

## Developing an enduring National Infrastructure Plan November 2024

### Submitter details:

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**Submission:**

## **Introduction**

1. The New Zealand Recreation t/a Recreation Aotearoa is a registered charity and the organisation responsible for providing leadership, advocacy and professional development opportunities for those involved in the broader recreation sector. We work at an agency, industry and professional level to build capability, develop partnerships, and equip individuals and organisations with the skills they need to deliver high quality recreation experiences that engage participants.
2. Recreation Aotearoa's membership includes recreation policy makers, territorial local authorities, voluntary organisations, regional sports trusts, outdoor recreation businesses, and others involved in the delivery of recreation throughout New Zealand.
3. Our mission is enhancing wellbeing through recreation.
4. Recreation Aotearoa believes recreation is vital to New Zealand society. Recreation is not just about enjoyment. It is about being healthy, engaged, stimulated, and interacting with others. This occurs via outdoor recreation, community recreation, and within parks, aquatics, and facility-based recreation centres.
5. Recreation generates significant value for society across several of the wellbeing domains and outcomes expressed within NZ Treasury's Living Standards Framework: Health; Subjective Wellbeing; Income Consumption and Wealth; Work, Care, and Volunteering; Family and Friends; Safety.
6. The most significant benefit of recreational physical activity, surpassing others by a significant margin, is derived from health benefits, even when factoring in the costs associated with related accident and injury claims. Overall health benefits to New Zealand amount to \$9.0 billion, or \$8.4 billion after deducting the injury claims. This constitutes nearly half of the net social value generated by physical recreational activities in Aotearoa New Zealand.
7. A thriving recreation industry can also help our nation prosper socially and economically. At last count, Play, Active Recreation and Sport contributes \$4.9 billion or 2.3% to our annual GDP, and the sector employs more than 53,000 New Zealanders.
8. Newly released findings from a Social Return on Investment study reveal that each dollar allocated to play, active recreation, and sport

yields a social return of \$2.12 in New Zealand. In essence, every dollar invested in these activities results in more than a twofold social return.

9. The nation's recreation values and opportunities are fundamental to the tourism industry. Approximately 50% of international visitors to New Zealand participate in one form of outdoor recreation, or another.
10. Creating well-designed green spaces for physical activity in urban areas can enhance their resilience to severe weather events, such as Cyclone Gabrielle. Additionally, these green spaces contribute to cooling urban environments and promoting the health and well-being of residents.
11. Greater understanding of these benefits and their downstream impacts, along with awareness of how laws and regulations can influence recreation delivery, are key to ensuring that New Zealand's recreation opportunities remain among the world's best.

## **General Comments**

12. Recreation Aotearoa submits its broad support for the development of a shared, long-term view of our infrastructure expectations and priorities, for New Zealand. We commend its broad and progressive scope beyond traditional and outdated conceptions of infrastructure. Recreation's role in supporting the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of New Zealanders aligns closely with the Commission's goals for a sustainable and inclusive infrastructure strategy.
13. However, we note that the language and framework of the discussion document tends to express a traditional and narrow conceptions of infrastructure. It is difficult to determine whether the commission considers social infrastructure', such as Active Recreation and Play spaces, as infrastructure worthy of consideration.
14. Recreation Aotearoa has a specific interest in the provision of places and spaces in which New Zealanders can engage in Active Recreation and Play. When thinking about these spaces and places, it is helpful to understand three types of recreation infrastructure.
15. The three types of infrastructure of interest to Recreation Aotearoa are (a) built facilities that to support Active Recreation and Play, such as aquatic facilities, playgrounds or skate parks; (b) 'non-built' infrastructure that creates opportunities for physical activity such as parks, walking tracks or cycle paths; and (c) the nascent field of

infrastructure design that explicitly includes opportunities for physical activity and play in the design of infrastructure projects such as cycleways and walking paths, adjacent to roads/highways (see points 18 and 19).

16. Recreation Aotearoa emphasises the critical importance of integrated planning for the Recreation sector. A standout example of this approach is the work undertaken by several Regional Sports Trusts in the development of Sport and Recreation Facilities Plans. These plans are crafted through collaboration among clusters of neighbouring Local Territorial Authorities, enabling a comprehensive evaluation of the existing facility network, anticipated demand on recreational spaces, and projected population changes. This regional lens allows for the prioritisation of projects that best serve the community as a whole. By fostering this level of integration, we can avoid duplication, expand recreational opportunities, and ensure more efficient and effective use of resources at a regional scale.
17. Recreation Aotearoa is disappointed that the Strategy fails to adequately acknowledge or reflect the principles of the NZ Treasury Wellbeing Framework. We strongly advocate for the adoption of this framework as it offers the Infrastructure Commission and the Strategy a robust and future-focused approach to measuring the key drivers of wellbeing for New Zealanders. The framework's 12 domains provide a comprehensive lens through which to assess and enhance our collective wellbeing, now and into the future. Of particular relevance to Recreation is the 'Time Use' domain, which aligns directly with the value and importance of recreation in fostering healthier, more connected communities.
18. Recreation Aotearoa strongly advocates for the integration of Active Design and universal design principles into infrastructure development across Aotearoa. These approaches are essential to creating spaces that encourage movement, connection, and inclusivity for all members of our communities. Active Design prioritises features that promote physical activity, such as walkable pathways, accessible green spaces, and thoughtfully designed recreational facilities.
19. Universal design ensures these spaces are accessible and welcoming to people of all abilities, fostering equity and reducing barriers to participation. By embedding these principles into infrastructure planning and development, we not only enhance wellbeing but also future-proof our communities, making them more resilient, vibrant, and supportive places to live, work, and play.

20. Finally, Recreation Aotearoa would like to highlight a critical oversight in the discussion document: the lack of sufficient consideration for the social value of infrastructure investment. Every infrastructure decision carries implicit opportunity costs, and failing to fully account for the broader social benefits risks undervaluing projects that contribute significantly to community wellbeing. Recognizing and prioritising social value alongside economic and environmental factors is essential to delivering outcomes that truly enhance the quality of life for all New Zealanders.