

## Jim Boulton: We're de-clogging our streets, but there's more to do

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OPINION: I don't know about you but I'm delighted!

The reason that I'm delighted is that I had the great pleasure to fly back into Queenstown after a trip north recently, arriving here at peak rush hour, facing the prospect of traffic congestion making me late for a meeting at the council.

To the contrary it took me maybe two to three minutes to get from the airport round-about to the BP roundabout, with no congestion at all at the BP roundabout, and off into town with time to spare.

To say that the opening of Hawthorne Drive (aka the eastern access road) has been a success in reducing traffic congestion is an understatement.

The NZ Transport Agency tells us that the peak-hour average travelling time between the roundabouts is now three minutes, significantly reduced from the previous 10 to 20 minutes.

I think you'd all agree, one of the great frustrations of living in our district is, at least at this time, behind us.

I'm also delighted with the take-up of the use of the airport park and ride and the removal of the unsightly and unsafe lines of cars parked on the side of State Highway 6 (Kawarau Road).

Residents of McBride Street also tell me life is now much easier for them now that traffic using their street as a "rat run" has also markedly decreased.

These are pleasing achievements, yet we've still got a long way to go on traffic.

NZTA has committed to the double-laning of State Highway 6 between Five Mile and the airport roundabout.

Personally I would like the timing of this improved and it's something I am seeking further commitment on.

It's a work in progress.

For the good folk of Quail Rise and Tucker Beach there's good news in the shape of a planned underpass under the Shotover Bridge to join the Queenstown-bound lane on the southern side of the highway.

This will greatly improve safety and stress levels relating to the current intersection.

I understand that work on this is to commence later this calendar year and we continue to push for a confirmation date.

The new Kawarau Bridge is proceeding at pace and there is a commitment to have two lanes operating over the Christmas and New Year period – although there might be some reversion to a single lane for a period early in the New Year for final completion works.

Thankfully it does appear, however, that the current ski season is the last one where we will see the level of congestion caused by an inadequate one-way bridge.

On the subject of bridges, the council is focused on looking at our needs over the coming years.

In particular, we note the likely need for a second Kawarau crossing in the not too distant future, an alternative to the one-way Edith Cavell Bridge and possibly even an upgrade or addition to the current State Highway 6 Shotover Bridge.

I'm very conscious of the time it took to get commitment to the new Kawarau Bridge and if we don't start pushing for this work now we risk similar congestion at some time in the future.

The good news is there is a higher degree of willingness by NZTA at management level, at board level and with the Minister of Transport to recognise the problems that we have.

The challenge will be to turn this enthusiasm into action.

*Jim Boulton is the Queenstown Lakes mayor*