

**6 March 2012**

A new rail service for logs between Wellington and the Wairarapa is expected to reduce congestion and make driving easier over the precarious Rimutaka Hill Road. However, Masterton residents still face a long wait before trucks are diverted around the town.

Port company CentrePort, which is majority owned by Greater Wellington, has signed an agreement with KiwiRail to load rail wagons at the Waingawa railhead every week day and deliver them to the port. The service, which started on Monday, is expected to transport about 80,000 tonnes of logs a year.

The rail service is part of a plan to better accommodate the Wellington region's thriving export log trade which has nearly tripled over the last three years. CentrePort handled 583,000 cubic metres of logs last year.

Most of the logs will come from Forest Enterprises forests in Te Wharau, Ngahape and, if capacity allows, Te Mai. Forest Enterprises general manager of forestry Bert Hughes said the cost of road freight was a big factor in the company making the commitment to rail.

Mr Hughes said 80,000 tonnes of logs was about 20 per cent of the total logged in the region each year, and would mean 12 to 14 fewer truck movements a day. The region has about 68,500 ha of commercial forest, of which Forest Enterprises owns about 14 per cent.

Greater Wellington Regional Council chairwoman Fran Wilde said the initiative would help with commuter traffic over the hill. But there would be little impact on logging traffic through Masterton, and a bypass was still "some time out".

A Masterton Eastern Bypass was included in Greater Wellington's long-term 2010 Regional Land Transport Strategy, but is not in the council's draft work programme for the next three years.

"The bypass is very much at the assessment stage, not even at the design stage," Ms Wilde said.

Sources: *The Dominion Post* and Tessa Johnstone, *Wairarapa Times-Age*. To read the original *Times Age* story click [here](#) .