

22 July 2025

Te Waihanga the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission
Level 7, The Todd Building
95 Customhouse Quay
Wellington 6011

To Whom it May Concern,

Submission on the Draft National Infrastructure Plan

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the New Zealand Government's Draft National Infrastructure Plan and commend the vision and long-term thinking that underpins this important document.

As the regional economic development agency for the wider Palmerston North city and Manawatū region, we strongly support the direction set out in the Plan—particularly its emphasis on infrastructure that drives productivity, strengthens resilience, and delivers intergenerational value. We also take this opportunity to highlight the strategic importance of freight and logistics infrastructure, which is essential to both today's economy and New Zealand's future prosperity.

The Plan rightly acknowledges the pivotal role of the Manawatū region in shaping Aotearoa's economic and infrastructure landscape. Of the 17 nationally significant projects identified, six are located in Manawatū and directly support the rapidly developing hub of **Te Utanganui – the Central New Zealand Distribution Hub**. This is a clear endorsement of the region's growing importance in driving economic performance and resilience. These projects include:

- Upgrades to NZDF facilities, housing, and roads
- Continued development at Linton Military Camp
- Completion of the RNZAF Ohakea Base expansion
- Enhancement of freight connections via the Manawatū Regional Freight Ring Road

These long-term investments not only support regional growth; they also reinforce the national significance of Te Utanganui. Strategically located in the geographic centre of the country, Te Utanganui is a multimodal freight and logistics cluster with the potential to transform how goods move across New Zealand.

Support for a clear, long-term strategy

The development of the Manawatū Regional Freight Ring Road is one of the most critical enablers of national supply chain resilience. It is a key link in a broader corridor that includes *Te Ahu a Turanga: Manawatū–Tararua Highway* and the planned *Ōtaki to North of Levin Expressway*. Together, these projects connect Central New Zealand with the capital and wider North Island, facilitating the efficient movement of freight, people, and defence capability.

With major defence installations at both Linton Military Camp and RNZAF Ohakea, Manawatū is a region of strategic national importance. Investment here supports both commercial logistics and national security outcomes.

We welcome the Plan's intention to establish a clear, long-term strategy for nationally significant infrastructure. With finite resources, New Zealand must focus investment where it delivers the greatest national value. A strategic, integrated pipeline - backed by certainty and coordination - will deliver this.

About Te Utanganui

Te Utanganui is New Zealand's only intermodal hub where road, rail, and air converge. Located at the heart of the country, the hub is well connected to both islands and international ports, complementing major freight centres in the Golden Triangle and Canterbury.

Multiple infrastructure projects in Manawatū - either underway or planned - combine to establish Te Utanganui as the primary logistics and distribution hub for central New Zealand.

The case for freight and logistics

While the draft National Infrastructure Plan sets a strong investment direction, we would welcome more projects in the freight and logistics sector as how we move freight is critical to New Zealand's future prosperity and resilience both domestically but more importantly for growing exports. Freight underpins New Zealand's economy and is forecast to grow by 60% over the next 30 years, driven by population growth, changing consumer demands, and regional economic development. Supporting this growth requires well-planned, strategic infrastructure that enables the safe, efficient, and low-emissions movement of goods across the country.

Investment in freight infrastructure is not just about moving goods; it underpins productivity across every sector, supports export competitiveness, and ensures communities can reliably access essential products and services, even during disruptions. Progress on the New Zealand Freight and Supply Chain Strategy has been slow and the recent and disappointing decision by the Ministry of Transport to not refresh the strategy makes it imperative that the National Infrastructure Plan steps up to provide the clear direction and investment needed to advance this work. A stronger focus on freight and logistics within the Plan will ensure infrastructure decisions drive improvements in the resilience, sustainability, and efficiency of New Zealand's supply chains to meet the demands of the future economy.

The role of Te Utanganui and priority projects

Te Utanganui plays a central role in the national freight system, connecting regional centres, major ports, and markets. It will reduce urban congestion, improve road safety, and lower emissions.

To support robust planning and investment, Te Utanganui commissioned a comprehensive economic analysis by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER). This work shows the programme delivers a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) between 1.71:1 and 2.05:1, demonstrating strong value for money and national benefit.

We strongly support the inclusion of the Manawatū Regional Freight Ring Road in the Infrastructure Priorities Programme. This project is essential to enabling Te Utanganui, addressing freight-related congestion and safety challenges, and enhancing regional connectivity.

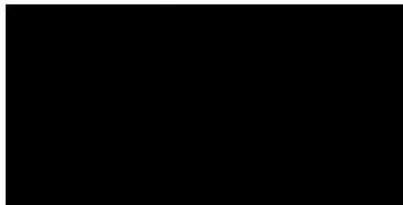
We also encourage the Infrastructure Commission to consider prioritising KiwiRail's Central North Island Freight Hub as part of the next tranche of national priority projects. This hub is a critical component of Te Utanganui's network and supports the Plan's goals for low-emissions freight and intermodal connectivity. We will be working with KiwiRail to submit this project.

Conclusion

We commend the Government's commitment to long-term, integrated infrastructure planning and strongly support the inclusion of freight and defence investments in Manawatū in the Draft National Infrastructure Plan.

We urge continued prioritisation of infrastructure that strengthens New Zealand's supply chains, supports regional development, and contributes to a more productive, resilient, and connected future. Te Utanganui stands ready to play a central role in delivering this vision for all New Zealanders.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive Officer
Central Economic Development Agency (CEDA)

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