

Significant land transport challenges facing New Zealand



New Zealand faces a complex set of land transport challenges, shaped by our rugged topography, dispersed population centres and heavy reliance on road networks. These challenges vary considerably across the country.

The country's economic prosperity is underpinned by a transport network that enables people and freight to move around efficiently, quickly and safely. Therefore, addressing these challenges is crucial for growing the nation's economy and improving quality of life.

The most significant transport challenges are:

- Maintaining existing networks.
- Providing basic access to opportunities and enabling the movement of freight around the country.
- Resilience to natural hazards and climate change.
- Congestion and capacity constraints, especially in large and growing cities.
- Reducing the level of harm to people and the environment.

Upkeep of networks

Ensuring the upkeep of our existing networks presents a major ongoing challenge. Deteriorating assets reduce the efficiency, effectiveness, and safety of the land transport system, and require more investment in the long run.

Maintaining and renewing existing roads, replacing end-of-life or at-risk bridges, and continuing to operate public transport services requires a larger share of total available funding each year.

Movement of people and freight

Facilitating the efficient movement of freight around the country, and providing access to work, education, health and essential services, and other opportunities, is the transport system's core task. This can be difficult, particularly in remote and rural areas, as well as for people with lower incomes or limited mobility.

Ensuring the safe and efficient movement of people and freight supports economic productivity, improved social cohesion, and equitable access to opportunities for all New Zealanders. Inefficient or unreliable freight movement undermines a productive economy by adding costs that are ultimately borne by us all.

Resilience to natural hazards and climate change

Resilience to natural hazards and climate change is a growing challenge. The country is prone to earthquakes, floods and landslides, which can disrupt transport networks and cause significant damage to infrastructure.

Recent weather events have highlighted how these risks are compounded by the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events. Addressing these challenges requires proactive planning, investment in resilient infrastructure and strategies for adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change on transport.

Road congestion

Population growth, dispersed land use patterns and increasing vehicle ownership contribute to growing congestion on roads, leading to delays, added economic costs, decreased productivity, and environmental degradation.

Congestion and capacity constraints in many of our major urban centres restrict economic productivity, prevent increased housing supply, and reduce the quality of life. These also have a significant impact on freight movement and overall economic productivity.

Slower and less reliable journeys reduce the number of jobs and other opportunities people can reach in a reasonable travel time, meaning they don't enjoy the benefits that growth should bring to their prosperity and quality of life.

In major urban areas, it's particularly important for investment in infrastructure and services to be accompanied by better integration between transport and land use, managing demand and making the most of the existing networks through initiatives like road pricing.

Safety

While the transport system brings great benefits to New Zealanders, reducing the level of harm to people and the environment is also a significant challenge.

New Zealand continues to experience a high rate of road crashes and fatalities, which require a multifaceted response to create a future where mistakes have much lower consequences.

Effort is also needed to reduce the negative environmental and health impacts of the transport system, including from vehicle emissions and the effects of transport infrastructure on ecosystems and water quality.

Targeted solutions

It's critical that these challenges are addressed in an efficient and effective way. This requires focusing on the most critical issues and delivering solutions tailored to local conditions.

This approach means we can make the greatest possible progress towards addressing these challenges with every dollar of public money that is spent. Innovative financing mechanisms and strategic partnerships can further leverage resources to deliver infrastructure projects that support economic growth and improve connectivity.

