

Around the districts but at what speed?

CARS and roads have become safer, but driver attitudes to speed have not.

This fact was emphasised to the Waitomo District Council at the council's October meeting by Bill McMaster, the Waikato Regional Council's representative on the Regional Transport Committee (RTC), who are looking to local authorities to take some leadership and control in reducing the national road toll.

The committee's overall focus is to make New Zealand's roads safer by reducing the number of crashes and their severity when they occur at speed.

Mr McMaster, who works as the team leader for transport and infrastructure for the regional council, says the RTC is focused on helping prevent death and injury on Waikato roads.

He says road users agree that the current interpretation and implementation of the speed limit is inconsistent, and travel speeds do not always support safety.

"There are times when drivers are not aware of what's around them when driving, and if an accident occurred how the road will affect them if they have to take evasive action," he says.

While some are calling for an increase in speed for the open roads, Mr McMaster says statistics show that a 15% increase in speed increases fatalities by 75%.

However, a new initiative is being introduced by the RTC to manage speed, which is different to setting speed limits.

In the Waikato region on average, there are 70 reported crashes each month with an average 20 causing injury and about five are fatal.

John Garvitch, senior safety engineer at the New Zealand Transport Agency, says the RTC is looking to local councils who have the leadership and capability to bring about legislation, for support and enforcement to assist in making road systems safer by managing speed in their districts.

He says the Waikato region has a very poor record with 55 road deaths this year and "although we have about 16% of the national road network, we are above the average in crashes and fatalities hence the need for a speed management plan."

Mr McMaster says the long-term objective of the proposed initiative is to have a consistent regional approach to speed management, the core of which is to recognise each road is different and what may be a suitable speed in one area may not in another.

It is planned to map each road in the Waikato, including the North King Country, using a nine point criteria along with input from local councils.

A draft plan will be available for public consultation in September.

Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna, who is a member of the RTC, welcomes the initiative and says it's



FASTER OR SLOWER?: A study on managing speeds on Waikato roads, including the North King Country, will take into account road conditions and the types of traffic that use them before speed limits are changed.

been difficult in the past to manage speed on local roads.

He believes some roads in the district could have lower limits because of their nature, but others could be 100km/h or more. He applauds the decision for local input from those who regularly travel the roads.

Otorohanga mayor and RTC member, Max Baxter says: "You can bring in speed restrictions, but it still doesn't excuse stupidity, lack of attention or inexperience, but hopefully these proposed changes will give a better indication for people to drive to the conditions."

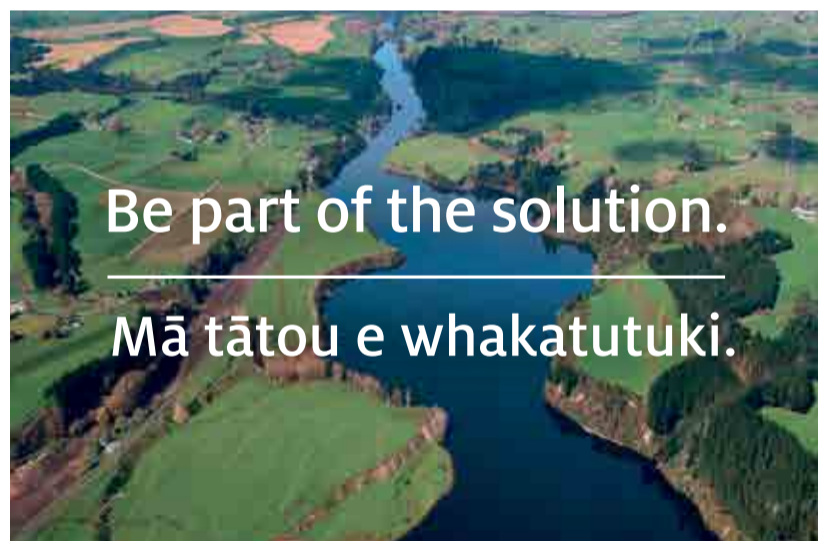
He says there needs to be a trade-off "where some road speeds may come down as they are not suitable to

be 100km/h, but other roads like the Waikato Expressway could be raised to 110km/h."

"The problem you have on any roads on a state highway where you drop a speed down to say 80km/h, what happens to those feeder roads that may be of a lesser standard than what the main road is, are you saying it's okay to drive at 100km/h on those?"

"This becomes a bit of nightmare when you have differing speeds for different rural roads."

Mr McMaster says a presentation has been made to the 11 Waikato councils who have agreed to support the development of a regional plan to manage speed.



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A group of 24 people, representing sectors and the community, is due to recommend solutions to reduce contaminants entering water in the Waikato and Waipa rivers' 1.1 million hectare catchments.

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Tuesday 10 November

6.30pm - 8.30pm

Otorohanga Club, 107 Maniapoto St, Otorohanga

Please note this is a facilitated workshop so please arrive for a 6.30pm start.

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