

Dear Councillor

Am I the only one in Northland who gives a toss at the first impression that tourists to Northland get? I've long been a critic of local authorities involving themselves in tourism; nowadays, of course, tourism is somewhat synonymous with economic development which makes it sound a bit sexier.

But now that you are involved, how many of you actually care about the "visitor experience" that everyone goes on about? How many of you have stood up and been counted in opposition to the way that NZTA has foisted the Brynderwyn View Stop on Northland?

Some councillors, notably the Chair of the Regional Transport Committee, seem surprisingly supportive of this abomination and, as far as I can gather, he has been supported by members of his committee none of whom seem to care about the public danger, certainly not enough to suggest that the committee charged with developing a road safety plan even discusses the dangers much less commissions a professional safety report totally independent of NZTA influence.

For the record, in my view, the Brynderwyn View Stop is dangerous and offers a third rate, third world visitor experience. In plain language, NZTA have chosen a site where the view is crap and accessing it dangerous.

[So you don't believe me that it isn't safe?](#)

1. Why does a brand new section of highway with a dividing median fence and constructed as a 'safe system' have an 80kmh limit? Simple, because NZTA took away the median fence and invited tourists in campervans to turn right across two lanes of high speed traffic in a high crash area – in other words they created danger when none existed previously and where there were plenty of safe options and yet still have the temerity to call this a "safe system";
2. OK, you may not believe me ([read my submission](#)) but you may believe NZ Police. These are the people who clean up in the aftermath of road carnage. In the words of their Road Policing Manager, Inspector Wayne Ewers, when asked by Superintendent Russell Le Prou to establish NZ Police's position ([click for letter](#)): *"My view is similar in that it is not a good example of improving the safety on this piece of road with the recent upgrades to the Brynderwyns by having vehicles crossing double lanes to get to a location (view spot) should they be travelling north"*;
3. But Inspector Ewers goes even further stating that *"I was at a joint agency meeting recently where the topic was raised informally outside the meeting time; all agreed and had concerns with the lack of safety in the design which included NZTA members"*. It appears that even NZTA members believe it to be unsafe. In reality, everyone knows that it isn't safe to divide a median barrier and allow a right turn across two lanes of high speed traffic in a high crash area. It sure as heck is not a 'safe system' as NZTA continually claim it to be – it is certainly not 'international best practice'.
But, as far as I can figure, I am the only one actively challenging NZTA on this claim;
4. WDC has assessed the view stop ([click for document](#)) and they agree that it is unsafe with claims that:
 - a. *"WDC would not want to be involved in a lookout in a location that would encourage more north-bound often visiting, foreign drivers, to cross south bound traffic lanes"*
 - b. *"There would no doubt be an outcry that council had selected a dangerous spot for a lookout whenever a car crossing into or out of this area has a near miss or worse a fatal accident"*

So why don't you believe me that it is an inferior visitor experience?

You don't need to believe me when I say that it is an inferior experience. I haven't actually been there but this is how a Northland resident explained it to me in an email: *"I was disappointed with the view at any rate as there is a large metalled private area blocking much of the view unless you climb the hill alongside the fenceline! This track appeared to have turned very muddy with use!"*

Or you could believe Whangarei District Council professional landscapers who have claimed among other things that *"Essentially this spot is a sow's ear"* and *"NZTA are really stretching our imagination referring to it as a lookout"*.

So, WDC followed through on this? Well no actually. WDC CE, Mr Forlong, emailed NZTA on 9 May 2017 *"I'm keen to get NZTA's response to the concerns below"*.

NZTA did not respond and, it appears that, Mr Forlong's keenness quickly dissipated.

To their credit, at least in the early stages, WDC were keen to have a positive 'visitor experience' with storyboards, history etc. just like anybody who actually values a positive 'visitor experience' would.

But the whole thing becomes clear when one realizes just how this "view stop" came about

This site wasn't selected for any of the very valid reasons that make any site an appropriate place to stop. Mr Gammie, NZTA Chief Executive, explained it thus ([click for letter](#)):

- 1. Having a turnaround area in the middle of the project removed the need for multiple breaks in the median throughout the project;*
- 2. Having a turnaround area in the middle of the project removed the need for people to travel the length of the project to turn around;*
- 3. This land was available to us as it became redundant from the road re-alignment.*

Hello, a turnaround? Afraid so! It was selected as a turnaround so that locals didn't have to travel the full length of a fenced highway to turn around, and NZTA just happened to have a bit of spare land *"in the middle of the project"*. Nothing to do with a 'safe system' or the quality of the view.

What do I think you should do?

I think that it is about time that our elected representatives stood up to NZTA and told them unequivocally that their performance in respect of this view stop is both insulting to our visitors, who must put themselves in danger to 'enjoy' a substandard view, as it is demeaning to Northland to offer, as a first impression for tourists, a third rate, third world facility?

I'd welcome the support of any of you in holding NZTA to account for its conduct because, so far, I've been a lone voice. Take the opportunity to visit the 'view stop' on your way north and then, at least, insist that your council debate this openly and transparently.

Regards



Wayne Deeming

Attachments

- [1. The letter from Mr Gammie referred to above;](#)
- [2. A submission that I made to RTC but which was never presented as Mr Bain declined to offer me the opportunity to address the committee or to honour his public undertaking to have the RTC "have a look at it";](#)
- [3. A letter from NZ Police referred to above;](#)
- [4. Information from WDC referred to above.](#)