

Auckland CBD Victopia apartment tenants, businesses nearby safe but concerns over lengthy road closures

6 Jul, 2019 5:00am

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NZ Herald

By: **Michael Neilson** and **Bernard Orsman**

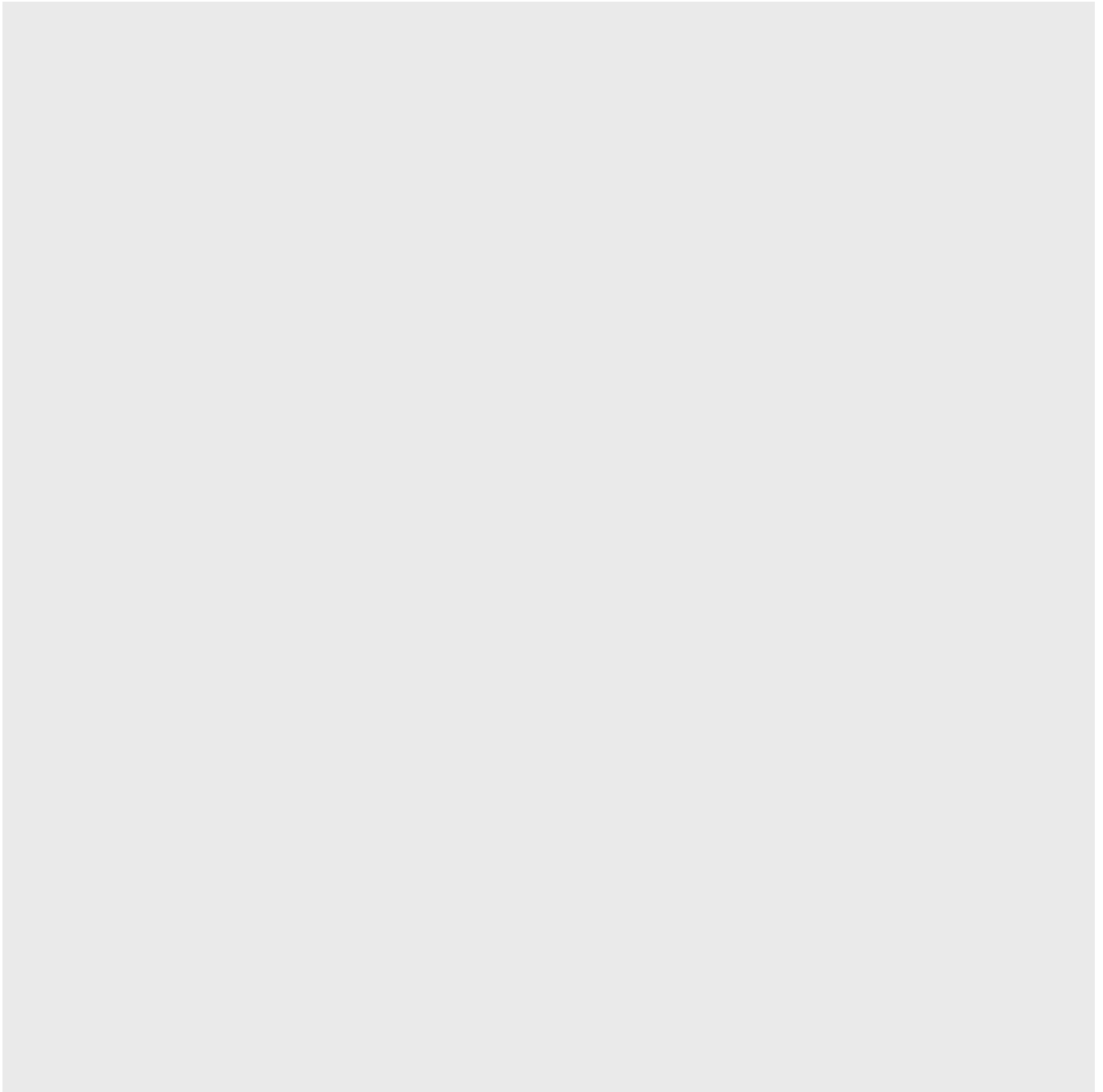
Residents and businesses near a central Auckland apartment block where a 40kg panel blew off in a storm have been told they are safe but traffic using the area faces days of delays.

The loss of the panel from the Victopia building on the corner of Victoria St West and Nelson St forced road closures which caused long traffic delays.

Ian Harris, who represents residents, said the incident did not mean people had to get out of their apartments.

He said about 20 per cent of the 203 apartments up to level 3 had been vacated so that remedial work worth \$40 million could proceed. The work, which began in March, is expected to take about two years.

An inspection on Friday morning had identified other loose panels, but Harris said there was no issue for residents.



The Victopia apartments with a missing panel that fell to the ground during high winds on Thursday. Photo / Will Trafford

About 40 panels had been marked with red crosses as needing reinforcement. Harris said these would be covered with plywood sheets before a net was thrown over the area as a secondary precaution.

An abseiling team was working with two cranes to do the work on Friday afternoon, and would resume first thing on Saturday.

Meanwhile plans were also being drawn up to erect scaffolding facing Victoria St West, a busy thoroughfare for a large number of vehicles and pedestrians.

Harris said they were hoping to finish necessary work and be able to reopen the roads by early next week, depending on the weather.

But a manager for the crane firm, Teak Construction, told the *Herald* such a job would normally take three weeks, and at minimum at least a week.

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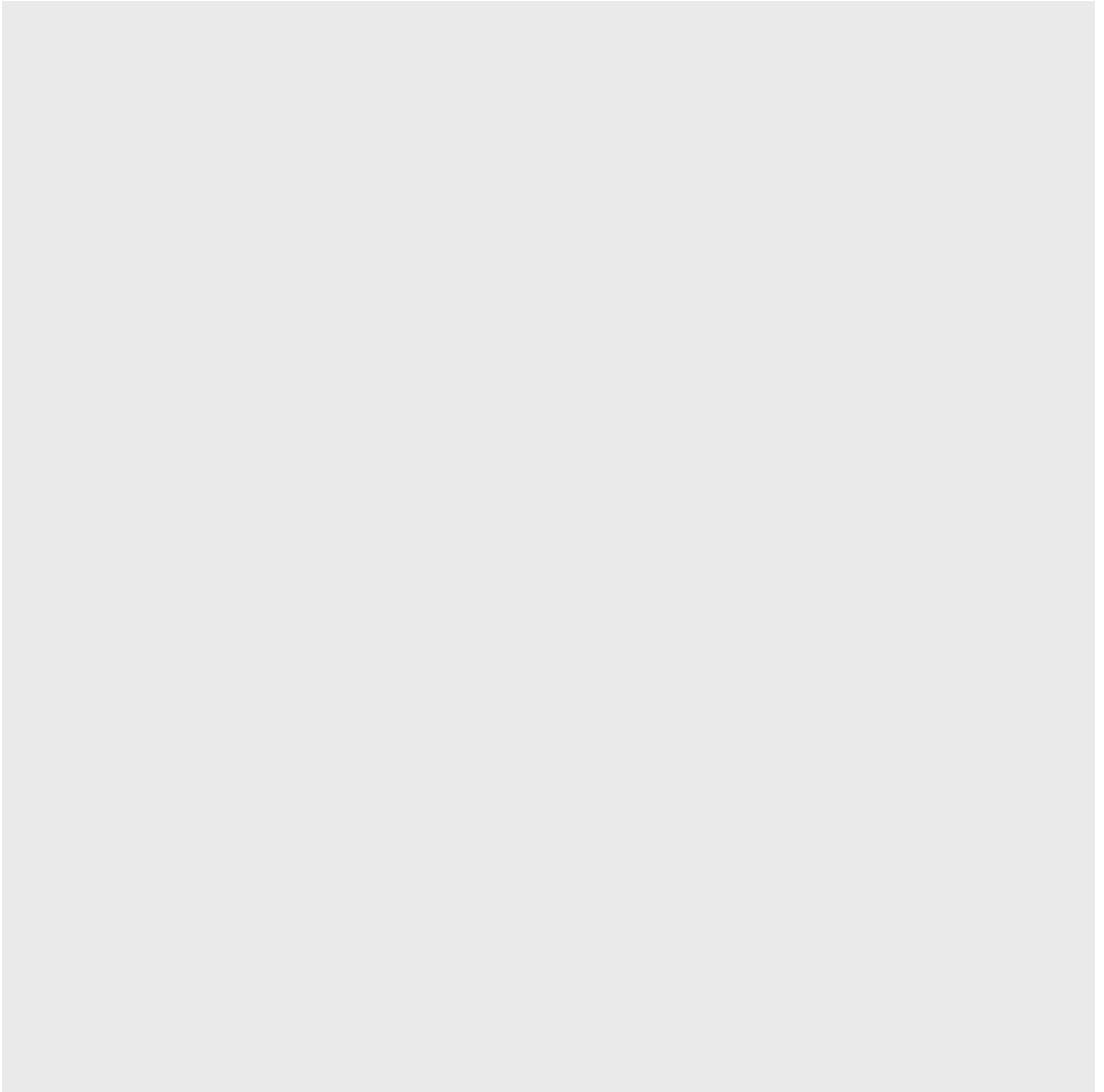
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One occupant who asked not to be named said he was annoyed he could not get his vehicle out of the apartment but he understood the reasoning.

"They need to fix the issues with the building and that is why all of the work is going on."



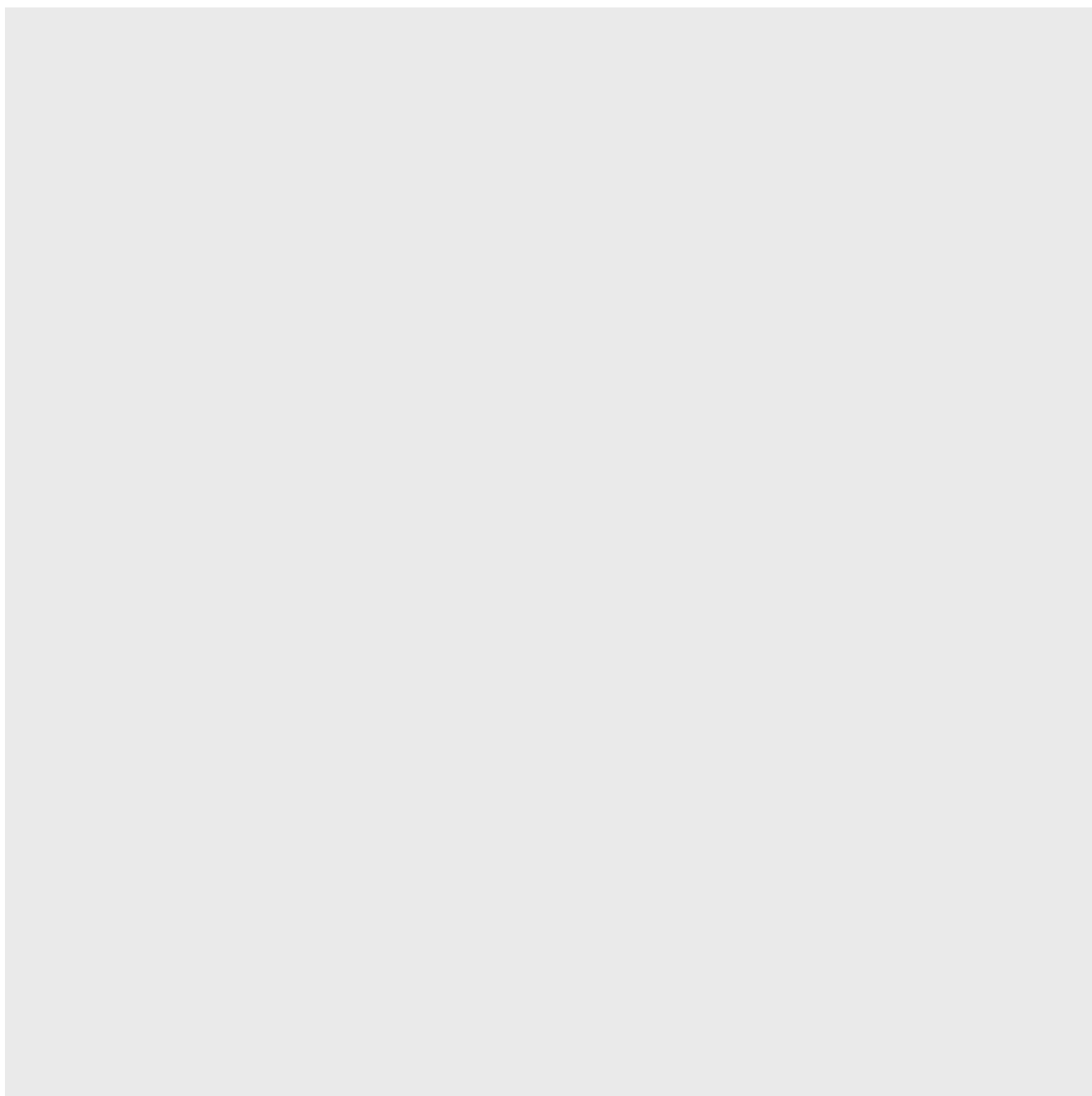
Police outside the Victopia Apartments on Thursday after a panel fell down during strong winds. Photo / Will Trafford

A rental car company on Nelson St was facing difficulties with the one-way road closed, meaning some customers had to drive the wrong way up the street to drop off their cars.

Some customers left their vehicles on nearby streets.

Nelson Cafe owner Amy Wong said her shop near the Victoria St intersection on Friday was "very quiet".

"Normally people can park in the five minute zones nearby, but not today, so we are feeling the impacts."



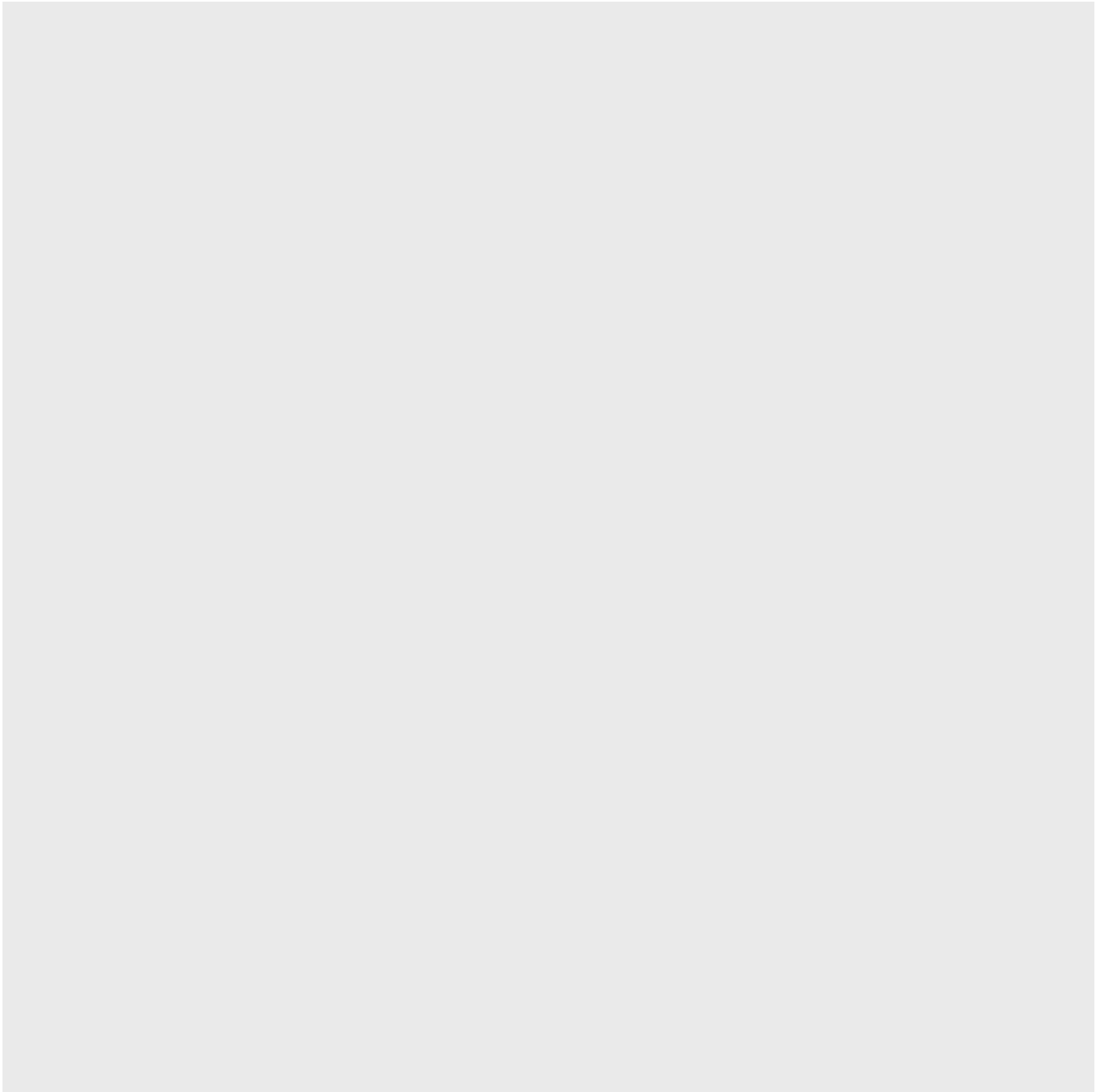
A crane getting to work on the Victopia apartment building where a large panel was blown off in a storm.
Photo / Alex Burton

They were hoping the road would be open by the end of weekend.

"Our fingers are crossed, if it is any longer it could be really bad for our business."

A witness on Thursday said she heard a "very loud bang", then saw dust fly up from behind a construction fence when the panel fell.

The panel fell off a bedroom on level 13, 36m above the ground.



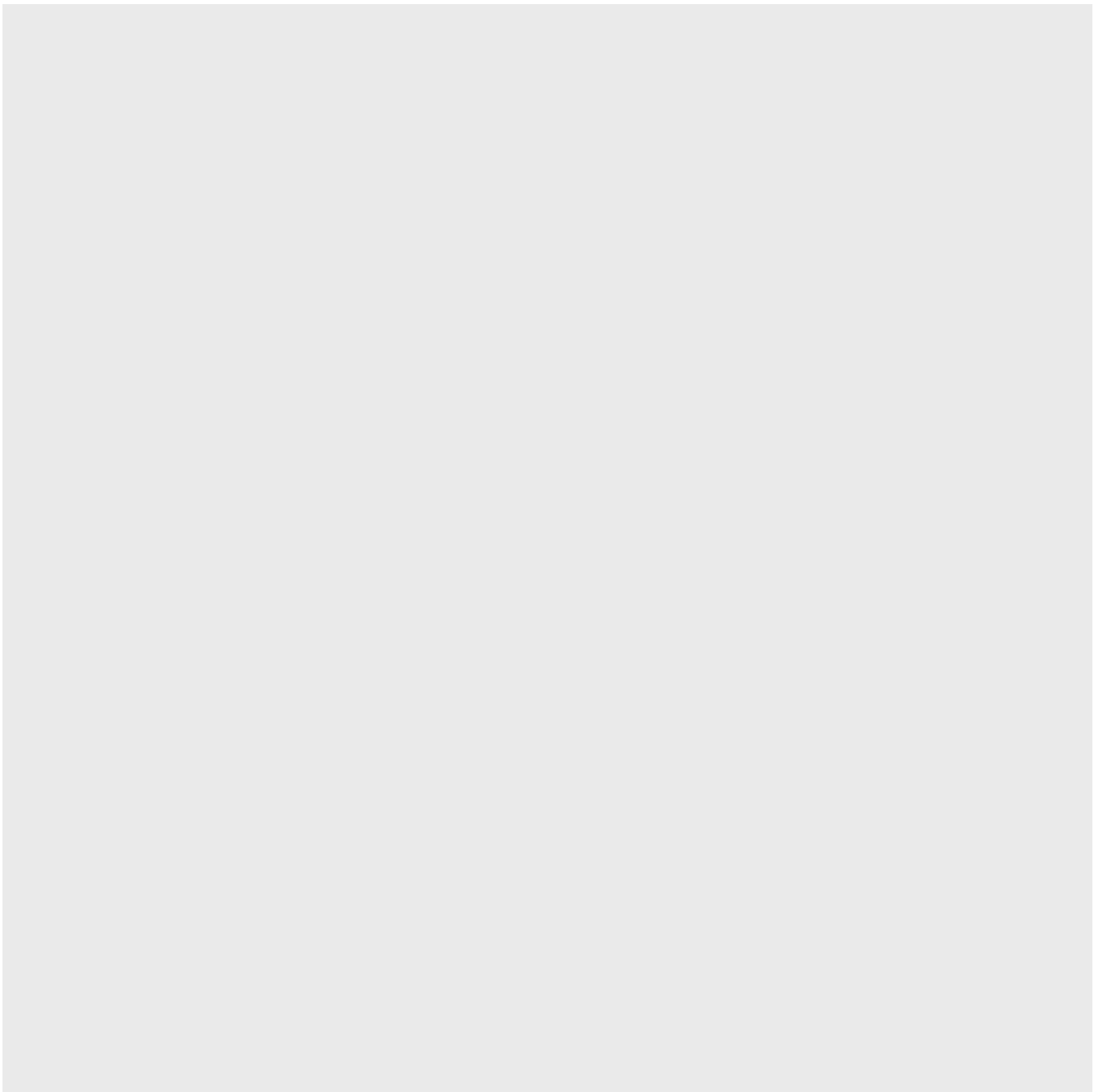
Traffic chaos at the intersection of Victoria St West and Nelson St in Auckland's CBD. Photo / Alex Burton

It was 1.2m wide and 2m long and made of fibre cement, weighing 30 to 40kg, the crane firm manager said on Friday morning.

Auckland Mayor Phil Goff said he wanted answers about safety issues at the building.

"I expect council officers to be asking hard questions of the building owner about the safety of the panels on this building."

Chairperson of the building's body corporate Jacquie Turner said Goff "needs to get his facts straight".



Traffic chaos looking up Nelson St on Friday. Photo / Alex Burton

"The council allowed the building to be built back in 2003/2004 with unproven product that we are now fixing," said Turner, who lives in the building.

"We are all very angry, have gone through hell and with legal battles, gone through millions."

Turner said the public could be assured there were no safety concerns with the building, and work would continue through the weekend to fix the issues as soon as possible.


Auckland Transport said closures were in place on Victoria St West between Nelson St and Hobson St, Nelson St from the Victoria St intersection to Fanshawe St, and the eastbound lane on Victoria St West into Nelson St.

A spokesman said traffic lights across the city were being live managed to deal with the road closures.

There were also traffic control staff allowing traffic to turn from Nelson St to Victoria St West, and boards at entrance points to the area advising of closures.

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