



10 April 2026

Hon. Chris Bishop

Minister of Transport
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

**State Highway 2 (SH2) – north through Waioweka Gorge and south to Hawke's Bay:
national corridor failure requiring immediate attention**

Tēnā koe Minister Bishop,

We write to you to raise the urgent need for early, coordinated action from central government to ensure State Highway 2 (North through Waioweka Gorge and South to Hawke's Bay) is recognised and treated as a nationally significant corridor, rather than continuing to underperform as a constrained regional asset.

The corridor is currently failing too often and for too long. When SH2 is compromised, freight movement stops, people movement is restricted, and supply chains across Tairāwhiti, Bay of Plenty, and Hawke's Bay are immediately disrupted. These impacts are not contained locally; they flow directly into national productivity, affecting business confidence, investment decisions, and the performance of key primary industries. Public evidence identifies economic losses of approximately \$8 million per day during closure events.

SH2 is the primary East Coast lifeline, underpinning time-sensitive harvest windows and three high-performing primary production economies that contribute directly to NZ Inc. There are no viable alternative routes.

The current system is not delivering. Investment settings continue to prioritise population and benefit-cost ratios over network criticality, leaving high hazard-risk provincial regions structurally disadvantaged. The NZ Transport Agency's own planning material confirms the high dependence on SH2; however, this is not reflected in funding prioritisation.

In practice, this results in:

- Restoration to pre-event condition rather than building resilience
- Repeated and avoidable disruption with no meaningful reduction in risk
- Reliance on short-term workarounds such as convoying
- Declining business and investor confidence

Other regions benefit from network redundancy and proactive resilience investment. The East Coast is expected to operate with repeated isolation as a baseline level of service. That is an inequitable outcome and a system-level failure.

We note recent commentary that funding is not the primary constraint for recovery. However, continued inaction indicates that current investment frameworks, prioritisation settings, and delivery ownership are not enabling progress. There remains no effective weighting for single points of failure, and investment continues to be reactive rather than preventative.

This corridor must be repositioned from a regional recovery issue to a matter of national economic significance. Without explicit recognition in the Government Policy Statement (GPS) and alignment through the National Land Transport Plan (NLTP), it will not translate into funded activity. We have seen this before, and our regions continue to carry the consequences.

We are seeking the following actions from you as the Minister for Transport:

1. Immediate recognition

- Confirm SH2 (north through Waioweka Gorge and south to Hawke's Bay) as infrastructure of national significance

2. National Land Transport Plan 2027–30 prioritisation

- Prioritise and fund resilience and reliability improvements aligned with existing business cases
- Shift from reactive response activity to proactive investment that reduces risk and supports economic continuity

3. Government Policy Statement direction

Require investment frameworks to explicitly account for:

- Network criticality
- Lack of alternative routes
- Risk exposure and climate vulnerability
- Economic and social impacts of disruption
- Single-point-of-failure corridors that result in extended and repeated isolation of communities

4. Delivery accountability (within 3 months)

- Assign Ministry of Transport leadership to lead the delivery of actions and progress much-needed work on medium- to long-term options in partnership with NZTA and local government

The East Coast is being repeatedly isolated by a system that is not delivering for our people and businesses. It is no longer a question of evidence or need; both are well established. The issue is delivering the actions needed to change the narrative – the corridor is now a national liability.

We are working to maintain our local networks and support our communities. We need the same level of commitment applied to the nationally owned and maintained network.

We request a meeting within the next four weeks to confirm direction and next steps.

Please have your office contact Chief Executive Gisborne District Council Nedine Thatcher-Swann (Nedine.Thatcher-Swann@gdc.govt.nz), who will coordinate a time.

Ngā mihi,



Mayor Rehette Stoltz
Gisborne District Council



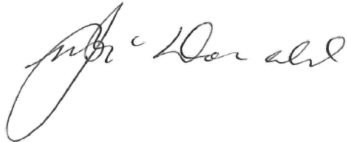
Mayor David Moore
Ōpōtiki District Council



Councillor Sophie Siers
Regional Council Chair
Hawkes Bay Regional Council



Councillor Rob Telfer
Regional Transport Chair
Gisborne District Council



Councillor Matemoana McDonald
Regional Council Chair
Bay of Plenty Regional Council



Councillor Ken Shirley
Regional Transport Chair
Bay of Plenty Regional Council



Councillor Neil Kirton
Regional Transport Chair
Hawkes Bay Regional Council

cc: Hon. Nicola Willis, Minister for Economic Growth

cc: Hon. Shane Jones, Minister for Regional Development

cc: Hon. James Meager, Associate Minister of Transport

cc: MP Dana Kirkpatrick

cc: MP Katie Nimon

Appendix 1: Why is this important?

This corridor functions as a critical freight and community lifeline, yet:

This corridor functions as a critical freight and community lifeline, yet:

- It operates under degraded conditions for a significant portion of the year
- It is subject to repeated full closures and prolonged restrictions
- It has no viable alternative route

This is not a resilience issue alone. It is a system performance failure.

When this corridor fails, the impact extends beyond the region:

- Freight reliability deteriorates, affecting national supply chains
- Primary production and exports are disrupted
- Investor and business confidence decline
- Visitor numbers decline
- Communities lose access to essential services

This corridor underpins economic activity critical to New Zealand's broader performance.

Impacts extend to:

- Time-critical freight and produce movements to ports and markets
- Reduced supply chain reliability and export confidence

This is a direct constraint on national productivity and food supply; it is not a localised issue.

Available New Zealand Transport Agency – Transport Resilience Evidence and Investment Strategy (NZTA TREIS) data indicates a high frequency of closures on our region's state highways over the past six months. However, this dataset does not capture the full extent of disruption. It excludes a number of closure events (50+ events identified through Facebook posts since April 2025), and it does not reflect periods where the network is technically open but operating under reduced levels of service (e.g. convoying, restricted access, or repeated opening and reclosing).

As a result, the data used for decision-making and understanding impacts in our region understates both the frequency and duration of disruptions. Even on this conservative basis, the level of network unreliability recorded in TREIS is still significant. Decisions on performance, investment, or prioritisation that rely solely on this dataset risk materially underestimating the scale of the issue due to incomplete data.

Isolation:

- State Highways 2 and 35 are our only viable connections from the East Coast to the rest of New Zealand
- National assessments identify loss of access to essential services, including hospital supply chains, as a direct consequence of corridor failure
- Even when "open," access is often restricted (e.g. convoy operations or essential travel only), materially limiting movement

Economic disruption:

- Industry impacts include at least \$5,000 per truck per day and at least \$5,000 per crew per day during disruption
- Closure durations are frequent and significant. TREIS data for the past six months shows 21 closures totalling 503 hours. This excludes closures related to severe weather events and planned overnight closures not included in the dataset.

Event Type	Description	Data	
		Count of Event ID	Sum of closed duration hours
Area Warning	Crash	1	
	Flooding	4	48.53
	Other	7	426.78
	Public Event	1	8.00
	Slip	1	9.00
Area Warning Total		14	492.32
Road Hazard	Crash	6	7.88
	Fire	1	2.17
Road Hazard Total		7	10.05
Grand Total		21	502.37

Safety risk:

- The corridor is assessed as “Extreme risk” within national resilience frameworks
- Conditions regularly include:
 - Falling debris and short-notice closures
 - Stop/go operations, convoy management, and constrained worksites

This creates:

- Unpredictable and unsafe travel environments
- Increased exposure for freight operators and the public

This corridor is not consistently operating at the safe and reliable standard expected of national infrastructure.

Gisborne District Council has progressed an East Coast Connectivity Programme Business Case to identify a pipeline of interventions. However:

- Progress is not matched by national coordination or ownership
- There is no clear delivery lead at a national level
- Regions are expected to advance nationally significant risk without national alignment