



Engagement Summary and Decisions Report

Corban Estate pedestrian level crossing removal



September 2023

Overview

We have recently started work to remove some level crossings before CRL opens to the public, including seven pedestrian level crossings across the rail network and one road level crossing at Church Street East in Penrose.

Removing our pedestrian level crossings is required to reduce the risk of serious injury or death, and therefore receive regulatory approval from Waka Kotahi, before we introduce more frequent trains after CRL opens to the public.

Community engagement on Corban Estate and O’Neills Road pedestrian level crossings has provided us with valuable feedback, including local concerns about the removals, the alternatives routes, and how we can make these routes easier to use.

Level Crossing Removal Programme

We are planning to introduce a rail network with new services and timetables after the City Rail Link (CRL) opens to the public.

These new services and timetables will mean that train frequencies will increase by 100% in some areas, resulting in a significant increase in the time that barrier arms and automatic safety gates are closed at those level crossings.

To improve safety at level crossings, and to support growth on our rail network, we have developed a Level Crossing Removal Programme.

This programme takes into account all level crossings across the Auckland rail network, the potential solutions for their removal, and what is required to improve safety at level crossings before we introduce more frequent trains.

The LGRP adopts a long-term approach and will remove our level crossings in phases over the next 10 to 30 years.

We have worked in close partnership with KiwiRail and Waka Kotahi to develop this programme.

- **Waka Kotahi** is responsible for monitoring and setting the regulations for rail safety in New Zealand. These regulations are designed to manage the safety risks faced by all rail participants, including Auckland Transport and our rail operators.
- **KiwiRail** is planning for significant growth in freight across the Auckland region and will operate more regular freight trains to support this growth. The Level Crossing Removal Programme will support KiwiRail to operate more frequent freight trains.

We are continuing to investigate the possible solutions for removing our more complex rail level crossings, including road level crossings and level crossings connected to train stations. Possible solutions for these crossings may include grade separation or full closure.

Pedestrian Level Crossing Removal project

We are starting to remove 7 pedestrian-only level crossings across Auckland. Removing our pedestrian level crossings is required to reduce the risk of serious injury or death, and therefore receive regulatory approval from Waka Kotahi, before we introduce more frequent trains after CRL opens to the public.

We are removing 7 pedestrian level crossings at the following 6 locations:

- **O’Neills Road, Swanson**
- **Corban Estate, Henderson**
- **Tironui Station Road East, Takaanini**
- **Kingdon Street, Newmarket**
- **Lloyd Avenue, Mt Albert**
- **Homai Station** (There are 2 level crossings at Homai Station)

To ensure we comply with existing safety regulations, and to support our case for receiving regulatory approval from Waka Kotahi, we will also implement a range of safety upgrades at other road level crossings.

These pedestrian level crossing removals and upgrades are required to demonstrate to Waka Kotahi that we have reduced the risk of an incident, such as a near miss or collision, before CRL opens.

Community engagement

We engaged with the Henderson and Swanson communities regarding the removal of Corban Estate and O’Neills Road pedestrian level crossings from 12 June to 2 July 2023.

Our engagement with these communities has provided us with valuable feedback, including local concerns about the removals, the alternative routes, and how we can make these alternative routes easier and safer to use.

Engagement did not focus on the removal itself because of the safety regulations which we must comply with. More information about these regulations is provided in the previous section.

We genuinely appreciate and thank our communities for taking the time to provide their feedback and suggestions.

Next Steps

In response to community feedback, we will upgrade lighting, install new signage, and trim the vegetation on the approach to the underpass before removing the level crossing. We will also investigate the Mt Lebanon Lane route and, if possible, improve the quality of the level crossing surface for pedestrians.



Engagement Snapshot

Feedback focused on how we can improve the alternative routes for **2** level crossings

Feedback from over **230** local residents and businesses

Feedback from **149** responses via our online survey

Conversations with **60** people across three community drop-in events

Feedback from **22** responses via freepost feedback forms

Ambassadors interacted with **150** people at the level crossings, across two days during peak hours

850 letters delivered to local residents and businesses

Engaged with an advocate group with **4** representatives of the Swanson community

More than **1,175** unique visits to the project webpage.



Our Engagement Approach

What did we engage about?

We worked with the Henderson and Swanson communities to understand how people currently use the Corban Estate and O’Neills Road pedestrian level crossings, how the removals will impact them, and how we can make the alternative routes easier and safer to use.

How did we engage?

We engaged with a variety of community groups, accessibility groups, local businesses, and residents. This included meeting with an advocacy group from the Swanson community who raised concerns about the project prior to our planned community engagement. We met with this group to discuss the project and walk around Swanson to experience their concerns.

Our community engagement involved:

- **Community drop-in events** – AT hosted two drop-in events to talk directly with affected communities. These events were hosted at **Swanson Train Station**:
 - 5:00pm – 7:00pm, Thursday 22 June 2023
 - 11:00am – 1:00pm, Saturday 24 June 2023

At the request of the community advocate group, AT attended a third drop-in event hosted by Community Waitakere at **St Marks Church Hall**:

- 2:00pm – 4:00pm, Sunday 2 July 2023
- **An online survey** – We provided an online survey accessible via the AT website. People were encouraged to submit feedback via AT Ambassadors, posters at the level crossings, and flyers.
- **Letters to residents and businesses** – We delivered letters to residents and businesses near the level crossings. This letter contained information about the removals, a link to the online survey, and a freepost feedback form to return written feedback to AT.

When did we engage?

Community feedback was open from Monday 12 June to Sunday 2 July.

Why did we engage?

We acknowledge that the Corban Estate or O’Neill’s Road pedestrian level crossing are useful connections for some people walking or cycling, and we acknowledge that the removal of these crossings will cause some inconvenience.

To understand this impact, we engaged with local communities to understand how or why they use the existing level crossings, and their concerns relating to the alternative routes. We value community feedback as the best source of information regarding these concerns and the potential solutions.



Corban Estate Pedestrian Level Crossing Removal

What you shared with us

Summary of key feedback themes

A review and analysis of feedback has provided us with an understanding of how people currently use the Corban Estate pedestrian level crossing, how its removal will impact them, and how we could improve the alternative routes.

The four key themes from the feedback are:

1. **Improving the underpass near Opanuku Stream**
2. **Improving the Mt Lebanon Lane level crossing**
3. **Timing of the level crossing removals**
4. **The impact of removing the crossing**



Theme 1: Improving the underpass near Opanuku Stream

What you said:

The underpass near Opanuku Stream feels unsafe, particularly for women, elderly or children. There is poor lighting and visibility, blind corners, and overgrown vegetation near the underpass. Safety of this underpass was the most common issue and was raised by 16 out of 41 responses for this crossing.

Some people are also not aware of the underpass near Opanuku Stream or do not know where it leads. Feedback revealed mixed experiences relating to wayfinding and signage, including signs that are out of sight or signs that don't exist where they should be. Improving signage for the underpass was suggested by 5 out of 41 responses.

Our response:

We recognise the safety and wayfinding concerns raised by your feedback. We will upgrade lighting, install new signage, and trim the vegetation on the approach to the underpass before removing the level crossing.

Theme 2: Improving the Mt Lebanon Lane level crossing

What you said:

The route to the Mt Lebanon Lane crossing is too steep and the crossing itself is too uneven for some people, including people with wheelchairs, mobility scooters, or other wheeled devices. The steep and uneven nature of the Mt Lebanon Lane level crossing was raised by 3 out of 41 responses.

The route via Mt Lebanon Lane adds significant distance and inconvenience for some people, particularly for people who live near Wadier Place or people walking from the Henderson town centre. Increased walking distances was raised by 3 out of 41 responses.

Our response:

We will investigate the Mt Lebanon lane route and, if possible, improve the quality of the level crossing surface for pedestrians. Given the nature of Mt Lebanon Lane as the only road entrance for Corban Estate Art Centre and some homes, we need to minimise major civil works and associated disruption. However, the project team does acknowledge the steepness of Mt Lebanon Lane and will consider this as part of the wider Level Crossing Removal Programme.

We also understand that the existing pedestrian level crossing may be the shortest or fastest option for some people. However, most trips will start or end some distance away from the crossing, and using one of the alternative routes will not add significant distance for people walking or cycling.

We acknowledge that there may be some people walking to the Corban Estate Art Centre from Wadier Place, however it is safer to cross Great North Road at one of the near-by traffic lights (near Henderson Valley Road or Mt Lebanon Lane).



Theme 3: Timing of the level crossing removals

What you said:

If increasing train frequencies cannot be achieved until all level crossings are removed, AT should consider removing the pedestrian level crossings last after all other level crossings. The timing of removing the level crossing is important to minimise the impact on walking, cycling, and accessibility around the Henderson community. Delaying the removal and ensuring better alignment with increasing rail frequencies was suggested by 4 out of 41 responses.

Removing the level crossing is important to prevent potential rail incidents in the community. Increasing rail frequency is important for the Henderson community. The safety bells are also loud and disruptive to some workers at the Corban Estate Art Centre. Removing the crossing as soon as possible was suggested by 4 out of 41 responses.

Our response:

We are currently investigating the possibilities for removing our more complex rail level crossings, including road level crossings and crossings connected to train stations.

In the meantime, we are starting work now to remove 7 pedestrian level crossings our pedestrian level crossings. This is required to reduce the risk of serious injury or death, and therefore receive regulatory approval from Waka Kotahi, before we introduce more frequent trains after CRL opens to the public.

We cannot delay removing our pedestrian level crossings until we have completed removals for other road crossings, which will require significantly more time, planning and resources, because this would prevent us receiving regulatory approval for our new CRL rail network.

In addition to pedestrian level crossing removal, an upgrade to Henderson Station is also proposed to provide capacity for some trains to turn around at the end of their service. The proposed upgrade of Henderson Station also requires the removal of Corban Estate pedestrian level crossing to enable important changes to signals and control systems on the approach to the station. Removing the level crossing allows optimum placement of the equipment needed for these systems.

We need to remove Corban Estate pedestrian level crossing as soon as possible to allow enough time for completing the Henderson Station upgrades before CRL opens.



Theme 4: The impact of removing the crossing

What you said:

Approximately 70% of feedback (29 out of 41 responses) relating to the Corban Estate pedestrian level crossing were opposed to its removal and were concerned about the potential negative impacts of removing it. These concerns are outlined below.

- **Travel choice:**
The level crossing is an important connection for the local community. Removing the crossing would result in fewer people walking and cycling, and more people driving, due to the safety issues or added distances associated with using the alternative routes. The effects of this would increase carbon emissions or congestion to the Corban Estate Art Centre.
- **Local business:**
Removing the level crossing would negatively impact local businesses, particularly the Corban Estate Art Centre whose reception is directly adjacent to the level crossing.
- **Safety**
The existing level crossing is not unsafe because there has never been an incident and there are safety bells to warn people of oncoming trains. The existing level crossing is the safest option because the underpass near Opanuku Stream feels more unsafe than the likelihood of a collision with a train. Removing the level crossing would also increase safety risks as people continue to cross in the same location after the level crossing is removed.

In response to feedback which opposes the removal:

Removal is required to reduce the risk of serious injury or death, and therefore support us receiving regulatory approval from Waka Kotahi for our new rail network after the CRL opens. Engagement did not focus on the removal itself because of the safety regulations which we must comply with. For more information on these regulations, we encourage you to read about the Pedestrian Level Crossing Removal project on page 1.

In response to feedback regarding travel choice:

Most trips will start or end some distance away from the crossing, and using one of the alternative routes will not add significant distance for people walking or cycling. We will also make improvements to the alternative routes based on community feedback. These factors will mean that travel choice is unlikely to change as a result of the removal.

In response to feedback regarding local business:

We have collected feedback from staff at Corban Estate Art Centre who generally support the removal. Staff responded positively to enabling more frequent trains and described the safety bells as being loud and disruptive to their work. We will work closely with the Art Centre as we make improvements to the alternative routes.

In response to feedback regarding safety:

Our Level Crossing Safety Impact Assessment, which confirms the safety risks currently playing out at the level crossing, has reported has reported 2 near misses – one in August 2014 and another in December 2014.

While a collision with a pedestrian has not occurred at Corban Estate Pedestrian Level Crossing, collisions with pedestrians have occurred, and continue to occur, across our rail network regularly. This includes 1 fatality at Mount Lebanon Lane in July 2016. We should not wait for another collision to occur at this location in order to justify removing the level crossing.

We will make improvements to the alternative routes to make them safer and easier to use.

We will also install fencing after removing the level crossing to prevent people crossing the tracks at the same location.

Other areas of interest

During our community engagement, we also heard about several other topics that were less common but are just as important to our analysis and decision making.

There were also some topics that are outside of the scope or budget that we would like to address.

Improve local access and connectivity

Feedback revealed a general need to improve connectivity around the wider Henderson area, including to the Corban Estate Art Centre. Some people described the need to better connect Corban Estate Art Centre to Henderson Valley Road via bridge, as well as a suggestion to provide a walking and cycling connection alongside the railway between Mt Lebanon Road and Sturges Road.

Our response:

We have been engaging with Eke Panuku regarding plans for a potential walking and cycling bridge across the Opanuku Stream between Corban Estate Art Centre and Opanuku Reserve, which would connect to Henderson Valley Road. Based on this engagement, we understand that there is uncertainty on the timing and funding for this bridge due to current budget constraints. Due to this uncertainty, we cannot align the timeframe for the Corban Estate pedestrian level crossing removal with the construction of the Opanuku Stream bridge.

We also acknowledge the suggestion for a new walking and cycling connection to Sturges Road, and this will be investigated as part of the wider Level Crossing Removal Programme.

Install automatic safety gates or build a bridge

Two responses suggested provision for automatic safety gates, bridge or underpass to improve safety while retaining a connection at this location.

Our response:

Automatic safety gates can prevent unsafe behaviour and crossing attempts. However, over time we have observed pedestrians pressing the emergency release button and crossing in front of oncoming trains, children climbing the fencing while the gates are closed, or prams becoming stuck in the tracks as people cross. This release button is necessary to meet accessibility requirements related to wheelchair users. This option is therefore not 100% effective at preventing serious injury or death.

We also do not have funding for a bridge or underpass due to current financial constraints affecting all Auckland Council organisations. These options require significantly more funding, time, resource consenting and planning to complete, which would also impact our ability to receive regulatory approval for the new CRL rail network.

Funding

One response questioned the cost of the options considered, including automatic safety gates and a bridge, and suggested AT to consider alternative mechanisms to fund these options to retain a connection at this location. For example, if Waka Kotahi are the primary rail safety regulators, they should partially fund the provision for one of these options.

Our response:

The cost of options are estimates designed to inform the decision-making process and do not represent exact costs. Providing estimates is useful to select an option which provides the greatest value for money before more detailed design work and exact costing.

Initial assessments completed during the Business Case stage indicated that low usage, limited space, and the availability of alternative routes did not justify replacing the existing pedestrian level crossing with a bridge or underpass. This informed our decision not to apply for funding for one of these options. Removing the pedestrian level crossing and making improvements to the alternative routes provides the greatest value for money in the current financial circumstances.

Repair the storm damage

One response raised an issue relating to damage on the banks of Opanuku Stream, which occurred as a result of the Auckland Anniversary Weekend floods and Cyclone Gabrielle.

Our response:

Auckland Council has established a separate programme of works to respond to damage caused by Cyclone Gabrielle. We have passed this feedback onto Auckland Council.

Car parking

Despite a broken yellow line to indicate no stopping or parking, private vehicles often park near the end of Mt Lebanon Lane and block the entrance to Opanuku Stream Shared Path. This is negatively impacting the experience of cycling in the area.

Our response:

We thank you for this feedback and have passed this onto the Auckland Transport parking services team.