

The Road to Better Ecological Outcomes for State Highway Projects

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Roads affect ecological features through their construction and, once operational, through vehicle use and maintenance activities. Impacts may include direct loss of habitat; promoting the establishment of pest plants, and changes to the physical and chemical environment. Roads can also provide opportunities to assist biodiversity, particularly in intensively built up areas where they may provide green space (vegetation) and blue space in the form of stormwater treatment ponds and wetlands. Ecological restoration, and/or replanting areas disturbed through construction activities are a common form of mitigation on road projects.

However, restoration doesn't always meet ecological expectations for either the NZ Transport Agency or key stakeholders. There are often challenges and obstacles around ecological restoration and also other components of ecological mitigation. Challenges can be encountered through the different stages of a project, from its design and construction through to its operation and maintenance. Many of these challenges are because of the road environment itself and others are from social and political influences, and expectations around what is achievable.

Challenges encountered for ecological restoration on NZ Transport Agency road projects and work that is being undertaken to address some of these challenges shall be discussed.