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Let's get our one new road right first time

Let's get it right first time for the Manawatū Gorge replacement and not create a legacy of mistakes that will require expensive retrofitting later, says Road Transport Forum (RTF) chief executive Nick Leggett.

"The RTF was concerned to find out this week that at this late stage of the Manawatū Tararua Highway build, the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) is proposing what was going to be a full four-lane piece of highway (two lanes each way) will reduce to two lanes at a pivotal point, for three kilometres. This will slow down trucks using the road, create congestion, and impact safety," Leggett says.

"This defies logic and it was bizarre to see the rationale including ridiculous statements such as this 'reduces the perception that the new road is a motorway' and is 'more in keeping with the rural look and feel'.

"This seems to be a last-minute cost saving measure, wrapped up in some kind of landscaping-speak that frankly, is likely to create a dangerous road.

"This is a highway and its core function should not be forgotten. A single lane each side at its steepest point is an unnecessary design approach given the carriage way appears to be wide enough, as shown in this [flyover](#). Most light vehicle users will be frustrated to be caught behind a truck when they find their passing opportunity evaporate in front of their eyes. This could well cause safety issues.

"This is the only new roading project on the horizon for the whole of New Zealand. It would be disappointing to see that a future-proof design was not being considered due to budget.

"Kiwis expect to see first-class infrastructure and high quality roading, given the increases in petrol tax that they have had to endure.

"The RTF is concerned that building a road now that is not fit for purpose, will only see a mammoth cost in the years ahead when the under specification will have to be corrected. Our view is that NZTA needs to ask the Government to increase the construction budget to get this road built right."

Road Transport Association New Zealand (RTANZ) Hawke's Bay manager Sandy Walker has been consulted on the design changes and says that road freight companies will be concerned by some of the design features in the latest plans.

"A gradient increase by two percent will further slow heavy vehicles and proposed roundabouts have not taken into consideration the heavy vehicles that will be using this road," Walker says.

"Stock effluent dumping sites have been removed from the scope of works and will not be accessible before taking on the hill which means effluent spillage all over the new road is likely. This may incur infringement notices, which will be heavily defended by our industry due to the lack of anywhere to dump that effluent."

"This is a key east-west connection for the Lower North Island to get New Zealand's food and primary products to market," Leggett says. "If the project is not funded correctly, it will slow down our economy and cause frustration to all drivers on that road."

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