



Reconnecting communities of the NIMT for long term well-being

On the 15th April 1885, on the southern bank of the Pūniu River, Rewi Maniapoto and his daughter, Te Kore, stood with Premier Robert Stout as the 'first sod' for the main trunk railway in Ngāti Maniapoto territory was dug. This event marked a vital agreement with Ngāti Maniapoto leaders to open up Te Rohe Pōtae (the King Country) – then off-limits to Europeans – to rail development.



What were parties bargaining for in that deal? Access to the King Country was granted against promises of long-term prosperity for its communities. Nearly 140 years later, many of the central North Island communities bordering the North Island Main Trunk Line are struggling, disconnected physically and economically from the rest of New Zealand.

Uncertainty can cause anxiety and social isolation has a number of well-known effects. Certainty that one's future is safe, that communities will thrive for upcoming generations, plays an important role in Taha hinengaro (mental and emotional well-being). There are many people in communities along the North Island Main Trunk Line who struggle to access medical services, cultural amenities, work opportunities, and study.

The North Island Rail Passenger (NIRP) initiative proposes to re-balance the development of the central North Island by defusing the current demographic pressures contrasted across the urban – rural divide, making land and communities along the NIMT more attractive as an alternative to urban sprawl.

This paper will identify critical benefits that regional rail can bring to our communities' wellbeing that no other mode of transport can provide reliably. As author of the [NIRP Feasibility study](#) commissioned by Ruapehu District Council in 2021, and ongoing advisor to the NIRP Initiative, Arnaud Deutsch, assisted by Sam Learmonth, will combine several facets of transportation, from storytelling to heritage, to technical decarbonised rolling stock information, to ignite the audience in thinking differently about rail investment.