

No Room for Delay on Western Ring Route

Media Release

30 January 2009

"The decision by government to look at alternatives to the proposed tunnel option for Waterview is neither unexpected nor unreasonable but should not be allowed to delay completion of Auckland's Western Ring Route" says NZ Council for Infrastructure Development chief executive Stephen Selwood.

"Completion of the Waterview connection is central to releasing the full value of the corridor including four projects already under construction: the Mt Roskill extension of SH20 about to open in March; the Manukau Harbour Crossing; the SH1 to SH20 link at Manukau and the Hobsonville extension at Westgate.

"When these four projects are completed by 2011, Waterview will be the last connection to a complete alternative north/south bypass to SH1 on the western side of the city. It will provide significant economic stimulus to West and South Auckland, and is central to lifting productivity across the whole of the Auckland region.

"This is by far the largest roading project in New Zealand's construction pipeline. It will employ thousands of people in design, finance, construction, professional services and facilities maintenance. While it is appropriate to take time to determine the best solution, this must not be allowed to delay completion of this critical link. In the short term we need the employment that this project will create, and in the longer term the productivity benefits that will flow across the entire New Zealand economy resulting from completion of the Western Ring Route.

"There is no doubt that surface options will be lower cost than the proposed tunnel solution. Saving money here will release funding for other transport projects across the country be they rail, road, bus, walking or cycling.

"But a surface road will also have social and environmental impacts that might otherwise be avoided by the proposed tunnel. Delay will engender continued uncertainty for the local community. The central issue to be resolved is whether design innovation can be achieved to improve affordability, minimise impacts on the environment and deliver certainty to the affected community in a timely manner.

"If the government decides to proceed with a surface or "open cut" design they will also need to pass supporting amendments to the RMA to streamline the consent for projects of national significance. Otherwise we can expect the project to be bogged down in the courts for years with the associated costs that will ensue.

"Allowing time for legislation to amend the RMA and a consequential nine month period to gain consents on the government's preferred design, means that the project could potentially be brought to market in 2010. That would still allow time for a competitive design-bid process and completion by 2015 or earlier. This timeline is consistent with other bigger infrastructure projects in

Australia. There is no reason why a similar timeline to completion should not be expected in New Zealand.

"But there is no doubt the timing is tight. Prompt decisions now need to be made".