

Wynyard Crossing Bridge update for the New Zealand Herald

24 April 2024

Eke Panuku provided the following update to the New Zealand Herald in response to further questions about the Wynyard Crossing Bridge.

These addressed questions about concerns raised by some of the hospitality tenants at North Wharf.

Below is the full response sent to the New Zealand Herald.

- One of the biggest frustrations and sheer shock from the eatery owners (and the feedback they say they get from the public) is the length of time it will take to get the bridge fixed and fully operational again - 13 months of temporary/permanent closures. The eatery owners say this is simply unacceptable in a First World Country - what is Eke Panuku's response to these assertions?

We are doing everything possible to both complete the necessary repairs and preventative maintenance in a timely manner and ensure the bridge can operate reliably for many years into the future.

It is not a simple job, requiring meticulous complicated work with large components designed for a marine environment. Where we can, we are looking at ways to speed up the process. The project team is continually monitoring the works programme to identify where time savings can be made.

For example, we are investigating with our contractors whether it's possible to have the team doing the sandblasting, remedying of the bridge's steelwork and applying the new anti-rust coating work double shifts. With one team working during the day and another during the night, it would reduce the overall time needed.

We are also looking at the option of relocating the bridge offsite to carry out the works.

It's important to note we are replacing a considerable amount of the bridges mechanical structure which is dependent on parts arriving from Europe and specialised refurbishment works off site. This is not something that can be done quickly.

Regarding the duration, it isn't 13 months. We were able to keep the bridge operating for all but a few days over the summer despite many issues, including be available during a number of important waterfront events like Red Bull Cliff Diving, the Z Manu World Champs and the Moana Festival. The full temporary closure has only been in place since 13 March 2024, six weeks ago.

The specialist engineers undertaking this work have advised that we can expect the bridge to be ready for next summer (late 2024). Updates will be provided throughout this time, and more firm timings will be advised as work progresses but if the works can be completed earlier they will be.

- Does Eke Panuku understand the sentiment - frustration, anger and puzzlement - about the length of time it will take for a fix?

Yes, we do. We have been in regular contact with many people in the quarter, including our tenants, residents, and other businesses. We have let them all know that if we could feasibly complete the necessary repairs and preventative maintenance any faster, we would.

We will continue to look at ways where we can speed up the process. Like everyone else, we too want to restore the bridge to full operation as soon as we can.

As mentioned yesterday, some of the things we have been doing to communicate with locals include:

- Wynyard Quarter Transport Management Association briefings with stakeholder groups from across the area including North Wharf tenants, Park Hyatt, ASB, marine industry representatives, the Waitematā Local Board and Heart of the City.
 - Heart of the City direct engagement.
 - One-to-one meetings with effected businesses to respond to concerns and partner in marketing initiatives.
 - Drop-in sessions for Wynyard Quarter residents at the Wynyard Quarter kiosk.
 - Regular email updates for all key stakeholders.
 - Monthly email newsletter.
 - Responding to direct requests from stakeholders who wish to meet.
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- The eatery owners believe Eke Panuku is not addressing their concerns, or the issue more generally, with any great urgency. One of the eatery owners cites a conversation he had with Eke Panuku in which he was told the organisation might consider airfreighting parts to Auckland - as if going by (slower) boat was the best option. Is Panuku confident it's looking at all and every urgent option?

Yes, we have a dedicated team which is managing this process and is looking at all available options to ensure the bridge is back to full operations as soon as is practically possible. Spending more will not speed up this work, it is down to the time required to do the necessary repairs and preventative maintenance work.

We are airfreighting parts - a number have arrived already and others are still in transit. The challenge is that parts for this specific bridge are no longer manufactured, so are not 'off the shelf' items. We looked across Aotearoa to see if we could find a local supplier but there wasn't one. We have chosen the international supplier based on quality and ability to manufacture the components needed, however these will need to be further adjusted in NZ before they're fitted to the bridge.

- You mentioned below you are looking at solutions in the short-term. What, specifically, are you looking at please?

One of our top priorities is to investigate options for temporary alternative access over the water.

We have had a number of questions and suggestions and are working at pace to investigate their viability.

This includes on-water devices such as water taxis. However, there are significant challenges and factors we need to consider with some of the options that have been suggested. These include the

time needed to implement, operator capacity, logistics, times of operation and health and safety considerations. And of course, the cost of operation.

While some sort of on-water crossing may sound simple to implement, where people get on and off, how it operates, when it operates, how many passengers it could take, and whether it would ultimately be a quicker crossing than the other options, are all things that need careful investigation. It is also important to remember that as a navigational channel, marine traffic has the right of way through this space. Any on-water option would need to factor in the ability not to interfere with the movement of vessels.

We are looking at trials of water taxis, but for all of the above reasons they may not prove a viable solution for the duration of the temporary bridge closure. Other alternatives we have considered include a pontoon, swing bridge and potential ferry stop in Wynyard Quarter but none of these options are as good as the City Link bus.

We have also received questions around the possibility of lowering the bridge at certain intervals for pedestrians. Unfortunately, this is not feasible, as the work requires the bridge to be closed and fully closed in. It will be fully scaffolded, sand blasted, have its steelwork remediated and coated with anti-rust coating that requires time to apply and dry. Therefore, it would be impossible to make the bridge accessible to pedestrians through that process.

It would likely also prolong the time needed for the work. It would mean having to re-do all the work to get the bridge and surrounding area ready for the maintenance every time the bridge was opened back up to the public. Lowering the spans of the bridge to make it available for public use when it has known technical issues also poses an unacceptable health and safety risk.

While we look into alternative ways to cross the water, we are doing all we can to ensure as many people as possible know that Wynyard Quarter is still open and easily accessible. We realise the alternatives are not as convenient as the bridge for people who want to make that direct walk, but they provide good options for visitors and commuters. The [Wynyard Quarter website](#) has an outline of the options available, including for those driving, taking the bus, or walking to the area.

- Do these possible solutions include water taxis and/or free carparking and/or more conveniently placed mini-buses (the eatery owners say the City Link buses are not convenient) and/or free Lime/Beam scooters? Specific comments on these possible solutions would be appreciated.

Yes. We are open to any and all suggestions however logistics and costs need to be carefully considered.

Relating to the specifics you've raised:

- On-water solutions are complicated for the reasons detailed above. This does not mean they've been ruled out but need careful consideration.
- We are talking with Auckland Transport about carparking in Wynyard Quarter, noting the first hour is already free in the Jellicoe Street carpark (Monday – Saturday, first hour free, \$6 per hour thereafter; Sundays and public holidays, first hour free, \$2 per hour thereafter).
- Adding more buses or mini-buses into this area is also complicated due to the amount of available bus stops and road space, not to mention vehicles and drivers. Initial discussions with Auckland Transport have highlighted that adding a new service into the wider bus network scheduling has knock on effects on other services that utilise the finite number of bus stops available across Auckland, and public health and safety requirements don't allow

us to just stop anywhere. If we tried to put in another service, it would not be as direct or reliable as the City Link bus. The City Link is a good, convenient service from the bottom of Queen Street to Wynyard Quarter.

- We are meeting with micro-mobility providers to look at how we can make these easier for people to use, for example reducing fares, ensuring stocks are available in the right places.

In considering all options we ultimately need to factor in what ratepayers would deem as the best use of their money; and also take into account our priority is to get the bridge fixed as soon as possible.

- **What are some of the events/marketing activities you are looking at to attract people to this area in winter?**

A significant public information campaign has been launched which aims to attract continued patronage to the Wynyard Quarter while the bridge is temporary closed. This involves collaboration with businesses in the precinct. Conversations and uptake of offers for collaboration have been really constructive and we are already working on some creative ideas alongside several of the businesses in the precinct as I mentioned yesterday.

We are also working closely with Tātaki Auckland Unlimited to support the events and activities it has underway, and Auckland Transport on travel alternatives.

We are using a variety of channels including social media posts, signage and localised digital advertising for regular updates including informing people of alternative transport routes around the waterfront, reminding those travelling to Wynyard Quarter to plan ahead, as well as progress updates on the work underway on the bridge itself.

- **As landlord of the area, will Eke Panuku consider rent relief for these eateries - in light of the costs they say they are bearing? If not, why not? If so, how much rent relief - percentage wise - might you consider?**

No, as the businesses themselves remain fully accessible. We understand and appreciate that there is an impact on businesses from the bridge's temporary closure, which is why we are working through plans for a destination campaign to attract people to Wynyard Quarter. We want to ensure as many people as possible know that Wynyard Quarter is still open and can easily be accessed, even if this direct connection will be unavailable until the necessary work is finished.

As I mentioned earlier, it is important to distinguish between Eke Panuku's two roles in this area. Eke Panuku, on behalf of Auckland Council, manages ten tenancies in North Wharf. In our capacity as landlord, our property team has been and continues to engage directly with our ten tenants.

The operation and management of the bridge as a piece of public infrastructure is separate to that and is not a lease management issue.

- **What do you say to eatery owners who are now having to lay off staff, and - on some days - close as early as 4.30pm because there are simply few or no people around?**

We are doing our best to educate as many people as possible on the alternative ways to access Wynyard Quarter and ensure they're aware of what's on offer in this neighbourhood. The

temporary closure of the bridge is unavoidable, and we are working to resolve it as quickly as possible.

- The eatery owners have accused Eke Panuku of incompetence and a lack of proper communication - your specific response to these points would be appreciated.

Our property team has been and continues to engage directly with our tenants. This includes one on one discussions as well as wider meetings with tenants, other businesses, and residents at which we have heard and responded to concerns and queries. Some of our tenants have chosen not to have one on one conversations with us. Like everyone else we too want to restore the bridge to full operation as soon as we can.

And, as mentioned above, some of the things we have been doing to communicate with locals include:

- Wynyard Quarter Transport Management Association briefings with stakeholder groups from across the area including North Wharf tenants, Park Hyatt, ASB, marine industry representatives, the Waitematā Local Board and Heart of the City.
 - Heart of the City direct engagement.
 - One-to-one meetings with effected businesses to respond to concerns and partner in marketing initiatives.
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 - Regular email updates for all key stakeholders.
 - Monthly email newsletter.
 - Responding to direct requests from stakeholders who wish to meet.
- Is Eke Panuku having to deal here with a piece of infrastructure that, in reality, is simply no longer sustainable - does Panuku support a more permanent, fixed structure (setting aside the price/cost factors)?

As I detailed in my response yesterday, Eke Panuku, and before us Waterfront Auckland, have included a new bridge as part of previous long-term plan proposals, to improve connectivity across to Wynyard Quarter.

There simply isn't the money available for a brand-new bridge. We are confident that the work we are undertaking, at a fraction of the cost of a new bridge, will ensure that the bridge will reliably operate into the future. As I detailed yesterday, we are fully overhauling the bridge's old components, including replacing the winches and cables, as well as completely scrubbing and re-applying new anti-rust coating to protect the steelwork from corrosion from the saltwater.

I note your reference to a more permanent, fixed structure. It is important to remember that any structure spanning this harbour entry would need to comply with marine traffic requirements so there is not an option to look at a fixed, as in single-span non-opening, structure.

- For background, can you please advise how many pedestrians use the bridge each day - both in summer and winter/ peak and non-peak periods.

As a guide, in 2022, 6,574 (daily average) weekday pedestrian movements, 9,094 (daily average) weekend pedestrian movements.

I'm afraid I don't have figures broken down by season, however it would be likely that Autumn/Winter figures would be lower due to the colder months.

- Has Eke Panuku made any representations to the mayor/wider council for special budget/help to get this fixed earlier than late 2024?

No, as spending more would not speed up the process. It is down to the time required to do the necessary repairs and preventative maintenance work.

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