

## By email

3 October 2024

Hon Nicola Willis  
Minister of Finance  
[Nicola.Willis@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:Nicola.Willis@parliament.govt.nz)

Tēnā koe Minister

### **“Blue Connection” Co-Investment Opportunity**

Thank you for your most recent letter, of 26 September 2024, relating to future CentrePort Ferry operations. We write to you as the majority shareholders, respectively, in CentrePort and Port Marlborough.

The Marlborough District Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council have been considering how we can support the Government in providing for reliable and enduring Cook Strait transport connections to support New Zealand’s business productivity and growth.

We are both committed to supporting our respective port companies to get a minimum viable product in place on both sides of the Cook Strait, to accommodate the new Interislander Cook Strait ferries. This would be subject to agreement with the Government on the design, and respective funding and accountability, and relevant port-side ferry operations.

As part of this first stage of work we would like to propose the idea of a “Blue Connection” co-investment opportunity, which would join government agencies, Marlborough District Council, Greater Wellington, the port companies, Iwi and private sector in the delivery of short- and long-term provision of port-side ferry operations, connection to the State Highway network and provision for out-of-port emergency response capability.

This approach would join-up the parties to:


- a. provide for consistency in ferry operations at both ports, whether single-user or multi-user ferry operations
- b. enhance connections from the port-side ferry facilities to the State Highway network
- c. repurpose existing / future vacated port space to provide for other port uses and reinvigorate the Wellington City and Picton town environments
- d. provide for out-of-port emergency response capability.

Whilst we would request that Port Companies be given the opportunity to comment on the commercial viability of any proposals, this approach is likely to require fast-tracking consents, possible legislative amendments, amendments to regional transport and regional planning instruments, and access to funding for major infrastructure investment.

Framing this proposition as a “Blue Connection” co-investment offers us the opportunity to set up a long-term partnership between central and local government, providing strategic leadership with the associated structural support to coordinate efforts and achieve synergies. We are sure that you would agree that enabling the Cook Strait ferry services represents fundamental national transport infrastructure for New Zealand. The need has never been stronger to deliver future proofed connectivity between the Islands.

We request a meeting to discuss this proposal further.

Nga mihi



**Daran Ponter**  
Chair  
Greater Wellington Regional Council



**Nadine Taylor**  
Mayor  
Marlborough District Council

CC: Hon Paul Goldsmith, Minister of State-Owned Enterprises  
Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Transport