

# TE TAI O POUTINI WEST COAST

## AT A GLANCE

*Our focus in the West Coast is to help create a safer, more resilient land transport system. One that supports economic and regional growth and recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, maintains critical connections and provides appropriate levels of service across all land transport networks.*

## COVID-19 INSIGHTS AND IMPACTS

This section sets out the how the current pandemic might impact on land transport in the West Coast. 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

- The West Coast economy relies heavily on a small number of industries with tourism, agriculture and mining making significant contributions.
- Employment in agriculture and mining is forecast to remain relatively stable.
- The region is one of the most reliant on tourism, with guest nights per capita (40), five times higher than the national average.<sup>63</sup> Fifty percent of the tourism spend in the region comes from international visitors, so the region will be heavily impacted by border closures.
- The ability for the West Coast to offset these losses through domestic tourism, is challenged by its remoteness from major population centres in the North Island and scale of the decline.

### POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITIES

Under the slower recovery scenario:

- the West Coast's forecast fall in employment to 2021 (relative to BAU) is -9.0%, significantly higher than the national average of -6.7%<sup>35</sup>
- Westland District employment (-14.7%) is particularly hard hit because of its reliance on international visitors

- the region is forecast to bounce back relatively well, with employment returning to near BAU levels by 2025<sup>35</sup>
- Māori, Pasifika and youth are likely to experience the greatest impacts, particularly those in key tourism centres. An increase in youth not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is expected.

### POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE LAND TRANSPORT SYSTEM OVER THE COMING DECADE

- Reduction in inter-regional trips over the short to medium-term because of reduced visitor numbers.
- Road and rail links within the region and key life-line connections to neighbouring regions are critical for access, freight and tourism, and supporting post-COVID-19 recovery.
- 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

### SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE HARMS

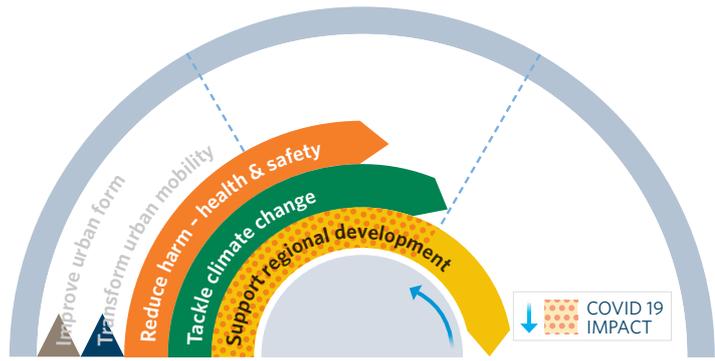
The West Coast has relatively low levels of DSIs, although it has the highest level per capita.<sup>47</sup>

### TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

The region's infrastructure and coastal roads are especially vulnerable to coastal erosion, extreme weather and flooding. Reliance on tourism and freight distribution means the availability of these networks will continue to be critical to economic stability in the region and as part of the recovery.

### SUPPORT REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The region's productivity is the sixth-lowest in the country, and the resident population is forecast to decrease over the next 30 years. The region's reliance on tourism will be heavily impacted by border closures.



SIGNIFICANCE OF STEP CHANGE TO REGION 2021-31

KEY 

 **31,575**  
REGIONAL POPULATION<sup>25</sup>

**-1.8%**  
REGIONAL POPULATION GROWTH 2013-18<sup>25</sup>

**7%**  
OF NATIONAL POPULATION<sup>25</sup> 2018

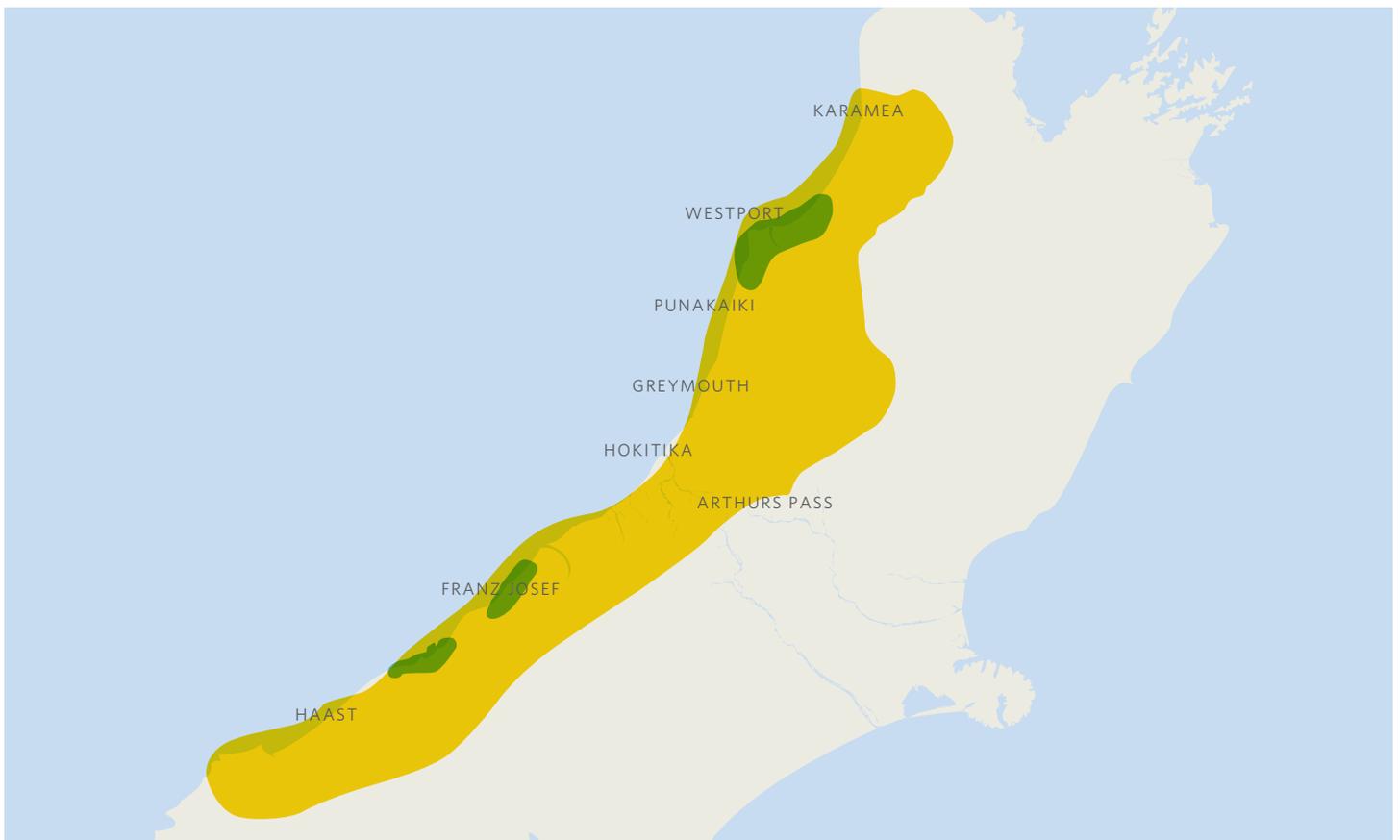
 **1.7%**  
OF NATIONAL DEATHS & SERIOUS INJURIES (DSI)<sup>47</sup>  
**50** TOTAL DSI<sup>47</sup>  
ANNUAL AVERAGE FOR PERIOD 2016-19

 **1%**  
OF NATIONAL VEHICLE EMISSIONS<sup>48</sup>

 **6%**  
OF NATIONAL GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT  
YEAR END MARCH 2018<sup>26</sup>

**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE**  
NO AVAILABLE REGIONAL DATA  
**4.1%**  
NATIONAL RATE  
YEAR END JUNE 2019<sup>49</sup>

Pre COVID-19 data



## WEST COAST TODAY

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

### THE WEST COAST IS ONE OF NEW ZEALAND'S MOST REMOTE REGIONS, RUNNING OVER 600KM ALONG THE WESTERN EDGE OF THE SOUTH ISLAND, WEDGED BETWEEN THE TASMAN SEA AND THE SOUTHERN ALPS.

It is the country's fifth largest region by land area, but the smallest by population size. Around half of the 31,575 residents are located in Greymouth, Westport and Hokitika with the remainder dispersed across the region.

Dairy farming and mining are longstanding industries. Tourism was increasing significantly prior to COVID-19 border restrictions. The region's economy is more reliant on tourism than any other region, with 40 guest nights booked per capita, well ahead of the second highest region Otago with 26, and more than five times higher than the national average of eight.<sup>64</sup> The glaciers are the third most common reason overseas visitors give for visiting New Zealand.

Economically the West Coast is performing below the national average in measures such as economic productivity and employment rates. Leading up to 2020, there was a significant difference in the economic performance of the three districts. Westland was performing better as a result of its strong tourism industry. It is a government priority to invest in the region to address the challenges around people's access to social and economic opportunity.

The West Coast is relatively isolated and relies heavily on SH6 and SH73 to connect communities and enable the movement of freight and tourists. The road and rail connections linking the region to the north, east and south are critical for the movement of primary produce, freight and tourists.

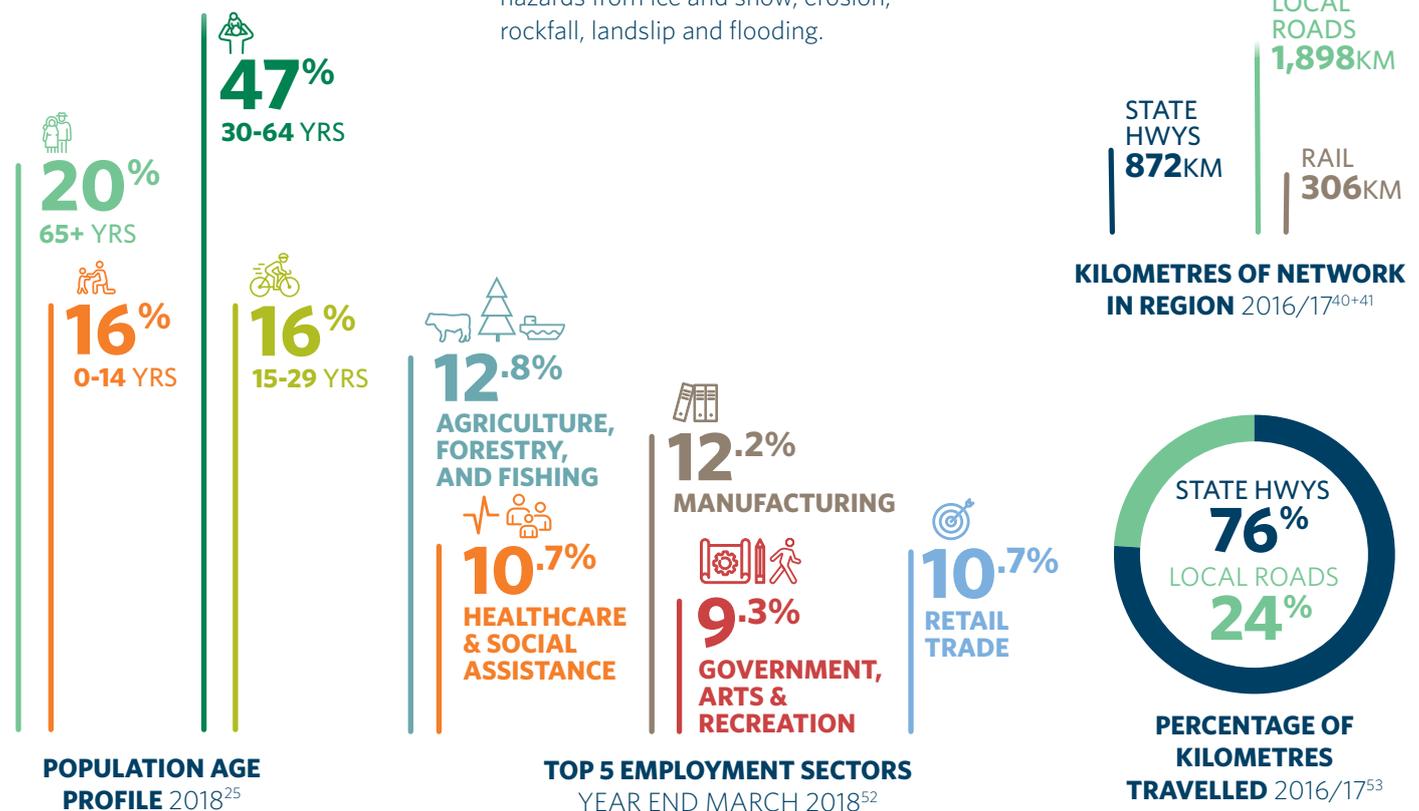
The land transport system is prone to disruption from slips, rock falls, flooding and crashes, with the area north of Westport particularly vulnerable to coastal erosion. State highways 6, 7, and 73 are all subject to high-risk natural hazards from ice and snow, erosion, rockfall, landslip and flooding.

The impact of network closures on customers and communities is worsened by a lack of alternate routes and extreme detour lengths. The tourist and freight sectors are particularly impacted by these closures.

There is very limited public transport on the West Coast, so movement between towns is highly reliant on access to private vehicles.

While the West Coast has relatively low levels of total deaths and serious injuries (DSIs), the region's transport system has the country's worst safety record in terms of DSIs per capita. The region has issues around:

- run-off road and head-on crashes, crashes involving vulnerable road users and speeding on high-risk urban and rural roads
- driver behaviour, especially with alcohol and drug impairment, people not wearing seatbelts, and speeding
- increasing numbers of buses, campervans and tourist drivers means more vehicles travel at slower speeds, leading to frustration when they can't be passed.



## WEST COAST TOMORROW

The West Coast has a small population that is projected to decline over time. Prior to the pandemic, the region's population is projected to fall to 30,600 by 2043. All districts were expected to experience population decline to some degree by 2043, including the largest centre, Greymouth.<sup>27</sup>

The region's population is aging faster than the national average with 30% of the population projected to be 65 years or over in 2043, with a relatively high median age also.<sup>27</sup> Ensuring good access to social networks, sports and social activities and essential services will be key.

The economy is moving away from traditional industries such as mining. Before COVID-19, tourism was a key regional industry. Domestic and international tourism was forecast to grow but will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic at least in the short to medium-term. Westland District (-14.7%) is particularly hard hit because of its reliance on international visitors.

Prior to COVID-19, employment in service industries was growing in the larger town centres and mining was expected to continue to decline. The transition to a low-carbon economy will change the way the dairy industry uses land. This will impact on the nature and movement of freight in the region. Under a slow recovery, the West Coast's would experience a drop in employment to 2021 (relative to BAU) of -9.0%.<sup>35</sup> This is significantly higher than the national average of -6.7%. However, the region is forecast to bounce back relatively well, with employment returning to near BAU levels by 2025.<sup>35</sup> Manufacturing and health will continue to be important.

The region is reliant on international tourism. Guest nights per capita are five times higher than the national average.<sup>68</sup> With 50% of the tourism spend coming from international visitors, the region will be heavily impacted by border closures.<sup>54</sup> Domestic tourism will not offset this reduction in visitor numbers largely because of its remoteness from major population centres in the North Island.

Rural and remote communities are looking for improved connections to Greymouth and beyond for their young people to access education and work, and for senior residents to access social activities, health and social services.

Emerging technologies, such as on-demand shuttles, could provide a future transport option to help people get around within these communities and improve access to services in Greymouth and beyond. Visitors to the West Coast will have a growing expectation to access information about the availability and condition of the transport network using a digital platform. This relies on the availability of mobile coverage. Improved access to high-quality data and information will also improve management of the transport system.

Some parts of the West Coast are already experiencing issues with coastal flooding and erosion. These impacts are expected to increase as a result of sea level rise and more intense weather. Forecasted increases in the frequency and intensity of storms will exacerbate existing issues in many parts of the region. Climate change impacts will add to existing resilience concerns in the region, for example the potential impact of a large earthquake on the Alpine Fault. It is likely that key tourist routes in coastal locations will be impacted by these, potentially affecting local economic productivity and business development.

Maintaining existing networks is already an issue, due in part to 85% of the region being conservation land from which councils receive no income from rates.<sup>65</sup> The significant number of people forecast to be living on a fixed or low income will place even greater pressure on councils' ability to maintain and fund new infrastructure and provide appropriate services to residents.

### KEY SYSTEM INSIGHTS

- The West Coast is the only region whose population is expected to decline over the next 30 years. This, and the low population base, creates a challenge for local councils to fund network maintenance.
- The region will be particularly affected by the downturn in tourism and border closures, however, employment is anticipated to return to near BAU levels by 2025.
- The region's land transport system is vulnerable to coastal erosion, extreme weather and flooding – the frequency and scale of which will increase in the long-term. Seismic risk is also above average because of proximity to the Alpine Fault.
- Road and rail links within the region and connecting the West Coast to neighbouring regions are critical for access, freight, domestic tourism and future international tourism. 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.
- Increasing freight volumes are placing pressure on aging infrastructure, particularly bridges between Ikamatua to Stillwater and Jackson.
- A small population spread throughout a large region has created a high reliance on private vehicles to get around.
- The region has safety challenges around run-off roads crashes, inappropriate speeds on high-risk urban and rural roads, and poor driver behaviour.

## FOCUS OF EFFORT: 2018-21

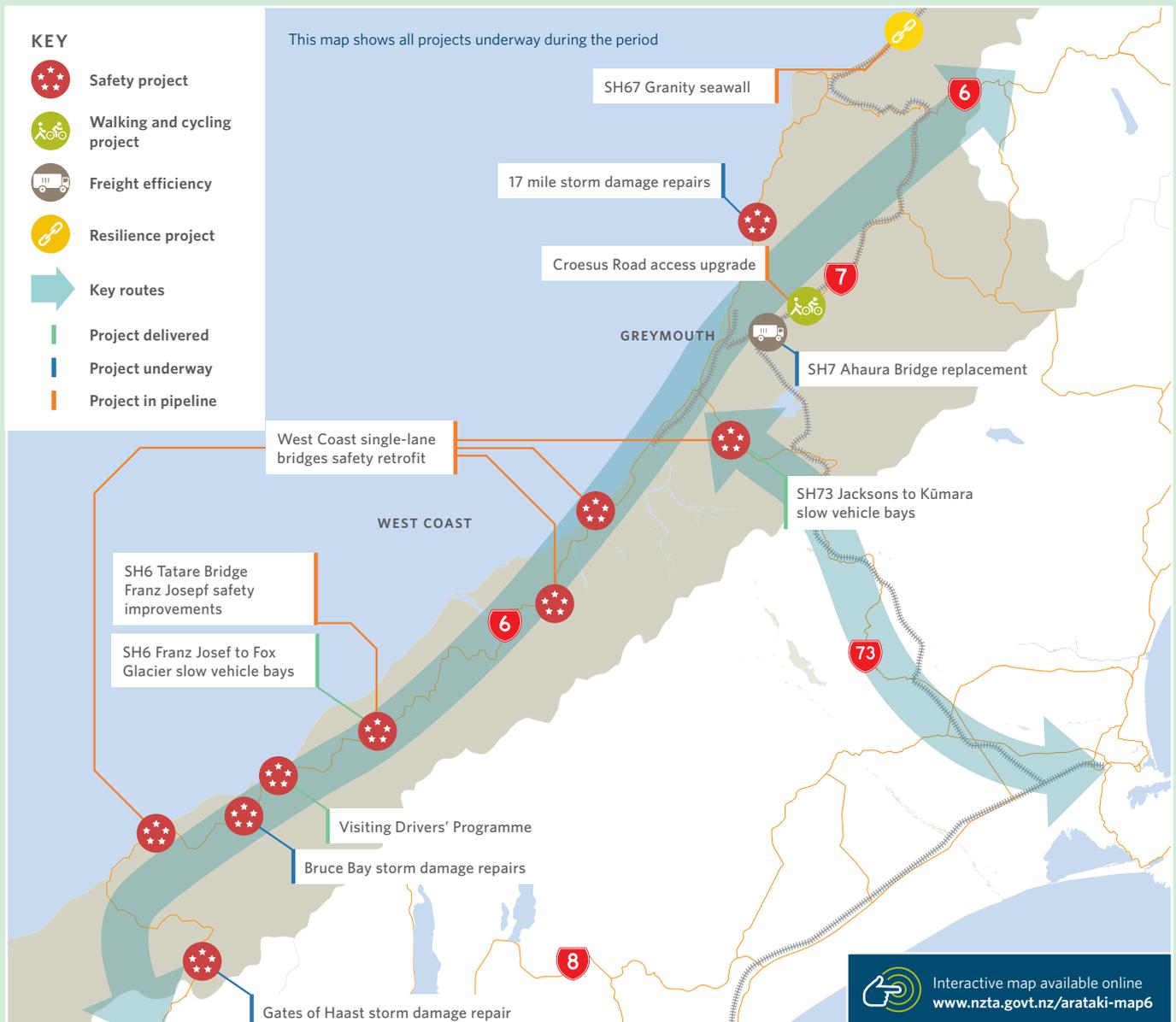
This section represents the existing commitments (eg the NLTP and NZUP). V2 has not been updated to include economic stimulus packages as that space continues to evolve.

Resilience work is planned for the highway network on the West Coast during this three-year National Land Transport Programme (NLTP) period to help reduce the number of closures and minimise disruption for customers. On SH6, SH7 and SH73, work is focused on helping prevent slips and rock fall at several known vulnerable locations. We will also engage with councils as they progress climate change adaptation planning.

The region has worked with central government and independent consultants to develop the Tai Poutini West Coast Growth Study which identifies the region’s

opportunities for, and barriers to, economic growth. The report considers the role of transport in economic growth:

- Investment in road resilience, safe and reliable connections along the West Coast into the region from the north, east and south are critical to supporting the region’s economy.
- As part of the NZ Upgrade Programme, the government’s regional investments to address key challenges include:
  - installing compliant guardrail on up to five single lane bridges throughout the West Coast network
  - supporting increased economic benefits from visitors and supporting the tourist industry, through enhanced visitor experiences, corridor improvements and increased visitor information
  - continued support for regional walking and cycling trails where there are opportunities to grow tourism and support increased expenditure from visitors.



## AREAS OF FOCUS: WEST COAST 2021-31

### 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 areas at increased risk of natural hazards and effects of climate change and prioritising other high-risk areas, eg Franz Josef
- enabling continuous improvement in network resilience through maintenance, renewals and through low cost-low risk investments
- enabling quick recovery following disruption to the land transport system
- supporting development of a longer-term response plan for vulnerable communities and infrastructure.

#### MITIGATION

We will focus on:

- engaging in local planning processes to ensure urban form and transport planning focuses on reducing emissions, private vehicle travel and average trip length
- ensuring climate change and greenhouse emission targets are embedded in the Regional Land Transport Plan
- supporting walking, cycling and lower emissions transport mode.

### SUPPORT REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (MEDIUM)

The West Coast is a priority for regional development support because of the long-term challenges it faces, such as high unemployment and low incomes. It is a surge region, identified by the government as needing investment to support regional economic development. To support regional growth, enable improved access to education, employment and visitor destinations, and to help raise standards of living, we will support:

- completing regeneration plans for towns and villages, such as the Franz Josef and Greymouth Master Plans, and deliver well planned transport that enables future growth
- contributing to visitor destination plans, providing transport infrastructure and services that improve access to destinations (Franz Josef, Dolomite Point, Croesus Track and Oparara Arches)
- SH6 Tatare Bridge Franz Josef safety improvements to address safety and access to the 130 metre-long single lane bridge to Franz Josef
- West Coast SH single-lane bridges safety retrofit installing compliant guardrail installed on up to five single-lane bridges

- Granity seawall protection on SH 67 between Granity and Ngakawau
- completing and promoting walking and cycling trail plans, such as the Regional Cycle Trail Strategy, and a connected network of cycle and walking trails
- working closely with councils, ports and regional tourism organisations to explore opportunities to improve tourism and possible amenity improvements
- transport initiatives that can improve economic performance including investment in the TranzAlpine service upgrade
- actively managing the SH6 connection, recognising its critical role in supporting the region's economy and the lifeline function that it provides to local communities.

### SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE HARMS (MEDIUM)

#### SAFETY

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

- targeted visiting driver campaigns
- targeted road policing and behaviour change programmes with a focus on alcohol and drug impairment, people not wearing seatbelts 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)
- separated facilities and infrastructure improvements in areas with significant levels of walking and cycling
- speed management to provide safe and appropriate speeds on high-risk rural roads. Targeted use of safety cameras to reduce speeding.

#### 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 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.

