

NZ Utilities Advisory Group to investigate options to improve work planning and records

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The chair of the New Zealand Utilities Advisory Group, Jim Donovan, announced today that NZUAG has been commissioned to carry out a fast-paced review of options to improve the planning, delivery, and management of works in our transport corridors.

New Zealand's infrastructure networks—road, rail, electricity, gas, telecommunications, water—share our transport corridors. Activities by one network often impact others, leading to traffic disruption, unplanned outages, repeated excavations, damage, and delays. These issues increase costs, inefficiencies, accident rates, and climate emissions, with significant direct and indirect economic and social impacts.

A mandatory National Code of Practice already exists, with standards and mechanisms for planning, coordination, and record keeping. However, persistent challenges include:

- Limited participation in work coordination and planning
- Untimely sharing of plans and as-built information, and poor data on old structures
- Patchy regulatory performance, compliance, and dispute resolution
- Limited workforce training and awareness of the Code
- Ad hoc, fragmented oversight and funding for better processes, with free-rider problems.

Wellington City Council's successful development and pilot of a new Underground Asset Register system has highlighted the benefits of better records and management processes. It is a valuable tool which deserves much wider utilisation, and the team that developed it has a wealth of useful knowledge. However, IT systems alone cannot solve the broader issues without addressing incentives, behaviours, and institutional responsibility to deliver improvements.

Key questions to be addressed by the review include:

- What are the key issues and root causes leading to poor compliance and records, and what are the scale and cost of these issues, if known?
- What improvements are needed for planning and management processes?
- What institutional arrangements are needed to support effective corridor management?
 - What incentives, sanctions, or monitoring approaches could be used to improve participation, use, compliance, and monitoring?
 - How can sector-led initiatives be enabled or scaled, and do they need policy and regulatory support?
 - What is the optimal role, if any, of local and/or central government?

The review will not attempt detailed technical evaluations or designs for processes and technology, as these are expected to be developed through any mechanisms arising from the study. It will take account of relevant stakeholder perspectives, including:

- Local and national corridor managers, utilities, contractors, and sector peak bodies
- Central government agencies
- Relevant IT organisations
- Wellington City Council's Underground Asset Register team.

NZUAG will be assisted by advisory firms Martin Jenkins and Harrison Grierson. The review should be complete in early 2026.

For further information, please contact:

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Background

NZUAG is an independent forum for local and national transport corridor managers, utility operators, and civil contractors. Its primary role is to advise the New Zealand government on improvements to the National Code of Practice for Utilities Access to Transport Corridors. The Code is secondary legislation established under the Utilities Access Act (2010).

Jim Donovan is a professional director with wide commercial, technology, and infrastructure sector experience. He is a former CEO of power company Electra and telecommunication manufacturer Deltec, and he has held various company, industry, and government board roles, including chair of Crown-owned telecommunication company REANNZ. As independent chair of NZUAG, he has no current interests in any network infrastructure sector participants.