

Support for Taranaki Crossing experience

An ambitious plan to enable more people to enjoy the beauty of Mt Taranaki and strengthen connections to its natural and cultural heritage has been announced.

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Source: Office of the Minister of Conservation and Office of the Minister of Regional Economic Development

An ambitious plan to enable more people to enjoy the beauty of Mt Taranaki and strengthen connections to its natural and cultural heritage has been announced by Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones and Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage.

The Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) will commit up to \$13.3 million to investigate and support the Mounga ki Moana Taranaki Crossing project, a major new investment for the region, including the National Park.

A proposed series of track upgrades under the crossing project would create a variety of short walks to help increase the length of visitors' stays in the region.

"The proposed Crossing concept would create a 41-kilometre "Mounga to Moana" walking experience offering a range of one-day walks from Dawson Falls via the North Egmont Visitor's Centre, Pouakai Range and Pukeiti Gardens to Oakura Beach.

"It will help to unlock Taranaki's tourism potential by creating a range of outstanding visitor experiences, just a short drive from New Plymouth or Stratford.

"The first phase of today's commitment will be a comprehensive investigation of the best ways to promote tourism in the Taranaki region and enhance biodiversity on Taranaki Mounga, and how the proposed Crossing tracks fit into that," Shane Jones said.

The project has been developed in consultation with Taranaki's eight iwi and aligns with their aspirations.

"The project will mean iwi have opportunities to invest in tourism-related businesses and express their kaitiakitanga of the mountain by sharing their stories, history and cultural values with visitors," Shane Jones said.

A potential upgrade of the North Egmont Visitor's Centre to create a conservation and cultural education facility will be considered, as will possible development of transport options such as shuttle buses to manage and reduce traffic within the National Park.

"DOC has already committed \$3.4m towards upgrading the section of track from North Egmont to the Pouakai Range as part of its Budget 2017 investment in visitor infrastructure," Eugenie Sage said.

"DOC's experience with this will help inform the best use of PGF investment to provide a quality visitor experience and enhance biodiversity on the mounga.

"Mt Taranaki is not an easy place to build or maintain tracks – it's prone to erosion and weather events which mean construction and ongoing costs can be higher than expected. There needs to be due diligence about visitor number projections before decisions are made.

"Moreover, we must be certain this work enhances the natural environment and people's connection to it rather than causing degradation of natural values. I have absolute confidence in DOC's expertise to ensure this," Eugenie Sage said.

The Mounga ki Moana Taranaki Crossing Experience was developed by Venture Taranaki through the 'Tapuae Roa – Make Way for Taranaki' Regional Economic Action Plan, which identified the Crossing as a priority project for the region.

The project has a total cost of \$23 million, with additional funding from central and local agencies including the Taranaki Regional Council, which owns the Pukeiti Gardens, Department of Conservation, the New Plymouth District Council and NZTA.

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