

Otorohanga Stopbank Pathway - Project Overview

Introduction

Otorohanga District Council with the support of the Otorohanga Community Board are constructing a 3.5 km long gravel pathway for shared use on the top of the stopbanks alongside the Waipa River and the outer edge of the main Otorohanga urban centre. This pathway will be a significant asset for our community that will be accessible to everyone including the young, the elderly and the less abled.

Primary Purpose

- To provide a safe and accessible off road route for all members of our community by connecting main urban, residential and recreational areas with a 2.5 metre wide shared pathway.
- To provide a safe and accessible pathway for children walking/cycling to school with the pathway connecting Otorohanga Primary School, Otorohanga South School and Otorohanga College, also including footpath connections to St Mary's Catholic School.

Other Use

- To provide for and encourage recreational opportunities for families living in our District while showcasing our natural environment, cultural art and local history (both Maori and European).
- To add value to our visitor offering by providing another reason to stop and spend time in Otorohanga's main town centre.

Community Outcomes

- Otorohanga District is a safe place to live
- Ensure services and facilities meet the needs of the community
- Provide for the unique history and culture of the District
- Promote the local economy and opportunities for economic development
- Manage the natural and physical environment in a sustainable manner
- Foster an involved and engaged community
- Recognise the importance of the District's rural character

Project Details

- Shared use between pedestrians, cyclists and mobility scooters
- Safe access for children away from high traffic routes
- 3.5 km long
- 2.5 m wide
- 13 urban connection points, which include;
 - Otorohanga College
 - Otorohanga Primary
 - Otorohanga South School
 - Rangitahi/Te Kawa Street area (Bowling Club, Playcentre, Elizabeth Place Pensioner Housing, Motorhome & Caravan Assn)
 - Tennis Club
 - Island Reserve

- Te Keeti Marae
- Reg Brett Reserve & Jim Barker Playground
- Maniapoto Street
- Huiputea Reserve
- SH3 & SH31/39
- Progress Drive Industrial Park

Construction

- 150mm deep limestone fines main pathway
- 800 m2 of plastic flexible grid panel reinforced paving to slopes over 1.5 degrees
- 2000 m3 of earthworks to build ramp connections (to maintain stopbank structural integrity)
- 140 m2 of concrete pads at major vehicle crossover/linkage points, breaks in path materials
- 25m of mini bridging (to avoid water ponding as a result of that section of trail)
- 78m of retaining walls
- Regulatory and information signage (eg 'share with care', 'keep left', 'pedestrians have right of way')
- 5km of fencing
- 300m of timber rail fencing
- 22 gates (majority of these for managing stock crossings)
- Approximately 1800 m2 of grass reseeding
- Approximately 300 m2 of landscaping

Project Funding

ODC (Otorohanga Community Property Account) and NZTA (to be confirmed end of September under the low cost low risk funding (formerly referred to as minor safety improvements)).

Project Team

The Stopbank Shared Pathway Project Team consists of the following people and their respective roles relating to this project;

- Trish Ambury - Project Leader and Stakeholder Engagement
- Stephen Loomans - Project Design Engineer
- Adam van Niekerk - Senior Engineer Oversight
- Dave Clibbery - Executive Oversight
- Mark Lewis - Operational Input
- Katrina Christison - Councillor & Community Board member
- Alan Buckman - Community Board member

Stakeholders

- NZTA

- Waikato Regional Council
- Kiwi Rail
- Maniapoto Maori Trust Board
- Nehenehenui Regional Management Committee
- Stopbank grazing licencees (Lance Phillips, Sports Club area subletted to Bruce Collinson-Smith)
- Otorohanga College
- Otorohanga Primary School
- Otorohanga South School
- St Mary's Catholic School
- Kindergartens/ECE's
- Rerenoa River Restoration Project Leaders (including Rosemary Davison)
- Otorohanga Historic Society
- NZ Motorhome and Caravan Association
- Otorohanga Bowling Club
- Otorohanga Tennis Club
- Community groups occupying land at Island Reserve (Otorohanga Sports Club, Tigers Sports Club, Otorohanga Referees Assn, Riding for Disabled, Otorohanga/Te Mata Polocrosse Clubs)
- Otorohanga Business Community (including OBA)
- Otorohanga District Development Board
- Waikato Regional Cycleway Network Group
- Waikato River Authority
- Disability Support Services
- Community

The Shared Pathway and the surrounding river control land management

Pathway design, construction and subsequent management of the pathway (once completed) have been considered alongside other key factors that also require careful thought, such as;

- Practical management of the pathway and surrounding river control area
- Financial costs for ongoing maintenance of pathway/river control area
- Impacts on grazing/harvest revenue positive/negative
- Environmental and cultural impacts positive/negative
- Impacts on other users of the river control area – such as grazing licencees, polocrosse club and other community groups positive/negative
- Impacts on river control assets (stopbanks), positive/negative

Out of these considerations three options are being presented for discussion to construct and manage the pathway with;

Option 1 – the existing land use kept at status quo; with balance land being grazed under current arrangement. Requiring us to;

- Fence off areas from stock required to build & maintain pathway (fencing both sides of pathway)
- Maintain as much grazing area as practicably possible from the balance land
- Provide access points for stock movement across new pathway
- Ensure the pathway is stock proof and stock is secure from public/dogs
- Retire small areas that will no longer be practical or economically viable for grazing

Option 2 – the partial retirement of some areas from grazing; the stopbanks themselves and the town side of the stopbanks. Requiring us to;

- Only fence along the base of the stopbank on the river side to graze only the river flats
- Provide heavy vehicle access and stock handling facilities to allow efficient movement of stock
- Retire stopbank and town side land from grazing
- Maintain stopbank sidlings and retired areas with mowing/planting

Option 3 – a move to harvesting grass as an alternative management method; with the whole grazing area from Phillips Ave to Waipa Esplanade, between the river and the town being retired from grazing. Requiring;

- No Fencing
- No stock access (other than for equestrian/community events/activities)
- Less maintenance of the pathway and stopbanks with no need to repair damage caused by stock
- Easier to manage multiple uses/users with no stock interference eg events, river access, people walking, dogs exercising, informal recreation, planting projects etc
- Sidlings can be mown by roading contractor at a reasonable rate
- Better net income to Council for redistributing into community projects/ grants and maintaining/developing the pathway and other river projects

Risks & Hazards

- Major traffic routes in the vicinity
- Steep banks
- Crash risks on curves & roadside point hazards
- Sight distance
- Night time use
- Water at certain times
- Personal security/safety in some locations
- Clashes between users
- Emergency access/assistance

Consultation

- The stopbank pathway project has recently been adopted in Council's Long Term Plan 2018-2028 which included a formal public consultation process.
- Along with this the Project Team have been engaging directly with key stakeholders through the concept planning stages to ensure all parties that need to be involved, have been included. This communication will continue throughout the project.
- The Project Team have already directly engaged with NZTA, Waikato Regional Council, Council's grazing lessees and Waikato Regional Cycleway Network Group to discuss specific aspects of the pathway design in preparation for the Board workshop and further community consultation.
- Once the Project Team have workshopped the details of the pathway proposal with the Community Board and reached an agreed way forward the Project Team will engage next with other key stakeholders which include;
 - Iwi representatives
 - Otorohanga Historic Society

- NZMCA (Council lessee)
- Otorohanga Sports Club
- Island Reserve and surrounding area users
- Kiwi Rail
- Rerenoa River Restoration Project Leaders
- Following discussions with Iwi and other key stakeholders we will take the proposal out for broader consultation with schools and other stakeholders identified in the list above for their feedback and input.
- As this is an exciting and significant project for all of our community we would like to invite them on the journey with us so they have the opportunity to provide us with their ideas and feedback also. We propose to do this by;
 - offering an informal 'drop-in' session for people to come and view the plans, meet the Project Team and discuss any concerns or ideas they may have
 - posting information including 'quick facts' and 'frequently asked questions' on our website and Face Book page
 - submitting an article in the Waitomo News giving a project overview with some key information
- The Project Team will collate the information received from the drop-in session/s, stakeholder engagement and any other feedback received and take this back for consideration at the following Board meeting - identifying any areas that may need further investigation or discussion with the Board.

Other potential opportunities

- Traditional Maori Art/other art can be located at strategic places.
- Story boards with local history Maori cultural references can be placed along the pathway.
- Children's bike skills track could be developed at a suitable site on the town side of the stopbank (similar to the new facility in Te Awamutu next to the Pop n Good playground).
- Pathway could be utilised for;
 - school fitness/event training
 - cycle skills/confidence training
 - organised adult 'fun' runs or training runs
 - Walking/dog walking groups
- Pathway could later be connected with further rural pathways/cycleways.

Further potential opportunities if entire river control area (river true right) was retired from grazing

- Dog exercise and equine activity areas can be extended/enhanced.
- Safe river access areas can be developed to meet summer demand with improved, coordinated management of the river areas.
- Designated planting areas can be developed/enhanced working more proactively with environmental stakeholders.
- Removal of all fencing allows safer access for families, some fencing may remain to protect plant species from dogs/people through the early stages of establishment.
- Better opportunities for community events/use through the provision of open green spaces and river access.