

Regional strategies and projects

WALKING ACCESS
ARA HĪKOI AOTEAROA



Strategic regional projects

The Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa works closely with local government, iwi partners, central government agencies and community stakeholders to develop long-term regional tracks and trails strategies.

The Commission brings value to regional tracks and trails projects through our ability to work across all land types and with all landholders/land managers.

The Commission can support all regional agencies and communities to develop successful outdoor access, recreation, active transport, and targeted tourism opportunities at a regional scale.

Key contributions include funding, or part funding, a regional programme manager (ideally embedded within a regional agency) and funding the initial hui and co-design development processes.

This work supports local communities to develop successful outdoor access, recreation, active transport, and targeted tourism opportunities at a regional scale.

These projects include:

- South Island High Country Project (2018)
- Taranaki Trails Strategy Project (2018)
- Pūhoi to Pākiriri Matakana Project (2019)
- Connecting Franklin-North Waikato Project (2020)
- Tairāwhiti Project (2021)

Regional trail strategy development projects use the following staged process:

Instigation

- An organisation within the community identifies a need for a trails strategy and asks for help.

Phase 1: Scoping Study

- Identify key issues and opportunities
- Bring partners, champions and stakeholders into the project, including DOC, local authorities, iwi representatives, key community groups and key community members
- Identify and secure funding for the project
- Recruit a programme manager to support local community aspirations
- Identify relevant regional and national policies and frameworks
- Inventory and audit of current regional trails and related facilities

Phase 2: Strategy Development

- Assist with establishment of Trails Trust draft policies and procedures
- Involves working closely with all involved and uses a co-design development process
- Investigate key values and the local context
- Determine the overarching kaupapa, purpose and narrative

- Develop business case or cost benefit assessment of the strategy
- Set the strategy including its alignment with other policies and frameworks

Phase 3: Trail Project Development Phase

- Break down strategy into 'bite sized' projects
- Determine the specific tracks and trails projects including phases, champions and priorities
- Identify funding to implement the project recommendations
- Determine capacity building requirements

Phase 4: Strategy implementation

- Support relevant agencies to implement the strategy
- Provide materials for inclusion in relevant long-term community planning processes
- Set a first stage 3-year implementation plan



South Island High Country

Initiator

The Commission initiated and funded this project.

Vision

The project sought to identify the pressures relating to public access to the outdoors in the Queenstown Lakes, Mackenzie, Central Otago and Waitaki districts and to produce a report outlining these along with any recommendations.

Partners

The project had no formal partners.

Progress

The Commission conducted extensive interviews with more than 50 people, including farmers, tourism operators, central and local government staff, economic development professionals and recreationists. We drew out common themes from these interviews. These formed the basis of a report, which we sent out for a period of public engagement. People almost unanimously endorsed the report's findings.

We published the South Island High Country Access Report in early 2018. High Country Federated Farmers, Fish and Game, Tourism Industry Aotearoa and the Zone 5 and 6 Mayoral Forum (representing every South Island territorial authority and regional council) endorsed the report.

In April 2018, the Zone 5 and 6 Mayoral Forum asked the Commission to apply for Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) funding. The funding would run a 1-2 year project identifying opportunities for new access.

That access would help to alleviate tourism pressures, spread numbers more evenly across the island and enhance economic development.

From April to August 2018, we prepared the proposed project plan and application and tested it with key stakeholders. The application sought \$992,000 to fund staff, office accommodation and public engagement. We applied in early August.

The Mayoral Forum nominated several mayors to form a steering group for the project. This group had an initial meeting before receiving a response on the funding bid.

In October 2018, the Commission learned that the funding bid was unsuccessful. PGF staff proposed that other funding sources would be more appropriate. The Commission sought to engage further with the PGF staff regarding the nature of these sources. However, we received no response.

Without funding, the project went on indefinite hold.

Taranaki

Initiator

This project was jointly initiated by the Commission and Sport Taranaki, with the support of Sport New Zealand. The Commission funded the project.

Vision

The project looked solely at recreational access (not active transport) in Taranaki outside the National Park boundaries, working with iwi and local authorities.

Partners

Four local authorities, Sport Taranaki, local iwi, community groups and the Department of Conservation
The bulk of the project was a piece of work by Dr Mick Abbott and a small team from Lincoln University to undertake a landscape-led approach to identify projects that could enhance people's connection to nature and improve public access to the outdoors.



Result

The final strategy report, published in June 2018, outlined nine critical projects that local government, central government, and volunteer groups could develop.

The Commission supported the development of a Taranaki Tracks and Trails Trust to take ownership of the strategy and coordinate various individuals and organisations to see it come to fruition over the coming years.

Initially, the Trust focused on project 5, an around the mountain cycle trail. The Commission assisted it in building relationships with NZTA, MBIE Tourism and Ngā Haerenga, the New Zealand Cycle Trail, as it developed a business case for funding the trail.

Other key projects are being worked towards by different parties, including NZTA, local authorities and Sport Taranaki. The Commission continues to provide support through its Regional Field Advisor (RFA). The project has enabled the Commission to develop a strategy for the region that achieves long-term benefits for the community and tourism. It has connected up a range of coastal walkway options. It has supported local government planning processes, including Long Term Council Community Planning processes.

It has helped Taranaki councils develop a business case for a new walking and cycling trail that will take people not in motor vehicles away from State Highway 3. This off-road trail will have many benefits for locals. It will make their commute and recreational use a safe, healthy and enjoyable experience. And it will attract more tourists, driving economic growth for the region.

Pūhoi to Mangawhai

Initiator

The Commission initiated this project after receiving \$800,000 in compensation from the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) for the destruction of part of the Moirs Hill Walkway caused by creating a new highway. Part of the compensation agreement was a commitment to spend the money in that area to improve public access to the outdoors.

Vision

The project aims to create a world-class, sustainable, shared-use commuting and recreational trail from Pūhoi to Mangawhai. It will safely connect communities to each other and to the values and spirit of the natural world of forests, coasts and ocean that keeps a watching presence over their special place. It will leave a healthy, living legacy that will benefit millions over decades to come.

Partners

The Commission has partnered with Ngāti Manuhiri, Auckland Transport, Auckland Council and the Matakana Coast Trails Trust, the Department of Conservation, Rodney Local Board, Auckland Transport, Waka Kotahi, as well as developers, locals and trusts.

Progress

The project is progressing rapidly and will result in a world-class, sustainable, shared-use commuting and recreational trail from Pūhoi to Mangawhai. Economic evaluation reports that the trail will bring \$217 million worth of benefits for a cost of only \$51 million. It will also bring significant environmental and community benefits.

The Commission and Auckland Council developed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to run a three-year project. The MoU identifies and supports future access routes for recreation and active transport, including securing easements across private land for these.

Through this MoU, the Commission agreed to pay a programme manager's salary to coordinate this work. The programme manager works in an Auckland Council office, and the council pays for their overheads. The programme manager was appointed in early 2019 and has coordinated a leadership group including iwi, local board, Council, community and central government representation to oversee the project. The programme manager works closely with the Matakana Coast Trails Trust.

The Commission engaged Dr Mick Abbott, a landscape architect, to help develop a tracks and trails strategy and vision document. The Trust can use this in its work and to support its applications for additional funding to establish trails once access is secured.

The programme manager has secured easements on private land to form part of future trails. The Commission's financial investment in the project will end in 2021 or early 2022. After this, the Commission's involvement will likely revert to similar levels of support that it would provide to any other trail — advice from the regional field advisor, use of Commission's easement, and some GIS expertise. The Pūhoi to Mangawhai project is the 'Gold Standard', which we aim to replicate as a model in other parts of the country.

Franklin-North Waikato

Initiator

Local community members called a hui in 2018 together with local iwi Ngāti Tamaoho and trails advocates. The hui aimed to create a shared vision for connecting communities, exploring cultural landscapes and growing the network for active recreation.

Local community members in the towns on either side of Auckland and the Waikato boundary requested we initiate this project.

Vision

The project aimed to identify recreation and active transport solutions for the fast-growing area between Pukekohe in southern Auckland and Rangiriri in northern Waikato.

Partners

The Commission partnered with Waikato Regional and District Councils, Waikato-Tainui and the Waikato River Authority.

Waikato District Council contributed \$5000 and Waikato Regional Council \$10,000 towards covering costs. The Commission has covered the remainder (approximately \$15,000 plus a significant amount of staff and RFA time).

The project also has support from Waikato Tainui, Ngāti Tamaoho and the Franklin Local Board of Auckland Council.

Progress

The first stage was an in-depth stakeholder report, based on the South Island High Country project. We interviewed more than 50 people to identify common issues and opportunities and made several recommendations.

Stage two of the project (currently underway) is a strategic piece of work by Dr Mick Abbott to map out projects and broad visions for what is needed, engaging with critical stakeholders.

Following the completion of the second stage, a project plan for implementation of the recommendations in the stakeholder report and the projects in the strategy will be developed and endorsed by crucial project partners — the Commission, three councils, and iwi.

The exact form of this implementation plan is yet to be determined. It is likely to include seeking funding to recruit a project manager similar to the Pūhoi to Pākiri project, as having dedicated staffing resources helps to ensure that the project remains at the forefront of organisational planning.

The implementation plan will ideally be signed off and put into action.



Tairāwhiti

Initiator

The Gisborne Cycle and Walkway Trust (GCWT) contacted the Commission for assistance with their project. They had employed a Trails Manager to grow the trails network. We're already working on local trails — but were struggling with getting traction within local government. We offered to assist in coordinating the development of a regional trails strategy.

With GCWT and the Trails Manager, we facilitated a community trails hui in Turanganui-a-Kiwa in February 2021. We explored requirements for a regional trails strategy and co-designed the next steps. It was evident that a Tikanga approach was the way forward.

At the same time, elsewhere on the East Coast, iwi leaders were considering iwi-led trail development — and planning the investment approach.

Partners

The Commission is partnering with GCWT, Trust Tairāwhiti and Gisborne District Council to fund the Tapuwae Tairāwhiti Trails Manager role.

We are seeking ongoing relationships with iwi and hapū. We are waiting to be invited in by the project team pursuing iwi-led trails in Te Tairāwhiti.

Progress

The community trails hui in 2021 amplified the influence and advocacy of local community trails groups and GCWT. This call led to increased resources for tracks and trails in Council's Long Term Plan and the Regional Land Transport Plan.

- The community trails hui confirmed strong local interest in trails and connectivity from communities in the region. In exploring the Tikanga approach to creating a strategy, we have found:
- local trails are as important as regional connections for the communities we have connected with — both are essential components to a successful trails strategy
- emerging iwi-led trail development in Te Tairāwhiti will require the Commission to play a different, supporting role (rather than the leadership role we previously took in previous regional strategies), and may also identify a niche role for us in wrangling ongoing local government engagement
- fortunately, the local Trails Manager has made ongoing local engagement a priority — and he has already provided valuable support to get community/hapū trails on the radar with council
- a global pandemic provides unique challenges and opportunities for strategic engagement — with face-to-face meetings curtailed on the one hand and organisations pivoting towards local, sustainable tourism offerings (including active recreation infrastructure) on the other.

Result

For now, the development of the regional strategy is on hold — awaiting critical resourcing decisions for iwi-led trails. Meanwhile, we support the Tapuwae Tairāwhiti Trails Manager in local trails planning and advocacy with local government and Waka Kotahi.



