

# Northland Walking and Cycling Strategy

August 2018





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## Whakatauki

Manaaki Tangata Whakamua tatou Manaaki oranga	Providing for people Moving together Providing for health
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## Karakia

Whakataka te hau ki te uru. Whakataka te hau ki te tonga. Kia mākinakina ki uta. Kia mātaratara ki tai. E hī ake ana te atakura. He tio, he huka, he hau hū. Tihei mauri ora.	Cease the winds from the west. Cease the winds from the south. Let the breeze blow over the land. Let the breeze blow over the ocean. Let the red-tipped dawn come with a sharpened air. A touch of frost, a promise of a glorious day. Let there be life
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## Mihi

E ngā iwi, e ngā mana, ka mihi ki a koutou katoa.  Ko tenei Rautaki, he Rautaki hou mo tatou rohe. E mahitahi ngā Kaunihera tokowha kei roto i te rohe o Taitokerau. Ka puta mai o ratou whakaaro mo te painga o te tangata, tautokohia te oranga, e whakamua ngā tangata, e Whakahono ngā hapori ki ngā hapori, e hīkoi, eke paihikara, e haumaru nei, mai a Terenga Wairua tae noa ki Kaiwaka, mai a Kaipara tae noa ki Whangārei.  Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.	All peoples, all authorities, our acknowledgements to you all  This Strategy is a new strategy for our region. The four Councils in Northland. They have put their thoughts into this strategy for the benefit of people, supporting the well-being, moving people and joining communities safely through walking and cycling from Cape Reinga to Kaiwaka and from Kaipara to Whangārei.  Greetings to you, greetings to everyone.
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## Executive summary

The **purpose** of this strategy is to provide a strong tactical framework to support the development and implementation of district council walking and cycling strategies, and to place these within a regional context by identifying actions that can be taken at a regional level.

The overarching **vision** for the strategy is:

***For Northland to be one of the world's best coastal walking and cycling destinations where the journeys and stories are as impressive and memorable as the scenery.***

The vision draws attention to the 'coastal' dimension of the region. Northland has the longest readily accessible coastline in New Zealand with a total length of 3200km and 14 major harbours, including the Kaipara Harbour which is the largest harbour in the southern hemisphere. It offers a real point of difference to the other regions of New Zealand and internationally.

Walking and cycling is becoming an ever more important part of the transport mix. The strategy recognises several prominent **issues and opportunities** relating to walking and cycling in the region including: growing participation rates; the presence of three nationally significant journeys; a lack of connectivity between infrastructure; the importance of working together to develop and jointly fund new opportunities; and the need to unlock the economic impact that walking and cycling creates in a way that protects sensitive areas.

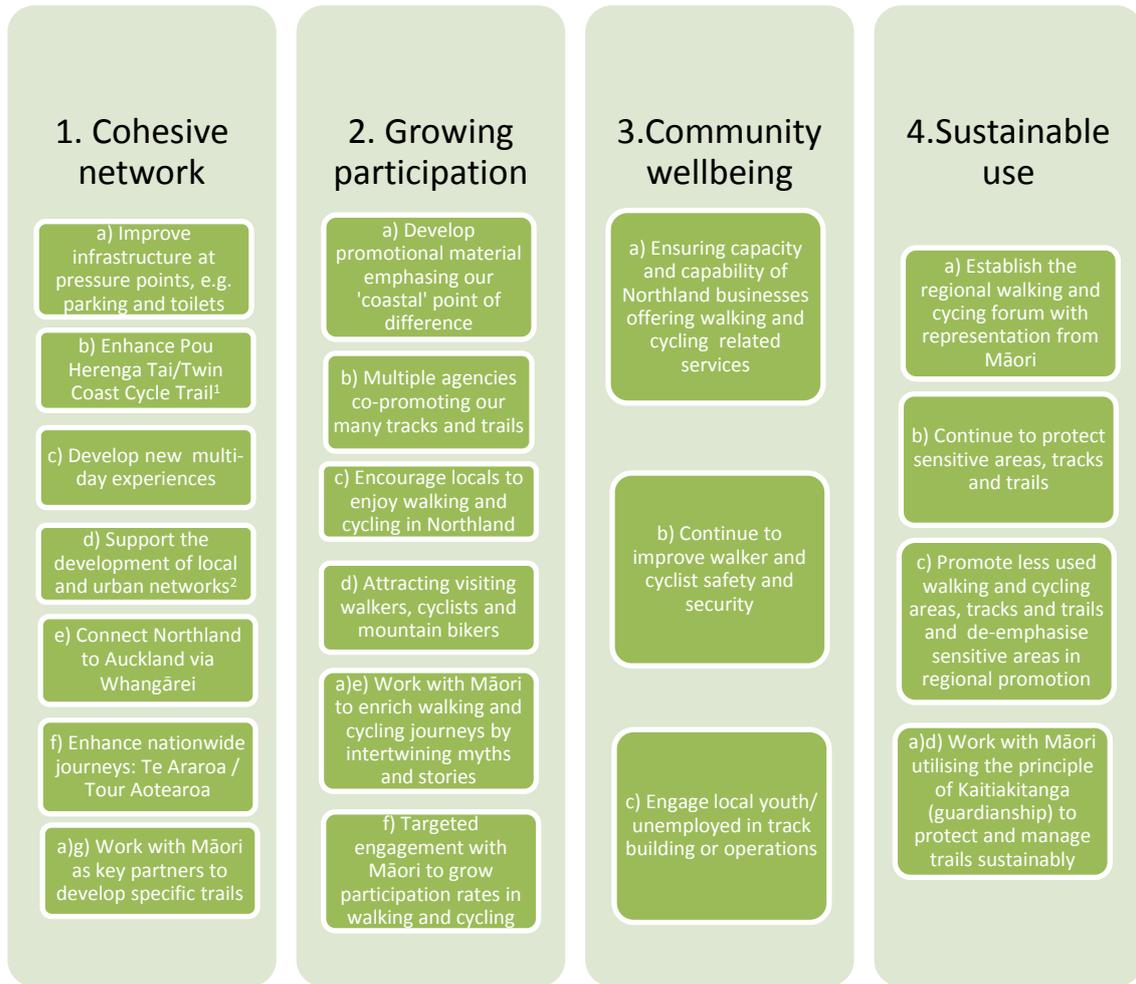
The strategy will assist in achieving the vision and responding to the issues and opportunities by delivering on four strategic **focus areas**.

1. Developing appealing and cohesive walking and cycling networks that connect Northland.
2. Growing walking and cycling participation and promoting Northland's coastal point of difference.
3. Improving community wellbeing including creating economic opportunities.
4. Ensuring walking and cycling infrastructure, and its use, is sustainable.

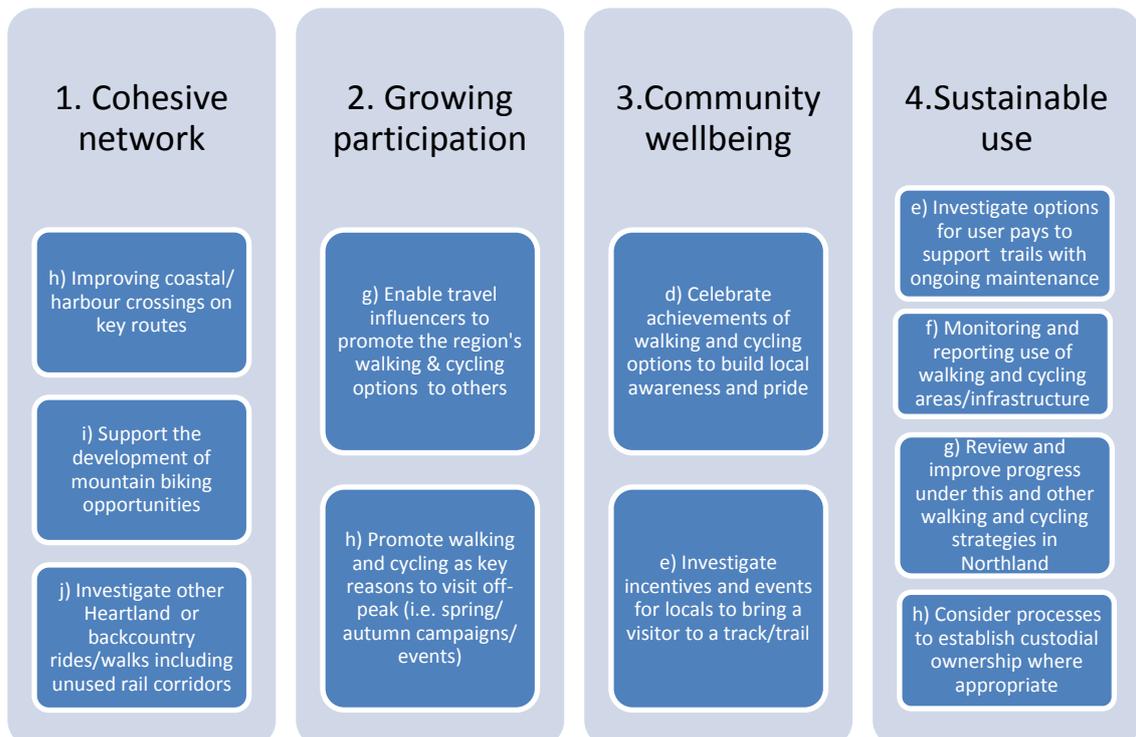
The first focus area emphasises the built infrastructure; the second concentrates on the promotion of that product; the third reflects the desire to see that the development bring benefits to Northlanders; and the fourth ensures that it is all done sustainably.

A summary of the short and longer term actions to deliver each of the four focus areas is outlined in the following diagram.

**Figure ES1. Summary of short term priorities**



**Figure ES2. Summary of longer term priorities**



**Notes:**

1. The priorities outlined above may comprise multiple projects e.g. the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail has potential projects to extend the trail at both ends and to connect with Ngawha Springs near Kaikohe.
2. The development of urban walking and cycling networks will occur at a district level. However, there will be valuable regional opportunities for sharing resources and ideas.

The region presently contains several long distance cycle trails:

- The Pou Herenga Tai/Twin Coast Cycle Trail between Ōpua and Horeke
- The Far North Cycleway from Cape Reinga to the Hokianga Harbour.
- Kauri Coast Cycleway between Rāwene and Dargaville.
- Kaipara Missing Link from Dargaville to Poutō Point at the mouth of the Kaipara Harbour and then by boat to Helensville.

The last three routes form part of 'Tour Aotearoa'.

Northland is the northern starting point of the Te Araroa Trail, a walking route which runs the entire length of the country from Cape Reinga to Bluff.

There are a large number of other scenic walks managed by DOC of varying length and grades, as well as a series of short walks managed by district councils. DOC manages a total of 119 tracks in Northland, representing 11% of all DOC tracks in New Zealand.

Northland has a relatively small number of overnight or multi-day tracks, including the Cape Brett Track and the Te Pahi Coastal Track. None of these tracks are currently designated as a 'Great Walk'. Northland has a relatively high proportion of short walks (93 tracks, equivalent to 13% of the total).

A number of new projects are proposed as part of this regional strategy that will connect the region's regional routes into a cohesive network. The below map provides an overview of the proposed projects in the strategy combined with existing regional walking and cycling routes.

## Map ES1: Existing and proposed regional walking and cycling routes



## Introduction

This is Northland's first regional walking and cycling strategy. Its development has been overseen by a steering group made up of representatives from Northland Regional Council (NRC) and Far North, Whangarei and Kaipara District Councils (FNDC, WDC and KDC respectively) with input from the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA), Northland Inc. Limited, the Department of Conservation (DOC), and the New Zealand Walking and Access Commission (WAC).

The economic future of Northland relies on strong transport networks, and walking and cycling are becoming ever more important to this mix. The region is one of the least urbanised in New Zealand meaning there is a greater reliance on private car use as well as a need to travel longer distances to reach places of employment, shopping, leisure, health and education. Walking and cycling provide positive, enjoyable, economic and healthy ways of getting around.

The strategy has been split into **two sections**. The **first section** comprises three parts which set the context for this strategy. These three parts identify the key **issues and opportunities** associated with walking and cycling in Northland; examine the **growing demand** for walking and cycling; and **outline the strategic framework and linkages** at the national, regional and district level within which the strategy lies.

The second section is broken into **four parts**, one for each of the four **strategic focus areas**. Each of these parts includes a discussion of the current situation in Northland with respect to the focus area, some of the potential opportunities that could occur, and the specific actions or projects that can be undertaken.

## A.1. Issues and opportunities

The Northland Walking and Cycling Strategy outlines a set of strategic focus areas that will address the following issues and pursue relevant opportunities.

**Joint funding** will likely be required to build and upgrade our walking and cycling infrastructure that links across district and regional boundaries. Focusing our limited funding on the right projects will be key to generating the greatest overall impacts in the medium to long term. Ongoing funding will be needed to maintain and improve these assets.

There is a current **lack of connectivity** in walking and cycling infrastructure that makes it difficult for people to use or reduces their appeal. Locals and visitors will benefit from better connections between tracks and trails. These connections may incorporate other modes of transport that make the journey more appealing and enjoyable, e.g. a scenic boat ride or heritage train trip.

Northland's unique geography presents an opportunity to **celebrate our coastline and harbours** as people walk and cycle through the region. Northland's coastal point of difference can help set us apart from other destinations and provide richer journey experiences that combine land and water based travel.

Another key advantage that Northland has over many other regions of New Zealand is **the presence of three nationally significant journeys** within the region, i.e. Te Araroa Trail walkway, Tour Aotearoa (bikepacking route) and a Great Ride (Pou Herenga Tai/Twin Coast Cycle Trail) which forms part of Nga Haerenga, the New Zealand Cycle Trail.

However, **awareness** of Northland as an iconic walking and cycling destination is low compared to other regions in New Zealand.

Growing walking and cycling **participation** rates for Northland residents and visitors to the region is likely to require a variety of interventions / activities targeted to a range of ages and interest groups from local school children to retired visitors.

Northland's current walking and cycling offerings vary widely in levels of use resulting in pressure points on popular tracks and underutilised infrastructure elsewhere. Consistently promoting a credible set of existing walking and cycling trails while communicating where not to tread can help with **protection of sensitive areas, dispersal of visitors and asset utilisation.**

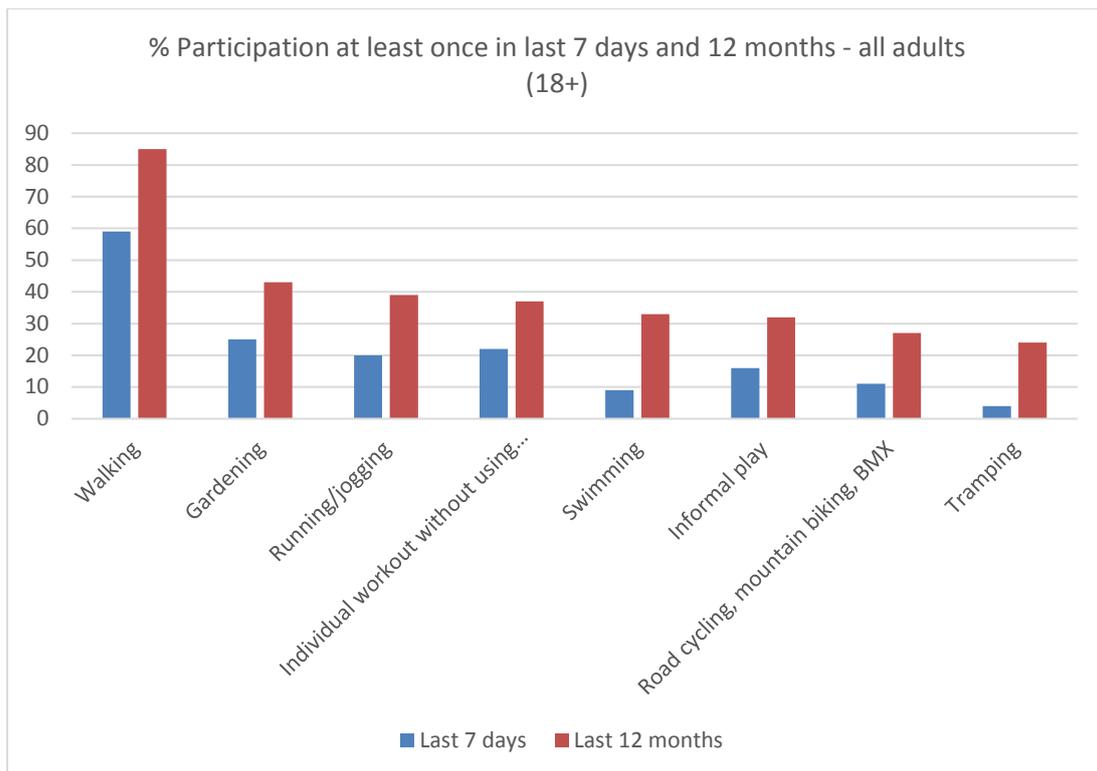
It will be necessary to engage and enable businesses to unlock **greater economic impact** through the provision of new products and experiences that will further increase awareness and appeal of Northland as a walking and cycling destination.

Identifying innovative ways of **working together** to pursue new walking and cycling development opportunities will be required in order to learn, leverage, share, save and celebrate successes.

## A.2. Growing demand for walking and cycling

The most recent Active New Zealand survey (2017)<sup>1</sup> carried out by Sport New Zealand highlights just how popular walking and cycling is for **New Zealanders**. Walking is by far the most popular sport and recreation activity undertaken by adults (aged 18 years and over) in both the last 12 months (85%) and the last 7 days (59%). Running and jogging is third (38%) in the last 12 months while cycling is seventh (27%) in the last 12 months.

**Figure 1. Popular sport and recreation activities for New Zealanders**

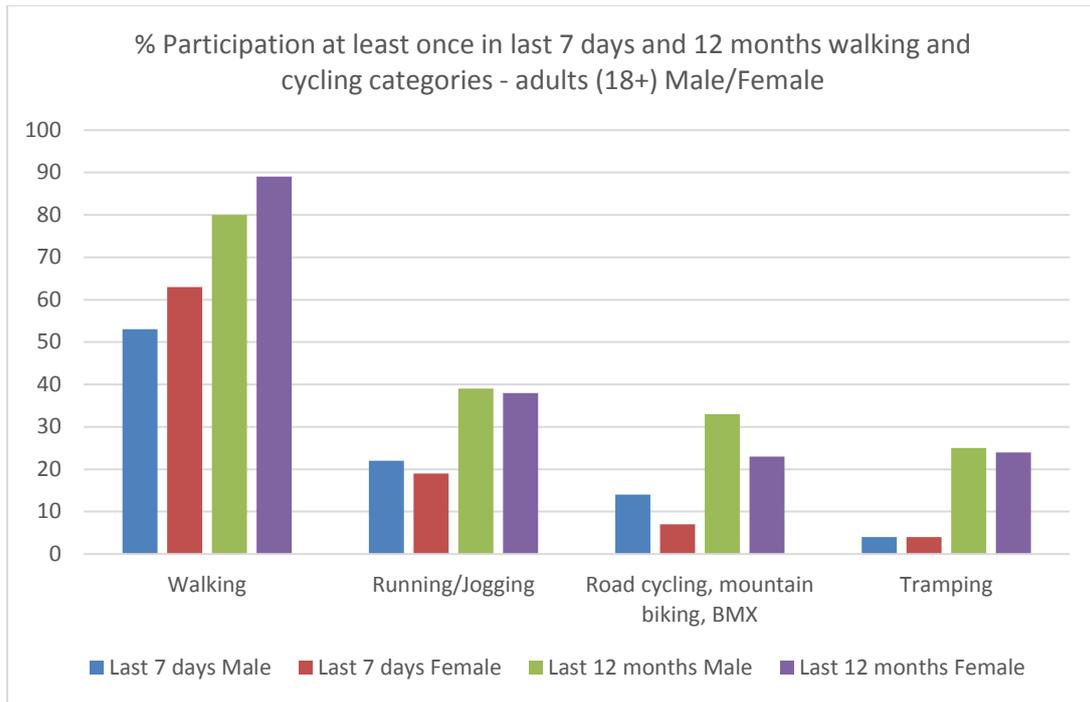


Walking is the most popular activity whatever the gender. Cycling is generally more popular for males.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sport New Zealand. – *Findings from the 2017 Active New Zealand Survey*.

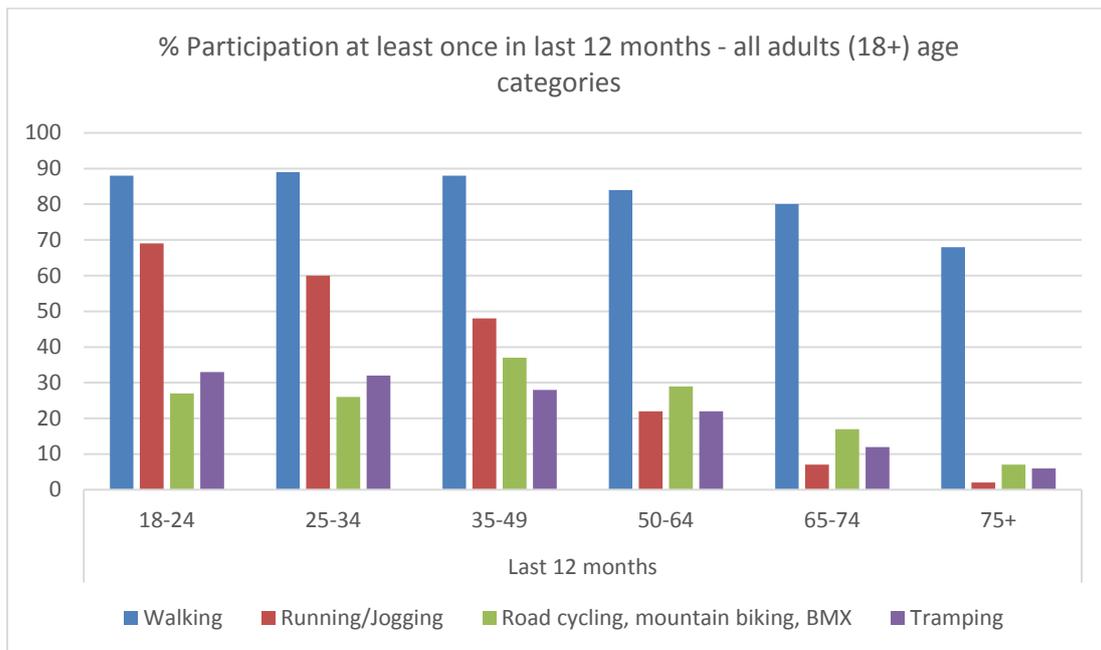
<sup>2</sup> These gender and age insights are supported by other research, such as *Benchmarking cycling and walking in six New Zealand cities: Pilot study 2015* by New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities.

**Figure 2. Popular sport and recreation activities for New Zealanders by gender**



Walking remains popular across all age categories although running and jogging rates fall off quite quickly with age. Cycling is most popular in the middle-aged categories.

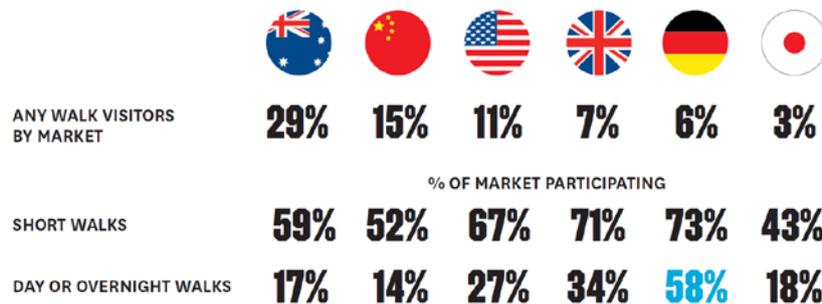
**Figure 3. Popular sport and recreation activities for New Zealanders by age**



In addition to these high domestic participation rates there are many **international visitors** who chose to include walking and cycling while on holiday in New Zealand.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of international visitors participated in walking / hiking over the past three years – averaging 1.1 million visitors per year (Figure 4).

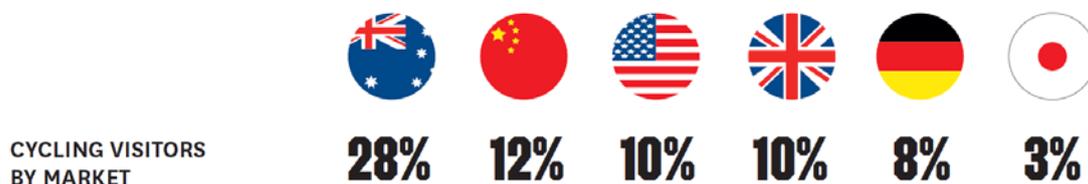
**Figure 4. Walking and hiking participation rates for international visitors**



Source: Tourism New Zealand, Special Interest Sectors Infographic, based on the MBIE International Visitor Survey for the three years ended March 2017.

A smaller number, 9% of international visitors, participated in cycling during the past three years – an average of 138,000 visitors per year. Australia is the largest market for cycling experiences in New Zealand (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Cycling participation rates for international visitors**



Source: Tourism New Zealand, Special Interest Sectors Infographic, based on the MBIE International Visitor Survey for the three years ended March 2017.

It is important to consider the **various users** of cycling and walking infrastructure, and the underlying trends in each segment of the market (Table 1).

**Table 1. Growth trends by type of walker and cyclist**

Walker types	Current Trends
School / commuter	Stabilising after long-term decline
Short walks	Growing
Day walks	Growing
Multi-day walks	Growing
Epic walkers, e.g. Te Araroa	Growing but very small numbers

<b>Cyclist types</b>	
School / commuters	Stabilising after long-term decline
Local recreational riders	Growing
Easy off-road trails	Growing
Avid mountain bikers	Growing
Active riders wanting multi-day adventures	Growing
Bikepacker (combining biking and camping)	Growing but very small numbers

While there is a growing trend towards more walking and cycling, the type of activities/experiences sought is shifting gradually in line with changing demographics, values and attitudes, and trip characteristics.

For example, visitors generally have less time and outdoor experience than previously. They want to engage physically with the outdoors but in a way that is easily accessible in terms of location and commitment. They seek short, easily accessible soft adventure activities, escaping from the everyday through nature-based experiences.

Another trend to follow is the adoption rate of electric bikes that is drawing more people into cycling and mountain biking by effectively removing the need for hard uphill riding.

Further research is required to better understand these trends and how they relate to Northland so that the region can benefit from the growth trends in people walking and cycling from New Zealand and around the world.

### A.3. Strategic framework and linkages

The Northland Walking and Cycling Strategy provides a link between nationally relevant strategies and agencies, regional initiatives, and plans at a district level (Table 2).

**Table 2. Linkages with national, regional and district strategies and plans**

<b>National</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>District</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The <b>Government Policy Statement for Land Transport Funding</b> is produced by the Ministry of Transport. It sets the priorities for central government land transport funding.</li> <li>○ The <b>New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA)</b> is a key partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The <b>Northland Regional Land Transport Plan (2015-2021)</b> sets out the overall regional land transport priorities. This includes a strategic priority to increase travel choices and to improve participation in walking and cycling, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Whangarei District Council's Walking and Cycling Strategy 2018</b> (draft) provides the detail for a comprehensive set walking and cycling initiatives within the district and how these will link with other areas.</li> </ul>

National	Regional	District
<p>and funding agency for transport projects across Northland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The <b>Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE)</b> funds economic and regional development including cycle trail development.</li> <li>○ The <b>Department of Conservation (DOC)</b> administers Great Walks, Short Walks and Day Hikes in its role as custodian for New Zealand’s public conservation land.</li> <li>○ The <b>New Zealand Walking Access Commission</b> is a Crown entity that protects and promotes free, certain, enduring and practical access to the outdoors.</li> <li>○ <b>Nga Haerenga, The New Zealand Cycle Trail Inc.</b> is focused on growing New Zealand through outstanding cycling experiences.</li> </ul>	<p>to promote connections between walking, cycling and public transport.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The <b>Tai Tokerau Northland Economic Action Plan</b> provides a strategic framework for regional economic and tourism development.</li> <li>○ <b>Northland Forward Together</b> is the collective plan for all four Northland councils to work together to deliver better outcomes for Northland and its people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The <b>Kaipara Walking and Cycling Strategy 2017</b> outlines plans for the district to become a walking and cycling destination.</li> <li>○ Work is underway on a walking and cycling strategy for <b>Far North District</b> and an Experience and Product Development Plan for <b>Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail</b>.</li> </ul>

The following paragraphs describe in more detail some of these strategies, plans and funding sources.

### **Government Policy Statement for National Land Transport Funding**

The Government Policy Statement (GPS) sets the priorities for central government land transport funding for a period of ten years. A new GPS for the period 2018/19 – 2027/28 (GPS 2018) was released in June 2018.<sup>3</sup> Relevant objectives and results identified for walking and cycling are shown in Table 3.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.transport.govt.nz/multi-modal/keystrategiesandplans/gpsonlandtransportfunding/>

**Table 3. Walking and cycling objectives and results in GPS 2018**

Strategic Priorities	Objective	Long term (10+ year) results	Short to medium term results (3-6+ years)
Safety	A land transport system that is a safe system, free of death and serious injury	Significant reduction in deaths and serious injuries	Cycling and walking is safer
Access	A land transport system that provides increased access to economic and social opportunities	Metropolitan and high growth urban areas are better connected and accessible	A more accessible and better integrated transport network including public transport, walking and cycling
	A land transport system that enables transport choice and access	Increased mode shift from private vehicle trips to walking, cycling and public transport	Improved good-quality, fit-for-purpose walking and cycling infrastructure Improved real and perceived safety for both pedestrians and cyclists Increased proportion of journeys made using public transport and active modes of travel Expanded and better connected walking and cycling networks both in urban and rural areas
Environment	A land transport system that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, as well as adverse effects on the local environment and public health	Reduce transport's negative effects on the local environment and public health	Increased uptake of active travel modes such as walking and cycling to support environmental and public health objectives

Source: Government Policy Statement on Land Transport, 2018/19 – 2027/28

The GPS provides a quantum of funding towards walking and cycling projects based on a range (upper and lower band). The proposed annual funding range for walking and cycling projects (including capital expenditure and promotional activities) in the ten-year funding period from 2018 to 2028 is as follows:

**Table 4. Annual funding for walking and cycling in GPS 2018, 2018-2028**

Year	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28
Range (\$M)	\$60- \$95	\$80- \$120	\$95- \$145	\$80- \$125	\$75- \$115	\$75- \$115	\$75- \$115	\$75- \$115	\$75- \$115	\$80- \$120

Source: Government Policy Statement on Land Transport, 2018/19 – 2027/28

NZTA has the responsibility of allocating funding through the National Land Transport Programme within this funding range. This funding can be allocated to walking and cycling projects if put forward by district councils through the Regional Land Transport Plan (see below).

### **Northland Regional Land Transport Plan (2015-2021)**

The Northland Regional Land Transport Plan is the region's 'joint' bid for funding assistance from the National Land Transport Fund (NLTF). It includes land transport projects put forward by district councils and NZTA, and the public transport programme put forward by the regional council. Councils can bid for a share of the NLTF based on the overall strategic fit of projects with funding criteria. Unless funding assistance is provided at 100% national funding, a local share for a project is usually necessary.

### **Dedicated funding streams**

There are two specific national funding sources that can be accessed for walking and cycling projects separate to the NLTF.

#### *Urban Cycleways Programme*

A \$100 million fund to be spent between 2015/16 – 2017/18 on cycling infrastructure in main urban centres throughout New Zealand. WDC received \$3.5 million (\$2 million from the Urban Cycleways Fund and \$1.5 million from the NLTF) to develop the Kamo shared walking and cycling path in the city with a total cost of \$4.8 million.

#### *National Cycleway Fund*

The National Cycleway Fund, established in 2009, supported the establishment of an initial 19 Great Rides that formed Nga Haeranga, the New Zealand Cycle Trail. Three existing trails were subsequently granted Great Ride status, taking the total to 22 Great Rides throughout New Zealand. An additional \$25 million over four years was announced at Budget 2016 for the next phase of the New Zealand Cycle Trail. The Pou Herenga Tai/Twin Coast Cycle Trail was developed partly through funding from this fund.

### **Other funding streams**

#### *Provincial Growth Fund*

The Provincial Growth Fund, announced by the Labour Government in 2018, aims to lift productivity potential in the provinces. Its priorities are to enhance economic development opportunities, create sustainable jobs, enable Māori to reach their full potential, boost social inclusion and participation, build resilient communities, and help meet New Zealand's climate change targets.

All provinces are eligible for funding, however, Tairāwhiti/East Coast, Hawke's Bay, Tai Tokerau/Northland, Bay of Plenty, West Coast and Manawatū-Whanganui have been identified for early investment. The fund has three investment tiers:

1. Regional projects and capability: Support of economic development projects, feasibility studies and capability building identified by the regions.
2. Sector investment (including One Billion Trees programme): Investment in initiatives targeted at priority and/or high value economic opportunities.
3. Enabling infrastructure projects: Investment in regional infrastructure projects that will lift productivity and grow jobs.

#### *Tourism Infrastructure Fund*

This fund provides \$25 million per year for the development of tourism related infrastructure such as car parks, freedom camping facilities, sewerage, water works and transport projects. Although not specifically aimed at walking and cycling development, councils can access the fund to develop complimentary facilities in areas subject to growth pressure from tourists.

#### *Investment and Growth Reserve*

NRC maintains an Investment and Growth Reserve (IGR) to enable it to make strategic investments that lift the long-term growth of the Northland economy. The IGR is funded by an annual input of \$1.7 million from council's investment income with additional transfers from council's Community Investment Fund to both inflation-proof this annual input and to top-up the IGR if needed to support economic development opportunities that arise. The IGR is used to provide operational funding to Northland Inc., fund business case assessments and invest in projects that meet the eligibility criteria.

### **New Zealand Walking Access Commission**

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission (WAC) is the Crown entity that plays a lead role in protecting natural heritage by promoting free, certain, enduring and practical access to the outdoors.

WAC has indicated their support of future development of tracks and trails in Northland. This support could range from:

- Assisting in understanding unformed legal roads and access ways
- Assessing the relative merits of proposed walking or cycling tracks
- Tapping into the expertise of their experienced team to optimise or add value to potential projects as they are scoped
- Providing independent advice on regional and / or track and trail narrative development to ensure the Northland story and point of difference is being conveyed.

## **Tai Tokerau Northland Economic Action Plan**

The Tai Tokerau Northland Economic Action Plan (TTNEAP) contains more than 50 actions to coordinate economic development in Northland. The development of the action plan was overseen by a steering committee of district councils, the regional council and government agencies. The logistics and transport infrastructure workstream includes several relevant projects to walking and cycling: This includes:

- Connecting Northland – a roading project that will connect Auckland to Whangārei in several stages. An opportunity exists to incorporate walking and cycling into the project.
- Twin Coast Discovery Route upgrade – improving bridges, layovers and byway signage. Walking and cycling is likely to form part of the package of initiatives.

### **District walking and cycling strategies**

Though non-statutory documents, district councils may choose to develop walking and cycling strategies as a way of expressing a proposed walking and cycling programme. Currently two district councils in the region have walking and cycling strategies which have either recently been reviewed (KDC) or are in the process of being reviewed (WDC). FNDC is working to develop one.

## B. Strategic focus areas

There are four strategic focus areas that seek to balance growth in the supply of facilities and services with the increasing demand from users within Northland and visitors from outside the region including overseas travellers. The foundation for this balanced growth will be increasingly connected and safer communities across Northland and enabling businesses to benefit in ways that are sustainable.

**Figure 6. Four focus areas of the Northland Walking and Cycling Strategy**



### B.1. Focus area one: Developing appealing and cohesive walking and cycling networks that connect Northland

This focus area sets out the walking and cycling 'hardware' needed for Northland. It is divided into four parts: the development of a regional network; local routes; urban networks; and mountain bike opportunities.

#### **Development of a regional walking and cycling network**

Northland is a region where tourism is of increasing importance. Tourism provided approximately 8800 jobs in 2017, almost 13% of total jobs in the region (9% nationally). Over \$1 billion was spent in the region including \$783 million domestic spending and \$278 million international spending<sup>4</sup>. Tourism related expenditure has been growing by 10% per annum over the past three years.

At present, walking and cycling is not a prime drawcard for visitors to the region. A quality regional network will encourage an uptake in domestic and international

<sup>4</sup> Northland Region Economic Profile, <https://ecoprofile.infometrics.co.nz/Northland+Region>.

walking and cycling tourism in Northland, increase visitor spending and extend the time visitors spend in the region. The development of a regional network will also align with projects included in the TTNEAP such as the revitalisation of Twin Coast Discovery Route and the development of scenic byways known as Northland Journeys. The walking and cycling projects identified in this strategy will, when fully developed, create a cohesive regional network. This will include a mix of:

- Walks – from short half-day walks to multi-day hikes.
- Easy Rides – these are rides for the recreational and casual cyclist and comprise mostly grade 1 and some grade 2. They include what are termed as 'Great Rides'.
- Avid Rides – these are rides for the more intrepid and adventurist cyclist and will comprise anything that is grade 3 or higher. These will include rides that are on and off road.

Opportunities should be taken to enable, where possible, walkers and cyclists to jointly use the infrastructure, thereby ensuring a greater target audience and use.

**Map 1: Existing regional walking and cycling routes**



## Current state of the regional walking network

Northland is the northern starting point of the Te Araroa Trail which runs the entire length of the country from Cape Reinga to Bluff (Map 1).<sup>5</sup> The trail in Northland uses a mix of beaches, paper roads, existing tramping tracks on public land and some crossing of private land. It follows the same route as the Far North Cycleway along Ninety Mile Beach (Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē) before heading eastwards across to Kerikeri through several Northland forests. From there the trail follows a route close to the western seaboard of the region. Some parts of the trail are quite challenging for casual walkers, although the trail is not intended for this purpose. Trail development has been driven by the Te Araroa Trust with financial assistance from funding partners such as DOC.

There are a large number of other scenic walks managed by DOC of varying length and grades, as well as a series of short walks managed by district councils. These provide visitors with access to stunning viewpoints and culturally significant locations throughout the region. DOC manages a total of 119 tracks in Northland, representing 11% of all DOC tracks in New Zealand (Table 5).

**Table 5. DOC managed tracks in Northland and New Zealand**

	Northland		New Zealand		Northland as % of NZ
	Number	% total	Number	% total	
Short (under 4 hours)	93	78%	699	62%	13%
Day (over four hours)	22	18%	274	24%	8%
Overnight / Multi-day	4	3%	157	14%	3%
Total	119	100%	1,130	100%	11%

Source: Department of Conservation, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/walking-and-tramping/>

Northland has a relatively small number of overnight or multi-day tracks, including the Cape Brett Track and the Te Paki Coastal Track. None of these tracks are currently designated as a 'Great Walk'.

On the other hand, Northland has a relatively high proportion of short walks (93 tracks, equivalent to 13% of the total). These include the Tokatoka Scenic Reserve Track and Tutukaka Head tracks. The region has two of the 14 nationwide "Best Short Walks" promoted by DOC – Mt Manaia Track and Mangawhai Cliffs Walkway. It is also home to one of the five nationwide "Best Day Hikes" identified by DOC – Te Whara Track (Bream Head). These were part of a new initiative announced by the government in September 2017. Northland tracks feature on the front cover of both the "Best Short Walks" and "Best Day Hikes" brochures.

DOC has a work programme in place to improve specific tracks and experiences over the next two years. These include the Cape Brett redevelopment, the Ruapekapeka pa and battle historic site (to be completed by January 2021), and the Bream Head

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.teararoa.org.nz/>.

tracks. DOC is also working towards redeveloping the Tane Mahuta experience in Waipoua Forest.

### Opportunities to enhance the regional walking network

#### *Enhance the Te Araroa Trail*

The trail is of national significance and many people choose to start their journey at Cape Reinga meaning Northland is the first impression that walkers get when using the trail. The growing popularity of the trail and the fact that it crosses large parts of the region present an opportunity to improve the facilities on the route and overall visitor experience. Improvements could include access to the trail itself, signage, parking and toilets. Dedicated funding streams such as the PGF and the TIF provide opportunities for district councils and other groups such as the trail trust to apply for funding. These improvements should be coordinated with DOC's programme of work to ensure the most efficient coverage.

#### *Investigate opportunities to develop new multi-day walks*

DOC announced in 2017 that it was accepting proposals for new Great Walks. The Te Pahi Coastal Track is currently being considered by DOC as one of seven proposals to be designated as a new Great Walk in the North Island. Should this progress, it will be a significant drawcard for tourists to the region, particularly given the proximity of this walk to Auckland compared to other existing Great Walks.

Rather than building a new multi-day track, an alternative is to "join up" in a promotional way existing short and day tracks in the region to present viable multi-day walking options. This could build on district council, DOC and other tracks and trails located in the region.

### Current state of the regional cycling network

The Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail between Ōpua and Mangungu is the region's only Great Ride (one of 22 nationwide), forming part of Nga Haerenga, The New Zealand Cycle Trail.<sup>6</sup> The 87km long trail provides a safe, largely off-road route that is divided into four sections. It can be completed over several days of travel and ridden all year round. The trail is suitable for most riders as it is generally flat with gentle climbs - most of it being grade 1 and 2, with one section a grade 2-3.

The region has a developing network of Heartland Rides (Map 1). Heartland Rides function as back country cycle touring routes (mainly on-road) linking the Great Rides (mainly off-road trails), urban centres, transport hubs and other key tourist attractions. There are three Heartland Rides in Northland:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nzcycletrail.com/>.

- Far North Cycleway – this 161km Heartland Ride runs along Ninety Mile Beach (Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē) from Cape Reinga to Ahipara and then along quiet rural roads to the north side of the Hokianga Harbour.
- Kauri Coast Cycleway – this 113km Heartland Ride links Rāwene on the Hokianga Harbour through to Dargaville. This route mainly uses SH12, and passes through kauri forest and secluded coastal settlements.
- Kaipara Missing Link – this 118km Heartland Ride joins Dargaville with central Auckland. The route heads southwest from Dargaville to the holiday village of Poutō Point at the mouth of the Kaipara Harbour. The “missing link” to this cycle tour involves a boat trip across the Kaipara Harbour. The trail then follows a surprisingly gentle route into the very centre of Auckland.

Together these three routes link Cape Reinga with Poutō Point along the west coast of Northland and form the first 400km of the developing ‘Tour Aotearoa’ route from Cape Reinga to Bluff (3000km).<sup>7</sup> Tour Aotearoa has grown to attract 600 riders in 2018 and is rapidly growing as a ‘bikepacking’ route attracting many overseas riders.

Northland’s existing Heartland Rides currently appeal to ‘strong and fearless’ and ‘enthused and confident’ cyclists who are comfortable travelling longer distances on the state highway network and/or gravelled roads relatively far from townships. The Pou Herenga Tai/Twin Coast Cycle Trail on the other hand provides a higher level of service, suitable for all riders, with the route mostly off road or alongside road, closer to townships and services. Other areas of the region, particularly the east coast, popular with visitors, are poorly served by cycling routes.

The TTNEAP includes amongst its projects, a plan to revitalise the Twin Coast Discovery Route (in both the Transport / Logistics and Visitor Industry work streams). The Twin Coast Discovery Route is an 800km touring route around the Northland Region starting in the Auckland Region. NZTA and Northland Inc. have partnered to develop a Programme Business Case (PBC) to collaboratively address this. The PBC considers the case for investment to address problems on the Twin Coast Discovery Route to encourage visitors and locals to get off the beaten track, to visit new places, try new experiences and stay longer in Northland.

The PBC identifies a number of options and initiatives to achieve these outcomes. Cycling is an emerging visitor activity in Northland and has the potential to generate economic benefits for the region. Accordingly, cycling connections are an important component of the PBC preferred programme with recommended options including extensions to existing cycling paths, linking to other attractions and the creation of new infrastructure.

Northland Inc. and NZTA have worked with local authority partners to develop a series of byways around the region that form a set of Northland Journeys.<sup>8</sup> The thematic journeys function as offshoots of the main touring route and are road based

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.touraotearoa.nz/p/home.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.northlandnz.com/visit/northland-journeys/>.

journeys primarily for vehicles although could be used by cyclists. Northland Journeys include:

- Where Giants Gather – the journey from Whangārei Town Basin to the Whangārei Heads
- Ancient Kauri Trail – from Paparoa to Omapere
- Into the Wide Blue Yonder – from Whangārei Falls to Tutukaka and on to Hikurangi
- Te Ara (Coast to Coast) – connecting Waitangi with Omapere including Horeke and Rāwene
- The Secret Coast (Old Russell Road) – from Whakapara on SH1 (Oakura turnoff) to Russell
- All About Islands – a set of water based journeys encouraging visitors to visit an island in the Bay of Islands.

### Opportunities to enhance the regional cycling network

#### *Enhancing the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail*

Further development of the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail from a visitor experience perspective is now possible given the physical trail has been completed. For example, itineraries that combine cycling with cultural experiences such as marae meals and stays, and/or create linkages with other transport modes, such as catching a steam train from Ōpua to Kawakawa or a steam boat from Horeke to Kohukohu, will make this journey even more interesting and enjoyable, and maximise the economic returns and social benefits for the communities along the route.

There are also opportunities to extend the trail at both ends. At the western end, the trail could connect the Mangungu Mission House to Rāwene via a bridge over the Takeke River. This 24km project would comprise a ridgeline grade 2 unsealed road trail with spectacular vistas, connecting the trail to west coast facilities and attractions. It would also create a link with the Kauri Coast Cycleway onwards to Opononi. At the eastern end, there is an opportunity to extend the trail through to Waitangi, and eventually on to Kerikeri. Extending the trail by 8km from Ōpua through to Waitangi would complete the initial trail concept of linking the two initial signing grounds of the Treaty of Waitangi / Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

#### *Connecting Auckland to Northland via Whangārei*

The existing network of three Heartland Rides focusses on joining up sections of Northland's west coast. Future improvements to the state highway network between Auckland and Whangārei creates opportunities to better link the east coast of the region with Auckland for walkers and cyclists as well as motor vehicles. These include the improvements to the roading network around the Hibiscus Coast proposed by Auckland Transport, the currently under development Puhoi-Wellsford Road of National Significance, and any future improvements north to Whangārei. Whilst consideration of walking and cycling provision in tandem with any programmed roading improvements is important, it is also necessary to understand the type of

offering that users want. Visitors who wish to access Northland's coastline or want a quieter experience are unlikely to find much appeal in a route wholly parallel to a state highway.

Auckland Transport are working with community cycling groups in the former Rodney District to connect the Hibiscus Coast with Wellsford and ultimately Northland. The route is likely to be on lightly travelled roads hugging the east coast. This presents an opportunity to create a Heartland Ride spanning the length of Northland's east coast from Auckland to Whangārei. To be viable, the connection to the Northland network will likely need to be at Mangawhai which could be an extension of a local initiative to develop an off-road cycleway between Waipū and Waipū Cove. The mix of quieter routes near Northland's coastline combined with some utilisation of off-road sections near upgraded state highway corridors, where appropriate, may have broad appeal to visitors.

#### *Connecting Whangārei to Bay of Islands via the East Coast*

Cyclists wishing to cycle from Whangārei to the Bay of Islands (Ōpua, Paihia and Russell) currently have two choices – they can travel up SH1 or use the Old Russell Road. SH1, though more direct, carries a higher volume of traffic including heavy vehicles and therefore can present an intimidating option to cyclists. The Old Russell Road on the other hand is more lightly trafficked and provides scenic rest stop opportunities. However, it currently provides little in the way of dedicated cycling infrastructure. Directly east of Whangārei is the Tutukaka Coast, part of the Twin Coast Discovery Route, but with no direct cycleway connection. Exploratory work, led by WDC, is underway to connect Whangārei to Ngunguru with a formal cycleway connection. This could provide a logical entry point to a heartland ride running up the east coast from Whangārei to the Bay of Islands.

#### *Utilisation of redundant rail corridors*

Northland has a number of rail corridors that are no longer in use or have been 'mothballed' by Kiwirail. Some of these are currently being utilised by cycleways – for example part of the Pou Herenga Tai/Twin Coast Cycle Trail is on an old track bed. Additionally, the Kamo urban cycle route follows the operational rail corridor through Whangārei. The changing rail landscape in Northland does present a number of opportunities, including:

- The development of the Kaihū Valley River Cycle Trail (Dargaville to Donnelly's Crossing) as a Great Ride via the redundant rail corridor. This could also become part of the Kauri Coast Cycleway, making this Heartland Ride more user friendly and catering to a broader visitor group.
- The possibility of connecting Dargaville to Whangārei via the currently disused rail corridor (a branch of the North Auckland line) if and when the railway line becomes available. A decision on the decommissioning of the railway line is still to be decided and as such this is not an immediate priority.

A distinctive on-rail cycling experience may also be an option on some sections of the railway track.

- Repurposing the mothballed North Auckland line north of Kauri for walking and cycling, providing a direct route from Whangārei to Kawakawa and the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail. Again, this is dependent on any plans to decommission the line by Kiwirail and therefore is not an immediate priority.

#### *North Kaipara Harbour Heartland Ride*

There is currently no formal route connecting the west and east coasts of Northland south of the Pou Herenga Tai/Twin Coast Cycle Trail. North of the Kaipara Harbour, recreational cyclists can use SH12. However, this road is subject to relatively high traffic volumes including heavy vehicles. The development of a route from Dargaville to Mangawhai, could better connect townships and features in between such as the Matakoho Kauri Museum and Tokatoka Peak, using off-road routes and low volume roads. The project could capitalise on sections where existing walking and cycling projects are gaining momentum (for example at the Matakoho Bridges realignment and use of Ruawai Stopbanks) to ensure connectivity. The project could connect Dargaville to Maungaturoto and then onwards to Mangawhai.

#### *Developing off-road or low volume road alternatives to existing Heartland Rides*

Northland as a relatively sparsely populated region has a number of coach roads and other back roads with low traffic volumes. These can provide alternatives to cyclists who would prefer not to use state highways or more heavily trafficked local roads., Existing heartland rides in Northland appeal to the 'strong and fearless' cyclist. Using alternative routes such as coach roads will appeal to other types of recreational cyclist such as young families or older riders. They also present an opportunity to showcase Northland's landscape away from the state highway network.

An immediate opportunity worthy of further exploration exists with the Waoku Coach Road to the east of the Waipoua Forest. This would provide a logical extension to the potential Kaihū Valley River Cycle Trail and provide an alternative route for the Kauri Coast Cycleway which currently uses SH12 through the Waipoua Forest. This could potentially link up with the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail where the coach road joins with the Kauri Coast Cycleway east of Opononi. This would provide a trail experience linking Northland's key attractions.

A further opportunity is providing a safer off-road alternative to the Kauri Coast Cycleway as it runs between Rāwene and the popular tourist attraction of the Waipoua Forest (currently the cycleway runs concurrent with SH12).

#### *Enhancing existing connections from Auckland to Northland via the Kaipara Harbour*

The Kaipara Missing Link connects Helensville (and by extension Auckland) with Poutō Point where the route continues north to Dargaville via Poutō Road. This section could be enhanced by increasing the frequency and dependability (i.e. a fixed season) of ferry

services across the harbour and improving wharf infrastructure at Poutō. An additional ferry service to Pahi, Ruawai or Matakoho from Helensville, bypassing the longer leg of the Missing Link Cycleway on the Poutō peninsula is also a possibility.

The table and map below provides an overview of the priority regional projects in the strategy. Please note that each cycling project listed below can also be used as a walking track.

**Table 6: Proposed Regional Walking and Cycling Projects**

Project name	Length (km)	Likely grade	Strategic benefits
Pou Herenga Tai   Twin Coast Cycle Trail - Ōpua to Waitangi	8	1/3	Extension east of Great Ride to popular visitor attractions
Pou Herenga Tai   Twin Coast Cycle Trail Enhancement	87	1 (some 2)	Enhances visitor experience on an existing Great Ride
Pou Herenga Tai   Twin Coast Cycle Trail - Horeke to Rāwene	24	1/3	Extension west of Great Ride to Kauri Coast Cycleway Heartland Ride
Whangārei to Mangawhai (Southern Connection)	TBD (≈70)	1/3	Part of long distance connection of Whangārei with Auckland and Bay of Islands.
Whangārei to Tutukaka Coast (Northern Connection)	55	1/2 (some 3)	Part of long distance connection of Whangārei with Auckland and Bay of Islands.
Pou Herenga Tai   Twin Coast Cycle Trail - Waitangi to Kerikeri	19	1/2	Extension east of Great Ride to popular visitor attractions
Kaihū Valley Rail Trail	40	1 (some 2)	Off road alternative for existing Heartland Ride.
Dargaville to Maungaturoto	90	2/3	Part of the connection of the east and west coasts in southern Northland. Will help provide a 'loop' of the region.
Maungaturoto to Mangawhai	TBD (≈30)	3	Part of the connection of the east and west coasts in southern Northland. Will help provide a 'loop' of the region.
Tutukaka Coast to Bay of Islands (Northern Connection)	TBD (≈90)	3	Part of connection of Auckland, Whangārei with Bay of Islands
Kauri Coast Cycleway Enhancement (Rāwene to Tane Mahuta)	37 / 45	3	Off road alternative for existing Heartland Ride.
Waoku Coach Road	50	4	Off road alternative for existing Heartland Ride.
Kaipara Missing Link Enhancement	59	3	Off road alternative for existing Heartland Ride (through new ferry services).

**Map 2: Proposed regional walking and cycling projects**



## **Development of local routes**

The second part of focus area one recognises that developing local routes are also important. These routes will more safely connect local communities to access education and employment opportunities as well as provide health and environmental benefits.

### Current state of local district walking and cycling routes

Currently the off-road network of local walking and cycling routes in Northland is limited (with the exception of the Whangārei urban area which is addressed separately). Communities for the most part use the local roading or state highway network when travelling by bike. Footpaths are also used. However, this is illegal under the NZ road code unless designated as a shared path. Frequently, submitters to councils cite a 'hostile walking and cycling environment' as a barrier to use. This includes having to share the road with fast moving traffic as well as complaints about the roads themselves being narrow and winding.

District councils are increasingly being more proactive in helping communities to develop short local routes that connect rural areas with employment and recreational opportunities. Local community groups, with district council support, are establishing to advocate, and in some cases project manage, the development of walking and cycling routes.

A good recent example is the Waipū to Waipū Cove walking and cycling track developed by the Waipū Cycling and Walkway Trust (Map 3). The Waipū community raised funds for this project with donations of money, materials and volunteer hours from local business and residents as well as the gifting of private land.

**Map 3. Stage One of the Waipū to Waipū Cove walking and cycling route**



Future opportunities for local district walking and cycling routes

District councils can partner with local communities to help fundraise and develop off-road and enhanced on-road walking and cycling routes. There are significant opportunities to better connect communities, particularly those with growing populations in relatively close proximity. Other examples of where local routes could be improved include:

- Whangārei to Whangārei Heads
- Mangawhai to Mangawhai Heads
- Taipa, Cable Bay, Coopers Beach and Mangonui
- Marsden Point, One-Tree Point and Ruakaka
- Links between the Kauri Coast Cycleway (and future Kaihū Valley Rail Trail) and Kai Iwi Lakes.

Although off-road routes are usually the preferred solution, a package of measures including traffic calming, signage, speed restrictions and road markings can enhance the environment for on-road cycling particularly where there are constraints around

off-road provision. In addition, it is entirely possible, over the longer term, that these local routes may themselves become part of a wider regional network (Heartland Rides or Great Rides) as they form coherent connections. Another possibility is that they join to and complement the regional network by forming 'spurs'.

### **Development of urban networks**

The third part of focus area one is the development of urban cycle networks. Strong urban network growth in Whangārei, connecting different areas of the growing city with the city centre, has led to an increased uptake in walking and cycling. Other built up areas in Northland could also benefit from the development of urban networks. Benefits tied to this include reducing congestion in the urban area, increasing safety for riders, and improving health and environmental outcomes.

#### Current state of Northland's urban network

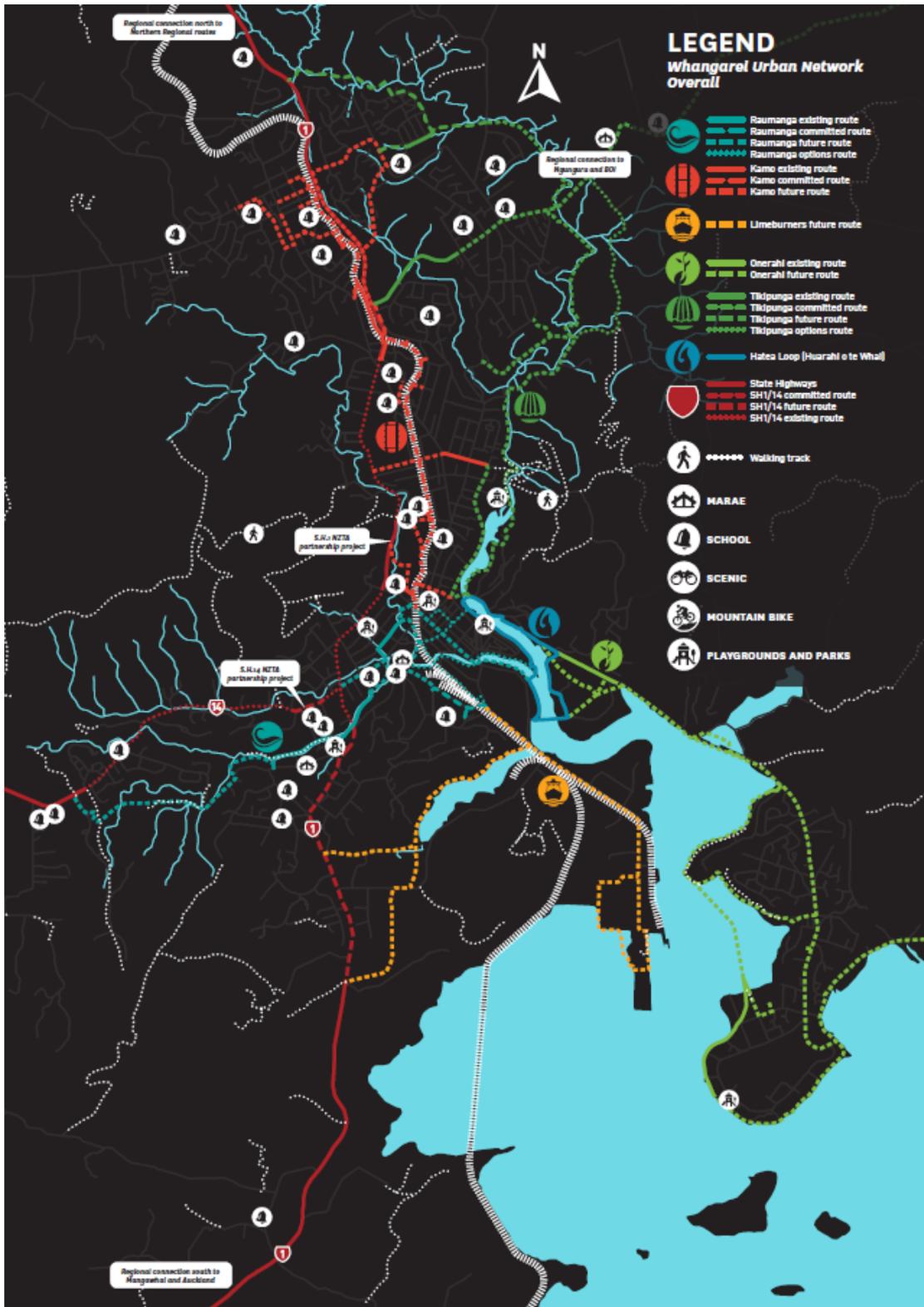
The only comprehensive urban network in Northland presently is in its biggest centre, Whangārei. The Whangārei urban network is currently being developed around five key shared path routes that spoke out from the city centre (Map 4). The three currently being development are the Kamo Route, the Onerahi Route and the Raumanga Route. The Tikipunga and Limeburners routes are proposed future developments.

WDC successfully received \$2 million from the Urban Cycleways Programme to develop the Kamo shared walking and cycling path (along with \$2 million from the National Land Transport Fund). Further funding from the National Land Transport Fund and the Urban Cycleway Programme has led to a total funding injection of \$13 million for this spoke. Construction of this route is now underway. The Whangārei city centre to Onerahi spoke has nearly been completed. A final portion of the Whangārei city centre to Raumanga pathway is awaiting completion of the SH1/Tarewa Road intersection upgrade. Where possible, shared paths are being developed using a high quality 3.5m wide concrete base suitable for all-users.

#### Future opportunities for Northland's urban network

In future funding rounds, the Whangārei urban network will be expanded from the three main spokes to include feeder routes to improve access to the network. These include spurs in Kamo and to Tikipunga as well as a longer route to Ngunguru and the Tutukaka Coast. The intention is that once the current spokes are complete, the network will span five high quality shared pathways. Other main centres in the region such as Kaitiāia and Dargaville (such as link between Dargaville township and the museum) could benefit from similar development of high quality shared paths, replicating their success in Whangārei.

Map 4. Whangārei urban network



## Development of mountain biking opportunities

A network of mountain biking opportunities is the fourth part of this focus area. Although still a developing activity in Northland, evidence from other regions of New Zealand and internationally show that it can be an important tourism drawcard. The recent opening of the Waitangi Mountain Bike Park has further increased the viability of this leisure activity in the region.

### Current state of mountain biking

There are just two DOC managed mountain biking tracks in Northland out of 176 throughout New Zealand. There are several designated mountain bike parks including:

- Glenbervie mountain bike park near Whangārei – 44 tracks and approximately 120km of track length in total. This park is on land owned by Rayonier Matariki Ltd and is managed by Whangarei Mountain Bike Club.
- Parihaka mountain bike park – 23 tracks and approximately 15km of tracks length in total. This park is on WDC reserve land and is also managed by Whangarei Mountain Bike Club.
- Waitangi Mountain Bike Park – currently 26 tracks (more are planned in 2017/18) and approximately 40km in track length. This park is on land owned by the Waitangi National Trust and is managed by Focus Paihia.
- The Kerikeri Mountain Bike Club have built and maintain more than a dozen trails in the Kerikeri Inlet / Waitangi Forest.
- Heads Up Adventures – a privately-owned mountain bike park that has recently opened near Onerahi.

Mountain biking has the potential to be a significant tourism earner. For example, it is estimated that the median annual recreational value of mountain bikers using the Whakarewarewa Forest in Rotorua is \$10.2 million, and \$5.2 million from walking.<sup>9</sup> The estimated recreational benefit from mountain biking is almost five times the annual timber revenue from the forest based on indicative planted forest costs and revenues.

Northland is not as well-known as a mountain biking destination but is growing in popularity, evidenced by growing ridership at Waitangi Mountain Bike Park which is reported every month. The added value from the economy comes from increased guest nights and visitor spend rather than revenue generated from using the parks themselves (entry is free to Glenbervie and Parihaka although Waitangi encourages buying a voluntary wrist band priced at \$25). In this way, the parks provide an

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<sup>9</sup> *Non-timber values from Planted Forest: Recreation in Whakarewarewa Forest*, Turner et al (2011), NZ Journal of Forestry.

additional activity complementing built and natural attractions and extending tourism into the shoulder seasons (around summer).

#### Future opportunities for mountain biking

The opening of the Waitangi Mountain Bike Park has the potential to draw more tourists to the Far North. The business case for the park suggests that its development will create 50 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs after 3 years and 168 FTE's after 10-15 years, and contribute \$6.4 million to the local economy over 3 years (\$21 million over 10-15 years).<sup>10</sup> In the longer term, expansion at the park could see a visitor centre opened with café and toilet facilities. The park is also seeking silver star accreditation to hold competition level events which could be a big drawcard for the area.

Although Whangārei is well served by both Glenbervie and Parihaka mountain bike parks, facilities are limited. A toilet block is to be installed at the base of Parihaka in the near future. Information and signage marketing the parks is also limited. In the future, there are likely to be opportunities to improve facilities around these existing parks which will add to rider experience and generate greater awareness of the offer to the local community and to visitors.

#### **Short term actions**

- a) Improve infrastructure at pressure points on both walking and cycling trails, e.g. car parking and toilets.
- b) Enhance Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail – the New Zealand Cycle Trail Inc. and the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail Trust / FNDC should plan for and support further experience and product development on the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail so that appealing new itineraries are available in travel trade channels and featured by travel media to grow the appeal and economic value of the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail.
- c) Develop new multi-day experiences, including by:
  - i. Councils and Northland Inc. supporting any future decision by DOC to establish a Great Walk in Northlands.
  - ii. Councils and DOC working together to develop/promote multi-day experiences using existing short and day walks / rides in the region.
- d) Support the development of local and urban networks, including by:
  - i. District councils should develop opportunities in partnership with local community groups to expand local walking and cycling networks. Assistance could be in the form of community grants as well as

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<sup>10</sup> Business Case for Waitangi Mountain Bike Park, Focus Paihia

technical expertise with business case development, feasibility studies and design work.

- ii. District councils should consider dedicating more shared pathways for the use of pedestrians and cyclists where this is safe to do so.
  - iii. In partnership with local communities and special interest groups, develop local recreational walking and cycling tracks for the health, well-being, and social development.
  - iv. WDC should consider future expansion of the Whangārei urban network beyond the completion of committed projects.
  - v. District councils should look at opportunities to expand walking and cycling opportunities in other main centres.
- e) Connect Northland to Auckland via Whangārei, including by:
- i. WDC, KDC, Auckland Transport and the NZTA should work together to ensure that walking and cycling considerations are incorporated into planned roading improvements between Auckland and Whangārei.
  - ii. KDC, Auckland Transport and the NZTA should work together to on a joint proposal to connect the developing Rodney section of the Auckland to Whangārei Heartland Ride with the Northland section at Mangawhai utilising off-road and lightly trafficked routes.
- f) Enhance nationwide journeys: Te Araroa / Tour Aotearoa, including by:
- i. KDC and Auckland Transport should explore long term opportunities to expand chartered ferry links across the Kaipara Harbour to promote cycle based tourism as well as seeking ways to improve wharf infrastructure at Poutō Point.
  - ii. KDC should progress the Kaihū Valley River Cycle Trail by repurposing the rail corridor from Dargaville to Donnellys Crossing into an off-road cycleway and potentially also developing this route into a Great Ride extending further south to Matakōhe or Paparoa, subject to the development of a viable business case.
  - iii. District councils, DOC and Northland Inc. should work with the Te Araroa Trail Trust to support the development and enhancement of the national walking trail.
- g) Work with Māori as key partners to develop specific trails.

### **Longer term actions**

- h) Improving coastal / harbour crossings on key routes
- i) Support the development of mountain biking opportunities, including by:
  - i. District councils should consider supporting the development of mountain bike parks through community grant funding and technical support.
  - ii. In addition to promoting the Waitangi Mountain Bike Park and planning for continued track maintenance and development, potential may exist for developing beach riding experiences / tours using new mountain bike (fat tyre) technology.
  - iii. In addition to physical track development, product development will be required so that companies offer services spanning bike hire through to training camps and guided rides to make it easy for locals and visitors to enjoy the facilities more.
- j) Investigate other Heartland or backcountry rides / walks including unused rail corridors, including by:
  - i. WDC and FNDC should work together to develop a Heartland Ride proposal between Whangārei and Bay of Islands utilising off-road and lightly trafficked routes.
  - ii. KDC should investigate the feasibility of a Great Ride or Heartland Ride between Dargaville (or Matakohe / Paparoa should a Great Ride to these towns be deemed possible) and Mangawhai utilising off-road and lightly trafficked routes.
  - iii. District councils should liaise with KiwiRail, should rail corridors be decommissioned, for potential repurposing of redundant rail corridor for walking and cycling.
  - iv. KDC and FNDC should progress the development of the Waoku Coach Road as an alternative to using SH12, subject to the successful development of the Dargaville to Donnelly Crossing off-road cycleway.

## B.2. Focus area two: Growing walking and cycling participation and promoting Northland's coastal point of difference

The purpose of this focus area is to ensure that the walking and cycling network and infrastructure built within focus area one is promoted with consistent messaging and utilised by both visitors and locals. The benefits that result from this focus area include:

- Improved health, social and environmental outcomes
- A modal shift for travel to work and education
- Increase international and domestic tourism spend
- Extend time spent in the region by visitors by slowing their pace of travel
- Improve employment prospects in the region
- Enhance Northland's appeal as a cycling and walking destination
- Increase leverage from other initiatives in the region included in the Northland Economic Action Plan and the Provincial Growth Fund.

### Current state of walking and cycling uptake in Northland

The Northland Regional Land Transport Plan (2015-2021) describes the benefits of walking and cycling for the region:

- Not all people have cars – such as the young and elderly.
- There are substantial health benefits
- They are the most environmentally friendly forms of travel
- Economic benefits – less wear and tear on roading.
- Public transport is not always available
- Walking is already a component of most trips
- They are both popular activities for visitors.

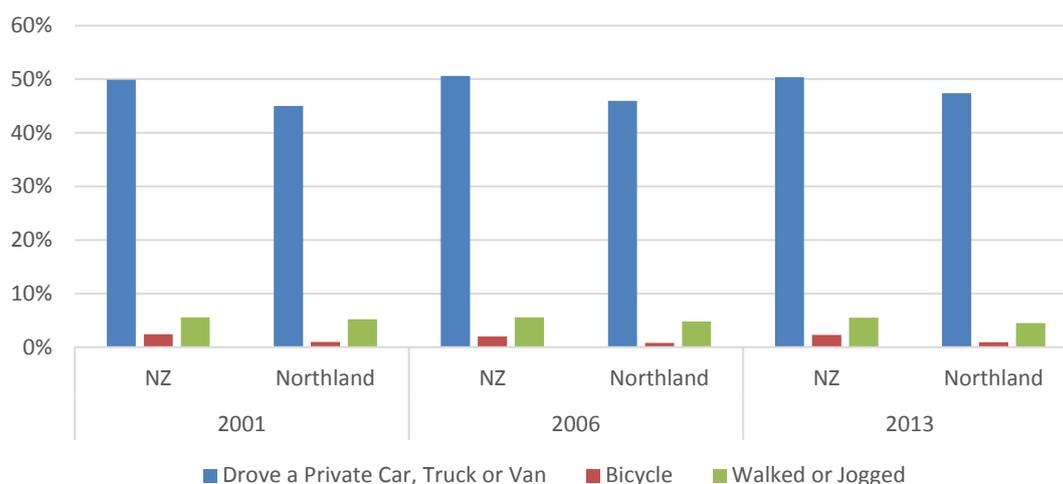
According to 2013 census data, the rates of walking and cycling versus other modes of transport are relatively low in Northland. A greater number of people are choosing to walk but, overall, the private car is much the favoured mode of transport to work. This is not dissimilar from NZ as a whole, although in Northland the choice of cycling to work is lower than the national average. These trends have remained relatively constant over the period between 2001 -2013<sup>11</sup> with reliance on the private car actually increasing slightly in Northland (Figure 7<sup>12</sup>).

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<sup>11</sup> Data taken from Statistics NZ census data

<sup>12</sup> Figure 7 is a % of all those surveyed. A large % of those surveyed said they did not go to work on that day or worked from home, hence private car use is not higher.

**Figure 7. Mode of transport to work in Northland and New Zealand**



The 2017 Active NZ survey (the most recent survey of its type) provides an insight into the level of participation in sports in Northland.<sup>13</sup> Encouragingly, walking is the most popular sport and recreational activity (55% of adults surveyed have walked in the last seven days and 80% have walked in the last 12 months), rates not too different from the national average. However, rates of cycling in the region are notably below the national average. Only 7% of those adults surveyed have cycled in the last seven days (compared with a national average of 11%) and, more significantly, only 18% have cycled in the last 12 months (compared with a national average of 27%).

The barriers to greater uptake of walking and cycling can be summed up as follows (most of these factors are not unique to Northland and could apply also to other provincial areas):

1. Physical barriers – distance, topography and conditions, including lack of infrastructure (e.g. signage), inappropriate infrastructure (e.g. poor surfaces), unsafe infrastructure or infrastructure that does not connect the right origins and destinations.
2. Psychological barriers – anxiety about crime and fear of traffic (i.e. an individual's common perception that it is not a safe method of travel).
3. Institutional barriers – inadequate initial and ongoing investment in infrastructure, external costs of not using private vehicles and historical neglect of pedestrian/cyclist interests in government administrations etc.

In practice, these factors overlap considerably. The lack of cycle network infrastructure in the region acts to create psychological barriers to travel in the region, particularly around fear of safety and crime. Cycling is an inherently more vulnerable form of travel, where not adequately separated from motor vehicles, with worse outcomes for riders from collisions. Historically there has been a lack of

<sup>13</sup> Sport New Zealand. – *Findings from the 2017 Active New Zealand Survey*.

understanding on driver etiquette around cyclists. The 'share the road' scheme has introduced the 1.5m width for safe passing of cyclists on roads however this is not always adhered to and relies on enforcement and ongoing education.

Greater walking and cycling uptake in Northland could have significant benefits to health outcomes as the region generally fairs poorly across most indicators. For example, the region has a higher proportion of its population fall into the 'most deprived' category of the national index of deprivation compared with the NZ average. In 2016/17 38% were in Quintile 5 (most deprived) compared to a national average of 20% (nationally, equal proportions of the population live in each quintile). Greater deprivation can be a causal factor in worsening health outcomes including the development of comorbidities – i.e. a combination of factors leading to an early death (cancer, strokes, hypertension, heart failure, diabetes etc).

In 2013/14, Northland had the third highest prevalence of obesity in New Zealand with 33.3% of adults obese. Northland has one of the lowest life expectancies, particularly for Māori males even when compared with national Māori population data. Northland also has one of the lowest self-ratings of good health at 87.9%. This measures a person's perception of their health status considering physical and mental health factors<sup>14</sup>.

#### Future opportunities to increase the uptake of walking and cycling in Northland

There are a number of way of encouraging behaviour change to increase walking and cycling in both every day activities such as travel to school and employment. One already discussed above is improvements to physical infrastructure such as dedicated, signed, off-road paths or on-road cycle lanes. Beyond this, however, there is the need to build-up the support network for walking and cycling infrastructure in the region. This includes secure storage facilities for bicycles (something which can be provided for by public funds) as well as cycle repair shops (something likely to be provided by the private sector).

Bikes in Schools is a programme led by the Bike on New Zealand Charitable Trust the purpose of which is to enable as many New Zealand children as possible to ride a bike on a regular and equal basis within the school. The package includes equipment, storage containers and tracks around the school grounds. A number of possible funding sources are suggested – local councils being one. NZTA, through the 'National Cycle Education System', has allocated \$600,000, administered through Bike on New Zealand, who will work with local councils to identify schools to financially assist. A number of schools in Northland have benefited from the scheme.

The emerging development of electric bicycles (e-bikes) presents an opportunity to overcome some of the barriers to greater uptake of cycling, such as distances and topography, primarily steep grades which would require a dismount for all but the fittest users. This also presents opportunities to encourage enterprising new

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<sup>14</sup> Data from Northland District Health Board

businesses and deliver economic growth and employment opportunities. Elderly communities are seen as a major potential target audience.

Travel/journey planning is another way of encouraging walking and cycling through partnerships between district councils, district health boards, community groups and businesses. A dedicated resource in district councils would be useful to promote travel planning opportunities and would supplement work being undertaken to improve cycling infrastructure and promote school cycling.

Given the worse health outcomes outlined above it is important to engage particularly with Māori. The most recent Active NZ survey (2017) found that Māori and Pacific adults have lower than average weekly participation in sport. For the walking category, 56% of Māori had walked as a recreational activity in a given week whereas the rate for road cycling, mountain biking and BMX was around 9%. Both these rates were below the average however, young Māori spend the most time participating in sport in any given week. One of the barriers highlighted in the Active NZ survey was lack of fitness and poor health which were greater barriers than the average.

Growing awareness of the walking and cycling routes in Northland will be required to grow participation levels within the local community and with visitors to the region. An opportunity exists to promote the very best Northland has to offer so that these experiences provide a draw card for new walkers and cyclists to sample then engage in walking and cycling more often and for longer durations.

Northland has a dedicated regional tourism organisation (RTO), part of Northland Inc. Limited, a council-controlled organisation owned by Northland Regional Council. This important role occupies the space in the middle and works as a bridge between council and community/business interests.

Recently, promotion by the RTO has focused on highlighting Northland's walking and cycling trails including both district council managed trails and the DOC. The website portal highlights these as 'Northland journeys'. The 'journey' aspect to promotion is important and aligns with the vision of this strategy. It is expected that going forward, there will be a strong emphasis on story-telling, promoting the unique 'coastal' dimension to Northland's walking and cycling network. In promoting the 'journey' aspect, it is important to involve Māori. Northland has a rich tapestry of myths and stories involving travel – such as Kupe's journey around the coast.

What Northland presently lacks is unified walking and cycling branding. This includes everything from route signage to marketing material. Strong and unified branding will be important as regional walking and cycling routes develop. It is also a relatively inexpensive action to undertake compared to the investment in the trails themselves.

Northland has a number of advantages that allow walking and cycling to be expanded into the shoulder seasons (that is the period either side of summer). Although traditionally a summer beach destination, the weather in Northland rarely gets too cold for walking and cycling making it a viable destination for Aucklanders

(our biggest domestic market) who wish to tour earlier or later in the year. This will be an important message to convey in any promotion of the walking and cycling network.

#### **Short term actions**

- a) The RTO continues to work with trail developers, businesses and the community to develop promotional material emphasising Northland's coastal point of difference.
- b) Multiple agencies co-promoting our many tracks and trails, including repeating or amplifying in local media any positive international media stories that show how good Northland already is as a cycling and walking destination.
- c) Encourage locals to enjoy walking and cycling in Northland. District councils continue to partner with the NZTA, local schools, the Ministry of Education and Bike on New Zealand to deliver bikes in schools. District councils should also consider a resource to promote walking and cycling for everyday activities – for example work and educational activities.
- d) Attracting visiting walkers, cyclists and mountain bikers, such as investigating incentives for locals (perhaps supported by local businesses) to enjoy walking and cycling in Northland outside the summer season.
- e) Work with Māori to enrich walking and cycling journeys by intertwining myths and stories.
- f) Targeted engagement with Māori to grow participation rates in walking and cycling.

#### **Longer term actions**

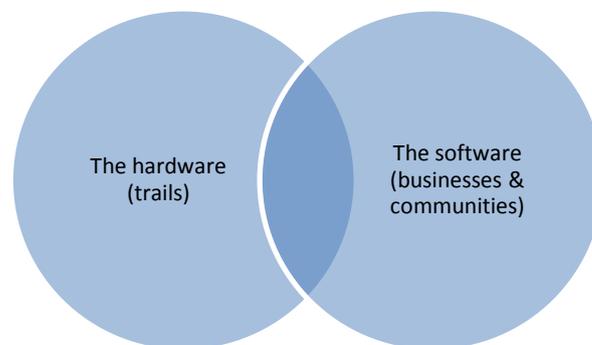
- g) Enable travel influencers to promote the region's walking and cycling options to others.
- h) Promote walking and cycling as key reasons to visit off-peak (i.e. spring / autumn campaigns / events)

## B.3. Focus area three: Improving community wellbeing including creating economic opportunities

This focus area seeks to ensure that the benefits of developing and investing into a regional walking and cycling network flow through to locals. It concentrates on the 'software' needed to provide a quality walking and cycling experience. These benefits include job creation and improved employment prospects, diversification of tourism opportunities, and less tangible aspects such as community pride.

The relationship between this focus area and focus area one – developing the trails themselves – is an important one as outlined by the figure below.

**Figure 8. Relationship between focus areas one and three**



The 'hardware' space is filled by district councils as well as agencies such as the DOC who fund and build the infrastructure. The 'software' space is filled by business seeking to leverage the economic benefits of trail development. This might include large scale operators but also smaller community enterprises, for example marae and homestay operators.

Northland has several attractions that receive large numbers of visitors, including the Bay of Islands, Waipoua Forest and the Tutukaka Coast. Like many popular tourist attractions across the country, these areas are increasingly under pressure from rising tourist numbers.

On the other hand, there are many areas of Northland that do not see many tourists as they are simply seen as 'off the beaten track', or lack specific attractions or the infrastructure to encourage people to visit. This includes most of the west coast and some of the east coast (away from the popular Bay of Islands and Tutukaka coastline). Many of these areas are some of the more economically and socially deprived areas of Northland. The development of walking and cycling routes could be a game changer for these areas and that the experience elsewhere can be replicated in Northland. This is borne out by regional and national evidence.

The development of the New Zealand Cycle Trail has had positive economic benefits in New Zealand to date. The Nga Haerenga, New Zealand Cycle Trail Evaluation

Report (2014) estimated that visitors spent \$131-\$176 per person per day or \$173-\$743 per person per trip on the existing trails. The 439 businesses included in the report attributed 5% of their turnover to trail business with 50 new full-time positions created. One in seven businesses also said that the capacity for their services had been expanded at some stage, approximately 1000 people have been employed on the development of the trails since construction began. More widely, \$50 million of economic and social benefits have been realised with a positive cost:benefit ratio of 1:3.55. Anecdotally, the report found that the development of the trails fostered a sense of community pride.

In the Northland context, it is likely that similarly positive feelings will be created as tangible pieces of infrastructure begin to take shape. In Northland, the Pou Herenga Tai-Twin Coast Cycle Trail has attracted an estimated \$400,150 in revenue from domestic tourists and \$116,649 in revenue from international tourists (total visits 14,517). This was in 2015, prior to the full opening of the trail so the actual revenue and number of visitors may be higher now.

Walking and cycling trail development is expected to be especially economically beneficial in Northland because the region typically has higher rates of unemployment than most other regions of New Zealand. As of March 2018, unemployment sits at 6.3% which is higher than the national average of 4.6%. This is actually a 10-year low with unemployment in the recent past being in the range of 8-9%. The development of trails is likely to provide tangible jobs for workers during the construction phase with some positions remaining long term for track maintenance. The construction of tracks is a transferable skill, the expertise of which can be exported to other regions of New Zealand.

The perception of security and safety in walking and cycling is an important factor which contributes to an individual's modal choice. Improving security and safety is therefore an important aspect which needs to be taken into consideration when addressing the well-being of walkers and cyclists. This can be done through things like increased signage, lighting in appropriate places, better intersection crossings, advocating for mobile coverage, adequate car parking and road safety programmes.

#### **Short term actions**

- a) Ensure capacity and capability of Northland businesses offering walking and cycling related services.
- b) Continue to improve walker and cyclist safety and security.
- c) Engage local youth / unemployed in track building or operations where practicable.

#### **Longer term actions**

- d) Celebrate achievements of walking and cycling options to build local awareness and pride.
- e) Investigate incentives and events for locals to bring a visitor to a track / trail.

## B.4. Focus area four: Ensuring walking and cycling infrastructure, and its use, is sustainable

This focus area ensures that the work undertaken in the other three focus areas is done in a sustainable manner. While walking and cycling is inherently more sustainable than other forms of transport (the uptake of walking and cycling can lead to a reduction in carbon emissions and less wear and tear on the road network), it can come with environmental and resource costs.

For example, while seeking to increase visitor numbers, it is important to ensure that additional pressure is not placed on the environment. Ensuring that appropriate governance and funding arrangements for trails are put in place is also part of sustainable development.

A key benefit of developing an expanded regional walking and cycling network is that visitors can be spread to other less travelled parts of the region, reducing pressure on natural and infrastructure assets (existing trails, car parks, toilets and the like). In doing so however we need to ensure that we are not creating new environmental pressure and risks which did not previously exist. For example, walking and cycling trails could be a vector to transport pest species and disease.

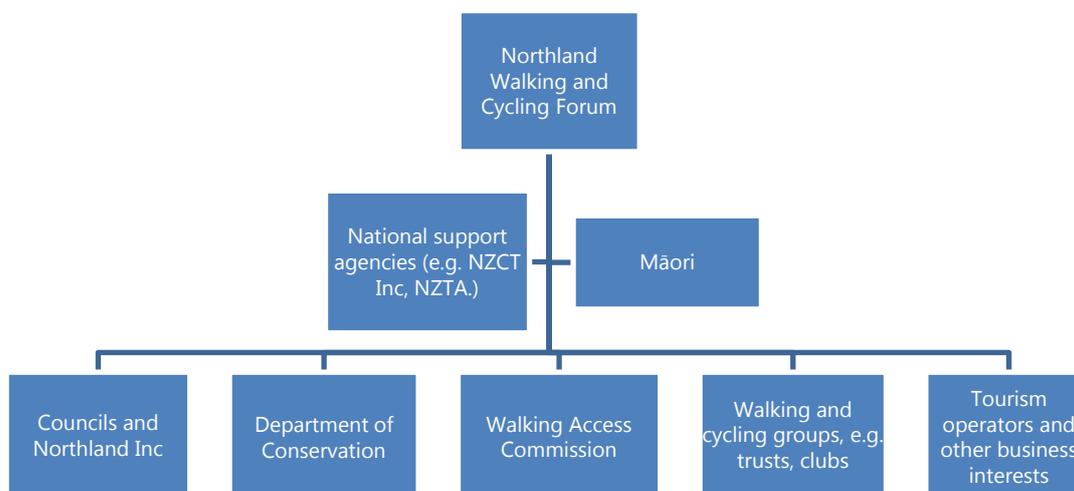
Particularly vulnerable are Northland's kauri forests. Kauri dieback has illustrated the risks associated with the spread of diseases to vulnerable and much treasured areas due to visitors. Kauri dieback is a disease spread by people not cleaning footwear or moving off track treading onto kauri roots. The disease is a major threat to kauri, a number of which are thousands of years old, with Northland having the largest and widest kauri trees in New Zealand. Some 450 sites across Northland, Auckland and Waikato have been identified as potentially affected, with most of these sites located in Northland. In June 2018, the Department of Conservation proposed to close or partially close 34 bush tracks in the upper half of the North Island to combat kauri dieback. Thirteen of these tracks are in Northland, including some tracks within the Russell and Waipoua Forests. Walking and cycling trails will thus need to be designed with environmental sustainability in mind.

In developing trails, it is important that they are constructed and maintained at the appropriate grade level and are fit for purpose. This will provide both a predictable experience for visitors as well as reduce wear and tear and thus long term maintenance costs. Ultimately this will mean that the trails are more financially sustainable. A number of innovative solutions could also be examined to reduce the local burden of trail maintenance (refer to actions below).

There is already a significant amount of work underway to improve walking and cycling infrastructure and participation within each of the three districts of Northland. This strategy is the start of an ongoing set of projects and processes that will deliver additional connectivity and synergy for Northland. At the heart of this regional strategy will be an ongoing process for prioritising and optimising walking and

cycling development activities carried out by a regional walking and cycling forum (Figure 9).

**Figure 9. Northland Walking and Cycling Forum proposed structure**



The forum will bring together those with roles and responsibilities in developing walking and cycling:

- The regional council, whose role is to coordinate the effort of the regional forum as well as advocate for a national share of walking and cycling funding for the region.
- District councils, whose roles are to fund the local share, construct and maintain walking and cycling routes and support local initiatives to increase the uptake of walking and cycling.
- Northland Inc. whose role is to promote walking and cycling from a visitor perspective.
- National support agencies often have a number of overlapping roles, for example NZTA is responsible for allocating funding to district councils through the National Land Transport Fund but also constructs, operates and maintains its own infrastructure. The Department of Conservation also owns land and undertakes trail development. The Walking Access Commission provides advice and advocacy.
- Māori will have an important role in providing guidance on the development of trails as well as how to promote and look after them.
- Local walking and cycling groups have an important role providing advice on the development of trails from a usability perspective. Tourism and business interests could provide advice from a commercial perspective.

#### **Short term actions**

- a) Establish the regional walking and cycling forum with representation from Māori.
- b) Continue to protect sensitive areas, tracks and trails including through education, infrastructure (e.g. wash stations) and closures where appropriate.

- c) Promote less used walking and cycling areas, tracks and trails and de-emphasise sensitive areas in regional promotion.
- d) Work with Māori utilising the principle of Kaitiakitanga (guardianship) to protect and manage trails sustainably.

**Longer term actions**

- e) Investigate options for alternative uses of payment to support trails with ongoing maintenance.
- f) Monitoring and reporting use of walking and cycling areas / infrastructure.
- g) Review and improve progress under this and other walking and cycling strategies in Northland.
- h) Consider processes to establish custodial ownership of tracks and trails where appropriate.

## Appendix 1. Prioritisation of potential track and trail projects

In preparing this Strategy criteria was developed to assess the benefits and relative merits offered by new potential track and trail projects for walkers, cyclists and possibly also horse trekking. The criteria will continue to be used by the Regional Walking and Cycling Forum to re-evaluate those projects already identified as additional information comes to hand and to assess other track and trail projects as they are identified. The criteria considers the following nine components:

- Route offers wow factors (e.g. views, stories and links to iconic places or attractions) that align with our draft vision for Northland as "a world's best coastal walking & cycling destination"
- Likely to attract walkers or cyclists (in the appropriate target market e.g. easy, intermediate or avid)
- Will deliver significant economic benefits in the long term i.e. beyond the build phase
- Enables complementary benefits for community health, commuting and events
- Provides a safe route(s) for walkers and cyclists
- Route is logical and direct
- Route connects with accommodation, attractions and other services e.g. cafes / retail
- Route integrates well with other walking and cycling routes
- Local community supports the trail / route i.e. there is a local project champion or group.

The use of this criteria has influenced the short and longer term priorities in Focus Area One.





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