

## Wairarapa Level Crossing changes – Frequently Asked Questions

### **What work are you doing in the Wairarapa Line?**

Wairarapa Line work is part of the Wellington Metro Upgrade Programme, a \$700 million programme of works designed to build a more reliable, modern and resilient railway across the wider Wellington region.

The Wairarapa Line is aging. KiwiRail is in the process of replacing existing tracks, sleepers, bridges and making improvements that will support the introduction of new, more frequent trains on the line. This work will also remove speed restrictions on the line, so commuters will experience faster journey times. This is a once in a generation investment in the Wairarapa Line. Work started in late 2021, some of it is happening now and work will continue until to 2026

Safety is a key component of this work. In addition to building better track infrastructure that can safely handle more and faster commuter trains, KiwiRail also has to reassess the safety of level crossings on the Wairarapa Line.

### **Why do you have to close level crossings on the Wairarapa Line?**

Greater Wellington Regional Council is investing in new hybrid trains that will be able to offer more frequent commuter services between the Wairarapa and Wellington. At the same time, KiwiRail's track upgrade work will allow trains to travel faster.

To allow more frequent trains, KiwiRail has to reassess safety on the line and submit proposed changes (to ensure safety in the context of more frequent trains) to the rail regulator Waka Kotahi. This is a variation to the Wairarapa Line's existing Safety Case.

Level crossings present a documented risk to pedestrians and vehicles. That risk increases as we start to run more trains more often and at faster speeds.

By international standards, there are too many level crossings on the Wairarapa Line – with 30 crossings along the 45km length of line between the end of the Remutaka Tunnel and Masterton. This is an average of one crossing every 1.5km, with some crossings as little as 175m apart. In comparison, the 30km Hutt Valley Line (Wellington- Upper Hutt) has three road level crossings.

To improve safety we expect to upgrade the majority of the level crossings – so that they will all have barrier arms, flashing lights and warning bells. This helps reduce risk.

However, the best way to remove risk is to close level crossings. Given the high number of level crossings on the line, some will have to be closed.

### **Why are you now doing a wider regional study?**

KiwiRail's safety assessments of level crossings, which led to our upgrade/closure proposal were based on the safety characteristics of individual level crossings, factoring in other considerations – such as whether there are viable alternative routes, in the case of closure.

The community called for a better understanding of the safety risk across the region, a better understanding of traffic impacts, and clarification of the criteria the rail regulator Waka Kotahi uses when assessing safety cases.

The purpose of this new study is to be as thorough as we possibly can. We're keen to reassure the community that we have carried out a full assessment of the impact of any proposed closures.

The study, which is expected to take a couple of months, will provide that broader view. The rail regulator will also be engaged in the study, providing greater clarity around their safety case assessment criteria.

The study may confirm our initial assessment, or it may present a different perspective on any level crossing closures along the line. It may be that we need to close fewer crossings, or more.

The study, along with the safety assessments for individual crossings, community feedback we've received from residents, commuters and organisations such as Fire and Emergency New Zealand and Free Ambulance services, will feed into updated level crossing upgrade/closure proposals which we will take back to the council/community working groups.

**Does your wider regional study mean that decisions around level crossing closures will no longer need to be made by October 2023?**

Yes. We need to complete the study and go back to Masterton and Carterton council/community working groups with an update level crossing change plan for the region.

We do need to begin some level crossing work over the Christmas/New Year period but we will start with crossings that we know cannot be closed, for example because doing so would create a deadend road and stop people getting to their homes.

**Does your wider regional study mean that fewer level crossings will be closed?**

We won't know that until the study is complete. This is expected to take a few months. The study could recommend fewer level crossings should be closed, but it could also recommend more be closed.

The study, along with the safety assessments for individual crossings and other factors, will feed into updated level crossing upgrade/closure proposals which we will take back to the council/community working groups.

**What is the minimum number of crossings that must be closed?**

There is no minimum or maximum number of crossings that must be closed.

KiwiRail must develop a proposal to ensure rail safety on the Wairarapa Line, to allow more frequent commuter train services to run. This has to be approved by Waka Kotahi (as rail regulator). This "safety case" will be based on international best practice, which will include safety improvements at crossings and some closures.

The Wairarapa Line has 30 level crossings in a 45 km stretch of line, which is high compared to the rest of New Zealand and internationally:

- In the Masterton district there are six level crossings
- In the Carterton district there are 17 level crossings – with five of them in a 1.1-kilometre stretch of line
- In the South Wairarapa district there are seven level crossings.

Safety issues around Wairarapa Line level crossings, given increased train frequency to come, include:

- Judds Road in the Masterton district, which is particularly risky for drivers because of the short distance between the junction and the rail line. This is known as short-stacking and means that a long vehicle is unable to safely clear the level crossing when stopping at the adjacent road intersection - which is a significant safety risk.
- The number of crossings in the 1.1km stretch of line through Carterton – which is extremely high and represents a safety risk.

### **Are level crossings closing anywhere else in New Zealand?**

International best practice is to close level crossings, wherever practical.

There is a requirement to remove all level crossings across the Auckland metro network to improve safety.

Like Wairarapa, this is to enable more frequent trains than there currently are across the city, when the City Rail Link (CRL) opens.

CRL will enable commuter services in the city to double, over time. Though on a much smaller scale, the new hybrid trains on the Wairarapa Line will also double the current number of peak services and introduce more inter-peak services.

### **What is KiwiRail's criteria for assessing which level crossings to close?**

International rail best practice is to remove all road level crossings – completely removing the risk of collisions with vehicles.

This means, to leave crossings open we have to demonstrate that it is not reasonably practical to close them.

When considering level crossing closures, we look at a range of criteria:

- Individual crossing safety profile (done to the international LCSIA and LCAM standards). Short stacking for example makes a crossing particularly unsafe.
- The viability of closure – a number of the crossings in the Wairarapa region have to remain open because there are either no alternate road routes, the alternative would significantly lengthen journey times, or the level crossing closure would significantly disrupt traffic flows. Closing any level crossing impacts traffic, but some have a major effect. Reflected in our original proposal, some crossings were to remain open at councils' request because those roads are major traffic routes. KiwiRail has also been engaging with Waka Kotahi, as Local Roding Authority responsible for SH2, around impacts on traffic flows.

- We are also commissioning a region wide study which will consider level crossing safety across the Wairarapa as a whole, including impacts on traffic.

### What is Waka Kotahi’s criteria for approving a safety case?

KiwiRail has primary responsibility for assessing safety at level crossings and proposing changes to manage risk, in the context of more frequent trains running on the Wairarapa Line, for the Safety Case variation.

Waka Kotahi, as rail regulator, has an oversight role – checking that our level crossing proposals (upgrades or closures) will ensure an acceptable level of safety on the line, so far as is reasonably practical.

Waka Kotahi is working with us as we do our regional study.

### How many rail collisions have there been in the Wairarapa?

Collisions at level crossings on the Wairarapa Line over the last decade:

Date	Level Crossing	Incident
17/2/2013	Wiltons Road, Carterton District	Ute collided with train
18/10/2013	Andersons Line, Carterton District	Car collided with train
21/2/2014	Fox St, Featherston	Car collided with train (while overtaking bus)
1/2/2016	Western Lake Rd, South Wairarapa	Car collided with train
5/9/2017	Kent St, Carterton	Car collided with train
20/10/2017	Norman Ave, Carterton District	Heavy vehicle collided with train
7/1/2020	Hodders Rd, Carterton District	Car collided with train
28/1/2021	Western Lake Rd, South Wairarapa	Car collided with train
27/3/2022	Pembroke St, Carterton	Car collided with train
31/12/2022	Matarawa Rd, Carterton District	Heavy vehicle collided with train
21/7/2023	Norfolk Rd, Carterton District	Car collided with train

### **Why were you proposing to close level crossings where there haven't been any collisions/or leaving crossings open where there have been collisions?**

KiwiRail safety standards and the safety case variation are about the potential risk of collision across the region, in the context of more frequent trains running on the line.

Though more than 70 per cent of collisions in the last decade have been in the Carterton District, our level crossing changes are not focussed on specific crossings where there have been collisions in the past. The total number of crossings in the Wairarapa is itself a safety risk.

Some crossings, where there have previously been collisions cannot be closed – given there are no alternative routes (for example, in the case of Andersons Line, Hodders Rd and Matarawa Rd) or closures would significantly impact traffic flows.

All crossings that remain open will be upgraded with improved safety features, which will help reduce the risk of future collisions.

### **Won't closing road level crossings increase transport emissions – given people will need to take detours and travel further?**

The entire reason for the safety improvements on the Wairarapa Line is to allow more frequent commuter services between the Wairarapa and Wellington, and across the Wairarapa region.

More frequent, faster and convenient journeys will encourage more people to leave their cars at home and make use of rail public transport within the region and for the longer journey into Wellington. This will create significant emissions savings long term.

### **What is happening with the Judds Rd level crossing in Masterton?**

This crossing has short stacking issues – where a long vehicle is unable to safely clear the level crossing when stopping at the adjacent road intersection. This is a significant safety risk.

Eliminating the short stacking risk will be a vital element of the safety case variation that is required to implement more frequent commuter train timetable on the Wairarapa Line.

After discussions with community representatives and the Masterton District Council, KiwiRail has assisted in drafting some potential road layout changes that could reduce some of the risk associated with crossing. KiwiRail is not funded to undertake this work, so alternate funding would be required.

We have paused the Wairarapa level crossing changes while we undertake the wider regional safety study. We will continue working with the community working group around level crossing changes.

### **What's happening with the Brooklyn Rd level crossing in Carterton?**

Our initial plan was to close Kent Street instead of Brooklyn Rd. However, after discussions with the Carterton District Council we understood Kent Street is heavily used by through traffic to avoid going through Carterton itself.

We also learned that there was potential for a cycleway along Brooklyn Rd. If Brooklyn Rd were to close, the funds we have available for barrier arms and other protections could be used to build the cycle and pedestrian crossing, which the council would have to pay for if the road remained open and the cycleway went ahead.

We now understand the cycleway is unlikely to go across the tracks at Brooklyn Road.

We have paused the Wairarapa level crossing changes while we undertake the wider regional safety study. We will continue working with the Carterton council/community working group around level crossing changes in the district.

**Have you consulted with Fire & Emergency NZ and ambulance services?**

We have engaged with Fire & Emergency NZ, Wellington Free Ambulance and NZ Police around our proposed level crossing changes.

We expect to continue working with FENZ and Wellington Free Ambulance representatives through the Carterton council/community working group.

**Why did you not announce proposed level crossing closures in South Wairarapa?**

We are having discussions with the South Wairarapa Council around level crossing upgrades and some closures in its area. The Council are keen to align any changes with its upcoming master plan. We expect to announce level crossing changes later this year, when the Council's master plan goes out for public consultation.