

# Underwater pipe for Hobson



PHOTO: WATERCARE

**UNDER PRESSURE:** The current Hobson sewage pipe is a leaky eyesore. The new pipe will be below sea level and will stop sewage from flooding the bay.

## The Hobson Bay sewage pipe is 90 years old and leaking. AROHA AWARAU, ANNA BARGE and JONATHAN DOW investigate the issues involved in a new pipe project.

The Waitemata Harbour is notoriously polluted, especially after heavy rain, when beaches are often closed. However help is on the way. A new sewerage tunnel is to go under Hobson Bay that will help solve the problem of sewage ending up in the harbour.

A human waste overflow forced the Auckland City Council to close Okahu Bay earlier in the year. Heavy rain overloaded wastewater pipes and sewerage spilled into Hobson Bay from an overflow pipe near the Orakei Wharf. An unacceptably high level of disease causing bacteria was found in the water, making Okahu Bay unsafe for swimming.

Much of this overflow comes from the Hobson Bay sewage pipe, which crosses Hobson Bay is more than 90 years old. It leaks and is an eyesore. With Auckland's growing population putting pressure on the wastewater systems, this is a problem that is just going to get worse.

After exploring different options, Watercare, which is responsible for the Hobson Bay pipeline, initiated Project Hobson. The project plans to replace the existing sewer with a 3km underground tunnel.

Project Hobson involves the construction of a new tunnel running from Logan Tce in Parnell, under Hobson Bay and the Orakei ridgeline, and to a new pump station in the Orakei Domain.

Watercare expects the project to cost \$47 million.

In March, Watercare lodged resource consent applications for the project and released a report assessing the effect it will have on the environment.

The new tunnel will be larger than is actually required. The extra capacity will mean that sewage will no longer overflow into Hobson Bay during wet weather.

The extra capacity in the tunnel will also mean that in the unlikely event of the Orakei pump station shutting down, there is less chance of an overflow being released at Orakei wharf.

The proposed pipeline will run under Orakei resident Gordon Tettit's home in Sumdeley St but he isn't worried about any disruption.

"I've been assured by the council that the thing will be so far underground that there will be no surface effect. As they say, 'out of sight, out of mind'," he said.

The 3km tunnel will run about 15m to 40m below sea-level and Watercare spokesperson Mark McLauchlan says most people won't realise work is going on.

Although the tunnel is far underground there will be some above-ground evidence of it.

Watercare plans to reclaim land on the western shore of Hobson Bay at the end of Logan Tce and on the southern shore near Victoria Ave in Remuera.

The reclaimed land will be where the new tunnel links to existing sewers and will also be the site of facilities that will treat any odours and remove any grit from the wastewater before it enters the tunnel.

Watercare plans to landscape both reclamations with native coastal vegetation and walking tracks that link to the existing Hobson Bay walkways.

The other significant above-ground development will be a new, larger pump station that will replace the existing pump station in the Orakei Domain.

Ngati Whatua has endorsed an underground sewerage tunnel, said Nagrimu Blair, heritage and resource manager for the iwi. He said tribal memories of local burial sites and shellfish grounds desecrated by raw sewage were the main reasons for this.

Mr Blair said Ngati Whatua was consulted on the project and look forward to better protection of their sacred grounds. However, with the proposed eastern transport corridor also heading its way, it urges Watercare, the councils and Transit New Zealand to try and minimise any possible effect these projects will have on the land.

Construction should begin on the new tunnel next summer and is expected to take four years. The new tunnel and pumpstation will then be brought into use and the old pipeline across Hobson Bay will be demolished.

Last summer the Auckland City Council found an unacceptable level of pathogens in the water at Auckland beaches on 14 occasions, said Sharon Tang, environmental health officer for the council.

Once the new tunnel is in use sewage in Hobson Bay should be just a memory, and beach water quality will greatly improve.

Project Hobson is high on the list of residents' concerns because it affects their back pockets.

Mike Gibson, of Orakei, has spoken to his neighbours and says although they endorse an upgrade of the current sewerage pipeline, most are concerned about a potential increase in their water rates.

Watercare assures its customers there will be no rise in Watercare prices as a result of Project Hobson.

However, the city's sewers are coming under increasing pressure. Metrowater, the utility company owned by the Auckland City Council, expects 33,000 new buildings to be developed in the city over the next 20 years.

Metrowater says existing customers are not expected to pay for any future upgrades to the wastewater systems. Instead, in line with the company's user-pays system, new users will pay for any upgrades.

Last July, Metrowater began charging \$1890 plus GST for a "network upgrade charge" that must be paid for by every home before a water meter will be installed.

### Project Hobson

- The Hobson Bay sewer carries a quarter of the Auckland region's wastewater to the Mangere Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- The pipe is more than 90 years old.
- Watercare is seeking resource consents to build a new tunnel under Hobson Bay.
- It will run between 15m and 40m below sea level and will have a diameter of between 3m and 4m.
- The cost will be \$47 million.
- Watercare has budgeted for this, and the cost will not be passed on to existing customers.
- It aims to stop sewage mixing with wastewater and overflowing into the Hauraki Gulf and the Waitamata Harbour

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# Raw sewage dumping to end



PHOTO: PAUL ROSSER

by Edward Gay

The Fullers Ferry Company is preparing to install a sewage disposal unit for the first time in 45 years of operation.

The move follows mounting criticism during the America's Cup in Auckland last year when 2000-3000 boats congregated on the Hauraki Gulf and many of them, including Fullers ferries, dumped raw sewage overboard.

General manager Michael Fitchett says Fullers has been trying to fix the problem.

"We've been trying for several years to put a system in place, but the Auckland Regional

Council refused to accept sewage from our boats into the Mangere treatment plant," says Mr Fitchett.

According to Fullers, the time frame for installation is uncertain.

"We're conducting experiments now, working out systems. The training process involves 180 staff," says Mr Fitchett.

North Shore City councillor Joel Cayford says the ARC regulations that allow boats to discharge sewage if they are 500m off shore and in water 5m deep or more should be changed.

"The North Shore City Council is spending millions of dollars on upgrading sewers and stormwater

drains and yet boats and ferries are able to legally dump raw sewage straight into the harbour," says Mr Cayford.

Complaints have been received from boats caught in the wake of a ferry when it has discharged sewage.

Dominic McCarthy, an environmental scientist at the ARC says that while it regularly monitors sewage content in the Waitemata Harbour, the sewage is an aesthetic problem.

"It's horrible for bathers when they find it rolling up on the shore."

Mr McCarthy says the ARC is working on the issue.

But Mr Cayford says the ARC could tighten the regulations.

"Other countries around the world treat their harbours as public parks. We don't tolerate the dumping of sewage in our parks; we shouldn't tolerate it in our harbours."

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**HARBOUR PLAN:** Fullers ferries working on a new scheme to fix a long-standing sewage problem.