



Engagement Summary and Decisions Report

Homai Station pedestrian level crossing removal



August 2024

Overview

Auckland Transport (AT) has recently started work to remove some level crossings before the City Rail Link (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 New Zealand Transport Agency, before we introduce more frequent trains after the CRL opens.

Community engagement on the removal of pedestrian level crossings at Homai Station has provided us with valuable feedback, including local concerns about the removal, the alternative route, and how we can make this route 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. This will mean that the barrier arms and automatic safety gates at some level crossings will be closed more often, impacting our wider transport network, and potentially causing more people to take risks due to the frustration of delays.

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

The LXRP 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 New Zealand Transport Agency** 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 AT 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 currently investigating the possible solutions for removing our more complex rail level crossings, including our busy road level crossings.



Pedestrian Level Crossing Removal project

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 the CRL opens.

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 New Zealand Transport Agency, 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 New Zealand Transport Agency that we have reduced the risk of an incident, such as a near miss or collision, before CRL opens.

About Homai Station

There are two pedestrian-only level crossings connected to Homai Station. Both level crossings are not controlled by automatic safety gates. The station is situated near the Blind and Low Vision Campus and Manurewa High School, and a Park and Ride is located adjacent to the station on Dalgety Drive.

Currently the platform can be accessed from three locations:

1. Stairs from the Browns Road overbridge
2. A pedestrian-only level crossing from McVilley Road
3. A pedestrian-only level crossing from the Park and Ride and bus stop.

Community engagement

We engaged with the Homai community regarding the removal of the two pedestrian level crossings at Homai Station.

Our community engagement has provided us with valuable feedback, including local concerns about the removal, the alternative route, and how we can make the alternative route 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.

Our Engagement Approach

What did we engage about?

We worked with the Homai community to understand how people currently use the pedestrian level crossings connected to Homai Station, the impacts on station access, and how we can make the alternative route via Browns Road easier and safer to use.

We asked for feedback on the following improvements and encouraged suggestions for other improvements that could be made:

- Build a new ramp to replace the stairs between Browns Road and Homai Station.
- Replace footpaths damaged by tree roots on McVilly Road.
- Widen footpaths surrounding the station to 1.8m, including footpaths on Browns Road, McVilly Road, to the Park and Ride, and the bus stop.
- Other footpath improvements surrounding the Park and Ride, including re-routing footpaths to provide a more direct connection between the bus stop and Browns Road.

Community engagement did not focus on the removal itself because of the safety regulations which we must comply with. Our engagement was about how we can improve the alternative route.

How did we engage?

We engaged with a variety of community groups, accessibility groups, local businesses, and residents, including Manurewa High School, the Blind Low Vision Education Network (BLENNZ), and Blind and Low Vision NZ.

Our community engagement involved:

- **Public drop-in events** – AT hosted 2 public events to talk directly with the communities. These events were be hosted at **Homai Train Station**:
 - 2:00pm – 4:00pm, Wednesday 15 November
 - 11:00am – 1:00pm, Saturday 18 November
- **Blind and Low Vision Workshops** – We ran multiple workshops and events with BLENNZ and Blind Low Vision NZ, including a Whānau Event hosted by BLENNZ on 7 November 2023.
- **3D Printed Model** – We have worked hard to create 2 physical models for the blind and low vision community to touch, providing them with a hands-on understanding of the changes.
- **Online survey** – To ensure anyone affected by or interested in the project had the opportunity to provide feedback, we provided an online survey via the AT website.

- **Station Announcements** – We worked with our rail operator, Auckland One Rail, to install recorded announcements at Homai Station to raise awareness of the removals and community engagement.
- **AT Ambassadors** – Ambassadors were available at Homai Station to raise awareness of the level crossing removals, our community engagement, and distribute brochures with information about our engagement.
- **Posters** – People were informed of the removals and community engagement via posters installed at Homai Station, including at the level crossings and station shelter.
- **Brochures** – Ambassadors distributed brochures to people on the station platform and also placed them under the windshields of cars parked at the Homai Park and Ride.
- **Letters to residents and businesses** – We delivered letters to residents and businesses near the level crossing. This letter contained information about the removals, a link to the online survey, and a feedback form to return written feedback to AT.

When did we engage?

Community feedback was open from Monday 6 November to Sunday 26 November 2023.

Why did we engage?

We acknowledge that the pedestrian level crossings are a useful connection for people walking or cycling, including blind and low vision users coming from McVilly Road, and commuters accessing the Park and Ride facility. We acknowledge that the removal of this crossing will cause some inconvenience.

To understand this impact, we engaged with local communities about how they use the existing level crossings, and how we can improve the alternative route via Browns Road to make it easier and safer to use. We value community feedback as the best source of information for these improvements.

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 on page 2 of this report.



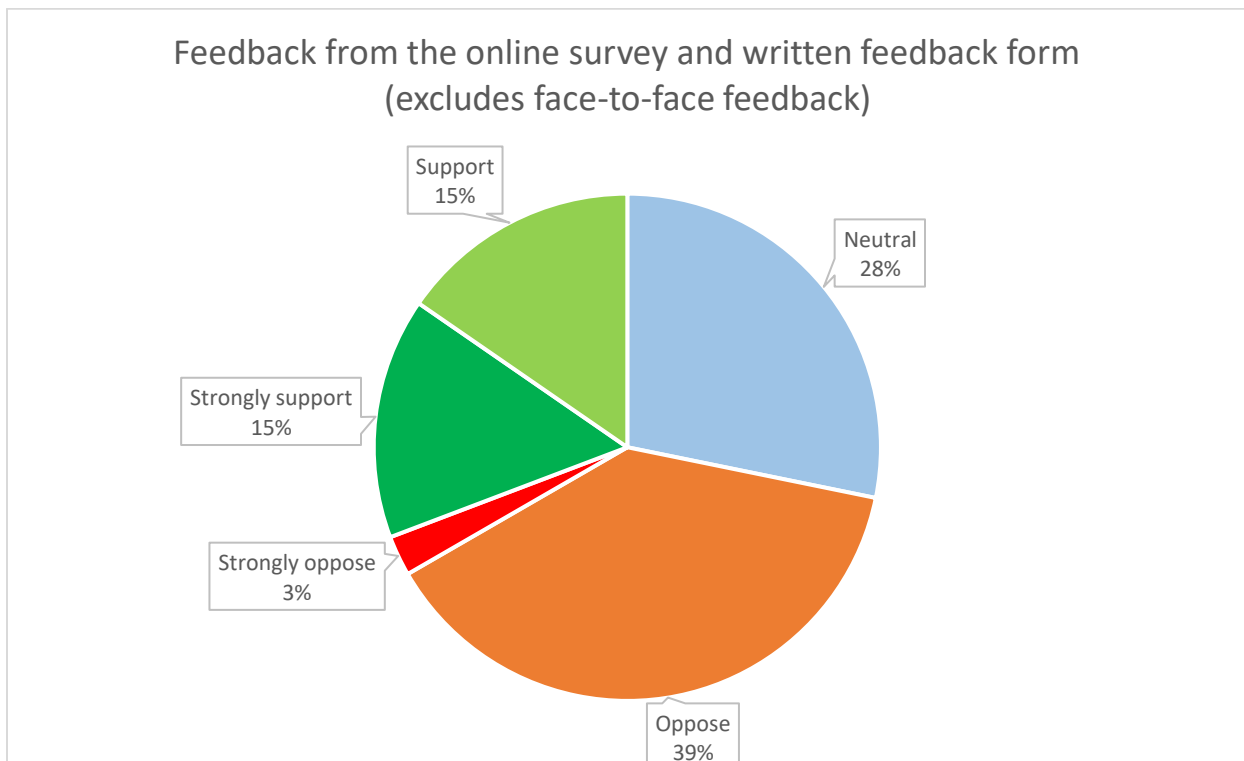
Homai Station Pedestrian Level Crossing Removal

Engagement response

The majority of community feedback was received via our face-to-face engagements (100+ interactions), including engagement with the Blind and Low Vision community and our public drop-in events at the station. We received relatively less feedback via our online survey and written feedback form (40 responses).

We received more feedback via face-to-face engagement because this was more suitable for many people affected by the removals, which mainly consisted of staff, students and family belonging to blind and low vision groups, and busy rail commuters.

- **Feedback received via our face-to-face engagement was overwhelmingly supportive for the removal and out recommended improvements, and included suggestions for further improvements to enhance the safety of Browns Road. This feedback was mainly provided by staff, students and family belonging to blind and low vision groups.**
- **Feedback received via our online survey and written feedback form revealed a mixed response to the removal and recommended improvements. While it represented a minority of the feedback received, the sentiment of this feedback is outlined below:**





What you shared with us

Summary of key feedback themes

Community feedback and observing behaviour during the engagement events at Homai Station has provided us with a better understanding of how people currently use the Homai Station pedestrian level crossings, the impacts on accessibility, and how we can improve the alternative route via Browns Road.

Below is a summary of the key feedback received:

1. Our recommended improvements
2. Improvements suggested by community feedback
3. Support for the removal
4. Safety of the level crossing
5. Install automatic safety gates
6. Build a bridge
7. Impacts of the removal



Theme 1: Our recommended improvements

Approximately 25% of feedback received from our online survey and written feedback form (10 out of 40 responses) related to the safety of the level crossing, its removal, or the recommended improvements.

However, the majority of feedback related to our recommended improvements was received via our face-to-face engagement.

The feedback received for each of our recommended improvements is outlined below.

- **A new pedestrian ramp connecting Homai Station to Browns Road:**
 - In principle, the pedestrian ramp received very strong support from the community.
 - The new ramp needs to be wide enough for 2 wheelchairs to pass each other.
 - There needs to be better lighting across the new ramp and onto the station platform.
 - There needs to be bollards at each end of the ramp to prevent bikes riding too fast down the ramp.
 - Some feedback told us that a ramp would be too steep for wheelchairs.

- **New footpaths on McVilly Road:**
 - In principle, new footpaths on McVilly Road received strong support from the community.
 - Feedback requested AT to ensure that the correct tactile pavement is used, and explained that the existing tactile pavement installed at the bus stop is incorrect.
 - Debris often falls onto the footpath from nearby trees, including accumulated leaves and branches, impacting the senses and wayfinding of blind and low vision pedestrians.
 - Some feedback has suggested a shelter over the footpath, or a new raised pedestrian crossing on McVilly Rd adjacent to the BLENNZ driveway to avoid this section of footpath.

- **New footpaths to the Park & Ride:**
 - Install better lighting and new shelter on this footpath to mitigate the longer walking distance.
 - Ensure that this footpath is made as short as possible to provide the most direct path between the Park and Ride and Browns Road.

- **Wider footpaths in the area:**
 - In principle, wider footpaths for the area received strong support from the community.
 - The footpaths need to be wide enough for 2 wheelchairs to pass each other.

Our response:

- **A new pedestrian ramp connecting Homai Station to Browns Road:**
 - The new ramp will be wide enough for 2 wheelchairs to pass each other.
 - The new ramp will include new lighting from Browns Road to the station platform, providing greater visibility and safety at night.
 - We have worked closely with accessibility groups to ensure the gradient of the ramp is made as accessible as possible. The gradient will be 1:14.

- **New footpaths on McVilly Road:**
 - The new footpaths in the area will include new and upgraded tactile pavement. We have been working closely with local blind and low vision groups to ensure the correct tactile pavement is installed.
 - Debris and vegetation are often private property issues which AT cannot control. If vegetation is located on the berm, or if debris is affecting footpaths, it is generally the responsibility of the adjacent property owners to maintain this.
 - We do not have available budget to install a raised pedestrian crossing adjacent to the BLENNZ driveway.

- **New footpaths to the Park & Ride:**
 - The new footpath will include new lighting, providing greater visibility and safety at night.
 - Stairs will be installed to provide a shorter connection from the Park and Ride to Browns Road and Homai Station.

- **Wider footpaths in the area:**
 - Wherever possible, the new footpaths will be made wide enough for 2 wheelchairs to pass each other. This is not possible in all areas due to underground utilities that cannot be relocated.



Theme 2: Improvements suggested by community feedback

What you said:

Feedback received via our face-to-face engagement from staff, students and family belonging to the blind and low vision community revealed overwhelming support for our recommended improvements, but this feedback also told us that additional improvements are needed to ensure Browns Road is made as safe and accessible as possible.

This feedback suggested the following additional improvements:

- **Install a curb or fence on the Browns Road overbridge.**
 - To prevent blind and low vision pedestrians walking into the road.
 - To create a physical and safe barrier between pedestrians and vehicle traffic.

- **Install a raised pedestrian level crossing near the entrance of BLENNZ.**
 - To allow blind and low vision pedestrians to avoid debris and low hanging branches on the McVilly Road footpath, which would occur regardless of the footpath being replaced.
 - To allow blind and low vision pedestrians to avoid crossing at the Browns Road intersection. This intersection is difficult to cross for blind and low vision users who may sometimes walk into the road.

Our response:

- **Install a curb or fence on the Browns Road overbridge.**
 - We will install a curb along the Browns Road overbridge based on community feedback.

- **Install a raised pedestrian level crossing near the entrance of BLENNZ.**
 - We do not have available budget to install a raised pedestrian crossing adjacent to the BLENNZ driveway.



Theme 3: Support for the removal

What you said:

Approximately 58% of feedback received from our online survey and written feedback form (23 out of 40 responses) provide supportive or neutral responses to the removal and recommended improvements.

Feedback received via our face-to-face engagement was overwhelmingly supportive for the removal and out recommended improvements, and included suggestions for further improvements to enhance the safety of Browns Road.

The supportive feedback told us while it would be nice to retain a walking and cycling connection at this location, it is more important to prevent a serious injury or death within the Homai community. These respondents were aware of the increasing number of incidents at level crossings and, in general, agreed that removing the level crossing is the best option going forward.

Our response:

Thank you for your feedback. While engagement did not focus on the removal itself because of the safety regulations which we must comply with, we appreciate your awareness of the safety risks at level crossings and your support for the project.



Theme 4: Safety of the level crossing

What you said:

Approximately 23% of feedback received from our online survey and written feedback form (7 out of 40 responses) related to the safety of the level crossing, its removal, or the recommended improvements.

We received more feedback related to safety via our face-to-face engagement.

Some feedback told us that the existing level crossing is the safest option for people walking and cycling because of the following reasons:

- There has never been an incident at this level crossing.
- Browns Road is congested with too much vehicle traffic.

Some feedback also suggested that removing the level crossing would increase safety risks for the following reasons:

- People will continue to cross the tracks in the same location after the level crossing is removed.
- People will be dropped off on Browns Rd near the ramp instead of McVilly Road, and this will be dangerous as there is nowhere on Browns Rd to safely pull over.

Other suggested that, if Auckland Transport is concerned about the safety of the level crossing, improvements ought to be made to the level crossing itself, such as installing automatic gates, as opposed to the alternative route.

Our response:

Automatic safety gates can prevent unsafe behavior and crossing attempts. However, over time we have observed pedestrians pressing the emergency release button and crossing in front of oncoming trains, school children climbing over the safety gates while they are closed, or prams becoming stuck in the tracks as people cross. Gates are therefore not 100% effective at preventing serious injury or death.

We are also required to remove the pedestrian level crossing to comply with safety regulations, receive regulatory approval from Waka Kotahi, and ultimately run more frequent trains.

While a collision with a pedestrian has not occurred at this location, there are recorded near misses despite the automatic safety gates. Collisions with pedestrians have occurred, and continue to occur, across our rail network.

We will not wait for a collision to occur at this location to justify removing the level crossing.

Based on community feedback, we will make improvements to the alternative route to ensure it can support safe access for everyone after the level crossing is removed.

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



Theme 5: Install automatic safety gates

What you said:

Approximately 22% of feedback received from our online survey and written feedback form (6 out of 40 responses) suggested that we install automatic safety gates to improve safety while retaining a connection at this location.

We received more feedback related to automatic safety gates via our face-to-face engagement.

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

What you said:

Approximately 22% of feedback received from our online survey and written feedback form (6 out of 40 responses) suggested that we build a bridge to improve safety while retaining a connection at this location.

We received more feedback about an overbridge via our face-to-face engagement.

This included some feedback which suggested building a bridge at the north end of the station for the following reasons:

- To maintain short walking distances for Blind and Low Vision NZ, located at the end of McVilly Road.
- To provide an alternative means of exiting the station during an emergency.

Our response:

We are currently experiencing significant funding constraints as we address a funding shortfall. All level crossings, including road level crossings, are assessed based on a range of factors including their safety risk, operational requirements, and their role in the wider transport network. Based on this assessment, and with the limited funding available, it is important to look at the relative priority of each level crossing.

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 due to the proximity of Browns Road, an overbridge is not a cost effective relative to the recommended improvements.

A bridge would be significantly more expensive to construct and involve ongoing maintenance costs. AT does not have funding for these costs.



Theme 7: Impacts of the removal

What you said:

Approximately 42% of feedback received from our online survey and written feedback form (16 out of 40 responses) was opposed to the removal or expressed concerns about the potential negative impacts of the removal.

We received more feedback about some of these concerns via our face-to-face engagement.

These concerns are outlined below.

- **Increased walking distances**

Using Browns Road as an alternative route will increase walking distances and travel times, causing inconvenience to people accessing Homai Station from the Blind and Low Vision campus or the Park and Ride. The inconvenience of this is made worse in poor weather conditions and at night.

- **Travel choice**

Removing the level crossing would result in fewer people walking, cycling and using public transport, and more people driving, due to the added distances and inconvenience of using Browns Road. The effects of this would increase safety risks and traffic congestion in the area.

- **Blind and Low Vision pedestrians**

Using Browns Road to access the station impacts blind and low vision pedestrians who rely on sensory to navigate, and the loud / busy road traffic will hinder this.

The level crossing removal will also double the walking distance for Blind and Low Vision NZ at the end of McVilly Road.



Our response to feedback opposed to the removal:

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 did not focus on the removal itself because of the safety regulations which we must comply with. Our engagement was about how we can improve the alternative route.

More detail about these regulations is provided on page 2 of this report.

Our response to feedback concerned about the potential impacts:

- **Walking distances and time:**

We acknowledge that the pedestrian level crossings are a useful connection for people walking or cycling, including for blind and low vision users coming from McVilly Road, and commuters accessing the Park and Ride facility.

We also acknowledge that the removal of this crossing will cause some inconvenience by requiring people to walk an extra 2-3 minutes, as well as the incline on Browns Road compared to the relatively flat level crossing.

However, except for people using the Park and Ride, most trips will start or end away from the crossing, and using one of the alternative routes will not add significant distance for people walking or cycling. This includes trips from BLEENZ and Manurewa High School where using Browns Road will not add significant distance.

We will also make improvements to the alternative routes based on community feedback to minimise walking distances from the Park and Ride as much as possible.

- **Travel choice:**

The level crossing removals will not add significant distance to most trips. We will also make improvements to Browns Road and McVilly Road based on community feedback. These factors will mean that travel choice is unlikely to change as a result of the removals.

- **Blind and Low Vision pedestrians**

We recognise the impact of these changes on the blind and low vision community, including people from BLEENZ and Blind Low Vision NZ. However, we are required to remove the level crossings (see page 2 for more detail)

We have worked closely with blind and low vision groups in the area to ensure the new footpaths and ramp are made as accessible as possible. We have also worked together to create educational resources to support learning of these changes, including 3D models for the blind and low vision community to interact with.

We want to ensure the blind and low vision community are supported as much as possible through this change.