



Briefing

AUCKLAND BOUNDARY: ALLOWING ACCESS TO AUCKLAND

To: The COVID-19 Ministerial Group

Date	22/11/2021	Priority	Urgent
Deadline	23/11/2021	Briefing Number	DPMC-2021/22-893

Purpose


This briefing provides advice on removing the restrictions preventing all people (including workers) travelling into Auckland between the commencement of the COVID-19 Protection Framework (the Framework) and the removal of the Auckland boundary on 15 December.

Recommendations

1. **Note** that on 15 November 2021, Cabinet agreed to maintain the current boundary around Auckland and to retain the current restrictions on movement across the boundary until Wednesday 15 December [CAB-21-MIN-0477];
2. **Note** that Health officials advise that there is no public health rationale for continuing to prevent travel into Auckland;
3. **Agree** to lift the current restrictions on travel into Auckland and retain the current restrictions on travel out of Auckland from 11.59pm Thursday 2 December when the Framework commences until 11.59pm Tuesday 14 December when the Auckland boundary restrictions are lifted;
4. **Note** that people travelling into Auckland would be able to return home again but would be subject to testing requirements (a negative test within 72 hours prior to leaving Auckland); and

YES / NO

5. **Agree** that this briefing is proactively released, with any appropriate redaction where information would have been withheld under the Official Information Act 1982, in January 2022. **YES / NO**


Ruth Fairhall Head of Strategy & Policy, COVID-19 Group
...../...../2021

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern Prime Minister
...../...../2021

Hon Grant Robertson Deputy Prime Minister
...../...../2021

Hon Kelvin Davis Minister for Māori Crown Relations
...../...../2021

Proactively Released

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

...../...../2021

Hon Andrew Little
Minister of Health

...../...../2021

Hon Kris Faafoi
Minister of Justice

...../...../2021

Hon Peeni Henare
Associate Minister of Health (Māori Health)

...../...../2021

Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Associate Minister of Health

...../...../2021

Hon Aupito William Sio
Minister for Courts

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Contact for telephone discussion if required:

Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
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Minister's office comments:

- Noted
- Seen
- Approved
- Needs change
- Withdrawn
- Not seen by Minister
- Overtaken by events
- Referred to

Proactively Released

AUCKLAND BOUNDARY: ALLOWING ACCESS TO AUCKLAND

Background

1. On 15 November 2021, Cabinet agreed to maintain the current boundary around Auckland and to retain the current restrictions on movement across the boundary until Wednesday 15 December [CAB-21-MIN-0477]. The current restrictions limit travel in and out of Auckland except for specified purposes, with testing requirements.
2. On 22 November, the Minister for COVID-19 Response indicated to Cabinet that he would ask officials to provide advice on removing the restrictions preventing all people (including workers) travelling into Auckland between the commencement of the COVID-19 Protection Framework (the Framework) and the removal of the Auckland boundary on 15 December.
3. Cabinet has agreed in principle, subject to health assessment and confirmation by Cabinet on Monday 29 November, that the country transitions to the COVID-19 Protection Framework at 11.59pm Thursday 2 December. This means any changes to boundary restrictions would apply for less than two weeks from 3 - 14 December.

Public health advice

4. Public Health officials advise that there is no public health rationale or justification for restricting entry into Auckland at present given the higher rates of community transmission in Auckland relative to other regions in New Zealand. Additionally, the measures in place through the COVID Protection Framework will limit spread in the unlikely event that the person becomes infected and subsequently leaves Auckland.
5. Anyone entering Auckland should be strongly encouraged to be vaccinated before entering Auckland and reminded to get a test should they develop symptoms.

Impact of lifting restrictions

6. You have asked for advice on removing restrictions preventing travel into Auckland. Allowing travel into Auckland would provide social benefits for people seeking to reconnect with friends and family or attend significant events like weddings, funerals and tangihanga.
7. Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) officials advise that allowing travel into Auckland could also have significant economic benefits. In particular, they note that many building and construction workers who would normally travel into Auckland for work have not been able to do so as they do not meet the high threshold for business travel under the current restrictions. Allowing travel into Auckland would allow these workers to operate once more.

Travellers allowed into Auckland would be permitted to leave

8. However, one of the currently allowed purposes for crossing the boundary is to return home to a person's principal home or place of residence. If people who live elsewhere are allowed into Auckland without restriction, they will also be allowed to leave again to return home. This would enable short trips into Auckland for non-essential purposes, such as

Christmas shopping, and could significantly increase travel across the boundary in both directions.

9. While testing requirements would remain in place to leave Auckland, travellers returning home have to have returned a negative test in the last 72 hours. This would apply to people travelling for work or non-work purposes, regardless of whether they are vaccinated. Those travelling for short periods could rely on a test taken before they entered Auckland, meaning the testing requirement would not pick up any COVID-19 infection acquired during their visit.
10. Workers crossing the border under existing provisions, who are already part of a surveillance testing regime, could continue to rely on surveillance tests taken every seven days, rather than a test 72 hours prior to travel.

Operational challenges to lifting restrictions

11. Travellers entering Auckland would no longer require exemptions. However, travellers leaving Auckland would require checks. Those leaving Auckland to return home are expected to carry proof of residence outside of Auckland, eg a utility bill.
12. Increased travel in and out of Auckland will make it difficult to continue boundary checks at current levels without increased delays. Work already undertaken by officials has demonstrated the challenges with maintaining the current enforcement posture with increasing levels of demand.
13. In addition, making changes to the approach to the Auckland boundary will put further pressure on agencies and operators who are trying to get ready for the transition to the Framework. Amending the restrictions on the Auckland boundary will add complexity to the transition.

Conclusion

14. Although there will be operational challenges to lifting restrictions, there is no public health rationale for preventing travel into Auckland. On balance, officials recommend allowing travel into Auckland as part of the transition to the Framework.

Next Steps

15. If you agree, restrictions on travel under the current Alert Level Order will be amended for the new Framework Order to allow for travel into Auckland.

Consultation

16. The Ministries of Health and Transport, MBIE, NZ Police and the Crown Law Office were consulted on this paper.