

# Statement of Intent 2021-2025



**WALKINGACCESS**  
ARA HĪKOI AOTEAROA

**NEW ZEALAND WALKING ACCESS COMMISSION  
ARA HĪKOI AOTEAROA**

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# Statement from the Board

This Statement of Intent (SOI) sets out what the New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa intends to achieve or contribute to over the next four years and how we will manage our functions and operations to meet our intentions.

This SOI is produced in accordance with s141 of the Crown Entities Act 2004.

When the Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa was first established it was to help people reach an outdoor destination, be it a fishing spot, hunting spot, or a mountain. Normally access was over private land and walking was the main way of getting there.

Over time, our work has changed. Many more people are walking and cycling for the journey and the experience, rather than to get to a specific destination. The initial COVID-19 lockdown emphasised how strongly people want to enjoy the outdoors.

This shift from demand for access, to demand for an experience and a journey now shapes much of our work. This new form of access connects closely with the stories about our land, our shared history, and valuing our environment. People expect these connections as part of their journey to special places.

In the early days the commission's functions, as listed in the Walking Access Act, helped us:

- ensure the rights of public access where they exist
- resolve disputes about land, and
- negotiate new access.

The development of our mapping system was integral to this.

The report on the Act review noted that the three most important things that people value about the commission's work are:

- the network of regional field advisors working to resolve walking access issues through discussion and negotiation
- the outdoor mapping system, and
- our focus on integrity, transparency and patience.

A key strength of our work is 'the breadth of our stride'. Many other stakeholder agencies are limited by either land boundaries or statutory boundaries. The commission can work across all land types and with anyone. We work with individual land holders, iwi and hapū, trails groups, national advocacy groups, councils, and central government agencies and departments. We were able to put doors in the walls between them and facilitate collaborative outcomes.

Negotiating access to destinations remain crucial. It is the bedrock of what we do. But we are also developing a new leadership role as specified in our legal functions. Our leadership focuses on helping local and regional communities to develop new journeys and experiences across the land. Our broad stride and experience facilitating other organisations towards a shared goal has given us the skills we need as we grow this leadership role.

These new journeys are crucial to Aotearoa New Zealand's regional economic development, our community connectedness, our mental and physical wellbeing and our connections to our environment and history.

This new leadership role shapes much of our strategic direction for the years to come.



Don Cameron

Chair

15 June 2021



Lisa Chase

Board Member

15 June 2021

# Strategic overview 2021-2025

## Purpose

Our purpose is to provide people with free, certain, enduring and practical access to the whenua.

### **The New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa**

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hīkoi Aotearoa is the Crown agent responsible for providing leadership on access to the outdoors. We administer a national strategy on outdoor access, including tracks and trails. We map outdoor access, provide information to the public, oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors, help to resolve access disputes and negotiate new access.

The Walking Access Act 2008 is our governing legislation. The commission has an office in Wellington and a network of regional field advisors throughout New Zealand. An independent board governs our work.

To secure public access across a variety of land types, the commission works with other government agencies such as the Department of Conservation (DOC), Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) and Waka Kotahi, and alongside local government, iwi, private land holders, industry representatives and community groups.

We recognise mana whenua rights and interests in whenua. We ensure mana whenua can uphold kaitiakitanga over land. We partner with iwi, hapū and other Māori organisations. We work with Te Arawhiti in our interactions with tangata whenua.

# Strategic context

## Legal and political expectations

The direction for our work comes from three sources:

1. The Walking Access Act 2008. This provides our statutory purpose — to provide the New Zealand public with free, certain, enduring, and practical access to the outdoors.
2. Recommendations from the independent review of the Walking Access Act 2008. This report recommends the commission expand its scope to partner more closely with Māori, integrate with Te Araroa, provide greater support to tracks and trails groups and continue its strategic regional work.
3. The Minister's letter of expectations 2021. The Minister also requires the commission to progress its strategic regional projects, continue progressing its Māori partnership and engagement strategy and implement non-legislative recommendations from the review of the Walking Access Act 2008.

## Environmental influences

The following factors in our current environment inform our strategy:

- people want to connect to our shared history through the land. In particular mana whenua want to protect places of historical significance and ensure the history linked to those sites is part of New Zealand's general historical record
- better connections to whenua and between communities support the government's wellbeing approach and all four capitals in Treasury's Livings Standards Framework: natural, human, social and financial
- a better network of active transport tracks and trails help us respond to climate change by reducing our carbon emissions and adapting to the worst effects before they cause damage and destruction
- improved access to the outdoors and to outdoor recreation improves people's mental and physical wellbeing
- enabling and promoting active transport improves health, reduces congestion, protects the environment, and connects communities
- supporting the rapidly growing numbers of community groups seeking support, funding, advice and connections enables them to create new public access, for recreational, social and economic benefits
- supporting iwi access to culturally significant sites and areas provides opportunities for Māori kaitiakitanga and motuhaketanga, and
- developing local tracks in the wake of COVID-19 supports the many New Zealanders who are looking for ways to connect with the outdoors.

# Strategic framework

## **Our purpose — Te mauri o te hīkoi**

New Zealanders value our connection to te taiao. Our purpose is to connect people and places. We will work to provide people with free, certain, enduring and practical access to the whenua.

We want a network of tracks, trails and public access that allow people to walk out their front door into nature. We want people to be able to walk, bike or ride horses - for recreation and to connect with whenua. We also want to connect people to ngā hapori whanui, their whanau, their schools, shops and gathering places.

## **Our mission - What we intend to achieve**

We will lead national development and support local public access to the outdoors. We are the organisation that helps communities link together so that they can work collectively to share access to whenua.

We will work with central and local government agencies, iwi, hapū, organisations and community groups to create public access opportunities that support healthy and prosperous communities.

## **Our outcomes and priorities**

The following outcomes are important to our success:

- managed access is available where and when it will add most value to communities
- people know how to find access
- people access the outdoors responsibly

We will achieve these outcomes through our ongoing daily work and implementing the Minister's five priorities for the commission that arise from the Report on the Findings of the Review of the Walking Access Act 2008 and the Minister's letter of expectations 2021.

The Minister's five priorities for the commission are:

### **1. Regional projects**

Progress our strategic regional projects in Tairāwhiti, Franklin-North Waikato and Matakana. The leadership we provide on these regional projects helps communities work together to develop a comprehensive network of tracks and trails that connect them to the environment and each other.

By coordinating trails groups, mana whenua, local government, private landholders and government agencies communities can develop networks of tracks and trails that meet different needs. These needs could include, health, community well-being, active transport, protecting our shared culture and heritage, and caring for our environment.



## **2. Te Araroa Trail**

Continue to develop our partnership with Te Araroa Trust, developing and improving management of the trail. Te Araroa is growing from being a trail for a small number of dedicated through-walkers to a trail that all New Zealanders can enjoy and complete in segments over their lifetime. Our expertise in mapping and in helping move walking trails off busy roads means the Trust and its local volunteers can focus on implementing its strategy.

## **3. Māori partnership and engagement**

Continue progressing our Māori partnership and engagement strategy, to address barriers to public access and supporting wider-government efforts to unlock the potential of Māori heritage and history. The commission is learning how we can work more closely with Māori groups. As we lift our capability we are better able to support the Crown's Tiriti obligations and to support Māori mana motuhake.

## **4. Collaborate with tracks and trails groups**

Build our support for regional and local volunteer groups and trusts involved in walkways, tracks, trails and public access to the New Zealand outdoors. Many of Aotearoa New Zealand's tracks and trails are built and maintained by groups of volunteers. We can support these local people with their important mahi by facilitating their meetings with central and local government agencies, and by providing advice, a community space to share ideas, and grants to help secure legal public access.

We will also promote and lead engagement between these groups and local hapū and iwi.

## **5. Cycling infrastructure**

Continue to incorporate cycling access alongside walking access negotiation and development. Cycling is becoming ever more popular both as a mode of active transport and as a recreation and tourist activity. We can help retrofit good cycling infrastructure to our existing tracks and trails as well as develop new cycleways.

Cycling infrastructure is a key priority for many local councils and government agencies. We have expertise to support these organisations to develop their cycle path networks.

# Our outputs - How we deliver

Our ongoing work also contributes to these outcomes. The outputs we intend to deliver on our outcomes are:

## Outcome 1: Managed access is available where and when it will add most value to communities

### Outputs:

- Regional communities will have strategies to develop links to their local communities and special places. Outdoor access for people living in peri-urban areas of Tairāwhiti, Franklin and Matakana will improve.
- More of Te Araroa will journey through scenic off road-trails rather than on open roads. This will give walkers a safer and more enjoyable journey.
- Māori will have improved access to wāhi tapu and other special places.
- Trails groups will be able to share information with each other to improve their capacity to develop networks of public access.
- More shared pathways will allow people to connect to their communities by cycling as well as walking.
- Community and recreational groups will be able to access the outdoors because of agreements with landholders, recreationists and local authorities.

Our current output measures track how we:

- facilitate and lead public outdoor access
- facilitate resolution of access disputes
- manage the Enhanced Access Grants, and
- engage with communities.

# Outcome 2: People know how to find access

## Outputs:

- More tracks and trails will tell the stories of tangata whenua through improved signs and greater collaboration with local iwi and hapū.
- Local groups will use our digital mapping system to develop networks of tracks and trails that they can share with their regional communities.
- More people will use our high-quality digital mapping systems. Our partnerships with organisations such as LINZ, DOC and councils, ensure our maps remain up-to-date and accurate.

Our current output measures track how we:

- manage our access mapping system, and
- provide tracks and trails information.

# Outcome 3: People access the outdoors responsibly

## Outputs:

- Regional trail groups will develop trail networks in consultation with environmental and conservation organisations.
- Trail designs will improve tracks and protect the safety of walkers and bikers. Cyclists and walkers will have a better knowledge of how to share trails.
- More people will be aware of information about behaving responsibly outdoors contained in the Outdoor Access Code.

Our current output measures track our:

- school education programmes
- digital-led behaviour change initiatives, and
- monitoring of walkway compliance.

Early in the period 2021-2025 we will undertake a review of our performance management framework so we can better report how we are achieving our outcomes.

# Financial position

The Walking Access Commission receives its annual funding by an annual appropriation from the Crown, as part of Vote Primary Industries (MPI).

When the commission was first established in 2008, the level of its baseline funding was set at \$1.789 million. This funding level remained unchanged for the next 10 years.

In 2018, the commission changed its strategic direction and operational delivery. This resulted in an increased workload, with the need to recruit additional staff, and the need for the commission to invest in infrastructure, particularly IT hardware and systems.

To fund its increased workload, the commission made the decision to reduce its existing cash reserves. The overall effect of this, was to use those cash reserves to fund projected shortfalls between the commission's annual funding and its annual expenditure. As part of its forward financial planning the commission projected that by late 2021 those existing cash reserves would be depleted.

The Walking Access Act 2008 was reviewed in 2019. The review found "resounding support for the ongoing necessity of the Act and of the New Zealand Walking Access Commission".

The review made 30 recommendations for changes to the commission's legislation and its operational focus, including increased funding.

In order to address the forecast shortfall in its existing cash reserves, the commission needed to increase its baseline budget to meet both operational and inflationary pressures. New funding was sought through a formal budget bid, as part of the government's Budget 2021 process.

The budget bid covered the commission's funding of existing activities as well as additional funding for:

- the management and ongoing sustainable support for the iconic Te Araroa trail, and
- improving the commission's engagement and partnerships with iwi and Māori across the country, as per its obligations as a Crown agent.

In May 2020, the commission was informed that its budget bid had been successful for an additional two years to June 2022.

In October 2021, the commission will make a budget bid to extend its existing baseline budget, and to fund non-legislative changes recommended by the Report on the Findings of the Review of the Walking Access Act 2008.

The commission is also planning to use some of its remaining cash reserves, where appropriate, to fund one-off capital projects when it is cost effective to do so.

# Organisational health and capability

## Our systems

Information technology (IT) is critical to the success of the commission. Many of our key resources are digital. These include our mapping system and website. We manage our internal records via SharePoint and we undertake our case management using ActionStep.

The commission is committed to managing the inherent IT risks involved in delivering many of our resources online. Our risk management practices ensure the resources we allocate to manage our systems are sufficient to mitigate key risks such as outages, data loss and privacy breaches or leaks.

## Managing our health and capability

The commission's board ensures that it has the skills and expertise to exercise good governance. It has a formal governance policy and undertakes an annual self-review. The commission is committed to being a good employer (as defined in the Crown Entities Act 2004). Our success relies on stakeholders viewing the commission as independent, responsive, and credible. We are committed to:

- maintaining a culture where staff feel valued, enjoy coming to work and share a commitment to excellence
- recruiting on an equal opportunity basis
- providing for flexible working arrangements where appropriate
- incorporating a spirit of service into our work, in accordance with the Public Services Act 2020
- using a performance review process to help manage employee development, and
- having a health and safety policy to support a productive and safe work environment.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The commission reports its progress towards achieving the outcomes and impacts in this document each year in our annual report.

Forecast financial statements and measures developed to assess performance are available separately in our Statement of Performance Expectations (SPE). We review the SPE annually, in conjunction with Audit New Zealand, to ensure the financial forecast statements are current and the performance measures remain fit for purpose.

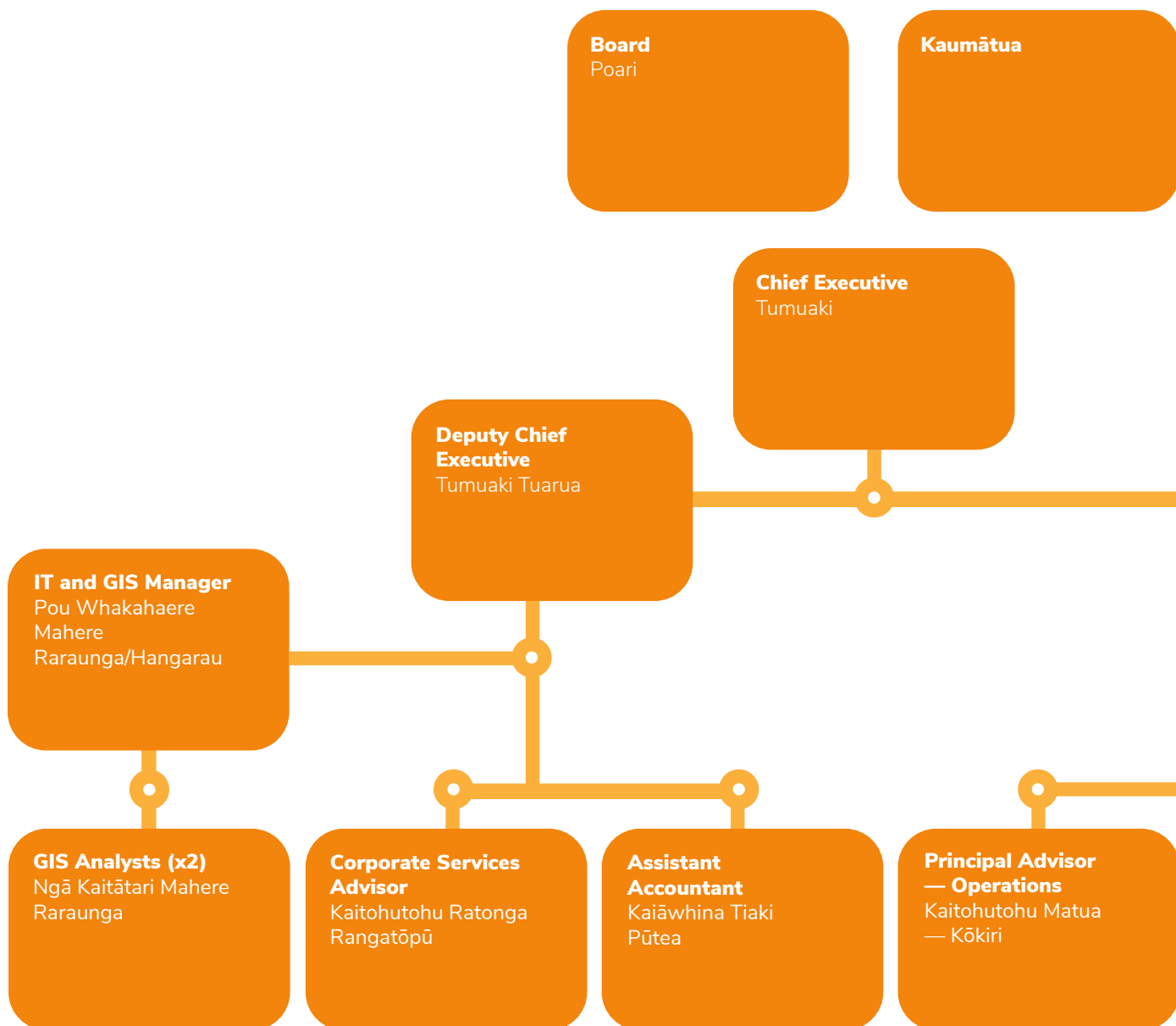
We measure performance by monitoring internal operational information and, where necessary, external surveys.

# Our people

The commission's capability comprises its board, a skilled team and relevant GIS systems and technology. We employ this capability to achieve our statutory functions, and the objectives outlined in this Statement of Intent.

The commission is a small organisation that works to develop a collaborative culture that values the input of all staff. It has a team of 14 staff (12.8 FTE) working from its Wellington office and 12 part-time contractors (3.7 FTE) working as regional field advisors around New Zealand. The main role of the regional field advisors is to liaise with key stakeholders, the public, user groups, and local authorities.

The commission also has a kaumātua to advise board and staff members on tikanga Māori and to assist us to establish, build and maintain partnerships with Māori in respect of access matters.



# Supporting equity and diversity

The commission is committed to supporting equity and diversity within the organisation. It strives to treat people fairly and respectfully, ensuring equality of access to opportunities, as well as understanding and appreciating the benefits of individual differences.

The commission believes it benefits from having a diverse workforce. We are committed to recognising and valuing different skills, experiences, specialties, and perspectives of staff.

The commission's equal employment opportunities policy commits to making employment decisions based on relevant merit. It treats all employee and job applicants fairly, regardless of their age, gender, disability, employment status, ethnicity, involvement in union activities, marital or family status, political opinion, religious or ethical beliefs, or sexual orientation. The commission also expects all contractors it works with to have equitable employment practices.



# Risk management

The commission regularly assesses risks and mitigation measures to manage potential vulnerabilities. This ensures we are able to meet our objectives and maintain our performance when we face challenges and adversity.

Risk	Response
<p>Increased awareness of the commission's value, services, products, skills, and expertise may generate resource pressures.</p>	<p>We will clearly communicate priorities to staff and direct resources to our statutory functions and to achieving the outcomes of this Statement of Intent. We will seek additional funding to meet operational need.</p>
<p>The Review of the Walking Access Act 2008 and the positive report it generated may exacerbate this risk. Stakeholders could expect significant growth in the commission's capacity and capability because of the report's recommendations.</p>	<p>The commission will explain to stakeholders that Cabinet has made no decisions relating to the review of the Walking Access Act 2008 or changed funding levels. Therefore, we cannot implement the recommendations.</p>
<p>Losing key personnel results in a loss of institutional knowledge.</p> <p>Relying on part-time contractors to fill Regional Field Advisor roles presents a risk. These roles are critical for maintaining on-the-ground relationships with key stakeholders. Losing personnel and therefore organisational relationships is likely.</p>	<p>We will manage this by widening the commission's internal skill and knowledge base.</p> <p>Our small number of staff makes it easier to communicate with each other and share information. But because there is little duplication in roles, there is a high risk that important information is held by a single person.</p> <p>Our case management database will continue to allow new Regional Field Advisors to learn about past work in their area.</p>
<p>Our IT systems could be disrupted by failure of provider systems, security failure, failure to deliver on objectives, or an inability to maintain an appropriate level of investment.</p>	<p>These risks will change over time. To mitigate these risks, we need to engage with service providers and constantly review our investment in IT systems.</p>
<p>If we do not invest enough in digital systems, they may become obsolete and we may not be able to replace them, or they may become increasingly prone to malfunction.</p>	<p>We will seek additional funding so we can continually maintain and improve systems so they remain functional and relevant.</p>
<p>If we do not receive additional short-term base-line funding, we risk reducing our capacity and capability. This creates a risk to our reputation as an honest and authoritative broker and a trustworthy agency.</p>	<p>We will seek additional funding to ensure levels of staffing, activity, and service do not compromise delivery operation.</p>
<p>Losing key staff, regional field advisors, board members or specialist contractors for an undetermined period because of the COVID-19 pandemic is a risk.</p>	<p>We will quickly disseminate precautionary measures to help stop the spread of the virus to staff, regional field advisors and board members. We will encourage working from home, flexible working arrangements and use of digital technology.</p>
<p>There is a risk that the commission does not fulfill its Tiriti obligations or engage appropriately with iwi.</p> <p>The commission's reputation and operations are at risk if we do not have a cohesive Māori engagement strategy.</p>	<p>We have developed an engagement and partnership strategy. We are implementing that plan by building our internal capacity and capability, and having appropriate performance reporting measures in place.</p>
<p>Local government, landholders and the public hold differing views about the law and processes involved in managing and resolving access problems. This creates tension when managing public and private interests.</p>	<p>The commission will meet with concerned parties, providing independent and accurate advice and information.</p>











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New Zealand Government

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