

1 November 2021

File Ref: EXTR-9-1244

Hon Stuart Nash  
Minister for Economic  
and Regional Development  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Hon Grant Robertson  
Minister of Finance and  
Infrastructure  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Hon Nanaia Mahuta  
Minister of Local Government  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Tēna koutou Ministers

## **Budget 2022: RiverLink co-investment in flood protection**

This is a request for funding – for \$165 million, for flood protection works on the Hutt River. It reflects a matter of acute concern to both Government and Greater Wellington – the protection of Crown and regional assets, public safety and economic resilience in the Hutt Valley.

Due to commence construction in late 2022, RiverLink’s flood protection work is expected to safeguard residents from large flood events that could cause an estimated \$1.1 billion worth of damage across the community, to thousands of homes, five schools and 600 businesses. RiverLink will also protect other significant Crown assets including the state highway, railway line, health facilities, schools and other assets.

RiverLink is a partnership between Waka Kotahi, Hutt City, Ngati Toa, Taranaki Whānui and Greater Wellington with a vision of creating a thriving community connecting the City, People and the River. Greater Wellington’s component of RiverLink was first envisaged in the 2001 Hutt River Floodplain Management Plan, and initially budgeted in our Long Term Plan 2012-22. Embedded in our responses to climate change and recovery from COVID-19, it represents a key pathway to community resilience and wellbeing. Despite these wider benefits, current funding arrangements see this cost falling to regional and targeted local ratepayers, with no contribution from the Crown.

### **The challenge we now face**

As with other flood protection schemes around New Zealand, RiverLink represents a critical first action in adapting to the impacts of climate change. However, to retain its integrity and risk reduction capability in the face of more frequent and intense weather events, RiverLink requires investment to a higher level than first envisaged in 2001.

Present funding arrangements are neither equitable nor sustainable for addressing present and emerging needs. We ask that government now ‘return to the table’ and financially share in the task of providing necessary fit-for-the-future protection in one of the most heavily populated floodplains in New Zealand. This case for co-investment was well set out in the regional sector’s “Central Government Co-investment in River management for Flood Protection” (August 2019). Subsequently Cabinet considered the matter in a

report from the Minister for Local Government (DEV – MIN-0120). This led to the matter becoming a work stream for DIA, which is still under action.

The national interest in investing in flood risk management is clear. It is to protect public safety, provide community resilience, mitigate risks to the national economy, and protect nationally significant and publicly owned infrastructure in a manner that addresses the increased risk from climate change. Co-investment in flood protection is an appropriate pre-emptive response for central government to take. The cost of picking up the pieces if the lower Hutt River floods does not bear thinking about. It would be more than 10 times the scale of the recent Westport floods

### **Funding request**

Greater Wellington's share of the whole RiverLink project is currently estimated at \$330 Million. This is made up of property acquisitions, 3 Waters and other infrastructure upgrades, river widening, biodiversity and amenity enhancements and stopbank works. To date we have invested approximately \$100M in property, design and consenting costs. Resource consent applications have now been lodged, so the scope of the project is now well understood. The matter has been directly referred to the Environment Court to speed up the process. A decision is expected by mid-2022 and construction programmed to start later in 2022.

RiverLink was included in the regional Mayoral Forum application to CIP as part of the Covid 19 economic recovery package but was not approved as the project did not meet the funding criteria. With the current advanced status of the project and the on-going effects of Covid 19 we ask that it be reconsidered for Government funding through Budget 2022.

We ask you to meet us in the middle and contribute 50% (\$165 Million) of the total cost of Greater Wellington's share, to provide for RiverLink flood protection.

### **Next steps**

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the flood protection elements of RiverLink in more detail.

Ngā mihi



**Daran Ponter**

Chair

Greater Wellington Regional Council

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CC: Campbell Barry, Mayor, Hutt City Council; Callum Katene, Chair, Te Runanga o Toa Rangatira; Holden Hohaia, Chair, Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust