



MEDIA RELEASE

Rail & Maritime Transport Union

16 December 2019

Government commitment to future of rail will save lives and combat climate change

Plans announced for the future of New Zealand's railways will save lives and strengthen the economy, and the Rail & Maritime Transport Union says the announcements highlight the importance of voting to keep National out in 2020.

Transport Minister Phil Twyford has released a draft New Zealand Rail Plan that sets out a path to incorporate rail planning and funding alongside road and public transport under the Land Transport Management Act.

"It may seem dry to some at first glance, but these are not just legalistic changes or branding exercises. This is a much needed revolution in transport policy," says RMTU National Secretary Wayne Butson.

"Rail was nearly destroyed in this country by the privatising National government of the 1990s, and under John Key was allowed to fall into unnecessary managed decline. This Labour-led government finally treats rail with the seriousness it deserves, and these policy announcements represent the first concrete plans we've seen in over a decade to put our country's transport system back on solid ground."

The freight tonnage transported by rail is expected to increase by 55 percent by 2042, and ageing stock and inventory around the country is in need of replacement.

The government is committing to shift an increasing proportion of freight away from heavy trucks and onto New Zealand's rail network, in order to reduce congestion, reduce carbon emissions, improve safety outcomes and reduce road maintenance.

“As the smoke from Australian bush fires stains New Zealand glaciers the colour of old blood, we are all forced to consider the burning urgency of confronting and defeating climate change,” says Mr Butson.

“The only way to do that is through a dramatic reduction in carbon emissions, and the only way to do that is by replacing dirty and inefficient modes of transport with cleaner and greener technology. Rail is the future we’ve been waiting for, and we don’t have any time to delay.”

The union is particularly pleased to see commitments in the government’s strategic planning to consider further electrification of the North Island Main Trunk between Auckland and Wellington, and the East Coast Main Trunk between Auckland and Tauranga.

With New Zealand’s road toll continuing to hit shameful levels of injury and death, anything that can be done to reduce these grim statistics is urgently necessary.

In a 2016 study commissioned by the Ministry of Transport it was estimated rail eliminates around 271 accidents per year by reducing the volume of heavy transport on public roads.

“For too long, we have allowed our roads to become death traps,” says Mr Butson.

“An overreliance on freight trucking has seen the quality of our roads deteriorate under heavy wheels, as tired drivers working long shifts for low pay endanger the lives of everyone around them. Rail is far safer than road transport for all concerned, and frankly it is shameful that the lobbying interests of the trucking industry were valued more by the National government than the lives of their own citizens.”

As the stage is set for a long overdue rebalancing of New Zealand’s transport system, the RMTU calls on everyone with an interest in the sector to prioritise its future when they decide on who to vote for next year.

“Labour governments have come up with excellent plans for the transport sector before, but they tend to be announced rather late term,” says Mr Butson.

“For safety, for economic security, for the environment and for all the regional towns and struggling communities out there that want a fair suck of the sav, we need to re-elect a government that has proven its commitment to the future of rail.”

ENDS

For further information, please contact:

Wayne Butson

General Secretary
Rail & Maritime Transport Union
Mobile: 027 496 2461
Office: 04 473 6693