



## COMPLETION OF THE SKYLINE TRACK

### 1. Purpose of report

To update the Committee on progress in completing the Skyline Track and outline two route options between Old Coach Road and Johnsonville.

### 2. Executive summary

The Skyline Track runs for 12 km between Makara Saddle in Karori and Old Coach Road in Johnsonville. The final section to be completed runs between Old Coach Road and Spicer Forest and is identified as a high priority in Our Capital Spaces 2013.

The original proposal was to construct the track on private land along the top of Ohariu (Best) Ridge. Officers have been unable to reach agreement with the land owners on this proposal. Two other options have been proposed and reviewed by officers. Initial discussions have taken place on those options with key stakeholders and the landowners involved.

This report provides an update on these discussions and asks the Committee to support a continuation of this work.

### 3. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Environment Committee:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Agree on the indicative routes proposed for the Skyline Track and Te Araroa Walkway shown as options 1 and 2 in Appendix 1.*
3. *Note officers will continue to work with private land owners to secure access over their lands for the Track subject to Council approval.*

### 4. Background

The Skyline Track runs for 12 km between Makara Saddle in Karori and Old Coach Road in Johnsonville. There is a further link through Makara Mountain Bike Park, Wright Hill Reserve and Te Kopahau Reserve to the south coast.

Between Bell's track in Ngaio and Old Coach Road the Skyline Track merges with Te Araroa, the Long Pathway. This 3000km walkway between Cape Reinga and Bluff was officially opened in 2011 with Wellington being the end of the North Island sector.

North of Old Coach Road the route of Te Araroa Walkway currently follows the valley floor along Rifle Range Road and then Ohariu Valley Road until it reaches Spicer Forest. This is a poor walking route as it runs along a narrow road with poor site lines for walkers and no off road track or footpath.

The Outer Green Belt Management Plan 2004 (OGB Plan) and the Open Space Access Plan 2008 (Track Plan) both identify the need to complete the Skyline Track between Old Coach Road and Spicer Forest via Best Ridge. This would enable both the Skyline Track and Te Araroa Walkway to follow the same off road route.

The Open Space Access Plan identifies the Skyline Track as one of its top ten initiatives<sup>1</sup>. Our Capital Spaces 2013 identifies completion of the Skyline Track as a high priority<sup>2</sup>

Officers have been working for the past three years on a possible route for the track in conjunction with the Wellington Committee of the Te Araroa Trust (the Trust). The emphasis has been on keeping the route on the top of Ohariu ridge to make the most of the magnificent views, enable an easy gradient for walking (and biking) and to keep down track development costs.

Officers and members of the Trust have approached private land owners on Ohariu Ridge to gauge their interest in providing access over their land by means of a Right of Way (ROW) or acquisition. Key landholders have stated that they are not currently interested in providing access or sale of their property.

In April 2014 officers met with members of the Trust, key stakeholders from Churton Park and Tawa and Guy Callender from Churton Homes. The meeting explored options for the future route given the private land options across Ohariu ridge are not a current option. This report explores two options.

## 5. Discussion

Two route options have been identified and reviewed.

**Option 1 – Marshall Ridge (Figure 1):** This route would run north from Old Coach Road via the Totara Block (185 Ohariu Valley Road) owned by Transpower. Then up onto Ohariu Ridge via 270 Ohariu Valley Road and down through the Council reserve to Chippenham Grove.

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<sup>1</sup> Page 22 Open Space Access Plan

<sup>2</sup> Policy 1.9.1 Complete the Skyline Track and the Harbour Escarpment Track and links to adjacent suburban communities ( years 1-3)

The track will then pass through Churton Park to the new subdivision on the east side of Stebbings Valley below Marshall Ridge and northwards above the valley towards Tawa. One option yet to be explored could take it through the private pine plantation using an old military road (option 2a). See Figure 1.

### **Advantages**

- Provides a possible route for future access and connectivity between Upper Stebbings and Tawa
- Enables the development of short walks and loops.
- Accelerates the local walking connections which are identified in the Northern Reserves Management Plan and were being implemented over time as the Stebbings development progresses.

### **Disadvantages**

- Not favoured by the Te Araroa Trust as it would be too circuitous taking people down into Churton Park and back up on the east side before returning them to the west side of Churton Park. Walkers would soon work out it would be easier to take a more direct route along existing roads.

**Option 2 - Ohariu Ridge (Figure 2):** Same as option 1 until it meets Chippenham Grove in Churton Park. Then up Amesbury Drive and into Gifford Grove to the new reservoir on the west side of Stebbings Valley. Then it would run below the ridgeline as high as possible whilst remaining within Stebbings Valley.

### **Advantages:**

- Keeps the route out of Churton Park as much as possible
- Still keeps longer term options open to use Ohariu Ridge.
- Favoured by Te Araroa Trust.

### **Disadvantages**

- Steeper terrain means the track may need to drop into the valley with more extensive earthworks and track work required in some parts including steps.
- Not favoured by the land owners of Stebbings Valley as it may affect their development work and future development planning. They would like to discuss this further before committing to this route.

The support of Te Araroa Trust for option 2 is crucial given they will be carrying out negotiation with land owners. . In addition it can be easily rerouted should land on top of Ohariu Ridge become available in future.

## **5.1 Implementation**

Whichever option is chosen, implementation will require negotiations to confirm access over private land followed by track construction. Given the current negotiations plus the development in Lower Stebbings Valley it is envisaged construction could not commence for 2 Or 3 years.

**Access over private land:** Long term access is best achieved through either an easement or acquisition of the land required for access. This will require negotiation with the private landowners and could include possible betterment payments to the private landowners subject to valuation.

Both track options require access over the same areas of private land as shown in figure 1. Initial discussions have taken place with the landowners concerned. Progress is as follows:

1. Option 1 & 2 - 185 Ohariu Valley Road (Transpower): Transpower have indicated that they would be prepared to provide a licence to the Council for the public to pass over the land subject to:
  - a. The Council taking liability for any actions caused by the public accessing Transpower land
  - b. Agreeing on a route that minimises disruption to the existing grazing lease
  - c. Modifications to existing pylons to prevent the public climbing them. Many pylons on private land do not have barriers to prevent unauthorised access.
  - d. The licence would be limited to continued ownership by Transpower. In the event of a land sale, public access would cease, unless the new owners agreed to continue it. A licence does not provide an encumbrance on the title.
2. Option 1 & 2 - 208 & 270 Ohariu Valley Road: Te Araroa Trust are leading this conversation and are waiting on a response from these private land owners.
3. Option 1 - Ohau land and Cattle Ltd: one of the owners Guy Callender has indicated that they would be prepared to allow access over their land in the upper part of Stebbings Valley on an informal basis but would not be in a position to negotiate easements or Rights of Way (ROW) at this time. Further discussions are needed to confirm final routes and timing to ensure they do not interfere with ongoing subdivision development.

**Track construction:** The track construction and associated costs cannot be estimated until the final route is established and a detailed assessment of the construction required, position and location of signs and so on.

## **5.2 Consultation and Engagement**

Engagement has already occurred with key landowners and stakeholders over the route. This will continue as the route is further defined.

## **5.3 Financial considerations**

Still to be determined once negotiations are complete and a full assessment of the route has been carried out.

## **5.4 Climate change impacts and considerations**

None

### **5.5 Long-term plan considerations**

The costs of acquisition and/ or easements as well as construction costs will need to be included in deliberations for the 2015 – 2025 Long Term Plan. There is no funding in the current LTP.

## **6. Conclusion**

The completion of the Skyline Track between Old Coach Road and Spicer Forest is proposed over the next three years subject to funding. Officers are working with key landowners and stakeholders to facilitate this work. The paper outlines how work on this project will continue.

**Contact Officer:** Mike Oates, Manager Open Space and Recreation Planning

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1) Strategic fit / Strategic outcome

*Example: The policy supports Council's overall vision of Wellington Towards 2040: Smart Capital. The policy supports Council activities as a facilitator of recreation partnerships and provider of recreation services. Agreement to the policy will contribute to Council meeting the outcome of offering a diverse range of quality recreation and leisure activities (see outcome 7.1 Recreation Opportunities).*

### 2) LTP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

*Example: The project will be considered as part of the 2015 – 2025 Long Term plan*

### 3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

*None*

### 4) Decision-making

*Example: This is not a significant decision. The report sets out a number of options and reflects the views and preferences of those with an interest in this matter who have been consulted with.*

### 5) Consultation

#### a) General consultation

*Engagement has already occurred with key landowners and stakeholders including Te Araroa Trust. This will continue as the project develops.*

#### b) Consultation with Maori

*None at this stage.*

### 6) Legal implications

*Example: Council's lawyers have been consulted during the development of this report.*

### 7) Consistency with existing policy

*Consistent with priorities and actions in Our Capital Spaces (2013) and the Open Space Access Plan (2008)*