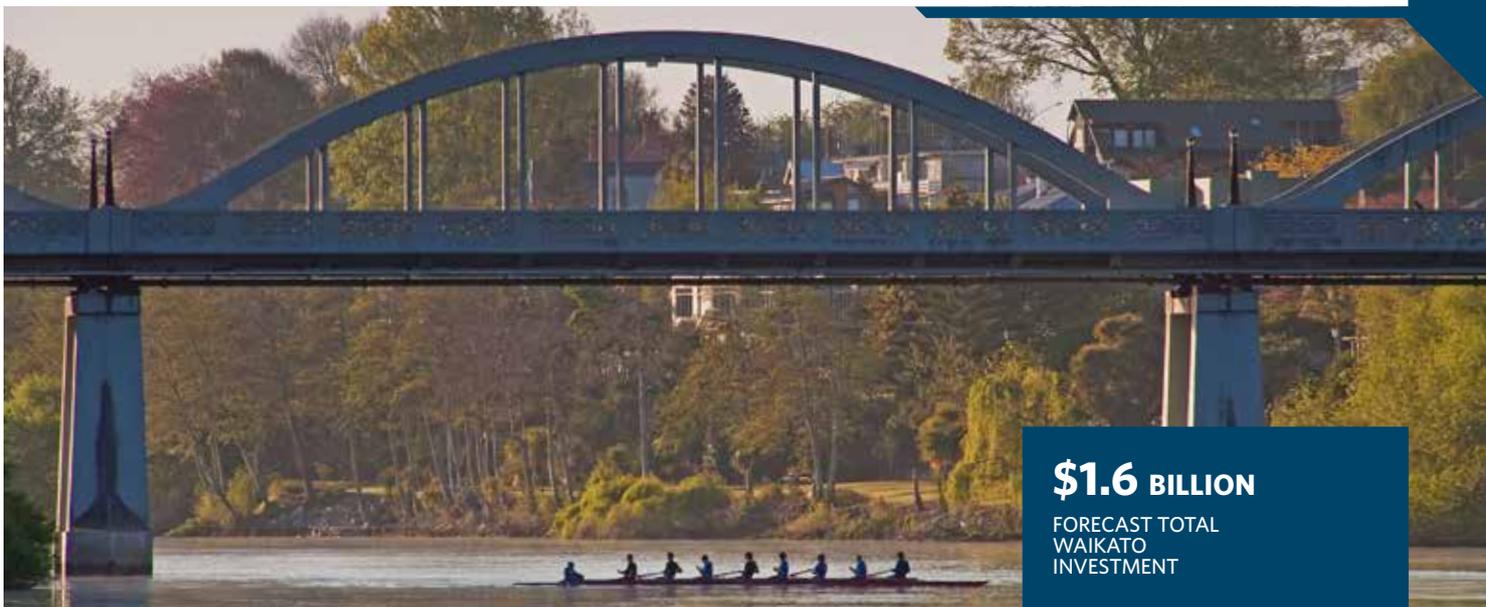


WAIKATO



Waikato’s significant contribution to growing New Zealand’s social and economic wellbeing underlines the importance of a regional land transport system that provides access, is resilient and provides journeys that are safe and reliable.

Together with Auckland and Bay of Plenty, Waikato is part of the ‘golden triangle’ recognised as the productive heart of New Zealand’s economic engine room.

The region has important road and rail connections to large and growing centres, notably Tauranga and Auckland. Forty percent of the nation’s freight movements go into, out of, or through Waikato.

The journey through Waikato from Auckland to the Port of Tauranga via Hamilton (by road and rail) connects the three largest urban centres in the upper North Island, the two largest ports (Auckland and Tauranga) and the country’s largest international airport (Auckland).

The Transport Agency will work with its partners, particularly those in local government, to ensure NLTP investments contribute to a vibrant region in terms of its continuing social and economic development, and its growing population and economic base.

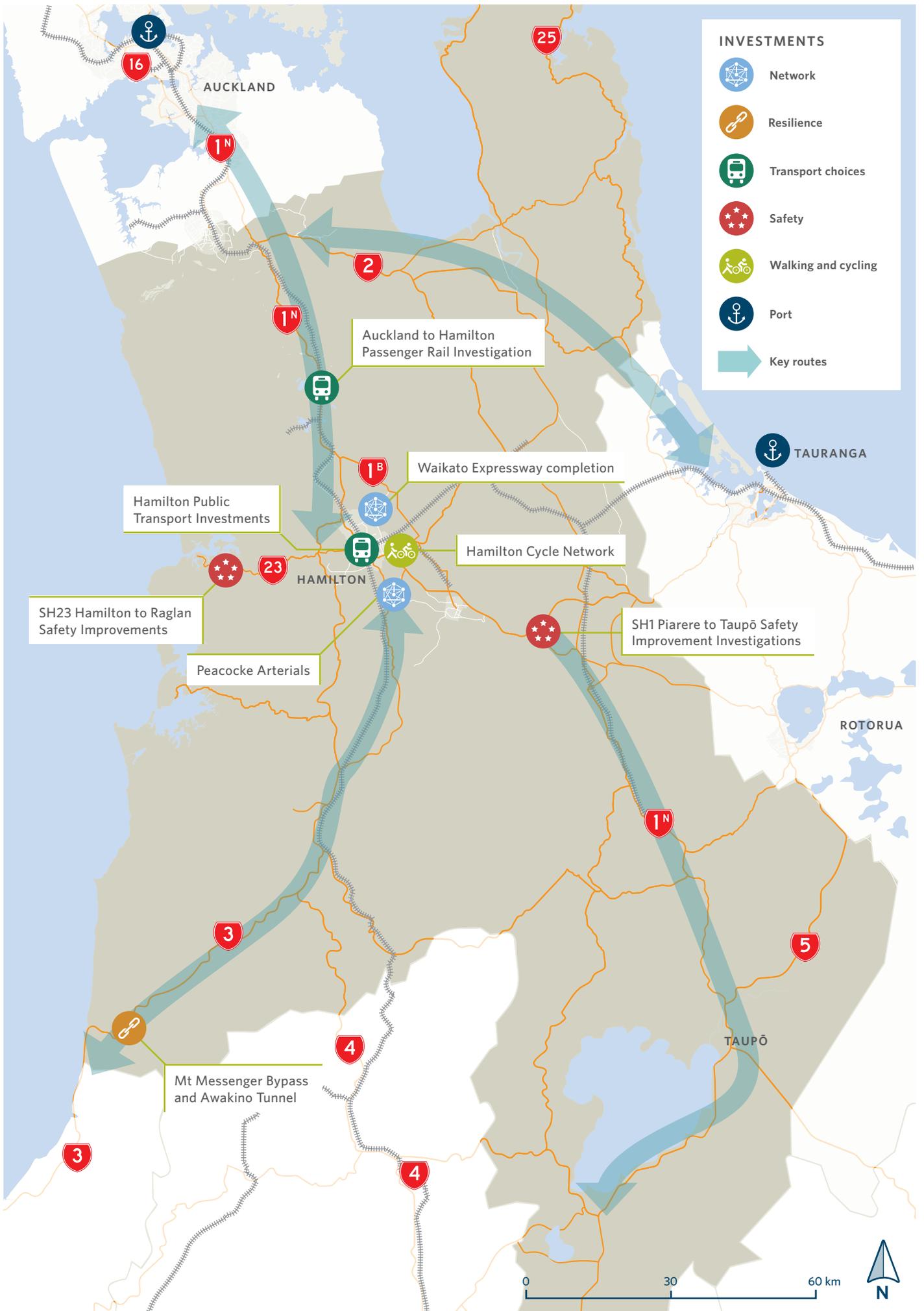
A CENTRE FOR FREIGHT

For road based freight, the completion of the Waikato Expressway in 2020 will make this journey safer, faster and more reliable. The expressway will create a four-lane highway that is forecast to take 35 minutes off a trip from Auckland to south of Cambridge.

While SH1/29 will remain the preferred route for road based freight between Tauranga and Auckland, once the Waikato Expressway project is completed, other routes suitable for high productivity motor vehicles (HPMV) will be investigated and developed to help the growing freight task move more effectively.

The East Coast Main Trunk Line is the major link for freight movement between Auckland, the Waikato and the Bay of Plenty. It carries over a third of New Zealand’s rail traffic and is the most densely used sector of the national rail network. Rail will continue to play an important role moving containerised and bulk exports to the Port of Tauranga, and delivering imports from the port to distribution hubs in the Waikato and south Auckland.





Hamilton is emerging as a major distribution and logistics centre, with access to road and rail networks, and strategically located to service Auckland, the Bay of Plenty including the Port of Tauranga and markets to the south.

Three key inland ports/distribution centres have been established or are planned: including a 480-hectare inland port under development at Ruakura; Fonterra's Crawford Street rail hub; Ports of Auckland's inland port at Horotiu. Further opportunities to move freight by rail will continue to be investigated.

HEARTLAND ACCESS

State highway connections from Waikato south to Taranaki (SH3) and east to Rotorua (SH5) are critical for the social and economic development of those centres and connecting regional communities.

While these two routes are generally fit for purpose, the 53km section of SH3 through Mt Messenger and the Awakino Gorge runs through rough terrain and is narrow and winding. A number of projects to primarily improve safety resilience and reliability are progressing, including the Mt Messenger and Awakino Tunnel bypasses.

Partly because of these strategically important interregional state highway corridors, Waikato has high traffic volumes. With around a quarter of national road deaths, the region has the highest fatal crash rate per kilometre in New Zealand.

IMPROVING SAFETY

The Transport Agency has a number of opportunities to improve safety in the region. Completion of the Waikato Expressway is expected to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries.

There is an ongoing programme of investment in safer roads and roadsides at high-risk locations, including SH2 Pokeno to Mangatarata and SH29 Piarere to Te Poi/Te Poi to Kaimai Summit projects. These projects are being re-evaluated as part of the NLTP development process to confirm that their focus is consistent with the GPS priorities.

The Transport Agency is working with local government to ensure that cycling is a safer transport choice as part of the BikeReady national programme of cycle education in schools.

PROVIDING CHOICE

There are expected to be around 390,000 people living in Hamilton and the surrounding Waikato and Waipā districts by 2043 – an increase of nearly 50 percent from the 2013 population. The Future Proof partnership has developed a long-term strategy to guide how the development associated with this growth is managed.

This partnership involves key stakeholders working together to deliver an integrated approach to land use and infrastructure planning including transport. Increasingly, more innovative approaches that help to influence and manage transport demand will be required to support more liveable urban outcomes particularly in and around the Hamilton area.

Passenger transport in Hamilton is focused around bus services. These make up 2.8 percent of trips to work - the national average is 5.5 percent - although Hamilton has the country's fourth largest public transport service. Hamilton City anticipates future capacity constraints and congestion on its roads, and the need to increase the number of trips made by public transport, walking and cycling.

The Access Hamilton Strategy guides Hamilton City's development and transport infrastructure planning during the next 30 years. The strategy highlights the need for an integrated approach to land use and transport planning, including actively promoting transport choice and working to increase the amount of walking and cycling.

Cycling is a priority focus for Hamilton and satellite urban centres. Significant investment is being made in urban cycle networks as well as strategic interregional connections, such as the Cambridge to Hamilton section of Te Awa - the great New Zealand river ride. Construction will start on the 20 kilometre Cambridge to Hamilton section, which is expected to attract hundreds of users every day.

Improving the region's network of cycleways through the Great Rides and Heartland Rides programmes will help to drive economic and social benefits to all parts of the region.

Waikato earns 8.1 percent of New Zealand's total gross domestic product (GDP). This includes a \$1.23 billion visitor economy - \$230 million from international tourists and \$1 billion from domestic visitors.

Tourist numbers continue to grow, with Pōkeno to Tauranga on SH2 an important tourist journey providing access to the Coromandel Peninsula, Bay of Plenty and to the Hobbiton attraction near Matamata.

The western end of the SH2 journey also carries high freight volumes. The journey is also subject to heavy traffic to and from coastal communities in the Coromandel and Bay of Plenty during holiday peaks.

GEARING UP FOR GROWTH

Considerable population growth and development is projected and planned for Hamilton, the settlements that surround it such as Cambridge and the north Waikato area.

This growth will place demands on the transport system in and around Hamilton, the north Waikato and southern Auckland as people travel for work, school, shopping and community events. The Transport Agency will continue to work with partners and key stakeholders on integrating land use and transport planning to manage this growth to support good urban development outcomes.

Examples of this include the work led by the Future Proof partnership and the focus on developing an integrated spatial plan for the Auckland-Hamilton corridor. This includes investigations into an Auckland to Hamilton passenger rail connection to help provide travel choice, reduce pressure on roads, and to support growth and urban development in existing centres along the corridor.

South Waikato has a declining population, high unemployment and low household incomes. Improving transport choice and access through a reliable and resilient land transport system is a key contributor to providing more business and job opportunities to grow the area's economy and providing access for people to social and recreational activities.

RELIABLE JOURNEYS

Waikato's land transport system, generally, is considered resilient. However, the Coromandel and Raglan areas can be exposed to severe weather events and tidal surges that cause flooding, and slips and closures on the road network. During winter, snow and ice can also cause disruption on SH1 between Turangi and Taihape. The low-lying Hauraki Plains have been identified as being vulnerable to rising sea levels. The Transport Agency is continuing to work to improve the resilience of the region's highways to minimise disruption and improve travel-time reliability. An example of this will be working with the key partners including local government to investigate responses to the resilience issues experienced in the Coromandel.

While road transport networks in and around Hamilton are generally fit for purpose, sustained growth has led to increased congestion at key points, and conflict between local and state highway traffic. Completing the Waikato Expressway will help relieve these pressures by enabling the majority of north-south state highway traffic to bypass the city.

INVESTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- \$235m to complete the Hamilton section of the Waikato Expressway.
- Hamilton public transport programme improvements.
- SH3 Mt Messenger Bypass. This project will take SH3 around the existing problematic steep, narrow and winding section of SH3 at Mt Messenger where there are a range of safety, resilience and reliability issues.
- \$2.9m for the Hamilton to Auckland passenger rail start-up service.
- \$7.9m construction of section 1 of the Hamilton to Cambridge cycle connection.
- \$34m for the SH3 Awakino Tunnel Bypass.
- \$13m for the SH26 KiriKiri Stream Bridge replacement.

CASE STUDY

SAVING OUR NATIVE BATS

Emerging from the many kilometres of expressway under construction in Waikato is an environmental survival strategy to help two of the country's oldest residents exist in the modern world.

Long tailed and short tailed bats - they are no relation - are ecological ancients who have called New Zealand home since it splintered from the Australian mainland some 65 million years ago.

The bats are often in the front line of Transport Agency projects to improve the safety and efficiency of the state highway network in the Waikato. New roads can be driven through gullies and forests where they live and feed, and flight paths are disrupted by new bridges.

The Transport Agency, contractors and consultants have obligations under the Resource Management and Wildlife Acts to protect the environment and manage wildlife like bats. Wildlife management could differ from project to project and the Transport Agency recognised the need for one consistent framework.

The starting point was an established Memorandum of Understanding setting out how the Department of Conservation (DoC) and the Transport Agency work together where the environment and state highways shoulder up to each other.

Collaboration between the two led to the creation of the framework and a consistent approach that covers a wide range of bat management techniques including the sort of monitoring equipment to be used, locations for new nests, and how information about the tiny mammals is interpreted and used.

The groundbreaking framework can apply not only to state highway construction but to other infrastructure projects throughout New Zealand.

It is too early to say how effective the framework is. A third species of native bat has been wiped out by a plague of rats. At the very least, the DoC/Transport Agency framework will give these remaining two species of ancients a fighting chance of survival.

