



The Vaisigano Bridge was opened for public use on Tuesday. Photographer: Aufai Areta Areta.

Bridge opening hailed as injection for morale, businesses

Adel Fruean

Residents living on east Upolu returned to school and work from the Father's Day long weekend to be greeted by a brand new \$43 million Vaisigano Bridge, which was opened to the public on Tuesday morning.

Although the bridge has yet to be officially commissioned, the Government has decided to open it for use to free up traffic congestion which has become a regular feature at the area since the bridge was closed for construction.

But that was no longer the case on Tuesday morning and it was a welcome reprieve not just for motorists in general but also the business community at Matautu and the surrounding area. Claire Leota, co-owner of Siva Afi, welcomed the opening, saying it is a much-needed injection to morale and businesses.

"We hope that seven months later things will start to pick up and we get more traffic down here because

it's been really dead," she said.

She said the major impact on their business was the restaurant.

"I mean we have all suffered, the Marina, and then Seafood Gourmet closed for several months; it's just been awful."

Peter Jensen, owner of Kool Shack, agrees.

He said on the first day that the bridge was opened, he had a lot more customers. Before the bridge was opened, he said that it was very hard on his business with less customers because some could not be bothered to drive the long way or because of the potholes from the roads.

A Vaiala resident, Tuulima Laiti praised the Government for another successful project that will benefit the people of Samoa.

"The new bridge will assist with limiting traffic jams because every morning there are so many cars in long queues because there was only one road to use.

"However, I expected it to be a four lane bridge because but it's not,

overall it's a good initiative."

The Manager of Scoops ice-cream and delights, Leilani Fruean, also welcomed the good news.

"When the bridge closed, it was hard for Scoops especially because you had to go around through the Leone bridge."

She also added that it was a double impact for their business with limited opening hours due to the state of emergency orders.

"We are so thankful to our loyal customers that have kept us going through these hard times.

"And now with the new bridge opening it makes it easier for our customers to come to us.

"A lot of our customers that came today shared their joy of the bridge finally opening and making it convenient for those going to work, school and also just for an easy flow of traffic."

The Chief Executive Officer of the Land Transport Authority (L.T.A.), Galumalemana Taatialeoititi Schwalger, said the public will be

able to use the \$43 million project before its official launch later this month. She said it is only necessary to open the road for use considering the continuous traffic congestion in the east coast road that has forced travelers to take the detour road in Levili. Construction works for the Vaisigano bridge began in May 2018 by Japanese Konoike Construction company. Local subcontractors Bluebird construction, Capella Pacific construction Samoa and Ott Constructor also contributed to the 27 months construction works.

The C.E.O. said that small vehicles can use the bridge but the heavy trucks are advised to use the alternative route that is being used as a detour to travelers.

Government contributed to the project by way of lease of the contractor's temporary yard, relocation of affected utilities, obtaining relevant permits, maintenance works and exemption of import and duty taxes.

Savai'i 'investment' company under investigation

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cense," he said.

Mr Olarewaju denied that the business was based on a pyramid scheme model, or a classic fraudulent system of making money based on recruiting an ever-increasing pool of "investors."

(The schemes eventually collapse when the recruitment of new investors stops.)

Its bank accounts have been frozen, the Samoa Observer has learned.

Mr Olarewaju told the Samoa Observer that issues with the company - which was started about two months ago - began when their agent in Savai'i attempted to transfer funds from her personal account to the business'

"She [the business agent] was trying to transfer \$20,000 into our company account but then our account got frozen," Mr. Olarewaju said.

"And so we went to Central Bank and we had [a] two hour [long] meeting with them and the advice is that we need to follow guidelines if we really want to continue with the investment company," said Mr Olarewaju.

He said the company ultimately holds more than \$100,000 in its accounts with the Bank of the South Pacific (B.S.P.).

The Country Head of the B.S.P., Tautiaga Maryann Viali-Vaai, declined to comment on behalf of the bank.

"I cannot comment further pending the investigation by the Central Bank of Samoa," Tautiaga said.

"I would like to reiterate however that in exercising our obligations under sections 23 and 24 of the Money Laundry Prevention Act 2007 to protect customers and the public at large, BSP works closely with the Central bank of Samoa, by reporting any suspicious transactions that we detect through the banking system.

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