

Roundabouts can swing both ways - and hit you in the face

Councillor Duncan of Taupo Ward reporting, as I see it anyway. This time about one of the oddest transport decisions I have ever been involved with, and as I have been doing them for about 30 years that is saying quite something. I will try not to oversimplify, but on 10 December:

Your elected members decided to let staff spend over \$300K to basically harass a residential street in Wharewaka, and with virtually no redeeming features at all.

THE ORIGINAL PLAN IN 2008:

- An original consent condition of the Maunganamu Drive subdivision was that a roundabout be constructed on Lake Terrace once traffic volumes exceeded a threshold of some 2000 vehicles/day, and this happened in 2024. Even though some might argue a roundabout isn't strictly necessary, the good part of this story is that the full cost of building it is to be met by the Maunganamu Drive developer and not the ratepayer.
- A consent condition of the Lakeside Pukenuamu Road subdivision (roughly 60 or so households) was for it to have a more direct connection to Lake Terrace at some point in time, and \$210K (in today's dollars) were given as Developer Contributions to make this happen at a future date. Until this happened, the 270 metre strip of road connecting it to Wharewaka Road was built around 2007, and it was expected that the ratepayer would pay for its later removal (estimated at \$150K).

THE SITUATION IN 2024:

- From the outset the Council staff position has been steadfast: Do a Pukenuamu Road connection to the new roundabout for a more direct connection to Lake Terrace, and remove the aforementioned 270 metres of existing roadway. This is mainly on the basis that it will save an estimated \$9K/year in maintenance of the asphalt surface over the next 40 years (although if resealed in chipseal would only be a fraction of that), and a few hundred km's of total additional daily travel for Lakeside Pukenuamu drivers (funnily enough that was never a serious concern for the Taupo Town Transformation Project, which diverts thousands of drivers a day around the town centre). Still of some uncertainty is how the currently undeveloped section at 1A Pukenuamu Road will get its vehicle access.
- Lakeside Pukenuamu subdivision residents were consulted early last year for their preference, and well over 90% of them remain firmly opposed to any change in the status quo. Their legitimate concerns are mainly to do with a foreseeable increase in vehicle traffic that a new roundabout connection could entail, which include drivers erroneously headed for the lakefront and potentially some with boat trailers which may be awkward to turn around. A Pukenuamu resident representative suggested to release the collected \$210K in Developer Contributions for Council to spend as it pleases elsewhere, and even to personally pay for any Council legal expenses in the unlikely event this decision were ever challenged.

The majority decision of elected members was to proceed with the staff recommendation to connect Pukenuamu Road to the new roundabout, with the only elected members in opposition being myself and Councillor Westerman. On show during the deliberations was how a few of your elected members behave when faced with some in-person resolute opposition (not very dispassionately, is how I would best put it), and almost immediately after the decision was made Mayor Trewavas was served a legal notice by a Pukenuamu representative.

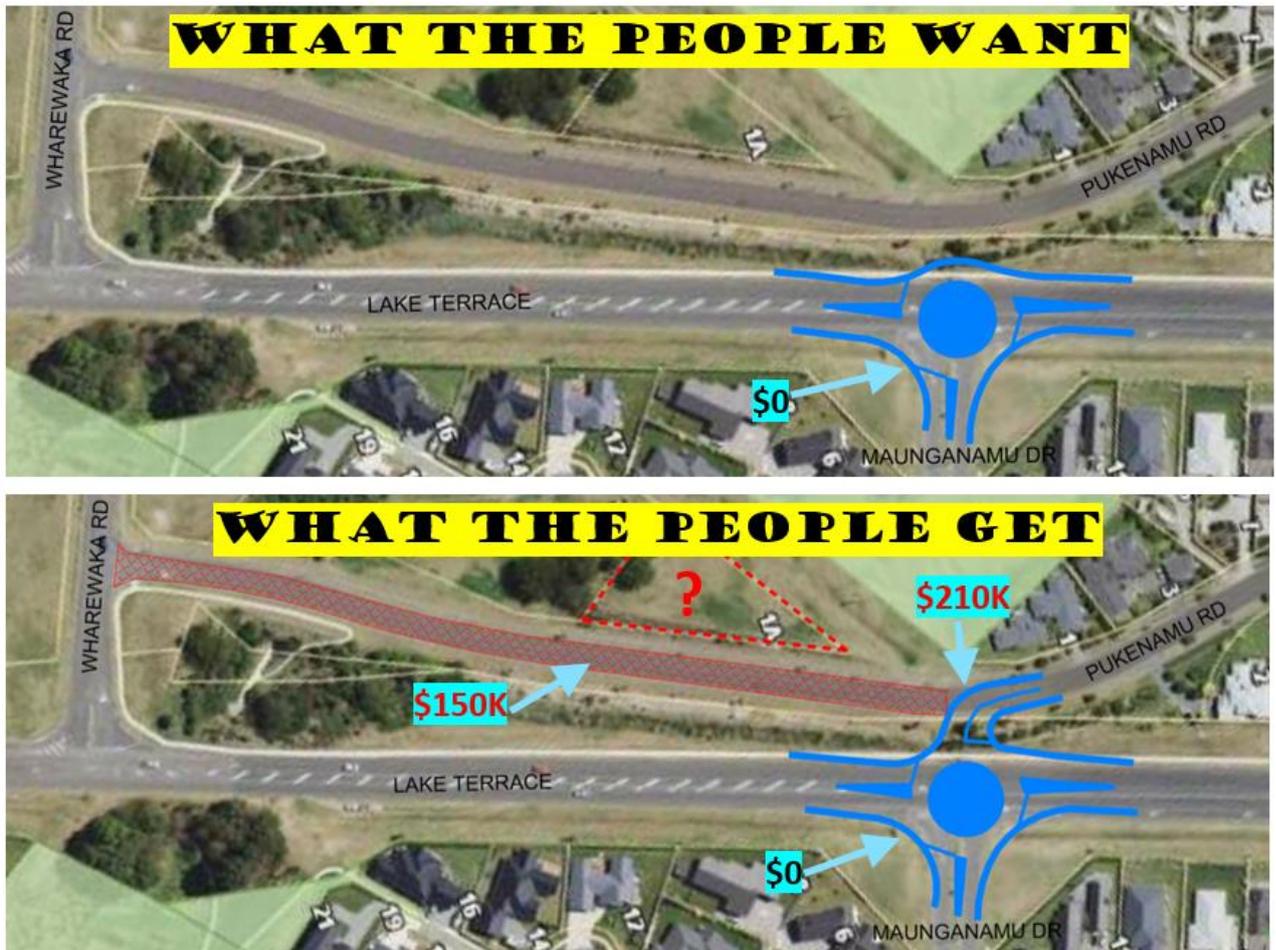
The item took about 40 minutes of deliberation, and can be viewed here from about the 2 min mark:

<https://youtu.be/dxRG3VYndVg?si=6DhLaUVbpQUCYtZY&t=116>

In terms of Council decisions in absolute disdain of resident wishes and a wastage of resources, this one is well up there in my books. If this were a Greenfield development where no-one was yet living and all that matters is having an efficient transport network - I absolutely get it. But context is everything in local government, and we are now talking about ripping up 270 metres of perfectly good roadway at

ratepayer expense, peeving off almost the entire Lakeside Pukemamu community, and all to the substantive benefit of virtually nobody.

What else is there to really say?



Note that at Taupo District Council elected members don't actually get to decide much about anything to do with transportation, because major decisions are delegated to staff. But it appears that because this was looking like something of a political hot potatoe, staff sought the assent of elected members first. I am all for elected members getting more influence in matters as these, but I have to admit this is no example to brag about. However, I do think it highlights that having qualified staff with the requisite experience also matters quite a lot.