

IN THE MATTER

of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER

of Proposed Plan Change 37 - Nukuhau (private) by AN Rajasingham LPT Trustees No 124 Limited anors to the Taupo District Council to rezone c.78ha of land in the Nukuhau area from Rural Environment to a mix of General Residential and Mixed Density Residential with a Neighbourhood Shopping Centre overlay.

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF MICHAEL ROWAN SAPSFORD FOR BIKE TAUPŌ
INCORPORATED**

27 October 2021

INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and experience

1. I am currently a committee member for Bike Taupō Incorporated (Bike Taupō) and have held this position since 2008. I also held the role of Bike Taupō Chair role for five of those years. This role is a voluntary role. I wrote Bike Taupō's submission on Proposed Plan Change 37 (PPC37).
2. Professionally I am the director of Roam Consulting and am a full member of the New Zealand Planning Institute and a Certified Hearings Commissioner. I have a Bachelor of Resource and Environmental Planning and a postgraduate Diploma in Rural Studies from Massey University.
3. I have worked as a planner for more than twenty years undertaking a variety of resource consent and policy projects including urban, rural, commercial and industrial planning projects for Central Government, iwi, businesses, community groups and Councils.
4. In addition to this I have worked on numerous strategic planning processes relating to conservation, recreation, tourism and community based projects. I have worked on a number strategic plans in relation to the development of bike trails and cycle routes throughout Aotearoa.
5. Previous roles of relevance include Team Leader of the Taupō District Council Environmental Policy unit and a Strategic Project Manager, where, amongst other work project managed the changes to the Taupō District Plan which embedded TD2050 (2006) into the Taupō District Plan.
6. In addition to my formal experience and qualifications I have been a Taupō resident since 2004 and regularly cycle into and around Taupō town.
7. I have previously lived on Lakewood Drive and commuted by bike into the Taupō CBD most days. I have three children who currently attend Saint Patricks Primary School on Acacia Bay Road. I often drive them to school or, on occasion, ride with them. This has given me a very good understanding as a cyclist and parent of traffic flows and how safe the road is for people on bikes particularly on Acacia Bay Road, Wairakei Drive, Poihipi Road, and Norman Smith Street.

Background

8. My evidence is given on behalf of Bike Taupō in support of our submission. I am presenting this evidence first and foremost as a member and representative of Bike Taupō and as such this evidence cannot be considered that of an expert witness.
9. In preparing this evidence I have read the statements of Cheryl Cleary, Hamish Crawford, Robert Swears and Ruihan Cui for the applicant and Matthew Bonis (the S42A report) and David Smith for Taupō District Council. I have also read the Joint Witness Statement of experts in relation to transportation effects.
10. I also met with Mr Crawford on 21 September 2021 to discuss our submission further.

BIKE TAUPŌ

11. As stated in our submission Bike Taupō is a cycle advocacy group which provides the Taupō community with a voice for cycling. To date Bike Taupō has helped create a cycling culture within the district through constructing and maintaining over 200km off road tracks, partaking in continuous dialogue with regulatory authorities; promoting cycling and cycle safety and playing an active part in Taupō's growing cycling community.
12. Cycling is a big part of Taupō. Taupō has a world class trails network (International Mountain Biking Association Silver Level Ride Centre) and have several iconic events (Round the Lake Cycle Challenge and Iron Man) that involve cycling. Cycling also contributes a significant amount to the local economy and at last count we had six bike shops in Taupō town. Biking is important to Taupō.
13. We have seen significant growth in people on bikes in the last five years. After the 2021 this growth increased. Part of this is driven by the significant uptake in the use of E-Bikes which are favoured by older riders who are turning more and more to E-Bikes for recreation and getting around. In January 2019 1,7830 E-Bikes were imported into Aotearoa each month and in December 2020 this was up to 6,349¹, and this was even with supply chains affected by COVID-19.
14. There are now more people on bikes than ever within the last decade. Biking is an important part of the Taupō community and economy. Biking is a low carbon alternative to cars and needs to be enabled as a cleaner and healthier alternative to motor vehicles.
15. Bike Taupō is currently developing a strategic plan. As part of this planning process Bike Taupō distributed a survey seeking information on biking in Taupō from locals and visitors. This survey was developed in June 2021 after we prepared our submission on PPC37. We received 783 responses to that survey.
16. One of the questions in the survey was, "What would make you ride more (not just mountain biking) in Taupō?" This question was only asked of those who reside in Taupō District and received 351 responses. Of those responses 96 people referred to matters relating to road safety, lack of cycle lanes, lack of cycling infrastructure and unsafe roads and intersections. I have listed a few typical responses below:
 - *Better places to cross roads. There are so many cars around town, quite congested but are scary for bike riders*
 - *More places to lock your bike up in town. Getting across Wairakei Drive by control gate Bridge. The place is a real cluster.*
 - *I hate that town roundabout*
 - *Better safety on roads. Can't always be off-road and the roads and drivers are not bike friendly.*
 - *Being able to ride off road. Roads are not a good place for bikes.*

¹ Source: NZ Customs

17. While these responses represent a small cross section of views from locals, they do provide insight into some of the reasons why local people may not ride their bikes as often as they could or should.

BIKE TAUPŌ SUBMISSION

18. Our submission to PPC37 was that before the proposed development is to occur the cycling infrastructure between the subject site and Taupō Town needs to be upgraded to a suitable level. There is a distinct lack of cycling infrastructure in Nukahau, and the roads are not currently safe environments for cyclists. The additional traffic generated by the proposed development will exacerbate this issue.
19. There has been no assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the safe use of the surrounding roads by cyclists. This is despite the clear direction contained in Objective 3f.2.1 of the Taupō District Plan and associated policies which read as follows:

3f.2.1 The safe and efficient operation of the roading network, and movement of traffic, including cyclists and pedestrians within the District.

POLICIES

- i. Ensure activities avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects on the operation and function of the roading network, including the movement of traffic cyclists and pedestrians, as accordance with the Roding Hierarchy.*
 - ii. Encourage activities, including the design and location of new vehicle crossings, to provide for the safe and efficient movement of traffic, including cyclists and pedestrians.*
 - iii. Encourage the use of alternative modes of transport such as cycling and public transport.*
20. The references to cycling in these provisions are very clear. However, PPC37 does not contain any consideration of these matters outside of the structure plan area.
21. It is Bike Taupō's submission that there has been no consideration of the impact of the plan change on the safe functioning of the roading network for people on bikes.

EXPERT STATEMENTS OF EVIDENCE

22. As noted above I have reviewed those statements of evidence from experts relating to planning and transport.
23. In their Joint Witness Statement, the transport experts agree that:

Because of its proximity to the Taupo town centre, the PC37 site presents a viable alternative to motor vehicle transport between the site and the CBD (DS 4.6).²

² Para 2.1c

24. DS 4.6 reads:

"... the location supports the uptake of sustainable transport modes to a greater degree than other currently – zoned residential sites that are located further away from the town centre such as Acacia Bay, Mapara Road and Kinloch"

25. I agree that the location of the proposed development is one which puts it within a short bike ride to the CBD. However, the reality is that the lack of safe cycling infrastructure negates any proximity benefits. There are no cycling lanes that connect the structure plan area to the town centre. The intersection at Acacia Bay Road and Norman Smith Street, to be used by 50% of traffic generated by the development, is not safe for people on bikes. Those biking into town from Lakewood Drive must 'take the lane' and navigate a challenging intersection which includes a semi slip lane uphill to Acacia Bay Road. Riding from town up Norman Smith Drive and turning up Acacia Bay Road also means riding in the middle of the road and waiting in a very exposed position on an intersection where drivers often cut the corner on the way into town. For students and older riders the footpath is often the safest place to ride bikes in this area.
26. Those riders coming from the new northern end of Docherty Drive will likely work their way through the streets and cul-de-sacs to exit onto Norman Smith Street at the lights or potentially Kaihua Road. Those who exit at Kaihua Road will need to take the foot path down to the lights or cross the road to get to the shared path further down Norman Smith. Crossing Norman Smith at peak times is not an easy prospect. Coming home is more difficult with less options available.
27. Bike Taupō would contend that the potential proximity benefits of the location of the development, as they relate to sustainable transport modes, are in fact a false positive. These benefits would only be realised if the connecting roads were made safe for existing and new users to traverse by bike.
28. The Section 42A report considers an assessment of the impact of increased levels of traffic on cycle safety unnecessary³. I disagree with this position given the direction provided in Objective 3f.2.1 and associated policy. Bike Taupō also submits that it is now 2021 and biking is not a fringe activity but one that is absolutely necessary to be considered in all urban planning and developments of significance.
29. The Section 42A report rejects those submissions seeking substantial increases in cycle connections or facilities⁴. The report does however recommend a deferred zoning reliant on the upgrade of Control Gates bridge due to issues of traffic congestion and capacity of roads. The irony of this approach is not lost on Bike Taupō. There are adverse effects associated with use of the roads by cars. The same roads are not safe for bikes and the council rejects the need to upgrade cycling infrastructure. Bike Taupō submits that if the cycling infrastructure was improved then that may mitigate the effects created by the use of these busy roads by cars.

³ S42A page 75

⁴ S42A para 194

30. Bike Taupō's submission point requesting that proposed cycle lanes along Acacia Bay Rd and Norman Smith Street should be formed prior to the proposed development occurring has been rejected by the Council. Similarly, that there should be clarity within the application regarding how the development will avoid remedy or mitigate effects on the use of the existing roadway's by cyclists, especially students travelling to and from school at peak times. The reason given for rejecting these submissions is that they are "outside the spatial extent of Plan Change"⁵. Bike Taupō struggles with this reasoning as yes they are outside of the spatial extent of the structure plan area but they are within the envelope of effects associated with the plan change. The same logic has not been applied to Control Gates bridge or wastewater infrastructure so why has it been applied to the provision of cycling infrastructure that, if developed would mitigate some of the effects of the plan change on the safe and efficient operation of the roading network.
31. I have read the evidence of Mr Swears and generally agree with his statements relating to cycling. Mr Swears evidence demonstrates an understanding of the area and the needs of cyclists. His evidence is the closest we have to an actual assessment of the effects of PPC37 on cycling.
32. I would like to draw the hearing panels attention to the following parts of Mr Swears evidence which Bike Taupō supports:
- Para 60(i) in respect to roundabouts, "...the outcome for for motorcyclists and cyclists is not as favourable, as conflicts are still frequent and impact speeds for them are still above their lower Safe Systems thresholds."
 - Para 71: "Transport modelling does not typically provide us with a robust means to identify the impact of active modes (walking, cycling, and personal mobility devices (PMDs) such as scooters); therefore, transport modelling is typically motor vehicle focused."
 - Para 75: "Therefore, reducing the number of motor vehicle journeys or motor vehicles used for journeys (as occurs with public transport) should result in a reduction in emissions."
 - Para 86: "Road users presented with the option of congested travel by private motor vehicle or free-flowing travel by active mode, may choose to travel by active modes if the journey distance is practicable (and other factors such as route attractiveness are achieved). Given that there are locations on the transport network where congestion is expected (regardless of whether the Project is established), I consider that options should be identified and pursued that will allow for that congestion to be reduced."
 - Para 93: "While there is relative flexibility for active mode users travelling from the Site to the CBD, I consider some of the routes that can be followed, based on existing or slightly modified infrastructure, will be safe and appropriate. However, the key exception to this is access from Lakewood Drive."
 - Para 95: "Notwithstanding the issues for active mode routes from the Site into the Taupo CBD, the constraints along Norman Smith

⁵ S42A page 76

Street, particularly to the east of Noble Street are such that I consider additional provisions for cyclists are desirable before cyclist numbers are increased."

- Para 98: "It may be appropriate for some of the development contributions associated with the Project to be directed towards improvements to the walking and cycling network between the Site and Taupo CBD."
 - Para 166: "I also recognise that for active mode travel to and from the Site to be encouraged, there needs to be good infrastructure for walking and cycling beyond the boundaries of the Site (as well as within the Site). Because there is benefit to all active mode users (not just those associated with the Project) I consider it desirable for the Applicant to work with Council to develop complementary solutions (within and beyond the Site respectively) that will encourage active mode use."
 - Para 178 (iii): "...the location of the Site relative to the town centre also presents the potential to reduce congestion through some motor vehicle trips being transferred to active modes."
 - Para 178 (v): "...However, I consider it important that detailed design of transport engineering elements of the Site is subject to road safety audit. That auditing should include a specific focus on walking and cycling."
 - Para 178 (vii): "Existing infrastructure for walking and cycling should be improved to accommodate additional active mode traffic generated by the Site. In addition, there needs to be good connectivity between the active modes infrastructure on the Site and associated infrastructure beyond the boundaries of the Site."
33. While these excerpts need to be read within the context of Mr Swears' wider evidence, we consider that they recognise; the importance of cycling as a positive form of transport, that there is currently no appropriate cycling infrastructure between the plan change area and town and that this infrastructure would benefit from enhancement. We also take from his evidence that there has not been any technical assessment of the effects of the development on cyclists.
34. As noted above, Mr Swears evidence demonstrates a practical understanding of the needs of cyclists. His evidence also provides due recognition of the importance of providing for 'people on bikes' as legitimate road users and a form of transport which can have wider benefits for the functioning of the road. This level of understanding and due recognition is lacking in the wider evidence.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

35. The location of the proposed plan change is seen as positive in its proximity to Taupō town and the ability of residents being able to cycle to town. There is however a lack of safe and effective cycling infrastructure between the plan change site and town. This in effect negates these benefits.
36. The council Section 42A report recommends that requests to upgrade cycling infrastructure prior to development are rejected. This view rejects the direction contained Objective 3f.2.1 of the Taupō District Plan which

seeks the safe and efficient operation of the roading network, and movement of traffic, including cyclists and pedestrians within the District.

37. A deferred zoning is recommended by Mr Bonis on the basis that roading and wastewater infrastructure does not have the capacity to deal with the effects of the plan change on that infrastructure. The same level of consideration has not been given to cycling infrastructure even though upgrading cycling infrastructure could have beneficial effects on identified traffic congestion. Bike Taupō would however agree that the cycling infrastructure does not have the capacity to deal with the effects of the plan change.
38. Bike Taupō does not oppose the plan change but does seek that adequate consideration is given to the safety of all road users and that the benefits of effective cycling infrastructure are recognised. That infrastructure is not currently in place in Nukuhau and needs to be prior to development within the plan change area starting.
39. Bike Taupō supports the proposed deferment approach however recommends that the following amendments (highlighted) are made to Policy 3a.2.3 as shown on page 47 of of the S42a report:

v. Subdivision in the Nukuhau Structure Plan Area should only occur where:

*(i) the resulting lots will be connected to Council's waste water network; **and***

(ii) additional capacity for vehicle movement (beyond that available in October 2021) is provided at the Control Gates Bridge (through either expansion or a second bridge) across the Waikato River, or otherwise would not result in traffic demand that would result in substantial increases in delay or travel times.

(iii) Cycling infrastructure is provided between the Nukuhau Structure plan area and the town centre that enables cyclists to safely travel to and from Taupō Town.

Or words to that effect

Rowan Sapsford
27 October 2021