

OIA2024 – 214

To Mike Mellor

Via FYI.org – fyi-request-29517-d6202289@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mike

I am responding to your requests under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), asking for:

- *the full timeline of the decision-making process,*
- *all communications with Hutt City Council and bridge users, including any notice provided,*
- *details of the maintenance access proposed to be provided,*
- *why this maintenance access cannot be adapted for pedestrian use,*
- *what consideration has been given to alternative pedestrian access,*
- *any other similar proposals that may be in the pipeline, and subsequent request asking*
- *the relevant community/communities that KiwiRail has identified, and all communications with them;*
- *their relevant interests, and how KiwiRail is having regard to them.*

Please find our response below.

The closure of the walkway is due to the planned upgrade to the rail bridge, part of which will involve the removal and replacement of the sleepers on the rail bridge.

As the walkway is attached to the sleepers, we have no option but to remove it as part of the upcoming work.

Because of the historical design of the walkway, it can't be replaced in its current state – i.e. with modern safety standards, a pedestrian walkway must be adequately separated from tracks, creating a safe distance between people and trains, and can't be supported by the tracks themselves.

A replacement walkway however could be built and be attached to the concrete piers, and we will be happy to do this if Hutt City Council opts to fund a replacement. We note that KiwiRail is only funded to work on our rail line, and we do not have funding for pedestrian walkways.

You can see our press statement here which provides a bit more information about the background and problems with the current structure <https://www.kiwirail.co.nz/media/ava-rail-bridge-walkway-to-close-in-2025>

The maintenance work on the Ava rail bridge includes:

- removing and replacing sleepers on the north-bound track
- removing and replacing rail and fastenings, across the bridge and on the bridge approaches, on both north-bound and south-bound tracks
- replacing the corrosion protection coating for the steel bridge beams
- installing emergency access to the structure.



This emergency access upgrade involves building unprotected walkways on the bridge, which are needed for maintenance access and as an emergency egress for train passengers and crew if a train was stopped on the bridge.

These walkways will sit right next to the track so are unsafe for public use.

Timeline of the decision-making process

There has been an agreement in place for the Ava bridge walkway between the railways and local council since 1927.

The most recent iteration is a 2006 Grant Agreement which transferred ownership of the walkway asset at Ava Bridge from KiwiRail to Hutt City Council.

Discussions between KiwiRail and Hutt City Council about the need to upgrade the rail bridge, and how this affects the walkway began early in 2024.

- February 2024 – KiwiRail contacted Hutt City Council about plans to upgrade the bridge if rail infrastructure funding becomes available.
- May 2024 – Government announced funding for Wellington and Auckland metro renewals in Budget 2024.
- June 2024 – KiwiRail worked through the process of determining the split between the two metros. Funding for Ava Bridge renewals was subsequently included in the work programme put forward for Government approval.
- July 2024 – funding for Ava Bridge renewals was confirmed.
- September 2024 – KiwiRail arranged a site visit involving KiwiRail and Hutt City Council officers.
- October 2024 – KiwiRail advised Hutt City Council of the need to close the Ava Bridge walkway in order to carry out the upgrade work.

Communication with Hutt City Council and community

- 10 October 2024 – Letter to Hutt City Council confirming the closure of the walkway to coincide with works on the rail bridge.
- 14 November 2024 letter to Hutt City Council Mayor, Barry Campbell, in response to a letter from the Mayor received 7 November.
- 10/11 Dec 2024 – correspondence with local schools, Bob Scott Retirement Village, wider community via Moerā Community Hub, and letter drops around the neighbourhood.

Please find this correspondence attached to this response.

Consideration given to alternative pedestrian access

While KiwiRail is mindful that this is popular walkway with the community. Because it is literally attached to the rail sleepers there is no possibility of keeping it intact, and, as noted above, current safety regulations mean it cannot be replaced in its current form.

We are talking with Hutt City Council and are open to replacing it with a new walkway that can be attached to the piers of the bridge. But, because KiwiRail funding only goes so far as to pay for the upkeep and replacement of train infrastructure, the budget to pay for a new walkway would need to be sourced via Hutt City Council.



We continue to talk with, and are happy to work with Hutt City Council should they decide to pursue and fund an alternative option.

Social responsibility

Safety is a key consideration for KiwiRail when it comes to social responsibility. We need to adhere to modern safety standards and invest in a safe and reliable rail network. This year the Government invested \$52.9 million in the Wellington network which includes the rail bridge upgrade and other priority rail works around the region.

This work is crucial for ensuring the continuation of commuter services across Wellington.

Engagement with the community

Our engagement is focused on informing neighbours about the upcoming works and potential for disruption, which has involved a letter drop to neighbours on either side of the bridge. We also made contact with schools and the kindergarten in the area, and Bob Scott Retirement Village. We have also notified Moerā Community Hub, and signs have been installed at the bridge.

We will continue to work with Hutt City Council and the community on possible options for the site. Because decisions relating to the future of the walkway rest with Hutt City Council, Council will take the lead on wider community engagement.

We trust this answers your queries.

This information has been released under the OIA. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of this response by the Ombudsman, in accordance with section 28(3) of the Act. The relevant details can be found on the Ombudsman's website: www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Allard", written over a white background.

Dave Allard

Senior Government Relations Advisor, KiwiRail

