

THE FREIGHT SYSTEM NEW ZEALAND NEEDS



OUR ELECTION 2026 CALLS TO

*Move More,
Spend Smarter,
Stay Safe.*



OUR CALLS FOR THE FREIGHT SYSTEM NEW ZEALAND DESERVES



Cost of living and economic growth will dominate

Cost of living and economic growth will dominate the 2026 election. Everyone from businesses through to everyday New Zealanders have felt the pinch in their pocket, and voters need solutions.

The freight sector has an indispensable role to play in any solution. Freight costs account for around 12 percent of supermarket prices — every Kiwi family pays the freight bill at the checkout. From fruit and vegetables, to appliances and construction materials, every sector of New Zealand’s economy depends on the freight system.

But this system is under pressure. Over the next 20 years, New Zealand’s freight task is projected to grow by 55 percent. Our infrastructure is struggling to meet the needs of our communities, our workforce is aging, and operators face escalating operating costs and pressures every year.

Freight is a \$59 billion sector. At that scale, small improvements compound into serious national gains, and small failures do the same in reverse. We have just watched that happen since the Iran conflict began in February: higher diesel alone has cost New Zealand more than \$1.5 billion.

We appreciate the recent decisions from government to launch the Action Plan for Freight and establish the Freight Advisory Council. We call on the next government to build on this momentum.

This booklet sets out six calls to fix our freight system. The calls hold no matter who forms the next Government. NRC is firm on what the system needs, constructive on how to get there, and ready to help build it.



Justin Tighe-Umbers
Chief Executive
National Road Carriers Association

Six ways the Government can make freight work better



1. Spend smarter for a better network



2. Rules that keep up with the world



3. Resilient energy to keep New Zealand moving



4. Responsible operators only



5. Compete for the drivers we need



6. A Minister of Supply Chain



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1. SPEND SMARTER FOR A BETTER NETWORK



The Opportunity

New Zealand already spends in the top 10 percent of the OECD per person on infrastructure, yet sits in the bottom 10 percent for what it delivers. Ending the cycle of projects that start, stop and change with each government would shift spending from consultants and bespoke plans to construction.

A freight network planned as one system would let the most productive trucks run the whole journey, instead of stopping short where council routes end. Bringing infrastructure and supply chain planning together can accelerate freight productivity and lower transport costs.

**Smarter investment to keep
New Zealand moving.**

The Call



Task the Freight Advisory Council (FAC) and the Infrastructure Commission to identify the investments, across road, rail, sea and air, that move the most freight for each dollar spent, drawing on the National Infrastructure Plan.



Get National Land Transport Revenue reform right. What we pay for roads and rail needs to be spent on maintaining them, and we need to make sure that user charges bring in enough to pay the bill with some left over for new projects.



NRC expects the next Government to set freight-efficiency and productivity targets for 2030 and report progress against them every year.



2. RULES THAT KEEP UP WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD

The Opportunity

Currently New Zealand insists on writing custom vehicle rules instead of adopting proven international vehicle standards. Changing these rules can take years. In the meantime, our freight operators can only watch as the world adopts bigger, safer, and more efficient trucks.

The potential freight productivity gains are very real. For every four loads of New Zealand trucks, European high-capacity trucks can do it in three. We also risk being left behind by international supply chains. International shipping lines are rapidly adopting 38-tonne containers which would be too heavy for most permitted trucks allowed on our roads.

**Adopt the international
manufacturer standards.**

The Call



Stop writing bespoke New Zealand standards. Adopt the international manufacturer standards the rest of the world builds to.



The Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) must provide a fast, predictable pathway for changes to the Vehicle Dimensions and Mass (VDAM) rule and other transport laws, regulations and rules, so proven ideas can reach the road within months.





3. RESILIENT ENERGY

TO KEEP NEW ZEALAND MOVING

The Opportunity

New Zealand needs energy to move our economy. Right now, freight's energy is neither secure nor diversified. 97 percent of our heavy vehicles run on diesel, and every litre of diesel we rely on travels here by ship.

Any significant shock to our fuel supply chain – whether that is a geopolitical event, future pandemic, or natural disaster – could stall our freight supply chain in weeks. When diesel prices spiked in April 2026, an estimated \$157 million left the economy in extra fuel costs in a single week. The total cost to New Zealand in increased diesel cost since the Iran war started in February is more than \$1.5 billion.

The Call

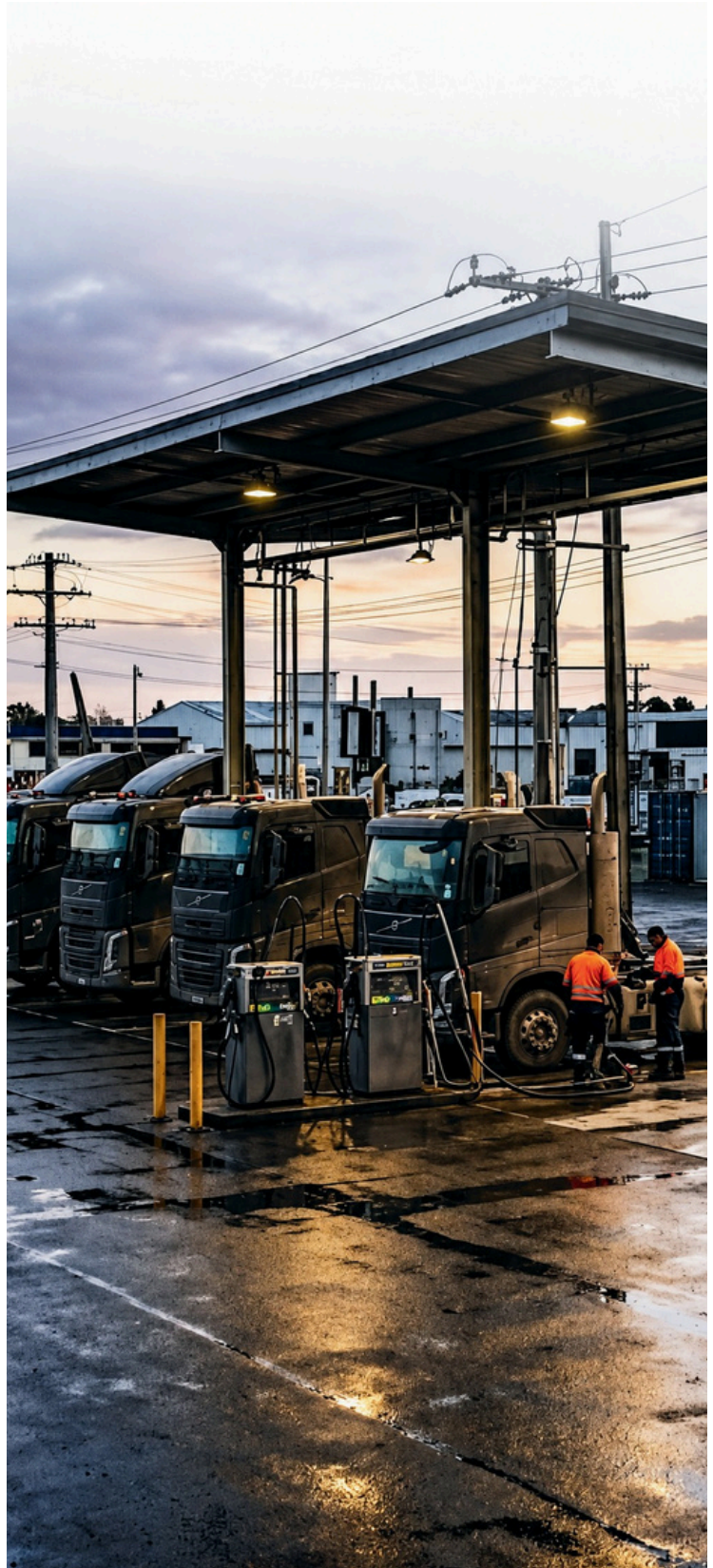


Further firm up our onshore fuel supplies through increasing onshore storage capacity, and higher statutory minimum holdings to give greater security in future supply disruptions and dampen price shocks.



Grow our energy independence by backing the shift to low and zero-emission heavy vehicles and driving domestic energy generation and distribution so operators can make the switch with confidence.

**Grow our energy
independence.**





4. RESPONSIBLE OPERATORS ONLY



The Opportunity

A Transport Service Licence (TSL) should reflect that an operator has met a competent standard. It is currently too easy to get and too hard to lose. A handful of bad operators can undercut the majority of good compliant operators – creating unfair and illegitimate margins enabled by corner cutting and taking advantage of a system that struggles to catch them.

A procurer can take the cheapest quote for freight transport without fear of consequence, creating a race to the bottom where the operator that skips on compliance and charges less wins the business. We need a level playing field, where businesses have to answer for the safety of the carrier they hire.

Raise the bar for the Transport Service Licence.

The Call



Raise the bar for the Transport Service Licence. The system needs to identify and attach consequences to operators who create risks. Compliance should be audited across the life of a licence, and licences should be removed from those who fall short.



Build a level playing field where freight transport operators and end customers all hold a level of responsibility for safety compliance. The Australian Chain of Responsibility (CoR) legislation is an example of a system that ensures purchasing decisions take compliance and the cost of it into account.



5. COMPETE FOR THE DRIVERS WE NEED

The Opportunity

The average New Zealand truck driver is 57 years old, and the proportion of young New Zealanders who seek to join this sector is rapidly shrinking. The truck driving labour pool is international and mobile, and we are struggling to attract qualified skills to our shores.

Immigration settings work against us. Truck drivers sit at level 4 of the ANZSCO scale (the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations), below the skilled-worker threshold. With no simple immigration pathways, international labour looks elsewhere.

Set clear competency standards.

The Call



Recognise truck driving as skilled work, with a migration pathway to residency, so New Zealand can compete for the people it needs.



Ensure that the licencing system demands that drivers are trained to New Zealand conditions when they arrive and set clear competency standards for entering the industry and staying in it.





6. A MINISTER OF SUPPLY CHAIN



The Opportunity

There is currently no person or group with end-to-end responsibility for New Zealand's freight system performance. Roads sit with one minister, rail with KiwiRail, ports with councils, workforce with Immigration, and energy with another portfolio.

Australia, the United Kingdom, and Singapore each line up the three things that make freight work: one minister responsible for the end-to-end supply chain, a government department that can span this system, and a co-ordinating body with a mandate to bring government and industry together. New Zealand aligns none of them. The Freight Advisory Council can advise the minister; it cannot direct or deliver.

Appoint a minister accountable for end-to end freight and supply chain.

The Call



Align all parts of the freight system by appointing a minister accountable for the end-to-end freight and supply chain, ensure that government departments are structured to support this accountability, and provide the Freight Advisory Council with the mandate and the secretariat to advise, shape and monitor freight improving initiatives.



Once the bodies are aligned, we need a unified supply chain strategy covering road, rail, sea and air, that holds across electoral cycles.



DRIVING NEW ZEALAND FORWARD SINCE 1936.

National Road Carriers (NRC) has supported and advocated for New Zealand's freight operators since 1936.

Today, our 1,500 members operate around 16,000 trucks across the country.



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