



Northland Rail Programme

June/July 2024

Kia ora

Our assessments and testing of the North Auckland Line (NAL) have revealed issues that will delay its reopening.

We have completed repairs to more than 200 damage sites along the 180km line which were left in the wake of the January 2023 extreme weather event and Cyclone Gabrielle. These include some major civil works repairing slips and large embankment collapses.

With the track fully reinstated between Swanson and Whangārei, we have been busy running work trains, test trains, the tamper (which aligns the track and packs ballast), the EM80 track geometry assessment vehicle,

and Non-Destructive Testing (NDT) vehicles over the track to make sure the line is safe and it meets our compliance criteria.

During inspections we discovered issues with the piles on some bridges. These are not at sites damaged by weather and were not part of the line upgrade work we have carried out over the last few years.

With the NAL already closed we are taking the opportunity to repair these bridges now.

We were planning to reopen the NAL in late July, but we now expect this will be pushed out by at least a month.

Our structures and track teams have started the bridge repairs and are

working as quickly as they can.

KiwiRail remains committed to supporting freight flows into and out of Northland, providing transport options for the region's businesses, and helping take freight off the region's roads.

I appreciate this delay is disappointing, but we need to make sure the line is fit for purpose and that our freight services are reliable.

If you have any questions about the work we're doing, please contact us at: northlandrail@kiwirail.co.nz

Eric Hennephof

Northland Rail Upgrade Programme Director

Progress repairing the North Auckland Line



An example of drainage improvement near the 93km mark in the Ahuroa Valley. Installing larger culverts helps protect the line from being washed away in future weather events.



Progress repairing the major 185km damage site, south of Tauraroa. This is an example of Northland's slip prone geology, where a gentle hillside slumped under the rail line. It has required major excavation and drainage work beneath the rail embankment, which was rebuilt with sturdier materials.

Track has been successfully reinstated across damage sites on the NAL to Kauri (north of Whangārei). The track testing and assurance phase is now underway.

Repairs have been fully completed on the 99 minor - moderate sites and substantial work is complete on all 35 major damage sites. There are still varying degrees of tidy up work continuing at eight major damage sites.

KiwiRail's focus during the cyclone recovery has been improving the resilience of the line wherever we can, particularly through improving drainage to channel natural water flows beneath or away from the rail line.

In addition to our cyclone recovery work, NZ Upgrade Programme funded track upgrade work (to allow 18-tonne axle loads) on the line north of Whangārei to Kauri, where Fonterra has a dairy plant, is complete.

Work has also been completed upgrading the track in the Whangārei Rail Yard to take 18-tonne axle loads and work has commenced to reconstruct the hardstand surface of the container terminal. We are also doing work to improve drainage and flood management in the yard, which will help protect the surrounding community. As with the upgrade work to Kauri, getting this work done before the NAL reopens reduces any further disruption for customers.



Drainage improvement work going on at the Whangārei rail yard.

Marsden Point Rail Link and Kauri - Otiria

Last year KiwiRail was funded to progress the detailed design of the new rail line between Oakleigh and Marsden Point. This is a key step that needs to be completed before any construction can begin.

By mid-2025 we expect to send the detailed design and a revised business case to the Government, for it to consider and agree next steps for the funding and construction of the spur line.

The important background work we are doing is progressing well:

- Track design is now at the 85 per cent stage, with structural design (such as overbridges, rail and road junctions, farm underpasses) at 50 per cent.
- We continue to work through several value engineering options to gain further confidence with pricing.
- Geotechnical investigations continue along the designated rail route, including Cone Penetrometer Tests, Cores and Test Pits. This will confirm our understanding of the underlying geology, which ranges from marine silts, peats, sands, greywacke and Northern Allochthon. Understanding the geology is crucial to ensuring that construction is robust and cost effective.
- Land purchases have progressed well with 80 per cent of the designated private land required now acquired by KiwiRail. Final negotiations are being concluded with the remainder.

As announced recently, we have paused the work to reopen the mothballed line between Kauri and Otiria. This will now form part of our business case for building the Marsden Point Rail Link. See more information about that decision at:

[Rail upgrade north of Whangārei aligned with Marsden Point Rail Link | KiwiRail](#)



Above: core drilling near Flyers Road on the Marsden Point Rail Link route, to understand the geology. Below: ground testing at Oakleigh

