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Keep New Zealand Moving

ACT will get more transport infrastructure built from every dollar, stop road-user revenue being wasted, build roads ahead of growth, and stop unnecessary rules pushing up the cost of getting around.

New Zealanders pay a lot for transport through fuel tax, road-user charges, rates and tolls. They rightly expect that money to be spent building and maintaining the transport network.

The current National Land Transport Programme forecasts $32.9 billion of investment over three years. More broadly, New Zealand has spent an average of 5.8 per cent of GDP on infrastructure each year over the past two decades – towards the upper end of the OECD – yet ranks towards the bottom for the value it gets from that investment. The problem is not simply how much we spend, but what we get for it.

Too much is swallowed by optional extras, over-engineered designs, deferred maintenance and rules that put politics ahead of value.

Families are priced out of newer vehicles, while public contracts can still be shaped by ethnicity rather than merit.

Every dollar wasted is a dollar that cannot fix a road, relieve congestion or stay in the pockets of New Zealanders.

ACT will focus transport spending on movement, safety and resilience, demand value from every project, and then get out of the way of the people who build, drive and invest.

ACT will keep New Zealand moving with six reforms to build more, waste less and make every transport dollar deliver.

01 Build what works

ACT will require major projects to publish the lowest-cost safe option alongside the preferred option, including the cost, delivery time and benefit-cost ratio of each. Where excessive design assumptions materially increase cost, the additional cost and benefit must also be disclosed.

New Zealand has made simple infrastructure too complicated to build. Good engineering must manage genuine safety and resilience risks, but it must also identify safe, workable and affordable solutions.

The Infrastructure Commission found this problem is widespread. Of 64 proposals submitted at stages requiring robust options and economic analysis, only 14 provided enough information to assess. Just two had properly considered cost when narrowing their options. The Commission warned that failing to consider lower-cost or non-built solutions may be contributing to infrastructure cost growth.

The Burnside Bridge shows how this happens. The 99-metre single-lane bridge was badly damaged and closed after Cyclone Gabrielle. The council estimated that replacement could cost up to $16 million, but says this was a high-level estimate prepared without site, flood or geotechnical investigations or a settled bridge design. NZTA declined to fund a repair or replacement and allocated up to $560,000 to demolish the bridge and make the site safe.

A bridge builder initially proposed a simplified $2.75 million replacement, but later advised that a bridge meeting full public-road requirements would likely cost $6–9 million, subject to further investigation. The council has now authorised up to $100,000 to test a targeted repair.

Overly conservative assumptions present the same risk. RCP8.5, the highest-emissions climate scenario, was used in flood assessments for the Woodend Bypass and Hastings' Mangarau Stream works. At Woodend, NZTA's expert found that RCP6.0 would produce rainfall estimates 5–10 per cent lower but would not materially change the assessed flooding outcomes. Neither project published a comparison showing the additional cost and benefit of designing around RCP8.5.

The lesson is not that safety or resilience should be compromised. It is that the lowest-cost safe option must be properly investigated, priced and tested before high-level estimates, excessively conservative assumptions or optional design features become embedded in a project.

Infrastructure should meet sound engineering standards and address real risks. Not every project needs to be bespoke or gold-plated at the expense of the people paying for it.

02 Build for growth

ACT will require major growth areas to have funded transport-capacity plans, protect future routes early, and use clear traffic triggers to move projects from planning into construction so infrastructure arrives with growth.

New Zealand keeps adding homes, jobs and freight demand, then acting surprised when the roads cannot cope. Councils approve development, the Crown controls the state highway, and each waits for the other to pay. Too often, the houses and traffic arrive years before the roads needed to carry them.

Mill Road in South Auckland shows the problem. Rapid housing and business growth has pushed parts of the two-lane corridor towards or beyond 20,000 vehicles a day, yet additional road capacity has repeatedly lagged behind development. SH16 through north-west Auckland tells a similar story at a productivity-crushing 35,000 vehicles per day on a two-lane road. The same pattern is emerging around Tauranga, Hamilton, Queenstown and other fast-growing centres.

Road charges, tolls, developer contributions, council funding and private capital can all bring investment forward. Development should help pay for the infrastructure it requires instead of loading every cost onto existing ratepayers or waiting for a single Crown cheque.

ACT will make growth trigger action. On major two-lane growth corridors, 10,000 vehicles a day will trigger route protection, 15,000 will trigger consenting, design and a funded capacity plan, and 20,000 will trigger construction of additional lane capacity where growth is continuing. That means land is protected and projects are ready to build before congestion becomes entrenched.

03 Fix the network first

ACT will protect maintenance and renewal funding in the National Land Transport Fund so it cannot be raided to pay for new capital projects.

Road users see the basics failing: potholes left unrepaired for too long, blocked drains, weak bridges, recurring slips and roadworks that drag on while traffic-management bills grow. A dependable network starts with looking after the roads, bridges and drainage New Zealanders already rely on.

GPS 2024 started turning that around by ring-fencing pothole-prevention funding. In 2024/25 NZTA resurfaced 1,928 lane kilometres of state highway and rehabilitated another 349 lane kilometres, exceeding both targets. ACT will make that discipline permanent rather than let maintenance become the balancing item when new projects cost more than expected.

Every Government Policy Statement should set a protected three-year allocation sufficient to meet published road-condition, resurfacing and rehabilitation targets. Once that allocation is set, NZTA should not be able to transfer it to new capital projects during the programme period.

04 Put delivery before ethnicity

ACT will make equal treatment a condition of Crown infrastructure funding. No Crown-funded project will use ethnicity to decide who can bid, how bids are scored, who receives preference or who must be subcontracted. Ethnicity-based spending targets and reporting requirements will also go.

Public contracts should be awarded on price, capability, safety and delivery - not ethnicity. In Government, ACT helped scrap Labour's target for eight per cent of relevant Crown contracts to go to Māori businesses. Public money should buy the best result, with suppliers competing on equal terms.

But these policies remain in local government. Auckland Transport directed $64.48 million to Māori-owned businesses in 2024/25, around 3.2% of expenditure. Its target rises to 5 per cent in 2025/26, with a longer-term goal of 10 per cent of supply-chain spending with Pakihi Māori.

The $1.39 million Te Kia Ora Marae carpark was tendered only to Amotai-registered Māori-owned businesses. Auckland Transport's Kake Mai programme also requires head contractors on new capital projects to partner with selected Māori and Pasifika-owned businesses.

Closed tenders can be efficient where there is a genuine commercial reason to limit bidders. Ethnicity is not one.

Small and emerging firms - including Māori and Pasifika businesses - should get a fair shot through simpler tenders, smaller contract packages and fewer barriers, and win work because they can deliver.

ACT will put equal treatment into Crown funding agreements. Use ethnicity to decide who competes, who gets the work or where the money is spent, and the project will not receive Crown funding. Taxpayers will fund delivery – not ethnicity targets.

05 Make road money deliver roads

ACT will ensure that non-functional art, monuments and decorative amenity features are ineligible for National Land Transport Fund funding.

Motorists pay fuel taxes and road-user charges and rightly expect that money to be spent maintaining and building roads. Yet core transport budgets are still used for public art, decorative landscaping and cultural monuments that do not make a journey faster, safer or more reliable.

For example:

- $630,599 for the 12-metre Te Manu Rangimaarie sculpture at the Piarere roundabout.
- $810,000 for the Te Waka sculpture on the Waikato Expressway.
- $2.238 million on the Oaro-to-Clarence corridor, including four pouwhenua, nine tekoteko, tunnel and surface murals, three artwork panels, artwork at stopping sites and palisade fencing.
- $1.876 million for five sculptures on Te Ahu a Turanga.
- $200,000 for the Hemo sculpture in Rotorua.
- $3.7 million for 35 pou and two taonga artworks on Te Ara Tupua.

This illustrates a prioritisation problem. The true total is unknown because NZTA does not calculate or publish how much it spends nationally on art and other amenity features. The costs are bundled into individual project budgets, where each extra can be defended as a small proportion of a much larger project.

Philanthropists, environmental groups, businesses, iwi and communities should be free to add the features they value, but those extras should be funded through voluntary contributions, sponsorship or local fundraising – not the roading budget.

06 Keep vehicle prices down for families

ACT will scrap unrealistic vehicle-emissions settings, oppose arbitrary age bans and other rules that price affordable used vehicles out of the market, and require new proposals to disclose their effect on vehicle supply, prices and fleet turnover.

Most New Zealanders do not replace an old car with a brand-new one. They trade up to the safest, most reliable vehicle they can afford. Used imports still account for around two in every five light vehicles entering the fleet and provide reliable cars around the $15,000 price point.

But used-import passenger registrations have fallen from around 165,000 in 2017 to 85,000 in 2025, while the average age of New Zealand's light passenger fleet has risen from 14.3 to 15.3 years. More than four in ten light vehicles are now at least 15 years old.

Restricting affordable imports can make that worse. A family priced out of a ten-year-old Japanese hybrid does not suddenly find another $20,000 for a new car. They keep the old one longer. Standards should reflect the vehicles actually available from Japan, our main source of used imports, not assume every household can afford new.

ACT will make affordability the test. If an emissions, testing, or age rule reduces the supply of affordable vehicles, pushes up prices or keeps older cars on the road longer, ACT will scrap it.

Keep New Zealand moving

New Zealand does not have to accept deteriorating roads, rising project costs and worsening congestion as the price of growth. We can build and maintain more with the money New Zealanders already pay by focusing on the basics and demanding value from every dollar.

That means road funding for roads, practical engineering, maintenance before vanity projects, new capacity before congestion becomes entrenched, affordable vehicles for families, and public contracts awarded on merit.

Transport is part of a bigger challenge. New Zealand needs to become a country that can once again build useful infrastructure at a reasonable cost and in a reasonable time.

ACT will build more, maintain what we have, waste less and make every transport dollar deliver – so New Zealand keeps moving.