

BoP Times

TEL Announcement

Local motorists face new \$2 toll

John Cousins | 29th July 2010



NEW DIRECTION: The new stretch of highway, known as the Tauranga Eastern Link, will be New Zealand's largest single roading contract. APN

Tolls of \$2 for cars and up to \$5 for trucks have been approved by the Government to kick-start the new \$450 million motorway from Baypark to Paengaroa.

Transport Minister Steven Joyce today announced that the 17km of new road bypassing Te Puke would be tolled for up to 35 years.

It meant that construction of the new road could now start next year - about seven years earlier than if the Government had not opted for tolls to cover the \$100 million funding shortfall.

Motorists will save up to 12 minutes in travel time each way when the new motorway opens in 2016.

The motorway is one of the Government's seven essential state highway projects linked to New Zealand's economic prosperity.

Mr Joyce said the project was driven by the pace of growth in the Bay and would kill three birds with one stone - it would improve access to the port, improve safety along one of New

Zealand's most dangerous stretches of road, and allow development to go ahead alongside the new road.

The main developments were the massive residential expansion planned for Papamoa East out to the Kaituna River and the proposed Rangiuru Business Park.

Mr Joyce said it would also improve the quality of life for Te Puke residents, and the town would not look back from getting heavy traffic out of the main street.

The reality was that if the tolling proposal had been rejected during the community consultation phase of the project, then the \$1 billion the Government was putting into highway construction each year would not have been enough to get the project started early next year. It would have been pushed back by projects with a greater need, such as completing the Waikato Expressway.

Mr Joyce said there had been 92 per cent support for tolls.

The New Zealand Transport Agency anticipated the Cabinet decision by calling for tenders for the 23km project which consists of widening the existing road from Baypark to Domain Rd and building a new four-lane motorway across farmland to Paengaroa.

Tenders have closed, with two New Zealand consortiums lodging design and build bids for the country's largest single roading contract. A decision on the successful tender will be announced in three months.

NZTA regional director Harry Wilson said the earlier the road was built, the better.

Te Puke's commercial and industrial growth had been constrained by the capacity of the existing highway.

"The solution was to bypass Te Puke and we are now delivering that."

An electronic tolling system using sensors mounted on an overhead gantry meant motorists would not have to stop to pay a toll.

The sensors will detect the size of the vehicle and photograph the number plate, allowing the bill to be sent to the owner.

NZTA state highways manager Rod James said that he was confident motorists would see the value in paying a toll, rather than sticking to the old route through Te Puke.

Apart from the the time saving, it would be much safer, with plenty of opportunities to pass.

It would be a clearer decision than whether to use Tauranga's current toll road - Route K.

"It is a very different project in terms of the benefits it provides."

Mr James said it was a win-win situation because the existing road would be considerably improved for those who still needed to use it.

Nearly all the properties along the route of the Eastern Link have been purchased, with negotiations continuing for the last four properties.

Mr James was hopeful they would not have to resort to the Environment Court, although construction could start regardless.

Mayor credits 'unrelenting focus' for roading victory

[John Cousins](#) | 30th July 2010

An "unrelenting focus" by the Western Bay of Plenty's political leaders preceded yesterday's historic announcement that construction will start early next year on the \$455 million Tauranga Eastern Link.

"We never lost sight of what we wanted to achieve," said Western Bay District Council Mayor Ross Paterson of a journey that started many years ago.

He said the road went to the heart of achieving economic development opportunities and housing an extra 70,000 people by 2050.

"It's great we can get on and get it built."

Mr Paterson spoke after Transport Minister Stephen Joyce confirmed that Cabinet had agreed to toll the Eastern Link - meaning construction could start seven years earlier than if the Government had relied on the National Land Transport Fund to meet the \$100 million funding shortfall.

He paid tribute to the importance that cooperation between councils played in the Government having the confidence to get behind the project.

Mr Joyce said the Eastern Link would bring a significant boost to the region at a time when economic development was absolutely needed.

He noted the role played by SmartGrowth - the Western Bay of Plenty joint councils' planning document to manage growth out to 2050.

"It is great to get everyone together knowing what they want."

Mr Joyce said the project was very important for Tauranga, with Cabinet's decision endorsing the fact that the Western Bay of Plenty was one of New Zealand's most important economic development areas.

Talking in 2015 dollars, he said the project would cost about \$567 million, of which \$137 million would be borrowed and repaid from tolls.

The existing road through Te Puke would remain a free alternative route once the Eastern Link opened in 2016.

New Zealand Transport Agency's regional director, Harry Wilson, said construction of the Eastern Link would create real jobs where they were needed.

A joint statement from the MPs for the Bay of Plenty and Tauranga, Tony Ryall and Simon Bridges, said that as well as shortening the journey for motorists and reducing transport costs for business, the efficiencies created by easier access to the port would boost the region's growth.

They said public consultation saw 92 per cent of respondents give conditional or unconditional support to using tolls to advance the project. Bay of Plenty Regional Council chief executive, Bill Bayfield, said SmartGrowth recognised the challenges that population growth would bring to the region and how future projects, including the Rangiuru Business Park, would benefit immensely from the new road