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# Wellington Rail Programme Newsletter

March 2024

## Work over Easter

KiwiRail is in the middle of an \$870 million upgrade of the Wellington metro network. It includes work around Wellington and the Wairarapa to enable more frequent trains, and other improvements to support Greater Wellington Regional Council's new hybrid trains to the Wairarapa and Palmerston North.

We have a lot of work to do and have to do it while commuter trains keep running. To minimise disruption we need to take advantage of times when rail patronage is low, to get work done efficiently and productively.

This Easter most of the Wellington network will be closed to passenger trains between 29 March and 1 April. Trains will be running between Porirua and Waikanae.

We will have about 280 staff and contractors out across network this Easter, working 24/7 in many places. Work will include:

- Replacing a crucial piece of track infrastructure (turnout) near Petone, which allows trains to turn onto the Melling Line.
- Doing initial work in the Remutaka Tunnel, ahead of major track replacement work at Christmas.
- Continuing work on the Fitzherbert St (SH2) level crossing in Featherston. Work over Easter is focussed on the pedestrian part of the crossing and will not require the road to be closed.
- Installing cables under the Matarawa Rd and Moffats Rd level crossings south-west of Carterton.

This is part of an upgrade to the Wairarapa signals system, to allow more frequent trains.

- Laying new track at Tawa, which will require the McLellan St level crossing to be closed.
- Replacing ballast (the rocks the tracks sit in) around the northern end of Waikanae. There will be traffic management around the Hadfield Road level crossing.
- Continuing work around Wellington Railway Station to improve signals and track layout, which will allow more trains in and out of the station.

Metlink will be running bus replacements in areas where the track is closed. Information is available at:

[Buses replacing trains » Metlink](#)



A work train carries 50 metre-long track panels (made up of composite sleepers attached to 50kg rail), for the track replacement in the Maoribank Tunnel over Christmas



*Welding sections of rail together at Plimmerton during the Christmas break*

### **Artwork celebrated as Plimmerton Station's major upgrade winds up**

KiwiRail was delighted to be part of an event at Plimmerton Station this month to celebrate the 'Science in the Swamp' murals painted by local school students. The event was hosted by the Plimmerton Residents' Association and was attended by Porirua City Mayor Anita Baker and around 20 members of the community along with the young artists and their families.

Senior project manager Peter Coles

says the artwork is a wonderful addition to the look and feel of the station, which has undergone a pretty major upgrade.

"We've recently completed a new platform to reduce congestion, and to allow more services to run in the future.

That's involved building additional shelters, constructing a third track through the station and realigning some of the existing track. We've also resurfaced the existing central platform. The new underpass where the students' murals take pride of place is also part of the makeover.

The Plimmerton Station upgrade

started in 2021 and finished in March this year. Peter says he is grateful to the community for their support.

"The collaboration over the project life has been amazing, with assistance from multiple parties, including the Residents Association, Porirua City Council, Mainline Steam Heritage Trust, Greater Wellington Regional Council, and Metlink.

"Plimmerton is a special spot and tight community, and this station is quite a unique site with the heritage site and building on it. It is lovely to see it looking all fresh and new."



## Wellington in winter

By the start of April, as temperatures drop, we won't need to impose heat speed restrictions on parts of the Wellington network.

However, instead of the risk of rails expanding in the heat, in winter we will have to deal with ice on the tracks and overhead electric cables, heavy rainfalls that can cause slips around parts of Wellington, sea spray on tracks near the harbour and even heavy leaf fall, which can cause areas of low adhesion that makes it challenging for trains to grip the rail.

We'll continue our vigilance through the winter months, and we'll be taking a number of actions to reduce the impact of these hazards.

For example, we closely monitor the steep hillsides on the Kapiti Line between Pukerua Bay and Paekākāriki, and in recent years have undertaken slope stabilisation work there and in other parts of Wellington. However, given the terrain on large parts of the Kapiti and Johnsonville Lines, slips remain a risk.

Grit is put down to help manage

slippery tracks but ice on the overhead lines can be difficult to deal with. Though there are usually only a handful of days in winter that are cold enough to coat the overheads in ice, when that does happen there is a risk the flow of power to trains is disrupted and services can come to a sudden halt.

We will be doing everything we can to keep things running smoothly, but, as all Wellingtonians know, winter in the Capital is never easy and there is always the risk of disruptions.

## Wairarapa Update

### Level crossing upgrades and closures

Last month we released the independent report recommending which of the 30 Wairarapa level crossings across the Wairarapa could be upgraded, and which needed to close.

With more trains on the lines moving at faster speed, it's essential that KiwiRail looks at safety and continues to satisfy NZTA regulations by providing a safe operation 'So Far As is Reasonably Practical'. We were able to reduce the number originally earmarked for closing from 7 to 5.

This includes keeping Pembroke Street level crossing in Carterton open, and moving Judds Road, which does need to close, to the very end of the work schedule to give Masterton District Council time to secure funding for the road changes needed to keep it open. You can see the full report on our [website](#).

We are in the process of finalising the level crossing work programme. Currently we are:

- Beginning talks with Masterton District Council about the process and possible timeframes for designing and building the changed roading layout at Judds Road. We will proceed with the level crossing design on the



*Making safety and performance upgrades to the Fitzherbert St, Featherston, level crossing over State Highway 2 during the Christmas holidays*

- assumption that it will remain open.
- Finishing up work on the Fitzherbert level crossing in Featherston by completing work on the pedestrian maze at the north end of the crossing over Easter.
- Digging trenches ready for laying signalling cables along the entire length of railway line between Featherston and Masterton. At present we are trenching along a rural section in Carterton, and over Easter we will be working underneath the Matarawa Rd and Moffats Rd crossings.

## Work on renewing New Zealand's second longest tunnel gets underway

It's been a long time since tracks were laid inside this 8.8km tunnel – the second longest in the country, which has been in operation since first opening in 1955.

With passenger and freight trains passing through every day, the Remutaka Tunnel is a critical piece of infrastructure for the region.

Last year we got inside to replace the drainage in the tunnel. We are excited now to be starting the work of completely replacing the old wooden sleepers with modern composite sleepers and heavier gauge 50kg railway line. This will allow trains to travel through the tunnel safely and comfortably at 100kph instead of the current 60kph limit.

Project manager David Sauvageon says KiwiRail is in the preparatory stages of a significant, and complex piece of engineering work.

“The tunnel is a challenging environment. Our teams have to work in a dark and confined space, and we have short windows to get as much of the work done as we can when trains aren't running.

“Some of the early preparation work is underway, with the crew on site and in



full swing 24/7 from Friday 29 March through to the end of Monday 1 April. There will be further work over ANZAC Weekend, and smaller work windows throughout the year. Christmas will see our next major line shut down where we can do the bulk of the work and complete the job.

“We're mindful of keeping noise and disruption at arms-length from the neighbours where we can and have set up an additional laydown area where we are further away from people and houses. All high-noise activity, like dismantling the old rail panels,

will happen during the day as much as possible, and we will have traffic management in place to keep the environment safe for anyone on the road.”

Upgrading the Remutaka Tunnel is part of Future Rail – a partnership between KiwiRail and Greater Wellington Regional Council to make train commuting around the Wellington Region and Wairarapa faster and with more frequent services. Peak and off-peak services on the Wairarapa line are set to double from 10 to 20 per day from 2029.

## Wairarapa train disruptions

We appreciate the frustration Wairarapa Line passengers are experiencing at the moment with extended journey times.

\$375 million is being invested to upgrade the aging Wairarapa Line, to improve its resilience and support more reliable and frequent trains. Some of the current delays are due to speed restrictions on the lines, which are put in place to ensure trains can keep running safely. Speed restrictions are often in places where upgrade work is going on, has just been done and needs time to bed in, or where major work is yet to be done – such as in the Remutaka Tunnel. They are also used when a track fault has been discovered and needs to be fixed.

Currently there are approximately 15 minutes of speed restriction delays on the line – which will be reduced over time.

Other factors also influence service reliability, such as short-term infrastructure faults and train crewing shortages.

### Wairarapa speed restriction sites include:

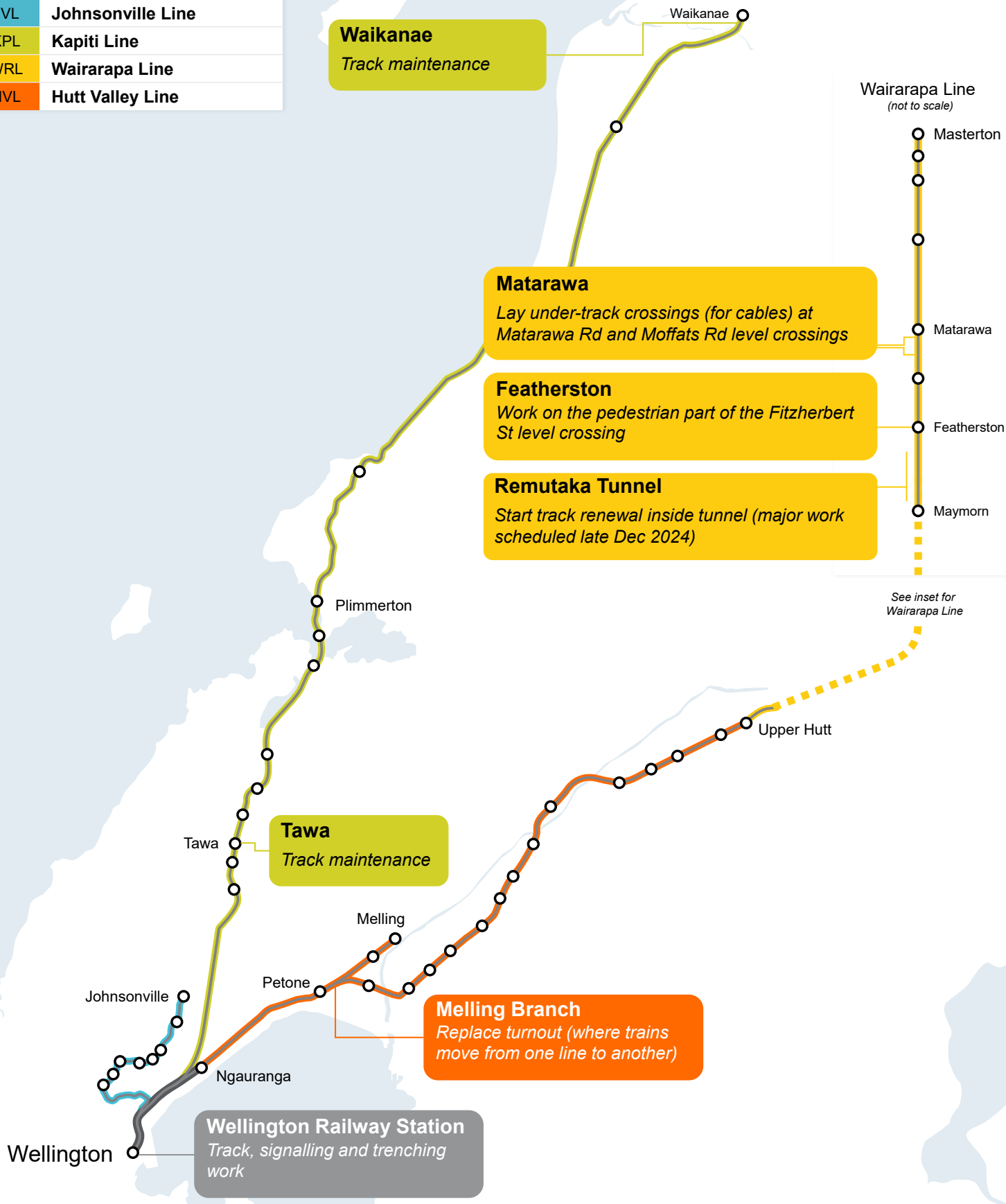
- Carriage vibrations in Wairarapa (~6min), north of Featherston – KiwiRail and Metlink are working together on a solution. Speed currently restricted to 60 km/h along parts of a 16km section of track.
- Renall Street Level Crossing (~1.5min), Featherston – Safety related. Signalling design work required. Speed currently restricted to 10 km/h.
- Speedy's Crossing (~1min), near Featherston – Safety related, following a major vehicle collision a few years ago. This will be mitigated by the Wairarapa level crossing project. Speed currently restricted to 40 km/h.
- Remutaka Tunnel (~3min) – 8.8km track replacement required, scheduled for Christmas 2024. Speed currently restricted to 60 km/h.



# KiwiRail Wellington works

## Easter 2024

JVL	Johnsonville Line
KPL	Kapiti Line
WRL	Wairarapa Line
HVL	Hutt Valley Line



If you have queries please contact our Community Engagement team on 0800 801 070 ext 43042 or by email at [contactus@kiwirail.co.nz](mailto:contactus@kiwirail.co.nz). For public transport information visit [metlink.org.nz](http://metlink.org.nz)

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