OC260690

14 September 2026

[redacted]

Tēnā koe [redacted]

Thank you for your email received by the Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport (the Ministry) on 17 August 2026 , requesting the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

> "1. Any Cabinet paper or advice to Ministers that led to the decision on 17 August 2026 to commission an independent Detailed Business Case for an additional Waitematā Harbour Crossing.
>
> 2. The terms of reference or scope for that Detailed Business Case."

I have identified four documents within the scope of your request and am releasing them to you in part as listed in the document schedule attached as Annex 1.

Certain information is withheld under the following sections of the Act:

9(2)(a)	to protect the privacy of natural persons
9(2)(f)(iv)	to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials
9(2)(g)(i)	to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any public service agency or organisation in the course of their duty
9(2)(i)	to enable a Minister of the Crown or any public service agency or organisation holding the information to carry out, without prejudice or disadvantage, commercial activities

With regard to the information that has been withheld under section 9 of the Act, I am satisfied that the reasons for withholding the information at this time are not outweighed by public interest considerations that would make it desirable to make the information available.

If you would like to discuss this decision with us, please do not hesitate to contact us at OIA@mcert.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review of this response by the Ombudsman, in accordance with section 28(3) of the Act. The relevant details can be found on the Ombudsman's website www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Please note that due to the public interest in our work, the Ministry publishes our Official Information Act responses and the information contained in our reply to you may be published on its website. Before publishing we will remove any personal or identifiable information.

Nāku noa, nā



Mitch Macaulay
Manager, Transport Financing
Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport

Annex 1: Document Schedule

#	Date	Reference	Title of Document	Decision on request
1	7/04/2026	OC260262	Aide Memoire: Update on 2026 Waitematā Harbour Connections Cabinet Paper	Released with some information withheld under sections 9(2)(a), 9(2)(f)(iv) and 9(2)(g)(i).
2	9/06/2026	OC260397	Draft Cabinet Paper - Waitematā Harbour Connections Update and Public Engagement (including attached Cabinet paper)	Released with some information withheld under sections 9(2)(a), 9(2)(f)(iv), 9(2)(g)(i) and 9(2)(i).
3	27/07/2026	OC260501	Cabinet paper – next steps on Waitematā Harbour Connections	Released with some information withheld under sections 9(2)(a), 9(2)(f)(iv), 9(2)(g)(i) and 9(2)(i). Attachments 2 and 3 (the Cabinet Paper and Minute) are refused under Section 18(d) of the Act. Once Published the documents will be available on the Ministry's Website here: https://www.transport.govt.nz/about-us/our-corporate-publications/proactive-releases/results
4	7/08/2026	OC260655	Aide Memoire: Options for SRO appointment for the Waitematā Harbour Connections Detailed Business Case phase	Released with some information withheld under sections 9(2)(a), 9(2)(f)(iv), 9(2)(g)(i) and 9(2)(i).

Document 1

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT
TE MANATŪ WAKA

AIDE MEMOIRE

7 April 2026 OC260262

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister of Transport

AIDE MEMOIRE: UPDATE ON 2026 WAITEMATĀ HARBOUR CONNECTIONS CABINET PAPER

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Purpose

1 Update you on the assurance outcomes for the Waitematā Harbour Connections project, the forthcoming June 2026 Cabinet Paper and the ongoing policy work programme required to meet project timelines.

The project is well-placed for a June option decision and to progress to pre-implementation

2 The primary assurance process is complete. Gateway, the Independent Reviewer, and NZTA IQA all concluded that there is sufficient information for Cabinet to take a decision on a preferred option (bridge or tunnel) in June and for the project to progress to pre-implementation. The Ministry supports this conclusion.

3 The assurance process identified key risks to the project that need to be addressed during pre-implementation s 9(2)(f)(iv) A June decision by Cabinet on the preferred option is required for the project to move into pre-implementation and address these risks fully in a timely manner. Further Cabinet decisions and advice to address these key risks will then likely be required in February 2027 to maintain timelines.

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

4

5

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

[redacted]

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s 9(2)(g)(i)

13

14

Next steps

15 The NZTA Board is scheduled to endorse the Investment Case at its 15 May Board meeting. We recommend you take the Investment Case and option decision to ECO committee the week of 22 June and Cabinet the following week.

16 We will work with NZTA to provide you a draft Cabinet paper in May in line with the above approach. If you wish to discuss the contents of this Cabinet paper or any of the material in this aide memoir ahead of this, the project can be put on the agenda for the 9 April officials meeting.

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Contacts

Name	Telephone	First contact
Duncan Wilson, Principal Advisor, Transport Financing	s 9(2)(a)	✓
David Wood, DCE, Investment and Monitoring		

Document 2

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT
TE MANATŪ WAKA

9 June 2026 OC260397

Hon Chris Bishop **Action required by:**

Minister of Transport Wednesday, 10 June 2026

DRAFT CABINET PAPER – WAITEMATĀ HARBOUR CONNECTIONS UPDATE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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Purpose

To provide you with a draft Cabinet paper for the Cabinet Strategy Committee (STR) on 23 June that gives an update on the Waitematā Harbour Connections project and seeks agreement for public engagement.

Key points

- NZTA has completed the Waitematā Harbour Connections Investment case. Their Board endorsed the tunnel option. Fully progressing to pre-implementation requires Cabinet to endorse a preferred option. You indicated you wish NZTA to undertake public engagement prior to Cabinet endorsing a preferred option.
- For the paper to be considered by STR on Tuesday 23 June, it will need to be lodged by 10am on Thursday 18 June. To allow a week for Ministerial and Departmental consultation you will need to circulate a version by Thursday 11 June. NZTA, Treasury and DPMC have already been engaged in the development of the attached Cabinet paper. We understand Infrastructure and Investment Ministers Group (IIMG) intend to discuss the contents on 18 June, and we will work with Treasury to provide a separate cover note for this item.
- If Cabinet agrees to the public engagement, NZTA will require six to eight weeks from the STR meeting to develop, implement and analyse public engagement and targeted stakeholder feedback. This will allow you to report back to ECO committee seeking a preferred option in late August or early September. This timeframe is tight and, if decisions are not progressed promptly, creates risk that Cabinet will not have time to endorse a preferred option prior to the general election. s 9(2)(g)(i) [redacted]
- Given the high level of stakeholder interest in this project, we have recommended that Cabinet give a delegation to you and the Minister of Finance to approve an engagement plan before the public engagement process commences, to ensure you are comfortable with the scope of the engagement, the key messages, and the questions that will be asked.

- While there will be a high level of public interest in the project generally, the Ministry expects that a significant proportion of the feedback received will focus on the fact that the preferred option does not explicitly provide capacity for active modes.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

1 **Provide feedback** on the attached Cabinet paper by Wednesday 10 June so an updated version can be circulated for Ministerial and Departmental consultation by Thursday 11 June Yes / No



David Wood
Deputy Chief Executive, Investment & Monitoring

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister of Transport
..... / ..... / .....

Minister's office to complete: ☐ Approved ☐ Declined

☐ Seen by Minister ☐ Not seen by Minister

☐ Overtaken by events

Comments

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Contacts

Name	Telephone	First contact
David Wood, Deputy Chief Executive, Investment & Monitoring	s 9(2)(a)	✓
Duncan Wilson, Principal Advisor, Transport Financing		

ATTACHMENTS 1

Draft Cabinet paper and A3s - Waitematā Harbour Connections update and public engagement

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In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Transport

Cabinet Strategy Committee

Waitematā Harbour Connections update and public engagement

Proposal

1 This paper updates the Cabinet Strategy Committee on the Waitematā Harbour Connections (WHC) project and seeks agreement for the Minister of Transport to direct the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) to conduct public engagement on the best performing bridge and tunnel options.

Relation to government priorities

2 The Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2024-34 (GPS 2024) commits to delivering an additional road connection between Auckland's North Shore and the central business district.

Executive Summary

3 The existing Auckland Harbour Bridge (AHB) forms part of the busiest corridor of the state highway network. The corridor carries 170,000 vehicles crossings daily and underpins $911m in annual economic activity, projected to increase to $3.9b by 2051.

4 The AHB is an aging asset that requires long term de-loading regardless of any new crossing and, in the coming decades, will need major renewal works involving multiple lane closures for months at a time to maintain even a reduced level of service. The estimated cumulative economic cost of the disruption to undertake the renewals is calculated at $4.8 billion. An additional crossing reduces the costliest network disruption and solves the resilience and capacity problems facing the corridor, enabling future economic growth.

5 In October 2024, the previous Minister of Transport (Hon. Simeon Brown) directed NZTA to undertake detailed investigations into the best performing bridge and tunnel options. Both options, in conjunction with a refurbished AHB, would provide a total of 10 general traffic lanes and two dedicated bus lanes across the harbour.

6 On 15 May 2026, the NZTA Board endorsed the WHC Investment Case and the recommended option of a tunnel. s 9(2)(i) [redacted]

7 In order for an additional crossing to be in place before renewals take place on the existing AHB, a replacement project needs to proceed with urgency, with main

[1] P50 and P95 are probabilistic cost estimates that represent a budget that has a 50% and 95% respective likelihood of covering actual costs of construction.

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construction beginning by 2030/31. The assurance process undertaken on WHC Investment Case has concluded that the work done to date is robust and sufficient to support a form decision and to proceed to pre-implementation.

8 Given this urgency, I seek Cabinet's agreement to direct NZTA to undertake public engagement on the two options developed in the Investment Case. s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

9 After Cabinet decides on the preferred form of the crossing, more work will be required to complete the Approval to Deliver to the standard required to support a final investment decision. The scale and complexity of this project, and s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted] means that Cabinet will need to provide more direction than would be the case for other major roading projects. Cabinet will need to consider a range of issues, s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted] with in-principle decisions on these issues expected in mid-2027.

Context

10 Auckland's harbour crossing plays a critical role in the state highway network, forming part of the busiest travel corridor in New Zealand that carries 170,000 vehicle crossings daily and underpins $911m in annual economic activity, projected to increase to $3.9b by 2051.

11 Progressive corridor upgrades over 60 years (clip-ons, Northern Busway, state highway and network enhancements) have served growing demands, but we are approaching the limits of what is possible to meet future transport demands with existing infrastructure.

12 Issues on this section of the corridor now put significant pressure on the wider network with widespread economic impacts. Most notably the AHB does not enable High Productivity Motor Vehicles (HPMV)[2] limiting freight efficiency, and NZTA has recently rejected Auckland Transport's application for electric double decker buses to use the AHB due to weight issues, impacting the efficacy of the public transport network.

13 Resilience issues in the corridor from weather events, including flooding, wind and sea level rise, are causing unplanned closures on the AHB, and are occurring with increasing frequency. The impact of lane closures on the AHB is significant and economic costs range from $4 million to $190 million per weekday for unplanned events. Structural rehabilitation does not address any of these unplanned closures.

14 Parts of SH1 and the Northern Busway already face flooding when there is extreme rainfall or coastal inundation. By 2041, all lanes could close for up to an hour 18 days a year, with two northbound lanes closed for up to two hours during these events. By 2060, the future southbound bus lane on the AHB approach will be inundated from

[2] HPMVs are trucks that exceed normal weight limits and need a permit to operate but provide more efficient freight movement. They are excluded on certain roads due to weight and size issues, including the AHB.

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high tides, on average every two weeks; by 2070, two traffic lanes will also be underwater, and by 2090, the entire motorway is expected to be submerged.

15 High wind events have a significant impact on operational protocols, e.g. an event that results in the loss of 2 lanes in each direction and speed restrictions for 6-12 hours, is predicted to increase customer delay hours across the network of between 90% and 200% compared to a typical day.

16 The existing AHB requires major renewals works in the coming decades that will require lengthy closures of multiple lanes at a time. The estimated cumulative economic cost of these disruptions is $4.8 billion consisting of:

16.1 Closing three lanes for 250 working days for main truss bridge deck strengthening – economic disruption of $3.75 - $4 billion.

16.2 Closing three lanes for 80 working days for truss bridge over arch recoating – economic disruption of $1.2 billion

16.3 Closure of two lanes over 80 working days for the replacement of extension bridge expansion joints - economic disruption of $600 million.

17 Even with the major renewals, additional restrictions will need to be placed on the AHB to ensure it maintains operations until 2090. This includes increasing volume and weight restrictions on trucks and buses. The economic cost of these additional restrictions is estimated to reach $89 million per annum by 2043.

18 s 9(2)(f)(iv)



19 Three decades of studies have evaluated a wide span of additional crossing options and have progressively narrowed down the options to the best performing bridge and tunnel option in this corridor.

20 s 9(2)(f)(iv)



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21 In October 2024, the Minister of Transport set out the Government's expectations for the project and requested NZTA undertake a detailed analysis of the highest performing bridge and tunnel options, before seeking a decision from Cabinet on which option to progress. GPS 2024 included the Government's commitment to delivering an additional crossing that provides, at a minimum, additional road connections between Auckland's North Shore and the central business district.

22 At the March 2025 NZ Infrastructure Investment Summit, I announced the next steps for the project, including undertaking geotechnical, environmental and utilities investigations over the following 12 months to inform a decision on whether a bridge or tunnel should be the preferred crossing option. I also announced that NZTA would commence early market soundings from April 2025 with civil contractors, maintenance providers, investors and debt financiers to test design and staging opportunities, delivery approaches, market appetite and capacity, and potential funding, financing and procurement options. I indicated that the Government expected to announce a preferred option in mid-2026.

Proposed solutions

23 NZTA has completed the Investment Case comparing the best performing bridge and tunnel solutions. This investment case has gone through its assurance process including Gateway Review, Independent Reviews, and NZTA internal Independent Quality Assurance process. These processes all concluded that the information is robust and of sufficient quality to support a form decision between the two options to proceed to pre-implementation. s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

24 Both bridge and tunnel options provide long-term solutions to solve specific and increasing issues of resilience and demand. Both options achieve this through the provision of a roading connection between Auckland's CBD and North Shore with ten lanes for freight and general traffic, a dedicated bi-directional busway corridor, and resilience improvements to guarantee long-term SH1 connectivity. The attached slides detail the configuration of each option.

25 Irrespective of form, a new crossing delivers substantial benefits for New Zealand, including:

25.1 A doubling of public transport (PT) trip capacity across the harbour and shortened commutes by 4 to 13 minutes with a dedicated busway (from 35,000 to 77,000 daily bus users).

25.2 30,000 more jobs accessible within 30 minutes across the Auckland region.

25.3 Up to 13 minutes faster for morning commuters from Wairau Valley to Symonds Street.

25.4 Boosting the economy through greater freight efficiency (25% increase in inter-peak freight capacity).

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25.5 Extending the service life of the AHB to the 2090s and beyond (due to a 40-50% reduction in vehicle weights).

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

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[3] s 9(2)(f)(iv)

s 9(2)(f)(iv)



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s 9(2)(f)(iv)

36 [redacted]

37 [redacted]

38 [redacted]

NZTA Board endorsed the tunnel

39 On 15 May 2026, the NZTA Board endorsed the WHC Investment Case and the recommended option of a tunnel. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

40 [redacted]

40.1 [redacted]

40.2 [redacted]

40.3 [redacted]

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s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Next steps

41 Subject to Cabinet's agreement, I propose to direct NZTA to undertake public engagement on the two options that have been developed in the Investment Case

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

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44.1

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44.6 s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

Cost-of-living Implications

45 The engagement decision sought in this paper will not have any direct cost-of-living implications. s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

Financial Implications

46 The engagement decision sought in this paper does not have any direct financial implications. s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

Legislative Implications

47 The engagement decision being sought in this paper does not have any direct legislative implications. s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

Population Implications

48 There are no specific population implications in this proposal.

Human Rights

49 There are no implications for human rights in this paper.

Use of external Resources

50 The WHC Investment Case has been developed by NZTA, with input from specialist consultants.

Consultation

51 NZTA, Treasury, and DPMC were consulted in the development of this paper.

Communications

52 Subject to Cabinet agreement, NZTA will undertake public and targeted stakeholder engagement on the project in mid-2026.

Proactive Release

53 I intend to release this Cabinet paper barring any redactions under the Official Information Act 1982 within the standard 30 business days.

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Recommendations

The Minister for Transport recommends that the Committee:

1 Note that AHB serves as an inter-regional asset for the upper North Island, Auckland, Waikato, and Bay of Plenty communities, supporting $911m in annual economic activity, projected to grow to $3.9b by 2051

2 Note that the existing AHB needs major renewal over the coming decades. These renewal works will cause $4.8 billion of economic disruption without an additional crossing in place

3 Note that in addition to the renewals, the existing AHB will need increasing operational restrictions that, without an additional crossing, will add an additional $89 million in economic cost per annum by 2043

4 s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

5 Note that the assurance process has concluded that the work done to date is robust and sufficient to support a form decision and to proceed to pre-implementation

6 Note that proceeding to pre-implementation does not entail proceeding with the project, and a report back is expected in 2027 to approve any implementation parameters

7 s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

8 Note that the NZTA Board has endorsed the tunnel as their preferred option

9 Agree that the Minister of Transport direct NZTA to undertake public and targeted stakeholder engagement on the two options

10 Agree that the Minister of Transport and Minister of Finance jointly approve an engagement plan

Once the Minister has approved the draft Cabinet paper for lodgement for Cabinet or a Cabinet committee, this section should be updated to state 'Authorised for lodgement'.

Hon Chris Bishop

Minister for Transport

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Waitematā Harbour Connections Supporting Slides

DRAFT
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Cabinet paper - next steps on Waitematā Harbour Connections

Date:	27 July 2026	Priority:	High	Tracking number:	OC260501

To	Action sought	Response by
Hon Chris Bishop **Minister of Transport**	**Agree** preferred delivery arrangements and provide any feedback on the attached draft Cabinet paper	28 July 2026

Contact for discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Stephanie Rowe	Executive Leader, Delivery	s 9(2)(a)	☑
Mitch Macaulay	Acting Manager, Transport Financing		☐
Duncan Wilson	Principal Advisor, Transport Financing		☐

Action for Minister's Office staff

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Purpose

1. This briefing seeks:

    - your approval to the preferred delivery arrangements for completing the detailed business case (DBC) for the Waitematā Harbour Connections (WHC) project; and
    - any further feedback on the draft Cabinet paper prior to lodgement on Thursday 30 July 2026 (attached in **Annex 1**).

Key points

Draft Cabinet paper

2. Officials have been preparing you a draft Cabinet paper to seek decisions on next steps for the WHC project – including establishing governance and delivery arrangements to oversee delivery of a Detailed Business Case (DBC) on crossing options.
3. Your office circulated a draft Cabinet paper for Ministerial consultation on 9 July 2026. The attached Cabinet paper has been updated to incorporate feedback from your colleagues that:
    - the Meola Reef crossing option needs to be properly considered as an alternative option alongside the tunnel and bridge options considered by NZTA;
    - the Market Led Proposal (MLP) s 9(2)(j) also needs to be properly considered alongside the current solutions;
    - the paper needs to more clearly set out how the project will align with wider transport development in Auckland and include an Auckland 'voice' in governance; and
    - that the DBC will further refine the options, costs and trade-offs before Cabinet decides on the preferred solution in mid-2027.
4. We request any further feedback on the draft Cabinet paper by Tuesday 28 July 2026.

Options for delivery arrangements

5. We understand you are also interested in exploring different options for the delivery arrangements to complete the DBC. In this briefing we set out two options:
    - Option 1: An independent entity established within MCERT; or
    - Option 2: An independent project team hosted within NZTA.
6. This paper outlines these two approaches and the advantages and disadvantages of each. MCERT recommends Option 1 – that the WHC project team is established as an independent entity within MCERT. This option sends the clearest signal that this project is shifting to core Crown-led.
7. We seek your feedback on these two options and can then update the Cabinet paper to reflect any changes needed.

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Recommendations

8. We recommend you:

   a. **note** that the attached draft Cabinet paper has been updated to reflect feedback from Ministerial consultation

   b. **agree** the WHC Project Team be established as an independent entity within MCERT **(recommended)** Yes / No

   or

   agree the WHC Project Team be established as an independent unit hosted by NZTA Yes / No

   c. **provide** feedback on any further changes you would like made to the attached Cabinet paper

   d. **agree** that, pending your feedback, the Cabinet paper be lodged by 30 July 2026 for consideration by ECO on 5 August 2026 Yes / No



Stephanie Rowe
Executive Leader, Delivery, Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT)
27 / 07 / 2026

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister of Transport
..... / ..... / .....

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Comments

Cabinet paper - next steps on Waitematā Harbour Connections

Background

9. Officials have been preparing you a draft Cabinet paper to seek decisions on next steps for progressing the WHC project.

10. This Cabinet paper will seek decisions on establishing a new independent governance and delivery model and that a DBC be completed by mid-2027 to inform decisions by Cabinet on the preferred crossing option.

Updated draft Cabinet paper

11. You circulated a draft Cabinet paper on next steps for the WHC project to your ministerial colleagues for feedback on 9 July 2026. Feedback provided by your colleagues, and changes made in the attached draft Cabinet paper, are set out below:

    - the Meola Reef crossing option needs to be properly considered as an alternative option alongside the tunnel and bridge options considered by NZTA;
    - the MLP s 9(2)(i) also needs to be properly considered alongside the current solutions;
    - the paper needs to more clearly set out how the project will align with wider transport development in Auckland and include an Auckland 'voice' in governance; and
    - that the DBC will further refine the options, costs and trade-offs before Cabinet decides on the preferred solution in mid-2027.

12. The updated Cabinet paper incorporates this feedback (see **Annex 1**). Key changes include:

    - making it explicit that the Meola Reef crossing option and Stage 2 of the MLP will be considered on a common assessment framework alongside the existing Investment Case solutions, all options will go through a common assurance process, and that ultimate decision making on all four options sits with Ministers;
    - including the chair of the Auckland Regional Transport Committee (ARTC) on the WHC Steering Group to ensure alignment with the 30-year plan in development and new governance arrangements for transport in Auckland; and
    - edits to note that the DBC will involve further refinement of costs and trade-offs from progressing with the project.

13. We request further feedback on this paper by 28 July 2026. It will then be lodged on Thursday 30 July 2026 for consideration at Cabinet Economic Policy Committee (ECO) on 5 August 2026.

14. We understand you intend to announce next steps on WHC at the Building Nations 2026 event on 20 – 21 August 2026. We will work with your office to support this announcement.

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Options for establishing the WHC Project Team

15. We understand you are also interested in exploring different options for establishing the WHC Project Team to deliver the DBC. We have assessed two options:
    - Option 1: An independent entity established within MCERT; or
    - Option 2: An independent project team hosted within NZTA.
16. Both options would involve drawing in resources and staff from different agencies. We have outlined how each approach could work below, noting that the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) would confirm the details of how the preferred option will be implemented.

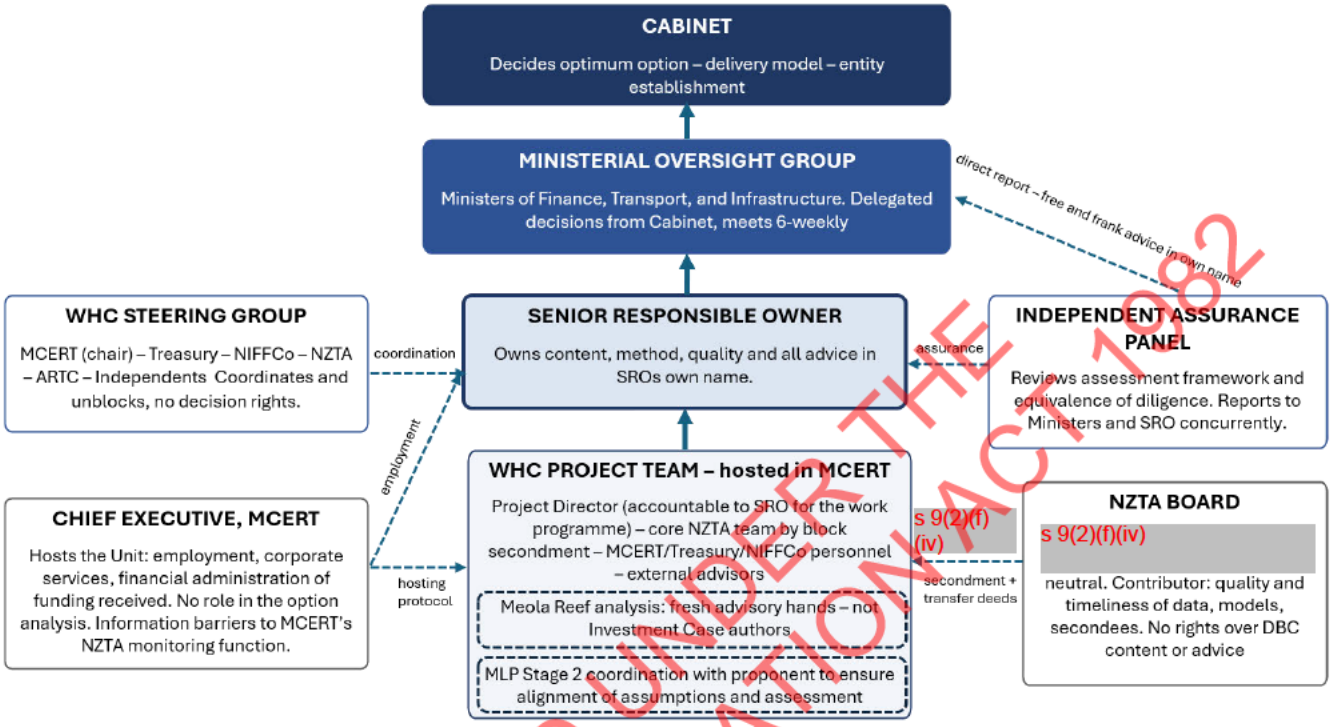
Option 1: Independent entity established within MCERT

17. Under this option, an independent entity would be established within MCERT. This would provide the strongest independence to develop the DBC outside of existing arrangements in NZTA.
18. Under this option, an SRO would be appointed by the MCERT Chief Executive and employed by MCERT. The SRO would have full discretion over the development of the DBC and assessment of alternative options. The SRO would report directly to joint Ministers – the Ministers of Finance, Transport and Infrastructure. MCERT would host and administer funding for the WHC Project Team. MCERT would not direct the content of the DBC as the DBC would be owned by the SRO.
19. s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted] the NZTA WHC project team would be seconded into the WHC Project Team alongside staff from other agencies (including MCERT, NIFFCo, and Treasury). NZTA's Board would not direct the DBC process, but NZTA would still have a say at the governance level through their membership in the WHC Steering Group.
20. Under this proposal, the independent study into a corridor solution at Meola Reef and MLP engagement would take place as separate workstreams under direction from the SRO. The contract for the Meola Reef feasibility study would be administered independently from NZTA to minimise any perceived conflict of interest.
21. A common assessment framework will apply identically to all four options (the two Investment Case options, Meola Reef crossing option, and MLP). Assurance will be shared across all four options and operate at two levels:
    - A common assurance process: Gateway and Investment Management System requirements on a fixed schedule; and
    - An Independent Assurance Panel, appointed by the SRO with the agreement of joint Ministers, which reviews the assessment framework and the equivalence of diligence across options and reports to the SRO and Ministers concurrently. These are distinct from the advice Ministers will continue to receive from agencies in their own name, including MCERT's advice as monitor and Treasury and Infrastructure Commission system perspectives.
22. s 9(2)(f)(iv), s 9(2)(g)(i) [redacted]

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function, and employment responsibilities with the project team. While these issues will need to be worked through, arrangements can be made to ensure requirements are being met. The Cabinet paper provides delegated authority to joint Ministers to take fiscally neutral funding decisions.

Figure 1: Illustration of governance and delivery structure under Option 1



Advantages	Disadvantages
s 9(2)(g)(i)	Establishing a new unit outside of NZTA will take additional time to establish and may result in attrition from the NZTA project team arising from the transition from NZTA to MCERT
Provides a clear signal to the market, and public, that this is a core Crown-led project that warrants a bespoke approach to delivery	Novel three-line construct (SRO / host CE / s 9(2)(f)(iv) creates complexity around decision rights and accountability (which can be overcome through ensuring clear processes and terms of reference)
Converts cleanly if Cabinet chooses a new Crown delivery vehicle — the Project is already outside NZTA, making it easier to establish a new delivery unit if needed post-DBC	MCERT hosts the Unit while monitoring NZTA — any potential conflict of interest would need careful management (e.g. by maintaining distance between MCERT's hosting of the Project Team and its function for monitoring NZTA)
The SRO's position is simplest to defend as there is no embedded relationship with the sponsoring agency to explain	If NZTA ends up as the delivery agency, the team moves twice which results in additional cost and potential loss of capability / staff

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Option 2: Independent project team hosted within NZTA

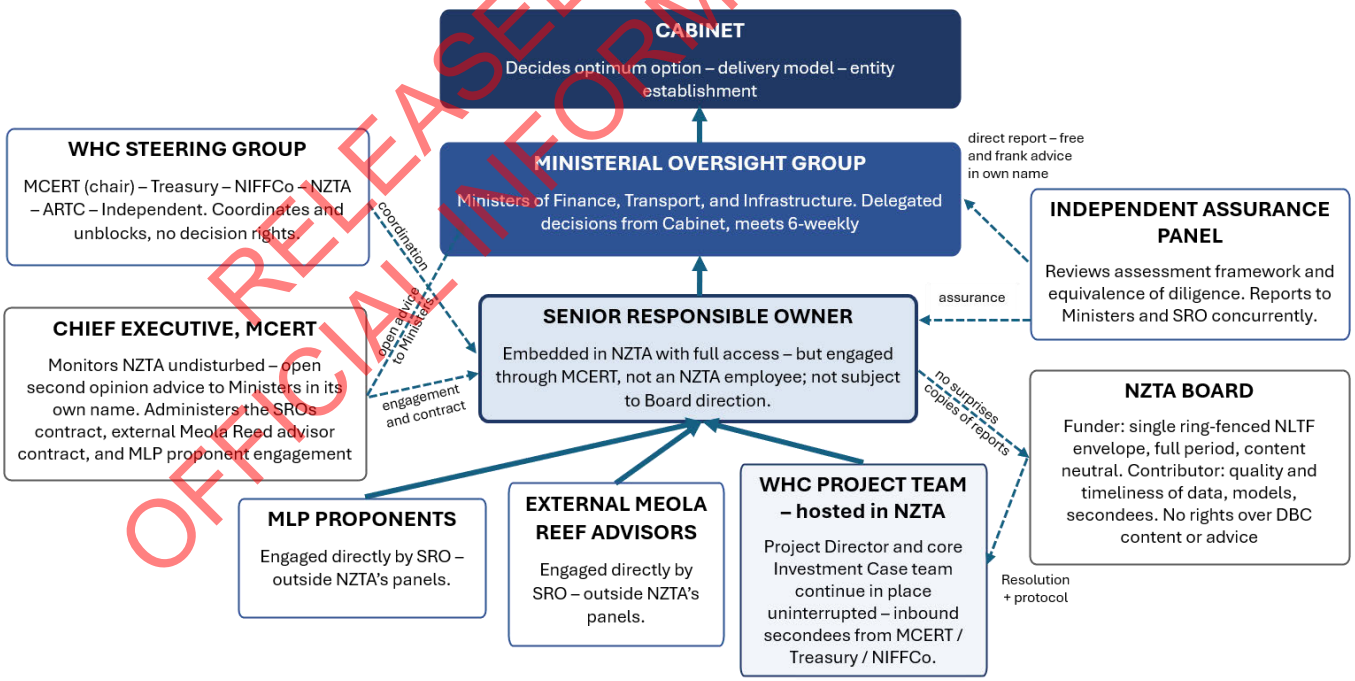
23. Alternatively, the WHC Project Team could be hosted within NZTA to minimise project disruption. Like Option 1, this option also includes an independent SRO appointed by the MCERT Chief Executive and employed by MCERT with full discretion over the development of the DBC and assessment of alternative options. However, the WHC Project Team would be hosted within NZTA as the project's 'home' agency for this work.

24. s 9(2)(f)(iv) However, the NZTA Board would not be able to direct the content or conclusions in the DBC and would receive reports on a 'no surprises' basis from the SRO and WHC Project Team.

25. The SRO would administer the contract for the Meola Reef crossing study, as well as engagement with the MLP proponent independently of NZTA channels to minimise any perceived conflict of interest. Similar to option 1, a common assessment framework would apply to all four options. A common assurance process would also be shared across all four options and be overseen by an Independent Assurance Panel appointed by the SRO.

26. Cabinet would hold final decision rights on the preferred option, delivery model and any entity establishment. This arrangement is likely to carry fewer concerns about NZTA's ability to carry out their statutory functions, however, having an independent SRO embedded in a Crown Entity but reporting directly to Ministers and not their Board is a novel arrangement that will need to be managed – including to ensure there is clear accountability for the DBC.

Figure 2: Illustration of governance and delivery structure under Option 2



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Advantages	Disadvantages
Helps to preserve existing momentum and expertise by adding expertise and resources to support work	Continued hosting within NZTA does not best reflect the move towards a Crown-led project
Makes use of existing funding machinery and can be quickly established by Board resolution	s 9(2)(g)(i)
MCERT's monitoring function of NZTA continues as normal with no conflicts of interest that need to be managed	Placing the team in NZTA may result in unclear accountability and relationships with NZTA's leadership and Board
	Direct Ministerial reporting outside the Crown Entity Board is unusual and creates unclear accountabilities
	If arrangement does not work, making changes mid-DBC development is highly disruptive

Recommendation

27. s 9(2)(g)(i) Situating the WHC project team within NZTA does not best reflect a move towards a core Crown-led project.

28. Establishing the unit within MCERT will likely take more time than building on the existing NZTA-hosted project team. However, this disruption is likely to be required at some point in the project as s 9(2)(f)(iv) Cabinet holds most decision rights. Establishment readiness for implementation will be prepared during the DBC so that the mid-2027 decision will include a recommended approach to implementation and delivery arrangements.

29. Now is likely the least disruptive time to extract the project from NZTA. They have made good progress on the technical elements of the project, but some of the key outstanding areas s 9(2)(f)(iv) sit outside their areas of responsibility. While it would be possible to extract the WHC project team from NZTA later, it is best to do so before the DBC (and its conclusions) are too far advanced.

30. The disruption of shifting the project to MCERT can be mitigated through block secondment of the existing Project Team and Project Director to maintain the existing structure as much as possible. s 9(2)(f)(iv) The SRO will be given discretion to amend existing arrangements as they deem necessary to support completion of the DBC phase.

Risks

31. Timing to establish the independent entity within MCERT and complete the DBC, Meola Reef

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crossing study, and MLP stage 2 by mid-2027 is tight. s 9(2)(g)(i) [redacted]

32. s 9(2)(i) [redacted]

Next steps

33. If you have any further feedback on the attached Cabinet paper, please provide this by the end of Tuesday 28 July 2026 for it to be incorporated ahead of lodgement on Thursday 30 July 2026 for consideration by ECO on Wednesday 5 August 2026.

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Annex 1

Draft Cabinet Paper – Next steps on Waitematā Harbour Connections

Attached separately.

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Cabinet Committee Background Information and Talking Points

Cabinet Committee: Cabinet Economic Committee (ECO); 5 August 2026

Paper Title: Next steps on Waitematā Harbour Connections

Portfolio: Transport

Officials Attending:

- Jeremy Lightfoot, Chief Executive, MCERT
- Paul O'Connell, Deputy Executive Leader – Sector Strategy, MCERT
- Mitch Macaulay, Acting Manager – Transport Financing, MCERT.

Background Information:

- Waitematā Harbour Connections will be the biggest transport infrastructure project in New Zealand's history and have a significant effect on shaping Auckland as a city.
- Major renewal works are required on the existing Auckland Harbour Bridge in the early 2040s at the latest. To minimise the disruption an alternative crossing needs to be operational first. s 9(2)(f)(v)
- NZTA have completed the Investment Case comparing their best performing bridge and tunnel options. Their Board endorsed the tunnel as their preferred option.
- Other stakeholders have advocated for alternative options. The Mayor of Auckland prefers an al gnment over Meola Reef to the west, and NIFFCo have received a market led proposal s 9(2)(i)
- These have not yet been assessed to the same standard as the options in the Investment Case.

Talking Points:

- NZTA have completed the Investment Case that compares their preferred bridge and tunnel options as per the direction set by the Minister of Transport in 2024.
- This Investment Case provides a robust comparison of the performance of these two options and has significantly advanced the understanding of issues with the corridor and potential solutions.

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- However, the Investment Case does not compare the options to a solution at Meola Reef, the Mayor of Auckland's preferred option, nor to the Market Led Proposal s 9(2)(i)
- Further work is also needed to establish a clear path to delivery, s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- International evidence of projects this size and complexity highlights the importance of thorough planning at the outset, including having strong stakeholder alignment and clear delivery pathways, before deciding on a single preferred option.
- This reduces the risk of delays and complications during the delivery phase when such issues are far more costly and disruptive.
- I am recommending that the WHC project move into a next phase where a full Detailed Business Case is developed for the two solutions in the Investment Case, alongside investigations into a solution at Meola Reef and the s 9(2)(i) Market Led Proposal.
- Assessing all the potential options on the table is important to ensure we arrive at the best solution for the crossing and will help build buy in with key stakeholders.
- The size and importance of this project mean it needs to be led through an independent unit, made up of cross-agency expertise, to ensure the next phase takes an unbiased view of all the possible options.
- I am therefore proposing that this project be led by an independent unit housed in the newly established Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT).
- Moving the project outside NZTA will better reflect where decision-making lies for this project s 9(2)(f)(iv), s 9(2)(g)(i)
- To ensure this work meets the expectations of all stakeholders, I am recommending that this work be undertaken by an independent Senior Responsible Owner who will sit within MCERT, but report directly to Joint Ministers on the project.
- This SRO will have sole responsibility for the DBC and overall assessment of all options. The existing NZTA project team will be merged with expertise from MCERT, Treasury and NIFFCo to form a single WHC project team solely focused on this project.
- Assessing all the options consistently is important to ensure they are weighed fairly. A common assessment framework and assurance process will also be held across all four options to ensure they are assessed fairly and impartially.
- I expect the full DBC and assessments of Meola Reef and the Market Led Proposal to all be completed in time for Cabinet to assess the options and decided a preferred crossing approach when I report back in mid-2027.

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Potential Q&As

Q: Why are we not deciding on a preferred option now?

- More work is required on the delivery pathway for the Investment Case options, s 9(2)(f)(iv) before we can confidently decide a preferred form.
- Global experience is that projects this size and complexity consistently face elevated risk due the aggregation of scale, duration, governance complexity, political intervention, approvals risk and the need to maintain social license.
- Best practice is to reduce these risks in the planning phase when it is easier to change before entering the delivery phase where issues result in far bigger delays and cost increases. Deciding a single option now would lock us into an option that does not have a clear delivery pathway nor widespread stakeholder support.

Q: Why is NZTA not running the next phase?

- NZTA have completed good, detailed design work to advance our understanding of the issues and constructability of potential solutions
- However, I believe it is important that a wider range of views is present in the next phase given any solution will need to draw on a range of levers across government.
- s 9(2)(g)(i)
-

Q: What is the Meola Reef crossing option?

- The Meola Reef option is an alternative crossing situated over Meola Reef to the west of the existing Auckland Harbour Bridge. It is the Mayor of Auckland's preferred solution.
- It has the advantage of being a shorter crossing length than other routes but is further from the existing state highway network making network integration more challenging.
- An independent study will assess the viability and comparative performance of this crossing to allow us to consider it alongside other solutions.

Q: What is the Market Led Proposal process?

- The Market Led Proposal process is run by NIFFCo and allows private sector proponents to present unsolicited proposals to the government where they may have innovative solutions that have not been considered to justify exclusive negotiation outside the normal procurement process. It must then pass through various assessments.
- NIFFCo have received a market led proposal s 9(2)(i)

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- The Market Led Proposal s 9(2)(i) has passed Stage 1a (that the proposal is for a project in the public interest and the proponent has the exclusive ability to deliver) and Stage 1b (that the proposal has the potential to provide a value for money solution).
- It is now ready to proceed to Stage 2 which includes a detailed assessment, doing so alongside the DBC and Meola Reef investigation will allow for a fair assessment of the best possible solution.

DRAFT
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Attachments 2 and 3 (the Cabinet Paper and Minute) are refused under Section 18(d) of the Act.
Once Published the documents will be available on the Ministry's Website here: https://www.transport.govt.nz/about-us/our-corporate-publications/proactive-releases/results

Aide Memoire

Options for SRO appointment for the Waitematā Harbour Connections DBC phase

Date:	7 August 2026	Priority:	Urgent	Tracking number:	OC260655

Information for Minister(s)
Hon Chris Bishop **Minister of Transport**

Contacts

Name	Telephone	First contact
Stephanie Rowe, Executive Leader, Delivery	s 9(2)(a)	☑
Mitch Macaulay, Acting Manager, Transport Financing		☐
Duncan Wilson, Principal Advisor, Transport Financing		☐

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Purpose

1. Provide you with information on how a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) to lead the Detailed Business Case (DBC) phase of the Waitematā Harbour Connections project may be appointed, following discussion at Cabinet Expenditure and Regulatory Review Committee (EXP).

The SRO will hold final responsibility for the outputs from the next phase of work

2. The SRO will hold final responsibility for the DBC, independent Meola Reef study and Crown interaction with Stage 2 of the Market Led Proposal. This responsibility includes providing an assessment of these options and a recommendation to Joint Ministers in mid-2027.

3. This is a significant amount of work to be completed in a short time frame and how quickly the SRO can be brought up to speed and the amount of flexibility they have to deliver what is required will have a significant impact on the quality of the outputs Ministers receive.

4. Regardless of the appointment process, the SRO will require funding and staffing delegations, clear authority and accountability, and direct Ministerial communication.

Appointing through the Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) Chief Executive (CE) provides the quickest and most flexible option

5. The SRO role is primarily tasked with delivering a specialist technical piece of advice, it is deliberately intended to be apolitical to protect the independence and impartiality of the advice produced to maximise the chance the findings are supported by a variety of key stakeholders. Making the appointment through the MCERT CE will support the appearance of apoliticality.

6. Appointing through the MCERT CE provides the greatest flexibility in terms of remuneration, who can be appointed and allows for financial and staffing delegations to be agreed directly. This will support the SRO to have the flexibility they require to organise and run this phase and deliver the best possible advice in mid-2027.

7. Appointing through the MCERT CE also provides the quicker pathway to onboarding the SRO and establishing the project team. Given this appointment is likely to be for 9-12 months to lead the completion of the DBC and other studies, a quick appointment that maintains momentum will be required to meet expected timeframes. Once a preferred option has been selected in mid-2027 and the project moves into pre-implementation for a single option, leadership of the project will need to be reconsidered on a longer term basis, this more substantive longer-term appointment would be supported by a Cabinet appointment process.

An appointment that goes through Cabinet provides greater input but slows and complicates the process

8. At EXP Ministers made changes to the recommendations to make the SRO a Cabinet appointment rather than by the MCERT CE. While technically Cabinet does not make appointments, we have

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identified two options whereby the SRO appointment will first be considered by Cabinet; appointing the SRO as the head of a new Departmental Agency or appointing the SRO as a single person Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG).

9. A Departmental Agency is an operationally autonomous agency hosted by a Public Service department with the CE reporting directly to Ministers. The CE of this Departmental Agency would be appointed by the Public Service Commission after consideration by Cabinet through the Appointments and Honours Committee (APH) in the same process as other Public Service CE appointments. The establishment of the Departmental Agency would also require an Order-in-Council to establish which would require going the Cabinet Business Committee or Legislation Committee committees prior to the election. Consideration should also be given as to whether the small size and short term of this unit warrant the creation of an entirely new entity.

10. A MAG provides Ministers with external advice on particular issues. The SRO would make up a one person MAG and their appointment would first be considered through APH. This option has greater flexibility in establishment, but the SRO would have far less power in how the officials from various agencies support their work, with officials still employed by their home agency and supporting the MAG through terms of reference only.

11. Both of these options would require taking the appointment through APH Committee. Realistically a late September appointment via the final APH Committee on 15 September is the only viable pre-election option. This timeframe would substantially reduce the recruitment and selection period down to a single week in order to run the APH process:

    - Recruitment and selection of SRO – Now until 14 August;
    - Due diligence of candidates – 17 to 21 August;
    - Minister selects preferred candidate, draft APH paper – 24 to 28 August;
    - Ministerial and agency consultation on APH paper– 31 August to 4 September;
    - Update and lodge the paper – 7 to 10 September;
    - APH – 15 Sept (final APH pre-election);
    - Cabinet – 21 September.

12. Appointing the SRO through a MAG would incur the fee limits under the Cabinet Fees Framework (although a Departmental Agency would not) s 9(2)(i)

Recommended approach

13. The DBC phase will require rapidly pulling together a cross-agency team, developing detail on multiple options and running a fair and balanced assessment process in the next 9-12 months.

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14. The most important factors in appointing the SRO for effective delivery of the next phase are hiring the right candidate as quickly as possible and giving them the flexibility and authority to lead the work effectively.

	Appointment by MCERT CE	Ministerial Appointment
Strength of candidate	+ Remuneration able to be set according to market rate	s 9(2)(i) [redacted] - Recruitment and selection period limited to one week to accommodate APH
Timeliness of appointment	+ Appointment able as soon as preferred candidate available	- Appointment contingent on tight Cabinet Committee timelines
SRO flexibility and authority	- SRO authority confined to terms of reference conditions + Confers staffing and funding delegations at appointment	+ SRO given clear Cabinet mandate and backing - SRO role restricted by organisation form

15. Appointment via the MCERT CE is the preferred approach as it maintains existing project momentum for the relatively short time available for the DBC phase (9-12 months), and supports a stronger recruitment process by removing constraints caused by APH timeframes s 9(2)(i) [redacted]

16. If Cabinet approves a preferred option to proceed into pre-implementation in mid-2027, this wold provides an opportunity to reset leadership and organisation of the project to align with the intended delivery model and engage Cabinet in this more substantive appointment.

Next Steps

17. EXP agree to an edited recommendation to give responsibility for the SRO appointment to Cabinet and not the MCERT CE. If you wish to change this back you will need to seek agreement at Cabinet on Monday 10 August.

18. Subject to final Cabinet decisions, the appointment of the SRO will commence following the 10 August Cabinet meeting. Any organisational arrangements required to support this will also commence at this point in time.

19. The Waitematā Harbour Connections DBC phase is due to report back to Ministers with their findings and recommendations in mid-2027. The decision to proceed to pre-implementation of the preferred option will be sought at this time, this will include the delivery entity and organisational change required for this transition.

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Annex 1

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Attachment
OC260655

Cabinet Background Information and Talking Points

Paper Title: *Next Steps on Waitematā Harbour Connections*

Portfolio: *Transport*

Background Information:

- EXP considered the Cabinet paper "Next Steps on Waitematā Harbour Connections" on 4 August. They requested a change to allow Cabinet to appoint the SRO.
- You will discuss this paper, including how the SRO will be appointed, at Cabinet on Monday 10 August 2026.

Talking Points:

- At EXP we discussed the appointment process for the SRO and how to give Cabinet greater involvement in appointing this key role.
- I have sought advice from officials on options to allow for this and note that options to give Cabinet or Ministers the appointment decision wouldn't be possible before the Election.
- Given the tight timing to produce a DBC and independent studies by mid-2027, I consider that finding a suitably skilled and experienced SRO quickly is key.
- Leaving the appointment decision to the MCERT Chief Executive will enable a faster process to appoint the SRO and get on with delivering the DBC and other studies.
- But I also recognise Ministers' strong interest in who gets appointed to this key role.
- I propose that Joint Ministers confirm priorities for the role through the role description for the SRO and nominate an interview panel member for discussion with the Chief Executive.
- This would give Ministers involvement in the appointment and the ability to highlight what we would expect to see in a strong candidate in terms of their background, skills and experience.
- I propose updating the EXP Minute to reflect the following in **recommendation 7**:

  agreed that a dedicated Senior Responsible Owner, responsible for the delivery of the Detailed Business Case and investigations into other options, be appointed by the Chief Executive of MCERT with Joint Ministers confirming priorities through the role description and nominating an interview panel member for discussion with the MCERT Chief Executive.

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What other options were considered to appoint the SRO?

- There is no perfect machinery-of-government arrangement the allows Cabinet to appoint the SRO.
- Officials looked at two options – either a new Functional Chief Executive role within MCERT, or appointing the SRO as a one-person Ministerial Advisory Committee:
    - Establishing a new **Functional Chief Executive** would require Cabinet approving the specifics of the role, and an Order-in-Council to establish the position. There would be insufficient time after this to recruit and appoint a candidate before the final CBC on 27 October 2026. This role would also likely constitute a 'significant appointment' that could only be taken during the period of restraint if certain conditions were met and would contravene our existing direction to not establish additional Public Service entities.
    - Establishing and appointing an SRO via a **Ministerial Advisory Committee** is also not possible prior to the election. Establishing the terms of reference and role description and recruiting and shortlisting will likely take until the end of September at the earliest. Appointing an SRO via this method would also restrict their powers to run the DBC process as they could not hold staffing and funding delegations and advice would need to come from individual agencies.
- By contrast, Public Service Chief Executives have greater flexibility in appointments within their departments.
- Under my recommended option, Joint Ministers can still input into this process through reviewing the job description and may nominate an interview panel member for discussion with the MCERT CE

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