Northland has a poor road safety record - speeding, impairment, not using seat belts and fatigue are primary contributors. Growth from tourism and freight could exacerbate this.
NORTHLAND TODAY

NORTHLAND’S ECONOMY IS LARGELY RURAL BASED, RELYING ON DAIRY, FARMING, FORESTRY AND HORTICULTURE PRODUCTION.

The oil refinery at Marsden Point remains a large employer in the region, while tourism is offering significant growth opportunities. The region’s economic advantages include its proximity to the large Auckland market, easy access to export markets, its natural environment and climate.

Almost 70% of the population lives in rural communities outside the region’s only major centre, Whangārei.2 This dispersed population means there is limited public transport service beyond Whangārei and Kaitaia and a high dependency on private vehicle use to access key services, such as tertiary education, training and healthcare.

Northland’s population grew by 27,000 or 18.1% between 2013-18,17 faster than any other region as a result of immigration and accommodating the growth overflow from Auckland.

Key transport routes, such as SH1, are critical in connecting Northland’s towns and communities. This will continue as access along the corridor north of Auckland is improved, making Northland an even more attractive region in which to live, work and visit.
NORTHLAND TOMORROW

Northland’s percentage population growth rate from 2013-2018 was the highest of any region. Currently it is forecast to grow to approximately 197,000 by 2043 or 4% of New Zealand’s population, largely as a result of the ongoing effects of Auckland’s strong growth during the next decade. This is expected to result in increased traffic volumes and congestion around Kerikeri, Whangārei and Ruakaka and along the Whangārei to Auckland corridor.

This population growth, industry changes because of climate change and the country’s transition to a low-emission economy will impact rural land use in Northland. For example, there is already evidence of a transition from dairying to avocado production. While primary industries will remain the backbone to the region’s economy, the service industry is growing its share of employment in the main centres.

Hotter, drier summers, an expected outcome of climate change, will increase dust issues on the region’s high proportion of unsealed roads, while sea level rise and increased intensity of storm events will result in greater disruptions to access in some areas. Only 40% of the region’s 5805km of local roads are sealed.

Rural communities in Kaipara and the Far North are looking for increased local employment and improved connections to centres such as to Whangārei for their young people to access education and employment, and for older residents to access physical and social activities, health and social services. Those living in Whangārei and larger centres, have a growing expectation to plan, book and pay for transport across a range of modes on one digital platform.

Emerging technologies, such as on-demand shuttles, could provide a feasible shared transport option in the future to help people get around within the Far North and Kaipara, and improve access to services in Whangārei. 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.

Northland’s ageing population, particularly in the Kaipara district, and the region’s high unemployment rate will place even greater pressure on Northland’s councils’ ability to maintain and fund new infrastructure.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Northland’s social and economic opportunities are dependent on its connections, both rail and road, south to Auckland and the rest of the country to support key industries, enable visitors and allow communities to thrive.
- A greater role for NorthPort within the upper North Island could significantly increase freight volumes on road and rail. This would need support from transport networks (road, rail and coastal shipping) that can support the safe and efficient movement of goods to Auckland and other domestic markets.
- Forecast growth in Whangārei and Marsden/Ruakaka and coastal townships potentially increases reliance on private vehicle travel and travelling long distances to access services.
- Sea level rise and more extreme weather events will impact coastal communities and result in more frequent road closures.
- Northland has a poor safety record, the greatest risk areas are SH1 from Warkworth to Pakaraka (SH10), Whangārei’s urban area and high-risk rural roads. Driver behaviours such as speeding, alcohol, drug impairment and people not wearing seatbelts are also key issues.
- Regional development can be supported by improved access to employment and essential services for remote communities, access to visitor destinations and goods to market.
FOCUS OF EFFORT: 2018–21

Planning for local road improvements in Northland will provide improved access across the region. It will also support increased growth in the urban areas to reduce reliance on private vehicles, provide better public transport services and more walking and cycling facilities. The planned Whangārei urban cycle network will make it safer and more convenient for residents to travel about the city.

Work continues to identify and improve high-risk safety areas across the Northland network, as well as monitoring use by freight and tourists, to help reduce deaths and serious injuries. A programme of safety improvements is planned at regional hotspots, particularly along the popular tourist Twin Coast Discovery Route.

Improvements to Loop Road will make it safer for freight trucks accessing NorthPort, while the replacement of single-lane bridges at Taipā and Matakohe will not only improve safety but support growth of the region’s economy.

Free driving lessons and tests for the region’s young drivers is expected to both improve access to education, training and employment opportunities for those without access to alternative transport services and help reduce road deaths.
**SUPPORT REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (HIGH)**

Northland is a surge region identified by the government as needing investment to support regional economic development, particularly outside Whangārei. To support regional growth, enable improved access to education, employment and visitor destinations, and to help raise standards of living, we will:

- provide a safer and more resilient journey on SH1 Auckland to Whangārei, including NorthPort, for people, freight and visitors. We will progress initiatives in line with Te Hana to Whangārei business case re-evaluation work and continue route protection for longer-term corridor improvements
- provide a safer and more resilient new 22km four-lane corridor of SH1 from Whangārei to NorthPort, with a separated shared walking and cycling path. This will be progressed through the New Zealand Upgrade Programme
- support freight initiatives that are multi-modal, efficient and safe, such as improving the efficiency and reliability of the North Auckland Rail Line and rail connections to NorthPort
- delivery of priority cycle trails and walkways
- support improvement to prioritised rest areas with essential amenities to improve safety and journey experience
- support planning initiatives and township improvement plans in the Far North and Kaipara to deliver safer and more accessible local travel options
- maintain our focus for remote communities to access employment
- maintain focus on selected, high-priority state highway improvements, including SH11 and SH12 for the benefit of forestry and horticulture industry development initiatives in the Far North and Kaipara.

**SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE HARMs (HIGH)**

**SAFETY**

Support implementation of the Road to Zero: New Zealand’s road safety strategy 2020–2030 and associated action plan (2020–22), and regional safety strategies with emphasis on:

- targeting road policing and behaviour change programmes with a focus on alcohol and drug impairment, people not wearing seat belts and speeding
- safety treatments targeting run-off road and head-on crashes on high-risk rural roads (rural roads are roads with speed limits >80km/h)
- speed management to provide safe and appropriate speeds on high-risk rural roads with targeted use of safety cameras to reduce speeding
- supporting opportunities to reduce conflict between visiting drivers and heavy vehicles on the network north of Whangārei
- exploring with Northland district councils how the sealing programme can be accelerated to reduce harms.

**HEALTH**

Our approach to delivering better health outcomes, particularly the reduction of harmful emissions, will primarily be through initiatives that target other step changes, including improved urban form, increasing access to and use of public transport, walking and cycling, and efforts to reduce carbon 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.

**TRANSFORM URBAN MOBILITY (MEDIUM)**

Projected population growth in and around Whangārei 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:

- assisting and enhancing the Whangārei District Council (WDC) with the implementation of their Walking and Cycling Strategy
- assisting and supporting the council with planning and implementation of the Revised Regional Public Transport Plan
- supporting initiatives to improve connections and travel choice between the main Whangārei urban area and the growing urban area at Ruakaka/Marsden Point
- investigating opportunities for on-demand transport services in Whangārei and smaller regional centres
- working with WDC to encourage actively manage car-parking in the city centre, city fringe area and other key centres to increase uptake of public transport, walking and cycling for trips to these locations.
**IMPROVE URBAN FORM (MEDIUM)**

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

- increase focus on collaborative work with WDC in producing the Future Development Strategy (FDS)
- review district plan urban sections and support the city centre masterplan with appropriate transport investment for growth that make the best use of existing infrastructure
- improve guidance for WDC to integrate their revised programme business case with their FDS
- support land use changes that enable better public transport, walking and cycling facilities to significantly increase the number of residents living in the town centre
- support improved connections between the Whangārei city centre and waterfront (Town Basin)
- advocate for increased strategic integrated planning for land-use and transport along the Auckland – Whangārei corridor, including growth in coastal communities along the route and the future role of NorthPort.

**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:

- engaging in local planning processes to avoid infrastructure and development in locations 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
- engaging in long-term strategic planning to respond to the vulnerability of existing assets
- enabling quick recovery following disruption to the land transport system.

**MITIGATION**

We will focus on:

- engaging locally in planning processes so that development supports reduced carbon emissions by reducing travel by private vehicle and average trip length.
- ensuring network design and operation makes the best use of existing transport systems to manage demand and reduce emissions by prioritising the move to public transport and low emission options, and actively managing speed, urban freight and congestion.