

Submission

Strengthening the resilience of Aotearoa New Zealand's critical infrastructure system



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SUBMITTED TO: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

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via email to:

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1. Ashburton District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on **Strengthening the resilience of Aotearoa New Zealand's critical infrastructure system**. This submission has been prepared by Council officers and endorsed by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer.
2. Ashburton District (the District) is located in the middle of Canterbury, an hour's drive south of Christchurch and an hour's drive north of Timaru.
3. More than 36,300¹ residents live in our district. Approximately 50% of our residents live in the main town of Ashburton, with the rest of our residents living rurally or in smaller towns or villages across the district. Ashburton District has experienced moderate and sustained population increase since the mid-1990s, increasing by 22% between 2006 and 2013 (a 3.3% increase per year). Since 2013, this growth has slowed slightly, with an average growth of 1.9% per year since 2013².
4. This submission has been made in support of the Taituara submission and provides local context to their points. We reiterate the importance for local government to be part of all conversations going forward in a real and meaningful way given our place in providing, funding and/or regulating much critical infrastructure for our communities.

Local Context

5. Within our District we fund, operate, manage and maintain critical infrastructure of roads and footpaths, drinking water, wastewater, stormwater and solid waste management and collection.
6. We also serve our community through our Emergency Management activity where we are committed to ensuring the preparedness, resilience and recovery of our residents before, during and after emergencies.
7. This work sees us work closely with other critical infrastructure partners including emergency services of FENZ, Police and St Johns, our lines company EA Networks, telecommunications providers, Waka Kotahi, Environment Canterbury, our health sector including the Ashburton Hospital and General Practitioners and lifeline utility providers.

¹ Statistics New Zealand Estimated Population 30 June 2022

² Ashburton District Council Environmental Scan 2023

8. Through this varied mahi, we are increasingly aware and concerned for protecting, maintaining, developing and future-proofing the critical infrastructure that underpins our societies and way of life.
9. Our own Ashburton Urban River bridge on State Highway One is a very real and pertinent reminder to us of the vulnerabilities of our critical infrastructure. The bridge has been closed on two separate occasions within the past 2 years because of high river flows and subsequent slash building up alongside the piers, with a pier slumping in 2021.
10. This severed connections in the South Island, ground traffic flows to a halt and heightened concern amongst residents about just how vulnerable we are to the loss of infrastructure that we assume will always be there.
11. We have been planning for over ten years to construct a second urban Ashburton River bridge and are currently working with Government on how best to fund this.
12. This vulnerability is extended to the wider Canterbury environment, with multiple large, braided rivers crossed by significant bridges, all of which are at risk from natural hazards such as serious flooding events or earthquakes or human induced hazards such as sabotage. Ashburton District is unique in its vulnerability with the main township split by one such river, but also its boundaries defined by two major braided rivers, the Rangitata and Rakaia. While inland routes and bridges provide some additional access, State Highway One through Canterbury forms the artery along which much of the South Island's trade, visitor tourism and travel flows.
13. There is a critical need for increased maintenance of the river protection system, particularly stopbanks and river beds. This Council supports the work done by the Regional Council sector in advocating for Central Government co-funding of such river protection on the basis of the wide-spread benefits and the limited means for local communities to pay.
14. Local government cannot be expected to alone fund initiatives that provide much wider benefit to New Zealand.
15. Mechanisms such as government co-funding, potential public-private partnerships and toll funding are worth investigating and enabling to assist in providing for the future functionality of our critical infrastructure.

General Comments

16. We are absolute in our agreement in the need to adapt our approach to critical infrastructure regulation, to create a more secure platform for sustainable, inclusive, and productive growth in the future.
17. We agree that future megatrends identified, alongside other trends included in the Taituara submission will further impact critical infrastructure.
18. New Zealand's location on the Pacific Ring of Fire highlights our significant vulnerability to multiple natural hazards such as large earthquakes on the Alpine Fault and Hikurangi Subduction Zone, volcanic eruption and tsunami. Recent experience has shown how these can happen without warning on previously unknown faults, causing years of recovery for affected communities.

19. We support the inclusion of all critical infrastructure as shown in the following diagram:

Figure 1: Critical infrastructure can take many forms, including (but not limited to):



20. We agree that there is a need for critical infrastructure providers to work more closely together to ensure the delivery of resilient critical infrastructure. Shared understanding is important to enabling more efficient and effective solutions, better coordination, joint funding solutions and enabling the ‘best bang for buck’ while protecting, maintaining and future-proofing the critical infrastructure that enables our way of life.

21. Future resilience standards must be matched by suitable funding mechanisms that apply a fair funding burden to local communities, while enabling a step change in infrastructure resilience.

Final comments

22. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on **Strengthening the resilience of Aotearoa New Zealand’s critical infrastructure system**. We look forward to the next stage of this work.

Kā mihi,

Neil Brown
Mayor

Hamish Riach
Chief Executive