



Election Manifesto 2026

Great people working in a safe and sustainable civil construction industry, delivering quality infrastructure to enable our communities to thrive.

The civil construction industry builds the roots that New Zealand communities need to grow and flourish.

Civil Contractors New Zealand is the only industry association that solely represents the horizontal construction sector. As a national association with 12 branches across New Zealand, we provide a voice for more than 850 member businesses and organisations and work to support a healthy civil construction industry.

Our contractor members undertake approximately \$12 billion in capital and maintenance works each year, and employ approximately 60,000 people. We are committed to achieving a vibrant, busy and active civil contracting sector, delivering the infrastructure New Zealand communities need to thrive.

The industry is responsible for the physical construction and maintenance of horizontal infrastructure, including water, transport, seawalls and stopbanks, building foundations, cables, pipelines, ports, airports, public spaces and more.

This Election Manifesto has been informed by our members. We hosted twelve workshops across the country – one for each of our regional branches in Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay East Coast, Manawatū Whanganui, Wellington Wairarapa, Nelson Marlborough, Canterbury Westland, Otago, and Southland. Thank you to all of our members who provided feedback.

New Zealand is facing an infrastructure deficit, documented by the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission's National Infrastructure plan which identifies 11,925 projects worth \$275 billion currently in planning or delivery, with more than two-thirds of that value, \$193 billion, not yet fully funded.

The Plan also identifies that New Zealand is one of the top-spending OECD countries on infrastructure, but one of the bottom-ranking countries for efficiency and value for money. Consenting alone costs infrastructure projects \$1.3 billion each year. Projects are often announced without proper planning, maintenance and renewals are sometimes deferred in favour of new capital investment, pushing costs onto future generations.

The current boom-bust cycle of the pipeline is highlighted in the National Construction Pipeline Report 2025 as negatively impacting productivity, innovation, employment, skill levels and quality in the construction sector. Civil contractors are part of the solution. They need Government to understand their needs to make real change, in partnership.

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Civil Contractors New Zealand calls on political parties to recognise the industry's needs and work with the country's civil contractors to ensure the right settings are in place to build the infrastructure that will underpin New Zealand's economic growth, support thriving communities, and improve the quality of life for all New Zealanders now and for generations to come. We have put together this Election Manifesto to share the priorities of our industry with the incoming government.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Pollard', written in a cursive style.

Alan Pollard
Chief Executive Officer
Civil Contractors New Zealand



The civil construction industry's priorities at a glance

1 Ensure a stable, depoliticised pipeline of work

The biggest challenge facing the civil construction industry is an uncertain pipeline of work, driven largely by the influence of central and local government. The resulting boom-bust cycles create significant uncertainty across the sector and a range of negative flow-on effects for contractors and their workforce. Our recommendations for the incoming government include:

- Establish a long-term, cross-party infrastructure pipeline
- Establish independent accountability for infrastructure pipeline delivery
- Support local government reform that improves infrastructure delivery
- Recognise the true value of infrastructure

2 Optimise procurement practices

Current procurement practices are not always fit for purpose, often being inconsistent, inefficient, lacking transparency and creating unnecessary burden and cost for both civil contractors and New Zealanders in general. Our recommendations for the incoming government include:

- Implement a procurement framework that applies the Government Procurement Rules consistently across central and local government
- Introduce accountability processes for clients
- Embed early contractor involvement (ECI) into procurement practices

3 Decrease compliance and regulatory costs

The compliance and regulatory environment for civil contractors is increasingly complex, costly, and disconnected from the practical realities of infrastructure delivery. Our recommendations for the incoming government include:

- Implement a common-sense approach to compliance and regulation
- Build in feedback from industry when regulations are developed, to ensure they are practical and fit for purpose
- Support practical, risk-based, right-sized work site safety

4 Build workforce capability and capacity

The civil construction industry faces ongoing challenges in retaining a skilled workforce, driven largely by the inconsistent pipeline and lack of connection between skills trained by contractors and qualifications provided through the education system.

- Funding mechanisms and incentives for apprenticeships and on the job training
- Improve work readiness and connection to the school system
- Support civil construction trade apprenticeships
- Recognise and deliver infrastructure trade skills and qualifications
- Recognise civil infrastructure as an essential workforce
- Improve immigration settings in civil construction, particularly where skills are not delivered by the education system

5 Infrastructure resilience and sustainability

New Zealand's infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to climate change, severe weather events, and aging assets, and civil contractors continue to carry disproportionate liability risk when responding to emergencies and natural disasters. Our recommendations for the incoming government include:

- Formal recognition of civil contractors as essential first-response partners
- Prioritising infrastructure resilience
- Create a formal package of infrastructure resilience works projects
- Supporting innovation and sustainability



Priority 1

Ensure a stable, depoliticised pipeline of work

“We are riding a rollercoaster – when we go down there’s an exodus, and when we go up there’s always a struggle.” – Canterbury Westland Workshop

The biggest challenge our industry faces is an uncertain pipeline of work. The pipeline of infrastructure projects is heavily influenced by the government of the day and both central and local government funding cycles. The majority of the horizontal construction sector’s clients are central or local government. This influence results in ‘boom-bust cycles’ that create many negative flow-on effects for civil contractors, generate uncertainty across the industry and escalate costs for clients.



Credit - Pipeline & Civil

A change of government often results in projects from the previous government being cancelled or paused, even when these projects have significant planning and investment behind them. The lack of cross-party support for infrastructure projects shows a short-term project focus, rather than a focus on long-term, sustained infrastructure development.

Likewise, the pipeline of projects tendered by local councils is politically vulnerable, and significantly impacted by funding cycles. Our members experience ‘busts’ when councils and agencies are planning for the next funding cycle and ‘booms’ towards the end of funding cycles.

The absence of a stable pipeline makes it difficult for businesses to invest in workforce, plant and equipment, and technology/innovation. The lack of confidence in the current model limits the ability of businesses to scale and deliver when the pipeline recovers. There is little trust any project will go ahead until it is publicly tendered. If businesses do scale during the recovery, this becomes unsustainable as the pipeline slows down again.

Installing a pipeline at Puketutu Island.

Credit - Russell Green



Ensure a stable, depoliticised pipeline of work

Establish a long-term, cross-party infrastructure pipeline

- Commit to cross-party, long-term infrastructure planning supported by safeguards that adequately fund infrastructure construction and maintenance, and prevent approved projects from being cancelled. This will ensure continuity regardless of changes in government.
- Infrastructure planning should be right-sized evidence and data-driven, informed by independent advice, and must include planned maintenance for core infrastructure.



Credit - Pipeline & Civil

Establish independent accountability for infrastructure pipeline delivery

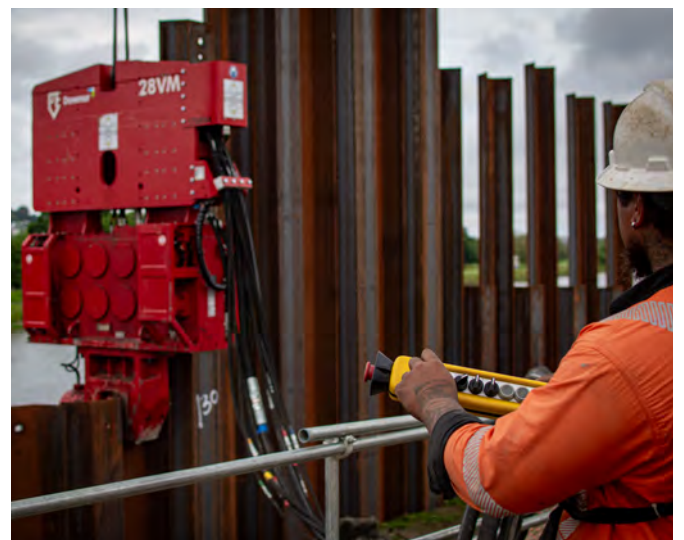
- Ensure there is an independent agency with the authority to monitor, report on, and hold central and local government accountable for the delivery of committed infrastructure projects, with findings reported publicly on a regular basis and formal input from industry.
- Multiple agencies provide independent advice about infrastructure projects. Yet no agency, from Treasury and the Office of the Auditor General to the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission, currently has the mandate to hold infrastructure providers accountable for delivery.

Support local government reform that improves infrastructure delivery

- Ensure changes to local government and government agencies result in the scale, financial capacity, and expertise to plan and procure civil infrastructure effectively over the long term.
- Consider whether amalgamation or shared service arrangements would deliver better outcomes for communities and more consistent work pipelines for the construction sector.

Recognise the true value of infrastructure

- Require infrastructure investment decisions to account for the full social and economic value of infrastructure, not just upfront capital cost.
- Develop and promote a broader range of sustainable funding and financing mechanisms for infrastructure such as tolling, water metering, and asset recycling.
- Recognise the cost of cancellation, deferral and delay of projects.



Installing sheet piling. Credit - Kian Belk, Downer

Priority 2

Optimise procurement

“Bureaucracy shouldn’t block the work – it should enable it.”

– Manawatū Whanganui Workshop

Current procurement practices are not always fit for purpose, often being inconsistent, inefficient, lacking transparency and creating unnecessary burden and cost for both civil contractors and New Zealanders in general.

Councils, council-controlled organisations, and government agencies all have varying procurement practices and different expectations about what is required from civil contractors, in particular with regard to pre-qualifications, non-price attributes, and compliance processes. Sometimes these expectations aren’t well-grounded in good practice, and much information provided through the tender process often appears to be largely ignored, with decisions made based on lowest price.

Rather than adding value through robust processes that ensure quality and successful delivery, this can increase overheads and drive unproductive work as contractors attempt to meet these varied requirements, ultimately adding to the cost of delivering essential infrastructure. This is compounded by poor planning, impractical timeline restrictions, and lengthy consenting processes, resulting in project delays that contractors often carry the risk for.

There is often a disconnect between project requirements and the practical realities of projects, with overly complex and risk-averse pre-qualification, compliance and documentation requirements. The fragmentation between clients, consultants and contractors results in poorer long-term outcomes, higher costs, and reduced productivity.

Lowest-price conforming bids are widely used for procurement practices but do not result in the best outcomes. This method of procurement fails to account for the quality, experience, and long-term performance of contractors and drives a race to the bottom. The true cost of a project is rarely recognised in the lowest bid price, and selecting the lowest bidder can result in cost overruns, project delays or ‘cut corners’.

For local councils in particular, there is a lack of accountability around delivering funded projects and their capital budgets in a timely manner. While councils are audited by the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG), there appear to be no meaningful consequences for underperformance or under-delivery until the situation becomes critical, at which point the local contracting industry and the community have already suffered the consequences of neglect.

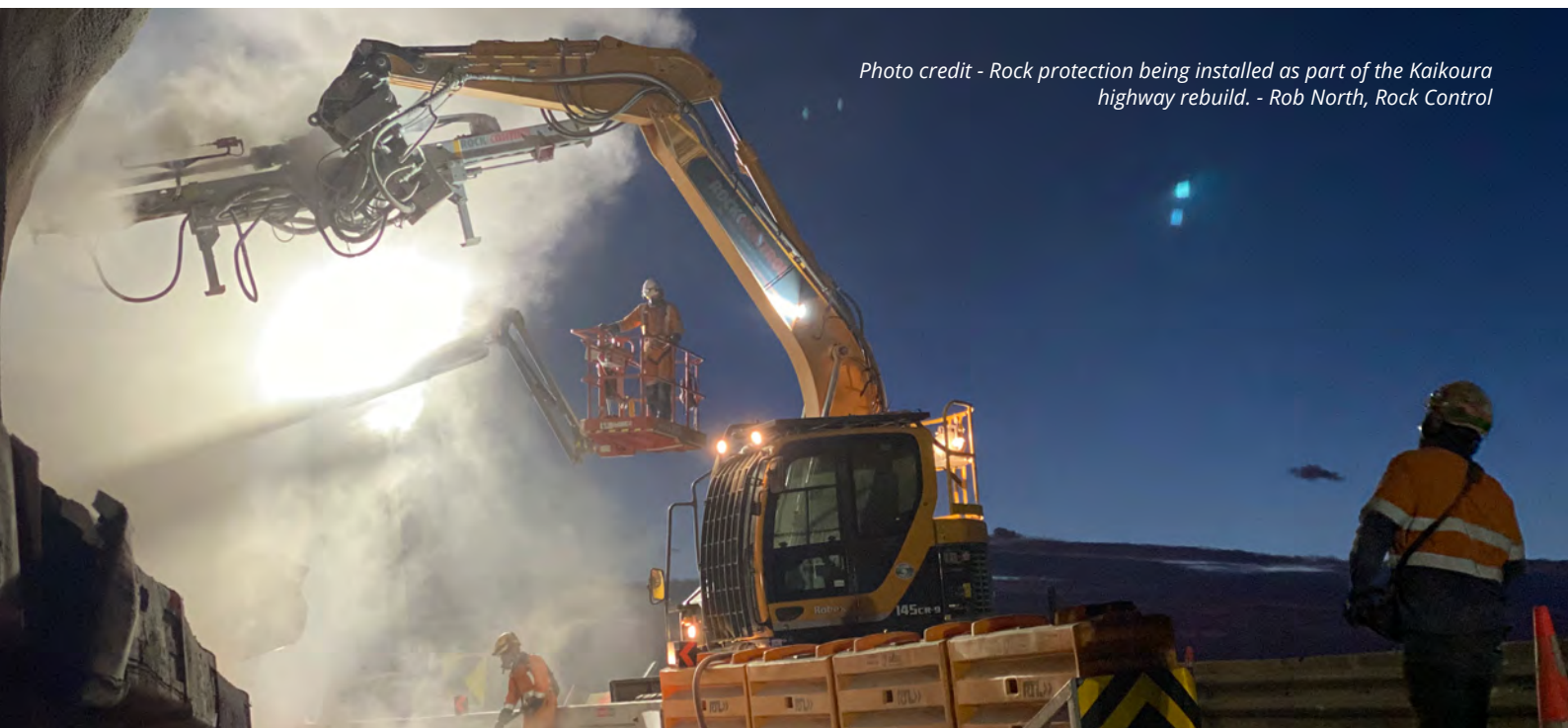


Photo credit - Rock protection being installed as part of the Kaikoura highway rebuild. - Rob North, Rock Control

Optimise procurement

Implement a procurement framework that applies the Government Procurement Rules consistently across central and local government

- Implement a nationally consistent procurement framework for civil infrastructure across central and local government agencies.
- Consider what measures are needed to lift compliance and ensure the framework is meaningfully followed.

“Six weeks to tender a project, three weeks to bid, another six weeks to regulate, and one week for contractors to be on site building - the weight isn't distributed evenly”

- Nelson Marlborough workshop.



Installation of a new 1500dia stormwater pipe.
Credit - Michelle Hoffmann, E.N Ramsbottom Contractors

Introduce accountability processes for clients

- Establish and enforce accountability processes including transparent reporting on delivery performance, budget adherence, and project outcomes with consequences for clients that fail to deliver committed infrastructure programmes.
- Mandate a competency framework for officials responsible for infrastructure capital and maintenance spend that also ensures project readiness before procurement commences.

- Establish a formal feedback mechanism through which civil contractors can report on client performance.

Where appropriate, embed early contractor involvement (ECI) into procurement practices

- Require ECI as a standard component of procurement for infrastructure projects, allowing meaningful engagement between clients, consultants, and contractors.
- Develop guidance for clients on how to implement ECI effectively, including how to structure remuneration, manage conflicts of interest, and transition from ECI into delivery.

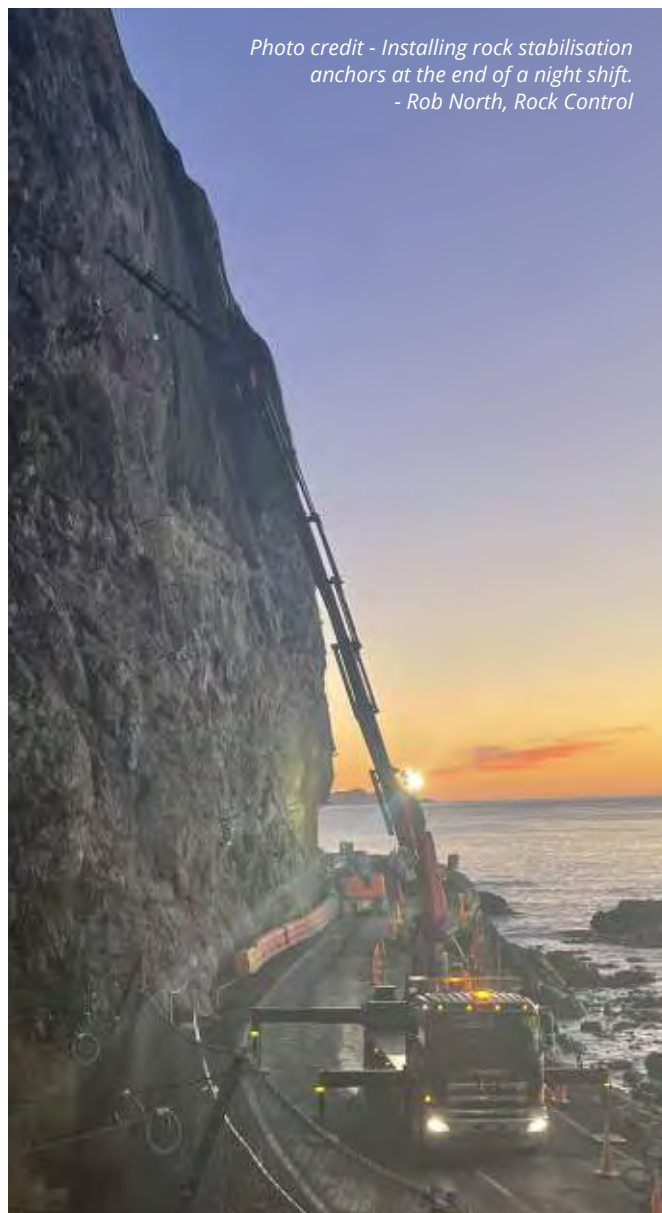


Photo credit - Installing rock stabilisation anchors at the end of a night shift.
- Rob North, Rock Control

Priority 3

Decreasing compliance and regulatory costs

“Politics often leads to fragmented rules. The industry needs consistency.”

– Hawke’s Bay East Coast Workshop

The disconnect between rule-makers and those who are working on site is widening. Compliance and regulation for civil contractors is increasingly complex, costly, inconsistent and disconnected from the practical realities of infrastructure delivery.

Environmental regulation and waste management processes are unfairly increasing the burden and cost for civil contractors, with little regard for environmental impacts. Regulation is currently not taking practicality into account. Recycling and re-use of materials such as soils is often prevented by regulations that aren’t fit for purpose.

In particular, waste minimisation and management processes are leading to unintended negative environmental outcomes. Re-use is not being provided for in design specifications or incentivised at a regional level. In some cases, contractors are forced to treat clean soil as contaminated waste, required to transport it long distances or pay excessive landfill fees because regulations are not fit for purpose.

Environmental regulation and health and safety requirements are increasingly risk-averse, with rules and processes that are often disconnected from on-the-ground realities. Decision-making is often overly cautious, resulting in rigid requirements that do not reflect actual site conditions or operational project needs.

Contractors often have a more practical understanding of the needs of the site, but are left out of the planning stages of a project and do not get a chance to voice their concerns, meaning that there is no opportunity to review impracticalities in project planning and design until construction begins.

Significant amounts of time and money are spent meeting procedural requirements rather than managing real risk, with contractors often carrying this burden.



Micro trenching for internet cable installation.

In addition, temporary traffic management must protect workers and road users, fostering good safety outcomes while avoiding unnecessary cost, disruption and delay. CCNZ recognises progress by NZTA in moving from prescriptive requirements to the risk-based New Zealand Guide to Temporary Traffic Management, including stronger assurance, new audit processes, embedding requirements into maintenance and renewals contracts, and releasing six new TTM credentials. However, there is a lot to do for change to be successful.

An incoming government should build on progress by ensuring TTM guidance is right-sized to the risk of each worksite, from state highways through to local roads, and improves safety while reducing costs and disruption to people’s journeys. The transition must be collaborative. Contractors, clients, road controlling authorities, designers, regulators and road users need shared understanding of their duties, because the move to risk-based TTM has created uncertainty as well as opportunity.

CCNZ also calls for public messaging and enforcement that reduces abuse of road workers, rather than treating TTM simply as a “road cone” cost problem. There are people working on and around road work sites, and there must be efficient systems in place to protect workers and road users.

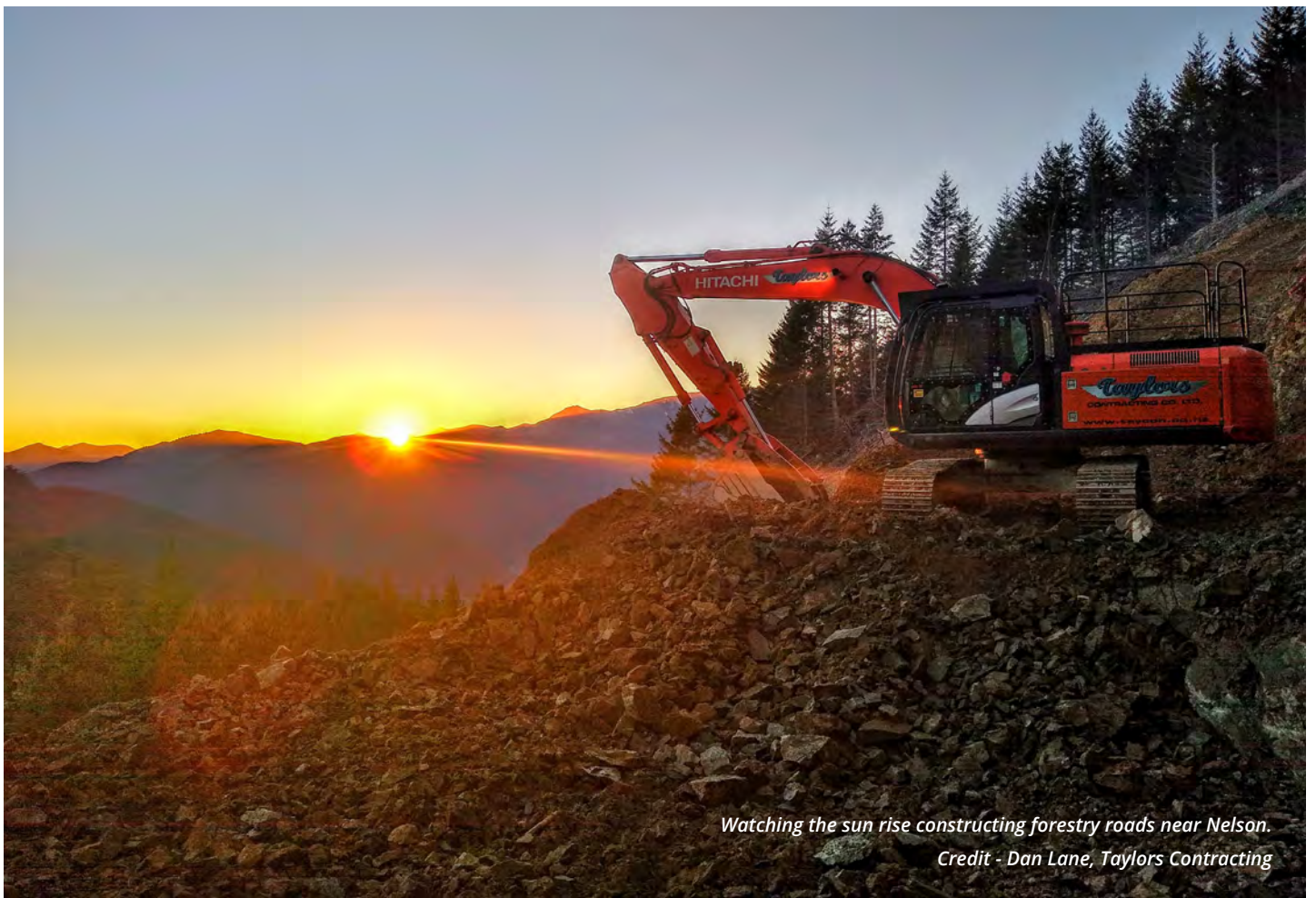
Decreasing compliance and regulatory costs

Implement a common-sense approach to compliance and regulation

- Require genuine, meaningful consultation with civil construction industry representatives when developing or amending regulation that is substantive rather than procedural, to ensure regulations take practical considerations into account.
- With industry, review existing compliance and regulatory requirements to identify and remove rules that are outdated, duplicative, or not achieving their intended purpose.
- Ensure practical input from industry is incorporated into the ongoing national direction and secondary legislation work for the Resource Management Act reform process.

Support practical, risk-based, right-sized work site safety

- Support a smooth transition to risk-based, 'right-sized' traffic management for the location it is applied to.
- Raise public awareness of the need to behave safely around work sites.
- Address antisocial behaviour around road work sites through increased enforcement and public awareness campaigns.
- Reduce unnecessary TTM cost and disruption without compromising worker or public safety.



*Watching the sun rise constructing forestry roads near Nelson.
Credit - Dan Lane, Taylors Contracting*

Priority 4

Building workforce capability and capacity

“Growing our own workforce and supporting education and training in this sector is critical for New Zealand’s long-term capability and resilience.”

– Otago Workshop

Our industry faces ongoing challenges in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, which is driven largely by the lack of any pathways from education for people to join the industry, and also the unstable and inconsistent pipeline of work.

Instability in the work pipeline makes it difficult for employers to invest in formal, nationally recognised training for their workforce. This does not provide certainty or career progression, resulting in workers departing the industry in search of more secure employment. In turn, this impacts the number of experienced trainers with specialist civil construction training skills and knowledge.

Employers currently bear the full cost of training new employees. It’s not well recognised that training is primarily developed and delivered by the employer. Training is a project cost, whether this is skills development or formal qualifications. Either way, it needs to be funded, whether this is through project cost or educational funding.

Ongoing vocational education reform over the last six years has impacted the workforce. Constant change has seen employers disengage from formal learning and qualifications. The reform of polytechs, ITOs and trainers has been substantive, but over this time, neither the Tertiary Education Commission nor New Zealand Qualifications Authority have been reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Industry trains on the job, rather than in the classroom. These skills are needed to deliver work safely, to the standard of quality required by the client. Qualifications are often not a requirement of this training, and can be viewed by clients as an unnecessary cost to a project that can be cut, in an industry that does not have mandatory qualification requirements.

Yet, having qualified and competent staff provides assurance that projects will be completed to a high standard of quality.

Many highly skilled and competent tradespeople working in the industry do not hold recognised qualifications. Experienced civil tradespeople urgently need an accessible and user-friendly pathway to recognise the skills they have gained on the job. The current methodology for recognising and obtaining qualifications based on existing job skills needs a full review, and needs to be consistently applied across education and qualification providers.

At entry level, many school-leavers enter the workforce without foundational skills required, further widening the gap between training pathways and industry needs, and increasing the burden and cost of training on employers, and by extension their clients.

Current immigration settings exacerbate the problem. High wage thresholds, regional work restrictions, short-duration visas, and lengthy accreditation processes make it difficult for contractors to recruit and retain workers. CCNZ is working on better defining the workforce, but requires genuine government partnership to fully recognise what makes up the workforce.

Definitions of ‘skilled’ roles have reduced the number of immigrants who can qualify for a pathway to residency and restricted the ability to bring in critical workers. Many highly skilled people are viewed as ‘common labourers’ by the immigration system, which does not align with civil construction industry roles at the trades level (as opposed to surveyors and engineers, who have clearly defined skill standards).

“We have a good apprenticeship model, it just needs to be funded and properly serviced.”

- Wellington Wairarapa workshop

Building workforce capability and capacity

Funding mechanisms and incentives for apprenticeships and on the job training

- Fund and incentivise civil construction employers to support and deliver on-job training that is directly connected with civil trades qualifications.
- Adequately fund programmes delivering national civil trade skills programmes.
- Fund and support long-term training programmes, rather than short-term pilots
- Create focused programmes for all new entrants including disadvantaged social groups or long-term unemployed.
- Support the establishment of apprenticeship training trusts as entities that can support people in achieving civil construction apprenticeships. This can provide continuity of work for new entrants and assurance the qualification can be completed successfully.
- Review the Tertiary Education Commission and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority to ensure they remain fit for purpose

Improvements to work readiness and connection to the school system

- Establish direct avenues for pre-entry, entry and pre-apprenticeship civil construction training. These should align directly with employment opportunities and lead into qualification and apprenticeship pathways.
- Partner across industry, education, and government to establish an industry-recognised programme for engaging with schools that can be templated, shared with contractors, and used as an avenue for new entrants to enter the industry with job-specific skills and an understanding of work site expectations.
- Embed a consistent civil construction trade skills programme within the school curriculum, incorporating practical entry-level knowledge such as driver's licensing and other key entry civil trade skills and knowledge.

Skills recognition and training infrastructure

- Ensure that when new civil trade qualifications are introduced, older qualifications and prior learning gained outside of formal qualifications continue to be recognised.
- Establish the Civil Trades certification as a mandatory, legislated requirement. There are clear precedents for this, including electricians, gasfitters, plumbers and drainlayers.

Recognition of civil infrastructure as an essential workforce

- Formally recognise civil infrastructure as an essential workforce, ensuring that immigration settings, particularly the Green List and pathways to residence, to reflect the long-term skill demands of delivering and maintaining New Zealand's critical infrastructure networks. This is especially important in the medium term while clear and well serviced education pathways are established.
- Work with industry to develop a civil infrastructure workforce pipeline strategy that pairs domestic training pathways with targeted immigration settings, reducing New Zealand's vulnerability to skilled infrastructure labour shortages.

Practical improvements to immigration settings

- The infrastructure workforce is not clearly defined. Ensure the ANZSCO/NOL includes suitable occupation codes to cover skilled Civil Trades work, in particular a 'Civil Trades Technician' occupation pathway to the National Occupation List at Level 3.
- Prioritise additional infrastructure-specific trades roles, working with industry to better define skillsets and role expectations.
- Extend the maximum continuous stay for civil construction workers under the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) from three years back to five years.

Priority 5

Infrastructure resilience and sustainability

“New Zealand’s networks are vulnerable — storms, slips, climate impacts, and aging assets. Contractors see this up close every day.”

– Hawke’s Bay East Coast Workshop

New Zealand’s infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to climate change impacts, severe weather-related events, and aging assets. Civil contractors are on the front line of both everyday delivery, emergency response and natural disasters, yet they carry disproportionate risk with regard to potential liability for actions taken in the face of these events.

The current approach to infrastructure management and maintenance is reactive rather than proactive. Aging assets are often repaired only after failure, increasing the cost and complexity of recovery.

As outlined in the foreword of this document, the National Infrastructure Plan highlights this concern. New Zealand ranks fourth to last in the OECD for asset management, and up to 60 cents in every dollar of future infrastructure investment will be needed simply to replace and rebuild what already exists.

Additionally, sustainability is not consistently prioritised in design and construction. Opportunities to reduce emissions, use low-carbon materials, adopt circular economy principles, and implement climate-resilient technologies are often overlooked. New Zealand’s civil infrastructure sector has an opportunity to lead the transition toward smarter, lower-carbon construction, but this requires deliberate policy settings and targeted investment from government.



A concrete foreman and his team check quality on their footpath installation. Credit - Topline Contracting

Infrastructure resilience and sustainability

Formal recognition of civil contractors as essential first-response partners

- Formally recognise civil contractors as essential first-response partners within New Zealand's emergency management framework and
- introduce liability protections for civil contractors acting in good faith during emergency response.

Prioritise infrastructure resilience

- Establish funding mechanisms and develop a long-term strategy for preventative infrastructure maintenance to reduce the costs of asset failure. This is particularly important for aging water and transport infrastructure.

Support innovation and sustainability

- Commit to a cross-party, long-term infrastructure plan to provide the industry with the certainty it needs to invest in sustainable construction practices.
- Encourage climate resilient standards for procurement and planning processes such as modern construction methods, digital engineering, and low-carbon materials by establishing funding or incentivising industry-led investment.
- Ensure existing waste minimisation practices are fit for purpose and truly result in efficient circular economy processes, with proper classifications that incentivise re-use of material on site. This is particularly important for soil management processes.



*Contractors installing rock protection to support a forestry road culvert.
Credit - Dan Lane, Taylors Contracting*



About Civil Contractors New Zealand

Founded in 1944, Civil Contractors New Zealand is the national association for civil contractors, providing a voice for more than 850 member businesses and organisations. We work to support a healthy civil construction industry, founded on the highest levels of experience, capability and knowledge.

Our members enable New Zealand communities to have a better quality of life by constructing the country's essential transport, water, energy, internet and other infrastructure networks. Collectively, our contractor members undertake approximately \$12 billion in capital and maintenance works each year, and employ approximately 60,000 people.

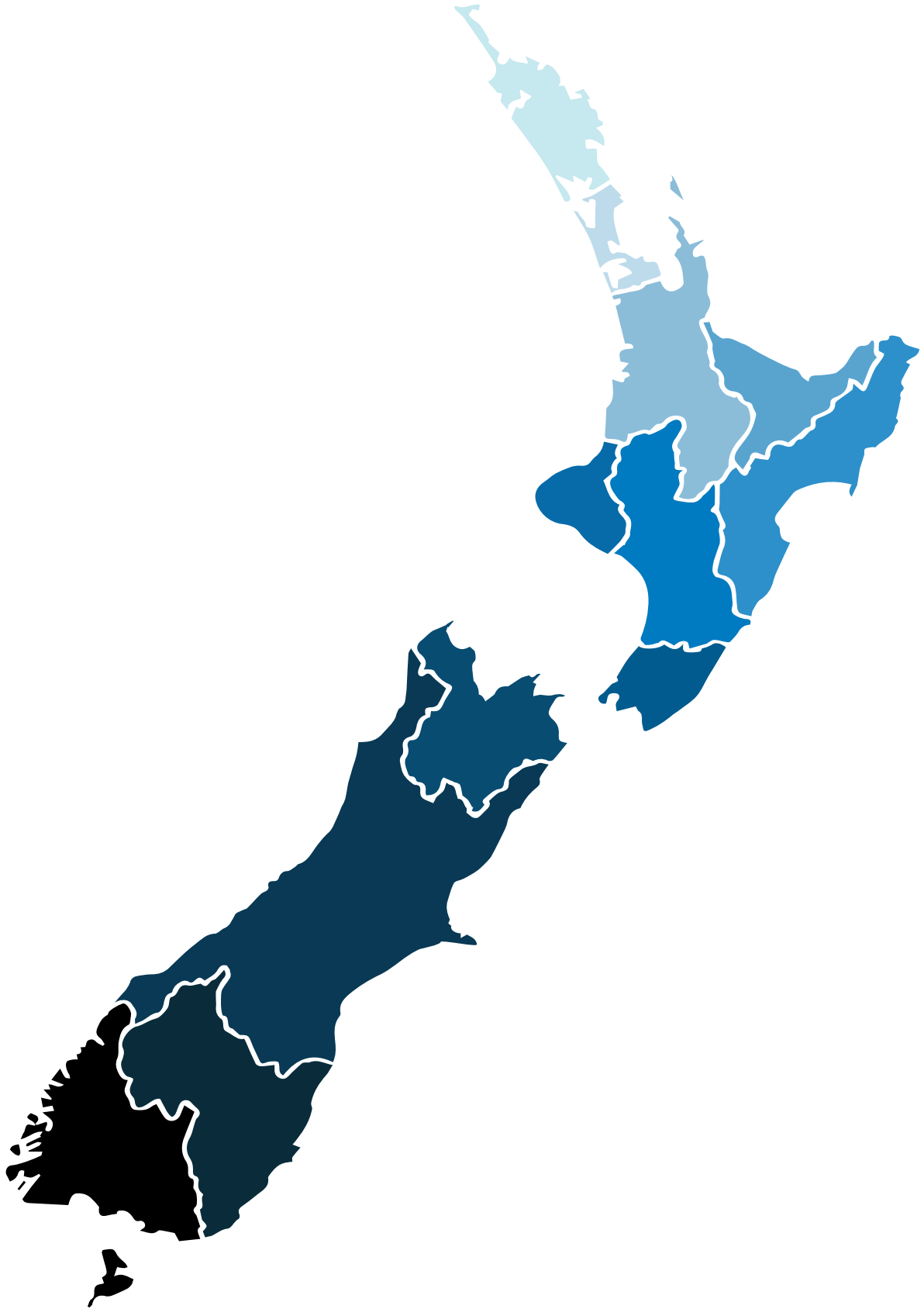
CCNZ connects the industry with decision makers, career development opportunities, networking events, technical knowledge and up-to-date information on industry trends. If you would like more detail on any points raised in this manifesto, please contact us:



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