

1.

Introduction

Our engagement activities, including today's drop-in session, are to inform you of the challenges we are facing and the options we are exploring to reinstate walking access to the beach.

Together with the Thames-Coromandel District Council and Destination Hauraki Coromandel, we are seeking your feedback, as well as feedback from stakeholders, to help inform our decisions.

Today's drop-in session will provide technical information about the process being undertaken to restore access to Mautohe Cathedral Cove and explanations of the context we are working in, as well as the factors guiding the options we have developed.

Photo: Department of Conservation (DOC)



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

2.

Background

The number of people visiting Mautohe Cathedral Cove has grown significantly over time, which has affected local communities, visitors and the site itself.

The growth in visitors has exceeded our expectations – we need to manage visitors more carefully in the future to ensure the quality of the visitor experience is protected.

Visitor numbers increased prior to Covid-19 by 31% between 2015 and 2019.* Once visitation returns to pre-Covid levels, we anticipate visitor demand for this site may further increase, which will need careful management.

We appreciate Mautohe Cathedral Cove is a key driver of tourism in the district. However, the economic value of tourism must be balanced against the need to protect the place itself.

Without proper controls and protections, the values that draw tourists to this place are likely to be further compromised.

* DOC Hauraki/Waikato/Taranaki Regional Visitor Insights Report – 2020–2021.



3.

Who are the visitors?

The results of the February 2024 survey of more than 200 visitors strongly indicate:

- Mautohe Cathedral Cove remains a top visitor destination in Aotearoa New Zealand
- the scenery and landscapes remain the major drawcard for visitors
- the overall satisfaction with the Mautohe Cathedral Cove experience is the highest for any destination managed by the Department of Conservation in the country
- how people access Mautohe Cathedral Cove (currently only by boat or kayak) doesn't influence their satisfaction rating.

We also know many people who visit Mautohe Cathedral Cove are international or out-of-region visitors. These people are often casual walkers with limited outdoor skills and experience. We know from observation that some visitors arrive and are unaware of what walking to the beach requires – they're not dressed appropriately and often don't anticipate a steep walk requiring significant effort. We must manage the visitor risk at this site for this group.

Underlying all our work is the need to keep visitors safe and provide a positive experience.



4.

Ensuring a good result

Following the 2023 extreme weather events, we have identified sporadic rockfall from the arch and continue to monitor the stability of the landslide areas, which appear to be still moving in places.

Additionally, there are several complex overlapping issues, including the:

- legislation we must work within, including our responsibilities under section 4 of the Conservation Act (which require us to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi), the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act and the Reserves Act
- impending Treaty Settlement with Ngāti Hei and DOC's likely obligations
- aspirations, values and cultural heritage of significance to Ngāti Hei as our Treaty Partner
- need for geotechnical land monitoring to tell us where to best locate infrastructure
- independent technical advice informing the options.

To future-proof Cathedral Cove, we must:

- weigh up our preference for resilience against the sensible use of public funds
- consider the effects of climate change at this coastal site.



5.

Our phased approach

The complex and overlapping issues we're dealing with at Mautohe Cathedral Cove have influenced the careful, methodical and phased approach we are taking to determine the best way to manage this site.

We are currently in the first of three phases.

Phase one

- Assessing walking track options and entry points to the recreation reserve.

Phase two

- Potentially building and, if applicable, creating transport links – anticipated to commence in July 2024.

Phase three

- Managing visitor pressures at the site given they have increased beyond expectations.
- Working with Ngāti Hei, the community, local government, the tourism sector and stakeholders to manage these visitor pressures.
- Navigating the complex work and interactions between iwi, the community and stakeholder interests within the legislative constraints – this process will take some time, potentially 2–3 years.



Photo: J Brew

6.

Working with Ngāti Hei

Mautohe Pā and the maioro (defensive ditches and banks) located directly above Mautohe Cathedral Cove's iconic archway occupy a prominent position in the Te Whanganui-O-Hei Marine Reserve and are of great significance to Ngāti Hei.

Mautohe means 'lasting resistance' and refers to the pā site immediately to the north of Mautohe Cathedral Cove beach on the small outcrop of land.

Section 4 of the Conservation Act requires us to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. This means we must work in partnership with mana whenua, in this case Ngāti Hei, to manage this location.

Ngāti Hei have expressed concerns about whether Mautohe Cathedral Cove can sustain the volume of manuhiri (visitors) it has seen in the pre-Covid years. Manuhiri must be welcomed, managed, looked after and encouraged to contribute back to the whenua (land) and offset their impact.

It is central to the heart of Ngāti Hei to ensure the whenua is protected, respected and treasured into the future.



7.

Landslide and rockfall risks

In the first 6 months of 2023, the level of rainfall in Whitianga broke the records that began in 1961. Independent geotechnical advisors noted the types of landslides and rockfall typically occurring at the reserve are triggered by high rainfall events.

The likelihood of further land damage from severe storms is very high. Some parts of the recreation reserve are more unstable and prone to landslides and rockfalls than others.

A 2023 report by Tonkin + Taylor assessed the landslide risk in this area and recommended we review the site and explore practical risk reduction options.

This review process is underway and includes:

- landslide predictive modelling
- geotechnical monitoring to find out if the land has stabilised and what level of risk remains
- work to identify a resilient access to the beach at Mautohe Cathedral Cove
- work to identify practical visitor risk mitigations.



8.

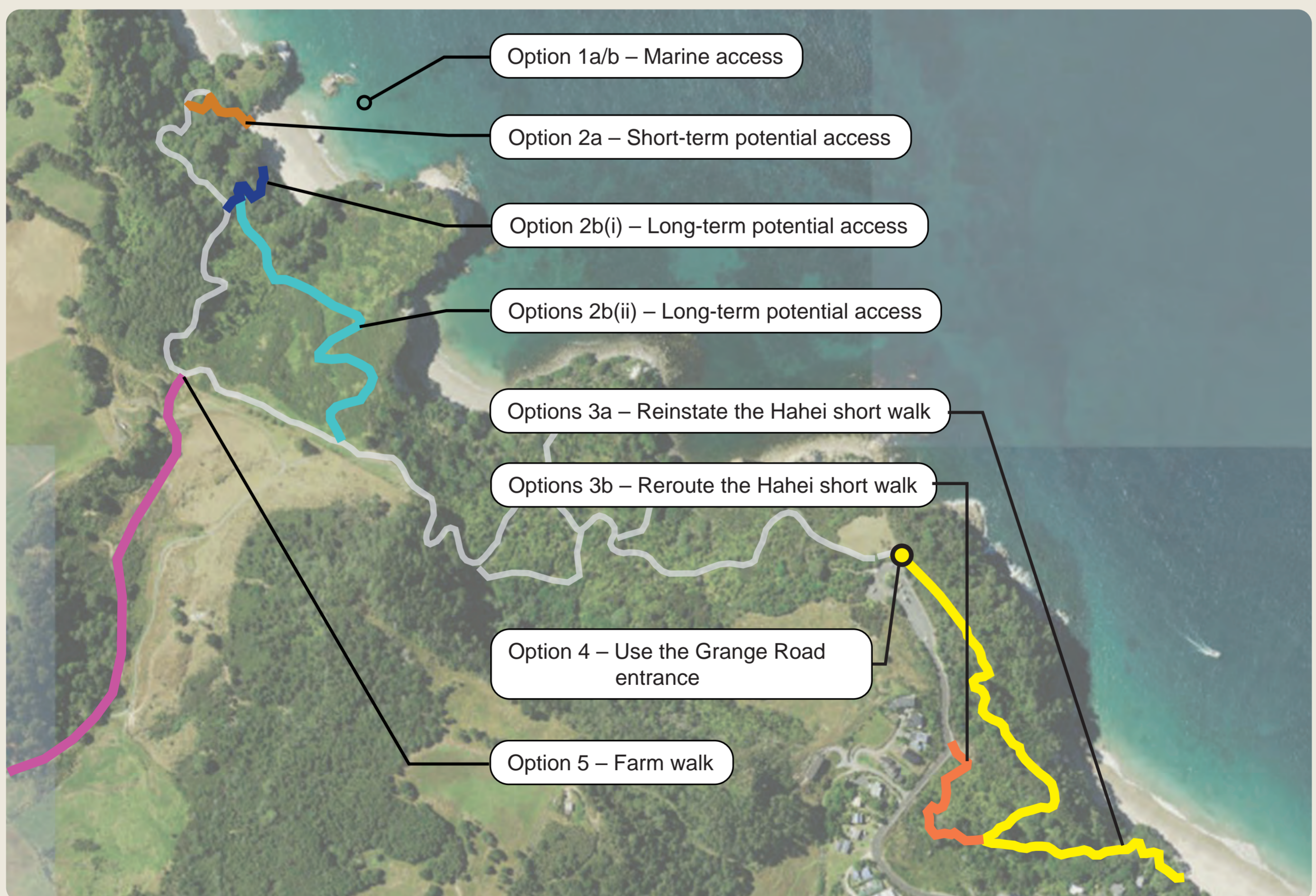
Track reinstatement options

We are exploring a number of options to reinstate access to Mautohe Cathedral Cove.

We've examined long-term and short-term options – guided by the legislation we operate within, the values and cultural heritage of Ngāti Hei, as well as what can be practically achieved at the site.

We need to balance the impact of visitor tourism, the economic value of tourism, the costs and benefits of the options, and the likely impact of climate change at a coastal site where land movement has been an issue for some time.

The following map shows the different options we are looking into.

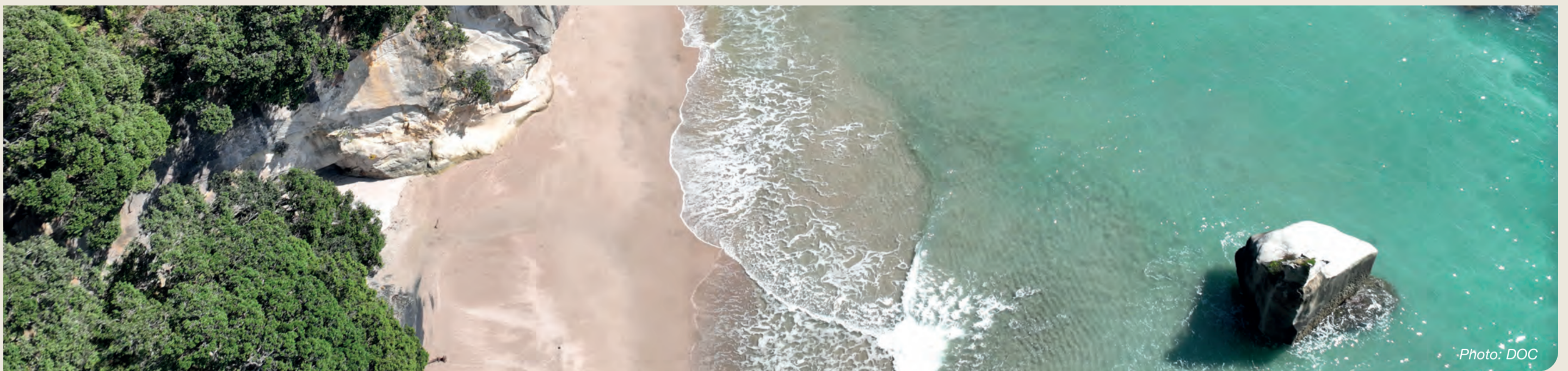


For more information on each of these options, visit doc.govt.nz/mautohecathedralcove

9.

Trade-off matrix

The below graphic compares each reinstatement option considering speed to reopen, future sustainability, cost and the length of the new track.



Mautohe Cathedral Cove visitor experience access options

	1. Marine access only	2a. Reinstatement existing access	2b. New access route to beach	2a+b. Staged approach	5. Hahei Walk – connect Hahei to Grange Road	Stingray Bay and Gemstone Bay	Access via private farmland
Speed to open	Status quo – marine access only.	Gets walking access open relatively quickly. Rebuilt for summer 24/25 season.	Takes a minimum of two summer seasons to build. Ready in time for summer 25/26 at the earliest.	Gets access open relatively quickly. Short-term access 2a rebuilt for summer 24/25 season. Longer term access 2b ready summer 25/26 at the earliest.	Could be built as part of a staged approach during summer 24/25 or after.	Lowest priority because cove access is not dependent upon this route being open.	Track start to the cove is via farmland. - In the short term, speeds up rebuild of 2a access to cove. - In the long term, 2b would be slower, ready for summer 25/26 at earliest.
Resilience against future damage	Little infrastructure required – so little maintenance is needed.	Represents the least resilient option. Vulnerable to ongoing weather events. Very limited lifespan.	Built to resist future storm damage (estimated 50-year lifespan).	Short-term access with low resilience. Longer term access is resilient (estimated 50-year lifespan).	Significant landslide risk and visitor risk on the existing track. However, able to reroute to create a resilient Hahei Walk to provide access to Grange Road.	Stingray Bay cliffs are prone to landslides/rockfalls. Track access will be impacted by slow-creep landslides. Gemstone Bay – storm surges will continue to damage stair structures in future.	Depends which access route down to the beach is chosen – 2a is not resilient, 2b is resilient.
Costs	Lowest investment. Some investment required if a collaborative management option is undertaken.	Lower end initial investment. Still a significant investment for a short lifespan.	A significantly larger investment than reinstatement.	A very significant investment	An investment risk to reinstate the existing Hahei Walk. A lower cost investment exists if the track is rerouted.	Building resilience into access to these two bays will mean extra costs on top of the main cove access costs.	Depends which access route down to the beach is chosen. If it's existing access 2a , lower end initial outlay. If it's a new access route 2b , higher outlay.

10.

What happens next?

Some things we simply don't yet know – work is either underway or will need to be completed for us to share with you.

We don't yet know the full costs of each option, and the pricing for reinstatement varies. Temporary options offer lower upfront costs but lack long-term resilience, while more resilient options require extensive engineering and can be costly. Factors such as walk length and route choice present distinct pros and cons influencing the final cost.

The timeframes for completion of the options are also unknown, and these will be directly influenced by the option we pursue.

Feedback from the public will be included in a report to the Minister of Conservation in June.

