

## Project Spotlight - Otaki to north of Levin with New Zealand Transport Agency

Can you give us a general overview of your project?

This is a roading infrastructure project, led by the NZ Transport Agency, looking to improve State Highway 1 from Otaki to north of Levin to accommodate expected future traffic volumes and support the growth of the community. The Otaki to north of Levin project forms the northernmost section of the Wellington Northern Corridor.



**Tell us about your project:**

**What types of engagement methods/tools did you use?**

We used a variety of methods to reach people – these included:

- a project newsletter sent to all households and businesses in the project area;
- a local media and advertising campaign;
- holding open days and drop-in sessions;
- attending markets and community meetings;
- a feedback form and annotated map; and
- using the [www.bangthetable.com](http://www.bangthetable.com) online engagement platform to mirror the face-to-face engagement.

**What principles did you find most useful in carrying out this project?**

#### OPENNESS

This principle is important for the Agency given the on-going nature of this project. The community are very familiar with conversations of the past and we faced some tough discussions head on. One piece of material we created that really helped with being open was to set out the 'Story so far' – this included what people had said and how the Agency has taken it on board.

#### TRUST

Because of all the previous engagement, clearly defining the purpose of this round of engagement, including having internal buy-in from decision makers and the commitment to be more collaborative, helped build trust with key stakeholders and the wider community. The project team faced all the events and meetings to provide consistency and make the engagement personal.

*"Good on Lonnie and the team for fronting up to the meeting at the Manakau Hall 2/7/17. They seemed very sincere in their desire for a good outcome from the process. We cannot lay the blame from the past upon them."*

**Did you come across any surprises on this project?**

There was a lot of interest from the community and a fair bit of demand for the project team to talk to particular groups, attend community meetings and hold extra events. It was important to be responsive to the needs of the community and remain flexible to meet these needs. We extended the closing date for feedback by one week to cater to those who had attended one of the later events or meetings.

The team has learnt from this and will ensure future engagement periods factor in these groups and locations.

## Have you applied the IAP2 Spectrum in this project?

Like many projects of this scale, we are applying several levels of the Spectrum. The majority is engagement with the community is occurring at the 'consult' level. For key stakeholders and iwi we are seeking deeper engagement at the 'Involve' level – promising to directly reflect concerns and aspirations in the alternatives developed. We have also established a Project Reference Group (PRG), made up of key stakeholders, community groups and iwi, to directly advise the project team – this is operating at the 'collaborate' level. The PRG have advised on the engagement process; told us who to talk to; shared particular community concerns; and are currently inputting into the Multi-Criteria Analysis to narrow down the possible options.

For all levels we are making sure we provide feedback on how public input influenced the decisions.

## If you could change the engagement process in some ways, how would you do that?

Time! Having more time would mean we could have kept the engagement period open longer; had more events; and sought further feedback. We will be having a second round of public engagement, so there will be another opportunity for people to input again.

## What did you find the most rewarding aspect of working on this project?

When you are engaging on a project, you really get to know a community. Hearing stories and capturing feedback to input into the technical side of the project is very rewarding. Finding out new things and seeking local knowledge, positive and negative, adds value to the process. Engaging with a community when the subject is emotional for them, promising to listen when the process hasn't gone well beforehand, then seeing them place trust in the project team is very humbling.

*"I just wanted to say that it was quite emotional for me to see you connecting with our people in a personal and interested and respectful way yesterday in our whare. This could not be more different from the last time ... how lovely it was to see you all talking with individuals, showing them that respect and care, and appreciating something of the feel of our history and personality, as well as engaging properly."*

## What are the current challenges or barriers that still exist in this area of engagement?

This project is on-going and there are elements of uncertainty for the community. It's been tricky facing the community, many of who are seeking answers that the Transport Agency aren't in a position to give yet. This will hopefully change towards the end of the year as the project progresses.

## Were you able to overcome those barriers/challenges and if so how?

Communication, being honest and working through the technical aspects as efficiently as possible are all elements that are helping to overcome the challenge of community uncertainty. One of the objectives for the engagement is to maintain and nurture relationships, the true test as to whether this has been achieved will be known at the end of the process.

## What are some of the learnt lessons from this project that you could apply to future projects?

We have just completed a round of public engagement and have undertaken a debrief session to learn lessons we can apply during the next round. Some of the outcomes of that session relate to:

- the types of collateral to produce;
- the increased number of events needed;
- fine tuning the logistics around the events;
- having a balance of open and closed questions; and
- finding a better way to present the data from the map.

For more information: [www.nzta.govt.nz/o2nl](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/o2nl)



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*Levin Family Fun day, 10 June 2017*





*Levin RSA drop-in session, 23 June 2017*