

NZTA U-turn signals hope for Bayfair underpass fight in Tauranga

16 Nov, 2019 12:00pm

3 minutes to read



Protesters move through the Bayfair underpass. Photo / File



By: [Kiri Gillespie](#)

Multimedia journalist

kiri.gillespie@nzme.co.nz

A landmark meeting has instilled hope in Tauranga community representatives calling for the popular Bayfair underpass to be saved.

Representatives from NZ Transport Agency met with community representatives, including mayor Tenby Powell and members of Bayfair Underpass Alliance and Bike Tauranga, on Thursday to discuss options that could save the existing underpass.

The popular Maunganui Rd underpass had been scheduled for demolition this month as part of the \$120 million Baypark to Bayfair (B2B) Project, also known as Baylink. This came despite protests and petitions from thousands calling for the underpass to stay.

Alliance chairman Philip Brown said the three-hour meeting had been positive and resulted in a specific option "which could work, I think".



Bayfair Underpass Alliance chairman Philip Brown says a change of direction from NZTA regarding the Bayfair underpass is positive. Photo / File

The option, known as "Option 5", includes keeping and extending the existing underpass and redesigning the bridge structure, abutments and ground improvements. The option would result in construction delays and potential increased costs of \$10m to \$20m.

The agency is also considering another option involving an overpass near Concord Ave.

Brown said it was still early days but felt the community's concerns had finally been taken seriously.

"We haven't got a solution yet but we've got a direction. It's no fait accompli - if the price doesn't work, it won't happen."



Bayfair Underpass Alliance chairman Philip Brown (right) with National Party's Chris Bishop and Todd Muller at the underpass ahead of a large protest calling for NZTA to save the walkway.

Bike Tauranga's Kevin Kerr said the meeting was significant in that it was the first time every group with interests in the underpass had come together, including engineers, elected council members, and other stakeholders.

It was also the first time Kerr had seen the transport agency seriously consider future options involving the underpass, he said.

"Two weeks ago NZTA were still saying 'no underpass'.

"[At the meeting] There seemed to be a willingness to keep the underpass - that's the desired outcome. That's was the first time we've seen that change from NZTA. It's really, really positive."

Transport agency senior project delivery manager Andrew Thackwray said it established the working group to create better communication on why and how decisions were made.

Thursday's meeting covered the traffic modelling beyond 2040 plus 15 potential redesign options.



Visual representations of what Option 5 could look like. Images / Supplied
"We are now progressing at speed to confirm the feasibility of the options, especially given the time constraints around the construction programme."

The available funding for upgrading the underpass is \$13m.

"We will continue to work with our partners and the working group with progress over the coming months."

The project will still include a signalised pedestrian crossing at the Bayfair roundabout, regardless of the outcome of the options identified above.



Visual representations of what Option 5 could look like. Images / Supplied Powell said the council must work more pragmatically and in collaboration with partners including central government agencies. During the week prior to his inauguration, Powell met with city leaders and Minister of Transport Phil Twyford "to reset our relationship from one of combative to partnership".

"This is now the reset position," he said.

Powell said greater regional co-operation and bringing people together was critical to advancing the area.

"The strength of working together as a sub-region sends a positive signal to central government and therefore enables direct conversations about infrastructure.



Tauranga mayor Tenby Powell has been involved in trying to find a suitable solution to the Bayfair underpass woes. Photo / File
"NZTA has quickly picked up on our new strategic partnership focus and, accordingly, they are open to exacting this."

Powell is meeting with the transport agency's chairman, Sir Brian Roche, next month.

"This heralds a positive future relationship for Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty with NZTA and other government entities."