NZ AIRPORTS ASSOCIATION

NZ AIRPORTS ELECTION MANIFESTO 2026

Airports for growth

Priorities for a better-connected New Zealand

New Zealand needs an aviation system that gives people affordable and reliable connections, brings visitors to our regions and gets high-value exports to market. Airports provide the essential infrastructure that makes those connections possible, and keep communities connected when other transport networks are disrupted.

Airports are long-lived essential infrastructure. Decisions made during the next parliamentary term will shape New Zealand's connectivity, resilience and capacity for growth for decades.

The next Parliament can build on recent progress, including monitoring of airline on-time performance, the Aviation Action Plan, investment in Ohakea as a permanent alternative airport, more flexible options for meeting runway end safety requirements and improved visitor visa settings. Recent international services at Hamilton and Dunedin demonstrate the opportunity to grow connectivity across the airport network.

NZ Airports asks all political parties to commit to four priorities.

Our four priorities

1. **Monitor fares, capacity and competition**
   Establish consistent public reporting and use the evidence to support competition and protect connectivity.
2. **Maintain stable regulation that supports investment and consumers**
   Preserve a predictable, evidence-based framework for efficient long-term airport investment.
3. **Protect airports' ability to operate and grow**
   Safeguard airport operations and the capacity required for future growth through the planning system.
4. **Back tourism and international connectivity**
   Maintain competitive visitor settings and support commercially sustainable international air services.

Our commitment

NZ Airports will work constructively with the next government and Parliament, airlines, communities and other aviation partners to deliver these priorities and improve the efficiency, resilience and performance of the aviation system.

1. Monitor fares, capacity and competition

Establish a permanent public monitoring programme for domestic airfares, airline capacity, service reliability and competition, supported by independent analysis.

New Zealand's domestic aviation market is highly concentrated. One airline holds more than 80 percent of the domestic market, and most regional routes are served by a single airline. Where competition is limited, there is a strong public interest in understanding how that affects fares and the services available.

Better information will help communities understand changes in their air services and give government a sound basis for deciding whether action is needed. It will also help identify how airline entry, exit and capacity changes affect passengers, businesses and regional economies.

Better public information matters most when households are under cost-of-living pressure. It would also give any airline considering entry or expansion a clearer view of where demand and opportunity sit.

New Zealand already publishes airfare price indexes and airline punctuality information, while international licensing collects route, schedule and capacity data. These are useful foundations, but they do not provide a consistent public picture of fares, capacity, demand, reliability and competition by airline and route.

Reporting should distinguish between airlines as well as routes. Route averages can obscure material differences in fares, capacity and service patterns between operators. Comparable measures should account for route mix, booking timing and fare conditions.

The Civil Aviation Act 2023 enables regulations requiring aviation participants to provide activity information, including airfare trends, passenger volumes and flight movements. The next government should use those powers to establish a durable and proportionate reporting regime.

Australia already publishes regular information on fares, capacity and airline competition, providing a useful model that New Zealand can adapt to its regional and market conditions. Australian reporting shows that fares on routes served by a single airline are typically higher than on routes with airline competition.

Our ask of the next government

- **Establish the programme.** Use the Civil Aviation Act 2023 to establish a funded monitoring programme during the first year of the next term.
- **Report by airline and route.** Publish meaningful information on fares, capacity, passenger demand, service reliability and competition, including on regional routes and routes served by a single airline.
- **Publish regular analysis.** Provide accessible public reporting using clear definitions, appropriate reporting lags and proportionate protections for genuinely commercially sensitive information.
- **Act on the evidence.** Use the findings to address barriers to commercially sustainable airline entry and expansion. Where monitoring identifies a sustained risk to an essential regional connection, assess the service's social and economic value and consider proportionate, competitively neutral action before essential connectivity is lost.

2. Maintain stable regulation that supports investment and consumers

Maintain a predictable, evidence-based airport economic-regulation framework that enables efficient investment in the long-term interests of consumers.

Airports are an infrastructure success story. Ipsos research in 2024 found airports are New Zealand's highest-rated infrastructure type,[1] and the National Infrastructure Plan 2026 found that airport infrastructure is meeting New Zealanders' needs.[2]

Airports invest over decades in runways, terminals and other essential facilities. Stable regulatory settings give them the confidence to commit to those long-term assets, while independent oversight tests whether the prices airports charge are reasonable.

Confidence in the rules supports timely investment and the capacity needed for growth, resilience and airline competition.

However, in the last 18 months airport regulatory settings have been reviewed three times. While each review has found the system is generally working well, constant review brings uncertainty to a sector that has to make long-term decisions.

Consumers benefit when airport investment is well planned, efficiently delivered and subject to effective consultation and independent scrutiny.

The next government should bring stability to these settings, because consistent evidence shows they are working for consumers.

Our ask of the next government

- **Retain the system that is working.** The information-disclosure regime and the Civil Aviation Act 2023 are together driving the right outcomes for consumers.
- **Keep requirements proportionate.** Maintain predictable requirements that give airports, airlines and investors confidence to make efficient long-term infrastructure decisions.

3. Protect airports' ability to operate and grow

Ensure the new planning system safeguards airport operations and the capacity communities will need in the future.

Airports cannot readily relocate. Safe and efficient operations depend on managing aircraft noise, the height of buildings and structures, and activities on surrounding land. If incompatible development is allowed nearby, it can constrain services and make future expansion more difficult and costly.

Resource management reform is an opportunity to recognise these needs early. National direction, regional spatial plans and local planning decisions should protect existing operations and provide for future growth, while appropriately managing effects on neighbouring communities.

[1] Ipsos, *Global Infrastructure Index 2024: New Zealand edition*, 18 October 2024. Airports were rated very or fairly good quality by 81 percent of New Zealanders, the highest of the ten infrastructure types surveyed, against a global average of 72 percent. Survey of 1,001 New Zealand adults, May to June 2024. www.ipsos.com/en-nz/2024-global-infrastructure-index-nz-edition

[2] New Zealand Infrastructure Commission, Te Waihanga, *National Infrastructure Plan 2026*, sector summary: Airports. The Plan states that "overall, it appears airport infrastructure is meeting New Zealanders' needs," and reports investment to depreciation ratios at New Zealand's three largest airports averaging nearly 250 percent between 2016 and 2024. tewaihanga.govt.nz/national-infrastructure-plan-online/sector-summaries/airports

Our ask of the next government

- **Recognise airports in national direction.** Provide clearly for their operational and functional needs as essential infrastructure.
- **Protect the operating envelope.** Safeguard noise contours, obstacle limitation surfaces, safety areas and land required for future airport development before incompatible land uses become established.
- **Preserve designations.** Keep existing designations effective and give airport master plans meaningful weight through the transition to the new planning system.
- **Engage airports early.** Involve airports in spatial planning from the outset and provide timely, proportionate consenting pathways, while appropriately managing effects on neighbouring communities.

4. Back tourism and international connectivity

Make it easier to visit New Zealand and support air services that deliver lasting value to the economy and regions.

International visitors spent $18.1 billion in New Zealand in the year ended March 2025, generating approximately $1.9 billion in GST.[3] That spending supports businesses and jobs across New Zealand, and competitive visitor settings and international air connectivity are essential to growing it.

Recent visa improvements provide a platform for growth. The Australian visa recognition trial gives eligible Chinese visitors a simpler, lower-cost way to include New Zealand in their trip. Improvements for Pacific visitors also demonstrate the value of making travel settings more affordable and predictable.

The next government should evaluate these initiatives, retain arrangements that work and consider opportunities to extend them to other suitable markets.

New international air services require coordinated action. Airports and airlines carry the commercial risk, while visa policy, border processing, tourism promotion and agency readiness strongly influence whether a service can be established and sustained.

Our ask of the next government

- **Keep visitor settings competitive.** Maintain visa costs, settings and processing times that are internationally competitive, retaining successful visa-facilitation initiatives and considering suitable opportunities to extend them.
- **Coordinate promotion and air-service development.** Attract commercially sustainable international capacity that delivers national and regional benefits.
- **Keep air services arrangements responsive.** Ensure bilateral capacity settings do not constrain commercially viable new services.
- **Engage border agencies early.** Work with agencies on viable new services, with clear responsibilities, proportionate costs and agreed delivery dates.
- **Invest in passenger processing.** Fund secure digital passenger processing and more flexible operating models to improve efficiency and the passenger experience.

[3] Stats NZ, *Tourism satellite account: Year ended March 2025*, released 3 March 2026. International tourism expenditure was $18.1 billion, up 7.0 percent ($1.2 billion) on the previous year. GST on international tourism expenditure is reported in the accompanying data tables. www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/tourism-satellite-account-year-ended-march-2025/

Our commitment to the next government

NZ Airports will work constructively with the next government to deliver a more efficient, resilient and growth-focused aviation system.

We will bring the practical experience of the airport network to implementing and refreshing the Aviation Action Plan.

We will work with government, airlines and other aviation partners to:

- progress proportionate, risk-based aviation rules and coordinated investment in security and air traffic services;
- strengthen airport, fuel-supply and wider aviation-system resilience;
- develop sustainable arrangements for the essential public-good and resilience services regional airports provide; and
- prepare for future fuels, aircraft and passenger-processing technologies through coordinated standards and infrastructure planning.

We welcome engagement with all political parties and will help agree practical actions, responsibilities and measures of progress for the next term.