

# Historic Kopu Bridge

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**TO** Thames-Coromandel District Council  
**FROM** Greg Hampton - Area Manager Thames and Coromandel  
**DATE** 1 October 2014  
**SUBJECT** **Historic Kopu Bridge**

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## **1 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the review of the Historic Kopu Bridge Society's (the Society) proposal for the management and upkeep of the old Kopu Bridge.

## **2 Background**

The history of the old Kopu Bridge is well documented and has since 1928 provided a gateway via Kopu to the Peninsula. The bridge was finally replaced in 2011 and has been declared surplus to requirements by NZTA and is currently scheduled for demolition pending any sustainable proposal to retain the structure and transfer NZTA's responsibilities and future liability.

The Society submitted a proposal to NZTA for the retention of the structure. The proposal to transfer the asset and maintenance responsibility to their Incorporated Society has not been accepted by NZTA, as they did not assess it to be a viable and sustainable proposal for the reuse of the structure without placing any further burden on NZTA or the taxpayer.

Hauraki District Council made its intentions clear in stating that they have no interest in the ownership of the structure. The Hauraki Rail Trail currently does not include the historic bridge as part of its route, nor does it include the business development potential for Kopu in its promotions and management structure. There seems to be no appetite to align the historic nature of the area, its natural and man made features and the Rail Trail project or its proposed ongoing management and promotion to increase economic benefit to the district.

Council commissioned a review of the Society proposal to determine whether it would support the Society proposal and options for the retention and transfer of the bridge and demolition fund. The review of the Society proposal along with a presentation of the wider context within which it would need to determine its position on the retention or demolition of the bridge was presented to Council at its meeting on 25 June 2014.

At its meeting on 25 June 2014 Council resolved that it:

1. Receives the review of Historic Kopu Bridge Society Proposal report, dated 10 June.
2. Conditionally supports in principle the retention of the old Kopu Bridge.
3. Instructs staff to initiate discussion with NZTA and other relevant parties to confirm robust figures in relation to:
  - a) total cost to open the bridge for safe public use
  - b) total cost to demolish the bridge in its entirety, including the piles
  - c) total on-going cost of annual maintenance
4. Instructs staff to undertake a public opinion poll as to the future of the bridge in conjunction with the next rates demand.
5. Instructs staff to report back to Council by September 2014.

This is a follow up report, which provides further information as requested to support the Council in making its decision on this matter.

### 3 Issue

A number of issues and concerns were raised during the course of reviewing the subject of retention or demolition of the old Kopu Bridge. The issues listed below were recorded during a number of meetings and discussions and are included in this report as matters that may influence the Council decision on the matter.

Issues and risks for consideration are as follows:

- If Council supports the Society proposal this may mean that at some point in the future ratepayer money will be spent on the bridge activity in the event that the trust or other similar entity is disestablished.
- There is uncertainty as to the adequacy of the demolition fund to cover the actual cost of demolition in the event that the trust falls over or the structure becomes unsafe at some future point in time.
- The Society proposal includes technical and financial components. The technical proposal is sound but the financial and funding proposal may not be feasible without substantial ongoing funding.
- Council stated that it would not approve any funding of bridge maintenance and operation from the demolition fund or interest earned on the demolition fund (if under its control) due to the uncertainty regarding the actual cost of demolition at some point in the future.
- There is very limited information available to substantiate the economic benefit of retaining the bridge.
- There is no support from Hauraki District Council for the retention of the bridge and the Hauraki Rail Trail Project does not include the bridge as part of its route from Kopu to Kaiaua.
- Even if the old bridge was retained as part of the Hauraki Rail Trail, the financial benefits from using the bridge as part of its route would not be felt by the trust managing the bridge due to the specific management of the rail trail.
- The Thames Community Board considers the impact on local ratepayers to be significant as the bridge activity will not be funded as per the rail trail as a district activity.
- The Thames Community Board will also need to confirm its views on the retention of the old bridge and the possible future role of the board if the bridge is retained.
- Health & Safety was a significant concern raised by councillors at the 25 June Council meeting. The handrail will need to be made code compliant prior to allowing public access to the bridge if retained.
- Apart from the Health and safety concern regarding the hand rails, councillors considered the reputational risk unacceptable in the event that it supports the opening of the bridge for public use and someone commits suicide from the structure.
- Heritage is a valued concept or asset in the Thames community and forms a substantial part of the area's character and image. Council may be seen to support the demolition of a heritage asset.
- When the bridge is demolished, there is no way to replicate the structure or its potential benefits.
- Council needs to be comfortable that a significant proportion of the District's ratepayers support its decision. Only limited information was available through the NZTA consultation process. Councillors in the 25 June 2014 Council meeting didn't accept the "Save the Kopu Bridge" petition as an independent survey of public opinion. Council requested that a public survey be completed to provide an indication of public opinion.

Further to these issues, support for the Society, ongoing governance and operation of the old Kopu Bridge is not an activity or project allowed for within the Thames-Coromandel District Council structure. If Thames-Coromandel District Council is to form a Council

Controlled Organisation (CCO), Council Organisation (CO) or trust for the management of the bridge it will need to allocate resource accordingly.

## 4 Discussion

### Historic Status

The old Kopu Bridge has a New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) Category 1 status. This refers specifically to the swing span. Any changes of use or alteration to the asset and its links to the shore will require consideration by NZHPT and potentially an HPT Authority (consent) to complete proposed works. This includes the upgrade of handrails.

Hauraki District Council has the bridge listed as a Category A Heritage feature in the Schedule of Historic Heritage Inventory and will require building consent for the upgrade of the structure but not the maintenance of the bridge.

Thames-Coromandel District Council's Proposed District Plan has the bridge identified as a historic heritage item. Resource Management Act requirements in the future District Plan are likely to impact on the future bridge owner if the bridge is retained - to ensure that the heritage features and values of the old Kopu Bridge are retained.

### Related Thames-Coromandel District Council projects

Related projects and activities which would benefit from the retention of the old Kopu Bridge include the:

- The Hauraki Rail Trail with its future extension from Kopu to Kaiaua across the Waihou River, which could help make Thames a stopover destination for cyclists. The number of visitors recorded along with projected economic benefit to the area is estimated to increase with the retention of this historic feature.
- The Kopu Business Development and future vision for the Kaiwhenua / Kopu Gateway area. As part of the urban design strategy in the Kopu to Thames Structure Plan there is an increased focus upon improved amenity and attraction of visitors to the area as a *Pause Point* and eventually a destination. This is an attempt to reverse the localised negative impact that the new bridge and bypass has had on the business community in Kopu. The old bridge in its current form would serve as an open-air museum with associated storyboards, which if promoted well (through events and regular swing bridge demonstrations for example) could become an attraction for tourists and visitors alike. The bridge isn't seen as an attraction point in isolation, rather it is seen as forming part of the character of Kopu and the wider Coromandel Peninsula.
- If the bridge is retained it would also be a catalyst for the early release or disposal process for the Kaiwhenua land and hence a speedier outcome on treaty negotiations and development of the Kaiwhenua / Gateway concept as promoted by the Thames Community Board. This holds potential immediate and future economic benefit for the Kopu to Thames area.

### NZTA

It is not in the interest of NZTA to keep the asset, as it is surplus to requirements and a burden on the taxpayer. NZTA followed a consultation process based on the following options:

1. Demolition (A) Remove bridge and only piles in the navigational path of the river.
2. Demolition (B) same as option 1 except with the removal of all piles.
3. Demolition (C) same as options 1 and 2 – with components relocated to NZTA land as an open air museum - Bridge Museum
4. Partial Demolition (A) – The Pier – The removal of the structure on true left hand side of the swing span and the swing span. Only piles in navigational path will be removed.
5. Partial Demolition (B) – Same as option 4 above, but with all piles removed.

6. Slow Disintegration (A) – Bridge left as is with swing span left open.
7. Slow Disintegration (B) – Bridge left as is with swing span left closed and operated /opened when required.
8. Slow Disintegration (C) – Same as option 7 with a section of the deck and superstructure directly west of the swing span removed for navigation.
9. Retain the bridge as a functional walkway and cycleway.
10. Retain the bridge for adaptive commercial re-use.
11. Establish Council-owned trust to take ownership of the bridge.
12. Establish an independent trust to take ownership of the bridge.

An expression of interest process was commenced in October 2012 for adaptive reuse of the bridge. NZTA received 19 responses; 8 in support of retention of the bridge and 11 in support of demolition. Of those that supported demolition of the bridge, 8 supported retention of the swing span.

Two submitters proposed the retention of the bridge for walking and cycling activities. The Society submitted a business case to support their proposal. NZTA assessed the business case and decided that the proposal was not feasible.

Feedback to NZTA's public advertisements in March 2013 seeking public opinion attracted 125 responses. 69% of the responses were in support of demolition of the bridge with retention of the swing span and 31% were in support of retention of the bridge for public use.

NZTA has since developed its plan for demolition of the bridge and completed a number of pre-consent lodgement meetings with various organisations including Thames-Coromandel District Council. The proposed result would be the retention of three spans on the eastern bank of the Waihou River. Public would have access to the three spans on the eastern bank, which would have storyboards showing the history and other significant features of the area. The swing span and all piles will be removed. Hauraki District Council will potentially use the swing span with the development of the Kopu to Kaiua stage of the Hauraki Rail Trail Project, although it is not known if either NZTA or Hauraki District Council has made any provision for relocating and mounting the swing span.

The following two ownership scenarios for the transfer of the bridge asset and the demolition fund to Council would be acceptable to NZTA:

- Thames-Coromandel District Council owns the structure; Thames-Coromandel District Council manages the demolition fund and Thames-Coromandel District Council manages the facility.
- Thames-Coromandel District Council owns the structure; Thames-Coromandel District Council manages the demolition fund and a Trust / CCO manages the facility.

#### Bridge demolition methodology and cost breakdown

The proposed methodology for the demolition and removal of the bridge includes the systematic removal of the bridge components and transportation by barge and truck from its current location to a temporary storage location on the Kaiwhenua land, from where it will be dismantled and disposed of. The Kaiwhenua land is to follow a disposal process upon removal of the bridge components.

NZTA has acknowledged that the cost of the demolition would be completed as part of a variation order to the original bridge construction contract with HEB.

Opus followed up with HEB and it was confirmed that the cost of demolition presented to NZTA according to their methodology is less than \$2million.

HEB's cost to demolish the bridge is their cost to NZTA and not an amount remaining after deducting revenue from selling components of the bridge.

The installation of the swing span on the Hauraki Rail Trail is not part of the demolition project. It would be expected that Hauraki District Council will fund the relocation and installation of the swing span as part of the Hauraki Rail Trail Project, although this has not been confirmed.

The HEB methodology and scheduled costs are not included in this report due to commercial sensitivity.

#### Society proposal

The Society proposal was assessed in the report to Council on 25 June 2014. The technical proposal was reported to Council as being a sound and achievable approach to managing and maintaining this historic structure. The proposal included maintenance and renewal of all the risk components highlighted by NZTA's consultants. The proposal also included the maintenance and operation of the mechanical swing span and the facility as a whole.

The funding strategy stated in the Society latest business case does not rely on the transfer of the demolition fund or being able to use interest on that account. Instead it would employ a specific funding and sponsorship strategy, which may or may not be sufficient to support the ongoing annual operation of the facility.

The conservative budget requirement for this activity is between \$60,000 and \$180,000 per annum. This projected expenditure includes the worst-case scenario and significantly exceeds the annual amount spent by NZTA on the bridge in the past. The trust or CCO would need to apply for grants, engage in fundraising and obtain services, materials or other contributions in-kind to supplement its funding requirements.

#### Structural damage, natural disaster and insurance

The retention of the bridge brings with it liability to the owner in the event that the structure become unstable due to, among other things; normal asset degradation; natural disaster; fire etc. If the Council decides to support the retention for the structure it will need to take ownership of the bridge and divert all liability away from NZTA.

The proposed future use of the bridge is for a walkway / cycleway which is a significant reduction of load and vibration on the structure when compared to its previous use as a highway bridge carrying fully laden trucks and buses. The structure is in good condition for its age. It is structurally sound and it is anticipated to have an extended remaining life due to its intended future use.

In saying that, the old and new bridge will be subject to natural forces and could sustain damage in the event of a natural disaster (for example a tsunami or earthquake). The removal of the bridge components from the river may be compromised by the state/deposition of the damaged structure. The demolition fund is not intended to cover this eventuality. It is intended that the bridge be added to the Council's insurance portfolio of above and below ground infrastructure assets if the asset transfers from NZTA to Thames-Coromandel District Council ownership.

The CCO or trust would need public liability and/or indemnity insurance to cover its operation of this public facility which has been included in the Society business case.

#### Health and safety

Council at its meeting on 25 June 2014 stated that the bridge handrail will need to comply with the relevant building code even though there is no legislative requirement to complete work to enable a code compliant handrail.

The height of the rail currently complies with the requirements stated for bridge handrails where cycle ways are present. The rail height is ~30mm too low for pedestrian use when measured from the step. This is easily fixed, if required, with the addition of a 30 to 50mm timber strip on top of the rail. This together with a wire mesh fitted to the inside of the timber post frames will provide for code compliant handrails.

The bridge handrail upgrade is confirmed by Society to include the replacement of ~40 posts, repairs to cables, installation of stainless steel wire mesh and a 30 to 50mm timber strip to the top of the handrail. The handrail would then comply with the relevant codes. The cost is estimated in the region of \$45,000 to \$50,000.

This does not resolve the risk of suicides as highlighted by Council in its meeting on 25 June 2014. Jumping from a bridge structure is considered similar to jumping off a wharf if not permitted – it is not in line with the intended use of the facility and there is no liability to the owner. If this remains an issue, it may be considered that Health and safety signage should be erected with the express warning of injury or death resulting from jumping from the bridge.

#### Cost to open the bridge

A requirement for opening the bridge to the public is that the bridge is safe to use. The bridge is in good structural condition and the only issue raised that would prevent the bridge from being opened to the public is the handrail.

The \$45,000 to \$50,000 figure is therefore the minimum cost required to open the bridge to the public as per Council's requirements. More money can obviously be spent on aesthetical touch-ups and information boards. Volunteers or paid staff will need to be available to ensure the swing span is operated as and when required for navigational purposes.

#### Benefits

The following benefits exist with the retention of the bridge:

- Retention of a Category I heritage item
- Retention of a significant engineering structure
- Contribution to local and district heritage asset collection – alignment with Heritage Park Concept or Heritage Trail
- Potentially a major feature – District Heritage Tour
- Leisure and recreational opportunity
- Visitor interest attraction – weekly bridge openings operated by the trust
- Major feature of the K2K cycleway experience
- Economic benefit – a reason to pull into Kopu. Supporting local businesses.
- Demolition fund – internal lending opportunity
- Early release of surplus NZTA land Kaiwhenua blocks for stormwater improvements and development potential
- Discovery centre site
- Strategic alignment with the Kopu Structure Plan and the Kopu Business Improvement Project.

#### Dis-benefits

Some of the dis-benefits associated with the retention of the bridge are as follows:

- Commitment of Council resources to manage the demolition fund and trust or CCO
- Renewal and replacement costs
- Operating costs and ongoing maintenance
- Trust or CCO failure will result in continued retention costs or management of the demolition and disposal of the structure.

### Public opinion

As previously stated, feedback to NZTA's public advertisements in March 2013 seeking public opinion attracted 125 responses. 69% of the responses were in support of demolition of the bridge with retention of the swing span and 31% were in support of retention of the bridge for public use.

The Society petition to save the bridge was signed by ~2600 people. At Council's request, on 25 June 2014 staff posted a survey, which attracted 1,025 responses.

- Question 1 of the survey read: Do you think it's important to keep the historic Kopu Bridge? Of the 1,025 respondents that answered the question 42% supported the retention of the old bridge and 58% did not.
- Question 2 of the survey read: Would you be prepared to contribute towards retaining the historic Kopu Bridge (such as fundraising, labour or sponsorship)? Of the 1,015 respondents that answered the question 30% said yes and 70% said no.

There has been no formal community engagement or consultative procedure on Council's part with regard to the old Kopu Bridge.

### Thames Community Board

The Thames Community Board regards the retention of the bridge structure only to be beneficial and feasible if aligned with opportunities associated with the Kopu Business Improvement Project and the Hauraki District Rail Trail Project.

At the time of writing this report comment has not yet been made by the Community Board and this will be presented at the Council meeting on 22 October 2014.

## **5 Options**

Due to the severity of the risks stated by Council at its meeting on 25 June 2014 and the limited appetite for the retention of a structure which may result in a burden to the ratepayer at some point in future, it is recommended that Council consider its two immediate options:

### Option 1 – Do nothing

Avoid the risk and make it clear that Thames-Coromandel District Council does not support the retention of the structure due to the following reasons:

- It is not required as part of its local roading network and it does not want to place any further burden on ratepayers.
- The Society proposal is not deemed viable regarding the specific proposed financial treatment and legal structure and this will place a burden on Thames-Coromandel District Council ratepayers, which is not desirable.
- The alternative to the Society proposed financial treatment includes a grant scheme to be administered by Thames-Coromandel District Council along with the management of the demolition fund, which is not feasible due to the value of the demolition fund and the eventual requirement on Thames-Coromandel District Council's part to demolish the bridge when it becomes structurally unsound or suffers irreparable damage due to, for instance, natural disaster
- Hauraki District Council has already stated that it will not support the retention of the bridge, which means that Thames-Coromandel District Council alone would carry the potential risk.
- Thames-Coromandel District Council sees no alignment between the Hauraki Rail Trail Project and the retention of the old Kopu Bridge. It also does not recognise any specific benefit to Kopu or the district if the structure is retained as part of the establishment or ongoing operation of the Hauraki Rail Trail's Kopu to Kaiua stage.
- The new Kopu Bridge makes provision for cyclists and pedestrians, which is sufficient for the Hauraki District Council Rail Trail project's next stage to Kaiua.

- Thames-Coromandel District Council considers potential health and safety incidents and potential suicide risk associated with use of the bridge as a significant reputational risk, which it does not have an appetite for.
- NZTA is willing to, as part of its demolition of the bridge to leave the swing span portion of the bridge in a location as a static open-air museum feature. This may be placed on the Kaiwhenua land or on Hauraki District Council side of the Waihou River and referenced in signage placed at the three bridge spans to remain on the eastern bank of the Waihou River.
- Thames-Coromandel District Council is aware of the fact that obtaining consent to demolish the bridge in future will be a significant process due the bridge's age and historic status and does not wish to commit resource to that activity. This is not to be taken as Council's intention to support or not to support any consent application for the demolition of the bridge.

#### Option 2 – Support the retention of the bridge

Under this option Thames-Coromandel District Council will need to consider and address the following:

- Thames-Coromandel District Council will need to communicate its commitment to NZTA to accept ownership of the structure and manage the bridge in such a way that all liability is transferred away from NZTA.
- Thames-Coromandel District Council will receive the demolition fund (what remains of the \$2.3m at time of transfer, less a further \$50,000 as indicated by NZTA for transfer of the asset and funds) and will need to manage the fund in such a way as to minimise any future financial impact on the ratepayer.
- A Trust or Council Organisation (CO) or Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) will need to be established that will manage the bridge activity along with fundraising (including volunteer work and contributions in kind) for maintenance, upgrades, operation and promotion (event management) of the facility. An example of such a mechanism is included in this report as Attachment A.
- A CO or CCO is not necessarily the most cost effective structure for the entity due to the annual operating costs to deal with auditing and reporting. This additional cost is estimated at \$15,000.
- That the trust, CO or CCO obtains suitable insurance cover to safeguard Thames-Coromandel District Council from liability related to a range of factors including among other damage, injury or loss of life as a result of use of the facility and failure of the structure due to natural disaster.
- That the trust, CO or CCO will need to complete the handrail upgrade and obtain engineering/building compliance signoff for the work, prior to opening the facility to the public.
- That an operational management plan would be required for the facility which needs to cover among other matters, the operation of the swing span and associated Health and Safety.
- That regular and scheduled maintenance will take place in order to maintain the asset to an agreed standard and to ensure the ability remains to operate and open the swing span.
- That further planning is needed in the Kopu area incorporating the old Kopu Bridge to maximise opportunities for economic growth and development in the Kopu area.
- That it will be working with the trust / CO / CCO to ensure that the bridge is appropriately maintained and operated.
- That the trust / CO / CCO would be able to draw on the existing expertise and support from the Society, IPENZ, HNZ and other supporters of the retention of the bridge as per the attached letters of support to resolve issues as and when they arise with the operation of the bridge.

### Option 3 – Remain neutral

This is a further variation on the Do Nothing option theme in that Council neither supports the Society in its proposal to retain the structure nor does it support NZTA in its application to demolish and remove the historic structure.

## **6 Suggested Resolution(s)**

That the Thames-Coromandel District Council:

1. Receives the Historic Kopu Bridge report, dated 1 October 2014.
2. Resolves that it does not support the retention of the bridge in line with Option 1 and
3. Instructs staff to write to NZTA to advise them that Thames-Coromandel District Council does not support the retention of the old Kopu Bridge or the Society proposal, but that it supports the NZTA's intention to demolish the old Kopu Bridge.

Or

1. Receives the Historic Kopu Bridge report, dated 1 October 2014.
2. Resolves that it supports the retention of the bridge in line with Option 2.
3. Instructs staff to respond to NZTA with its decision to support the Society proposal to retain the old Kopu Bridge.
4. Instructs staff to develop a detailed proposal with the Society for the transfer and management of the asset, which is to include the details of the trust / CO / CCO or other entity for sign-off by Council.

Or

1. Receives the Historic Kopu Bridge report, dated 1 October 2014.
2. Resolves that it does not support the retention of the bridge in line with Option 3, and
3. Instructs staff to write to NZTA to advise them that Thames-Coromandel District Council neither supports the Society proposed retention of the bridge nor the NZTA's intention to demolish the old Kopu Bridge.

## **References-Agenda attachments**

**Attachment A** *Draft Trust Deed for old Kopu Bridge (Prepared for discussion by John La Roche Society Committee Member)*

**Attachment B** *John La Roche letter to David Hammond 12 September 2014.  
Doc Set 3557555*

**Attachment C** *NZTA letter to David Hammond 12 August 2014. Doc Set 3524756*

**Attachment D** *Letter from Scott Simpson to Gary Blake - 30 June 2014.  
Doc Set 3468409*

**Attachment E** *Historic Places Trust letter to Mayor Glenn Leach 22 April 2014.  
Doc Set 3390347*

**Attachment A - Draft trust deed for old Kopu Bridge**

**Attachment B - John La Roche letter David Hammond**

***Attachment C***

[Attachment C - 12 August 2014 NZTA Letter to David Hammond](#)

***Attachment D***

**[Attachment D - 30 June 2014 Letter from Scott Simpson to Gary Blake](#)**

**Attachment E - Historic Places Trust letter to Mayor**

