

Committee Secretariat
Transport and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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Submission to the inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand

Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission, is the Crown agent responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues. Our role is to advise on – and advocate for – free, certain, enduring and practical access to the outdoors. We administer a national strategy on outdoor access, including tracks and trails. We map public outdoor access, provide information to the public, oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors, help resolve access issues and negotiate new access.

Herenga ā Nuku has a function under the Walking Access Act 2008 to provide national leadership on outdoor access. One aspect of access to the outdoors is how people get to 'the outdoors'. Unfortunately, many of our iconic outdoor landscapes are hard for people without private cars or planes to reach. There are well-researched benefits to outdoor recreation, including mental and physical well-being, connection to the environment, and family and community. Unfortunately, these well-beings are not equitably available because it is much harder for some people to reach many of our outdoor spaces.

Passenger access to Kiwirail's existing freight network and closed rail network would allow these groups of people to access parts of New Zealand that they currently cannot access. Good examples include the network of walking and biking tracks and trails along National Park and the West Coast. But they also have the potential for far greater use of existing or new tracks in forestry blocks along the rail network supporting our forestry industry.

Herenga ā Nuku supports a more diverse and regular network of passenger rail opportunities for people to explore tracks and trails around New Zealand. A more comprehensive and regular passenger rail network has obvious environmental benefits and benefits to underserved communities. And it would also support new regional economic development opportunities, which we can manage sustainably. Before COVID-19, many of our most popular outdoor spots struggled with more visitors than they could handle. The benefits of rail are that it can take people to new places – sharing that tourist load more evenly across New Zealand – and it can also

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control the number of people travelling to a space. By comparison, the numbers of tourists travelling predominantly by private cars are much harder to manage.

From an emissions reduction perspective, Herenga ā Nuku also supports a more regular and diverse passenger network for its staff and contractors to travel for work meetings more efficiently. Air transport accounts for a significant amount of our carbon. Like all Crown agencies, we are working towards the government's carbon-neutral goal. The lack of efficient public transport alternatives to flying hampers this goal.