

# 1 Executive summary

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## *What happened*

- 1.1 At about 0340 on Saturday 7 December 2019, two family members left their home in Hamilton by car to begin a rostered shift at their place of employment in Morrinsville.
- 1.2 The car journey to Morrinsville took them through an area of roadworks near the intersection of State Highway 26 and Piako Road, four kilometres southwest of their destination.
- 1.3 The vehicle the two people were in was stopped briefly by a traffic controller holding a stop/go sign at the southern end of the roadworks while opposing traffic cleared the area. Their car was the first in a queue of cars waiting for the go signal. Once the opposing traffic was clear, the traffic controller moved the stop sign to the go position and the cars began moving through the work area towards Morrinsville.
- 1.4 A short time after the queue of cars had proceeded past the traffic controller, a train travelling from Tauranga towards Hamilton entered the section of track that automatically activated the level crossing warning alarms.
- 1.5 The driver of the car did not stop before the level crossing and proceeded on to the railway line directly in front of the approaching train.
- 1.6 The train and car collided, resulting in the two car occupants suffering fatal injuries.

## *Why it happened*

- 1.7 The approved traffic management plan under which the roadworks were being conducted did not identify the risks to road and rail vehicles of the level crossing situated within the proposed work area. Safety briefings and risk-mitigation actions taken by the road crew focused on their own safety and did not adequately mitigate the risks for other users approaching the level crossing.
- 1.8 The road was partially coned off to provide protection for the contractors who were painting the road markings approaching the level crossing. There was distracting activity being conducted and a vehicle with flashing amber beacons was parked next to the level crossing warning signals.
- 1.9 The proximity of the vehicle with flashing amber beacons next to the level crossing alarms likely created confusion, hindering the effectiveness of the warning devices to alert road users that a train was approaching.
- 1.10 The confusing scene created by the roadwork activity likely led the driver of the car to perceive, on being given a go signal by the traffic controller, that they had clearance to drive through the entire roadworks area including the level crossing.
- 1.11 Safety for pedestrians and vehicles using level crossings is on the Transport Accident Investigation Commission's (Commission's) watchlist of serious transport safety concerns.
- 1.12 The Commission **recommended** that **Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency** review its current auditing of agencies delegated to approve traffic management plans, to ensure that applicants developing traffic management plans near rail crossings have identified

any rail crossings within the vicinity of proposed work areas and have consulted the rail access providers to ensure that any additional safety requirements in relation to the road/rail interface have been met.

- 1.13 The Commission **recommended** that the **Secretary for Local Government** provide leadership to, and work with local authorities to ensure all traffic management plans near rail crossings are developed in consultation with the rail access providers and any additional safety requirements in relation to the road/rail interface are met.

### ***What we can learn***

- 1.14 Roadwork activity in the vicinity of a level crossing has the potential to distract road users from the level crossing warning devices. In planning for such activity, consideration must be given to the increased risks for road users.

### ***Who may benefit***

- 1.15 Road users, road controlling authorities, roading contractors and people involved with the planning and approval of work around road/rail interfaces may all benefit from the findings and recommendations in this report.