



## MINISTERIAL BRIEFING NOTE

**Subject** Background Information for Northland Visit  
**Date** 05 December 2014  
**OCU number** BRI- 0470  
**Priority** Routine

### Contact for telephone discussion (if required)

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### Action taken by Office of Minister of Transport

- Noted
- Approved
- Seen by Minister
- Referred to
- Needs change
- Withdrawn
- Overtaken by events

05 December 2014

Minister of Transport

## Background Information for Northland Visit

### Purpose

1. You are scheduled to visit Northland on Friday 19 December 2014. The visit will be hosted by the region's local government leaders, who greatly appreciate the opportunity to share with you their key issues and challenges, which range from broad or generalised concerns to highly site specific issues.
2. The attached overview provides you with information on the Northland transport network and the key issues for local leaders. The overview covers
  - Uncertain and limited rail, sea and air links
  - Limited travel choices, with only Whangarei offering a urban bus service
  - An extensive (and relatively expensive) road network which is in generally good condition, but with weak points
  - Steady decline in travel demand across both the state highway and local networks
  - State highways move most of the region's traffic but having substantially lighter traffic per km than other regional networks in the Upper North Island
  - Highly concentrated regional traffic volumes
  - High reliance on trucking to service the steadily growing freight task
  - Important tourist routes which can be further developed
  - Significant and growing resilience challenges
  - A reasonable road safety performance, with areas of high risk.
3. We will provide you with a more detailed note on the planned itinerary and some of the projects and sites that will visited.

Recommendation

- 4 It is recommended that you note the overview and, if required, direct us on which topics or issues you require additional or more detailed information before you visit the region.

*Ernst Zöllner*

Ernst Zöllner

Regional Director Auckland and Northland

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*Simon Bridges*

Hon Simon Bridges, Minister of Transport

Noted  Approved  Declined

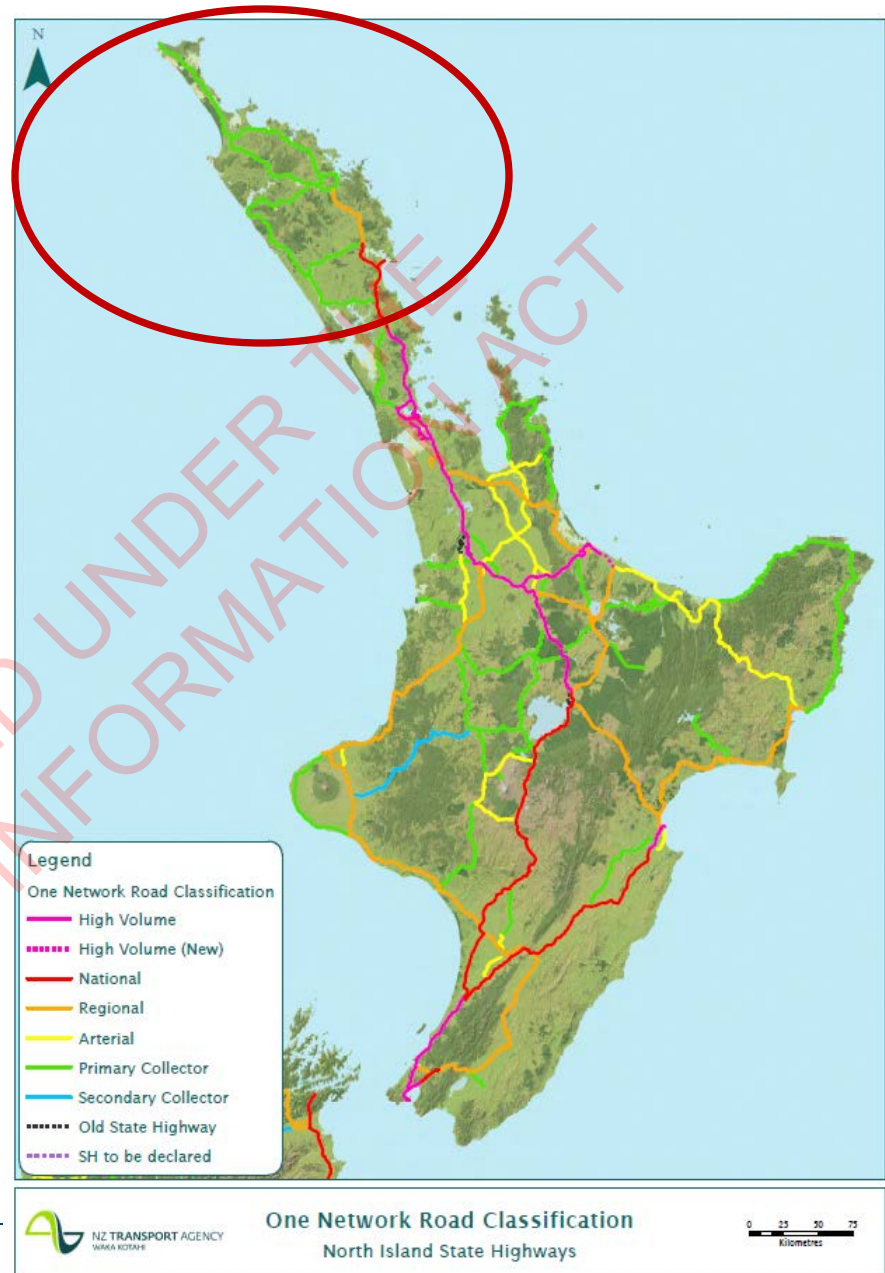
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Date

RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT

# Northland

An overview of its transport network and the key issues for local leaders



# Key points on Northland's transport system

*An isolated region that's heavily dependent on its roading network, with...*

1. Uncertain and limited rail, sea and air links
2. Limited travel choices, with only Whangarei offering an urban bus service
3. An extensive (and relatively expensive) road network which is in generally good condition but with weak points
4. Steady decline in travel demand across the state highway and local networks
5. State highways move most of the region's traffic but having substantially lighter traffic per km than other regional networks in the Upper North Island
6. Highly concentrated regional traffic volumes
7. High reliance on trucking to service the steadily growing freight demand
8. Important tourist routes which can be developed further
9. Significant and growing resilience challenges
10. Reasonable road safety performance with areas of high risk

# Introduction to Northland

## *- an isolated region that's heavily dependent on its roading network*

- Northland is approximately 300km long from Kaiwaka to Cape Reinga. The Auckland isthmus effectively separates the Northland region from the rest of New Zealand. As a result, Auckland is a key lifeline for Northland.
- Northland's population is around 160,000 of which just over one-third live in Whangarei. The low population and geographically dispersed settlement pattern mean there is a high dependency on private vehicles for inter and intra regional trips.
- There is relatively high population growth in the south, largely as a result of Auckland's growth. The north is relatively remote and sparsely settled. The east coast is characterised by high recreational use and coastal subdivision, with growth in coastal development in areas such as Mangawhai, Marsden Point/Ruakaka, Paihia, Kerikeri and the Doubtless Bay area. This has an impact on traffic congestion at weekends and holiday periods. The west coast has few settlements and some areas of decreasing population.
- Northland has several economically deprived rural communities, particularly in the Far North, with some of the lowest average income levels in New Zealand. Its rural and tourism based economy comprises pastoral farming, forestry and fishing. These industries rely on good transport (particularly roading) connections for access to Auckland, the rest of New Zealand and international markets (such as Northport). The transport system needs to be responsive to changing patterns in these areas, for example, the growth in farm dairy conversions and fluctuations in the forestry harvesting cycle.





## 2. Limited travel choices, with only Whangarei offering an urban bus service

- Contracted bus services only operate in urban Whangarei. A total mobility scheme operates in Whangarei for people with disabilities.
- The region also has a developing section of the New Zealand Cycle Trail in the Far North, which will eventually connect the east and west coastlines.



Patronage on the Whangarei City Link service.

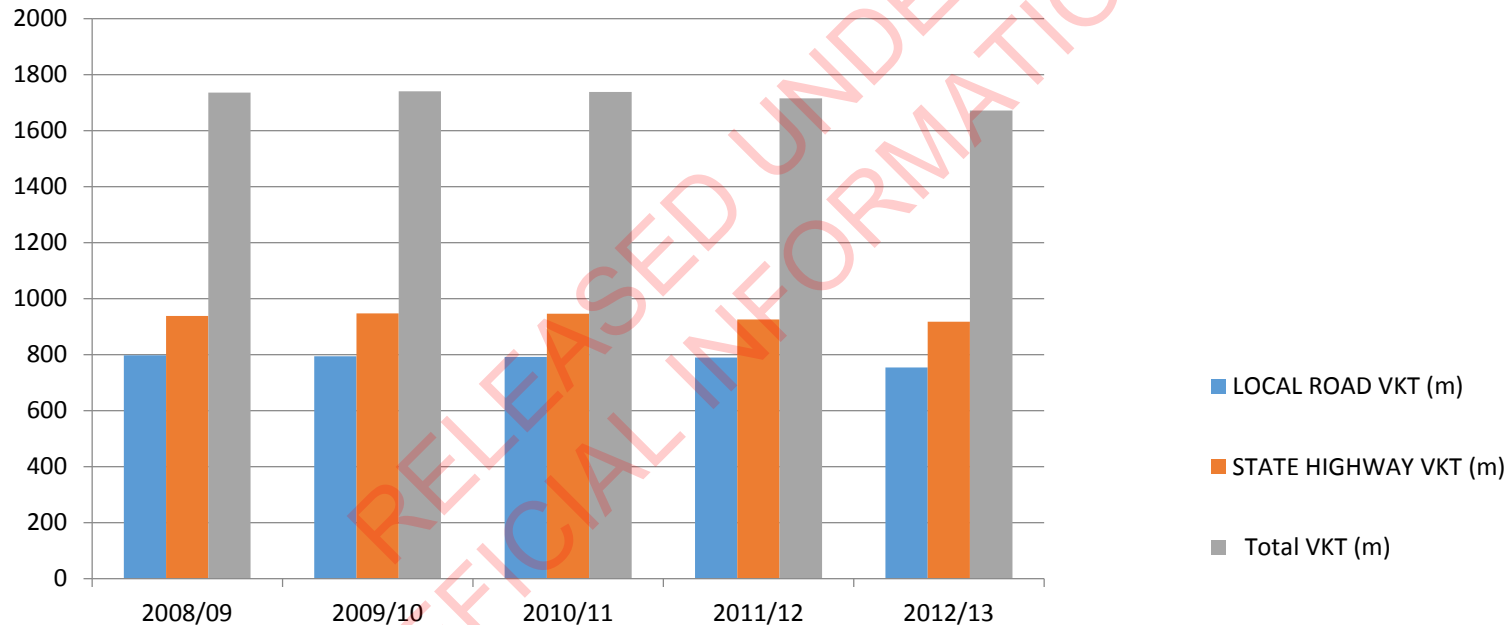


### 3. An extensive (and relatively expensive) road network which is in generally good condition but with weak points

- The region has approximately 6,626km of roads including 749km of state highways. Its main artery, State Highway 1, is around 340km long. The state highway network is fully sealed. 40% of the 5,877km of local roads is sealed. *The region has a high ratio of road length per head of population (42.7m/person compared to 22.3m/person nationally).*
- Given the geological and climatic challenges it is an expensive network to maintain, renew and operate.
  - *The state highway network is currently one of the highest-funded networks per lane km outside the three metropolitan areas. The draft 2012-15 regional programme proposes a 20% increase in maintenance, renewals and operations expenditure.*
  - *Maintenance, renewals and operations expenditure on the three local roading networks is at or above the national average for similar networks.*
- The state highway network's general pavement and surface condition is better than the New Zealand average, although *there are specific sections which require remedial work.*
- Taken together, the condition and performance of Northland's local roads is 'stable' and on par with the national average for local roads. *However, there is considerable variation across the networks and may be a growing risk of deferred maintenance.*
- Taken together, the network has one of the best safety 'star' ratings outside the three metropolitan areas *although there are identified sections and intersections where improvements are being planned.*

## 4. Steady decline in travel demand across the state highway and local networks

- Overall the demand for travel by road has declined in recent years, with annual total kilometres travelled declining for state highways and local roads. *This is in contrast to national trends for state highways and local roads. However, freight volumes are projected to steadily increase to 2042.*



## 5. State highways move most of the region's traffic but have substantially lighter traffic per km than other regional networks in the Upper North Island

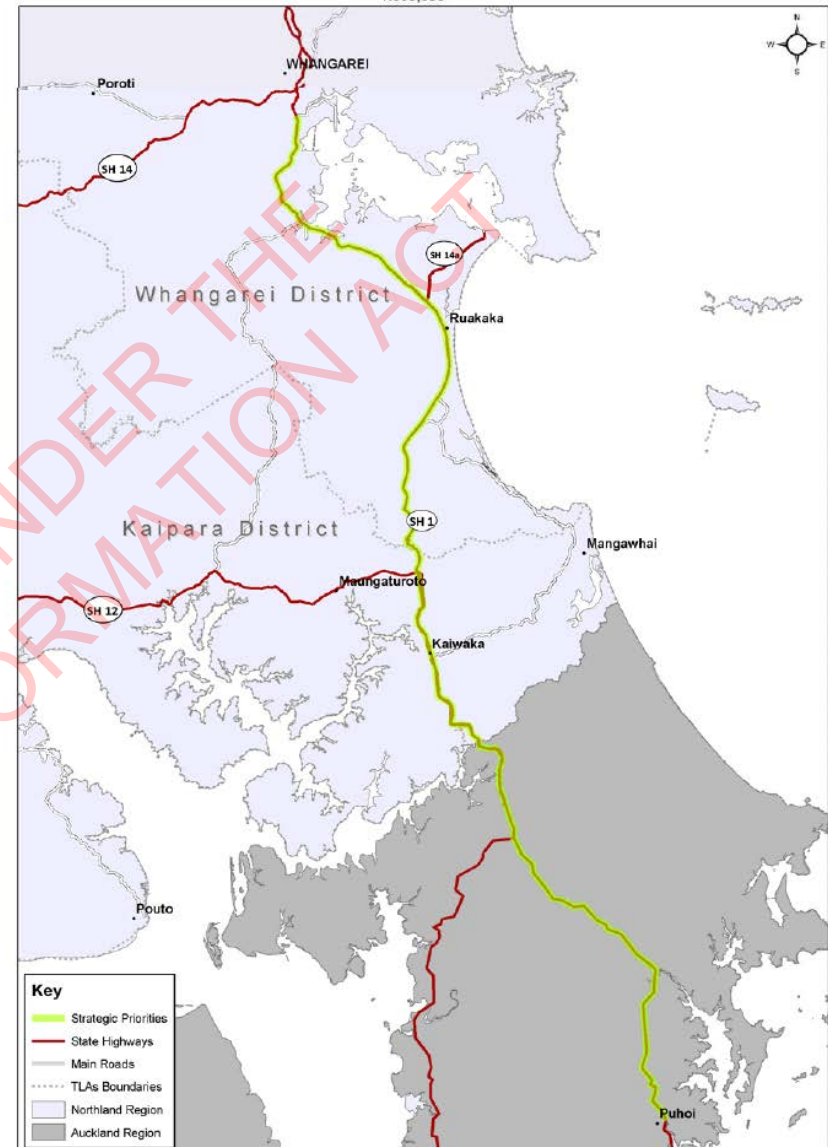
- Despite Northland's state highways comprising 11.3% of the total state highway length, 55% of the region's annual travel by road is on state highways. However, the state highway networks in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions carry even higher shares of their respective annual travel.
- As a whole, the Northland state highway network carries substantially less traffic per km than the networks in Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.

	Population (2013)	Total road length (km)	SH road length (km)	Population/SH road length (km)	SH % of regional network length	Total VKT (million)	SH VKT (million)	SH % of regional VKT	Total VKT (million)/km	SH VKT (million)/SH km
Northland Region	158,700	6610	750	212	11.3	1672	918	55	0.25	1.22
Waikato	418,500	11,237	1727	242	15.3	5364	3270	61	0.48	1.89
Bay of Plenty	278,000	4,596	748	372	16.1	2713	1556	57	0.59	2.08
NZ	4,464,000	94,160	10,916	409	11.6	41896	21845	52	0.44	2.00

## 6. Highly concentrated regional traffic volumes

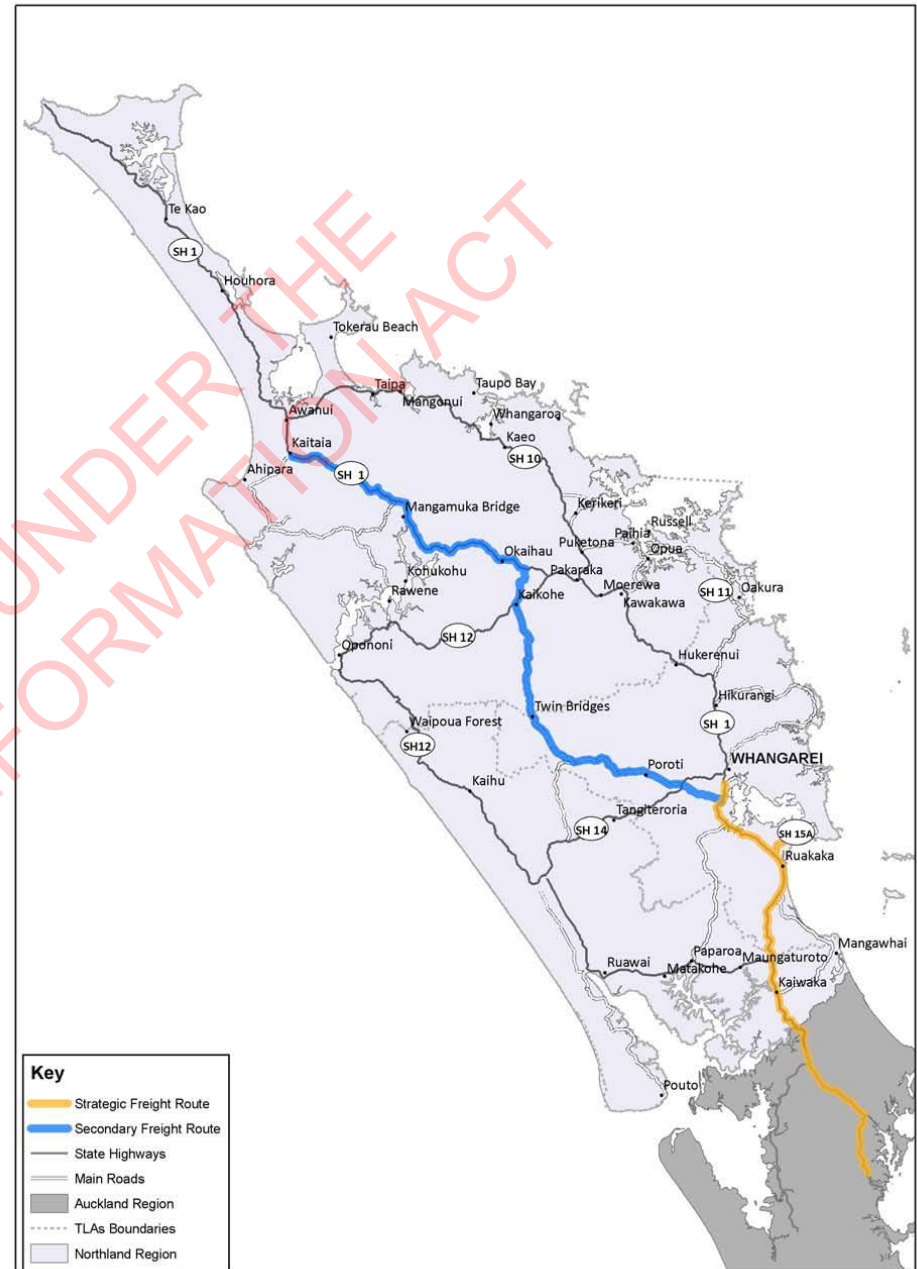
- Traffic is concentrated on the national strategic route from Auckland to Whangarei (10,000 average daily counts in Wellsford on State Highway 1 and 20,000 in Whangarei) with low volumes on the remainder of the network (1,200 north of Kaikohe and 2,500 in the west on State Highway 14). *Refer to issues below.*
- Congestion is mainly focused around Whangarei during the morning and afternoon peak periods. Whangarei is anticipated to grow in the next 30 years with development focused around the state highway network and access points such as the regional hospital on State Highway 14.
- There is also planned growth at the Marsden Point area. Residential and industrial growth will place the link between State Highway 1 and State Highway 15A under increased pressure. Other areas where traffic volumes are expected to grow include Waipapa and the north end of Kaitiāia.

Strategic Priorities - Puhoi to Whangarei  
1:350,000



## 7. High reliance on trucking to service the steadily growing freight task

- With its high proportion of primary industries, Northland's network has to accommodate a relatively large number of freight vehicles. Forestry is projected to continue to grow although its fortunes can vary significantly from year to year. Primarily focused in the north and west of the region, most logs are transported to the rest of New Zealand or overseas via Northport, using State Highway 1.
- Over the last decade the Crown has invested around \$88 million to develop an inland freight route between SH1 at Kaikohe and SH1 south of Whangarei, mainly to support the forestry sector. This route is used by an average of 200 trucks per day.
- *The route has the potential to take further heavy vehicles as an alternative to using State Highway 1 and other local roads, but local authorities argue that the route places a high cost burden on them (refer to local issues below).*





## 8. Important tourist routes which can be developed further

- Tourism is an important economic driver accounting for 3% of Northland's regional GDP and 6% of Northland's employment.
- Northland has a dedicated, sign-posted regional touring route (the Twin Coast Discovery Route) which covers 800km from Auckland around the two coastlines. The route supports the region's branding and encourages tourists to travel to more remote areas such as the Hokianga Harbour.

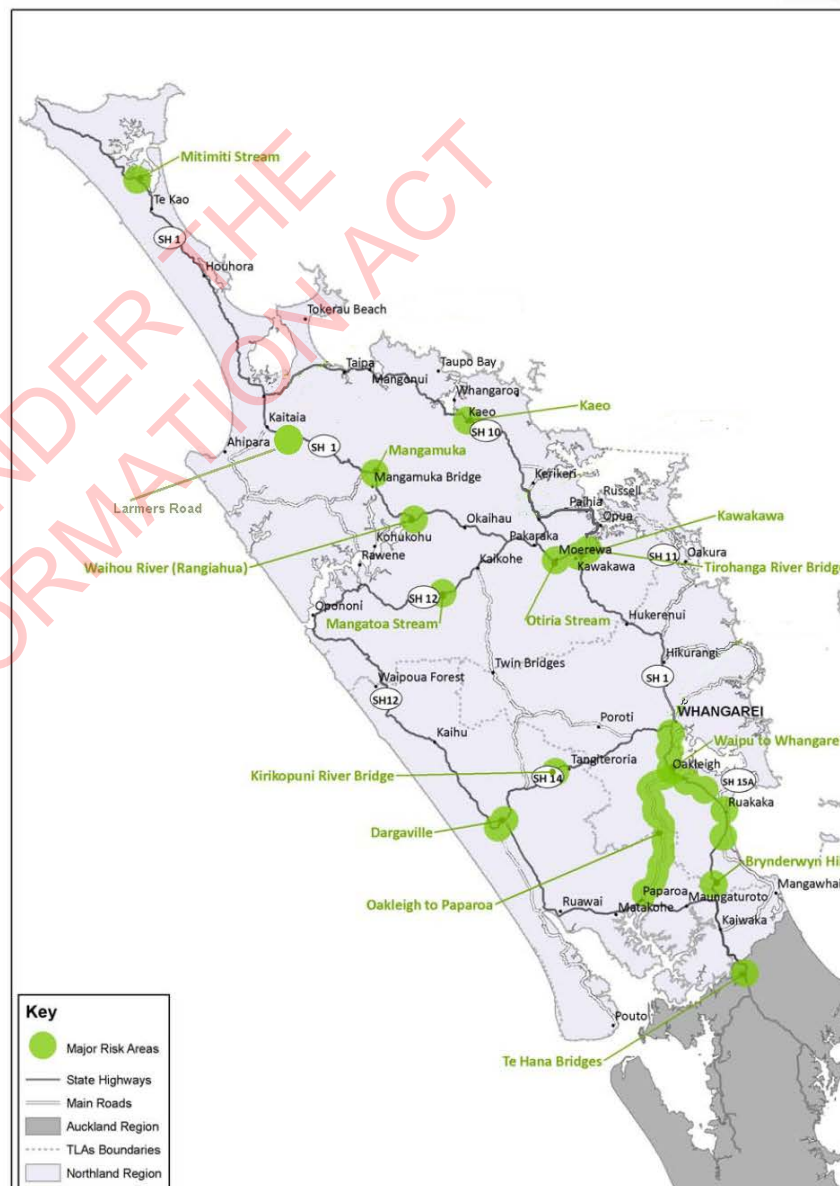




## 9. Significant and growing resilience challenges

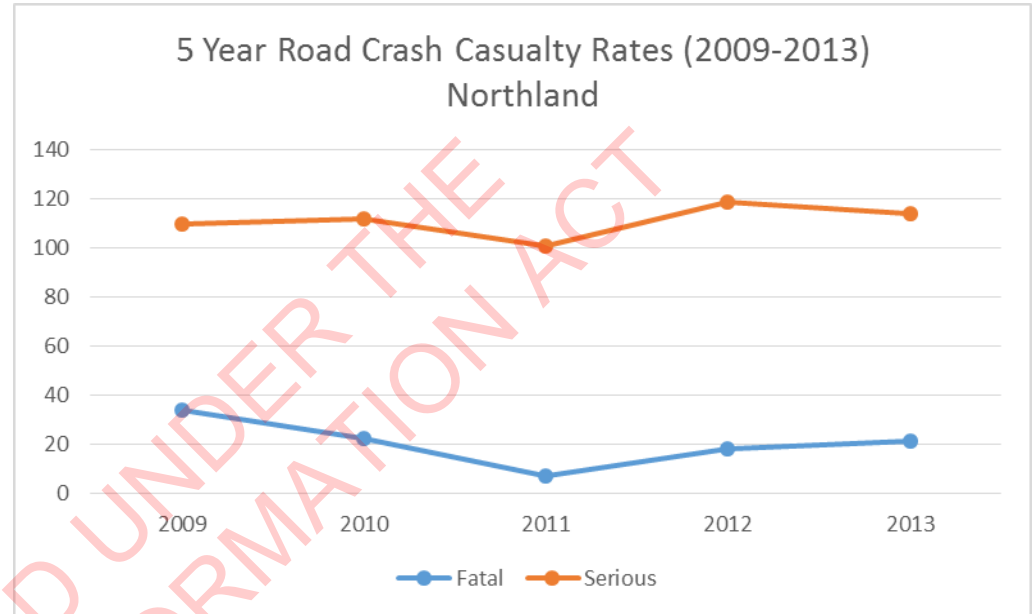
- The region has a difficult topography. It has steep-sided hill country with 15 major harbours and numerous estuaries, inlets and peninsulas. It also has a challenging geology including an abundance of ‘Onerahi Chaos’, a type of soggy clay. This clay can add considerable cost to road construction and maintenance compared to other regions.
- An increase in high-impact seasonal rainfall events tests resilience, safety and route security.
- In parts of the region there is a lack of viable alternative routes, which can result in long detours and significant additional travel times when major routes are compromised.
- *Despite these climatic and geological challenges, from a national perspective the network is assessed as reasonably resilient. However, there are identified sections for which increased preventative maintenance and/or improvements are planned. For some sites the solution is better catchment management (refer to issues below).*

Major Risk Areas - Northland



## 10. Reasonable road safety performance with areas of high risk

- Northland has had some success in reducing fatal road accidents between 2009-2011 (a low of seven fatalities was recorded in 2011 against 34 in 2009). However, fatalities have shown an upward trajectory in 2012 and 2013.
- The top causes of road crashes in Northland are driver-led factors such as poor judgement, overtaking and handling.
- Poor road alignment contributes to road trauma. Key projects such as Akerama Curves realignment and Brynderwyns safety barrier installation will help improve the general safety of the network.



### Highest risk corridors:

- SH1: Wellsford to SH12
- SH1: Brynderwyn to Whangarei
- SH1: Ohaewai to Whangarei
- SH11: Airfield to Lillypond
- SH12: Dargaville –Tokatoka

### Highest risk intersections:

- Pakaraka (SH1/10)
- Puketona (SH10/11)

# Public feedback on the network

## *Three key issues currently being raised by all Northland leaders*

- 1. The critical importance of better access to and from Auckland.** There is strong support for the Puhoi to Warkworth Road of National Significance and a subsequent long-term strategy and programme for Warkworth to Whangarei (not just to Wellsford) to address weak links such as Te Hana Bridge and the Brynderwyns.
  - The Transport Agency is developing a programme business case for the long-term development of the Auckland to Whangarei national strategic route. A draft is due in June 2015.*
- 2. The importance of the Inland Freight Route.** There is strong regional consensus around the need for the route to be further upgraded by the Crown (including the upgrade of the Loop and Portlands Road intersection with State Highway 1) and for the whole route to be declared a new State Highway '13'.
  - The Loop to Smeastons Road intersection business case is being advanced with use of a Crown grant. The Transport Agency is considering the request for the rest of the Inland Freight Route to be declared a state highway.*

3. **The need to address the resilience challenges.** The July 2014 storms caused extensive damage to the region's roading network and highlighted the vulnerability of some communities' access to services, employment, ports and the rest of New Zealand. Extensive calls have been made for increased investment from the Transport Agency and the Crown to address known areas of risk.

*There are four aspects to the Transport Agency's response:*

- **Restoration and rehabilitation of the storm damage.** Substantial progress has been made to date.
- **Prevention:** A proposed new \$3m-\$18m preventative maintenance programme for 2015-18 to address known areas of risk. Six proposed new state highway improvement projects for 2012-15 to upgrade infrastructure such as bridges, walls and culverts.
- **Mitigation:** Improved focus on readying parallel routes and services, and providing backup systems. Addressing catchment management issues where road works are unable to solve the issue or is not most cost effective solution.
- **Preparedness:** This includes ensuring collective understanding and readiness across partner organisations.

> FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED 2012-15 PROGRAMME WILL BE PROVIDED WITH THE ITINERARY

## Some of the more specific issues being raised by regional leaders

Kaipara District	Whangarei District	Far North District
<p>Support for addressing a substantial renewals backlog following an extensive rates revolt. <i>Good progress is being made.</i></p>	<p>Completion of the extensive improvements being made to State Highway 1 through the urban area. <i>Good progress being made.</i></p>	<p>Greater support for emergency works to address storm damage on the local roading network. <i>Most claims received to date have been accepted and progressed, but some differences persist around what are best value for money solutions.</i></p>
<p>Addressing safety issues around specific points such as the Matakohe bridges on State Highway 12. <i>Project is included in draft 2015-18 RLTP.</i></p>	<p>Corridor improvements to State Highway 14 in Whangarei linked to substantial growth at the regional hospital site. <i>Agreement to develop a long term corridor plan by mid 2015, and project included in draft 2015-18 RLTP.</i></p>	<p>Despite its Funding Assistance Rate lifting from 58% to 64%, leaders argue that additional National Land Transport Fund and Crown funding is needed to improve quality of all roads including projects around Kerikeri and Pahia to address seasonal congestion issues. <i>The Draft 2015-18 includes a substantial package to address resilience and congestion concerns, but its possible that money of these projects will not be able to receive funding in 2015-18 due to national demand.</i></p>
<p>Improving the resilience of the Papanoa-Oakleigh road, which is a diversion route for State Highway 1 Brynderwyns. <i>Being considered as part of State highway preventative maintenance package for 2015-18.</i></p>	<p>Support to address dust mitigation for residents on unsealed roads where there have been significant increases in forest logging truck movements. <i>Agency not able to support these local mitigation efforts from the NLF but is supporting the councils with national guidance and peer support.</i></p>	
<p><i>Comment: A small rural road controlling authority which is restoring its financial capacity and which operates at a reasonable level of capability</i></p>	<p><i>Comment: A well-performing road controlling authority with strong capability, a history of investment in required works but at risk of deferring some required renewals</i></p>	<p><i>Comment: A 'stressed' road controlling authority with limited capability and capacity due to extensive vacancies and high staff turnover</i></p>