

Manawatū/Whanganui Regional Update

August 2020

Overview

As a key freight and transport hub, the Manawatū/ Whanganui region is important for regional and national economic prosperity as well as having strategic value for the whole of New Zealand. Improving safety, resilience and access at this transport 'crossroads' is a focus.

SH1 and SH3 intersect in the region, as do the main north/south and east/west rail lines. Several major distribution centres are operating or being developed in the region, which rely on good access to ports and/or airports.

The announcement of the NZ Upgrade Programme (NZUP) in January was a major boost to critical transport projects around the country. The NZUP is investing \$817m to construct a new four-lane highway from Ōtaki to north of Levin, supporting growth in Levin and providing a safer and more resilient route. The project includes a separated shared path alongside the length of the new highway. Construction is expected to begin in 2025 and be completed in 2029.

Safety improvements also planned for the key State Highways around Levin, with planning underway for improvements to SH57, SH1 south to Ōtaki and SH1 north to the Manawatū River.

The SH1 Whirokino Trestle and Manawatū River Bridge project between Levin and Foxton opened to the public in February, improving this vital freight route. The new structures include wider lanes, safer road edges, and reduce the need for heavy vehicles to take a detour via Shannon.

The Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū Tararua Highway project to connect Manawatū, the Tararua district, Hawke's Bay and northern Wairarapa is a key project. Waka Kotahi will begin enabling works in late 2020 to prepare for construction of the new SH3 route to replace the closed SH3 Manawatū Gorge route.

In October 2019 a 15ha slip occurred about 19km south of the rural township of Raetihi, severing the highway connection between Raetihi and Ohakune with Whanganui to the south. SH4 is a major trade corridor through the central North Island as well as a scenic tourist route. A temporary road was opened before Christmas 2019, with construction of a permanent solution expected to begin later this year.

The Safety Boost Programme identified several regional state highways within the Manawatū-Whanganui region that would benefit from a range of low-cost safety improvements. Some of these improvements have already been completed, and more are planned.

Keeping the land transport system well maintained and safe is a large part of the NLTP investment in the Manawatū/Whanganui region. Over the 2018–21 NLTP period, local roads will receive about \$247m and state highways around \$90m for maintenance.

Reconnecting Manawatū and Tararua

Since April 2017, SH3 through the Manawatū Gorge has been closed because of slip damage. A safe, resilient and efficient replacement route – the Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū Tararua Highway project – is progressing well. Consent documents were submitted in March, and enabling works are expected to begin in October.

Work to address safety and increased traffic volumes in Ashhurst are ongoing. The Ashhurst community steering group has been re-established to provide a forum for community and council feedback, as well as updates from Waka Kotahi and Palmerston North City Council.

Providing safe walking and cycling access to the Manawatū Gorge is an important component of the network improvements in the region. Pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles currently share a narrow two-lane bridge. A shared path being constructed on the northern side of the existing bridge provides full separation from traffic. Once traffic volumes return to full capacity, when the Te Ahu a Turanga project is completed, the shared path will provide safe passage for the growing communities on both sides of the Manawatū River. The project is expected to go out for public engagement in September.

In the last 18 months

- Repairs to SH4 Anzac Parade in Whanganui have been completed, following major flood damage to the road, footpath and cycleway. Damage from the same event at SH4 Otoko Pā and Whiskey's Corner have been repaired, while work on several other slip sites continues.
- In May 2019, the He Ara Kotahi pathway in Palmerston North opened to the public, connecting Palmerston North City, Massey University and Linton. This \$19 million project was delivered by Palmerston North City Council with funding from the Government, Waka Kotahi, Central Energy Trust and Powerco.
- In November 2019, Whanganui's Te Tuawai (The Spine) cycleway officially opened to the public. It provides a safe route across the Whanganui City Bridge. This \$2.2 million project was delivered by Whanganui District Council with funding from Government and Waka Kotahi.

Safety

Safety is a major focus across the region, with 10 roads being made safer across Manawatū-Whanganui as part of the Safety Boost Programme, in addition to other safety improvements.

In the last 18 months

Underway or about to start

- Work to install rumble strips, signs, road safety barriers or a widened shoulder is now underway on the following five sections of Manawatū-Whanganui highways as part of an extension of the Safety Boost Programme:
 - SH56 Makerua (SH56) to Palmerston North
 - SH57, SH3 to SH56
 - SH54 and SH3 to Feilding
 - SH4 Tohunga Junction to Whanganui
 - SH3 Palmerston North to Ashhurst.
- Several speed reviews are underway or about to start:
 - SH3 Whanganui to Westmere
 - SH1 Bulls to Sanson
 - SH3 Palmerston North to Whakarongo
 - SH57 and SH1 Levin to Otaki

Urban centres

As well as being a major population centre, Palmerston North holds a strategic location in the region. Walking, cycling and public transport options are being improved to ensure a resilient, multi-modal transport network.

The NZ Upgrade Programme is investing \$211 million in infrastructure upgrades to increase line capacity and support increased frequency of the Capital Connection train services. The package includes the refurbishment of the Capital Connection carriages and a range of safety improvements.

On regional connectivity, Waka Kotahi is developing the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Improvements (PNITI) Detailed Business Case. This business case will identify a preferred route and supporting activities that will provide a safer, more effective connection between some of the region's key industrial areas and improve access and safety for pedestrians and cyclists. Waka

Kotahi, KiwiRail and Palmerston North City Council (PNCC) have signed an MOU outlining a shared commitment to work together on the new KiwiRail freight hub.

Regional development

Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū Tararua Highway project has a strong focus on creating positive regional outcomes, including a locals-first approach to recruitment; new housing - for the project and then made available to the community; opportunities for local business; building local capability through training and upskilling; and an unique Māori partnership model, with local iwi represented at governance, management and operational levels.

Other projects underway across the region will provide improved connectivity and resilience for journeys within and through the region. These projects are significant given the placement of the Manawatū-Whanganui region and its role for travellers and commuters as well as for the movement of freight.

The importance of resilience for these journeys has been highlighted by the closure of SH3 through the Manawatū Gorge, as well as by shorter-term closures of other roads as a result of weather events or crashes.

Work to improve safety and efficiency on SH1 was boosted by the NZUP investing \$817 million in the Ōtaki to north of Levin project. The project includes a separated shared path alongside the length of the new highway. The SH1 Whirokino Trestle and Manawatū River Bridge project between Levin and Foxton, opened to the public in February, also provides more certainty for journeys and reduces the need for heavy vehicles to take a detour via Shannon.

Investment in Manawatū-Whanganui

NLTP	2015-18	2018-21
Forecast total investment	\$527 million	\$838 million
Forecast maintenance and operations	\$386 million	\$376 million
Forecast public transport investment	\$17 million	\$25 million
Forecast walking and cycling	\$6 million	\$17 million
Regional network improvements	\$110 million	\$380 million

Overview map



