

Matatā Wastewater Scheme

PROGRESS UPDATE

OCTOBER 2015



Community Support

Following the Environment Court's decision to decline a resource consent for the proposed wastewater treatment plant site, the Matatā Residents Association organised a public meeting on 9 August so that the community could be updated on the implications for the scheme. Those attending strongly supported the introduction of a reticulated wastewater system for the town and a petition subsequently circulated by the Association indicated that at least 80 percent of Matatā residents and property owners also supported the proposal.

The message from the Matatā Residents Association initiative is a strong community preference for a wastewater scheme, rather than continuing to rely on septic tanks and soakage fields, which in the absence of sewerage reticulation, would be managed under a Bay of Plenty Regional Council on-site effluent treatment maintenance zone. For many property owners, that would mean a significant investment to upgrade their on-site systems.

Strategic considerations

The investigation of possible wastewater reticulation and treatment alternatives for Matatā has taken into account the following strategic considerations.

- The discharge of treated human sewage from Matatā into the Tarawera River is a prohibited activity under the Regional Council's Regional Plan for the Tarawera River Catchment.
- The Environment Court's interpretations of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management and the Regional Plan for the Tarawera River Catchment are a significant barrier to the establishment of a land application field for treated wastewater disposal anywhere in the Matatā vicinity.
- The resource consents for the existing wastewater systems in Edgecumbe and Whakatāne expire in 2026. The BOP Regional Council has expressed concerns that the discharge from the Edgecumbe system (into the Omeheu Canal and then into the Tarawera River) does not comply with the Regional Plan for the Tarawera River and is keen to see that situation addressed as quickly as possible.
- To ensure the best overall outcome for ratepayers, any solution needs to maximise the value of existing consented wastewater assets, minimise future operating costs and simplify future resource consent processes.

Integrated Wastewater Solution the Preferred Option

The investigation of possible wastewater reticulation and treatment alternatives for Matatā focused on two potential solutions – a standalone system, or an integrated scheme combining treatment with existing schemes in other centres.

Initially, 94 potentially suitable sites were identified for a standalone wastewater treatment plant and/or land disposal site in the vicinity of Matatā. After further investigation, these were narrowed-down to 15 sites for further analysis, including cost estimates. The highest ranked option was for a combined treatment plant and land application field site at Awakaponga, with an estimated capital (construction) cost of \$13.3 million and an annual operating cost of \$231,000. That estimate does not include costs associated with a resource consent application.

A separate piece of work being undertaken at the same time involved a strategic review of the other wastewater schemes in the District and, as part of that process, Council investigated the possibility of pumping Matatā wastewater to the existing treatment facilities at Kawerau, Edgecumbe and Whakatāne. This saw 23 possible options narrowed down to five for detailed analysis and cost estimates, with the preferred solution being to pump raw sewage from Matatā to Edgecumbe, upgrading the Edgecumbe treatment ponds, then pumping the combined treated wastewater to the outfall of the Whakatāne oxidation ponds for UV treatment and disposal via the existing ocean outfall.

This proposed solution provides a reticulated wastewater system to the Matatā township, potentially without incurring the consenting, construction and operating costs of a new treatment plant and disposal field. It also addresses the Regional Council's concern about the Edgecumbe wastewater scheme by eliminating the need to discharge to the Omeheu Canal. While the upgrading work at Edgecumbe and Whakatāne adds to the capital cost, the improved treatment standards achieved are highly likely to be required as part of future resource consent processes. The capital costs involved are just under \$24 million, but the operating costs (\$115,000/year) are considerably lower than all of the other options considered.

The Kawerau option is not considered to be feasible, due to the high capital cost (\$25.25 million) and very high operating cost of \$400,000 a year. The Kawerau scheme's land disposal system also means that any additional wastewater discharge will require a resource consent variation for an activity which is prohibited under the Regional Plan for the Tarawera Catchment.

Project Budget

The 2013 project budget for a standalone Matatā scheme was \$12.2M, to be funded by a Ministry of Health wastewater scheme subsidy of \$6.7 million, a BOP Regional Council grant of \$1.88M and a WDC contribution of \$4.62. To date, expenditure for project design, resource consent preparation and hearing, the Environment Court appeal and the subsequent investigation of other potential solutions is approximately \$2.8 million.

The cost estimates for an alternative Matatā standalone scheme range from \$12.5 million to more than \$14 million. Those estimates do not include any provision for resource consent costs and risks. Estimated operating costs are approximately double the cost of the preferred strategic solution.

Based on its contribution to the capital work required for the preferred strategic solution, Matatā's share of the estimated, \$24 million cost is approximately \$14M.

Next Steps

Increased external funding will be required to make either option affordable for Matatā and Whakatāne District ratepayers generally. The Council is in discussion with funding agencies about the possibility of gaining increased financial support to ensure that the rating impact of the proposed strategic solution is affordable.

Having refined the options to a manageable number, the Council will now seek stakeholder input to gauge the level of support for the proposed solution and help define the future development of the project.

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