

Initiatives replicated in other regions

More than three million international visitors come to New Zealand each year, and tourism is our largest export industry in terms of foreign exchange earnings. In the last 10 years New Zealand's overseas short-stay visitor arrival numbers have increased steadily from 2.4 million in the year to November 2006, to 3.5 million in the year to November 2016.

By 2022, visitor arrivals are expected to grow 5.4 percent a year to reach 4.5 million and international visitor expenditure will increase 65.5 percent to \$16 billion.

Many of these overseas visitors are choosing to drive themselves around New Zealand. Traditionally domestic tourists made up the majority of self-drive visitors, but there has been a marked increase in the number of international tourists who hire rental cars and camper vans. This trend is expected to continue and so the NZ Transport Agency has increased its focus on visiting overseas drivers as key customers.

The Visiting Drivers Project was established following the 2013/14 summer season when tourists driving on New Zealand roads became an issue of intense public and media interest. Many media articles reported unsafe driving and road crashes involving visitors, including some crashes that seriously injured or killed New Zealanders.

The project has delivered a range of initiatives that focus on road safety at each stage of a visitor's holiday – planning, booking, in-flight, arriving in New Zealand and when actually driving on our roads.

Many of the project's on-the-ground initiatives (implemented in Otago, Southland and on the West Coast) have now been replicated by the Transport Agency across the country for the benefit of all visiting drivers.



These on-the-ground initiatives include:

Education campaign on the Picton to Christchurch alternate route

The Visiting Drivers Project launched a major summer road safety campaign in Otago, Southland and the West Coast at the end of 2016.

The campaign is focused on helping overseas drivers recognise that New Zealand's roads are different from what they're used to. Billboards, posters, digital advertising and social media have been used to promote key safety messages to visiting drivers.

As the campaign was being launched, the Kaikōura earthquake struck resulting in the closure of State Highway 1 between Christchurch and Picton. The alternate highway route is via Lewis Pass which takes longer than State Highway 1 and is narrower and more winding.

It was decided that with the summer tourist season underway and many overseas visitors expected to drive this new route, the Visiting Drivers Project's advertising campaign would work equally well on the alternate Picton to Christchurch route.

The campaign's digital advertising, posters, billboards, coffee cup stickers and bar coasters have been rolled out along this route to remind overseas drivers to adjust their driving

For more information go to www.saferjourneys.govt.nz/visitingdriversproject

to suit New Zealand's roads by allowing more time for their journeys and driving to the conditions. Drivers are also being encouraged to take regular breaks.

'Keep Left' billboards in South Canterbury and Northland

'Keep Left' billboards, created by the Visiting Drivers Project for Otago, Southland and the West Coast, have been installed by the Transport Agency on some key Canterbury highways.

Three southbound billboards between the Rakaia River Bridge (north of Ashburton) and Lake Tekapo remind drivers to keep left. The billboards are targeting recently arrived visitors travelling south from Christchurch to Queenstown or Aoraki/Mt Cook.

'Keep Left' billboards are also being introduced in Northland over the 2016/17 summer period.



Road lane directional arrows in Wellington

The Transport Agency has installed more than 250 road lane directional arrows across the Wellington region. They are designed to increase drivers' awareness of keeping in the left lane as they travel on the state highway network.

While the arrows are new to the Wellington region, they have been successfully used in other parts of the country, including the Visiting Drivers Project regions of Otago, Southland and the West Coast.



The arrows are being targeted to areas where historically there have been issues with drivers being confused about which lane they need to be in, as they exit an intersection or at one lane bridges. The arrows are especially helpful in rural areas where the speeds are higher and there is less traffic around to help drivers remember to drive on the left.

Made of thermoplastic dot matrix material, the reflectorised white arrows are safer and more visible for all road users than traditional paint markings.

Vehicle checks

The Transport Agency, together with Police and Tourism partners, regularly conduct roadside checks of commercial vehicles travelling on the Te Anau to Milford Road. The purpose of these operations is to monitor compliance levels of coaches and buses, particularly in relation to driver and mechanical compliance, potential fuel leaks and dirty engine bays as it is seen as critical to minimise the possibility of a fire in the Homer Tunnel.

With the initiation of the Visiting Drivers Project in March 2014 and the increased focus on visiting drivers, the Transport Agency incorporated rental vehicle checks into their regular commercial vehicle checks and targeted other tourist locations such as Tekapo. This helps ensure rental vehicles are fit for purpose and that the rental company has provided road safety information to the driver.

The Transport Agency is now carrying out similar roadside checks on rental vehicles on key visitor routes in other regions.

Accurate travel information from navigation apps

One of the issues for visiting drivers is that they sometimes receive travel information from navigation apps or devices that is not accurate or helpful.

Tourists can be directed down roads that are shorter but because they are often narrower and more winding than the state highways, the journey actually takes longer and can be more challenging.

The Visiting Drivers Project alerted Google to this issue and they made changes to some of the problematic routes in the Otago and Southland regions.

In South Canterbury, the Transport Agency had been worried by visiting drivers stopping suddenly on the crest of the hill at the Tekapo-Pukaki canal crossing point on State Highway 8. It turned out they were following their GPS's suggestion to take a short cut, only to find the Canal Road closed.

The Transport Agency followed the project's lead and worked with Google to amend the travel information to make it clear that these roads are now closed to vehicular traffic. The Transport Agency, working with Google, also made changes to the route to the popular tourist attraction of Hobbiton in the Waikato region.

Summary

Tourism brings significant benefits to New Zealand's wider economy and individual regions. At the same time it brings challenges, including the need to keep our roads safe for everyone. New Zealand roads are different and it is important visitors are prepared for driving here.

The Visiting Drivers Project is focused on ensuring overseas drivers have all the information they need to make good choices for their journey based on correct travel times, speeds, road types and conditions.

Many of the Visiting Drivers Project education initiatives benefit all international visitors to New Zealand as they reach them before they begin driving on our roads.

The engineering initiatives on the roads and roadsides in Otago, Southland and the West Coast benefit all road users in these regions. As the Transport Agency applies these engineering initiatives to other parts of New Zealand, more and more road users, including international visitors, will enjoy the benefits of a safer roading network.

Visiting Drivers Project - Background

The Visiting Drivers Project is led by the Transport Agency, on behalf of the government, and made up of representatives from local government and the rental vehicle and tourism industries.

All the project partners are committed to working together to find ways to look after and inform visitors, and keep them and others safe on our roads while maintaining New Zealand's reputation as an attractive and safe tourist destination.

The project provides road safety information to all overseas visitors (and domestic visitors where appropriate) at every stage of their journey - planning, booking, in-flight, on arrival, and when driving on our roads. The project is focused on improving the roads and roadsides in Otago, Southland and the West Coast where overseas drivers make up a significantly large proportion of the traffic in summer. These engineering initiatives benefit all road users in the project area, not just visitors.

The project partners have developed an action plan with a package of short, medium and long-term initiatives across all stages of the tourism supply chain. These initiatives are designed to strengthen all parts of the roading system - safe vehicles, safe speeds, safe roads and roadsides, and safe users - and collectively have a big impact.

