



Council Workshop Briefing Session

Notes of a workshop briefing session of the Tararua District Council held in the Council Chamber, 156 High Street, Dannevirke on Wednesday 15 April 2026 commencing at 1:00 pm.

1. Present

Mayor – Mr S M Gilmore, Crs S M Wards (Deputy Mayor)(online), A J Amboy, C L Corlett, P A Johns, E F Kennedy, P M Naylor, E L Peeti-Webber, K E R Te Waaka, and S A Wallace

In Attendance

- Ms L Stevenson - Iwi Representative, Rangitāne o Tamaki nui-ā-Rua
- Ms C Marshall - Iwi Representative, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Tāmaki-nui-a-Rua (online)

- Mr C Haines - Chief Executive
- Mrs K Tani - Group Manager – Strategy and Information
- Mr H Featonby - Group Manager – Operations
- Ms T McDonald - Chief Financial Officer
- Ms J Smith - General Counsel
- Mrs B Kawana - Corporate Planning and Reporting Advisor
- Mr P Wimsett - Chief Strategic Advisor
- Mr R Earp - Strategic Advisor
- Mrs S Walshe - Finance and Revenue Manager
- Mrs B Fowler - Senior Financial Business Partner
- Mr D Erard - Tararua Alliance Manager
- Ms L Ransom - Project Manager, Tararua Alliance
- Mr K Kalesh - Asset Manager, Tararua Alliance
- Mrs S Anthony - Democracy Support Officer

2. Welcome and Workshop Opening

Cr Keshaan Te Waaka opened the workshop with a karakia.

3. Apologies

There were no apologies.

4. Reports

4.1 Transport Activity Management Plan - Strategic Priorities and Levels of Service

The Tararua Alliance Manager provided an overview of the Transport Activity Management Plan (AMP) timeline, noting the LTP (Long Term Plan) draft AMP is proposed to be completed in August 2026 to align with the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) submission of continuous programmes for FAR (Funding Assistance Rates). The focus of the workshop was on problem statements, funding options, and introducing differential levels of service.

The draft problem statements discussed:

1. **Network reliability and resilience** - Increasing severe weather events are placing strain on the roading network, which is susceptible to damage. Preventative treatments are needed to build resilience. Ongoing reliance on NZ Transport Agency funding for weather-related events is uncertain, so the council needs to minimise future risk exposure.
2. **Support Local Economy and Access** - Investment needs to prioritise economic activity and access, with increasing heavy freight and forestry use across the network.
3. **Affordable and efficient investment** - The council manages a large roading network with a low rateable population. Reliance on subsidy funding is high, and an ageing network is putting increasing pressure on budgets.
4. **Safety and Hazard Management** - Legacy low-volume rural roads have built-in safety risks, which will be addressed through targeted, risk-based improvements to reduce crashes and improve safety.

Weightings were discussed as a way to target investment for the greatest overall benefit and avoid isolated, reactive works.

A question was raised about whether forestry planting or harvesting has increased, and it was noted that planting has grown, largely driven by new plantings for carbon investment rather than harvesting activity.

Questions were raised about how growth scenarios and rural development align with health and safety, access, and long-term planning. Traffic counts were highlighted as a key driver of investment decisions, noting that not all roads can

be maintained to the same standard.

Transportation levels of service are focused on the quality of the user experience, with differential levels of service recognised as necessary because not all roads can be maintained to the same standard. Investment levels and weightings determine outcomes, and a customer mapping tool is being considered to support this approach. Levels of service represent the intended outcome, while performance measures demonstrate whether those outcomes are being achieved. In a constrained funding environment, it is important to be clear and transparent with the community about available options, constraints, and trade-offs, including potential measures such as unsealing roads, reducing service levels, or transferring responsibility where only a single property is served. While some data analysis has been completed, this workshop focused on overall options, with more detailed work to follow. Limited budgets and changes in government direction have constrained performance, with results below targets. Road smoothness is performing well relative to targets and peer councils, but footpaths remain underfunded and below community expectations, highlighting the need for clearer communication about limitations and achievable standards.

Roading Hierarchy:

Urban - The Government introduced a national roading hierarchy framework - One Network Framework (ONF), aim is to use this approach adapt locally with more granular subcategories. New lower levels of service are proposed for some roads, focusing on safety and access rather than comfort or amenity. Service Lanes would see lower levels of service. Around 35% of roads may fall into these lower categories.

Peri-urban - This category is now separated out within the ONF, it has been identified this as a distinct category for the district, this may change when we see growth within the district and we need to ensure we align with the district plan. Some examples of roads that fit this category are Tipapakuku Road and Cowper Road, Dannevirke; Sowry Road, Woodville; Chatham Street, Pahiatua; and Cullen Street Eketāhuna. The Government have set a new land transport rule for setting speed limits, including for peri-urban roads, work needs to done here to assess our roads speed limits and ensure they align with the national standards. Cost and consultation requirements for speed management have been factored into budgets.

Rural - An overview was provided of the three rural road categories within the One Network Framework and the additional subcategories being explored for Tararua. Around 35% of the network is expected to fall into a lower-volume category where the focus is on access and safety only, maintaining minimum standards rather than comfort or amenity, while still responding to customer requests. The team is still identifying roads that fit this category. The potential decommissioning or reclassification of low-use roads, particularly where farm amalgamations have reduced use, was discussed, with some roads potentially becoming service tracks. It was agreed that a clear policy is essential. It was

acknowledged that cost–benefit considerations were required, long-term savings, and wider impacts considered. Councillors expressed support for exploring this further, acknowledging the need to balance risks and benefits. It was also noted that NZTA bridge funding is increasingly difficult to secure, with other councils facing similar budget challenges, and that local bridge information will be identified in a future workshop.

Applying the road hierarchy to differential levels of service is ongoing, with better use of the hierarchy expected to show in the 2027 LTP, and the ultimate goal being clearer transparency and communication so communities better understand the standard of service for each road. Three funding options are under consideration: maintaining current funding with inflation, increasing investment, or decreasing investment, with a focus on long-term network needs and building on the funding secured to date. Pre-consultation opens on 20 April, with a strong emphasis on gaining community feedback to guide where more or less investment should occur. It was also noted that footpaths and vehicle entranceways received 16% of the budget requested, meaning additional local funding would be required to address these areas adequately.

The financial overview highlighted a strong emphasis on improving network resilience amid ongoing uncertainty about future NZTA funding, which may continue to decline. Since 2014, overall funding levels have remained relatively consistent, prompting questions about whether this represents a long-term underinvestment. It was noted that Tararua’s experience reflects a wider national trend, with most councils facing similar constraints due to a limited funding pool. This consistency over time reinforces the conclusion that the network is currently significantly underinvested relative to need.

Three investment options with varying risk levels were discussed, comparing the last Long Term Plan (LTP), current funding, and future needs. It was noted there has been historical underinvestment, with insufficient funding allocated to key needs.

Sealed pavements under the current LTP has delivered successful resealing programmes, achieving cost savings that allowed more work to be completed. Rehabilitation work is difficult to fund and requires stronger evidence, while the growing maintenance programme is placing significant strain on the network. Fuel pricing impacts is unknown. Overall, reseals, maintenance, and rehabilitation are closely linked, and more focus is needed on maintenance. Although the higher-cost option is recommended, roads cannot be ignored, and preservation techniques remain critical. Government funding (approximately 73%) is included, subject to being maintained at current levels.

The community perceives a “managed decline.” A large portion of the maintenance budget is concentrated on a small part of the network, placing pressure on the remainder. Catch-up maintenance is needed after prolonged focus on reseals.

The option of converting some sealed roads back to unsealed was discussed, noting this has been considered previously and is being explored by other councils. While unsealing may reduce costs at end of asset life, it introduces a different maintenance regime and requires early, transparent conversations with communities. Decisions must be evidence-based, supported by clear policy direction, and consider long-term affordability, resilience, and equity for ratepayers.

It was emphasised the need for a clear policy framework, robust evidence to support difficult decisions, inclusion of these matters as LTP priorities, and early engagement with communities to manage expectations and ensure the best value for money.

Unsealed Pavements – Current funding, including post-COVID allocations, has meant roads are passable. Drainage remains a key priority, with broader drainage issues constrained. Option B is preferred, allowing a small increase in maintenance while reducing metalling, which is currently at a sustainable level.

Differential levels of service will apply, with responses prioritised around safety issues and CRMs. The approach includes divesting from some assets and isolating improvements where appropriate. A change in treatment strategy is also proposed, including the use of Otta seal—a lower-cost sealing option suitable for light traffic. While rougher in appearance, it is durable, widely used in Australia, has undergone two years of performance evaluation, and generally performs well, helping to reduce long-term maintenance. This supports the adoption of innovative, lower-cost solutions.

Structures – Investment over the past 11 years includes \$1.9 million in replacements and \$1.7 million in maintenance; bridge replacements remain underfunded, resulting in a growing backlog. Current investment levels assume 300 year bridge lifespans. Routine bridge cleaning is the simplest and most effective maintenance activity, as blocked drainage allows moisture to build up in concrete. A structured cleaning programme is underway.

Bridges consist of multiple elements with differing functions and lifespans, requiring risk-based prioritisation. Inspections focus on higher-risk structures, with extensive data being collected to support future planning. Retaining walls present a significant risk due to limited funding and reduced inspection frequency.

Low-use bridges are being reviewed, including ownership considerations. Engagement with NZTA is ongoing to explore funding options, and alternative approaches. Several options remain under consideration.

A framework-based approach is being applied, prioritising network need over preference. Clear communication of risk, future renewals, ownership responsibilities, and potential cost-sharing with landowners is important. Before committing further funding, options such as weight restrictions and alternative

management measures will be considered to manage uneconomic renewals.

Members supported progressing a robust policy and process, including consideration of alternative routes, detour lengths, and usage levels. Weight limiting was seen as a practical tool to manage heavy vehicle impacts, particularly where viable alternatives exist, and to avoid Council bearing the full cost of damage.

Efforts to actively reduce costs were acknowledged, with confidence expressed in the Alliance structure and performance framework to maximise value for road users.

Renewals focus on balancing investment in drainage and water without compromising roading assets. Water management is the key issue, with the priority being to move water away effectively so assets do not deteriorate within two to three years. This requires adequate drainage reshaping, upsizing damaged infrastructure, and sustained maintenance and investment. Option B was recommended as it best reflects these needs and avoids compromising long-term outcomes, particularly given the lack of co-funding.

The absence of NZTA co-funding for drainage was noted, unresolved drainage and culvert issues have wide-ranging impacts across the roading network. Climate resilience is now a critical consideration, as past infrastructure decisions did not adequately account for climate impacts.

Winter conditions place additional strain on budgets. Footpath funding has declined, with no NZTA contribution, resulting in requests for Council funding. Deterioration of crossings and entranceways has raised community concerns and highlights the need for clearer communication about responsibilities between Council and property owners.

Options discussed included taking a more active role by inspecting, coordinating repairs, and potentially recovering costs from owners—possibly through rates—while ensuring fairness for those who have already paid for work. Alternatives such as assisting with upfront costs, spreading repayments, coordinated works to reduce costs, and targeted support for affordability were considered. Enforcement remains necessary where safety standards are not met.

Further work is needed to clarify legal responsibilities, manage risk, and address community perceptions that Council is responsible if someone is injured.

Network & Asset Management: Data analysis and mapping are critical to lifting the quality of network data, including line marking and resource information. Bridge condition monitoring is partially completed but currently on hold due to budget constraints; bridges rated to monitor performance. Reducing inspectors would have consequences, as accurate data is essential for effective asset management. Consider potential innovation options.

Development: The intent is to gauge appetite for investment—some trade-offs

may be required. There may be opportunities to fund safety improvements, such as red road markings outside schools, and to redirect funding toward more targeted interventions. Seek clear direction from Council. The \$3.3m allocation requires a stronger justification—further work to be brought back.

Overall Financial Summary: expressed concern about the proposed 5.79% increase, particularly with water reform impacts excluded. Achieving a 4% rate increase would require inflationary pressure to be absorbed in other areas. Operational budgets not factoring in change - does not include stranded overheads. \$290000 is 1% or rates.

It was queried the difference between recommended and current figures and asked what the position would look like if footpaths were excluded. Some items will proceed to consultation, so figures and messaging need to be clear. A scenario table excluding footpaths is requested.

Budgets, Risks, and Assumptions: It was noted the difficulty of budget decisions ahead. It was confirmed that assumptions include a FAR rate of 73% and inflation at 3%; fuel costs have not yet been factored in - any drop would be difficult to manage without funding. FAR rates are critical, especially as water revenue transitions. Linda Stewart is expected to brief Council on FAR rates within the next couple of months.

Next Steps: Refine modelling, explore key considerations, and bring options back in May/June. Lee is seeking guidance on which options to focus on. It was noted the need for trade-offs in a highly constrained environment, with all activity contained within a 4% rates increase. Pre-consultation will help inform decisions, and discussions will continue—no definitive positions yet. Presentation was well received.

Lorraine Stevenson congratulated the team, noting learnings from the Gabrielle response and the importance of collaboration, preparedness, and better information. Leaders face difficult choices amid service reductions, financial pressure, and global uncertainty. These challenges are not unique, and leaders must engage openly with communities—people understand funding constraints, and transparency reduces reactivity. Acknowledgement that these decisions are difficult but necessary in a time of significant change.

Cr Keshaan Te Waaka closed the workshop with a karakia.

The workshop briefing session closed at 4.17pm.