

Interviewee: Steve Kamo
Title: GWRC Flood Protection Engineer
Interview Date: 02/12/24.
Interview Time: 1:00 - 1:25 PM

Audio file

Steve Kamo (2).m4a

Transcript

00:00:29 Bettina

For first question, we wanted to see if you could introduce yourself for someone who doesn't know who you are.

00:00:39 Steve

Kia ora Steve Kamo. I am a Project engineer in the logistics and resourcing delivery team. Project engineering role as a Technical Support predominantly and the. Flood protection management plans. There's eight of them involved for flood protection purposes at greater Wellington Regional Council, and this is a role I've held for 9 1/2 years there. And principal focus is the Te Awa Kairangi, or the Hutt River localized region which is the largest populated catchment in New Zealand.

00:01:20 Frankie

How many years have you been working at the GWRC?

00:01:24 Steve

9 1/2 years plus, yeah.

00:01:25 Frankie

9 1/2.

00:01:27 Bettina

Have you ever been associated or worked with the Rotary Club?

00:01:31

I have worked aside them in some of their endeavors supporting our strategic initiatives there, planting recreational areas there, yes.

00:01:49 Bettina

And is your role in GWRC, all your projects regarding the Hutt River Corridor, are always around the flooding area.

00:01:56

yes.

00:01:58 Bettina

And when was the last time you used the Hutt River Trail or the Hutt River Corridor?

00:02:03 Steve

Yeah. In January this year so in the last three or four weeks.

00:02:09 Bettina

And can I ask what were you using it for?

00:02:11 Steve

I was actually using that as a means for getting to and from a sports event.

00:02:19 Frankie

Which what was it?

00:02:20 Steve

It was softball out at Fraser Park.(cut out some transcript) No it was nationals there.

00:02:30 Bettina

How long have you been a user of the trail?

00:02:34 Steve

I've worked in the Hutt and other roles, worked and played in the Hutt.

00:02:38 Steve

Since I arrived in 1996, so that's 28 years. I've probably been a frequent hutt rail user, more in the last 20 years. And having young children as well it's a popular spot.

00:02:48 Bettina

What? What sorts of activities do you usually do there?

00:02:53 Steve

Biking. Swimming. Blueberry picking. Sorry. Yeah, BlackBerry. And work.

00:03:06 Bettina

What are your favorite memories from the development of this trail that you have there?

00:03:14 Steve

It's though it's heavily modified there. It's a nice open space there's predominantly accessible, safe. It's been clean, I just have good memories there to be able to come and go there with not too much endurance there. The access is important for it. But I just just it's a, it's an open space that I feel that you can get really access with there and you know, it's a good, dependable area to go. And do, you know, work, play or whatever?

00:03:54 Bettina

And can I ask you, since you work within flood protection, but you're also a user of the trail, as a GWRC employee. How do you guys manage to balance flood protection versus recreation along the Hutt River Corridor.

00:04:08 Steve

Well, it sort of empowers you to be able to give the best of both worlds. I don't see that as a conflict here. I think as a compliment there, I'm very fortunate to be able to, you know, be able to have access to that work environment there and also to be in the aspects of the management of it there and that. You know, it goes a bit beyond just the asset itself there. It's the well-being of the space there.

00:04:39 Steve

We talk about ourselves being kaitiaki, which is, you know, caregivers, you know, taking care of the space there. And that's what we're tasked with as well. So, yeah, I'm fortunate. And I've actually, as I say, my work has actually been predominantly, the time I've been in Wellington, has been in the Hutt River and the Hutt Valley there. Worked over 20 years in the Hutt Valley. So if that was to be my Awa, I would say it's Te Awa Kairangi.

00:05:05 Steve

So I suppose you have this personal affinity to it there, and it's a pleasure to be able to work in it. And all staff would find that... there is parts of it that would be disheartening when you see it being treated the way it is at times, but you pick yourself up and you get paid to do it, you know.

00:05:24 Frankie

Could you tell us more about that?

00:05:25 Steve

Look, the water quality. And even more so water supply. It's a it's a finite resource and it's not only depleted the quality of it is well known there and whatever we have. Been trying to do to maintain it there. I think it's only just holding it there. And further deterioration, I think we would certainly see a loss of public enjoyment.

00:05:58 Frankie

And in what ways do you think it's evolved? So it's like deteriorating?

00:06:02 Steve

All human related factors. Climate change. Full stop period.

00:06:07 Bettina

Yes. And can I ask you, you've been a user, you mentioned since 1996 and since you've been a user for so long and work on it. What are your visions for the future of this corridor, what would be your ideal scenario?

00:06:28 Steve

My paramount my current role is to be able to help deliver the 40 year flood management Plan, which is obviously there is a set of tasks, whether they be engineering, which I am. Also around district plans or legislation around there to assist in those type of initiatives there to maintain that there. So there's a blueprint there that is now in its 23rd year to be implemented and over the last 17 years.

00:07:08 Steve

To achieve this, certainly trying to take something relatively aspirational that was in 2001 and then by 2040 there is to have this pretty well comprehensively done and I have been involved with the Riverlink project. Which has only a very small section of the REACH, but that's around hardcore engineering and that's one part there. But there's also the land development aspects there. And I think we've actually managed to have an ideal world there. We wouldn't be building and what is the river corridor so.

00:07:44 Steve

I think we've managed to thin back. No more encroachment into the river and actually be able to deliver on other initiatives. They're like giving the river room, etcetera. There. So I think the future will be as to be able to.

00:08:01 Steve

Make improvements or slight improvements on the status quo. I'm just hoping it's not too late there with the effects. With climate change, which wouldn't be our control.

00:08:13 Bettina

And what are your thoughts on the possibility of a commuter route being there on the Hutt River Corridor being a flood protection engineer and knowing what this trail was actually made for?

00:08:27 Steve

Initially, the trail there was a unsealed formed corridor there for users that had the abilities to commute along there, whether commute or traffic along there, whether it be walking, running, biking, whatever form there it was, I didn't think I'd ever envisage. A developed urban footpath to be so close to the river's edge there, given the confines of the river already, so I'm a little bit torn there and conflicted on that.

00:09:04 Steve

Here, but I do benefit from the ability to be able to move quickly because I'm a commuter on there is to go into and from and so I am conflicted there when I heard. They're gonna seal it. I thought it was stupid because I thought the maintenance would improve on anything yet, but we haven't had a lot of rainfall events.

00:09:24 Steve

Or rows of events on top of the boom to do cause damage, but the ones that we have had in there. As sort of a, we end up picking up the bill ratepayers, instead of the taxpayers who are funding this or the road users, footpath users, etcetera, the ones that are probably should be picking up the tab for those costs of maintenance.

00:09:53 Steve

It's a little bit of a cross purposes there. It's providing benefit to users there and suppose it comes down to sort of tier.

00:10:13 Steve

The multiple users on there, we've come to almost. I feel like they're almost a critical mass when it comes to push bikes. Now we've cyclists in there and then we've got to maintain that space there and it's got a high level of service than what was probably ever envisaged there you.

00:10:33 Steve

There's the window dressing there. There's some hard engineering, so the value of the assets is actually on the ground. You don't even see them and they're doing their job really, really well. And the land there is very expensive to obtain and we all know now trying to give the river more room or give us more flood defense space there. It's hard work and other forms of transport scooters, other things there. I think it's a function of time and space. I don't know if you could shuttle them along there and but it's almost getting to a sense of congestion. It's not there, but it is. It's only 23 kilometres along.

00:11:18 Steve

And a cyclist. They are the commuter cyclist can do there than an hour. If you have 1000 cyclists on it, which you don't, I'm not too sure what the users would be and they'd be big times. You're just transferring the issue from outside of the river corridor into. And well, you got a potential conflict zone there for many users. So yeah, I don't have a perfect solution, but I don't. Yeah, I don't believe that taking a pristine sort of natural sort of resource and then trying to put all this other recreational use in there is going to serve anyone any good in the future. The effort gets too crowded, yeah.

00:12:04 Frankie

Who or what do you think has been the most influential to the evolution of the Trail? So any organizations or any people in particular you think?

00:12:20 Steve

I would like to say that people, the Community here in the river there, I don't think I mean an organization. Has the professional theatre pay for it there? But it's the community that's spoken up and it's included the design standards there and the what is going to be where you know, and that's all part of the planning act there. So I would like to think that the local communities have had the final say. That's certainly their approach for the FMP.

00:12:54 Bettina

What are you hoping to get out of this project?

00:13:07 Steve

Providing evidence, the effects are really important to scientists, technicians there for decision making.

00:13:14 Steve

And to be able to take conversation, which is at a point in time to there, we could take the data and use that there for surveys and future there to look at trends there. So that whether this is the point in time especially from 2016 and the last time this the exercise was done was to see where the trends are. Having an account of the records of what people thought at that time. I mean only one voice but a sample size. There would be a pretty good reflection on what they would think of the river corridor.

00:13:46 Steve

What I was would have thought there 10 years ago when I was using the river corridor, was certainly nowhere near what I envisaged it would be happening here now and with RiverLink coming there, I know it's on in a river link. It's only in a reduced area, 3 kilometres, that is gonna be significantly different than what anyone would have ever thought there was before.

00:14:07 Bettina

And what are your opinions on RiverLink? Specifically, what do you think of this project that's being performed?

00:14:19 Steve

Haven't been involved on it for a few period of time, I've come a little bit disillusioned there. This was three agencies now four but anyway, three agencies, plus our iwi partnership there coming together and trying to get scale, trying to use economies of scale. Each has its objectives and trying to achieve. And when it overlaps there, there's some instead of having duplication or rework, it was developed a coordinated collaborate.

00:14:45 Steve

I think that's failed. I think we'd all say that there, whether it's affordability, it's staggered itself and delays, delays, it costs money there and it's all coming down to now about splitting. Heres on items, on principles there not agreeing it and no action. And that's just that's coming at expensive ratepayers. The inside becomes somewhat dissolution frustrated certainly there by their decision making. They've got a governance structure in there, but they've had that there for four years and I've seen no real consequence there. And if they call progress there what they've achieved today, I'd say waste of money. So they've got some hard decisions to make sooner or later. There I would think that they

again they should go out to the Community to be consulted on the myriad of decisions and then pursue it with Ernest there they need to get the faith back there.

00:15:46 Steve

This decision making by the sort of governor said there is just deplore.

00:15:58 Frankie

So you think Riverlink is they kind of screwed up a little bit right?

00:16:02 Steve

Well, they've, they've overreached themselves there. You have the means and the motivation. That's minor Manchester life and Greater Wellington has been pretty explicit with what its objectives have been, which is to provide a level of protection and a natural hazard there, with flooding and heart valley. And this was implemented in 2001, and they've communicated with these agencies Hutt City pays, the roading agency there and they agreed to go into initial design in 2012. That was only three years after they've finished book club. But we don't have started that consultation.

00:16:38 Steve

And exteriors, the next section downstream there we made it pretty clear what our motivation was there and then we went and put in our 10 year plans how much we thought that these works were gonna go. So we would always committed the money ratepayers money to this there. And the LTP's there said that we committed financially to this project and this is what we're going to do to, but each time the agency was coming around to a new funding cycle around there, it just would never line up there. So seriously, since you know, 2012, there we've had 4 funding rounds here and they still haven't really lined up and it keeps saying we've got the money, we've got the money, but we just the motivations not there, you know, it's just it's incredibly frustrating.

00:17:28 Frankie

Were the initial intentions of Riverlink, what were they like?

00:17:30 Steve

The objectives there of RiverLink for Greater Wellington was improved transport there around there. We've got skin in the game with metlink with the train services. Yeah. We've also got Park and ride facilities to improve the ride experience or to be able to encourage public transport. And they've also got our flood protection there to improve standard. This is what the community wanted to do. They knew they're up for some money and they said

that we're prepared to spend the money now instead of wait until an event comes. The so we've already gone out and consulted them in 2015 quite extensively. And the public at that time certainly knew what RiverLink meant. It was called Hutt City Centre Upgrade Project at the time, unfortunate acronym is HICCUP, so we changed it to a new name. So in 2016 we called it RiverLink. So, GW has been focused in always had their eye on the prize, the and approved objectives there. And they seem to sort of align with the other agencies there.

00:18:39 Steve

But we just didn't seem to be able to coordinate ourselves in such a manner. There didn't have the boy in there. Yeah. I'm sorry Riverlink. Is a key component. I mean it's a massive amount of expenditures. It's the narrowest confined point component in it there.

00:18:59 Steve

And yes, everybody's got a bit of skin in the game and responsibilities and accountability, but the price of it fails there as we know, is a billion dollars. That to be able to support along that network and along the river corridor, I suppose, or a lineal park. However, you wanna see it there? Yes, has extended benefits there. However, there has got to be a point in time when the core focus for GW was around flood protection. If we didn't remove the bridge, you only had a one in 85 year protection. The rest of the Heart River is supposedly got a one of 440 and that would account for climate change of at least one in 100 to the 21st century. So that was that was the right thing to do responsibly then acting now. So, yeah, we'll see what the future says.

(cut out transcript)

00:20:23 Bettina

But a lot of suggestions that we get from the survey are we want more lighting. So as of having lighting on the trail to make it more safe for people that want to use it at night, especially in the winter when it. So how would that play into flood protection, can you have lighting on the trail?

00:20:43 Steve

That's sort of a little bit of a conflict because we were about protecting infrastructure, if necessary to be in the river corridor, they either cross over it under it or along it. And however, there we provide the means, we've got a transpower power facility there that.

00:21:02 Steve

Powers up Hutt CBD area of the year, so it's a key piece of infrastructure sitting right in the in a flood prone area of bulk water, bulk wastewater all sitting accessible to erosion effects on home protection and there so. The phrasing there about improving the infrastructure that lighting is a service providers benefit. And I wouldn't see that because the provider of a transport network there is either the local council, the roading department or NZTA, because they fund half their project, they translocate that infrastructure into the river corridor that's on them.

00:21:51 Steve

But we wouldn't be seen to be wanting to protect something as you say, that's going to be at risk. It's a bit, it's a bit silly there. It's a bit like saying, well, yeah, you, you go out there into unknown waters there and knowing you're going to increase the risk so.

00:22:09 Steve

There is means and methods if they wanted to put lighting on there, but I just don't think that's an appropriate investment.

00:22:23 Bettina

A lot of people would like to see the path widened and some other parts either paved, or the ones that already paved they say that need to be redone because there's like potholes and stuff like that. So how realistic would it be that the path is actually widened and how does that play into flood protection?

00:22:48 Steve

I think the thing is here is that if we've got a transport network and if you look at it schematically there, it's like giving up the Hutt valley or back down the Hutt Valley, and then you've got your cross linkages there. The river itself is naturally formed and is incised itself against the weak material from a fault line. That is why the river has taken that path of least resistance, and that's where the water will lie.

00:23:20 Steve

It used to braid across the whole of the valley there and so that water was dispersed across that. Now we've modified it and confined it and it's moved itself right over to the western side there. Up above the river is the state highway. That was where it was formed. They also used to have a train link that used to run on a walkway parallel along there to Belmont as well. So we've crammed this in there, but unfortunately the demand of services and the frequency of those services has displaced the ability for pedestrians.

00:23:50 Steve

And the section up there to safely move along. So now they're moving that type of infrastructure into the narrowest part. That's the soft point being the river there. If it was came down to it that there would we sacrifice getting nowhere and being gridlocked, 0 movements along State Highway 2 versus travelling at 30 kilometres an hour, so everybody and anybody. I'd probably have to consider that option. Yeah, you know what I mean? Because at the end of the day, you can't. You can't commute along a swollen river there when it is. If there is that frequency there.

00:24:26 Steve

Or it's damaged to whatever does it. It just needs to offset an issue and put it in the next spot there to make it someone else's issue and I'm just not right with it there, yeah.