BUILDING THE FUTURE:

NATIONAL'S PLAN FOR THE SOUTH ISLAND

The South Island is now a powerhouse of the New Zealand economy – producing the food, fibre, energy, technology and visitor experiences the country needs and the world flocks to buy. In total, the South Island's economy is worth almost $100 billion a year, or around 22 per cent of the New Zealand economy, and its ports carry around a third of New Zealand's goods exports.

The Government's growth agenda has already been supporting the South Island's economic success. National's ambitious programme of RMA reform has unshackled development of new energy and new homes, while making life easier for farmers and growers. Ongoing investment in the infrastructure southern towns and cities need to grow has supported exports, tourism and urban growth. And after a sluggish post-COVID recovery, National's pro-growth agenda for tourism has encouraged tens of thousands of additional visitors to come to towns and cities like Queenstown, Christchurch, Wanaka, Dunedin and Nelson.

But there is still more to do. Productive firms and growing towns can still be held back by unreliable transport links, rules and regulations, and shortages of workers and homes. A single bridge closure can cut off a community or force freight through a long detour.

National is not starting from scratch. We have brought government spending under control, delivered tax relief for working New Zealanders, cut red tape for businesses and made it easier to build the homes, infrastructure and energy projects our country needs. Business confidence has rebounded and the economy is growing again, giving businesses greater confidence to invest, expand and employ more people.

National has also shown that responsible economic management and better public services can go hand in hand. By getting the Government's books back under control, National has been able to invest in the roads, hospitals, schools, Police and other essential infrastructure New Zealanders rely on, including in the South Island.

A re-elected National Government will:

- Build the transport and regional connections the South Island needs to move people, goods and visitors reliably.
- Grow Southern exports across agriculture, tourism, and mining and resources.
- Secure the energy new industrial investment needs, with substantial new demand matched by new generation, storage and network capacity.
- Strengthen the frontline health, education, and law and order services growing communities rely on.

Infrastructure: connecting the South

The South Island needs infrastructure that keeps communities connected and supports future growth. Distance means a failed road or bridge can isolate a town, and a single vulnerable corridor can put freight, tourism and emergency access at risk. National is investing in the transport and regional connections that remove weak points in the network and make better use of the assets already being built.

What we’ve done

National is delivering record transport investment across the South Island through the 2024–27 National Land Transport Programme, with South Island funding up 42 per cent on the previous three-year period:

Region	2021–24 NLTP	2024–27 NLTP	Increase
Top of the South (Nelson, Tasman, Marlborough)	$289 million	$479 million	66%
West Coast	$178 million	$255 million	43%
Canterbury	$1.2 billion	$1.8 billion	50%
Otago and Southland	$1.1 billion	$1.4 billion	27%

- $38.5 million to replace Christchurch’s Pages Road Bridge, and construction underway on the second Ashburton Bridge for completion by the end of 2027.
- $4.5 million for the first stage of the Rangiora Eastern Link, a $12.6 million pedestrian and cycle bridge over SH6 in Queenstown, and replacement of SH82’s Waihao North River and Elephant Hill Stream bridges, the first already complete and under budget.
- Canterbury’s Roads of Regional Significance, the SH1 Rolleston Access Improvements (estimated at $180–200 million and expected to be complete by the end of 2028), the SH76 Brougham Street upgrade (main works expected to be complete by late 2027) and the SH75 Halswell Road improvements, alongside early works on the Belfast to Pegasus Motorway and Woodend Bypass Road of National Significance.
- More than $150 million through Budget 2026 to strengthen vulnerable South Island state highways: around $20 million for SH60 Tākaka Hill, $40 million for SH6 Haast to Hāwea, $30 million for SH6 Cromwell to Frankton, $20 million for SH6 Frankton to Kingston and $40 million for SH94 Te Anau to Milford Sound. This sits alongside Crown Resilience Programme repairs at SH73 Candys Bend, $5 million for the SH6 Gates of Haast and $7 million to progress the fix for the SH6 Epitaph slip site.
- A $3.9 billion nationwide Pothole Prevention Fund, ring-fenced for resealing, rehabilitation and drainage maintenance, with 98 per cent of potholes now repaired within 48 hours and more than 20 lane kilometres of new roads delivered across the West Coast, Otago and Southland.
- A $9.8 million Regional Infrastructure Fund loan to upgrade Hokitika Airport, $4.6 million to upgrade port and wharf infrastructure at Greymouth and Jackson Bay, and Coastal Shipping Resilience Fund co-investment of $5.3 million in the reconstruction of Greymouth Wharf and $3 million in the ASP Rangitata at Timaru.
- $24.3 million towards a new Chatham Islands supply vessel, and loans to Air Chathams ($17.2 million), Sounds Air ($4.5 million) and Golden Bay Air ($1.1 million) to protect important regional air connections.
- A new Nelson–Tasman weather radar, on track for delivery in 2027, and a fixed-price contract signed for two new Cook Strait ferries.
- Major flood resilience investment through the Regional Infrastructure Fund, protecting the towns, farms and freight routes that flooding puts at risk: $16.6 million to upgrade the Wairau River schemes in Marlborough, almost $17 million for Motueka River and Tasman stopbanks, $10.8 million for Nelson’s Maitai and flood repair projects, $10.8 million for Mataura River protection at Gore and Mataura, $8.5 million for Westport Harbour and Buller River stopbank infrastructure, $6 million for the Waiho River stopbank on the West Coast, and river protection upgrades across Canterbury, Otago and Southland – from the Rangitata and Ashley to the Taieri and Oreti.
- Critical roading projects listed in the Fast-track Approvals Act, giving them access to a one-stop consenting pathway: the Ashburton Second Urban Bridge, the SH1 Woodend Bypass (Belfast to Pegasus) and the Hope Bypass in Tasman.

What we're doing next

A re-elected National Government will make a series of new investments in priority South Island projects. National will invest $50 million in the shared road and rail connections needed for the proposed Rolleston intermodal freight hub. Rolleston sits at the junction of the Main South Line, the Midland Line to the West Coast and State Highway 1, making it the natural place to consolidate freight moving between Canterbury's producers, the port and the rest of the island. Crown funding will be conditional on a final business case, committed freight customers and binding private co-investment, so taxpayers only contribute where the private sector is genuinely committed.

Queenstown is also one of the fastest-growing parts of the country and SH6 and 6A is its single most important piece of road. This is the corridor that carries workers to the airport, freight to the supermarkets, and visitors to the town that earns this country billions in export revenue. It needs to work, but instead, its chronically congested. A re-elected National government will support innovative public transport solutions like Gondolas, as well as practical road-widening to improve connectivity and efficiency along this stretch of road.

National also acknowledges that the South Island's roading network is especially vulnerable, with its mountainous terrain, active faults, and braided rivers. When a bridge or a corridor goes, there is often no second option - only a several-hundred-kilometre detour, or no journey at all. Building resilience into our roads is how we make sure a single event doesn't shut down a whole region.

A re-elected National government would target transport funding in the next Government Policy Statement on Land Transport to the most critical parts of the network, where disruption would have the greatest consequences for communities, freight, emergency response, and the economy. This would include prioritising bridge replacements on key routes on the South Island State Highway Network.

National will:

- Invest $50 million in the shared road and rail connections for the Rolleston intermodal freight hub.
- Ensure that congestion reducing Gondola solutions in Queenstown can access existing public transport funding in the NLTF.
- Commit $25m to four-lane the remaining portion past Hansen Road down to the Five Mile roundabout in Queenstown.
- Use the next Government Policy Statement to improve the network's most critical links, including South Island state highway bridge replacements.

Exports: growing what the South sells to the world

The South Island's prosperity is built on selling to the world. Its ports carry around a third of New Zealand's goods exports, and its farms, vineyards, mines and visitor businesses earn the income that pays for the services New Zealanders rely on. National is backing each of the South Island's major export sectors.

Agriculture

What we've done

- Reformed the RMA to make life easier for farmers and growers, and introduced legislation giving high-country farmers greater freedom to invest and diversify across around 1.2 million hectares of Crown pastoral land.
- Listed new water storage projects in the Fast-track Approvals Act, including Klondyke Storage on the Rangitata Diversion Race and the Balmoral water storage facility and fish screen on the Hurunui, granting access to a one-stop consenting pathway.
- $109 million through Budget 2026 to tackle wilding pines nationally, with Canterbury, Otago and Marlborough among the priority regions, alongside Rural Support Trust funding and Mayoral Relief Fund payments for farming communities hit by severe weather in Clutha, Hurunui, Kaikōura, Southland and Nelson Tasman.
- $1.2 million through AgriZeroNZ for North Canterbury start-up Āmua, developing technology to cut nitrous oxide emissions and nitrate leaching.

What we're doing next

A re-elected National Government will complete and implement the replacement of the Resource Management Act, giving farmers and growers the certainty they need to invest in food and fibre production. The new system will replace case-by-case litigation with clear, consistent national rules – so a farmer in the Amuri Basin or a grower in Central Otago spends less time and money on process, and more on production.

National will also implement the new Crown pastoral land settings, so high-country farmers can invest and diversify with confidence across the 1.2 million hectares of Crown pastoral land that supports so much of the South Island's food and fibre production.

National will:

- Complete and implement the replacement of the RMA, giving farmers and growers certainty to invest.
- Implement new Crown pastoral land settings so high-country farmers can invest and diversify with confidence.

Tourism

What we've done

Tourism is New Zealand's second-largest export earner, and the South Island is at the heart of it. International visitors spent $18.1 billion in the year to March 2025, up $1.2 billion or 7 per cent on the year before, and the sector now supports around one in nine New Zealand jobs. For towns like Queenstown, Wanaka, Tekapo and Hokitika, visitor spending is not a supplement to the local economy – it is the local economy, sustaining the cafés, guiding businesses, transport operators and accommodation providers that employ thousands of Southerners.

National has backed that industry with marketing, infrastructure and events. Almost $3 million of directly targeted South Island campaigns through the Regional Tourism Boost is bringing more international visitors south, including Great South's Southern Way campaign and the ChristchurchNZ-led Discover Different campaign across Canterbury and the West Coast.

Alongside the marketing, National has invested in critical tourism infrastructure, including more than $4 million in improvements to the Milford Road corridor and $15.2 million into the Milford Opportunities Project through the International Visitor Levy and the Department of Conservation's capital works programme. National has also invested $3.8 million in public toilet facilities in Queenstown Lakes and Mackenzie districts, $2 million for the Dunedin Tunnels Trail, $200,000 for the Waimate Trail, and made ongoing investment in the Great Rides.

Events matter too, filling beds and restaurants, and giving smaller centres a reason to be on the map. National has backed more than 120 South Island events through the Regional Events Promotion Fund, worth more than $1.9 million across two rounds, alongside major events support including Supercars in Christchurch, Crankworx, the Winter Games, Warbirds Over Wanaka and the inaugural Snow League World Challenge, which will be held at Cardrona next month. The results have been impressive. In the year to January 2026, South Island regions recorded an average 10 per cent increase in international visitor days, and visitor spending rose in every South Island region in the year to March 2026, with Southland recording the strongest turnaround, from a 5 per cent fall in 2025 to 13 per cent growth in 2026.

What we're doing next

National will provide standardised planning provisions through standardised zoning in our new planning system to supercharge our town centres, by enabling more mixed-use, and cutting red tape to make it easier for things like cafés and stores to open in our small towns. A small visitor town should not need to design bespoke planning rules from scratch for an old bank to become a café or a main-street shop to add accommodation upstairs. Standard provisions will let councils adopt sensible settings off the shelf, so towns can revitalise their centres and welcome new visitor businesses.

Once the Conservation Amendment Bill is enacted, National will implement the new concession timeframes for visitor businesses operating on conservation land, and publish regional performance so operators can see decisions being made on time. The Bill also enables access charging for international visitors at key sites such as Aoraki / Mt Cook and Milford Sounds. The revenue generated from these charges can assist with maintaining tourism infrastructure and biodiversity at these popular sites.

National will:

- Provide standardised planning provisions through standardised zoning to enable growth in our small-towns.
- Introduce access charging for international visitors at Aoraki / Mt Cook and Milford Sounds, prioritising reinvestment in local conservation and tourism infrastructure.
- Implement new conservation concession timeframes and publish regional performance.

Mining and resources

What we've done

Mining is a major South Island export earner and a backbone of regional economies on the West Coast and in Otago. New Zealand produced 213,000 ounces of gold and 2.5 million tonnes of coal in 2024, and gold export revenues have nearly tripled in three years to around $1.8 billion on the back of record gold prices. The South Island is critical to that success: OceanaGold's Macraes mine in Otago is the country's largest gold mine, employing around 700 people and producing more than five million ounces over its 35-year history, while the West Coast produces around 90 per cent of New Zealand's alluvial gold. In Buller, the Stockton mine (New Zealand's largest opencast mine) exports premium steelmaking coal. Together, gold and metallurgical coal account for around 80 per cent of New Zealand's mineral exports, and the Government has set a goal of doubling mineral exports to $3 billion by 2035.

- Listed regionally and nationally significant South Island resource projects in the Fast-track Approvals Act, giving them access to a one-stop consenting process, including the Buller Plateaux Continuation coal expansion, the Bendigo–Ophir Gold Project in Central Otago, Macraes Phase Four, the Barrytown Mineral Sands Project near Greymouth, and quarry expansions at Miners Road and Southern Screenworks to supply the aggregate Canterbury's growth requires.
- Backed West Coast critical minerals processing with $50 million of Regional Infrastructure Fund investment: $30 million for Westland Mineral Sands and $20 million for Taiko Critical Minerals in Greymouth.

What we're doing next

To provide greater certainty to the minerals industry, a re-elected National Government will develop a new Government Policy Statement on Mining and Extraction under the Fast Track Approvals Act. This new GPS will be modelled off similar ones created for grocery competition, and will make clear that mining and extractive activities have regional and national benefits qualifying them to access the Fast-track regime.

National will also develop National Standards under the replacement for the RMA for gravel extraction from rivers and for on-farm quarries. A consistent national rule for river gravel extraction will support both aggregate supply and flood management – gravel build-up raises riverbeds and flood risk, and extraction is often the most cost-effective flood protection available. A National Standard for on-farm quarries will let farmers take aggregate for tracks and maintenance without unnecessary consenting costs.

National will:

- Develop a new Government Policy Statement on Mining and Extraction under the Fast Track Approvals Act.
- Develop a National Standard for gravel extraction from rivers, supporting aggregate supply and flood management.
- Develop a National Standard for on-farm quarries, cutting consenting costs for farmers.

Energy: powering Southern growth

The South Island has strong renewable resources and some of New Zealand's best opportunities for new industrial investment. It also faces long connection lead times, constrained local networks and communities vulnerable to outages. National is unlocking new generation and making sure substantial new demand is matched by new supply.

What we've done

- Reformed the RMA and delivered Electrify NZ so new electricity generation can actually get built.
- Delivered fast-track approvals for four major new South Island generation projects: the 380MW Southland Wind Farm near Gore – set to be New Zealand's largest wind farm, powering up to 150,000 homes; the 190MW Puke Kapo Hau expansion of the Mahinerangi Wind Farm west of Dunedin, including a 60MW battery; the 220MW Haldon Solar Farm near Twizel – the first solar farm approved through fast-track; and the 23MW Waitaha Hydro scheme on the West Coast, a project two decades in the making.
- Re-consented the Tekapo Power Scheme through fast-track, securing hydro generation that powers more than 228,000 households, and approved the Lake Pūkaki hydro storage and dam resilience works.
- A further pipeline of South Island generation remains in the fast-track process, including the Kaihiku Wind Farm in Clutha (around 80 turbines) and major solar farms across the Mackenzie Basin and Waitaki.

What we're doing next

A re-elected National Government will complete and implement the replacement of the Resource Management Act, with more enabling rules for new renewable generation, so wind, solar and hydro projects are developed quickly and power prices are kept down. Fast-track has shown what a difference process makes: the Southland Wind Farm was declined under the RMA after years of process, then approved in around five months under fast-track. The new planning system will make that speed the norm for renewable generation, not the exception.

A re-elected National Government will also require that new data centre projects are accompanied by new, firmed generation, by applying an "additionality" test. Data centres are a significant economic opportunity for the South Island, which offers abundant renewable energy and a cool climate, but they are also very large electricity users requiring uninterrupted supply. Requiring new firmed generation alongside new data centres means the development of digital infrastructure doesn't put upward pressure on power prices for households and businesses, while giving energy developers the committed customers they need to finance new generation.

National will:

- Complete and implement the replacement of the RMA, with more enabling rules for wind, solar and hydro development.
- Require new data centre projects to be accompanied by new, firmed generation, protecting households and businesses from higher power prices.

Frontline services: health, education, and law and order

Growth is only worth having if it comes with the services growing communities rely on. National has shown that responsible economic management and better public services go hand in hand – and is investing in the hospitals, schools and Police the South Island needs.

Health

What we've done

- Begun construction on the New Dunedin Hospital, which will provide 351 beds expanding to 404 and be operational by 2031, and commenced redevelopment of Nelson Hospital, a new 128-bed inpatient building by 2029, $73 million in design and enabling works and a $10.6 million emergency department expansion.
- Planning a $180 million expansion of health services and infrastructure in Otago Central Lakes, and building the $5 million Clyde Primary Maternity Unit.
- Rolling out urgent and after-hours care to 98 per cent of New Zealanders within a one-hour drive through the $164 million national programme, including 70 rural and remote sites, with the first two South Island sites already delivered at Twizel and Tākaka. The programme also delivers a new 24/7 urgent care service for Dunedin (opened in December), new daytime services for Invercargill and Timaru, and extended after-hours care for Ashburton, Alexandra, Gore, Golden Bay and Ōamaru.
- Established the South Island's first Rural Training Hub on the West Coast, so more doctors, nurses and midwives can train and build their careers in rural communities, alongside a new CT scanner now operational at Southland Hospital and mental health peer support in Christchurch Hospital's emergency department.
- Health targets are delivering across the South Island. In the April to June 2025 quarter, 83.7 per cent of cancer patients started treatment within 31 days, 87.4 per cent of children were fully immunised by age two, and 78.9 per cent of emergency department patients were admitted, transferred or discharged within six hours – with Canterbury up 8 percentage points and the West Coast up 17.7 on a year earlier, despite increased attendances. Progress has continued since: in the most recent quarter, to March 2026, 86.2 per cent of cancer patients nationally started treatment within 31 days, up from 84.6 per cent a year earlier, and childhood immunisation reached 83.5 per cent, up from 79.3 per cent.

What we're doing next

A re-elected National Government will finish fitting out Tower Three at Christchurch Hospital, at an estimated cost of $70 million.

The building is currently being constructed with 96 beds included as shell space: the rooms are there, but not finished off. National will complete them now, so all 96 beds are ready for patients straight away instead of waiting – adding real capacity to the South Island's largest hospital as Canterbury grows.

National will:

- Finish fitting out Tower Three at Christchurch Hospital, delivering 96 additional beds for patients.

Education

What we've done

- Funded 322 new teaching spaces across the South Island since Budget 2024, with 224 already delivered or under construction, alongside $148.3 million of redevelopment work across 14 schools.
- A $161 million Canterbury school growth package, including a new primary school on Milns Road, a new school and 52 additional classrooms in Selwyn plus a site for a future school, major expansions at Rolleston College, Lincoln Primary School, Ararira Springs and Te Rau Horopito, and new classrooms at schools from Woodend to Halswell.
- $27 million for 18 new teaching spaces at Dunstan High School and Te Kura Whakatipu o Kawarau, with land secured at Ladies Mile for a future primary school as Queenstown grows.
- New classrooms for smaller and rural communities – including South Westland Area School, Amuri Area School, Fiordland College, Heddon Bush School and Te Anau School – and major redevelopments at Twizel Area School, Ellesmere College, Alexandra Primary School, and Aurora and James Hargest Colleges in Invercargill.
- Specialist classrooms at Ferndale School in Christchurch and Sara Cohen School in Dunedin, and replacement classrooms at Ashburton Intermediate and Maruawai College in Gore.

What we're doing next

A re-elected National Government will deliver the remaining funded teaching spaces, nearly 100 more classrooms already committed across the South Island, and complete the redevelopment programme underway across 14 schools. That means the classrooms families have been promised in fast-growing communities like Selwyn, Rolleston and Queenstown are built on time, alongside the rebuilds already underway in smaller centres from Twizel to Invercargill.

National will:

- Deliver the remaining funded teaching spaces, nearly 100 more classrooms across the South Island.
- Complete the redevelopment programme underway across 14 South Island schools.

Law and order

What we've done

- Put more Police on the beat, strengthened consequences for serious and repeat offenders and given Police more tools to keep communities safe. The Government has met its national target of 20,000 fewer victims of violent crime ahead of schedule.
- Signed the public-private partnership agreement for the first phase of the $700–800 million Christchurch Men's Prison redevelopment, delivering 240 additional high-security beds, 52 specialist mental health beds and a new health centre – lifting the prison from 926 to 1,166 operational beds when Phase 1 opens.

What we're doing next

Budget 2026 delivers a new Police station for Greymouth, giving the West Coast a modern base for frontline policing. National will also complete Phase 1 of the Christchurch Men's Prison redevelopment, with construction beginning this year and the new facilities due to be operational by mid-2030 – so serious offenders face real consequences and communities are kept safe.

National will:

- Deliver a new Police station for Greymouth through Budget 2026.
- Complete Phase 1 of the Christchurch Men's Prison redevelopment, operational by mid-2030.