



Engagement Summary and Decisions Report

O'Neills Road 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 LXRП 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 undertake a Traffic Assessment to better understand the safety concerns associated with the alternative routes. We have acknowledged the possible improvements suggested by the community and these options will be considered as part of our assessment. We will reach out to the Swanson community once our assessment is complete and improvements are identified.



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.



O'Neills Road 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 O'Neill's Road pedestrian level crossing, how the removals will impact them, and how we could improve the alternative routes.

The seven key themes from the feedback are:

1. Improving Pooks Road and North Candia Road
2. Improving Swanson Station
3. Improving Swanson Road and Christian Road
4. Timing of the removals
5. Install automatic safety gates
6. Build a bridge or underpass
7. Impact of removing the level crossing

Theme 1: Improving Pooks Road and North Candia Road

What you said:

The alternative route via the North Candia Road underpass feels unsafe, particularly for women, elderly or children. There are issues related to the accessibility and connectivity of footpaths, lighting, driver behaviour, vehicle speed, and the amount of traffic in general. Parking on North Candia Road also creates safety issues for people on bikes by blocking sightlines of driveways and the risk of opening car doors. The safety of this route was raised by 58 out of 129 responses.

The route via the North Candia Road underpass also adds significant distance and inconvenience for some people, particularly for people who live near the existing level crossing or people who use the level crossing for recreation (dog-walking or general exercise). Added walking distances via this route was raised by 39 out of 129 responses.

Suggested changes to improve the safety of this route included:

- New pedestrian crossings at the Pooks Road / North Candia Road roundabout.
- A new pedestrian crossing on Pooks Road opposite the existing level crossing.
- A new footpath on the north side of Pooks Road to extend the existing shared path.
- A new footpath on the west side of North Candia Road.
- Repair the existing footpath on the south side of Pooks Road.
- Improve lighting on Pooks Road and North Candia Road.
- New cycle lanes on Pooks Road.
- Slow down traffic by installing speedbumps, narrowing the roadway, and reducing the speed limit.
- Traffic lights at the Pooks Road / North Candia intersection.
- Traffic lights at the Swanson Road / North Candia intersection.

Our response:

In response to community feedback, we will undertake a Traffic Assessment to better understand the safety concerns of Pooks Road and North Candia Road. We have acknowledged the possible improvements suggested by the community and these options will be considered as part of our assessment. We will reach out to the Swanson community once our assessment is complete and improvements are identified.



Theme 2: Improving Swanson Station

What you said:

The lifts at the Swanson Station overbridge are unreliable and often break down. The information displayed on the lifts is also unhelpful and does not provide a good customer experience to address this issue.

The route via the Swanson Station overbridge adds significant distance for some people.

It is difficult to enter and exit the Swanson Station car park (near the Swanson Station Café) by bike due to car parks on Swanson Road blocking sightlines. There are also safety issues caused by vehicles entering via the exit or exiting via the entrance.

Footpaths near the entrance of the Swanson Station Park and Ride are unsafe. Vehicles turning into the Park and Ride drive too fast due to a wide turning radius; Vehicles entering or exiting the Challenge petrol station often cause accessibility issues by blocking footpaths; and the width of footpaths at this entrance is difficult to navigate for people in wheelchairs.

Issues related to Swanson Station, including the overbridge, were raised by 23 out of 129 responses.

Suggested changes to improve this route included:

- Replace the existing lifts with new ones large enough for bikes.
- Update the customer information provided on the lifts.
- A new ramp to the existing overbridge.
- A new second overbridge at Swanson Station.
- Improve the footpath near the Park and Ride entrance.
- Better lighting and shelter, including on the overbridge and at the bus stop.
- Better signage and markings at the entrance and exit of Swanson Station carpark.

Our response:

We are aware of the reliability issues regarding the lifts at Swanson Station. We understand the inconvenience this would have caused some people in the past, particularly for people with accessibility needs, and we apologise for this.

We have recently determined the likely cause of the issue and our Asset Management team is now working to resolve this. We will ensure that these lifts are reliably working before we remove O'Neills Road pedestrian level crossing.

In terms of the other safety concerns at Swanson Station, we will undertake an assessment to better understand these concerns. We have acknowledged the possible improvements suggested by the community and these options will be considered as part of our assessment. We will reach out to the Swanson community once our assessment is complete and improvements are identified.

Theme 3: Improving Swanson Road and Christian Road

What you said:

Walking and cycling on Swanson Road is unsafe due to frequent driveways with cars regularly crossing the footpath, overgrown vegetation, uneven or narrow footpaths, school children using traffic islands to cross Swanson Road instead of the controlled crossing near the school, driver behaviour, vehicle speed and the amount of traffic in general.

Parking also creates safety issues for people on bikes by blocking sightlines of driveways and the risk of opening car doors, and existing pedestrian crossings require bikes to merge into general traffic.

Improving Swanson Road was suggested by 10 out of 129 responses.

Suggested changes to improve the route via Swanson Road included:

- A new pedestrian crossing on Swanson Road near Swanson Station.
- Repair footpaths on the north side of Swanson Road, including near Swanson Station.
- New pedestrian crossings with traffic islands built away from the curb to allow bikes to pass through without merging into general traffic.
- Slow traffic down by installing speedhumps, narrowing the road, and reducing the speed limit.
- Traffic lights at the Swanson Road / O'Neills Road intersection.

There is also no viable option to walk or cycle around Swanson Station via Christian Road if the lifts are not working. Christian Road is also not very pedestrian or bike friendly in general.

Improving or providing an alternative route via Christian Road was suggested by 7 out of 129 responses.

Suggested changes to improve the route via Christian Road included:

- A new footpath connecting Swanson Station to Christian Road
- A new footpath on Christian Road between Swanson Road and Kātote Avenue

Our response:

In response to community feedback, we will undertake a Traffic Assessment to better understand the safety concerns. We have acknowledged the possible improvements suggested by the community, including for Swanson Road and Christian Road, and these options will be considered as part of our assessment. We will reach out to the Swanson community once our assessment is complete and improvements are identified.

However, we would like to clarify that frequent driveways and untrimmed vegetation are challenges experienced by all Aucklanders daily and are not unique to the specific alternative routes via Swanson Station or North Candia Road. Driveways and vegetation are also often private property which AT cannot control. If vegetation is located on the berm, it is generally the responsibility of private property owners to maintain this.

Theme 4: Timing of the 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 Swanson community. Delaying the removal and ensuring better alignment with increasing rail frequencies was suggested by 6 out of 129 responses.

Removing the level crossing is important to prevent potential rail incidents in the community. There have been numerous sightings of mopeds and motorcycles driving on the level crossing, as well as vehicles getting stuck on the tracks at this location. Level crossings should be removed as soon as possible to run more trains. The safety bells are also loud, disruptive, and prevent neighbours from enjoying lunch or dinner outside. Removing the crossing as soon as possible was suggested by 2 out of 129 responses.

If the level crossing is not removed soon, then AT should ensure that it is as safe as possible until it is eventually removed. This includes installing automatic safety gates for an interim period.

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 to support us receiving regulatory approval from Waka Kotahi for our new rail network after the CRL opens, including new services, timetables and frequencies.

We cannot delay removing our pedestrian level crossings until we have removed our 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.



Theme 5: Install automatic safety gates

What you said:

Install automatic safety gates to improve safety while retaining a connection at this location. Automatic safety gates were suggested by 37 out of 129 responses.

Our response:

Automatic safety gates can prevent unsafe behaviour and crossing attempts. However, over time we have observed pedestrians pressing the release button and crossing in front of oncoming trains, children climbing of 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.

Theme 6: Build a bridge or underpass

What you said:

Build a bridge or underpass to improve safety while retaining a connection at this location. This should be similar to what has been achieved on other parts of the network, including the rail overbridge built near Gowing Drive in Meadowbank.

A bridge or underpass was suggested by 13 out of 129 responses.

Our response:

As part of the Auckland Council group, we are currently experiencing significant funding constraints as we address a funding shortfall. All level crossings, including road level crossings, are assessed and prioritised based on a range of factors including their safety risk, operational requirements, and their role in the wider transport network. With the limited funding available, it is important to look at the relative importance of each level crossing and the potential solutions for their removal.

Auckland Transport will continue to lobby for additional funding to minimise the impact on communities as much as possible. However, initial assessments completed during the Business Case stage indicated that low usage and the availability of alternative routes meant that, in the current financial circumstances, an overbridge or underpass is unfortunately not a priority for this location relative to other level crossings across the network.

Building a bridge or underpass in this location would also require significantly more funding, time, resource consenting and planning to complete, which would impact our ability to receive regulatory approval for our new CRL rail network.



Theme 7: Impact of removing the level crossing

What you said:

Approximately 58% of feedback (76 out of 129 responses) relating to the O'Neills Road pedestrian level crossing were opposed to the removal and were concerned about the potential negative impacts of removing it. These potential impacts are outlined below.

- **Travel choice:**

The level crossing is an important connection for the local community. Removing the crossing would result in less 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 and congestion around the community.

- **Local business:**

Removing the level crossing would negatively impact local businesses, particularly the Swanson RSA, Pineapples Early Childhood Centre, and future Vines Estates restaurant.

- **Safety**

The existing level crossing is not unsafe because there has never been an incident, there are safety bells to warn people of oncoming trains, and good sightlines along the tracks.

The existing level crossing is the safest option because the trains which run to a time schedule, and pass through a level crossing with safety bells, are more predictable than vehicles on roads such as Pooks Road or Swanson Road. This is due to unsafe driver behaviour, vehicle speeds, and high traffic volumes.

Removing the level crossing would increase safety risks as people continue to cross in the same location after the level crossing is removed.

The approach adopted by AT is that the decision to remove the level crossing is fait accompli, despite adequate safety risk assessments for the alternative routes not being completed.

- **Urban development and growth**

Increasing urban development and population growth in the area will require walking and cycling infrastructure to support access for new residents. This growth means the level crossing is likely to be used more regularly, providing good justification to retain the level crossing.

- **Community segregation**

Removing the level crossing would segregate the community and create issues relating to accessibility, connectivity, and resilience if, for example, lifts at Swanson Station are not working. People need to access homes, shops, services, and jobs on both sides of the railway, and providing additional crossing points is important to support access around the community in this regard, especially for active modes.

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:

Based on community feedback and our Traffic Assessment, we will make improvements to the alternative routes to ensure they are easier and safer to use for people walking and cycling. We will work with the Swanson community to ensure these improvements are designed to support ongoing use of active modes after the O'Neills Road pedestrian level crossing is removed.

In response to feedback regarding local business:

Over time we have observed risks across the rail network such as children climbing over fencing while Automatic Safety Gates are closed, prams becoming stuck in the tracks, and distracted people with headphones crossing in front of oncoming trains.

We understand that the removal may require people to walk an additional 5-15 minutes to some specific businesses. However, we emphasise that the removal will ensure that people can continue these journeys safely without incident. The impact of an injury or death at the level crossing would be far greater than the potential financial impact on local businesses.

We would also like to emphasise that the majority of businesses are located near the Swanson Station overbridge and access to these businesses is unlikely to be impacted.

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 2 near misses since 2017. Community feedback has also reported sightings of mopeds and motorcycles driving on the level crossing, almost running into pedestrians, as well as vehicles getting stuck on the tracks at this location.

While a collision with a pedestrian has not occurred at this location, collisions with pedestrians have occurred, and continue to occur, across our rail network regularly. We should not wait for a collision to occur at this location in order to justify removing the level crossing.

We will make improvements to the alternative routes based on community feedback and a Traffic Assessment 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.

In response to feedback regarding urban development:

Urban development and population growth around O’Neills Road pedestrian level crossing, combined with the planned increases in rail frequency, will increase the likelihood of an incident. Removal will ensure we can prevent a potential incident.

In response to feedback regarding community segregation:

Auckland Transport will continue to lobby for additional funding to minimise the impact on communities as much as possible. However, initial assessments completed during the Business Case stage indicated that low usage and the availability of alternative routes meant that, in the current financial circumstances, an overbridge or underpass is unfortunately not a priority for this location relative to other level crossings across the network.

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.

Funding

Some responses questioned the cost of the options considered, including installing automatic safety gates or building a bridge. There also needs to be clarity on whether AT has applied for funding to build a bridge or underpass.

Some people suggested AT to consider alternative mechanisms to fund alternative options, including funding contributions from Waka Kotahi and the developers of neighboring communities.

Some feedback described the need to assess the various projects currently underway or planned in Swanson, including their relative priority and costs. The need to retain a crossing over the railway at O'Neills Road was perceived to be more important than other projects in Swanson, and AT should consider diverting funding from other projects.

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 Businesses Case stage indicated that low usage and the availability of alternative routes meant that, in the current financial circumstances, an overbridge or underpass is unfortunately not a priority for this location relative to other level crossings across the network. This informed our initial decision not to apply for funding for one of these options.

However, we have listened to community feedback and will seek approval of additional funding. Although we would like to emphasise that funding is unlikely to be available due to the current financial constraints.

Flooding

Feedback also suggested that the Pooks Road / North Candia Road roundabout is situated in a floodplain. Should improvements be made at this location, and in the event of flooding, the potential improvements would be damaged and people would need to walk through the floodwater.

Our response

We have engaged with the AT Roding, Space Planning, and other technical teams regarding the topography and existing infrastructure on the alternative routes. Potential flooding risks will be considered as part of the improvements that come out of our Traffic Assessment of Pooks Road and North Candia Road.