



# The Ruahine Runner & Capital Connection

## Regional rail to Manawatū and Hawke's Bay

Rail is a fast and efficient transport solution for regional New Zealand.

Trains can help people and freight in regional New Zealand travel safely and efficiently, taking trucks and cars off the road, and reducing the pollution that causes climate change. The indefinite closure of the Manawatū Gorge is an opportunity to revitalise passenger rail in this part of New Zealand. This announcement is part the Green Party's commitment to connecting the regions and expanding regional rail services across the country. The Green Party will:

1. Establish a new twice-daily, Monday-Saturday passenger train service between Palmerston North and Napier – the Ruahine Runner.
2. Bring fares down on the existing Capital Connection commuter service between Palmerston North and Wellington, with ongoing, stable funding.
3. Open up the land transport budget to allow more investment in rail throughout the country.

### The Ruahine Runner

The Ruahine Runner, a new rail passenger service through the Manawatū Gorge, will provide a fast, stress-free way to travel between Manawatū and Hawke's Bay, and take the pressure off the Saddle Road while the Gorge Road is closed. This is a simple and affordable solution in response to the Manawatū Gorge closure, and should accompany roading improvements around Ashhurst and on the Saddle Road. If successful, this service could be extended to Wellington, providing a second daily service between the capital and Palmerston North.

The Ruahine Runner would depart both Palmerston North and Napier twice daily, with services running in both directions in the morning and evening. It would stop at Woodville, Dannevirke, Waipukurau, and Hastings, taking 2.5 hours – faster than the existing freight trains on this route, about the same as by car, and quicker than the current bus service.

Diesel-powered SA/SD trains can be purchased from Auckland Transport, who are no longer using them, and refurbished at the Hutt Valley KiwiRail workshops to make them suitable for longer distance trips. Refurbishment will take an estimated 1-2 months. In the

short term, Capital Connection trains could operate a weekend service between Palmerston North and Napier.

We estimate the total upfront cost to the Government will be \$3.7 million in the first year. This is a relatively low-cost improvement that will form part of the long-term solution to the Gorge Road, currently estimated to cost between \$120 million and \$1.8 billion.

Our estimates include \$2 million to purchase the trains, \$500,000 to refurbish them, and \$30,000 to refurbish Woodville station. We estimate an ongoing passenger subsidy of \$1.2 million a year. This would be fully funded from the National Land Transport Fund as the service is a replacement for the State Highway.<sup>1</sup>

## Lower fares on the Capital Connection

Fares on the Capital Connection service between Palmerston North and Wellington have risen by up to 17 percent since 2012, to \$35 one way. Unsurprisingly, patronage has dropped to around 250 people a day. Had the Capital Connection been funded like other Metrorail services, this price hike is unlikely to have happened.

The Green Party is committed to reducing fares on the Capital Connection and providing it with consistent funding from the National Land Transport Fund. The exact amount of funding will be negotiated with greater Wellington Regional Council and Horizons Regional Council. A business case prepared in 2012 put the likely government share between \$200,000 and \$300,000 per year, with a high benefit-cost ratio of between 2.4 and 3.0.

## Opening up the transport budget for rail

A lack of planning and strategic investment has meant the National Government was unprepared for another closure of the Manawatū Gorge. This has left Ashhurst and the Saddle Road bending under the weight of heavy freight trucks. This is also true in other parts of regional New Zealand, where trains used to be backbones of local economies.

The Green Party will ensure a more balanced approach to transport funding by opening up the transport budget to invest in improving the rail network, and by increasing investment in regional roads. Only by having genuinely reliable and competitive alternatives to the state highway network will we have a more resilient transport network overall.

---

<sup>1</sup> Operating costs based on Capital Connection service costs, assuming higher fuel and labour costs to account for the additional service and the cost of leasing diesel locomotives to pull the train. Revenue is assumed to be approximately \$1.6 million. This assumes an average fare of \$13, in line with the average fare on the Capital Connection in 2012. It also assumes 400 passengers use the service daily. This level of patronage would require five percent of people travelling by car between Napier and Palmerston North to go by rail and one quarter bus passengers to switch to trains. We have developed these estimates using publicly available data from KiwRail and other sources, and estimates provided by the Rail and Maritime Transport Union.

[www.greens.org.nz/Ruahine-Runner](http://www.greens.org.nz/Ruahine-Runner)

The logo for the Green Party, featuring a stylized green leaf above the word "Green" in a white, serif font.

Authorised by James Shaw, Parliament Buildings, Wellington