[30/08/2026]

Martinborough Access Reference Group (MARG)

Report to South Wairarapa District Council - Strategic Access and Infrastructure Recommendations for Long-Term Plan Integration

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the formal recommendations of the Martinborough Access Reference Group to Council and to request that these options be formally received and considered for integration into the upcoming 2027 – 37 Long-Term Plan (LTP), while recognising that a number of the recommendations may also be suitable for consideration through the existing annual budget and work programme planning cycle.

Executive summary

The Martinborough Advisory Access Group (MARG) under the operational oversight of the South Wairarapa District Council was established to provide community-informed advice and recommendations on roading and access related issues affecting Martinborough in support of the development of the Council's 2027-37 LTP.

Drawing on community feedback, along with analysis of local transport and access challenges, MARG has identified four key priority areas for Council consideration. These include:

- Revitalising and introducing low-impact shared-space design principles around the Memorial Square Precinct.
- Improving the heavy vehicle bypass network to reduce the impact of commercial vehicles travelling through the town centre, including past the Martinborough Primary School and residential areas.
- Developing safe, walking and cycling routes that connect the township with surrounding vineyard trails.
- The feasibility of ending State Highway 53 prior to the square to enable more flexible use of the town centre precinct

MARG's role has been to identify community priorities, assess the broad feasibility of potential solutions, and provide strategic planning guidance. The group has not been asked to prepare detailed budgets or cost estimates for these projects. Instead, this report provides a framework to help Council officers undertake the required assessments, design work, and financial analysis needed to move proposals forward. The intent of the group was to ensure that any impact on rates were minimal and where possible public private funding approaches were used.

The recommendations have also been structured to allow smaller safety improvements to be delivered through existing funding programmes. Together, it is hoped that these recommendations provide a practical, community-supported pathway for improving Martinborough's accessibility, safety, and resilience over the coming decade.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the South Wairarapa District Council:

I. Receive the Martinborough Access Reference Group Recommendations Report.
II. Prioritise the short-term safety and maintenance interventions detailed below within the Councils existing 2026/27 annual budget.
III. Request that council officers assess and cost the proposed long-term planning and investment options detailed below as part of the 2027 – 37 LTP including how they relate to the revitalisation of Memorial Square and surrounding shared spaces and roading network, heavy vehicle freight bypass and, cycling network connectivity paths.
IV. Work with NZTA to seek the termination of SH53 to the intersection of Princess and Kitchener Streets.

Background

Establishment and mandate of the group

MARG was formally established by the South Wairarapa District Council (SWDC) in March 2026, under an advisory mandate to provide community-informed advice and recommendations on important roading, safety, walking and cycling access issues affecting the town.

Following a public Expressions of Interest campaign, members were selected to ensure a strong mix of local knowledge, lived experience and professional expertise. The members were all volunteers aside from the elected council representatives. Funding requirements were minimal with a small amount of administration, design and printing support.

Committee members were; Conor Kershaw (Chair), Dudley Anne Hill, Jo Gascoigne, Josh Hawkins, Nathan Fenwick, Phil McArthur, Richard Rooney, Michael Honey, and Tim Smith. James Brodie was appointed to represent the Martinborough Community Board, with the Council represented by Mayor Fran Wilde and Ward Councillor Rob Taylor.

The core objective of MARG was to explore complex, interconnected access-related issues and present recommendations to Council by August 2026, feeding directly into the development of the Council's 2027 – 37 LTP. The Group's Terms of Reference are attached to this report (Appendix 1)

Core strategic challenges

The Martinborough Ward is currently experiencing unprecedented, competing pressures across its localised roading, pedestrian, and active transport corridors. These multi-layered operational challenges stem from three primary drivers:

- Sustained population growth & future growth
- Freight and heavy transport volume
- Viticulture and tourism expansion

To navigate these structural pressures, MARG focused its evaluation on five critical areas that directly impact the long-term safety, economic vitality, and heritage character of Martinborough:

- Revitalising the Memorial Square Precinct and town centre functionality
- Heavy vehicle bypass diversion options
- Integrating cycling and walking infrastructure
- State Highway 53 termination
- Speed management and safety interventions

Through a range of background information provided to the group by council officers and NZTA, a targeted public drop-in session at the Waihinga Centre, and a broad community survey, MARG has paired this operational background with localised lived experience to draw together the recommendations contained in this report.

Key focus areas

Revitalise Memorial Square

Current situation
Martinborough Memorial Square is the historic and civic heart of Martinborough.

The Square is characterised by mature trees, many of them protected oaks, lawns, paths, seating and areas for passive recreation events. It hosts the annual ANZAC Day service and Martinborough Fair. The wider square reserve also incorporates active recreational and community facilities, including the playground and skate park, as well as the Martinborough Colonial Museum and Town Hall.

Council had previously identified pedestrian safety, the relationship between the Square and surrounding businesses, and the ability for people to move safely between the Square and town centre as important issues. Feedback from both MARG and the wider community highlighted that the Square was underutilised and lacked adequately designed shared public spaces. The existing trees and grassed areas were poorly maintained and in need of urgent attention. In addition, many of the square's light fittings were non-operational, raising safety and security concerns, and the area was prone to flooding during periods of heavy rainfall.

Beyond the immediate maintenance concerns, MARG and participants in the community drop-in sessions and survey identified a range of themes and potential improvements, including;

1. Better lighting that is dark sky friendly.
2. Trees reviewed for heritage and health. Removal of a limited number of trees that are deemed insignificant or unhealthy or hindering more significant trees to allow better light into the Square.

3. Improve visibility of crossing areas and create better connection between business precinct and the Square.
4. Reduce the width of roadway and make clear where cars and bikes should be parked.
5. Parking is an important lifeline to local business and must be neutral should parks be proposed to be removed, some support for more angle parking, explore a town carpark behind the fire station.
6. Celebration of local history, Māori, Pioneer and viticulture via QR reading posts.
7. Improved seating including tables for dining and potentially a covered seating area.
8. Create wider path areas to make the Square more user friendly through the winter months.
9. Enable the Square to be better used for more community events.
10. Preserve the war memorials and the heritage status of the Square.
11. Enhance the 'live edge' of the business precinct and widen these areas to close the gap between the square and the surrounding infrastructure.
12. Traffic slowing measures e.g. raised crossings and development of a crossing on the diagonal between the park and the Fire Station.

At the same time, there was strong community support for preserving the Square's memorial character and ensuring that any enhancements respected historical and cultural significance. Feedback consistently emphasised that improvements should be sympathetic to the square's heritage values, provide clear community benefit, and avoid unnecessary expenditure that directly resulted in increased rates.

Proposed strategic direction and recommendations

MARG recommends that Council adopt two areas of focus for the future management and development of Martinborough Memorial Square Precinct.

(i) Immediate improvements

There are a number of relatively straightforward matters that should receive attention in the short term to improve the condition, amenity and usability of the Square.

MARG recommends that Council:

- Give priority to the enhancement of the Square's established trees and grassed areas. Trees to be reviewed for historical and health significance with the help of a local historian and a suitable qualified Arborist.
- Address existing drainage issues, particularly on the northeastern corner.
- Review and improve lighting throughout the Square.
- Mitigate the rough paths that have been damaged through root damage.
- Work with the RSA on proposed improvement to flag poles and minor modifications to the memorial gates.

These matters are considered capable of being progressed independently of any future redesign of the Square and should therefore be considered for early action and funding within the existing Council budget.

(ii) Longer-term planning and investment

MARG considers that the Square Precinct is an integrated public space rather than treating the Square itself in isolation.

MARG recommends that Council include provision in the LTP for an urban designer or appropriately qualified urban design team to develop a conceptual plan for the future use and presentation of the Square and its immediate surrounds. The purpose would be to explore opportunities for creating a more connected, accessible and attractive series of shared public spaces, while retaining the Square Precinct's important; functional, memorial, heritage, landscape and community functions.

The work should consider, among other matters:

- how the Square can better connect with the surrounding town centre, shops, cafés and hospitality areas
- opportunities for creating or improving shared spaces around the perimeter of the Square, giving greater priority to pedestrians and community activity
- how pedestrian movement through and around the Square can be made safer, more accessible and more intuitive
- the relationship between the Square, surrounding roads, footpaths and State Highway 53
- opportunities to better manage vehicle, pedestrian, cycle, visitor and freight movements around the Square
- the location and management of parking, including identifying additional or alternative parking areas for visitors and businesses where appropriate
- opportunities for events, markets, outdoor dining and other community activities without compromising the Square's memorial purpose
- improved accessibility for people with disabilities, older people, children and families
- the protection and enhancement of the Square's mature trees, landscaping and open green space
- the appropriate location, seating, lighting, signage and other street furniture
- opportunities to strengthen the Square's role as the civic, cultural and social heart of Martinborough

MARG recommends that any conceptual design should be developed through meaningful community consultation before decisions are made on significant changes to the Square or its surrounding streets. The objective should not be to determine a final design at this stage, but to establish a long-term vision and a range of practical options that Council and the community can consider, prioritise and progressively implement through future LTPs and other funding programmes, including the existing Reserves Management Fund and public/private partnerships.

Heavy traffic movements & freight bypass alternatives

Current situation

Growth in the Wairarapa primary sector has resulted in a significant increase in the number of Class 1 heavy commercial vehicles travelling through residential areas and past Martinborough Primary School. The current heavy vehicle bypass route, which utilises New York and Dublin Streets before connecting to Princess Street and SH53, have generated a range of concerns. These include increased noise, the loosening of manhole covers, and safety risks, particularly at pedestrian crossings and intersections where heavy vehicles are required to negotiate sharp right-angle turns. In addition, neither bypass route was originally designed or constructed to accommodate regular heavy vehicle traffic.

In considering alternative routes, MARG concluded that there were no practical options for relocating the bypass unless the Waihenga Bridge was replaced and a new bypass corridor developed in conjunction with its realignment.

Proposed strategic direction and recommendations

MARG recognises that the management of heavy vehicle movements through Martinborough is closely connected to the future function, safety and amenity of the Square and surrounding town centre.

MARG recommends that Council:

- Retain the existing heavy traffic bypass route as the preferred route for heavy vehicles around the town, rather than seeking to redirect this traffic through the Square or other parts of the town centre.
- Formally recognise and protect this route in future roading and network planning, so that it remains available and fit for purpose as Martinborough grows and traffic volumes change.
- Within the 2027 – 37 LTP:
    - Undertake a review of the Dublin Road/Princess Street intersection, with particular attention to identified safety concerns, 30 km speed zone, sightlines, pedestrian movements and the ability to maintain an efficient flow of heavy and other traffic. Any improvements should seek to enhance safety without unnecessarily impeding the movement of traffic.
    - Engage with Martinborough School regarding its future traffic-management needs and encourage consideration of a potential off-street vehicle drop-off and pick-up area. This would reduce congestion and vehicle conflict on the surrounding road network, particularly at peak school times, while improving safety for children and pedestrians.
    - As part of a comprehensive urban design proposal, undertake an assessment of the existing road network through and around the urban area to ensure that roads currently carrying heavy traffic are structurally and operationally fit for purpose. This should include consideration of pavement condition, road width, intersections, drainage and wastewater covers, pedestrian safety and the ability of the network to accommodate current and anticipated heavy vehicle loads.

- As part of this assessment, ensure that future development and traffic planning takes account of the likely growth in visitor, freight and heavy vehicle movements, with appropriate investment in the road network occurring ahead of identified capacity or safety issues.

The longer-term objective should be a clearly defined and fit-for-purpose traffic network in which heavy traffic is appropriately managed around the town centre, local streets are safe and functional, and the Square and surrounding public spaces can progressively become more pedestrian and community focused.

Cycling & walking connectivity

Current situation

Martinborough has a strong cycling culture, supported by its popularity as a vineyard tourism destination and the high number of visitors who explore the area by bicycle. While walking and cycling within the township are generally well catered for, a significant gap exists between the town centre and the surrounding vineyard precincts. Cyclists and pedestrians travelling to these destinations are often required to use narrow road shoulders alongside high-speed rural traffic, creating safety concerns for vulnerable road users.

Feedback from MARG and the wider community has consistently identified the need for safer and more connected walking and cycling routes between the township and key visitor destinations. There was broad support for improving active transport infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and other small-wheeled users. However, there was also recognition that any future network should be designed in a manner that respects Martinborough's rural character and landscape, avoiding unnecessary urbanisation of the surrounding environment. It was further acknowledged that investment should be prioritised in areas where existing road corridors do not already provide adequate and safe access.

MARG has developed a conceptual cycle trail network to improve connectivity between the township, surrounding vineyards, and other destinations of interest – attached (Appendix 2). Further work is required to refine the proposal, including route investigations, engagement with affected landowners, and broader community consultation. Initial feedback received through recent community drop-in sessions has been favourable, indicating strong community interest in progressing the concept. It is envisaged that this work be included in the LTP.

As an interim measure, MARG also supports the development of a low-cost shared walking and cycling path within the road reserve along one side of Huangarua Road and Puruatanga Road, together with improvements along SH53 to provide safer access to the vineyard area via Kitchener Street. This approach would deliver immediate safety benefits while longer-term trail connections are investigated and developed. The MARG is confident that there will be funding available through other means than core rates for this type of project.

Proposed strategic direction and recommendations

MARG considers that Martinborough would benefit from a purpose-built cycle and shared-use trail providing a safe and attractive connection between the town centre and the surrounding vineyard and rural tourism areas.

Such a connection would support cycling and walking, improve visitor access to the vineyards, reduce reliance on vehicles for short trips and strengthen the relationship between the town centre and one of Martinborough's key tourism and economic assets. It would also serve as an added tourist attraction.

MARG recommends that Council:

- Identify the development of a purpose-built cycle/shared-use trail linking the Martinborough town centre with the surrounding vineyards as a longer-term strategic objective within the 2027 -37 LTP.
- Develop the project progressively as funding becomes available, including consideration of parks and reserves development contributions arising from subdivision, other appropriate Council funding sources and private sector or industry contributions.
- Investigate opportunities for a partnership model involving vineyard operators, tourism businesses, landowners and other stakeholders, recognising the wider economic and visitor benefits of the connection.
- In the interim, investigate the feasibility of providing within the existing 2026/27 annual budget a lower-cost shared pathway within the existing road reserve, initially along one side of Huangarua Road and Puruatanga Road, to establish a safer connection for cyclists and pedestrians without waiting for the longer-term purpose-built trail to be funded.
- Ensure that any interim pathway is designed to allow for future integration with the proposed purpose-built trail, avoiding investment that would prevent or compromise the longer-term network.

Consider the cycle connection as part of a wider walking, cycling and visitor mobility network, including connections to the town centre, Memorial Square, accommodation, hospitality businesses, vineyards and other visitor destinations.

MARG considers that the longer-term trail should be viewed as strategic tourism and community infrastructure rather than simply a recreational facility. It has the potential to improve visitor movement, reduce vehicle dependency, support local businesses and enhance Martinborough's reputation as a cycle-friendly wine tourism destination.

In the meantime, a relatively modest investment in an interim pathway would provide an opportunity to improve safety and connectivity while the funding and design work for the longer-term trail are developed.

State Highway 53 (SH53) termination

Current situation

State Highway 53 serves as the principal western gateway into Martinborough, connecting the town to the wider Wairarapa transport network. As vehicles approach the township, the highway transitions into Kitchener Street before terminating at Martinborough Square. While NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) is responsible for the state highway corridor and determines its operational requirements, Council retains responsibility for the associated footpaths, berms, drainage infrastructure, and other local streetscape assets adjacent to the roadway.

MARG has identified an opportunity to improve the management and function of the town centre by seeking to relocate the end point of State Highway 53 from Martinborough Square to the Kitchener Street and Princess Street intersection. This change would better align the state highway designation with the entrance to the commercial centre, while enabling greater local flexibility in how the streets surrounding the Square are managed and utilised.

Potential benefits of the proposal include reducing the complexity and cost of traffic management associated with community events, enabling more streamlined and potentially pre-approved road closure arrangements, and providing Council with greater ability to implement future changes to roadway layouts, parking arrangements, pedestrian facilities, and streetscape improvements. The proposal would also support the long-term aspiration of creating a town centre that is safer, more attractive, and more responsive to community and visitor needs.

Feedback received through community engagement was generally supportive of the concept, particularly where it would improve the ease of hosting events and allow greater local control over the town centre environment. However, some submitters expressed concern that transferring responsibility for part of the existing state highway network could result in additional maintenance and renewal costs being borne by Council and local ratepayers. These concerns highlight the importance of undertaking a detailed assessment of the financial, operational, and strategic implications before any formal approach is made to NZTA.

Current road maintenance and renewal costs are estimated at approximately $8 per m2 with an estimated 0.65km at 11m wide, circa 7000 m2 requiring chip seal every 8-10 years. Any transfer of responsibility would be an addition to the councils 406km of already maintained chip seal roads.

Proposed strategic direction and recommendations

MARG recommends that Council:

- Collaborate with NZTA to investigate the termination of SH53 prior to its end-point at the Memorial Square.

- Propose the point of termination be relocated to the intersection of Princess Street and Kitchener Street noting that the precise termination point and any associated traffic arrangements be determined through a professional transport and urban design assessment, with the community involved in considering the options.

It is proposed that this work could be undertaken alongside the wider urban design work proposed for Square Precinct and should have regard to MARG's recommendations that the existing heavy traffic bypass route be retained and formally recognised in future road network planning.

Speed management and safety interventions

Current situation
Martinborough has recently had a substantial programme of speed-limit changes under the Council's Speed Management Plan. These changes have progressively lowered speeds on the approaches and roads around the township. The programme has also included the establishment of a variable school-zone speed limit, recognising the particular vulnerability of children and families during school drop-off and pickup periods.

MARG also noted that current interventions have tended to focus on speed-limit and intersection changes rather than a comprehensive redesign of the pedestrian and traffic environment. Speed limits alone do not necessarily create a safe or intuitive road environment. This has left gaps and based on community feedback ongoing safety concerns around the location and visibility of pedestrian crossings for example. MARG received a submission from the Community Board highlighting concerns around the Jellicoe Street and Venice Street pedestrian crossing being dangerous particularly in winter with low sun. It is recommended that Council investigate what physical work could be done to improve this crossing safety.

MARG is of the view that there are opportunities to go further with physical and urban-design interventions, particularly in the approaches to the township, around the school, along pedestrian corridors and around the square. MARG recommends the Council consider:

1. Make the 30 km/h Square Precinct environment self-enforcing environment
Create a safe, people-friendly 30 km/h precinct around Martinborough Square where the street design naturally encourages low speeds. The objective is to make 30 km/h feel like the natural speed, rather than a speed drivers are simply asked to observe.

2. Raised pedestrian crossings
These could be particularly effective along the approach roads into the town centre. A raised crossing:

- physically slows vehicles;
- gives pedestrians a level or near-level crossing;
- improves visibility;
- makes the crossing more prominent;

- reduces the consequences if a vehicle fails to stop.

Given the volume of visitors and pedestrians in Martinborough, this would be worth investigating at the highest-use crossing points.

3. Pedestrian refuges / two-stage crossings

Where traffic volumes or road width make a single crossing difficult, provide a central pedestrian refuge. This is actually what NZTA has now incorporated into the SH53/Princess Street safety improvements: pedestrians can cross Princess Street in two stages rather than needing one large gap in traffic.

4. Kerb extensions at crossings

Build the footpath/kerb out into the parking lane so that pedestrians:

- have less distance to cross;
- become more visible to drivers;
- don't have to stand between parked cars before crossing

This also has the benefit of slowing turning vehicles.

Community engagement summary

To ensure that recommendations are reflective of local needs, MARG executed a robust, multi-channel community engagement strategy. This included:

- Waihinga Centre drop-in sessions 15 – 16 July, 5:00 – 8:00pm, 18 – 19 July, 9:00am – 3:00pm, in association with the Martinborough Community Board, MARG undertook a series of interactive public forums held in the Waihinga Centre Supper Room. These sessions allowed residents, business owners, and rural operators to comment and make suggestion directly onto physical spatial plans.
- Structured Community Preference Survey: An online and physical questionnaire deployed across the district to capture measurable data on user priorities, daily transit habits, and safety perceptions.

Attached to this report is a summary of the quantitative survey insights (Appendix 3).

Strategic and financial alignment

In alignment with MARG's advisory mandate, detailed financial costings have been excluded from this report. Instead, this document provides the strategic layout required for Council Asset Managers and Financial Officers to preform form business case costing during the upcoming LTP review cycle.

Conor Kershaw
MARG Chair