

# MANAWATŪ-WHANGANUI

## AT A GLANCE

*Our focus in Manawatū-Whanganui is on supporting urban growth, regional development initiatives and the COVID-19 recovery. We will work with partners to encourage increased use of public transport, walking and cycling, particularly in Palmerston North, manage the impacts of climate change, deliver safe and reliable inter-regional journeys and provide appropriate levels of service across all transport networks.*

## COVID-19 INSIGHTS AND IMPACTS

This section sets out the how the current pandemic might impact on land transport in Manawatū-Whanganui.

Significant levels of uncertainty remain regarding the scale and duration of COVID-19 impacts, particularly in the medium to long-term. We will continue to monitor and update as things change.

### POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON KEY SECTORS

- Manawatū-Whanganui's economy is forecast to perform better compared with other regions during the economic slowdown, because of the scale of the government services, healthcare and social assistance, and manufacturing sectors.
- Significant levels of primary production outside of the main urban centres are also expected to help mitigate the impacts of the economic slowdown on the region.
- The region is also the country's least reliant on international tourism, with only 17% of tourism spend in the region coming from international visitors.<sup>54</sup>
- Communities in the south of the region may be protected to a degree by the forecast relative stability of the Wellington economy.

### POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITIES

- Under the slower recovery scenario:
  - the Manawatū-Whanganui forecast fall in employment to 2021 (relative to BAU) is -5.3%, significantly lower than the national average of -6.7%<sup>35</sup>
  - the Ruapehu District (-7.9%) is forecast to be impacted harder than the rest of the region because of its greater reliance on tourism<sup>35</sup>
  - employment levels forecast to return to BAU in Whanganui and Rangitikei by 2025 & everywhere except Horowhenua and Manawatū by 2031.<sup>35</sup>

- Population growth expected to slow, at least in the short to medium-term, given the region's reliance on net migration. The region's economic performance comparative to other regions may lead to increased inward internal migration
- Māori, Pasifika and youth are likely to experience the greatest impacts, particularly in smaller regional centres. An increase in youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is expected.

### POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE LAND TRANSPORT SYSTEM

- Given the relative resilience of the Manawatū-Whanganui economy, no significant changes are expected in the nature, scale and location of transport demand over the medium to long-term. The 10-year outlook remains largely unchanged.
- Ongoing demand for multi-modal distribution function, centred on Palmerston North. Maintaining safe and reliable connections to the UNI, Wellington and Napier Port remain critical to supporting recovery across the LNI.
- There will be an ongoing need for transport services to support COVID-19 recovery by improving access to employment and essential services for vulnerable communities.
- There will be ongoing pressure on transport revenue as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown.

## REGION STEP CHANGES

### IMPROVE URBAN FORM

Much of the region's growth is expected on the edge of Palmerston North and Feilding, and in Levin.

### TRANSFORM URBAN MOBILITY

In Palmerston North, Massey University creates significant daily transport flows between city and campus. Selected free bus services have helped increase use of public transport. Journeys to work by foot or bike are above the national average at 11.4%.<sup>52</sup>

### SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE HARMS

The Manawatū-Whanganui safety record is relatively poor. Head-on and run off road crashes, high-risk intersections and driver behaviour are primary contributors.<sup>47</sup> Focus is needed on the Palmerston North, Whanganui and Levin urban areas and state highways that link them.

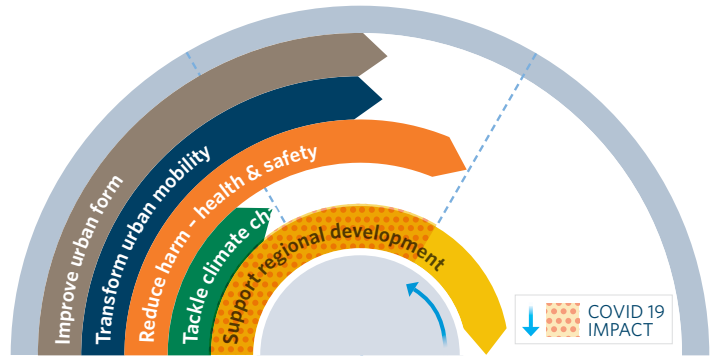
### TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

The impacts of climate change will make managing network resilience increasingly challenging. Rain and drought conditions will affect highly erodible land, while sea level rise will impact coastal communities. Transport carbon emissions per capita are above average, reflecting the volumes of through traffic, particularly freight using the region's road networks.<sup>48</sup>

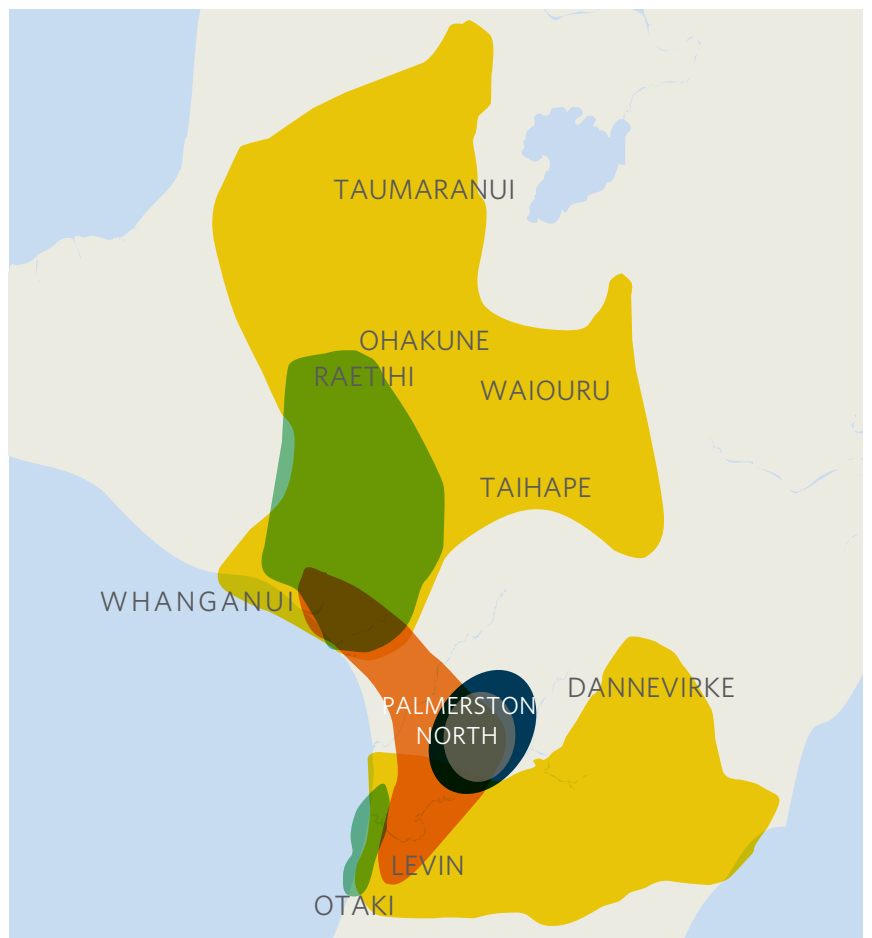
### SUPPORT REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The region has high unemployment rates and comparatively low median household income.<sup>50</sup> Access to education, healthcare and employment must improve, particularly in the north and east of the region, to deliver better social and economic outcomes.

The region has nationally significant connections for the movement of freight and tourists. We will continue to support inter-regional connectivity, especially road and rail freight connections to key ports and hubs. Our focus is also on providing appropriate infrastructure and services to support visitor destination management initiatives.



SIGNIFICANCE OF STEP CHANGE TO REGION 2021-31



**238,797**

REGIONAL POPULATION<sup>25</sup>

**7.2%**  
REGIONAL POPULATION GROWTH 2013-18<sup>25</sup>

**5.1%**  
OF NATIONAL POPULATION<sup>25</sup> 2018

**6.3%**  
OF NATIONAL DEATHS & SERIOUS INJURIES (DSI)<sup>47</sup>

**189** TOTAL DSI<sup>47</sup>  
ANNUAL AVERAGE FOR PERIOD 2016-19

**6%**  
OF NATIONAL VEHICLE EMISSIONS<sup>48</sup>

**3.8%**  
OF NATIONAL GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT YEAR END MARCH 2018<sup>26</sup>

**5.2%**  
REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE  
**4.1%**  
NATIONAL RATE YEAR END JUNE 2019<sup>49</sup>

## MANAWATŪ-WHANGANUI TODAY

Because of the level of uncertainty of population and economic trends, this section has not been reviewed in detail for Arataki V2.

**MANAWATŪ-WHANGANUI IS THE SIXTH-MOST POPULOUS REGION IN THE COUNTRY WITH AROUND 238,000 RESIDENTS.<sup>25</sup> IT IS A LARGE, DIVERSE REGION EXTENDING FROM LEVIN IN THE SOUTH TO TAUMARUNUI IN THE NORTH, AND FROM WHANGANUI IN THE WEST TO THE EAST COAST.**

Palmerston North is the largest centre and provides a service hub supporting surrounding areas. Tertiary education, research, logistics and military activities are significant contributors to Palmerston North's economy. Whanganui, Levin and Feilding are the region's other main urban centres. Outside of the main urban areas, primary production is the key economic driver with tourism critical to the economy of the Ruapehu District. Redeployment of defence force personnel is expected to increase activity at the Ohakea and Linton military bases. The region has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country and the second lowest median household income. Manawatū-Whanganui is a surge region, identified by the government as

needing investment to support regional economic development.

While the region generally has good access to essential services, communities in the north and east face some challenges accessing specialist services located in Whanganui and Palmerston North.

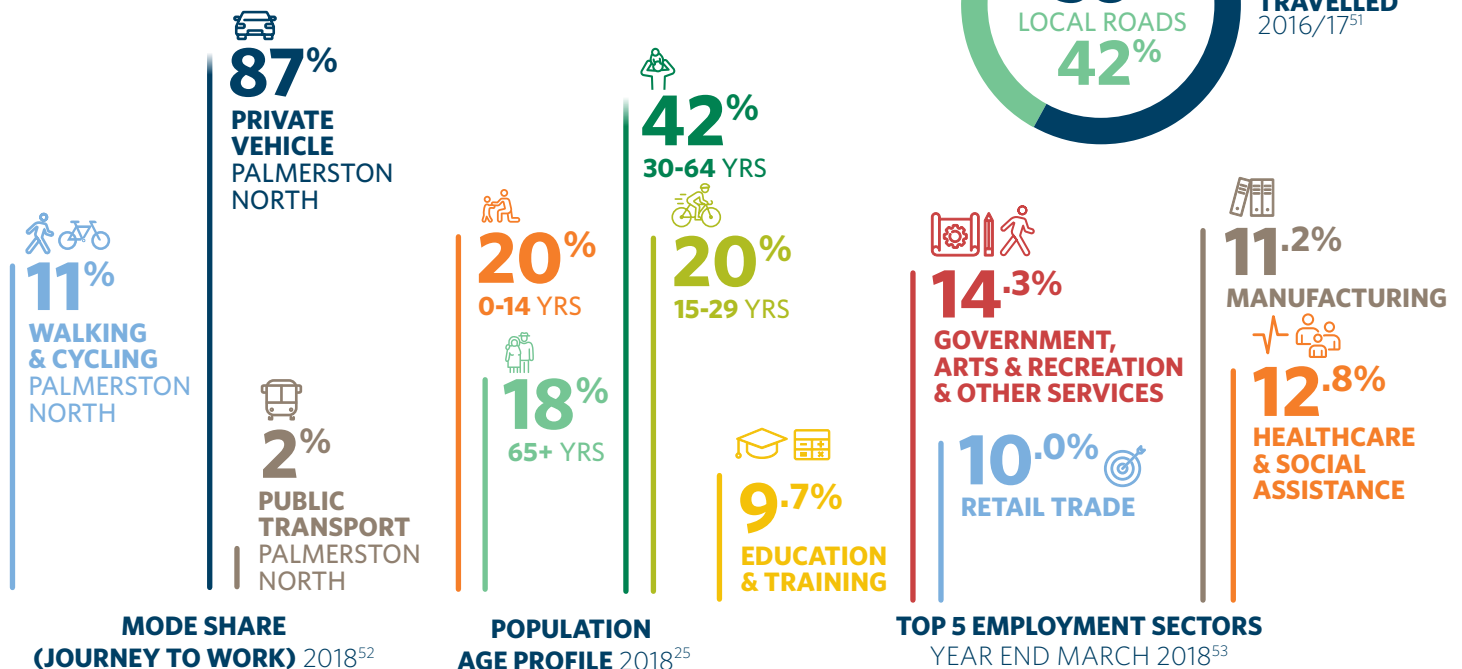
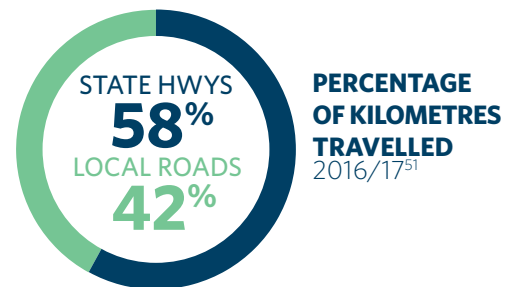
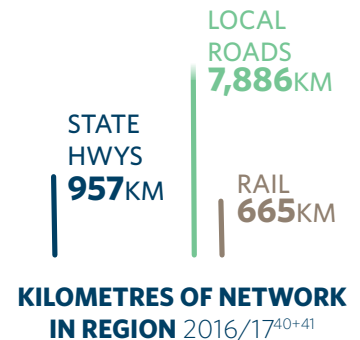
The region is located at the centre of the road and rail networks which connect Hawke's Bay, Wellington, Taranaki and the upper and lower North Island. These connections are a key economic lifeline, enabling the movement of people and goods between key centres of production, consumer markets and freight distribution hubs. The Capital Connection provides a weekday passenger rail service to Wellington.

Palmerston North is emerging as the primary distribution centre in the lower North Island. Resulting increases in the number of heavy vehicle movements have created safety and efficiency issues on the local road network which need addressing.

The rail freight journey is generally reliable but incomplete electrification of the network restricts journeys, with locomotive changes between Auckland

and Wellington, adding to overall journey times. Efforts to revitalise Whanganui Port could lead to increased movement of freight to and from the port by coastal shipping, rail and road.

Network resilience is a significant issue in some parts of the region, particularly on the Desert Road and SH4 north of Whanganui. The construction of Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū-Tararua highway project will resolve long-standing resilience challenges associated with the Manawatū Gorge. Between Levin and Ōtaki there is a stretch of SH1 with no viable alternate routes, and with poor levels of service for safety and resilience.



## MANAWATŪ-WHANGANUI TOMORROW

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's population was projected to grow by approximately 17,000 people to 248,000 in 2043, with most growth located in Palmerston North and Feilding.<sup>27</sup> Low growth or decline was projected for the remainder of the region. Horowhenua District has been included as part of the Wellington Regional Growth Framework area. Future growth in Levin and surrounding communities will be influenced by both the growth strategy, and the significant road and rail improvements being made in the area which will improve connections to both Wellington and Palmerston North.

The region's population is getting older, consistent with the national trend. The Horowhenua District, and in particular Levin, is actively positioning itself as a destination for retired residents. By 2043, 36% of the district's population is forecast to be over 65 years old.<sup>27</sup> Enabling access for senior residents will be important to ensure they remain socially connected, active and able to actively participate in their communities.

An increasing proportion of the population on fixed incomes will place pressure on councils' ability to maintain existing infrastructure, fund new infrastructure and provide appropriate services to residents.

The Manawatū-Whanganui regional economy is forecast to perform better than many other regions during the COVID-19 slowdown, supported by the scale of the government services, healthcare and primary production sectors. While economic activity is forecast to drop significantly in the short-term, the regions' economic drivers are expected to remain relatively consistent. Employment in service industries is expected to grow in the larger urban centres over the medium to long-term, with primary production remaining important in other areas. Improved inter-regional connections will support Palmerston North's growing distribution function, although a shift to rail might be needed in the transition to a low-emissions economy. KiwiRail has started design and land purchase for the Palmerston North freight hub, a purpose-designed facility to support better integration of road and rail freight movements.

While international visitor numbers have dropped sharply (and are forecast to remain below pre-COVID-19 levels for the foreseeable future), the majority of Manawatū-Whanganui's tourism revenue comes from domestic visitors. Domestic tourism is expected to increase, at least in the short-term, as more New Zealanders choose to holiday at home.

Emerging technologies, such as on-demand shuttles, could provide a feasible shared transport option in the future to help people get around within smaller towns and rural communities, and improve access to services in Palmerston North and Whanganui. Improved access to high quality data and information will enable better management of the existing transport system to get the most out of existing infrastructure.

Increased coastal erosion, sea level rise, storm surges, flooding, and storms are predicted to intensify over the next 30 years increasing risk to the road and rail network, parts of which are already vulnerable. Flooding on SH2 Mangatainoka and SH3 Whangaehu is considered a significant risk and is likely to worsen with climate change.

## KEY SYSTEM INSIGHTS

- Palmerston North is forecast to receive moderate levels of growth. Levin is also growing as housing supply and rental affordability pressures push lower income residents out of Wellington. It is important that growth in housing and employment, and the location of new facilities is accommodated in a way that minimises the need to travel long distances and reduces private vehicle use in urban areas.
- Palmerston North is emerging as the primary distribution centre for the lower North Island. Increasing heavy vehicle movements are reducing safety and efficiency of local road networks. The development of a high-tech rail hub in the northeast will enable rail to play a greater role in the movement of freight.
- Because of its central location, the region's networks carry significant volumes of through traffic. Providing safe and reliable links south to Wellington and east to Napier Port is particularly important to enable movement of people and goods.
- The region's safety record is relatively poor in terms of total deaths and serious injuries, with a need to focus on the Palmerston North, Whanganui and Levin urban areas, the state highways that connect them, and high-risk rural roads.
- Network resilience is a particular issue and more intense storm events resulting from climate change will worsen existing challenges, including areas with unstable terrain north of Whanganui. The impacts of sea level rise will also increase for low-lying coastal communities.
- Forest harvests across the region are increasing freight movements and impacting on the condition of local road networks.
- Transport can support improvements in regional development by improving access to employment and essential services for remote communities in the north and east of the region, and by supporting industry growth and access to visitor destinations.

## FOCUS OF EFFORT: 2018-21

This section represents the existing commitments (eg the NLTP and NZUP). V2 has not been updated to include economic stimulus packages as that space continues to evolve.

Working with industry, local government and local communities we will look to progress the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Improvements project to assist in building resilience and providing a safer, more effective connection between key industrial areas, and improve access and safety for those travelling by foot and bike.

The Urban Cycleways Fund will accelerate projects in Whanganui and a new pedestrian and cycle bridge, and new shared paths in Palmerston North to link the main residential areas and central business district with Linton Military Camp, the Crown Research Institutes and Massey University.

Manawatū-Whanganui has been the recipient of substantial Government investment to support regional development, including projects such as a cycle-walkway strategy, a regional freight (rail) hub, and implementation funding

for a farmer-driven programme to improve the cultural, environmental, social, and economic wellbeing of the Rangitikei district.

Delivery of safety upgrades on SH1 from Ōtaki to Levin and along the southern portion of SH57, as well as progressing a new SH1 corridor from Ōtaki to north of Levin.

Work is continuing on Te Ahu a Turanga (SH3 Manawatū Gorge Highway), which will provide a safe and reliable connection to Hawke's Bay, and reinstatement of SH4 north between Whanganui and Raetihi.

The revitalisation of the Whanganui Port Area will contribute to the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the Whanganui area. There is a need to identify and secure existing and future uses of the port area, including upgrading Wharf One.



Interactive map available online  
[www.nzta.govt.nz/arataki-map6](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/arataki-map6)

This map shows all projects underway during the period



## AREAS OF FOCUS: MANAWATŪ-WHANGANUI 2021-31

### SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE HARMS (MEDIUM)

#### SAFETY

We will support implementation of the **Road to Zero: New Zealand's road safety strategy 2020–2030** and associated **Action plan 2020-22**, and regional strategies, with an emphasis on:

- safety interventions targeting high-risk intersections, and run-off road and head-on crashes on high-risk rural roads (rural roads are roads with speed limits >80km/h)
- target road policing and behaviour change programmes with a focus on alcohol and drug impairment, people not wearing seatbelts and speeding
- speed management to provide safe and appropriate speeds on high-risk rural roads. Targeted use of safety cameras to reduce speeding.

#### HEALTH

Our primary focus around health is reducing harmful emissions in urban areas through improved urban form, increasing access to and use of public transport, walking and cycling, and other initiatives to reduce overall emissions.

We will support future pandemic planning by drawing our COVID-19 experience and initiative such as low-cost and temporary street calming and active transport projects that enable social distance while bringing health benefits from increased physical activity and reduced air emissions.

We will also continue to work to ensure that the noise impacts of transport are appropriately managed through a mix of land-use planning and mitigation works.

### SUPPORT REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (MEDIUM)

Manawatū-Whanganui needs regional development support, particularly in areas outside Palmerston North and Manawatū District. To support regional growth, enable improved access to education and employment, and to help raise standards of living, we will:

- continue to support inter-regional connectivity
- support visitor destination management plans and provide transport infrastructure and services that improve access and mitigate the impact of large numbers of visitors when international tourism recovers
- support freight initiatives that are multi-modal, efficient and safe, such as the Whanganui Port revitalisation, the KiwiRail freight hub in Palmerston North and delivery of the outcomes of the Palmerston North Integrated Transport Improvements business case

- complete and promote walking and cycling trail plans such as the Tararua Tourism and Trails Strategy and a connected network of cycle and walking trails
- Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū-Tararua highway project and Ōtaki to north of Levin are the top priorities for the region.

### IMPROVE URBAN FORM (MEDIUM)

While our focus is on multi-agency partnerships in the largest and fastest growing urban centres, we recognise the potential for growth in and around Palmerston North to support a safe and thriving city, with increased access to public transport, walking and cycling options and reduced carbon emissions. We will:

- engage in planning processes to ensure that land-use patterns reduce dependence on private vehicles, limit the need to travel long-distances to access employment and services, and limit carbon emissions
- influence land use decisions and integrate land-use and transport planning to support safe and efficient freight movements to key freight hubs.

### TRANSFORM URBAN MOBILITY (MEDIUM)

As the region recovers, population growth in Palmerston North, Feilding and Levin will increase travel demand on the region's networks and provides opportunities to support increased use of public transport, walking and cycling. Our focus will be on supporting:

- improvements to walking and cycling networks, with a focus on providing safe and efficient access to and within main activity centres and to education facilities, and linking existing infrastructure to provide connected networks
- public transport services, including the Capital Connection Rail Upgrades and on-demand services where they provide access to employment and essential services, are a more affordable transport option and/or help shape a more thriving city
- proposals to address the increasing need for services targeting mobility for senior residents, particularly in the Horowhenua and Ruapehu Districts
- development of the Palmerston North Network Operating Framework as a tool for optimising network performance
- opportunities to increase the proportion of freight on rail as part of improving access growing distribution hubs.

## TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE (MEDIUM)

We will continue to work to understand the opportunities to support climate change adaptation and mitigation.

### ADAPTATION

We will focus on:

- working together on implementing Horizons' 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy
- working with our partners and communities to prioritise interventions and responses to natural hazards in high-risk areas
- engaging in local planning processes to avoid infrastructure and development in areas at increased risk of natural hazards and effects of climate change
- enabling continuous improvement in network resilience through maintenance and renewals, and 'low cost/low risk' investments
- enabling rapid recovery following disruption to the land transport system.

### MITIGATION

We will focus on:

- engaging in local planning processes to ensure urban form and transport planning supports reductions in emissions, private vehicle travel and average trip length
- ensuring network design and operation makes the best use of existing systems to manage demand and reduce emissions by prioritising the movement of public transport and low emission options, and actively managing speed, urban freight and congestion.

