policies and rules are contained in Appendix 4B.

5.4 – Third party issues

5.4.3.3.2

Method 2 – Education and advocacy

Education and advocacy

Transit will provide local authorities, landowners or occupiers in the vicinity of state highways and developers with information on the adverse effects of vegetation on the state highway by:

- contributing to regional council plant pest management strategies;
 - contributing to codes of practice for forestry companies and the arboriculture industry, particularly in respect of tree felling and trimming adjacent to state highways;
 - advising landowners, occupiers and developers directly where appropriate;
 - contributing to local authority documents and strategies; and
 - developing processes for addressing any effects on state highways arising from vegetation that has protected status either under a plan or a statute with territorial authorities, regional councils and the Department of Conservation.
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5.4.3.3.3

Method 3 – Use statutory powers

Statutory powers

Where a landowner/occupier does not voluntarily manage vegetation that conflicts with this policy, Transit may use its legislative powers, including those in the Public Works Act 1981, TNZA, Local Government Act 1974 and the RMA to seek to avoid, remedy, or mitigate any adverse effects on the state highway.
