

West Coast Regional Update

August 2020

Overview

Building resilience into the state highway network to support the region's economy is our focus for investment in the West Coast's transport system. Tourism and dairy are key industries for the region, both of which rely on safe and resilient roads.

SH6 runs the length of the region and forms a critical lifeline between the region's communities, as well as providing access to key tourism attractions such as the glaciers, Punakaiki and walking and cycling trails. However, the highway is prone to closures from slips, rock falls, flooding and crashes. These closures not only disrupt travel but also have a significant impact on the economy.

There are no viable alternative routes south of Hokitika when SH6 is closed; and where there are detours, these are lengthy and often on unsealed local roads. Almost half the local roads on the West Coast are unsealed.

With few connections to neighbouring regions, and the challenging geographical environment, a resilient network is vital in the West Coast to support economic and social opportunities.

Safer and more reliable routes are required to the north, south and east of the region as visitors often travel around the South Island and come into the West Coast from these three access points.

Access

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 from unplanned events, in particular weather-related incidents. On SH6, SH7 and SH73, work is focused on helping prevent slips and rock falls at several known locations.

On SH7, a key freight route from the north, work is underway to replace the single-lane wooden Ahaura River Bridge with a new two-lane bridge, including pedestrian and cyclist access and a realigned highway.

Upgrading this bridge is part of an overall programme of work on the West Coast to improve freight connections and enable trucks to access the region's primary produce and move goods to market in the most cost-effective and efficient way.

With the Department of Conservation and Buller District Council, Waka Kotahi is planning to improve parking, cyclist and pedestrian access and connectivity between amenities and the iconic pancake rocks and blowholes at Punakaiki.

Waka Kotahi supported Grey District Council, Development West Coast and MBIE to improve the Croesus Trail transport link between Blackball township and the start of the Paparoa Track. Construction is nearing completion.

Safety

In this NLTP period, more than \$100 million will be spent on maintenance and renewals along West Coast highways to improve both resilience and safety to support economic development.

Much of the work is focused on improving roads and roadsides at high-risk locations throughout the region by managing skid resistance, improving delineation and signage, and managing snow and ice conditions.

Work will also focus on progressing the region's speed management plan to improve safety for both residents and visiting drivers.

Walking and cycling

Support will continue for regional walking and cycling trails where there are opportunities to grow tourism and support the visitor economy.

The Croesus Trail, 10kms of which forms part of the 55km track through the Paparoa mountain range, links the villages of Blackball and Punakaiki. The Paparoa Track has been given Great Walk status, making it one of the premier outdoor experiences in New Zealand. It is the first new track to be added to the Great Walk network since it was created in 1993 and the first to be built for both walkers and mountain bikers.

Regional development

The former Waiho River bailey bridge was destroyed during flooding on 26 March 2019; a new bailey bridge has since been installed. Waka Kotahi investment in storm repair work amounted to \$9.5 million. It is important Waka Kotahi remains agile and able to respond to such damage but also that resilience work is planned to minimise disruption in future. A further \$3 million has been allocated to raising the bridge in conjunction with raising the river stop banks.

Funding support also included Westland District Council and Department of Conservation's response to significant storm damage affecting Westland, including Franz Josef Glacier access.

In the past 12 months, around \$31m has been spent on responding to storm events on the West Coast. Examples include work at Dolomite Point, Punakaiki, 17 Mile Bluff near Barrytown, Starvation Point and Wallace Point in the Otira Gorge, Mt Hercules, Bruce Bay and Gates of Haast.

Over the next three years, Waka Kotahi will continue to work with local government, other government agencies, and communities such as Franz Josef to improve the resilience of the state highway.

NZ Upgrade Programme

Announced in February 2020, the regional package of NZ Upgrade Programme investment on the West Coast will help address safety risks, resilience, accessibility and travel time reliability as well as support regional economic development. The West Coast projects totalling \$10.1m are:

- SH67 Granity Seawall
- SH6 Tatara Bridge Franz Josef safety improvements
- West Coast state highway single-lane bridge safety retrofits (SH73: Mikonui River, Wanganui River, Moeraki River, Gates of Haast and Taipo River bridge).

In the last 18 months

- Waiho River bridge repairs were completed following the 26 March 2019 flooding at a cost of \$6.6 million. Total cost of repairs from 26 March 2019 event, including the Waiho bridge and damage at Fox River also in South Westland, is estimated at \$9.5 million.
- Resilience work at Dolomite Point, Punakaiki was recently completed at a cost of about \$7.8 million.
- Construction of eight slow-vehicle passing bays on SH73 and SH7.

Underway or about to start:

- Completing repairs to storm damage at Bruce Bay and Gates of Haast. This work is expected to be completed in June 2021.
- The resilience/security of SH7 will be enhanced with the replacement of the Ahaura Bridge. The single-lane partially wooden bridge will be replaced with a two-lane concrete bridge.
- Improving safety at the Manakaiaua bridge on SH6 with work on the approaches and replacing wooden handrails with guardrails. This work is expected to get underway this financial year.

- In partnership with KiwiRail, work continues repairing road and rail link on SH7 at Omoto because of a historically active slip between Greymouth and Stillwater. Long-term remediation of the site will ensure resilience of this vital connection with the West Coast, including the TranzAlpine passenger service.
- The West Coast projects from the regional package of the NZ Upgrade Programme will start construction in Spring 2020.

Investment in West Coast

NLTP	2015-18	2018-21
Forecast total investment	\$180 million	\$256 million
Forecast maintenance and operations	\$126 million	\$184 million
Forecast public transport investment	\$0.5 million	\$0.6 million
Regional network improvements	\$53 million	\$57 million

Crown funding	
NZ Upgrade Programme*	\$10.1m

*Waka Kotahi led projects only

Overview map

