

Submission to NZ Transport Agency (Waka Kotahi) SH1 Wellington Improvements Project

From Infrastructure New Zealand – Monday 22 December 2025

Infrastructure New Zealand appreciates the opportunity to make a submission on the SH1 Wellington Improvements Project. We apologise for this submission being received later than intended, at a busy time of the year. We thank NZTA for continuing to engage constructively with stakeholders on what is a complex and highly significant programme.

Infrastructure New Zealand strongly supports the proposed SH1 Wellington Improvements and considers this project to be a once-in-a-generation investment of regional and national significance. Decisions made now will shape Wellington's economic performance, resilience, housing outcomes and transport system for decades to come.

It is important for all parties to recognise that this is not just a Wellington roading project, it is a nationally significant investment in New Zealand's capital city.

1. A project of regional and national significance

State Highway 1 through Wellington is a strategically important transport corridor for the country. It connects the capital's CBD, many suburbs and the airport and hospital with eastern, northern and western Wellington, other parts of the region and the Lower North Island. This route also forms part of the spine of the national freight and passenger network.

Infrastructure New Zealand supports the recognition of this corridor as nationally significant and agrees that incremental or piecemeal solutions will no longer suffice. The status quo - congestion, unreliable travel times, safety risks and spill-over traffic onto local streets - is already constraining productivity and undermining Wellington's role as a national centre of government, business and services.

New Zealand cannot afford for its capital city to remain a transport bottleneck.

The SH1 Wellington Improvements Project represents a rare opportunity to address long-standing constraints in a coherent, strategic way rather than continuing with short-term fixes that shift problems rather than solve them.

2. Grade separation is essential, not optional

Infrastructure New Zealand strongly supports grade separation between nationally significant through-traffic on SH1 and local city movements.

Trying to force long-distance, freight and airport-bound traffic to compete with local traffic at at-grade intersections is inefficient, unsafe and economically costly. Separating these movements improves reliability, safety and network resilience - all of which are essential for a capital city.

Grade separation is not about privileging cars, it is about separating national movement from local movement so the city and region can function properly.

Without proper separation, Wellington will continue to experience congestion that undermines local amenities while still failing to deliver reliable national connections.

3. A balanced transport outcome: roads, walking, cycling and public transport

Infrastructure New Zealand supports the opportunity this project creates to strengthen walking, cycling and public transport within the city, alongside nationally significant roading.

This does not represent a trade-off. A mature transport system recognises that different modes serve different purposes. Separating through traffic enables better local streets, safer active modes and improved public transport reliability.

Good transport planning is not ‘roads versus bikes.’ It is building a system where each mode can do what it does best. It is time for Wellington to evolve to reflect that maturity.

Careful urban design and integration will be critical to ensure the benefits of improved active and public transport connectivity are fully realised and that city-shaping outcomes are positive.

4. Enabling affordable housing and urban growth

Transport infrastructure and housing outcomes are inseparable. Infrastructure New Zealand sees the SH1 Wellington Improvements Project as a critical enabler of future affordable housing growth, particularly in eastern and southern Wellington.

Reliable transport access is fundamental to unlocking higher-density housing, reducing development risk and supporting viable, well-connected communities. Without improved corridor performance, housing intensification risks compounding congestion rather than alleviating it.

You cannot solve Wellington’s housing challenges without first fixing its transport constraints.

This project should be viewed not only as a transport investment, but as part of Wellington’s broader growth and urban development strategy.

5. Resilience and access to critical services

The importance of resilience cannot be overstated. SH1 provides essential access to Wellington Hospital and the International Airport, both of which are critical regional and national assets.

Infrastructure New Zealand strongly supports investment that improves route resilience, redundancy and reliability, particularly in a city exposed to seismic risk, weather events and constrained alternative routes.

Resilience is not a ‘nice to have.’ it is an insurance policy for the capital city and the country.

Ensuring dependable access for emergency services, healthcare workers, freight and travellers must remain a core design objective.

6. Strong support for tolling and user-pays funding

Infrastructure New Zealand strongly supports the use of tolling as part of the funding and delivery model for the SH1 Wellington Improvements Project.

Tolling provides a transparent user-pays mechanism, helps manage demand on a high-value corridor, and enables major infrastructure to be delivered sooner rather than deferred indefinitely.

If we want infrastructure now, someone must pay. User-pays helps spread the costs across users during the life of an asset. It is fairer than loading most of the cost onto either immediate or future generations.

We encourage NZTA and central government to show leadership in normalising tolling for major projects of national significance, while ensuring schemes are designed with appropriate consideration of equity and network effects.

7. The need for careful planning and delivery discipline

Given the scale and complexity of this project, Infrastructure New Zealand emphasises the importance of disciplined planning, clear staging and strong governance throughout delivery.

Construction impacts must be carefully managed, and early, genuine engagement with communities, councils and mana whenua will be critical to maintaining social licence. At the same time, momentum must be preserved.

The greatest risk now is not doing too much, it is losing nerve and doing too little. Sadly, this is Wellington's recent history with important infrastructure projects. It's time to change that.

New Zealand has a poor track record of delaying, revisiting and diluting major infrastructure decisions. This project should be protected from unnecessary political or procedural churn once a preferred solution is confirmed.

Conclusion

Infrastructure New Zealand fully supports the SH1 Wellington Improvements Project and encourages NZTA and the Government to maintain ambition, pace and clarity of purpose.

This project is an opportunity to:

- Fix a nationally significant transport bottleneck
- Enable housing growth and urban regeneration
- Improve resilience and access to critical services
- Deliver a balanced, multi-modal transport system
- Demonstrate leadership funding through tolling

Wellington has waited decades for a solution of this scale. Given the relative position of the region (particularly Wellington City) in terms of its population and economic opportunities, it cannot afford to wait another generation for a project such as this.

Infrastructure New Zealand looks forward to continued engagement as the project progresses and supports NZTA in delivering an outcome that reflects the long-term interests of Wellington and the nation.

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