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Drawings being prepared for courthouse reconstruction

By MARK BIRCH

WORKING DRAWINGS are being prepared for the \$800,000 project to reconstruct the New Plymouth Courthouse.

Yesterday Justice Department regional courts manager, Eric Franklyn, Palmerston North, said the project was on track, with some aspects to be completed by the end of this year and the rest to be finished early next year.

The revamp is intended to attack big backlogs of jury trials by providing a total of four courtrooms, new judges' chambers and jury accommodation, more cells for prisoners, and a lift for disabled access. The 21-strong courthouse staff will stay in the courthouse building, while the Family Court and the law library move across to the Atkinson Building on Devon St West. There will be a covered way linking both buildings. It is envisaged that the redevelopment will provide sufficient facilities for at least 15 years.

Consultations between Justice Department consultant John Cooper, Wellington, and the police, Taranaki District Law Society, courthouse staff, High Court and District Court judges and the judicial building committee were 99% complete, said Mr Franklyn.

The revamp would have to be a phased job, to allow the courthouse staff to keep working and court hearings to be held throughout the construction period. Thus courthouse business would continue, although under difficulties.

Mr Franklyn expected the physical work to start with the shifting of the law library and some other facilities from the courthouse to the Atkinson Building.