

Transport Policy

A Public Transport System for People, Communities, and the Environment

Transport is essential public infrastructure. It underpins economic participation, community wellbeing, and national resilience during climate emergencies and global disruption.

The Alliance will establish a 100 percent publicly owned, integrated freight and passenger network in which coastal shipping and rail serve as the twin backbones of domestic long-distance freight.

1. Public Ownership of Strategic Transport Assets

The Alliance will return and retain strategic transport assets under full public ownership and democratic control, operating them for social, economic, and environmental benefit rather than private profit.

- **Rail:** the national network, tracks, signalling, rolling stock, and intermodal freight terminals.
- **Ports:** all sea port infrastructure, with privatisation and contracting out prohibited.
- **Aviation and transit:** Air New Zealand, moving from majority Crown control to full public ownership, together with strategic urban and regional public transport systems.
- **Shipping:** a newly established State Shipping Line.

These assets will operate as public services, serving our economic, social, and environmental needs rather than maximising returns.

2. Rail and Coastal Shipping as Freight Backbones

Rail and coastal shipping will be the primary long-distance freight carriers, shifting heavy cargo off the highways and reducing emissions, road damage, and deaths.

- **Intermodal freight:** coordinated schedules and seamless transfer across rail corridors, ports, and coastal shipping.
- **Feeder roading:** road freight repositioned as the local, regional, and last-mile network.

- **Regional access:** upgraded heavy-freight links connecting regional productive sectors directly to national networks.

Freight does not move to rail on its own, because the cost of heavy road transport falls on the public rather than on the operator and the government will use legislation, regulation, and investment to correct that.

3. A State Shipping Line

Aotearoa New Zealand no longer has a domestic merchant fleet. The last locally flagged and crewed container ship left the coastal trade in 2026, the last locally crewed coastal cement carrier had gone months earlier, and neither was replaced. There is no longer a domestic drydock able to service a vessel of that size.

We will establish a state-owned shipping line to rebuild domestic maritime capability and supply chain resilience.

- **Scheduled and reliable services:** regular coastal, trans-Tasman, and Pacific regional container and bulk routes.
- **Fuel security:** restore dedicated domestic coastal fuel tankers.
- **Emergency resilience:** fund an ocean-going emergency salvage tug and ensure vessels are available to service isolated regions during civil emergencies.
- **Workforce development:** domestic vessels flagged here, crewed under national collective agreements, and equipped with funded training berths for cadets.
- **Maintenance capability:** invest in drydock facilities so that a locally flagged ship does not have to leave the country for servicing.

4. KiwiPort: A National Port Network

We will replace destructive and parochial port competition with KiwiPort, a nationally coordinated, publicly owned hub-and-spoke network.

- **Hub-and-spoke model:** several primary deep-water international hubs, connected to regional spoke ports by regular domestic coastal feeders.
- **Capital rationalisation:** an end to the duplication of infrastructure between competing regional ports.
- **Public ownership:** port assets retained under shared municipal, regional, and national public control.

5. Cabotage and Supply Chain Strategy

We already have cabotage. Section 198 of the Maritime Transport Act 1994 reserves coastal cargo for Aotearoa New Zealand ships, and for foreign ships on demise charter to a locally based operator who employs the crew under our law. It also permits a foreign ship on a continuous international voyage to carry coastal cargo where that carriage is incidental to its international journey.

That third category now carries the majority of our coastal freight. The exception has become the rule, and it is why no operator will supply a locally flagged vessel. A ship paying New Zealand wages competes for the same cargo against vessels crewed on flag-of-convenience terms, for which the coastal leg is marginal revenue on a voyage already paid for.

The Alliance will:

- close the incidental-carriage exception in section 198(1)(c), ending the open-coast policy and reserving domestic sea freight for locally flagged and crewed ships;
- tighten the ministerial authorisation power in section 198(2);
- require KiwiRail and other state-owned enterprises to use locally flagged and crewed vessels for coastal freight;
- establish a Sea Freight Group, a ministerial council uniting government, cargo owners, KiwiPort, and the maritime unions, to drive modal shift;
- ensure seafarers on our coastal and trans-Tasman services are covered by New Zealand or Australian employment standards, not flag-of-convenience conditions.

Cabotage governs who may carry coastal freight. It cannot require anyone to send freight by sea, and it cannot produce a vessel where no operator will provide one. That is why the law and the fleet must be rebuilt together.

6. Public Transport

The Alliance will establish a fully integrated, quality public transport system covering urban and regional Aotearoa New Zealand.

- Integrated ticketing, timetables, and network planning across modes and regions;
- Affordable and, over time, free public transport;
- Restored and expanded regional and long-distance passenger rail;
- Reliable services in smaller centres and rural communities, not only in the main cities.

We will repeal the procurement requirements that force public transport into competitive tendering and corporatised operating models, and allow councils to run services directly where that delivers better outcomes.

A greater share of fuel excise and road-user charges will be directed towards public and regional transport.

7. Active Transport and Urban Planning

- Prioritise capital spending on electrified public transit, passenger rail, coastal shipping, walking, and cycling.
- Build separated, safe cycleway and pedestrian networks for everyday travel.
- Design town planning around accessible public transit rather than private vehicle movement and parking.

The objective is to give people a real choice. In much of the country there is currently no alternative to the car, and until there is, reducing car use is not a policy but a wish.

8. Safety and Worker Protections

- Direct funding towards evidence-based road and transit safety, speed management, and safer infrastructure design.
- Enforce strict health and safety standards and fair working conditions across port, rail, road, and maritime operations, using the Approved Code of Practice for Port Operations as the model.

Transport workers will have safe conditions and enforceable employment protections. Driver fatigue is a road safety issue as much as an employment one.

9. Accessibility and Partnership

Transport will be fully funded, affordable, and accessible for low-income households, disabled people, young people, older people, and rural communities.

Accessibility will be built into transport planning from the start rather than added afterwards.

Transport planning will be undertaken in partnership with iwi and hapū, whose interests in the network are those of a Te Tiriti partner rather than of a user group.

10. A National Transport Strategy

We will replace ad-hoc highway spending with a National Transport Strategy assessing projects on decarbonisation, regional employment, resilience, and whole-of-life public cost.

We should not have a transport system in which rail competes against roads, buses compete against trains, ports compete against rail, and local councils compete against central government for funding.

The Integrated Modal Network

Each mode has a role in a single network rather than a share of a market.

- **Coastal shipping:** primary domestic bulk and container freight between ports.
- **Rail:** primary long-distance land freight and inter-regional passenger transport.
- **Roads:** local, regional feeder, and last-mile freight and vehicle connections.
- **Public transit:** comprehensive urban, regional, and rural passenger services.
- **Active transport:** protected walking and cycling routes for short journeys.
- **Aviation:** publicly owned links between regions and global networks.

A transport system should be judged on affordability, accessibility, regional resilience, freight efficiency, emissions reduction, and democratic public control. Not on how many lane-kilometres were opened.