

Interchange a 'godsend' for booming suburb

Road project to offer 35-minute Pāpāmoa East-Rotorua commute

Pāpāmoa East Interchange

Emma Houpt

A new highway interchange for Pāpāmoa East has been described as an "absolute godsend" as the community grows at a "phenomenal rate".

Construction on the \$90 million Pāpāmoa East Interchange began on Wednesday with a sod-turning ceremony.

The road linking current and future eastern coastal suburbs to State Highway 2/Tauranga Eastern Link is expected to be finished in early 2026, the Tauranga City Council said.

It will enable faster travel for motorists driving between Pāpāmoa East and Tauranga, Mount Maunganui and the wider region, including Te Puke. It will also provide a connection to the Rangiora Business Park once that is operating.

The first stage of construction will start next month and be completed in April next year. This included earthworks to construct the southern ramps on the Tauranga Eastern Link.

The interchange will be constructed over the Tauranga Eastern Link, linking Te Okuroa Dr and the future Golden Sands Town Centre to the highway.

Bay of Plenty regional councillor Lyall Thurston said it was a "great day for the connectivity of the Bay of Plenty".

He said it would be an "absolute godsend" to current and future residents when complete as they would no longer need to go to Domain Rd to get to State Highway 2.

"I am doubly thrilled as a Rotorua constituency representative on the re-

gional council because when it finally is completed it will connect Rotorua within about 35 minutes.

"With all the housing issues, and the land that is being opened up and developed in Pāpāmoa East, Wairakei and ultimately Te Tumu people there could actually live there and commute to Rotorua and vice versa."

Luke van Veen, of Golden Sands bar and restaurant Papa Mo's, said he was pleased work had "finally started" and thought it would "take a bit of pressure off the roads".

"I am looking forward to it. It is only positive to see the growth. We just want it done quickly," he said.

Tivoli Cinema owner Karen Hawes said that, once complete, the interchange would be "amazing" for business as it would "bring in lots more people".

She expected it would increase accessibility for people living in Maketu, Paengaroa and Te Puke.

Suzanne Aubert Catholic School deputy principal Shelley McKay said Pāpāmoa East was growing at a "phenomenal rate" and the interchange was needed to address the rising population.

"The learners in our community that travel from early Pāpāmoa, and Te Puke will have a faster commute to school.

"Reducing the amount of time people are sitting in cars is going to be better for health and well-being and the environment."

Nathan York, chief executive of Pāpāmoa East housing and Sands town centre developer Bluehaven Group, said work commencing was a "fantastic mile-



Herald Network graphic

stone". "It sets up the future of the Eastern corridor, not just with our town centre development, but all our other residential and community services we are planning for."

Pāpāmoa Residents and Ratepayers Association chairman Phillip Brown said the new interchange should "include crossing the motorway and linking up with Bell Rd".

"I am not opposed to it, I just don't think it goes far enough. If it had a link through to Te Puke, then there would be a valuable interchange."

Tauranga City Council director of transport Brendan Bisley said the project budget was about \$90m. However, there were also "associated extension works" on Te Okuroa Drive and surrounding developments that took the total cost over \$100m.

The budget for the first stage and the bridge itself was \$12m.

Bisley said funding for the first stage was through the Housing Infrastructure Fund, which was going through final sign-off.

The council would be seeking other funding opportunities to cover the remaining costs of construction, he said.

He said the work under way now was "funded solely by Tauranga City Council". It had started before other funding was confirmed in order to meet council timelines for construction.

"The HIF has already been assigned and once signed off will fund ongoing work."

Council commission chairwoman Anne Tolley said the council was taking a "bit of a risk" starting works before funding from the HIF had been approved.

"But we feel it has been 20 years in the making. It's desperately needed to unlock the housing at that far end of Pāpāmoa," she said.

"It's quite urgent to provide access from that end of Pāpāmoa."

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