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## **Road building a priority for economic recovery**

In an economy battered by Covid-19, the Government should prioritise infrastructure spending on roads, Road Transport Forum (RTF) chief executive Nick Leggett says.

“We certainly hope to see some significant commitment to this in Thursday’s Budget,” Leggett says.

“Yesterday, we filed our submission on the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2021-22 - 2030-31, but in the current environment, the policy outlined in that document seems redundant.

“The document favours using money collected for roads, via taxes and road user charges, for other transportation including cycling, walking, and rail and heavily promotes rail freight over road. That means less money for roads that badly need the spend.

“There seems to be some push from Government to demonise trucks and we have noted our objection to the constant framing of trucks as dangerous and unsafe.

“They are not unsafe. Where there are safety concerns it is due to lack of infrastructure spend making New Zealand roads unsafe for the traffic demands placed on them; nothing to do with the performance of the vehicles themselves which are in fact, made ‘safe’ via a number of New Zealand laws, rules and regulations.

“The re-engineering of the transport system to satisfy ideology is not only costly, but flies in the face of economic reality. In a Covid-19 world, many people will be waking up to the fact that New Zealand needs export and import trade to survive. For that critical supply chain to work in a way that allows New Zealand to compete, you need a good roading network. We haven’t walked our products to market for some time.

“While we support passenger rail, road freight is simply more flexible and immediate than rail freight will ever be. There are some 93,000 kms of road in New Zealand and only 4,000 kms of rail track. That split isn’t going to change significantly and the freight customers (the market) will continue to make business-based choices, no matter how much money the Government throws at rail.

“Road freight carries 93 percent of the total tonnes of freight moved in New Zealand.

"We do not support any heavy-handed State intervention to counter market choices. It appears the mass return to rail freight is a fantasy, rather than policy grounded in evidence.

"Just last week KiwiRail said the proposal to restore the train line between Gisborne and Wairoa did not stack up and there was not enough rail freight on the route.

"The Covid-19 experience has confirmed the adaptability of road freight to meet a disruptive market, something rail is unable to do. We find it difficult to see a future with rail services supplanting trucks, especially when truck transport's environmental performance is continuing to improve with not only better engine and power train technology, but also better load management and delivery efficiency.

"All of this has been achieved without Government intervention by way of subsidies or favourable tax policy. In international transport circles, truck operators are considered one of the most innovative business groups in the world.

"To aid economic recovery, we would like to see the Government acknowledge the importance of road freight and the necessity of good roads," Leggett says.

The RTF submission is available on our website [here](#).

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**About Road Transport Forum New Zealand (RTF)**

RTF provides unified national representation for several regional trucking associations. RTF members include Road Transport Association NZ, National Road Carriers, and NZ Trucking Association. The affiliated representation of the RTF is about 3,000 individual road transport companies which in turn, operate 16-18,000 trucks involved in road freight transport, as well as companies that provide services allied to road freight transport.

The road freight transport industry employs 32,868 people (2.0% of the workforce), has a gross annual turnover of \$6 billion, and transports 93% of the total tonnes of freight moved in New Zealand.