

A project's blessing

The Northern Gateway Alliance's Northern Motorway Extension



The NGA's communications and community relations program recently won the NZ Public Relations Institute Award for the category 'Sustained PR Program'.

"It was the first time we entered this award. We were absolutely thrilled to have won," said Kate Woodruffe, NGA Communications Manager."

The location of the motorway extension in an area of high ecological and cultural value presented a variety of new experiences and challenges for the project team.

"We needed to work closely with the Maori community, including participating in some of their traditional ceremonies," said Kate.

Prior to construction, a site blessing was arranged. About fifteen people drove up a little country road to the top of a mountain in four-wheel-drives for the dawn ceremony.

"At first I was thinking, 'I can't believe I have to get up at 3am!', I didn't know what to expect," Kate said.

The representatives from the local 'iwi' (Maori tribe) began their chanting and prayers. This was followed by a meal of meat and vegetables cooked in the traditional 'hangi' way below the ground. A 'mauri' stone was then placed in the foundations of the tunnels and bridges to mark the beginning of construction. This is similar to the European tradition of placing a coin in the doorstep of a new home. The blessings are believed to provide safe construction and safe future use of the road.

Kate found it to be a very beautiful, spiritual and worthwhile ceremony.

Developing relationships with key stakeholders was another challenge. Many were opposed to the construction, some for environmental concerns, others were against government spending on environmental enhancements or the introduction of tolls.

"In the end, even though some people remained against the project, they were happy with the way we worked with them to address their concerns."

Kate says, "Leighton Contractors people really stand out. I enjoy working with people who aim high but can also celebrate success and have fun."

The Northern Gateway Alliance (NGA) Project

- The NGA is designing, building and project managing the Northern Motorway Extension of State Highway 1 between Orewa and Puhoi.
- The NGA comprises owner-participant Transit New Zealand, Fulton Hogan, Leighton Contractors, URS New Zealand, Tonkin & Taylor and Boffa Miskell.
- This is Transit New Zealand's largest ever capital project and the first state tollway.
- The project will ease traffic congestion through Orewa and create a safer and easier route between Auckland and Northland.
- Our vision is to "Create a visual showcase of environmental and engineering excellence".
- We aim to minimise environmental impacts.
- We are committed to listening and responding to the needs of the affected community.
- The Alliance is sensitive to the cultural needs of iwi and works through established protocols.
- The Alliance will continue to progress the design of the motorway throughout the life of the project.
- The Alliance has an uncompromising attitude to worksite and public safety.
- Construction of ALPURT B2 is progressing well, with completion expected in mid-2009.