



## **SUBMISSION ON REGIONAL LAND TRANSPORT PLAN 2015-2025 (2018 Review)**

**TO:** HAWKE'S BAY REGIONAL COUNCIL

**SUBMISSION ON:** REGIONAL LAND TRANSPORT PLAN 2015-2025 (2018 Review)

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- 1. Horticulture New Zealand (HortNZ) submits generally in support of the Hawke's Bay Regional Land Transport Plan (2018 Review).**
- 2. Background to HortNZ and its involvement with natural resource and environmental management**

HortNZ was established on 1 December 2005. It acts as an umbrella organisation for 22 affiliated produce groups representing growers of the following 'products': asparagus, avocado, blackcurrants, blueberries, boysenberries, citrus, export buttercup squash, feijoas, fresh tomatoes, kiwiberry, kiwifruit, nashi, onions, passionfruit, persimmons, pipfruit, potatoes, process vegetables, strawberries, summerfruit, tamarillos and vegetables.

The horticulture industry is currently estimated to be worth \$5.6 billion. Sixty percent (60%) of the produce is exported (i.e. \$3.4 billion) to 124 countries. Exports increased 40% from June 2014 to 2016<sup>1</sup>, and further increases in export volumes are forecast. In fact, the stated purpose of HortNZ is to enable, promote and advocate for growers to enable the development of a \$10 billion industry by 2020<sup>2</sup>. Aside from the obvious economic benefits associated with horticultural production, a thriving rural economy supports the social fabric of rural communities and the production of safe and healthy horticultural produce is invaluable for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The vision of HortNZ is 'Healthy food for all forever' and the HortNZ mission is 'creating an enduring environment where growers prosper'. HortNZ advocates for growers across the key industry areas of national regulatory reform, regional and district planning, biosecurity, research and development, access to labour, education, and readiness and response to adverse events.

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<sup>1</sup> Horticulture NZ (2017) *New Zealand domestic vegetable production: the growing story*. Accessed via <http://www.hortnz.co.nz/assets/Media-Release-Photos/HortNZ-Report-Final-A4-Single-Pages.pdf> on 18 April 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Horticulture New Zealand Incorporated Strategic Plan 2016 to 2025, accessed <http://www.hortnz.co.nz/assets/UploadsNew/HortNZ-Strategic-Plan-2016-25.pdf> on 21 April 2018.

HortNZ takes an involvement in local government planning processes on behalf of all 5,500 active growers as part of its national environmental policy work. HortNZ manages issues that cover and affect the whole horticulture industry (excluding winegrowers and winemakers). Many of the issues are common between districts/regions, therefore HortNZ provides input to policy at the national level, as well as regional and district policy processes.

With New Zealand's increasing population, domestic food supply is an issue that HortNZ is concerned about nationally. HortNZ have recently released a report<sup>3</sup> on domestic vegetable production in New Zealand to help educate and inform New Zealanders of this issue. While the ability to transport chilled fruit and vegetables has reduced reliance on locally-grown produce, it also creates risk if distribution channels are unexpectedly altered. For example, a blocked highway following an earthquake or significant rainfall could restrict access between fruit and vegetable hubs and their markets. A substantial amount of Hawke's Bay's horticultural produce is also exported out of the Port of Napier, so HortNZ considers planning for reliable and efficient transport networks to be a high priority.

### **3. Horticulture in the Hawke's Bay Region**

According to Matariki, the Hawke's Bay Regional Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2016, 'food production' accounts for 52.5% of the region's GDP. Although not all of that will be horticulture based food production, it is suggested that a significant proportion of it is.

The HortNZ database indicates that there are currently 407 growing operations in the Hawke's Bay Region, comprised of orchards, fresh vegetable and process vegetable growing operations, and there are also three growers of indoor covered crops. Horticultural production is predominantly focused on the fertile soils of the Heretaunga Plains, although there are also a number of process crop growers (i.e. peas) and some orchards in Central Hawke's Bay, and a scattering of other growers located throughout the region.

As highlighted in Section 4 of the Land Transport Plan, Hawke's Bay produces 61% of New Zealand's apple and pear crops, 70% of the country's summer fruit and 50% of the country's squash crop. All of these products fall under the umbrella of product groups that are represented by Horticulture NZ.

While a range of fresh fruit and vegetables are grown for domestic supply, the majority of Hawke's Bay's horticultural produce is exported – either fresh, or processed by one of the several large processing firms located in Hastings e.g. Heinz Watties, McCains. This means that efficient and safe transport links from packhouses/coolstores and processing sites, which are predominantly located in Hastings and Whakatu, to the Napier Port are absolutely critical to the ongoing success and contribution of horticulture to the Hawke's Bay Region.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hortnz.co.nz/assets/Media-Release-Photos/HortNZ-Report-Final-A4-Single-Pages.pdf>

## Census Statistics

The last Agriculture Census was undertaken in 2012<sup>4</sup> and provides a level of insight into the amount of land in horticultural production in Hawke's Bay. While this data<sup>5</sup> is of interest, it has limitations due to now being 6 years old. Apple plantings in particular are known to have increased significantly during this time. Another challenge with the data is that a number of growers requested that their information remain confidential. Therefore, this data should not be relied upon to define the full extent of horticulture within the Hawke's Bay Region, but it does effectively demonstrate the importance of horticulture not only to the region, but also to the rest of New Zealand. In the interests of brevity, only data for those crops where Hawke's Bay is a significant producer on a national scale have been included.

**Table 1. Area planted in outdoor fruit**

	<b>Apples</b>	<b>Pears</b>	<b>Peaches</b>	<b>Apricots</b>	<b>Nectarines</b>	<b>Plums</b>
<b>Hawke's Bay (ha)</b>	5,115	191	314	102	240	178
<b>New Zealand total (ha)</b>	8,845	617	452	434	409	362
<b>% grown in Hawke's Bay</b>	58	31	70	24	59	49

**Table 2. Area planted in outdoor vegetables**

	<b>Green beans</b>	<b>Peas (fresh/processed)</b>	<b>Pumpkin</b>	<b>Squash</b>	<b>Sweet corn</b>
<b>Hawke's Bay (ha)</b>	380	2,126	246	3,248	1,050
<b>New Zealand total (ha)</b>	1,186	6,672	1,048	6,837	4,664
<b>% grown in Hawke's Bay</b>	32	32	23	48	23

## 4. Overall comments

HortNZ is generally supportive of the Regional Land Transport Plan (2018 Review) and recognises that the plan must take into account and balance the competing demands to all sectors of the community. However, given the importance of horticulture to the Hawke's Bay Region, from both an economic and a social perspective, HortNZ would suggest that the importance of Hawke's Bay's transport links providing for the efficient and safe movement of horticultural produce really cannot be emphasised enough. This position is considered to be supported by 'Matariki', Hawke' Bay's Regional Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan<sup>6</sup> which states that it wants Hawke' Bay to become the country's leading exporter of premium primary produce<sup>7</sup>. The Strategy states that given the region's significant reliance on primary production, efficient transport of goods from the field to production facilities, and then to Napier Port and the wider North Island is key to growing and

<sup>4</sup> The next agricultural census will be held later this year.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/industry\\_sectors/agriculture-horticulture-forestry/2012-agricultural-census-tables/horticulture.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/industry_sectors/agriculture-horticulture-forestry/2012-agricultural-census-tables/horticulture.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> Accessed via <http://www.hbreeds.nz/about-matariki/strategy/> on 21 April 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to pg. 12 Matariki – Hawke' Bay Regional Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2016, Accessed via <http://www.hbreeds.nz/about-matariki/strategy/> on 21 April 2018.

maintaining the prosperity of Hawke's Bay business, and therefore the region as a whole.

## 5. Specific comments

The Regional Land Transport Plan 2015 – 2015 (2018 Review) (Draft document) identifies the importance of transport to the region and sets out the objectives and strategic priorities for the region. The comments below refer to specific sections in the draft document and propose changes to better reflect the importance and role of horticulture in the region.

As part of preparing this submission a number of local growers were consulted, with those particularly involved in the transport of horticulture specifically targeted. The views expressed in this submission reflect the comments and feedback of those growers who are using Hawke's Bay's transport network almost daily and are therefore critically aware of where issues currently exist. While the comments below generally focus on additional areas for improvement, or further works that are considered necessary, HortNZ would like to acknowledge the significant investment that has been made in the Pakowhai Road/Links Road Intersection upgrade, and the construction of the Whakatu Arterial Link; and the benefits that (once completed) these projects will have on the efficient and safe functioning of the transport network of the Heretaunga Plains.

### 5.1 *Section 5: Our Future*

In Section 5.1 (pg. 13) of the report it is stated that the region is relatively confident that major issues are in hand, planned improvements will do much to resolve high priority safety and efficiency problems on the Heretaunga Plains, and the focus of the region's effort now needs to be on emerging issues in rural areas. Based on the feedback of growers, HortNZ suggests that even once upgrades that are currently under construction are completed, congestion on the Hawke's Bay Expressway will remain a major issue, and the proposed safety treatments (e.g. those identified on pg. 31 of the Draft Plan) to be undertaken by NZTA over the next year will not be sufficient to address this.

All growers spoken too identified congestion on the HB Expressway as the biggest issue currently facing road transport in Hawke's Bay, and all suggested that four laning the Expressway, which was proposed by the previous central government, is the only practical way to rectify the issue. Growers generally felt that the rural roads that they used to access orchards/fields etc to collect produce were in a reasonable condition and did not create too many issues, however delays were encountered on all of the main arterial roads, particularly the HB Expressway. One grower suggested that having an efficient transport network that allowed timely transport of produce, particularly from packhouses/processing facilities to the Napier Port, used to create a competitive advantage for Hawke's Bay horticultural produce, however this is being eroded as a result of the increasing length of time it takes to transport produce across the Heretaunga Plains to the port. Given the importance of horticultural produce to the Hawke's Bay Region, HortNZ suggests that it is important that all possible steps are taken to ensure that that competitive advantage is protected.

Consequently, HortNZ urges the Regional Land Transport Committee to recognise the issues with the HB Expressway, and start putting in place steps to address the

problem. HortNZ does not feel that the current drafting of the plan sufficiently emphasises the need for additional capacity to be provided on this key route in a timely fashion, and suggests that further substantial improvements (discussed further in Section 5.6 below) on this critical route cannot be delayed until 2021. As noted in the Section 4.5 of the Draft Plan, over 1 million new trees have been planted in the region over the last two years. As the majority of Hawke's Bay's pipfruit is exported, this will further increase pressure on the already congested Expressway.

5.2 *Problem Statement 1: Parts of the Transport system lack capability, limiting opportunities for improved economic and social development*

In Section 5.2.2 (pg. 14) of the Draft Plan it is proposed to monitor traffic growth on strategic routes such as the Hawke's Bay Expressway. The Draft Plan states that it is expected that the completion of the Whakatu Arterial Link will channel freight away from the State Highway 2 coastal route onto the Expressway. While this clearly has benefits for the coastal route, and should achieve the long held goal of decreasing heavy traffic using Marine Parade, HortNZ suggests that this will potentially compound existing congestion issues on the Expressway, therefore monitoring traffic growth is not sufficient, and the Plan needs to bring forward the commencement date of activities related to improving access to the Napier Port.

With regards to Freight Transport (pg. 16) HortNZ is very pleased to see that the need to improve the capability of the network to transport High Productivity Motor Vehicles (HPMV) has been recognised and that funding will be allocated to strengthen necessary infrastructure. Many Hawke's Bay growers already have HPMV which are currently underutilised because of the existing limitations on the network, and strengthening of the necessary infrastructure will allow these larger vehicles to be better utilised. The use of larger vehicles may provide some short-term relief, or at least a delay in further increases in heavy traffic on the HB Expressway, as larger trucks can obviously transport larger loads, however the ability to utilise such large trucks will not account for the increased volume of pipfruit that the region will begin producing over the next few years. HortNZ supports the identification of the work needed to enable the use of HPMV over a larger area of Hawke's Bay's transport network as a problem.

5.3 *Problem Statement 2: Limited shared view of cross-boundary transport issues increases the risk of misaligned investment and/or management of the transport system*

HortNZ agrees that the integration of efforts to address transport issues between regions is important (pg. 17) and believes that the issues highlighted are relevant. HortNZ also agrees that co-ordination within the region can be a challenge. Several growers suggested that co-ordination between the local territorial authorities in their efforts to strengthen bridges to cater for HPMVs will be important, and if this is done effectively it will ensure that routes that are currently unable to be used by these heavy vehicles will become available more quickly, which will enable more efficient use of the transport network.

5.4 *Problem Statement 3: Poor user behaviour and transport system deficiencies increase the risk of deaths and serious injuries*

Section 5.4 of the Draft Plan relates to safety on Hawke's Bay's roads (pg. 19). HortNZ supports all efforts undertaken to make the regions road safer, and agrees that this is a problem that needs to be specifically addressed. Simply given their large number of

hours on the road, those transporting horticultural produce around and out of the Hawke's Bay Region are at particular risk of being injured or killed, therefore any improvements in road safety will be very positive, and a reduction in the incidence of serious crashes will clearly benefit the Hawke's Bay community as a whole.

#### 5.5 *Section 6: Statement of Transport Priorities*

Of the ten priorities identified in Section 6 of the Draft Plan (pg. 22) the following are considered to be particularly important from a HortNZ perspective (in order of priority):

- To complete planned safety and efficiency improvements on key routes to Napier Port and Major highways connecting the region
- To ensure High Productivity Motor Vehicle capability on the region's strategic routes and local road connections where appropriate
- To work together within Hawke's Bay to ensure aligned, integrated planning and joint solutions to cross-district issues

The reasons for these being identified as the top priorities for HortNZ have already been outlined in this submission, so will not be re-iterated here.

#### 5.6 *Section 8: Regional Programme of Activities*

In Section 8.3 (pg. 31) of the Draft Plan 'Activities for 2018-21' are listed. With regards to further improvements to the HB Expressway, NZTA has committed to funding safety interventions between Bay View and Pakipaki "including road and roadside treatments and a passing lane". Other projects related to improving access to the Napier Port are included in the table (pgs. 32-34) but are only scheduled to commence in 2021, or in the case of improvements from Meeanee to Pakowhai, in 2023. The projects are described as "removing constraints for seamless, safe and efficient freight journeys whilst maintaining the amenity value over certain sections of the strategic route".

As already highlighted in this submission, HortNZ strongly suggests that work to improve the HB Expressway, particularly its capacity, needs to commence now. Traffic volumes associated with horticulture are going to continue to increase and place further pressure on this important strategic route which is congested, particularly during peak times.

### **6. Response to specific questions posed by HBRC:**

6.1 Do you think the transport issues we have described in Section 5 are the most important ones? Are there other that should be considered?

Generally HortNZ does believe that Section 5 describes the most important transport issues challenging the region, but suggests that the need to increase capacity on the HB Expressway (in the short term) has not been sufficiently recognised.

6.2 Do you agree with our transport priorities for the region? (Section 6) If not, what else should be considered?

Yes, HortNZ generally agrees with the transport priorities identified for the region.

6.3 Section 8 sets out the transport activities that councils and the NZ Transport Agency are proposing to undertake in the next three years. Will this expenditure help to address our transport issues? If not, why not?

HortNZ submits that work to improve the HB Expressway needs to be commenced in the next three years, and not delayed until 2021. Therefore, HortNZ does not feel that the transport activities, as currently proposed to be undertaken over the next three years, will address the key transport issue facing the Hawke's Bay Region from a horticulture perspective.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries. Please note that HortNZ does wish to retain the opportunity to speak to the Regional Transport Committee about its submission/feedback.

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