Future Rail

Building a better rail network for the Lower North Island

Future Rail is a collection of projects underway to deliver a rail service with fewer speed restrictions and outages, longer trains and more services to allow for growth.

The Future Rail vision has two key areas of work: renewing existing infrastructure and adding capacity to the network. Both areas of work go hand in hand, and both are required for the complete Future Rail vision. Projects have various budgets, timelines and partners carrying out the work.

Improving the network is an ongoing project with currently funded infrastructure work in place until 2026. If funding continues for Future Rail projects, then work could extend through to 2027/2028.

Watch a video about Future Rail here

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Lower North Island Rail Connection

Purchase of new passenger trains for commuters living in Wairarapa, Horowhenua, Palmerston North and Manawatū

Why are new trains needed?

The fleet that Metlink uses to deliver its Wairarapa rail service, and KiwiRail uses to deliver its Capital Connection service, is nearing the end of its life and is at or exceeding capacity.

Metlink's carriages are currently hauled by locomotives that burn fossil fuels for the entire journey and no longer supports the strategy for carbon neutrality. In addition to this, the old carriage fleets don't have enough seating capacity for the increasing number of commuters travelling to and from the Wairarapa, Horowhenua, Palmerston North and Manawatū – and we expect those numbers to continue to grow. It takes many years to get new trains funded, designed, built and on the tracks, so we need to start now!

What are we proposing to buy?

Greater Wellington (GW), Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency (NZTA), Ministry of Transport (MoT), Horizons Regional Council (Horizons) and KiwiRail are working together to investigate the purchase of new trains.

GW is investigating a fleet of modern passenger trains that would operate on the existing overhead power supply to Waikanæ and Upper Hutt, and then continue to Palmerston North and Masterton using a secondary method of propulsion.

How would these new trains benefit customers?

A better customer experience in many ways!

- More seating capacity
- More frequent services
- Improved punctuality
- Improved reliability
- Shorter journey times
- Better on-board passenger amenities

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How would new trains benefit our environment?

In comparison to the current diesel locomotives, the new trains would dramatically reduce emissions. In addition, with a more attractive and higher-frequency, longer-distance rail service we expect more people would choose to use the train rather than their car, which would in turn reduce private vehicle emissions.

What would the new trains cost?

We won't know the full cost until we sign a contract for the manufacture of the new trains and maintenance depot, however, new trains could range from $300m to $500m depending on how many trains are purchased. Extra funding would be required to operate and maintain the new trains because they would be providing additional services.

Who would pay?

Farepayers and ratepayers in the Wellington region, Horowhenua, Palmerston North and Manawatū alone can't meet the cost of such a big, longterm investment. GW and Horizons will be seeking substantial assistance from the central government.

Would the tracks and stations cope?

Not without with Future Rail infrastructure upgrades. Central government has announced the $126m investment to enable the required infrastructure improvements.

When could the new trains be in service?

GW and Horizons are aiming to secure government funding assistance by early 2022. If we're successful, the first of the new trains could be built and ready to transport passengers by mid-2026.

How far along is this project?

NZTA has provided GW with $5m of funding to develop a detailed business case, the funding application, and continue with the procurement processes.

Before we complete the business case we're looking into a range of issues such as what the best available energy alternative is for the non-electrified section of the network, what timetable changes should be made, where should the trains be stored and maintained, and the list gœs on. This is expected to cost approximately $800k.

The remainder of the funding ($4.2m) covers the costs of preparing the detailed contracts and undertaking a two-stage procurement process for the potential $300m-$500m rolling stock design, build and maintenance contract.

When will the community be consulted?

The community will have an opportunity to offer views on these new trains during consultation on GW's forthcoming Long Term Plans, and again during development of the detailed specifications for the trains.