

Opening the Auckland Harbour Bridge for Events

In confidence

Meeting Date	19 April 2021
ELT Sponsor	Brett Gliddon, General Manager Transport Services
Prepared By	Kathryn King, Urban Mobility Manager
Legal Reviewer	Jessica Andrew, General Counsel Environment & Property
Version	Final
Date	14 April 2021
Pages	6

Purpose

This paper informs the Board of a proposal to develop regular events on the Auckland Harbour Bridge.

Recommendations

It is recommended the Committee recommends the Board:

- **Notes** the contents of this paper.

Strategic relevance

The Waka Kotahi national mode-shift plan *Keeping Cities Moving* establishes the importance of closing missing links in cities' strategic cycling networks, and the role that great communications and events can play in building public support for investment.

The Northern Pathway shared user path is a critical missing strategic link in the Auckland active modes network. While the project is one of the 24 projects in the NZ Upgrade Programme, it is likely to be several years before Aucklanders can cycle or walk across the harbour. Opening the Auckland Harbour Bridge for events could demonstrate Waka Kotahi commitment to walking and cycling in the intervening years.

Background

Events that open the bridge for people to walk and cycle would provide the opportunity to demonstrate how the wider network will function with this 'missing link'. Allowing more trialling of the route during the planning phase of the Northern Pathway would provide valuable information about patronage, journeys, customer profiles and opportunities for mitigations.

Similar events held regularly in cities like Los Angeles, Bogota and London have helped to build public support for safer, more accessible streets. The Auckland Harbour Bridge is a significant landmark for Aucklanders and could attract people from across the city, giving them a safe and pleasant experience that would build demand for safer streets in their own neighbourhoods. This in turn could support the entire Auckland programme of cycling investment.

Generation Zero and Bike Auckland have proposed a rally across the bridge on 30 May 2021 to make the case for the use of a lane on the bridge for walking and cycling.

Approach Taken

Two core approaches were considered, based on similar events abroad. These were to either (a) hold a single event to experience the bridge as an attraction, or (b) regular events designed to build demand for the broader programme of investment.

Under these approaches, a range of options were investigated, each with different operational, financial and strategic considerations.

The development process sought to:

- Align to strategy
- Enable access to as many people as possible, including families
- Limit the impact on the wider transport system
- Be sustainable over the period of the permanent structure's development.

The approach provides opportunity to scale the event from weekly to monthly over the spring/summer period.

Cost and Resourcing

An internal project manager would be required to oversee the development of the events and a team of people from across Waka Kotahi would need to contribute to it. Marketing of the events could be scaled depending on the impact desired, from a low-cost approach of utilising Waka Kotahi and partner communication channels through to paid advertising.

To maximise potential uptake an event management company could be employed. The combined event management and marketing could cost approximately \$100,000 p.a. for regular events over a single spring/summer season. Initial investigations indicate a per event cost for traffic management of \$40,000.

While this event will be less intensive when compared to the running of a Marathon event, there will be significant operational resources required to manage the movement of people on the bridges itself and the traffic impacts on the wider network. We would most likely need to look at developing plans to reduce the operational overhead if we were to run more regular weekly or monthly events which may incur additional costs.

Also currently not accounted for are any costs associated with improved access for people walking and cycling via the local road network, this would need to be developed in partnership with Auckland Transport and Panuku, and could involve local road closures to enable safe access. This is a significantly lower cost than traffic management for the Auckland Marathon, for example, due to there being a much lower number of local road closures and traffic control personnel required.

Sponsorship

Similar events held in other cities are often organised in partnership with a commercial organisation to offset the cost of the events. Developing a sponsorship model would require a significant

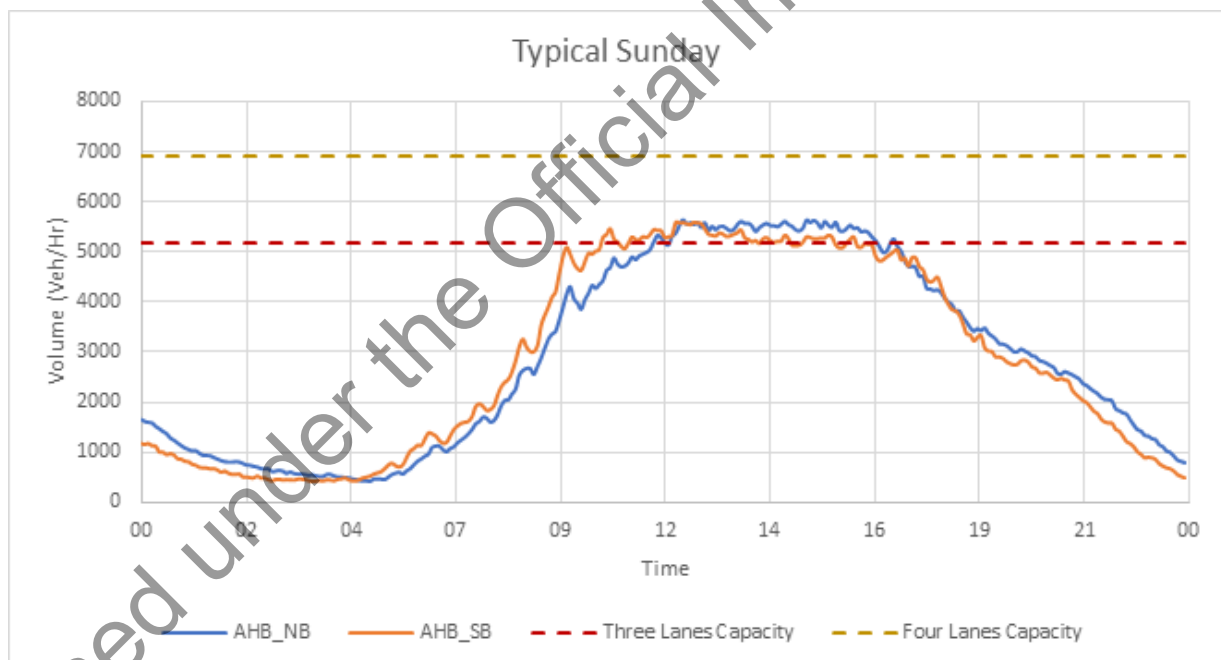
investment of time and the right skill set to negotiate, but would help to maximise the impact of events.

Operational Considerations

Traffic Management Operations

- Average traffic volumes on Sundays indicate that one lane on the Harbour Bridge could be utilised without significant impact to other road users, however this would not provide sufficient space to manage an event safely.
- Opening two lanes, operating three traffic lanes in either direction, would require travel demand management to reduce the impact on the transport system. The period of time over the weekend when demand would exceed capacity is limited to late morning through to late afternoon (see Figure 1 below). A morning event would therefore be recommended.
- While utilising the eastern (southbound) clip-ons would align to the proposal for the permanent structure, it would be far less disruptive to operate the event on the western (Northbound) clip-ons. The Auckland Marathon utilises the eastern clip-ons due to the course alignment at either end of the bridge. The marathon requires a significant number of ramp closures along with the bus lane at Onewa, which is particularly disruptive to public transport. The use of the western clip-ons would enable access at Curran Street and Stafford Road.

Figure 1: Average Sunday Auckland Harbour Bridge traffic volumes



Safety

- The bridge parapet is below standard, at 1.4m high, for safe walking and cycling. This could be remedied by constructing a lightweight tensioned wire restraint above the top of the barrier to be left in situ for regular events, subject to further investigations to establish feasibility and price. Alternatively it could be achieved by excluding people from immediately next to the parapet utilising marshals on the bridge.

- A single lane closure requires cones along the centreline between lanes 1 and 2, with safety zone requirements which reduces the available width to 2.5m. This would be too narrow for safe operation and a risk remains of errant drivers entering the closed lane.
- Closing two lanes of the Harbour Bridge would enable 7m of useable space for an event. The majority of the clip-on lanes are separated from the main bridge, however temporary options for safe separation of cars and people on each of the approaches needs to be investigated.

Access

The event would be designed to be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Further investigation is required with partners to develop the plan for connecting people to the Harbour Bridge, however the recommended access points are Curran Street and Stafford Road. Closing these two onramps would have limited impact to people driving across the bridge and there would be no impact to public transport users. We would work closely with Auckland Transport and Panuku to ensure there is convenient and safe access via local streets and public transport.

Options Analysis

Option	Pro	Con	Costs
Do Nothing	No risk of negative feedback from people who don't support the use of the bridge for events for walking and cycling.	Reputational risk of Waka Kotahi not demonstrating leadership. Lack of alignment to strategic goal. Risk of negative feedback from people who want walking and cycling access across the bridge. No opportunity to build demand for the crossing or test access implications.	Nothing.
Single Event	Some ability to demonstrate demand for the harbour crossing. Test how the crossing might be used by people walking and cycling, and how regular events could be operated, before investing in regular events. Lower cost associated with a single event.	Unclear alignment with strategic goal. Risk of negative feedback from people who don't support the use of the bridge for events for walking and cycling. Greater numbers of people than anticipated attempt to attend and traffic management is insufficient. There is demand for more events, or to utilise lanes of the bridge for walking and cycling, which would	Approx \$150,000

		require further investment.	
Regular Events	Stronger alignment with strategic goal. Build demand for the future crossing over the period before the crossing is constructed. Provide momentum for the programme of investment for walking and cycling across Auckland. Provide greater opportunity for people to take part and therefore be of greater value to Aucklanders.	Risk of negative feedback from people who don't support the use of the bridge for events for walking and cycling. Greater overall cost associated with ongoing events.	There would be a cost of approx \$150,000 - \$600,000 for a spring to summer season, depending on frequency of events. This would include event and traffic management. For a more permanent barrier system, there would be a cost of approximately \$2.5m.

Next steps

If the Board wants to proceed with opening the bridge to people walking and cycling, the following next steps are proposed:

1. Commence discussions with Auckland Transport and Panuku
2. Develop a detailed budget and investigate a partnership model for the events with Auckland Council
3. Come back to the Board with final proposal and costs
4. Employ a project manager and procure an event management team
5. Undertake investigations to design an appropriate barrier system and adapt the access points
6. Develop a communications plan and commence marketing of the event series
7. Develop an evaluation plan to ensure data and experiences of the events are captured.

Key issues

The key issues for the series of events are:

- *Strategic alignment to the Northern Pathway project:* The proposed event is designed to maximise uptake by as broader audience as possible, including families, to demonstrate latent demand and build public support for the crossing, and the wider Auckland programme of investment. The proposal of utilising the bridge on Sundays would require careful messaging around the Northern Pathway's wider purpose of all week access, and design for commuting as well as recreational use.
- *Stakeholder expectations:* The Northern Pathway is one of the most anticipated projects in the country and consultation indicates high demand for the crossing. There have also been repeated requests to utilise the Auckland Harbour Bridge for people walking and cycling. This series of events would contribute to the wider communications approach for the Northern Pathway, however risk remains that it will not sufficiently meet stakeholder expectation of permanent utilisation of the bridge, or that such events unduly impact other users of the bridge. There is also the risk that events unduly impact other users of the bridge, or in surrounding neighbourhoods, resulting in negative feedback from people who don't believe this is a good use of tax payers dollars.

- *Impact on the transport system:* There is a traffic congestion risk of holding an event, which could impact operations for public transport and the wider network.
- *Crowd management:* There is a risk that there is significantly more demand to attend the event than anticipated, and that the works required to make it safe are underestimated. The event series would be designed to safely accommodate a maximum number of people, and marketing will ensure the events are well attended. Risk of overcrowding could be managed by ticketing the event.
- *Legal and compliance:* Due to the unknown 'reason' for people attending the event (unlike the marathon where is following a set route and time period) crowd control is a risk. We are limited to time available on a Sunday morning which would require the bridge to be cleared at a certain point in time, this could create dissatisfaction from participants if asked to move on. A closely monitored ticketing, access and exit plan would be required along with emergency protocols for the event licence.
- *Cancellation:* In inclement weather we may need to make the decision to cancel the event (high winds etc), if the series were regular we would likely roll to the next date rather than reschedule. This would need to be tested once maximum numbers and level of interest are confirmed.

Health & safety, customer/stakeholder & environmental impact

While the impact of this decision is considered by the NZ Transport Agency to be neutral in terms of health and safety, the public and other stakeholders, and the environment. It will be important for the initial event to have sufficient observers and event management staff on the bridge itself to ensure any unforeseen safety risks or concerns are dealt with immediately and capture any improvements needed for future events.

There will be environmental implications in terms of effects on the natural environment as a result of construction, however there will also be health and environmental benefits due to the increase mode share for active users.

Public interest in this decision and the next steps in the project's development will be high. A communications plan will need to be developed as part of an implementation plan to set public expectations around the nature and purpose of the events.