

14 November 2024

Campbell Barry

Mayor of Lower Hutt

9(2)(a) - Privacy

CC Chris Bishop MP

Dear Mayor Barry,

Closure of the Ava pedestrian walkway

Thank you for your letter regarding the pedestrian walkway on the Ava rail bridge.

I appreciate your concern about the planned walkway closure and am aware that it is well used by the public.

The issue is that the rail and sleepers on the Ava rail bridge are near the end of life and if not replaced that could see the rail bridge closed and the Hutt Valley Line cut off within two years.

Full track renewal and structural maintenance of the rail bridge has been deferred for several years due to funding constraints. The Government announced funding for Wellington and Auckland metro renewals in Budget 2024 at the end of May. Since then KiwiRail has gone through a process to determine the split between the two metros and exactly what renewals would be included in each metro work programme. It was not until this work was done that we could confirm that the Ava rail bridge renewals would be undertaken as part of the Wellington programme.

As we were doing detailed planning work, the issue with the Ava pedestrian walkway came to light. The walkway sits on extended sleepers and there is not enough space or separation between pedestrians and trains, neither of which is allowed under modern engineering standards. Undertaking the bridge renewals brings these modern standards into effect, so the walkway has to be removed.

Regarding timing of the renewals work, the Budget funding has to be spent within FY2025. We plan to begin work in February 2025, with a targeted completion date of June 2025.

We were not aware that the Ava bridge walkway was a recommended tsunami evacuation route.

Unfortunately, being part of a tsunami evacuation zone doesn't alter the requirement for the walkway to be safe and compliant with current standards. We understand it is well documented



that the walkway is in a poor state, and there is no way for us to keep it in place and open from the time we begin repairs on the bridge.

The renewals will include building unprotected walkways on the bridge, which are needed for maintenance access and as an emergency egress for train passengers if a train was stopped on the bridge. I have asked my staff to explore whether it is feasible for these walkways to play a role in an emergency tsunami evacuation but cannot confirm if this is a realistic option at the moment.

While the existing walkway has to be removed, there is no fundamental issue with the rail bridge spans and/or piers being used to support a new pedestrian walkway, providing it met our current engineering standards. If, at any point, the Council is able to make funding available, including through the Cross Valley Connections programme, KiwiRail would do what we could to facilitate that.

I have been advised that our staff are working with Hutt City Council staff to develop a joint communications plan around the walkway closure.

Thank you,

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General Manager Metros

KiwiRail

