

# New Plymouth Airport will display \$60k replica of Don Driver mural

Christina Persico 16:08, Mar 21 2019

Artwork which has hung at New Plymouth Airport for more than 50 years will be removed and replaced with a \$60,000 replica, it has been confirmed.

Debate has raged for months on the fate of Don Driver's mural commemorating the first Trans-Tasman passenger flight landing at Bell Block in 1933.

A \$28 million dollar new airport terminal is being built, but the aluminum relief sculpture commemorating Charles Kingsford Smith's flight is not included. Instead the design will focus on a cultural narrative of Puketapu hapū, the historic owners of the land.



SIMON O'CONNOR/FAIRFAX NZ

Don Driver's artwork at the New Plymouth Airport.

On Thursday airport company Papa Rererangi i Puketapu (PRIP) announced it had given approval for a \$60,000 full-scale model of the mural to be put in a prominent position outside the terminal.

The replica will be resin-based and designed to withstand all weather. The original is likely to end up in the city's museum.

Airport CEO Wayne Wootton said the original work is too large to mount in the new terminal and too fragile to display outdoors.

"The original will undergo conservation work before it goes to its permanent home, which is likely to be Puke Ariki," he said.

"We're talking to the artist's family about how best to display this iconic work.

"After listening to public feedback, people clearly love it and we want to do it justice."

The resin replica will be "in a prominent place", he said.

But not everyone is happy with the decision.

Councillor Colin Johnston, who has supported keeping the original mural airport, said the matter should have been brought before the New Plymouth District Council (NPDC) given the level of public interest.

PRIP is a council-controlled organisation with NPDC its sole shareholder. However the council has no say in the airport's day-to-day operations.

"I'm not really happy with a replica," Johnston said.

"Who wants to see a replica? They want to see the original."

He had suggested to council officers that the mural could be included as part of the planned Coastal Walkway extension from Bell Block to Waitara, which will need to run past the airport.

"It's got heritage value. A lot of people like heritage stuff."

He questioned where the mural could be placed in the museum.

"If it goes to Puke Ariki it will go into the basement and no one will see it again."

Peter Barker, whose petition gained 1200 signatures, said it was a waste of \$60,000.

"There was never any intention of having the Don Driver mural in the new terminal," he said.

He said the compromise "had got the council out of trouble" but the general consensus of people he'd spoken to was that the mural belonged in the airport.

"I still believe the actual mural is site specific and the original should be where it should be.

"I'm disappointed that the council didn't have the balls to actually say, 'No, we want this as part of it.'"

PRIP is working on the replica with Conservator Detlef Klein, who oversaw another replica of a Don Driver work, Cats, which is in the main playground in Pukekura Park.

The seven-metre by two-metre Don Driver mural, depicting Kingsford Smith's 14-hour flight in the Southern Cross three-engined Fokker F.VIIb/3m monoplane, was commissioned by the then-New Plymouth City Council in 1966 and made by hand on very thin sheets of aluminum.

It has been in the current terminal since 1967.

**Stuff**