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It's damage control

King Country News, Waitomo

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By Jon Rawlinson & Chris Gardner

Waitomo was spared the worst of the recent storms that hit Ōtorohanga and Waipā, but the district is continuing to repair and prepare in the wake of last year's storms.

The impact of severe weather was a major theme of last week's Waitomo District Council meeting. Mayor John Robertson opened with sobering comments before a moment of silence and reflection.

"On February 13, had the river been higher in Te Kūiti and we had the sort of downpour that Ōtorohanga received (over 150mm of rain in 12 hours), we would have had severe flooding also," he said. "We are getting concentrated weather events with very high rainfall over short periods of time. These events cause havoc followed by significant cost to repair."

At the meeting, the use of \$2.8 million from the NZ Transport Agency, and an additional \$708,000 from council's coffers was approved.

It will go towards culvert and

drainage work, to help shore up roads and mitigate future repairs, and increase the metalling of rural roads, Robertson said.

"I am pleased the elected members supported this further investment above the budgets approved last year. This reflects our focus on investing in core services and infrastructure."

Rural roads can be vital lifelines during emergencies, but slips are proving costly to fix.

In total, almost 217 sites required work due to damage in July and October carrying a combined cost estimated at almost \$20 million.

"After driving out to the western part of our district and inspecting a major issue on Kopaki Road, I asked the executive to bring a full report to council on where we're at in addressing major damage to our roads," Robertson said.

"Waitomo has a huge amount of road repair and restoration work in front of it. Some is through the design stage and out for tender.

As for other sites, such as Kopaki Road, we're yet to work out which options are feasible."

Kopaki Road connects State Highways 4 and 30 south of Te Kūiti. In consultation with the NZ Transport Agency, council is considering whether repair costs are justified.

To the west Te Waitere Road, Taharua, is another problematic site – damage caused in July towards its northern end, near the cemetery, was exacerbated in October.

"I am very mindful of the inconvenience caused to residents on some of our damaged roads," Robertson said. "But I'm also mindful of the risk should there be further storm events causing further road collapses."

Meanwhile, retailer Shereen Parker is breathing a sigh of relief following news a temporary bridge is expected to be built on State Highway 39 by the middle of the month.

It will reopen to road between

her business in Pirongia and Ōtorohanga.

Parker's Franklin Street business in Pirongia, The Hive, experienced its worst day on Sunday, two weeks after the Mangati Bridge south of the township became a storm victim.

With traffic diverted through Te Awamutu and Ōtorohanga, Pirongia businesses saw takings drop by at least two thirds.

Transport minister Chris Bishop announced the timeline on Thursday – a day after Taranaki-King Country member of parliament Barbara Kuriger inspected the damage across the Waipā and Ōtorohanga districts and promised to advocate for the region.



Downer's Willy Chester, left, shows Waipā mayor Mike Pettit, chief executive Steph O'Sullivan and Taranaki-King Country MP Barbara Kuriger the Mangauika Road bridge taken out by the St Valentine Day's Storm. Photo: Chris Gardner



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Kopaki Road has been blocked since October's storms