

22 April 2021

## Submission on the Te Tairāwhiti Regional Land Transport Plan 2021 Draft for consultation

### Introduction

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hikoi Aotearoa is the Crown agency responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues. Our role is to provide New Zealanders with free, certain, enduring and practical access to the outdoors.

We administer a national strategy on outdoor access, including tracks and trails. We map outdoor access, provide information to the public, oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors, help resolve access disputes and negotiate new access.

The Commission has a team in Wellington and a network of regional field advisors. An independent board governs our work. Our governing piece of legislation is the Walking Access Act 2008.

Much of our work focuses on active transport. We support the creation, maintenance, enhancement and promotion of walking and cycling connectivity both for recreation and for commuting to local destinations such as schools, places of work and shops.

### Support for the draft plan

We note this draft RLTP has been developed in partnership with Waka Kotahi New Zealand Transport Agency (Waka Kotahi) and the Regional Transport Committee (RTC) and sets out the current state of the region's transport network, and the challenges and priorities for future investment.

Within the context of providing and maintaining the large land transport network for the region with predicted changes to climate, demographics and freight volumes, the Commission supports the broad approach of the draft RLTP with an emphasis on multi-modal transport and encouraging active transport.

The Commission notes the draft plan has been guided by the strategic direction provided through the Ministry of Transport's Transport *Outcomes Framework* and the *Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2021*, Waka Kotahi guidance and Tairāwhiti regional plans and strategies.

The three priority investment areas identified for this RLTP to help achieve the vision are safety, reliability & resilience, and access. Strategic objectives include these three priority investment areas and also include economic and environmental outcomes.

The Commission supports the integration of walking and cycling to encourage people to use alternative modes of transport within each of these priority areas. This will contribute to achieving the strategic objectives and proposed measures and indicators, according to the Ministry of Transport Outcomes Framework.

In the policy context, transport choice is a theme. The core statutes include expectations to achieve broad outcomes like an integrated, safe, and sustainable land transport system (Land Transport Management Act (LTMA) 2003), land use planning and its influence on travel choice (Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991) and reduced net carbon emissions (Climate Change Response Act 2002), all of which cycling/walking can contribute to.

The Transport Outcomes Framework takes a strategic and integrated approach to transport and makes clear what government is aiming to achieve through the transport system in the long term. Alternative transport modes including cycling/walking will contribute to achieving the 5 outcomes and are particularly relevant to the goals of 'Inclusive access, healthy and safe people and environmental sustainability'. A mode shift towards alternative transport also aligns with the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (GPS) priorities for expenditure including safety, better transport options and climate change. Mode shift to walking and cycling supports the objectives of:

- The Road to Zero safety strategy,
- NZ Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy and
- Arataki

*Arataki* is the Waka Kotahi framework setting out step changes for achieving land transport objectives at national and regional level. For Te Tairāwhiti, Regional development and climate change have been identified as key shifts.

Within the regional policy context, the *District Plan* and *GDC Long Term Plan* identify where and how resources will be applied and *Tairāwhiti 2050* includes walking, cycling and public transport as preferred choices, balanced with the response to financial constraints, climate change, demographic changes and freight demands.

Our submission is focussed on how improved walking and cycling provisions within the RLTP will help achieve the vision of safety, reliability & resilience, and access; as well as contribute to climate change objectives.

## Recommendations

### **The Region and Transport chapters** (ref page 6, Draft RLTP)

A regional overview of Te Tairāwhiti describes the people, the land, the transport system, active transport etc. The report describes how the Council has expanded the urban walking and cycling network. Council has also committed to prioritising its cycleway programme for commuters, especially where it creates safe access for school children. Improving cycle links and creating safe cycling routes are key priorities in developing the cycle network. The Urban walking and cycleway network indicates the work is focussed on Gisborne City. This is important work – and especially in the light of cycle safety and capability investment (e.g. Bikes in Schools) made in recent years. Now is the time to invest in a cycling and walking future for the current generation of Turanganui tamariki.

The Commission strongly supports the urban walking and cycleway programmes and recommends that the work happens early in the RLTP, to maximise the benefits for climate change mitigation, population health and wellbeing and resilience.

Further, across the region and in rural Tairāwhiti, economic development benefits from modest investment in cycle trails are well understood. Once again, there is reasonable expectation that external funding is a viable mechanism for achieving a network of connecting trails in the east coast, due to strong cost:benefit ratio of that type of investment proven elsewhere. For example, in 2016 the National Cycleways Trail evaluation report by Waka Kotahi showed a benefit ratio of 3.55 over the new network of cycleways developed across the country.

We urge the Transport committee to give serious consideration to the regional development opportunities that would arise from a network of tracks and trails; specifically using the RLTP to provide a framework, enabling the development of tracks and trails using parts of the transport network.

The Commission recommends the cycle/walkway network concept is expanded through a tracks and trails strategy to benefit other communities throughout Te Tairāwhiti.

**Strategic Framework** (ref page 22, Draft RLTP).

Walking and cycling options directly support the strategic outcomes of inclusive access, healthy and safe people, and environmental sustainability as well as the strategic objectives of safety, access and environmental outcomes. We note that safe active travel will be encouraged and supported through endorsement of a Walking and Cycling Plan.

The Commission is working with the Gisborne Cycle and Walkway Trust (GCWT) developing a strategic approach to tracks and trails for Tairāwhiti - which is timely for inclusion in the RLTP. While we note that the low rating base for the region means that the local share for transport funding is limited, the cost:benefit ratio for strategic walking & cycling investment is significantly higher than that for general roading investment<sup>1</sup>, and is likely to attract other funding (for example local tourism and economic development stimulus funding). Strategic walking and cycling investment should therefore be included in the RLTP.

The Commission recommends that the RLTP includes provision for Waka Kotahi and GDC to support the work of the Gisborne Cycle and Walkway Trust, local communities and the NZ Walking Access Commission to create a tracks and trails strategy for Te Tairāwhiti.

**Tairāwhiti Transport Investment Priorities** (ref page 24, Draft RLTP)

Safety, reliability & resilience and access challenges have been identified in that order of priority. Active travel modes including cycling and walking can positively contribute to both safety and access and provide a more realistic choice of travel mode. The Gisborne Cycle and Walkway Trust has been identified as a key investment partner to improve active mode share.

As above: the Commission recommends that the RLTP includes investment in active transport for communities throughout Tairāwhiti by expansion of the Walking & Cycling Network plan through a regional tracks and trails strategy.

The Commission recommends that it is both practical and cost effective to include facilities for cycling/walking at the design stage of strategic intersection and rural road improvement projects and bridge upgrades for the High Productivity Motor Vehicles including 50Max vehicles.

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<sup>1</sup> NZ National Cycleways cost benefit ratio was evaluated as 1:3.55 - or a BCR of 3.55 in *Ngā Haerenga NZ Cycle Trail Evaluation Report 2016* compared with the BCRs between 1.1 – 1.6 for the SH2/SH35 roading programme outlined in the *Waka Kotahi Connecting Tairāwhiti Programme Business Case 2018*

### **Proposed Regional Land Transport Activities** (ref page 38 Draft RLTP)

We support the inclusion of cycle/walk options in regionally significant activities.

As above: The Commission recommends a budget allowance for assessing, and constructing where necessary, cycle/walk options with all new roading work

### **Inter-regionally Significant Activities** (ref page 51 Draft RLTP)

Specific projects include bridge strengthening on the road between Gisborne and Opotiki and other roads throughout the region. While a key driver of this work is the increased loading carried on larger trucks, there is an opportunity to incorporate walking and cycle access facilities while retrofitting bridges, thus removing a significant access barrier for future active mode users.

As above: The Commission recommends a budget allowance for assessment and construction of cycle/walk options with all new and retrofit bridging work

### **Ten-year summary** (ref page 53 Draft RLTP)

In the draft plan \$200,000 per annum is allowed for cycle/walk Low Cost/Low Risk class of activity on State Highways. We question whether this is a realistic budget when mode-shift towards active transport has the potential to make such a positive contribution to achieving the inclusivity, health, environment, and resilience goals outlined in the plan, and the tracks and trails opportunities for improving access likely include significant sections of State Highways.

The Commission recommends the \$200,000 annual budget for Low Cost / Low Risk State Highway walking & cycling projects is reviewed and increased

### **Utilising existing transport land resources for active recreation**

Tairāwhiti has a substantial network of unformed legal roads managed by Gisborne District Council. It is important that council retains these unformed legal roads as they have significant value. In some locations, they could provide the opportunity to develop alternative off-road routes which allow people to cycle and walk safely. To help achieve the objectives in the plan the Commission recommends that GDC develops access-friendly policies on managing and retaining unformed legal roads. We have expertise in each of these areas and would be happy to help the council develop policies where they do not have them. We can provide examples that other councils have adopted.

The Commission recommends budget be allocated to investigation and consultation on key walking and cycling network connectivity along unformed legal roads, in collaboration with the Gisborne Cycle & Walkway Trust and other stakeholders

## **Tackling Climate Change**

While the draft RLTP includes the strategic objective of *A transport system which supports low-carbon travel and communities and has minimal impact on the environment*, it falls short on the pace and scale of necessary transport changes signalled in the Climate Change Commission's recent draft report on measures necessary to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

Specifically, the Commission *envisages an Aotearoa where cities and towns are created around people and supported by low emissions transport that is accessible to everyone equally and where urban form encourages cycling and walking, alongside efficient, affordable and interconnected public transport networks*.

Their report advises that the mode-share of the total distance travelled by NZ households *by walking, cycling and public transport can be increased by 25%, 95% and 120% respectively by 2030* (ref p.58). To put it bluntly, Te Tairāwhiti will not meet the 2030 target at the current rate of investment in walking & cycling. While it is acknowledged that the RLTP cannot by itself bring about the policy objectives related to reducing land transport emissions, it is of great concern that the draft RLTP does not engage on any real progress towards region-wide activity to support the mode shift until 2024 (see page 46; Tairāwhiti Walk & Cycle Network shown in table of proposed RLT activities).

The Commission recommends budget be allocated across 2021-2022 for preparation of a comprehensive active transport (walk & cycle) business case for the region.

The business case should involve active input from local communities into how best to transition the greatest possible mode-share from private motor vehicles to active modes. The Gisborne Cycle and Walkway Trust is a key strategic partner for this work.

The Commission recommends budget be allocated at the start of the RLTP 2021 to support the Key strategic partner Gisborne Cycle & Walkway Trust to produce a strategic Tracks and Trails Plan.

This will assist the identification of strategic active transport and recreation connections, and progress preparations for a comprehensive walk & cycle business case for Te Tairāwhiti region by 2023.

Nga mihi. We appreciate the opportunity to submit on the Gisborne RLTP 2021. The Commission intends to appear at the hearing.

For more information, please contact:

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