



13 APR, 2021

## 'A disgrace'

Northern Advocate, Whangarei Northland

# The Northern Advocate

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**POTHOLE PROVINCE**

# 'A disgrace'

**We asked you about the state of Northland's roads, and you told us:  
Terrible, dangerous, shocking**

**Full story P2-3**



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# Nth's roads 'shocking and dangerous', say locals

Feedback about lack of maintenance after AA trip around region has been damning

**Jenny Ling**

**N**orthland roads are a disgrace, abysmal, they're like goat tracks and they're third world.

They're botched, patched, shocking and dangerous.

These are just some of the adjectives and phrases fed-up motorists have used to describe the current state of the region's roading network.

The *Northern Advocate* has been flooded with responses to its recent story following a road trip with AA Northland District Council chairwoman Tracey Risetto to highlight safety issues caused by a lack of maintenance.

The AA is calling for critical funding – \$60-70 million – for repair and maintenance works to rectify many years of constant underfunding which has affected safety.

AA motoring affairs principal communications adviser Dylan Thomsen said the amount of road being resurfaced and renewed each year is actually in decline in Northland.

"Over the last decade, Northland has averaged 180-plus lane kilometres of state highway being renewed each year.

"In 2020/21 the funding available allowed 110 lane kilometres.

"This is a figure that needs to be going up rather than down because of the deterioration in Northland's roads and the backlog of catch-up work that is required."

Whangārei resident Nikki Hodgetts said the region's roads are "an absolute disgrace" and urgently need fixing. "It contributes to many accidents.

"With the thousands of homes being built up here, the big migration north, the possibility of North Port going ahead and the new highway, our city is going to expand hugely in the next five to 10 years.

"Our roading and infrastructure

should be top priority."

Fire and Emergency Muriwhenua Area Commander Wipari Henwood said areas of concern include the closure of State Highway 1 through Mangamuka Gorge.

"As a consequence there has been an increase in incidents along SH10, for varying reasons," he said.

"For every incident we look at determining the cause, whether it was driver error or if the state of roads contributed."

Narrow roads and increasing amounts of traffic can also be a problem for fire trucks needing to get to incidents quickly, especially with the large number of infrastructure projects under way, Henwood said.

"It's trying to manage the situation

until we get those major infrastructure projects completed. We have noticed a significant increase in traffic and the difficulty navigating through that traffic.

"Every time in the middle of summer we have seal issues – we get tar melt and then seal degradation. That's the environment we live in. If you've got increased traffic flows it adds to the problem."

Northland regional councillor Colin (Toss) Kitchen has also raised concerns about the huge increase in traffic volumes on SH10 due to the closure of the Mangamuka Gorge last July. The volunteer firefighter with 52 years of service said crashes "have doubled" on that road since traffic was forced off SH1.

SH10 was now showing signs of wear, he said, with uneven surfaces and bald patches of chip seal due to "all those heavy trucks".

"It's as busy as ever.

"I think it's got worse. Once they reopen the other state highway they're going to have to do a lot of catching up on maintenance."

Ten people have died on Northland roads this year.

Inough various factors are involved in the crashes, AA says there is a definite link between road maintenance and accidents.

Poor roads affect a vehicle's grip with the road, increasing its risk of skidding and the driver losing control.

Thomsen said nearly 11 per cent of travel in Northland is on roads below the minimum standard of skid resistance. "This is one of the maintenance factors with the biggest impacts on crash rates.

"Roads need good skid resistance to help vehicles grip and brake without skidding, particularly in wet conditions."

AA driving instructor Neville Redfern said he has to teach his students not only driving skills, but also warn them about the dangers of Northland roads.

Redfern, who has taught defensive driving for more than five years, said the roads are "not constant".

"We can go from being on a very good road on to a goat track in the space of 100m, roads that are full of potholes, unlevel, bumpy, windy and narrow all in a very short distance.

"Once they've got their licence, they can grasp more of what I'm talking about, but as a learner driver the roads are very unforgiving and young people, they make mistakes.

"The state of play at the moment is just not good enough."

Acting Northland road policing manager Steve Dickson said he couldn't comment on the overall state of Northland roads.

But police officers often took note of particularly bad patches such as potholes, which could cause accidents, he said.

"When staff come across pieces of road that need urgent repair or alteration they talk to [transport agency] Waka Kotahi or the district council



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and work together with them to identify safety issues as they arise.

“Or if the roadside has contributed to a crash then we’ll suggest or request those issues be considered by Waka Kotahi engineers. They’re the best-qualified people to alter or change any roading structure.”

Henwood said Fire and Emergency staff also advised Waka Kotahi about problematic pieces of road, especially if there have been numerous accidents in the same spot.

“We’ll discuss where it affects us when we have serious incidents, and have a debriefing and work through those. It’s all about the safety of the people.”

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency regional relationships director for Northland and Auckland, Steve Mutton, said “significant investments” are being made to improve the safety of state highways in Northland.

These include \$21.5m to upgrade high-risk intersections at Kawakawa, Puketona and Rawene, with significant safety benefits including improved visibility, safer speeds and reduced congestion.

The delivery of a \$792m four-lane state highway corridor between Whangarei and Port Marsden – expected to be finished by 2028 – would “significantly improve safety through the inclusion of a continuous centre median barrier, preventing violent head-on crashes from vehicles crossing the centre line”.

Readers have also questioned the quality of repairs carried out by contractors.

This is backed by the AA’s survey of Northland members, who have the greatest concerns about the amount of repeat roadworks in their area.

Ninety per cent of Northland members said they were concerned about money wasted through repeat roadworks this year, compared with the national average of 74 per cent.

Mutton said Waka Kotahi is confident in state highway maintenance contractor Fulton Hogan, which has held the contract for six years.

“Waka Kotahi is confident ... that maintenance work is being delivered in the region to an appropriate standard.

“We work closely with our contractors to ensure that any quality issues are addressed effectively, and any rework is undertaken at our contractor’s cost.

“Given the large quantity of maintenance works completed in the region we have had a very small number of reworked sites.”

Northland Road Safety Trust programme manager Ashley Johnston said it was also important to focus on driver behaviour and education.

Getting the message out about not speeding or drinking and driving, and not being distracted by mobile phones, was especially important for young, inexperienced drivers, she said.

Parents should look at purchasing vehicles that had a high star safety rating for their kids.

“They should have air bags and be aware how it’s going to handle on the roads ... it goes back to educating young drivers coming through.

“Going back to basics around wearing seatbelts, and not speeding or being impaired from alcohol and drugs. Focusing on those is going to make our roads safer.”



**Fire and Emergency Muriwhenua Area Commander Wipari Henwood.**



**Northland Regional Councillor and volunteer firefighter Colin Kitchen.**



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