

West Coast regional transport update – August 2019

Overview

Building resilience into the state highway network to ensure the region's economy continues to flourish is our focus for investment in the West Coast's transport system. Tourism is now the fastest growing industry for the region, just behind dairy in terms of economic contribution. Both rely on safe and reliable roads.

SH6 runs the length of the region and forms a critical lifeline between the region's communities, as well as providing access to key tourism attractions such as the glaciers, Punakaiki and various walking and cycling trails. However, the highway is prone to closures from slips, rock falls, flooding and crashes. These closures not only disrupt travel but also have a significant impact on the economy.

There are no viable alternative routes when SH6 is closed; and where there are detours, these are lengthy and often on unsealed local roads. Almost half the local roads on the West Coast are unsealed.

With the West Coast's relative isolation, the result of its few connections to neighbouring regions and its challenging geographical environment, a resilient network is vital to support economic and social opportunities in the region.

Safe, reliable routes are required to the north, south and east of the West Coast as visitors often travel around the South Island and come into the region from each of three access points.

Access

Resilience work is planned for the highway network on the West Coast during this three-year National Land Transport Programme (NLTP) period to help reduce the number of closures and minimise disruption from unplanned events, in particular weather-related incidents. On SH6, SH7 and SH73, work is focused on helping prevent slips and rock falls at several known locations.

On SH7, a key freight route from the north, it is proposed to replace the single-lane wooden Ahaura Bridge with a new two-lane bridge and realign the highway.

Upgrading this bridge is part of an overall programme of work to improve freight connections to enable trucks to access the region's primary produce and get goods to market in the most cost-effective and efficient way.

With the Department of Conservation and Buller District Council, the Transport Agency is developing a plan to improve parking and pedestrian access to the iconic pancake rocks and blowholes at Punakaiki, and with the Grey District Council, Development West Coast and MBIE to improve the transport link between Blackball township and the start of the Paparoa Track.

Safety

In this NLTP period, more than \$100 million will be spent on maintenance and renewals along West Coast highways to improve both resilience and safety to support economic development.

Much of the work is focused on improving roads and roadsides at high-risk locations throughout the region by managing skid resistance, improving delineation and signage, and constructing slow-vehicle passing bays.

Work will also focus on progressing the region's speed management plan to improve safety for both residents and visiting drivers.

Walking and Cycling

Support will continue for regional walking and cycling trails where there are opportunities to grow tourism and support the visitor economy.

This includes the Croesus Trail, 10kms of which forms part of the 55km track through the Paparoa mountain range, linking the villages of Blackball and Punakaiki. The Paparoa Track has been given Great Walk status, making it one of the premier outdoor experiences in New Zealand. It is the first new track to be added to the Great Walk network since it was setup in 1993 and the first to be built for both walkers and mountain bikers.

Regional Development

The former Waiho River bailey bridge was destroyed during flooding on 26 March 2019; a new bailey bridge has since been installed. The Transport Agency investment in all work relating to this storm will total about \$9.5 million. It is important that the Transport Agency remains agile and able to respond to such damage but also that resilience work is planned to minimise such disruption in future.

Throughout the next three years, the Transport Agency will continue to work with local government, other government agencies, and communities such as Franz Josef to improve the resilience of the State Highway.

Other examples of our response to storm events includes work at Dolomite Point, Punakaiki, to fix significant damage resulting from ex-Cyclone Fehi. This was completed at a cost of about \$7.8 million. Work continues to repair storm damage at 17 Mile Bluff near Barrytown, Bruce Bay and Gates of Haast.

In the last 18 months

- Waiho River bridge repairs following the 26 March 2019 flooding at a cost of \$6.6 million. Total cost of repairs from 26 March 2019 event including Waiho bridge and damage at Fox River also in South Westland, is estimated at \$9.5 million.
- Resilience work at Dolomite Point, Punakaiki was recently completed at a cost of about \$7.8 million.

- The Taramakau Bridge was built for \$25.08 million, which was completed July 2018.
- Construction of 8 slow-vehicle passing bays on SH73 and SH7.
- Construction of the Marlborough Street/SH6 roundabout in Greymouth.
- Completed stabilising work at the Epitaph slip at Knights Point on SH6.

Underway or about to start:

- Completing repairs to storm damage at 17 Mile Bluff, Bruce Bay and Gates of Haast. This work is due to finish in June 2020.
- LED replacement programme.
- The resilience/security of SH7 will be enhanced with the replacement of the Ahaura Bridge. The single-lane partially wooden bridge will be replaced with a two-lane concrete bridge. The Resource Management Act applications have been lodged. The project aims to have a construction contractor appointed before the end of the year. Construction is anticipated to take 18 months.
- Improving safety at the Manakaiaua bridge on SH6 by improving approaches and replacing wooden handrails with guardrails. Likely to occur this financial year.

Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) investment

Through the PGF, \$11.85 million is being invested to improve tourism on the West Coast. Access roads in the Oparara Arches Basin and the Paparoa Great Walk are being upgraded, as well as safety improvements at Punakaiki.

Funding is also being provided to investigate a passenger rail service between Hokitika and Westport and \$40 million is being invested into upgrading the TranzAlpine, which runs from Christchurch to Greymouth.

Investment in the West Coast

NLTP	2015-18	2018-21
Forecast total investment	\$180 million	\$195 million
Forecast maintenance and operations	\$126 million	\$145 million
Forecast public transport investment	\$0.5 million	\$0.5 million
Regional network improvements	\$53 million	\$45 million
Total Provincial Growth Fund		\$52 million