



UNISA Infrastructure Development Plan 2025

Contents

WHO is UNISA	2
WHAT IS THE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)	2
Vulnerability and resilience of infrastructure across the UNI	3
THE UPPER NORTH ISLAND	5
BUILDING ECONOMIC GROWTH	5
DELIVERING CONNECTED AND RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE	6
Freight, transport and the Upper North Island Supply Chain.....	6
Rail.....	7
Roads of National Significance	8
Delivery of sustainable energy infrastructure.....	9
Ports	10
UNISA KEY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS	11
INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP) – PROJECT/PROGRAMME PRIORITISATION.....	12
Collective Benefits for the Upper North Island.....	13
Northland	13
Auckland	14
Waikato	14
Bay of Plenty	14
Rail.....	15
APPENDIX 1:	17

WHO is UNISA

The Upper North Island Strategic Alliance (UNISA) was established in 2011 and is a collaboration between Northland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty Regional Councils, Auckland Council, Whangarei District Council and Hamilton and Tauranga City Councils. There is also representation from the DIA, NZTA and MBIE.

The seven councils have an agreement in place which confirms their commitment to enabling boundaryless discussions, advocating for inter-regional strategic priorities, and tackling associated challenges.

The value of the UNISA members working together includes:

- **The “conduit” value:** UNISA can act as a point of contact for central government, increasing the value of engagement. This is particularly efficient at the start of engagement processes where issues are common across UNISA partners.
- **The “partner” value:** UNISA can be a place for Mayors and Chairs to collaborate in approaches to central government on issues of mutual interest.
- **The “influence” value:** UNISA produces information relevant to inter-regional issues, increasing leverage with central government, as well as a collective understanding among UNISA (for example on issues such as freight, waste, and demand for industrial land).

WHAT is the Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP)

The IDP identifies the strategic drivers, priorities, challenges and opportunities for the Upper North Island in terms of inter-regional infrastructure that will make a difference for the region and all New Zealand. It provides an opportunity for UNISA to tell the boundaryless story of the key infrastructure projects that will be needed to build economic growth, deliver connected and resilient infrastructure solutions and enable the supply of affordable, quality housing across the Upper North Island.

This initial version of the IDP identifies the key infrastructure projects for each UNISA member council, and weaves together the story of how the priority programmes and projects will realise the potential of the Upper North Island.

The aspiration for this plan is that it will provide an agreed statement for Upper North Island projects which will be used to continue to engage with Central Government, showing that UNISA is a credible body to partner with.

The approach taken with the preparation of the IDP differs from how traditionally technical work has progressed under UNISA. Previously UNISA commissioned several good technical reports, but there was no binding narrative which carried these reports through to effective implementation. Instead, with this IDP, UNISA is seeking to motivate and sustain momentum by creating a compelling narrative and story, in to which further technical work and justification is loaded to support that story.

The infrastructure projects identified in the IDP are identified in:

- the Infrastructure Priority Projects and infrastructure Pipeline in development by the Infrastructure Commission/Te Waihangā, delivering against the National Infrastructure Plan
- council Long Term and Annual Plans

- the City and Regional Deals process.

The key drivers for the development of this plan are to:

- provide a clear and concise snapshot of the infrastructure needs of the Upper North Island, and what that infrastructure will enable.
- highlight the boundaryless approach taken by the UNISA members towards provision of infrastructure for the Upper North Island.
- recognise the value of the relationships in UNISA which means that progress is made together, and no one is left behind.
- recognise that working together as UNISA is more valuable to those communities and organisations across the Upper North Island, and the rest of New Zealand, than if everyone worked separately.
- Meet the need for an inter-regional plan in which proliferating Fast Track applications can be assessed and considered.

It is important to note that the IDP has a strong inter-regional focus and this is reflected in the criteria, scoring and resultant identification of projects. The top programmes and projects identified are ones that draw the UNISA greater region together. Within the UNISA area there will also be projects that are on their own potentially more significant in terms of cost and local impact, but are not included in this plan.

The preparation of the IDP will conform to the principles of effective infrastructure planning:

Cumulative	Pipeline and flow
Plan-led	Evidence based
Standards of provision	Resilient and functional
Flexible and proactive	Integrated

Whilst this IDP identifies new infrastructure and upgrades to existing infrastructure to address key gaps, it is important to emphasise and ensure that existing infrastructure is well-maintained and that there is continued investment in existing programmes and projects. This is highlighted through the National Infrastructure Plan developed by Central Government.

The projects identified in this plan cover priority infrastructure required for:

- Freight
- Transport
- Energy
- Ports.

Vulnerability and resilience of infrastructure across the UNI

It is also important to acknowledge the work that is carried out by the New Zealand Lifelines Council and the Regional Lifelines Groups. Lifelines are the essential infrastructure and services that support communities – utility services such as water, wastewater and stormwater, electricity, gas, telecommunications and transportation networks including road, rail, airports and ports.

Lifelines Groups have a close relationship with Civil Defence Emergency Management and coordinate activities aimed at reducing infrastructure vulnerabilities to national and regional scale emergencies. Their focus is on improving infrastructure resilience and so are a key stakeholder in the delivery and

maintenance of infrastructure across the Upper North Island. The National Infrastructure Vulnerability Assessment for 2023¹ provides a comprehensive overview of New Zealand's critical lifelines infrastructure and its resilience and vulnerability to major hazards.

¹ <https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/lifeline-utilities/lifelines-reports-and-resources>

The Upper North Island

Four regions make up the Upper North Island: Northland, Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty. It is considered the powerhouse of New Zealand in terms of population and economic growth. It contains the cities of Auckland, Hamilton and Tauranga (known as the “golden triangle” of NZ) including three coastal ports (North Port, Ports of Auckland and Port of Tauranga) and three inland ports, Ruakura (Hamilton), Metroport (Tauranga) and Wiri (Auckland). The Upper North Island is critical to the country’s supply chain and economy.

It also includes two international airports, one in Auckland and the other in Hamilton.

The issues that infrastructure across the Upper North Island needs to navigate:

- Resilience – future proofed and resilient to manage the impacts of climate change with a focus on reducing emissions.
- Growth – to support growth, infrastructure needs to be in the right place at the right time and able to continue to deliver into the future.
- Funding – efficient investment and value for money as infrastructure needs to be delivered within funding constraints.

Building economic growth

The Upper North Island supply chain and economy is nationally significant. The Upper North Island covers 21% of the overall area of New Zealand at 56,000km², it has 54% of the population and generates 56% of the country’s GDP* (Stats NZ).

The Upper North Island at a glance:

- Land area: **56,000km²**
 - 21% of New Zealand.
- Population 2023: **2.83m**
 - 54% of NZ population.
- 1 Unitary Authority, 3 regional councils, 19 districts
 - **1/3** of NZ local government family.

UNI is the powerhouse of New Zealand

- UNI GDP in 2023 was **\$215,987m**, around **56%** of the New Zealand economy.

UNI is NZ's gateway to the world

- **Auckland Airport** is the arrival point for the majority of New Zealand's international visitors.
- **Ports of Auckland, Tauranga and Northport** export the majority of New Zealand's goods.

Value of our infrastructure

- The vast **majority of goods by value** within NZ move through the UNI ports and Auckland International Airport.
- Freight volumes are forecast to increase.
- **High quality transport connections** are vital.

A vital natural environment

- Four of the UNI's main industry sectors (forestry/wood processing/dairy/tourism) depend on the natural environment.
- The UNI is home to some of NZ's most **significant natural assets** such as our longest river, largest lake and all of NZ's Kauri forests.



The Upper North Island freight network and supply chain underpins New Zealand's economy, and its future growth and productivity. About 52% (around 144 million tonnes) of New Zealand's freight originates in and is destined for the Northland, Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions². Intra-regional freight movements are very significant within UNISA regions, making up around 80% of the 144m tonnes, with the remainder being inter-regional freight movements between UNISA regions. More than 90% of UNISA's freight task is carried via road (in terms of volume/tonne), making it the predominant freight mode of transport. Secondary is rail and last coastal shipping.

The share of both national exports and imports is expected to grow: the Upper North Island regions already contribute around 56% to NZ's GDP, and are projected to contribute two-thirds of New Zealand's projected population growth to 2048³, and host some of the largest areas for export growth.

The Upper North Island provides 55% of the filled jobs across the country⁴. The key industries across the Upper North Island include manufacturing, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, freight & logistics, construction, tourism, technology, health care, education, retail and professional services.

For the Upper North Island to continue to grow economically and to support its increasing population, enabling the provision of affordable, quality housing is key, which will need to be supported by the appropriate type of infrastructure delivered at the right time.

Delivering connected and resilient infrastructure

Freight, transport and the Upper North Island Supply Chain

The Upper North Island handles over 50% of New Zealand's freight which is expected to double by 2035⁵. The New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy (2022), Arataki – NZ Transport Agency's 30-Year Plan, the Aotearoa New Zealand Freight and Supply Chain Strategy (2023) noted the following key challenges for the national freight system:

- **The resilience of our supply chains to shocks and stresses**, such as the need to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, natural hazards, and cyber-attacks.
- **The need to keep up with international trends for much larger volumes of freight and increased efficiency**. These include the digitisation and automation of supply chains and the introduction of bigger ships.
- **The need to reduce freight-sector carbon emissions to meet our net-zero carbon emissions target**, as well as the need to adapt to evolving consumer preferences (such as for locally produced and eco-friendly products).
- **The impacts of population growth on our freight system**. This could reduce the availability of land for storing freight and increase traffic congestion affecting freight movements.
- **Incomplete or fragmented networks** for example lack of rail connection to Northport.

² <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/assets/planning-and-investment/docs/upper-north-island-freight-story-highlights.pdf>

³ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/upper-north-island-regions-dominate-future-population-growth/>

⁴ Calculated by Co-Pilot using data from <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/employment-and-skills/labour-market-reports-data-and-analysis/labour-market-statistics-snapshot> and <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/employment-indicators-june-2025/>

⁵ Upper North Island Freight Story – Summary of Critical Issues – April 2013

- **The coordination and pace** of planning and investment.

The Upper North Island also faces some unique challenges. It has been the subject of many studies in the past 15 years. Generally, the following key challenges have been identified:

- Future capacity constraints for existing ports in their existing locations, and increasing tension between port activities and city centre activities in Auckland and Tauranga, which include land use and wider landside transport challenges;
- Lack of secure efficient and resilient transport connections to Northport, between Northland and Auckland, and between the Waikato and Bay of Plenty at the Kaimai ranges, which means the supply chain has several single points of failure.
- A suboptimal integration of inland ports and freight hubs with overall freight and port logistics across the Upper North Island.
- While progress has been made through the completion of transport projects like the Waikato Expressway, Ara Tūhono – Pūhoi to Warkworth and the re-opening of the North Auckland Line to Whangarei, current transport demand is impacting levels of service and future freight growth means the Upper North Island is a long way from having a resilient, reliable, connected and efficient supply chain for the movements of goods.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Freight and Supply Chain Strategy notes the freight industry must prioritise resilience due to increasing unpredictability in the operating environment. This includes making sure the freight industry can keep working during major disruptions, including natural disasters such as extreme weather events like the 2023 Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland Anniversary Weekend floods. The events closed both the state highway roading network over the Brynderwyns and the North Auckland Line rail corridor, severely impacting freight movement and business activity: the North Auckland Line reopened after being closed for 20 months following significant weather damage.

To navigate these collective challenges, it is necessary to be strategic and to:

- Maintain and make better use of existing infrastructure.
- Plan and manage the freight network and assets as an interconnected system.
- Strategically prioritise new projects.
- Better integrate the Upper North Island supply chain needs into statutory planning processes.

Rail

KiwiRail's current investment strategy for the Upper North Island is centred on strengthening the "Golden Triangle" of Auckland, Hamilton, and Tauranga. This area is considered a priority under the 2024–2027 Rail Network Investment Programme (RNIP). The focus is on improving freight efficiency and reliability, with targeted upgrades to infrastructure and services that support the movement of goods across this critical corridor⁶. The Golden Triangle is classified as F1—the highest priority for investment—reflecting its strategic importance to the national economy.

A key initiative under this programme is the proposed electrification of the rail lines. The government has allocated \$10 million to develop a detailed business case for extending electrification across the

⁶ <https://www.greaterauckland.org.nz/2025/04/08/wherefore-now-with-kiwirail/>

Auckland–Hamilton–Tauranga corridor. This would significantly reduce emissions and improve the sustainability of freight and passenger services in the region. In parallel, the Auckland metropolitan network continues to benefit from ongoing investment, including the extension of electrified services from Papakura to Pukekohe. These upgrades are designed to support growing commuter demand, reduce road congestion in the region’s rapidly expanding urban centres and reduce emissions.

KiwiRail is also progressing plans for the Marsden Point rail link—a 19 km spur from the North Auckland Line to Northport. This project, which has received funding for detailed design and land acquisition, aims to connect one of New Zealand’s few non-rail-served ports to the national network, boosting freight capacity and regional development in Northland⁷. Meanwhile, there is growing advocacy for expanding passenger rail services to underserved towns like Pōkeno, Tuakau, and Te Kauwhata, and for securing the future of the Te Huia service between Hamilton and Auckland⁸. These efforts reflect a broader push to ensure the Upper North Island’s rail infrastructure keeps pace with population growth and climate goals.

There are several key rail projects identified within the priority list of projects for this IDP. It is important to acknowledge that whilst these are identified separately the rail infrastructure operates as a network, so the priority of the projects and the value that they can deliver, need to be considered at the network level.

Roads of National Significance

The Roads of National Significance (RoNS) are a package of 17 roads that the Government has prioritised for completion across NZ to support economic growth and productivity, reduce congestion, improve safety, support housing development and to provide a more resilient roading network. 10 of those roads are in the Upper North Island region.

Upgrades and the extension to the existing roading network are planned and are included in the map below.



<https://nzta.govt.nz/planning-and-investment/roads-of-national-significance/>

⁷ <https://insidegovernment.co.nz/569m-kiwirail-investment-to-future-proof-network/>

⁸ <https://thefutureisrail.org/upper-north-island>

The list of UNISA prioritised projects include some RoNS, however, some RoNS are not identified specifically (eg Warkworth to Wellsford) as they may have a more localised impact rather than inter-regionally. This does not mean that they are not important, so whilst they may not appear in the UNISA list of projects, they may still be considered important by NZTA for delivering and operating their RoNS network, ensuring continued connectivity across the region.

Delivery of sustainable energy infrastructure

Alongside improving freight and transport networks across the Upper North Island to support economic growth, another key priority is the delivery of sustainable energy infrastructure.

Northland has significant wind, solar and geothermal potential so it makes sense to explore the set up of Renewable Energy Zones to help improve Northland's resilience and reliability. Energy Bridge aims to unlock Northland's solar, wind and geothermal energy which will help support energy supply across the Upper North Island and the wider region.

Transpower, Northpower and Top Energy have published a discussion paper and intend to develop an electricity development plan for Northland later this year (2025/26). Transpower are in the midst of a Waikato and Upper North Island upgrade – to increase long-term voltage stability and how to increase transmission capacity to serve Auckland and the wider region due to forecast future demand.

Over the next 30 years, the Upper North Island is set to undergo a major transformation in energy resilience, driven by climate adaptation, renewable energy expansion, and infrastructure upgrades.

Here are some of the key projects and initiatives that have been identified:

Transpower's WUNI Programme (Waikato and Upper North Island Upgrades)

Voltage Stability Investments: Installation of STATCOMs (grid stability devices) at Hamilton and Ōtāhuhu substations to manage voltage fluctuations.

Stage 2 Planning: Future upgrades to increase transmission capacity into Auckland and address growing demand.

Reactive Power Devices & Demand Management: Designed to mitigate risks from retiring thermal generation and rising renewable input.

Community Renewable Energy Fund

Solar & Battery Systems: At least 40 community buildings across Northland, Auckland, Waikato, and Bay of Plenty will be fitted with solar and battery systems to support emergency response and local resilience.

\$27 Million Funding (from mid-2024): For bespoke community energy schemes and scalable resilience projects nationwide.

Waikato Offshore Wind Project

Led by Te Waka & Partners: Aims to decarbonise local industry and support energy-intensive sectors.

Construction Expected by 2030: Will contribute significantly to renewable generation capacity and regional economic growth.

Auckland Energy Action Plan (2025)

Strategic Reserves: Proposal to maintain backup fuel (gas, coal, stored water) for dry spells.

Single Energy Regulator: Suggested consolidation of agencies to improve sector leadership and accountability.

Demand Response Tools: Development of new mechanisms to reduce peak demand and improve grid flexibility.

National Energy Transition Roadmap

100% Renewable Electricity by 2030: Government's aspirational goal driving infrastructure and policy reform.

Distributed Energy Resources (DERs): Emphasis on decentralisation, digitisation, and decarbonisation of the grid.

Real-Time Pricing & Market Reform: Updates to electricity distribution and wholesale pricing to support resilience.

Ports

The Upper North Island is considered the 'gateway into New Zealand' as it includes Auckland Airport (the arrival point for most New Zealand's international visitors), Hamilton International Airport and the coastal Ports of Auckland, Tauranga and Northport. It also includes inland ports – Metroport (Tauranga), Wiri (South Auckland) and Ruakura (Hamilton). These ports are responsible for handling the majority of New Zealand's international goods trade – over 70% of NZ imports⁹.

Currently central government's Transport & Infrastructure Committee is completing an Inquiry into the Ports and the Maritime Sector. The Committee is aware that efficient and competitive ports and marine industries are essential to sustaining economic growth and prosperity – the focus for this inquiry is to help raise the performance of the sector to benefit importers and exporters as well as the wider NZ economy.

There are several important investments proposed across the Upper North Island to safeguard the resilience of the ports and the ongoing contribution of the region to the New Zealand economy. Examples include:

- the Northport expansion
- Ruakura inland port scaling up its operations
- Marsden Point Rail Link
- Marsden Marine precinct including a dry dock

⁹ UNISA document "Opportunities for port networks" 2011. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://storage.googleapis.com/hccproduction-web-assets/public/Uploads/Documents/Opportunities-for-port-networks.pdf>

UNISA Key Infrastructure Projects

This IDP identifies the key infrastructure projects from across the Upper North Island. They include projects relating to freight, transport, energy and ports.

The projects have been assessed firstly by determining their wider impacts across the Upper North Island and/or New Zealand. They were then assessed using the criteria/strategic objectives identified in the New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy, plus other criteria that the Mayors & Chairs and CEs of UNISA agreed were important to consider when prioritising them.

Please see Appendix 1 for the full list of criteria.

Once the projects and their priority were determined through the criteria analysis, they have been agreed and signed off by the UNISA members, through the adoption of this IDP. The projects that were considered are listed in this IDP and have been spatially mapped for ease of reference.

Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP) – Project/Programme Prioritisation

Projects were submitted by each member council for review as a part of the development of the UNISA IDP. An initial review removed projects that did not have a wider Upper North Island impact leaving a total of 21 programmes/projects for review by the UNISA Officers Working Group. Using the criteria previously agreed by the UNISA CEs, the results of that prioritisation are shown below:

Projects
Marsden Point Rail link (Marsden Wiri pipeline not assessed)
RoNS Northland corridor (includes SH1 Brynderwyns)
RoNS Cambridge to Piarere
RoNS Hamilton Southern Links
Northland's Energy bridge
Tauriko West Enabling Works (Transport improvements and Wastewater and Water Supply)
Takitimu North Link Stage 2: Te Puna to Ōmokoroa
Connecting to Mount Maunganui
Tāmaki Makaurau Rapid Transit Pathway (including the Auckland Level Crossing Programme)
Tauriko West State Highway 29 upgrades
SH1 Auckland southern corridor optimisation and capacity improvements SH1 Papakura to Drury
SH1/SH29 inter-regional corridor between Auckland, Hamilton and Tauranga
SH29 Kaimai's Road
RoNS East West link
Rail: Triple track expansion through Auckland
East Coast Main Trunk (ECMT) rail corridor
Dry Dock Northland (port expansion already underway)
RoNS Mill Road
North Island Main Trunk (NIMT) rail corridor rail
Rail: double tracking to the second Kaimai tunnel
Auckland Harbour second bridge

Note that the above programmes and projects are sitting in different phases of delivery. Some are at business case stage whilst others may be further along in development with funding allocated. The focus for this prioritisation has been on strategic alignment, which is consistent with Te Waihanganga/Infrastructure Commission's approach. <https://tewaihanganga.govt.nz/our-work/infrastructure-priorities-programme/assessment-criteria>

Upper North Island Infrastructure Priorities

Taking a holistic view of the Upper North Island highlights a region with potential - yet increasingly constrained by infrastructure that has struggled to keep pace with rapid growth. As the economic and population heart of New Zealand, we need a coordinated approach to investment that goes beyond isolated upgrades. It requires a strategic focus on the highest priority infrastructure projects that, when delivered together, will enable housing, freight, energy, urban development opportunities, and will continue to support economic growth.

Whilst the programmes and projects in this Plan have been identified through a prioritisation process¹⁰, their impact is in the collective potential that is released when they are all delivered.

Collective Benefits for the Upper North Island

Collectively, these projects form a strategic infrastructure network that strengthens the Upper North Island's role as New Zealand's economic engine. They release land for housing and employment, improve freight and energy resilience, support mode shift and decarbonisation, and enhance safety and reliability across key corridors.

To fully realise the transformative potential of these infrastructure projects, central government must take a coordinated, strategic view of their collective benefits and interdependencies. These initiatives are not isolated investments; they form a connected ecosystem of freight, energy, housing, and public transport infrastructure that together underpin the nation's economic future. Progressing one without the others risks bottlenecks, underutilisation, and missed opportunities. For example, the success of the Marsden Point Special Economic Zone and Energy Bridge depends on the Northland Corridor's reliability, just as Auckland's rapid transit network relies on complementary housing and arterial upgrades in Drury and Mill Road.

With three-quarters of New Zealand's population living in the Upper North Island, these projects are not just local priorities - they are national imperatives. They support the country's largest ports, fastest-growing cities, and most productive freight corridors. To realise their full value, central and local government must align investment decisions, planning frameworks, and delivery timelines. This requires a true partnership - one that respects local knowledge and priorities while leveraging national funding and policy levers. Joint governance models, shared plans, and integrated business cases will be essential to ensure that infrastructure is sequenced, scaled, and delivered in a way that maximises impact for communities, businesses, and the environment.

Northland

In Northland, the proposed Dry Dock at Marsden Point would establish New Zealand's first large-scale ship maintenance facility, reducing reliance on overseas services and strengthening the coastal shipping sector. Alongside this, the Marsden Point Rail Link would connect Northport directly to the national rail network, enabling efficient freight movement and reducing pressure on road infrastructure. These projects would not only support Northport's growth but also create skilled employment and enhance regional logistics.

¹⁰ Aligned with the NZ Infrastructure Commission prioritisation criteria

The Energy Bridge project aims to connect Northland's renewable energy potential to Auckland's electricity grid. This initiative could attract up to \$1 billion in private investment, support national decarbonisation goals, and position Northland as a key energy exporter. Meanwhile, the RoNS Northland Corridor, including a proposed bypass of the SH1 Brynderwyn Hills, would deliver a safer, more resilient transport link between Auckland and Whangārei. This upgrade is essential for reducing travel times, improving freight reliability, and supporting housing and commercial development in a region vulnerable to weather-related disruptions.

Auckland

In Auckland, the proposed Second Harbour Crossing aims to relieve pressure on the aging Auckland Harbour Bridge and provide a resilient, multi-modal link across the Waitematā Harbour. Alongside this, the Tāmaki Makaurau Rapid Transit Pathway, including the Auckland Level Crossing Removal Programme, seeks to reshape the city's public transport backbone. By expanding high-capacity, congestion-free transit corridors and removing dangerous and inefficient level crossings, this initiative will improve safety, reduce emissions, and support compact urban growth across the wider region.

Further south, the SH1 Southern Corridor optimisation between Papakura and Drury is designed to accommodate rapid population growth in South Auckland. This project will add new lanes, improve interchanges, and integrate walking, cycling, and future public transport infrastructure. Meanwhile, the East West Link and Mill Road projects - both designated as RoNS - will provide vital east-west and north-south connections. The East West Link will improve freight access between SH1 and SH20 through Onehunga and Penrose, while Mill Road will offer a safer, faster alternative to SH1, improving resilience and journey reliability across South Auckland.

Waikato

The Hamilton Southern Links project is a proposed transport network of state highways and urban arterial roads designed to support the city's southern growth. Identified as a RoNS, it will connect SH1 and SH3 through areas like Peacocke, Tamahere, and Hamilton Airport, enabling access to over 12,500 new homes and 200 hectares of employment land. Although the route has been designated, the project remains unfunded and in early planning stages. Its delivery would reduce congestion, improve safety, and support integrated urban development, laying the groundwork for Hamilton's future transport and housing needs.

The SH1/SH29 inter-regional corridor upgrade is a critical safety and connectivity initiative linking Auckland, Hamilton, and Tauranga. This corridor is part of the Upper North Island's "Golden Triangle," a vital freight and commuter route. Once completed, the upgrade will improve traffic flow, reduce crash risks, and support more reliable movement of goods and people between major urban centres. Part of this corridor is the Cambridge to Piarere RoNS which has been identified as a priority for delivery as part of the 2024-27 National Land Transport Plan.

Bay of Plenty

State Highway 29 through the Kaimai Range remains a strategic link between the Port of Tauranga and inland freight hubs. Future upgrades to SH29 are needed to improve safety, reduce travel delays, and support the increasing volume of heavy commercial vehicles. These improvements would enhance the resilience and efficiency of one of New Zealand's most important freight corridors

The Tauriko West Enabling Works are a foundational set of upgrades to SH29 that will enable housing and business development in one of Tauranga's fastest-growing areas. These works include intersection upgrades, new roundabouts, shared paths, and improved public transport access. They are expected to enable up to 2,400 new homes and support the expansion of the Tauriko Business Estate.

Complementing the broader SH29/SH29A Tauriko West upgrades are a four-lane highway, new interchanges, and safety interventions to support long-term growth, reduce serious crashes and improve travel time reliability.

The Connecting Mount Maunganui project is focused on improving safety, accessibility, and transport efficiency in one of Tauranga's busiest urban and industrial areas. The project aims to deliver managed lanes on SH2 Hewletts Road, new local road connections, and enhanced walking and cycling infrastructure. These upgrades will support more efficient freight movement to the Port of Tauranga, reduce congestion, and improve resilience in a critical part of the city's transport network.

Rail

A suite of proposed rail infrastructure projects across the Upper North Island aims to transform regional connectivity, freight efficiency, public transport capacity and reduce emissions. In Northland the Marsden Rail Link will deliver the needed connectivity between the port and the rest of the regional rail network, improving the movement of goods across the region and supporting resilience of the ports network. In Auckland, the planned triple-track expansion would build on the City Rail Link by adding a third line to key corridors, enabling more frequent and reliable services across the city.

Regionally, upgrades/electrification of the East Coast Main Trunk between Hamilton and Tauranga and the North Island Main Trunk between Auckland and Wellington (such as double tracking at Whangamarino and the Ngaruawahia Rail Bridge) are being considered to support increased freight volumes and the reintroduction of inter-regional passenger services. The push by advocacy group "The Future is Rail" for double tracking to a second Kaimai Tunnel¹¹, says that this would alleviate a major freight bottleneck and allow for safer, more frequent train movements through the Kaimai Ranges. Together, these projects would enable the rail network to support sustainable growth, reduce road congestion and emissions, and strengthen economic links across the Upper North Island.

¹¹ <https://wbn.co.nz/2025/08/05/golden-triangle-rail-push-2/>

UNISA Infrastructure Development Plan Priority Projects



Data sources:
LINZ, Manaaki Whenua, DOC, Transpower,
KiwiRail, Eagle Technology, CDEM Canterbury



Waikato Regional Council 2025
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#7681

Northland

- Dry dock
- Marsden Point rail link
- Energy bridge
- RoNS Northland corridor (includes SH1 Brynderwys)

Rail

- Triple track expansion through Auckland
- East Coast Main Trunk Corridor
- North Island Main Trunk Corridor
- Double tracking to second Kaimai Tunnel

Auckland

- Second harbour bridge
- Tamaki Makaurau Rapid Transit Pathway (including Auckland rail crossing programme)
- SH1 Auckland southern corridor optimisation Papakura to Drury
- RoNS East West Link & Mill Road

Waikato

- RoNS Hamilton Southern Links
- RoNS Cambridge to Piarere
- SH1/SH29 interregional corridor
- SH29 Kaimai Road

Bay of Plenty

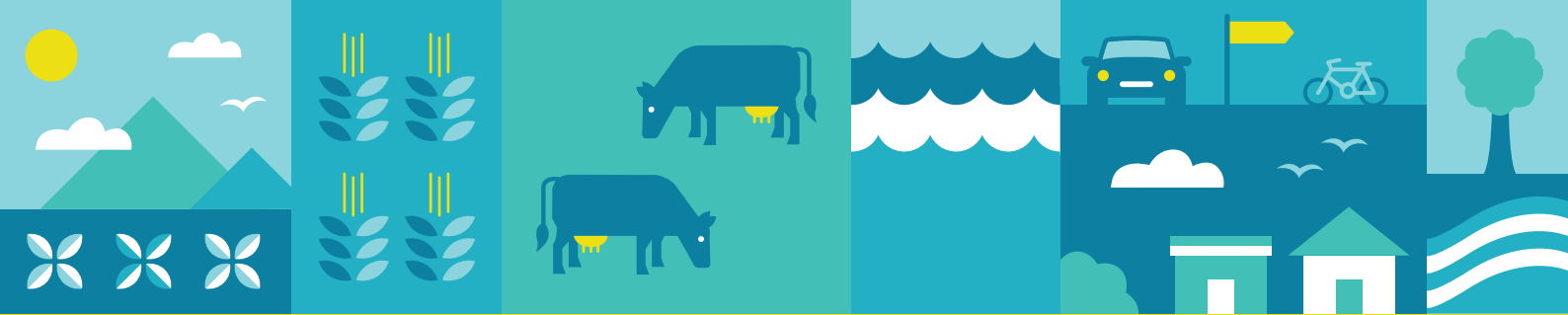
- Takitimu North Link Stage 2: Te Puna
- Tauriko West Enabling works
- Connecting Mount Maunganui
- Tauriko West SH29 upgrades

Please note that the flags are symbolic of projects and their locations so each flag could represent more than one project.

APPENDIX 1:

The criteria assessment questions are shown below (sourced from the National Infrastructure Strategy):

Assessment theme	Questions/considerations
Strategic alignment	Is there a clearly defined problem?
	Are benefits geographically distributed across several (Upper North Island) councils?
	Is the project regionally significant?
	Is the lead organisation clearly defined?
	The level of alignment with existing network and ability to leverage current/committed projects?
	Does the project improve reliability in the surrounding transport network?
	What is the level of community and local support for the proposal?
	Are adverse environmental effects appropriately managed?
Enabling a net zero-carbon emissions Aotearoa	Moving to a low-emissions energy sector
	Reducing emissions produced by infrastructure
Supporting towns and regions to flourish	Results in safer and more reliable infrastructure
	Securing and integrating freight and supply chain services
	Use of technology to improve regional advantage
Building attractive and inclusive cities	Taking a long-term approach to infrastructure in our cities
	Integrating land-use regulation and infrastructure
	Easing pressure on infrastructure networks
Strengthening resilience to shocks and stresses	A coordinated approach to critical infrastructure investment
	A planned approach to adapting climate change
	Improving information and tools for resilience
Moving to a circular economy	Setting a national direction for waste
	Managing pressure on landfill and waste recovery facilities
	Developing waste-to-energy for the waste we produce
Value for money	Is there an approach under development for the proposal that allows value for money to be quantified?
Deliverability	What are the governance arrangements and are they appropriate to the proposal's size and complexity?
	Impact of land acquisition on timelines, cost and any resultant community opposition
	The extent to which the project relies on new and untested technologies
	What is the project's likely mean cost overrun? (ref. Flyvbjerg).



UPPER NORTH ISLAND STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

