Submission to the Transport and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Ports and the Maritime Sector

From: New Zealand Marine Transport Association (NZMTA)

July 13, 2025

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1. Introduction

The New Zealand Marine Transport Association (NZMTA) welcomes this timely inquiry and the opportunity to contribute evidence on the role of regional shipping and coastal infrastructure in supporting a resilient, sustainable, and efficient transport network. Our members span the coastal shipping, workboat, shipbuilding, and small port sectors – industries that are vital to the connectivity, economic health, and emergency readiness of regional Aotearoa.

Cyclone Gabrielle was a stark reminder of how vulnerable our land-based transport corridors are, and how vital the sea remains as Aotearoa's third highway. Yet for decades, coastal shipping has been an afterthought in national infrastructure planning.

This submission makes the case for reclaiming the 'blue highway' - a decentralised, NZ-built coastal fleet, operating out of smaller regional ports to support freight, passengers, emissions reduction, and national resilience.

We commend the Committee for recognising the critical role that our ports and maritime sector play in supporting trade, regional economies, and national resilience. We believe a more coordinated, multi-modal, and regionally inclusive approach is urgently needed to future-proof the sector.

2. Who we represent

The New Zealand Marine Transport Association (NZMTA) was formed in 1970 to represent the owners of New Zealand's tourism charter and passenger vessels. Our members range from small family-run operations to larger regional transport providers involved in harbour cruises, fishing, sailing, passenger transport, and coastal trade. Over the years, our membership has grown to include a strong base of coastal workboat/barge operators and seafarers.

NZMTA is governed by a board of vessel owners and operators. We advocate for a safe, resilient, and thriving maritime sector that supports regional development and New Zealand's unique domestic and international maritime profile. We are funded primarily through member subscriptions and sponsorship and work closely with government and education bodies to ensure a pipeline of qualified seafarers, engineers, and deckhands.

In addition to our advocacy role, the board are committed to fostering innovation across the fleet, championing the uptake of hybrid and electric propulsion, low-emissions vessel design, and infrastructure that supports a modern, low-carbon future for domestic maritime transport.

3. Strategic context:

Why coastal shipping matters

As a nation, New Zealand is more reliant on maritime transport than almost any other developed nation, with 99% of our trade by volume arriving and departing by sea. Yet we are geographically isolated, distant from major global shipping routes, and lack the land-based freight options other countries enjoy. This heightens our vulnerability to global shipping disruption.

Global operators increasingly regard New Zealand as a marginal market. Ships serving our ports are older and smaller; port calls are being reduced, and operators face comparatively high port charges and complex biofouling rules. We risk being bypassed altogether - as seen in Maersk's short-lived coastal service and reduced post-COVID frequency of international calls.

Meanwhile, other countries are investing heavily in domestic shipping. Australia, the US, and the UK have implemented measures to strengthen domestic fleets for resilience, supply chain security, and emissions reduction.

New Zealand, by contrast, maintains one of the world's most liberal cabotage regimes. Foreign ships carry 78% of our coastal freight yet are exempt from our tax, labour, and emissions obligations. This undermines the competitiveness of domestic operators.

Our domestic capacity is further constrained by workforce shortages, limited dry-dock infrastructure, and regulatory misalignments (e.g., double-charging emissions under ETS).

We propose the development of two strategies:

- A **trans-Tasman strategy**, aligned with Australia's strategic fleet model, to create fairer operating conditions, resolve emissions policy overlap, support maritime training, and boost dry-dock capacity.

- A **regional strategy**, focused on small-vessel coastal services using regional ports—achievable at a fraction of the cost of road and rail expansion.

The sea remains one of New Zealand's greatest strategic assets. It is time to reclaim the blue highway.

Why regional shipping matters

Strategic resilience: After Cyclone Gabrielle, a single vessel operating between Napier and Gisborne kept supply chains open while roads and rail were down temporarily. Similar interventions were critical post-Kaikōura earthquake and during COVID disruptions.

Environmental performance: Sea freight emits less than 25% of the CO_2 per tonne-kilometre compared to road transport. One coastal service can displace tens of millions of truck-kilometres annually.

Infrastructure efficiency: Regional shipping infrastructure - such as ramps, fenders, shallow-draft berths, and mobile cranes - is modest in cost and often already in place. Recommissioning existing coastal terminals and regional marine precincts is significantly cheaper than building or repairing highways.

Economic opportunity: A fleet of purpose-built small vessels would create a strong pipeline for domestic shipbuilding and maritime training. New Zealand yards - such as McMullen & Wing, Q-West, AIMEX, Goughs, Circa, and Heron - are capable of building vessels up to 50 metres in length. These include fully electric and hybrid-electric boats, barges, and RORO's for regional freight and passenger services, as well as hydrofoils for postal and courier delivery. This approach retains value onshore and strengthens New Zealand's sovereign maritime capacity.

4. The strategic case for regional coastal shipping

We advocate for a distributed model of small-to-medium coastal vessels linking regional ports and intermodal hubs. Importantly, these vessels do not compete with deep-sea shipping; they complement it.

Key features:

- Vessels: NZ-built, sub-100m hybrid/electric/clean diesel RORO's and cargo vessels
- Routes: Inter-regional loops (e.g., Nelson–Greymouth–Westport, Auckland–Kopu–Thames)
- Infrastructure: Low-cost upgrades (e.g., ramps, laydown areas, shallow dredging)
- Terminals: Shared-use coastal hubs with road/rail connections
- Freight: Palletised or modular - not all freight requires 40ft containers

5. Historical context: decline of the coastal fleet

New Zealand's coastal shipping sector has undergone significant decline over the past three decades:

- Pre-1994: around 34 NZ-flagged coasters operated under cabotage protection.
- 1994: the Maritime Transport Act lifted cabotage restrictions.
- 1995–2010: foreign competition surged, and the domestic fleet collapsed.
- 2014–2022: Pacifica and Strait Shipping were sold offshore.
- 2025: only two NZ-flagged container ships remain.

As a result, coastal shipping now accounts for less than 5% of total freight, with much of the profit, employment, and vessel maintenance shifting offshore.

6. Coastal freight capability

New Zealand is already home to a robust and regionally distributed roll-on/roll-off (RORO) and barge vessel fleet, which plays a vital role in moving passengers, freight, and vehicles between key locations. This section outlines the capabilities of the main RORO and barge operators, highlighting the scale of existing operations and the potential to grow domestic coastal shipping capacity.

Major Operators and Core Capacity

SeaLink New Zealand

SeaLink is a privately owned Auckland-based ferry and freight operator under Lyncroft Holdings. It operates daily services between Auckland, Waiheke Island, and Great Barrier Island, with a fleet including *Seacat*, *Seaway*, *Island Navigator*, and the freight barges *Seamaster and Sea Quest*.

- Approximately 1 million passengers per year
- Approximately 11,700 freight sailings annually, likely carrying well over 22,000 trucks (including chilled, curtain-sided, and Hiab loads)
- Operates up to 40 daily sailings to Waiheke and 16 weekly sailings to Great Barrier

Bluebridge (StraitNZ)

Operating since 1992 (freight) and 2002 (passengers), Bluebridge runs two RORO vessels (*Strait Feronia*, *Connemara*) across Cook Strait, connecting Wellington and Picton.

- Approximately 400,000 passengers annually
- 50+ weekly sailings, carrying hundreds of thousands of tonnes of freight each year
- Offers approximately 10,000 lane-metres of RORO deck space daily
- Holds 56% of vehicle freight market share and 31% of Cook Strait passengers

KiwiRail (Interislander)

As a state-owned enterprise, KiwiRail operates three RORO vessels (*Kaitaki*, *Aratere*, and *Kaiarahi*) between Wellington and Picton. *Aratere* is the only rail-enabled ship in New Zealand.

- Approximately 1 million passengers and 250,000 vehicles annually
- 4,000 sailings/year, moving over 1.2 million lane-metres of freight
- *Aratere* alone carries approximately 650,000 lane-metres, 60% of which are rail wagons
- Contributes to KiwiRail's 18 million tonnes of freight moved annually, equivalent to an estimated 16% of NZ's total freight task

New Zealand-Flagged Coastal Freight Vessels

In addition to the major RORO ferry operators, New Zealand's coastal freight capability is bolstered by New Zealand-flagged cargo vessels serving the domestic coastal trade:

- M.V. Moana Chief
  Operated by Pacifica Shipping (a division of Swire Shipping NZ Ltd), *Moana Chief* is a 1,700 TEU container ship providing scheduled coastal services linking key North and South Island

ports, including Auckland, Tauranga, Nelson, Lyttelton, and Marsden Point. Notably, *Moana Chief* is currently the only New Zealand-flagged container ship operating on domestic routes, underscoring its strategic importance to the coastal freight network.

- M.V. Rangitata
  Operated by Coastal Bulk Shipping Ltd, *Rangitata* is a general cargo vessel with a capacity of up to 2,200 tonnes. It specialises in transporting bulk cargo such as fertiliser, grain, and gravel around New Zealand's coast, serving regional ports and supporting agricultural and industrial supply chains. Coastal Bulk Shipping maintains a commitment to New Zealand registration and crewing, contributing to the local maritime workforce.

Supporting the regional fleet – Barge and landing craft network

In addition to the national RORO operators and coastal freighters, New Zealand's barge and landing craft fleet services regional and remote communities, infrastructure projects, aquaculture, and inter-island freight. These vessels provide flexible RORO capability in areas with limited or no port infrastructure.

Heron Construction & McCallum Bros

Operate self-propelled barges and landing craft (e.g., *Acheron III*, *Kapua*) for heavy plant and aggregate transport. Work primarily in Auckland, Northland, and Coromandel.

Seaworks

Fleet of multipurpose barges, some with RORO capability. Specialise in cable laying, salvage, and project freight.

O'Donnell Park Barging (Marlborough Sounds)

Operate RORO landing craft (*Ngāpuhi*, *Lana*, *Willie O'*). Regularly carry fuel, livestock, and machinery into hard-to-reach bays.

Curtis Barge Services (Chatham Islands)

Use the *Curtis Island Trader*, a landing barge that moves vehicles, livestock, and general freight between the Chathams and the mainland.

Black Robin Shipping (Chatham Islands)

Former operator of the RORO-capable *Southern Tiare*. Newer vessels may retain or upgrade RORO capabilities.

Stewart Island Freight / Torea Charters

RORO landing barge (*Torea*) services Bluff–Stewart Island, transporting freight vehicles, equipment, and bulk goods.

Untapped potential beyond RORO

This overview only covers the known RORO and barge-capable vessels in the New Zealand fleet. Hundreds of additional commercial vessels, including workboats, fishing craft, tourism vessels, and aquaculture support boats, operate year-round in coastal regions. Many of these could be deployed or adapted to support parcel freight, courier goods, and last-mile coastal logistics - bringing coastal shipping to virtually every community with a wharf or beach landing site.

Case studies attached to this submission demonstrate the real-world benefits of coastal shipping - reducing emissions, improving resilience, lowering costs, and supporting regional economies. With the right investment and policy settings, New Zealand's existing RORO, barge, and coastal cargo fleets could form the backbone of a revitalised domestic sea freight network.

7. Infrastructure gaps hindering regional shipping

While more than $800 million has been invested in rail, regional port infrastructure has been largely overlooked. We propose the following areas as investment priorities:

- Reinstating roll-on/roll-off ramps
- Providing mobile cranes, laydown areas and dredging access
- Establishing intermodal terminals in smaller ports such as Greymouth, Nelson, and New Plymouth
- Expanding dry-dock capacity for haul-outs and vessel maintenance
- Supporting maritime workforce development

At least six New Zealand shipyards can build vessels up to 50 metres, and two can construct vessels up to 100 metres. However, the country still lacks sufficient dry-dock infrastructure to service even a modest coastal fleet. A centrally located dry dock would reduce vessel downtime, retain servicing jobs and expenditure onshore, and support the long-term viability of our domestic shipbuilding sector.

8. Supporting the domestic boatbuilding sector

New Zealand is fortunate to retain a world-class domestic boatbuilding capability, a unique advantage in an increasingly globalised market. Unlike sectors such as aviation or heavy road transport, New Zealand's marine manufacturing industry continues to produce high-quality vessels tailored to local conditions and emerging sustainability requirements.

This sector supports high-skilled employment and provides valuable training pathways for the maritime workforce. Across the country, boatbuilders are delivering a diverse range of vessels, including hybrid and electric craft, aquaculture barges, pilot boats, ferries, patrol and rescue vessels, workboats, and zero-carbon hydrofoiling vessels. This breadth of capability highlights the industry's potential to lead in low-emissions and fit-for-purpose maritime technology.

However, to fully realise this potential, stable demand and coordinated procurement are essential. Without consistent orders and investment in maintenance infrastructure such as dry docks, this capability risks decline - resulting in lost jobs and diminished sovereign capacity.

We recommend the following measures to strengthen New Zealand's boatbuilding sector:

- **Formal recognition of New Zealand shipbuilding as a strategic industry** within national economic and infrastructure policies, underscoring its role in transport resilience and sustainability.

- **Public procurement policies prioritising New Zealand-built vessels,** particularly for government and regional transport contracts, to stimulate industry growth.

- **Investment in national dry-dock infrastructure**, enabling efficient servicing and repair to support fleet longevity and competitiveness.

Supporting the domestic boatbuilding industry aligns with wider government objectives of regional development, skilled workforce growth, and environmental sustainability. A thriving marine manufacturing sector is critical to building a resilient blue highway that benefits all New Zealanders.

9. Potential funding model – <u>voluntary vessel registration</u>

To support maritime safety and infrastructure initiatives, a voluntary vessel registration scheme - covering both recreational and commercial sectors - could be introduced at an annual fee of $50 per vessel. With approximately 1.9 million recreational boaties across New Zealand, even modest uptake - such as one-third participation - could generate up to $75 million per year.

To encourage participation, boat owners could receive a safety incentive, such as a free lifejacket or personal locator beacon (PLB), in the first year of registration. While this would act as a loss-leader campaign in its initial stages, it would help introduce the concept of registration to the wider boating community.

Funds raised could be directed toward critical services and improvements, including Coastguard and search and rescue operations, upgrades to regional port infrastructure, and maritime safety education campaigns. This model would not only provide a sustainable funding stream but also alleviate pressure on existing government budgets and infrastructure spending ambitions. Importantly, it would achieve these outcomes without imposing additional costs on the general taxpayer—relying instead on voluntary contributions from the boating community that directly benefit those who use and depend on the maritime environment.

10. Recommendations to the Committee

1. Recognise coastal shipping as strategic - include it in national transport planning.
2. Target port investment - use the $30 million Coastal Shipping Resilience Fund for regional port upgrades.
3. Support New Zealand-built fleet development - use concessional loans and ‘NZ-built first’ procurement to support green vessels.
4. Level the playing field - apply coastal freight preference policies to government contracts.

5. Establish a Regional Transport Forum - enable coordinated infrastructure and planning across all modes.

Summary and insights

The case for regional coastal shipping in New Zealand is both practical and compelling. Nearly 90% of the population lives within 50 kilometres of the coast, with over 130 usable harbours spread throughout the country. This geography - a long, narrow landmass with dispersed communities - naturally lends itself to maritime transport solutions that are efficient, scalable, and low-emission.

Historically, New Zealand's domestic coastal fleet was far stronger. In the early 1990s, around 34 New Zealand-flagged cargo vessels operated under cabotage protections, providing regular, reliable services between regional ports. However, the 1994 removal of cabotage restrictions under the Maritime Transport Act opened the door to foreign-flagged vessels, resulting in a gradual but persistent decline of the domestic fleet.

By 2025, only two New Zealand-flagged container vessels remain, and the bulk of freight now travels by road - missing out on the many benefits coastal shipping offers, including reduced emissions, safer roads, and stronger regional connectivity.

The introduction of the $30 million Coastal Shipping Integration Fund in 2022 was a positive step, but the funding remains modest compared to the more than $800 million invested in rail. Nevertheless, the four coastal services supported by the fund have already demonstrated the value of targeted investment, offsetting an estimated 35 million truck-kilometres annually. These services help relieve pressure on roads, reduce maintenance costs, lower carbon emissions, and open new freight corridors for regional producers and exporters. It's also worth noting that many existing operators - such as Heron, McCallum Bros, and Seaworks - already have available capacity in their coastal ships and barge fleets.

Reinvesting in regional coastal shipping is a logical response to the mounting pressures on New Zealand's transport network. Our roads are increasingly congested, ageing, and vulnerable to natural hazards. Rail, while vital, is costly and geographically constrained. Coastal shipping leverages natural maritime infrastructure and can be revitalised with relatively low capital investment.

A modest fleet of purpose-built vessels, supported by strategic upgrades to regional ports - such as roll-on/roll-off ramps, laydown areas, and intermodal connections - could unlock major efficiencies across supply chains, while also generating domestic jobs in shipbuilding and maritime services.

The opportunity is clear: New Zealand has the coastline, harbours, and population distribution to support a thriving "blue highway."

With appropriate policy support, investment, and collaboration, coastal shipping can deliver resilience, environmental benefits, and regional economic growth, offering a cost-effective and sustainable alternative to over-reliance on road transport.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit and we would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee to speak to this submission.

Margaret Wind
Executive Director
New Zealand Marine Transport Association

CASE STUDIES: Coastal Shipping in Action

The following case studies demonstrate the tangible benefits of regional coastal shipping in Aotearoa. From reducing emissions and easing road congestion to enhancing regional connectivity and supporting the domestic shipbuilding sector, these examples show how strategic investment in smaller vessels and regional port infrastructure can deliver national returns. In each case, the sea route is not just an alternative, it's a smarter, cleaner, and more resilient solution.

These examples also make it clear that regional coastal shipping is not a hypothetical concept, but a practical, low-capital, high-return investment that aligns with New Zealand's transport, resilience, and emissions goals. By leveraging existing infrastructure, activating domestic shipbuilding capability, and enabling private sector operators, we can re-establish the blue highway as a core part of the nation's transport system.

Case Study 1: Auckland to Thames – Reducing Pressure on Road Networks

The corridor between Auckland and the Coromandel Peninsula is heavily trafficked, particularly in peak holiday and freight periods. SH25 is prone to congestion and subject to storm-related closures and maintenance costs.

- **Road Route:** Over 3 hours via SH25, depending on traffic
- **Sea Route:** 4-hour RoRo shuttle from Half Moon Bay to Kopu;
- **Outcome:** Up to 40% emissions savings and reduced wear on fragile regional roads

A daily marine shuttle could handle palletised freight and delivery trucks and vans, eliminating dozens of truck movements per day and improving service reliability for regional businesses. This route would also demonstrate how small-scale RoRo operations can complement road freight, particularly for urban-adjacent communities.

Case Study 2: Napier to Gisborne Post-Cyclone - A Lifeline for Isolated Regions

Cyclone Gabrielle devastated much of the road and rail infrastructure between Napier and Gisborne, with repair costs exceeding $500 million. In the aftermath, a single 50-metre coastal vessel was able to keep supply chains moving, providing a vital link between two of the East Coast's most important logistics hubs.

- **Road Repair:** $500 million+
- **Sea Route:** 6-hour shuttle on a 50m RoRo vessel
- **Outcome:** Maintains freight flow without immediate road rebuilding

This case highlights the value of a ready-to-go regional shipping network in emergency response and resilience. A modest fleet of purpose-built vessels could be deployed within hours following natural disasters, avoiding long delays and enabling continuity of trade.

Case Study 3: Whanganui to Nelson – Streamlining Inter-Island Trade

Freight between Whanganui and Nelson typically travels by road to Wellington, crosses Cook Strait by ferry, then continues south to Nelson, a process involving multiple handling points and extended transit times. The conventional route, including road and ferry segments, can take upwards of 15 hours, depending on scheduling and transfer times.

A direct coastal shipping service, such as that operated by Coastal Bulk Shipping's *MV Anatoki* (50m length, approximately 800-tonne capacity), offers a potential alternative. This sea route could reduce handling points and transit time, with voyage durations estimated around 12 hours, though actual times vary by conditions and vessel speed. Modern vessels can significantly reduce this transit time.

Whanganui Port is currently undergoing an $87 million revitalisation under the Te Pūwaha project, aimed at enhancing its infrastructure to support increased coastal freight.

Expanding direct sea services between Whanganui and Nelson may create new supply corridors and lessen dependence on the Cook Strait ferry network, with potential benefits including lower emissions and improved efficiency.

Case Study 4: East Coast logging transport to Tauranga

The East Coast's growing forestry harvest is forecast to generate over 2.5 million tonnes of logs annually. At present, much of this travels 250–400 km by road, adding up to 146 daily truck movements along scenic and sensitive corridors.

- **Road Transport:** 360,000+ truck trips per harvest cycle
- **Marine Option:** Log barges from Hicks Bay or Tolaga Bay to Port of Tauranga
- **Outcome:** Lower emissions, reduced road damage, improved safety

A study by Nelson Forests shows that ocean freight is 5–10 times more carbon-efficient than road transport. Minimal infrastructure, such as floating barge ramps and small coastal wharves, would enable a scalable, low-impact solution that benefits both the forestry sector and regional communities.

Case Study 5: 50m New Zealand-made RoRo vessels

A new generation of 50-metre, NZ-built hybrid-electric RORO vessels could be designed for regional shuttles. These small but capable vessels would be ideal for short-haul coastal routes where volume is lower, but frequency and flexibility are key.

- **Specifications:** 8–12 truck capacity; $18–28 million build cost; 18–24 month lead time
- **Deployment:** Auckland–Thames, Napier–Nelson, Whanganui–Greymouth
- **Outcome:** Job creation in local yards, lower emissions, enhanced regional capacity

New Zealand shipbuilders already produce vessels of this scale for aquaculture and government use. A coordinated procurement programme would support domestic industry while delivering strategic transport infrastructure.

Case Study 6: Urban freight – Auckland to Gulf Harbour & Pine Harbour

Suburban hubs like Gulf Harbour and Pine Harbour receive daily courier and light freight deliveries from Auckland's city centre by road — contributing to urban congestion and emissions.

- **Road Distance:** approximately 47 km per delivery trip
- **Marine Alternative:** 35–50 minute crossing with consolidated freight
- **Outcome:** Reduced road congestion, lower emissions, faster delivery cycles

A daily service carrying consolidated parcels could be paired with electric vans at each end to complete the last-mile delivery. This model can be replicated in other metro regions, creating low-emission delivery loops using existing ferry terminals and marine infrastructure.

Case Study 7: Strategic vessel support – scaling up with existing workboat operators

New Zealand has a capable and ready fleet of tugs, barges, and small cargo vessels operated by firms such as Heron Construction, McCallum Bros, and Seaworks. These vessels can provide immediate capacity for regional freight while a long-term fleet is built.
Examples include:

- McCallum's barge
- Seaworks' multipurpose vessels
- Heron's tug and workboat

These operators offer an interim solution to scale up coastal services quickly while avoiding further road wear and fuel costs. Support for vessel upgrades and flexible charter models could unlock underutilised marine capacity immediately.

Case Study 8: Potential RORO freight service – Auckland to Whangārei

The route between Auckland and Whangārei is a significant freight corridor in northern New Zealand. Currently, most freight travels by road via State Highway 1, a journey of approximately 160 km taking around 2 to 2.5 hours under normal conditions. Increasing freight volumes on this route contribute to road congestion, wear and tear, and environmental impacts.

A dedicated RORO freight service operating between Auckland and Whangārei using SeaLink's existing or slightly modified vessels (such as the *Seabridge/Sea Quest* or a similar barge) could offer an alternative sea freight solution.

- **Distance by sea:** Approximately 85 nautical miles (about 157 km) navigating up the east coast of the North Island.
- **Estimated sailing time:** At an average speed of 12 knots (typical for coastal RORO vessels), the journey would take around 7 hours one way.
- **Frequency:** A daily or near-daily service is feasible given vessel turnaround times and scheduling.
- **Cargo capacity:** Vessels like *Seabridge/SeaQuest* can carry approximately 50 to 70 trucks per sailing depending on load mix (curtain-sided, refrigerated, or Hiab trucks).

Freight Volume Potential

- **Truck equivalent capacity:** Assuming 60 trucks per sailing and one sailing per day, the service could move up to 420 trucks per week or about 21,800 trucks annually.
- **Lane metres:** With about 10 metres per truck, this equates to roughly 600 lane metres per sailing, matching or exceeding current road freight volumes for selected cargo types.

Comparison with Road Freight

Aspect	Coastal RORO Freight	Road Freight (SH1)
Distance	~85 nautical miles (157 km)	~160 km
Transit Time	~7 hours sailing + loading/unloading time (total ~8 hours)	~2–2.5 hours
Weekly Freight Capacity	~420 trucks	Limited by road capacity and driver hours regulations
Environmental Impact	Lower emissions per tonne-km (due to fuel efficiency and less congestion)	Higher emissions and congestion
Road Congestion Impact	Reduced heavy vehicle traffic on SH1	Adds to congestion and road wear
Cost Factors	Potentially competitive for bulk or scheduled freight, especially with fuel price volatility	Fuel, tolls, maintenance, driver wages

Potential Benefits

- **Environmental:** Significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and pollutants per tonne of freight transported compared to trucks on the highway.
- **Resilience:** Provides an alternative freight route in event of road closures (due to accidents, weather, or infrastructure works).
- **Cost Savings:** Potential savings from reduced road maintenance and vehicle operating costs, plus possible economies of scale for scheduled sea freight.
- **Regional Economic Growth:** Boosts coastal communities by improving freight connectivity and supporting maritime jobs.

Challenges & Considerations

- **Transit Time:** Longer transit times compared to road may limit suitability for just-in-time deliveries. However, bulk, scheduled, or non-urgent freight could benefit.
- **Port Infrastructure:** Adequate wharf facilities and logistics hubs needed at both Auckland and Whangārei to ensure smooth loading/unloading.
- **Regulatory Support:** Incentives or policies may be needed to encourage freight shift to coastal shipping.

Introducing a RORO freight service between Auckland and Whangārei could capitalise on New Zealand's existing coastal fleet to provide a greener, more resilient freight option. Although slower than road transport, the service's capacity and environmental benefits make it a valuable complement to road freight, easing highway congestion and supporting regional development.