

Auckland Harbour Bridge Walking and Cycling Event

In confidence

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| Meeting Date | 23 November 2021 |
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Purpose

To inform a Board decision in response to a request from the Minister of Transport to consider whether a walking and cycling temporary access trial on the Auckland Harbour Bridge could occur over the quiet summer months or a long weekend provided it could be done safely.

Recommendations

It is recommended the Committee recommends the Board:

- **Notes** this is not a trial that would set an expectation that further consideration will be given to providing live lane access.
- **Notes** the earliest an event could be held would be Mid-2022, with next Summer 2022/23 a more realistic timeframe.
- **Provides direction** to whether Waka Kotahi responds to the Minister's request by exploring the scale and type of event (private/public) if Waka Kotahi were to support one
- **Notes** the risks associated with events held on the Auckland Harbour Bridge

Strategic relevance

In September 2021, the Government confirmed that it would not proceed with the standalone bridge portion of the Northern Pathway. The Minister has requested the Waka Kotahi explore whether a walking and cycling temporary trial on the Auckland Harbour Bridge could occur over the quiet summer months or a long weekend provided it could be done safely (request appended)

Background

Investigations have been completed into a short-term option

Work was undertaken earlier this year to investigate feasible options for implementing a shared path over the Auckland Harbour Bridge (AHB) as a short-term option. This looked at both permanent (24/7) and temporary (weekends only) options and considered dedicating one or two lanes of vehicle traffic to a shared path.

The outcome of the investigation was based on current demand on the bridge. The only viable option, that would not create operational or structural issues or cause significant traffic congestion (without a large mode shift), would be a temporary access arrangement like the format used for the annual Auckland Marathon. This advice was provided to the Minister.

Successful Cycling and Marathon events have been run on the Harbour Bridge previously, between 2011-2018 an annual Bike the Bridge Event occurred, and every year the Auckland Marathon is held. During these events, 2 lanes are made available to facilitate crossing the bridge for a short period on a Sunday morning when traffic volumes are reduced, and is accompanied by significant event management and communications activity.

Medium-term investigations are underway

We have started work with our partners and key stakeholders to identify the right medium-term solution. As we work to confirm the form, function and timing of longer-term additional Waitematā Harbour connections, these medium-term options could include dedicated bike ferries or buses, to link seamlessly with our existing and planned infrastructure on the northern and southern end of the Harbour.

Initially, a long list of options will be identified, which will consider the previous landward component of the Northern Pathway and an extended area of the Waitematā, to include existing ferry terminals. Options that structurally connect to the existing AHB will not be considered. These options will be developed and assessed, presenting us with a shortlist and a preferred option. The preferred option will be presented to the Minister in March 2022 with the intention to complete a Single Stage Business Case in June 2022.

Modelling suggests a dedicated single walking and cycling lane would require a significant reduction in daily traffic volumes on the bridge to have a neutral effect on the wider Auckland transport System (greater than 17,000 vehicles per day or a 10% reduction), much greater than is achievable through the provision of walking and cycling access on the bridge alone.

Key Considerations

Management's advice is that the Board consider offering the Minister the opportunity to host an event, or series of events, as opposed to a trial.

Undertaking a "trial" as the Minister has requested, could set unrealistic expectations around the likelihood of a dedicated lane becoming available in the short term. Previous analysis demonstrates that unless a significant reduction in traffic demand occurs, the network is unable to support dedicated walking and cycling access on the bridge. Any trial would be better targeted at how an overall mode shift to reduce demand over the bridge could be achieved. We have not done the work to suggest what those levers for change are and how they could be tested; however, this topic will be explored further through the medium-term investigations.

Mass participation events of this scale require a relatively long lead time. Based on the work/time required for operational planning, marketing the event, securing funding partners, sponsorship recruitment, stakeholder management etc, a realistic period for a privately managed commercial event of this size would be 8-12 months. However, if Waka Kotahi decided to support and fund this event (in part or in full) in partnership with Auckland City, it may be possible to reduce this lead time to 6-12 months. The need for preparation time

means that this type of event will not be ready for the quieter summer months (early 2022) that the Minister has requested; however, April or May would be the absolute earliest, and a summer programme of events would be more realistic in spring/summer of 2022/23.

Risks and Mitigations

While the risks associated with holding events on the bridge are well known and similar for each type of event. Depending on the type of event, the scale of impact and mitigations does vary:

Event User and Worker Safety

Event participants will be near active traffic. Temporary installations of steel barriers of the type commonly used for bridge resurfacing operations would be used the entirety of the way from the access points to the overarch span to mitigate this risk. Collateral for safety of participants will need to be part of the event package.

The estimated walk time from Northcote to the Viaduct (7km) is 80-90 minutes. The estimated cycle time for the same trip is 20-30 minutes. At entry, event users must be given notice of the path closing time to prevent them from not being able to easily return to where they entered the path. Walkers would need strict cut-off times for entry from either end to ensure they would be off the bridge in time.

The gradient of the AHB will result in faster downhill speeds for cyclists which will present a hazard to other event participants. While utilising both lanes of a clip-on will provide a sufficiently wide cross section to allow for faster modes to be separated from slower modes, speed restrictions for cyclists would need to be carefully managed by event staff on the day.

To mitigate the risk of event participants falling from the bridge, the event would include a temporary installation of fencing on the water side of the lanes. This risk will be further mitigated by controls implemented under the event management plan (e.g., strategically placing event and security staff along the event path).

While operational set-up of barriers and temporary traffic management will occur during the low traffic overnight period, the demobilisation will occur during increased traffic volumes during daytime or evening hours. To protect workers, additional lane closures or temporary signage left in place may be required during the demobilisation period, which could result in a wider, short-term network impact. A longer event will require demobilisation later in the day, with again wider, more medium-term network impacts.

Stakeholder Impacts

Dependent on the preferred option, removal of one or more active lanes on a critical link in the Auckland motorway network, albeit temporarily, will result in impacts not only to users of AHB, but to users of the Auckland transport network, including public transport. Traffic congestion can be managed through running an event during a low traffic demand period, alongside demand reduction considerations and extensive public communications prior to the event.

Event Management will need to include communications to inform the surrounding neighbourhoods (both north and south) of the event, as there will be increased demand for parking, and an increase in users of multiple modes throughout the local road network. A plan developed with Auckland Transport and Eke Panuku could help event participants make full use of the public transport network and there are safe local connections on local streets to maximise non-car access to the event.

The Event Management plan needs to include considerations for motorists and heavy haulage to give them enough time to plan an alternate route, or to re-time their journey, due to the lane and ramp closures. Communications plans like those developed for the Auckland Marathon should be implemented for an event of this kind.

Other Considerations

An event can only be safely undertaken on a day with minimal wind and a low to zero possibility of rain. Alternate dates should be selected, and a communications strategy should be employed with sufficient time to alert users if the event is to be deferred or cancelled. Additionally, in the event of unforeseen inclement weather occurring during the event, a plan to evacuate participants quickly and safely from the bridge would need to be developed and able to deploy on short notice.

Under the COVID-19 Protection Framework, this event can only operate under the Orange or Green levels. In either level Orange or level Green, vaccination certificates will be required for the event to operate, and logistics for reviewing and accepting vaccination certificates will have to be in place at all access points to the event area. This will add another layer of complexity to safely managing event participation.

Event Options

Should the board decide to pursue or support an event, it would need to decide whether it should be a public or private commercial event and what the scale of any event would be.

Public Events

There is a varying scale of events that could be undertaken, ranging from cycling only event(s) through to a flagship series of events open to all.

A public event will require Waka Kotahi to underwrite the cost of the event, allowing it to be free for people to attend, although there would need to be restrictions on numbers of participants. A limit on the number of participants (e.g., 10,000 people) would be needed for safety and capacity reasons, depending on the length of time the event is run for. The estimated cost to facilitate a single public event funded by Waka Kotahi is \$400-\$500k, this cost will increase if a series of events is endorsed. This could be offset by partnering with Auckland Council and/or a commercial organisation for sponsorship; and a regular series of events could reduce the per event cost. A public event approach would allow more Aucklanders, regardless of their financial circumstances, where they live and how they travel, could participate.

Event Management is not a core Waka Kotahi function and requires specialised expertise in marketing, event planning and execution. All elements are necessary to ensure successful and safe participation for those who take part in the event(s). Waka Kotahi would need to rely on third party expertise to manage an event if it is decided that an event will be held, and to partner with Auckland Council and its CCO's as they have significant experience with events of this scale.

A single or series of public events open to all would provide the opportunity for Waka Kotahi to partner with Auckland's civic leaders to enable a flagship series of events to align to the Emission Reduction Plan. A regular series of events would provide Aucklanders with an opportunity to celebrate the city's natural attractions, bringing some relief following the challenges of 2020. This approach would ensure all Aucklanders, regardless of their financial circumstances, where they live and how they travel, could take part. A series of public events would mean higher associated costs to Waka Kotahi than the approx. \$400,000 for a single event.

Private Events

The running of a private commercial event is only plausible if walking and cycling access to the bridge is seen as a special occasion, therefore some certainty around Waka Kotahi future intentions in relation to walking and cycling access on the existing bridge is required.

A private commercial event would require participants to pay to attend, with the costs and risks managed by the Event Management organisation rather than Waka Kotahi. In this respect, Waka Kotahi could support those events that align to key strategic shifts.

A private event is likely to include a participation fee that would necessarily limit the inclusivity of the event. However, a private event will also restrict participant numbers, allowing tighter controls to minimise disruption.

Type of Event

Cycling event(s)

There has been significant pressure and public interest from people in Auckland to provide a link between the North Shore and the CBD. Currently temporary access arrangements like the format used for the annual Auckland Marathon could be used. For the purposes of this paper, due to the lead-time time required, the event could operate from 6am to 11am on a single Sunday morning in either May or November 2022. This timeframe mirrors the same period during the day as the Auckland Marathon, an already established event. An event on Sunday morning takes advantage of a low traffic demand period, which will minimise impact on the wider network.

Mobilisation would be implemented overnight, and the demobilisation would take approximately three hours. This results in an 11-hour window, during which two lanes of traffic would be dedicated to use for the walking and cycling event. A proposed programme could be:

- 3am – 6am: Mobilisation
- 6am – 11am: Walking and cycling event
- 10:30am – 11am: Last user sweep & rubbish collection
- 11am – 2pm: Demobilisation

This proposed timeframe takes advantage of the lower network demand timeframes. Evidence from historical Auckland Marathons, show that an event of this nature, during this timeframe typically causes no significant congestion Northbound, with some congestion in the Southbound direction between 7:30am and 12pm. However, congestion in both directions was mitigated by demand suppression through thorough pre-event communications tactics.

Waka Kotahi has been approached by a reputable Event Organiser seeking support to run a Cycling Event in November 2022 s 9(2)(b)(ii). Successful Cycling events have been run on the Harbour Bridge previously, between 2011-2018 an annual Bike the Bridge Event occurred. During these events, 2 lanes are made available to facilitate crossing the bridge. The logistical proposal around a private cycling event would mirror that required for a public cycling event. However, in comparison, a private event would greatly reduce the management complexity and cost to Waka Kotahi. Based on the work/time required for operational planning, marketing the event, securing funding partners, sponsorship recruitment, stakeholder management etc, a realistic period for a privately managed commercial event of this size would be 8-12 months.

Walking and cycling event(s)

This type of event would be very similar to a Cycling only event, with the inclusion of walking. The event could operate from 6am to 11am on a single Sunday morning in either May or November 2022. Again, this proposed timeframe takes advantage of the lower network demand timeframes and will lessen the risk of network-wide disruptions.

However, the inclusion of walking introduces additional complications and safety risks beyond a cycling only event:

- The estimated walk time from Northcote to the Viaduct (7km) is 80-90 minutes. The estimated cycle time for the same trip is 20-30 minutes. At entry, event users must be given notice of the path closing time to prevent them from not being able to easily return to where they entered the path. Walkers would need to leave no later than 9:30 from either end to ensure they would be off the bridge in time.
- A final sweep with security personnel should occur from both directions 30 minutes prior to the event ending to clear remaining users from the path and enable the lane closures to be removed on time and will include rubbish collection to mitigate the potential for rubbish entering the harbour or impacting traffic.
- The gradient of the AHB will result in faster downhill speeds for cyclists which will present a hazard to other event participants. While utilising both lanes of a clip-on will provide a sufficiently wide cross

section to allow for faster modes to be separated from slower modes, speed restrictions for cyclists would need to be carefully managed by event staff on the day.

Event(s) open to all active modes

The inclusion of walking and scooting, or mobility devices, introduces additional complications and safety risks that need to be considered. However, allowing a variety of modes would ensure more equitable access and allow more Aucklanders to have the opportunity to enjoy the bridge. We would aim to give people sufficient time to travel across the bridge, regardless of their ability or how they chose to travel.

Given that the bridge is an icon of Auckland, an open event would likely be very popular, providing an opportunity to integrate the travel over the bridge into the wider public transport and local street network. A series of events could also spread demand over multiple weeks and months and could help manage ability to participate if there were any rained-out events.

Managing the demand for vehicle travel would be required, and there is a significant risk that congestion may occur throughout the middle of the day and into the evening if a full day event was held. When modelling the highest level of traffic suppression, modal shift and traffic re-routing, this option could result in delays from approximately 12 noon to 8pm on weekend days in the Northbound direction between Mt Wellington highway and the bridge and Southbound between SH18 and the bridge. Any extension to an event beyond 11am on a Sunday would need to be addressed by comprehensive travel demand management planning which would address implications for congestion on the wider Auckland network

Health & safety, customer/stakeholder & environmental impact

See discussion of Health and Safety risks and management of these risks in the paper above.

Related documents

Investment & Delivery Committee paper August 2021, Auckland Harbour Bridge shared path Options Assessment

RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT 1982

Subject: Walking and cycling trial across the Auckland Harbour Bridge

Dear Sir Brian,

Thank you for Waka Kotahi's engagement over temporary trials for walking and cycling access across the Waitematā Harbour.

Earlier this year I asked the agency to investigate this, and in August, the agency communicated that the Auckland Harbour Bridge was not designed for a walking and cycling function and there are a range of complex issues that need to be balanced if a trial was to go ahead.

We continue to recognise the importance of better pedestrian and cycling access across the Waitematā. Given any trials going ahead are a decision for the Waka Kotahi Board, I'd like Board to seriously consider if a temporary trial could occur over the quiet summer holiday months or a long weekend if it can be done safely.

It will take time to investigate options to create a connection for walking and cycling across the Waitematā, so this is a way we can show progress on this issue for Aucklanders.

I look forward to being updated on the Board's decision.

Thank you again for this and your continued work with local government partners to expand New Zealand's walking and cycling network.

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