

TOP INSIGHTS



This report covers workforce issues pertaining to the Port but touches on how infrastructure workforce challenges impact Port operations. Our prior insight report on [Construction and Infrastructure](#) outlined related issues surrounding the civil construction sector workforce.

The Port of Tauranga is important for the Bay of Plenty's regional economy but is also critical to the entire nation's infrastructure being a key part of Aotearoa New Zealand's freight and logistics network. It is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest seaport with 190ha of operating space and over 250 staff working across a range of Port services. It serves as one of the [main national gateways](#) for exports handling 37 percent of all logs, dairy and kiwifruit exports as well as being the country's largest container terminal, handling 42 percent of all shipping containers. It also plays a vital part in our national infrastructure resilience by facilitating the flow of exports and imports in and out of the country. This becomes more important as the country and the world faces increasing levels of disruption like pandemics.

The Port of Tauranga needs to remain competitive to keep attracting international shipping to come to Aotearoa New Zealand. To continue to build a reputation as an efficient location to import to and export from, the Port will need to focus on efficiency and productivity. To achieve and maintain efficiency there are a range of workforce challenges it will need to mitigate, and opportunities it needs to lean into.

There are two key workforce challenges that impact Port activity. The first relates to shortages affecting the infrastructure workforce where inadequate civil construction skills affect roading infrastructure surrounding the Port, causing congestion and slowing port operations. The second relates to the Port itself where insufficient skills and labour in the Port combine to decrease overall operating efficiency.

Port and infrastructure considerations relate to the Group's [Regional Workforce Plan](#) ("RWP") through three key aspiration and action areas: Workforce resilience particularly around worker safety, well-being and mental health; climate change around supporting sustainable business activity; and education around education-to-employment pathways.

TRENDS AT A GLANCE



Container volumes: 1.20 million TEUs with 1,432 ship visits in 2023

Container traffic expected to continue: 49-61% forecast growth in traffic through to 2030.



279 – Number of employees working at the Port

45 – Average age of Port workforce

7.0% - Staff turnover down from 11.5% in 2023.



22% of Port workforce is female (in 2023) compared with 19% in 2021.

Sources: [Western Bay of Plenty Infrastructure Forum](#)
<https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/investors/results-reports-and-presentations/annual-and-interim-reports/>

TOP LABOUR MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

- The Port of Tauranga is working towards decarbonisation through automation.** It is leaning into terminal automation with plans to introduce fully electric automated stacking cranes, this will mean an increase in the number of containers that can be stored on site. It will also mean significantly fewer emissions than the traditional diesel-powered machinery, which has implications around the skills required to operate this type of new crane. In particular digital literacy will become an increasing area of demand and therefore focus as Port operations automate. The RSLG is engaging with Hanga Aro Rau and Waihangara Ara Rau on increasing digital literacy provision across a number of sectors including Port, Transport and Logistics. This opportunity connects with both the [technology](#) and [climate change](#) pou of the RWP.
- Road to success programme is being utilised to attract younger people into the driver workforce.** The programme aims to increase the diversity of drivers which will alleviate the shortage of truck drivers as the existing workforce ages. This will improve efficiency of freight accessing the Port, supporting greater flow of goods to and from the Port, but local drivers may be insufficient to meet demand. Immigration will be an important source of additional labour; however, access to potential workers is variable across the country as outlined in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty Freight [Action Plan](#) 2022.
- A new Hydrogen refuelling network is in development in the region.** There is momentum growing around the use of hydrogen as a fuel source for the transport and logistics sector. This has implications for the Port as it points at the use of hydrogen in both trucks and ships creating a new way to move cargo across the network. This also means new workforce skills and training will be required to ensure that the infrastructure around this new technology can be maintained. The RSLG is working with Priority One, Hanga Aro Rau and the Tertiary Education Commission to highlight these future needs. This opportunity connects with the [climate change](#) pou.
- Collaboration between education and industry is working to improve consistency across the region.** The RSLG is engaging with Hanga Aro Rau, Waihangara Ara Rau and regional stakeholders to better understand training challenges and work with groups like the Port H&S Leadership Group (which has an action around workforce sustainability) on which the Group already has representation. Once the RSLG understands all the issues, and in particular the future training needs, it can work much more effectively to ensure an evidence base is developed to inform future training investment of education providers. This opportunity links to the [education](#) pou in the RWP.

TOP LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

- Lack of suitable labour is increasing Health and safety risks.** Significant efforts have been made to improve health and safety in the Port under the banner of the Port H&S Leadership Group through the development of the [Port Sector Insights Picture and Action Plan](#). Multiple organisations provided input including Maritime NZ, Port of Tauranga, private sector organisations, Unions such as the Maritime Union and one of our RSLG members, Aubrey Wilkinson as President of the Rail. The plan specifically links to the lack of suitable labour to risks such as work fatigue due to insufficient worker numbers and being on call 24/7.
- Time and money constraints are limiting access to upskilling.** Much of the workforce is unskilled, according to industry stakeholders. They note that there is often a cost-benefit challenge for the workers as they weigh up the benefit of "downing tools" in order to take the time out to do the training. The other major challenge is how variable training can be with inconsistent development and fragmented delivery; as well as trainers with differing levels of skills and standards based on where and who is delivering the training. This makes it harder for workers to upskill in their current role or to progress in their careers.
- The low number of entry positions into Port work creates a challenge around attraction.** Current Port roles are generally physically demanding with long hours and can be low paid. For example, Lashers are one of these physically demanding roles, and also the first role for many entering the Port workforce. This makes it less attractive for many women, limiting the diversity of the workforce.
- The Port H&S Leadership Group has also identified an aging workforce as a challenge for the Port.** As more experienced workers leave the labour pool and get replaced by new staff the quality of knowledge and experience decreases. Aging workers are also less capable of handling the longer hours and physical nature of the work. Industry is grappling with how to approach transitioning older workers into less physical labour earlier to hold on to them longer, as well as how those older workers can pass that knowledge on to younger workers.

THE BOP REGION

SH29 | Tauriko Industrial Area connects the Port to the Golden Triangle. It's the main access point to Waikato/Auckland. Access for Tauriko Business Estate, residential development. Tauriko is experiencing major congestion, road safety issues and housing issues. To properly support Port activity the bypass needs to be completed to reduce congestion and infrastructure workforce shortages are slowing things down.

Cruise ships returning to Bay of Plenty, after a long hiatus caused by COVID, is revitalising support services around the port, like retail and hospitality.

The first cruise ship of the 2022-2023 summer season made its first call in Aotearoa New Zealand at Port of Tauranga in October 2022. The "Majestic Princess" called in to Port in October and was followed by 88 cruise vessels over the rest of the summer season.

[Hiringa Energy](#) opened a green hydrogen plant in mid-2022 supporting the shift of heavy transport over to hydrogen. Since then, Priority One has been working to develop a cluster of businesses to further develop the regions hydrogen eco-system including a hydrogen re-fuelling network, heavy vehicle conversion, as well as education and training. These businesses will boost employment and training across the region.