

Central cycle trail gets financial backing

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A \$26.3 million project to connect Central Otago's trail network and create 500 kilometres of continuous trail network will be a "game changer" for the region.

Prime Minister and Tourism Minister John Key announced on Sunday the Government would commit about \$13m towards the project, with the Central Lakes Trust contributing \$11.15m and the Otago Community Trust contributing \$2m.

"The proposal to create a 536km continuous cycle trail network by linking four existing Central Otago Great Rides – the Queenstown Trail, the Otago Central Rail Trail, the Roxburgh Gorge Trail and the Clutha Gold Trail – is the type of enhancement to the Great Rides we want to encourage."

Budget 2016 would provide \$25m in additional funding over the next four years to ensure the New Zealand Cycle Trail, Nga Haerenga, continued to offer a world-class experience, Key said.

The investment was part of a \$45m tourism package in Budget 2016 to further support tourism's contribution to economic and job growth across New Zealand.

"I think it is a great investment. It is an investment in the future, in jobs and opportunities for people. But, it is a lot of money for you to stump up with. It will be over a four to five year period, but we will match that."

Central Lakes Trust chief executive Paul Allison said the investment was a "game changer" for the region.

"The trust is going to commit \$11.15m to the project. Putting that into context that is more than five times any single grant we have approved in the history of our trust. Two million is the biggest previously."

The investment would not impact negatively or disadvantage any future projects, he said.

"We are in a strong financial position. We have got reserves totaling more than that and our budget and grants process for the next few years will not change. It will remain at \$6m-plus."

The Otago Community Trust had partnered with the Central Lakes Trust and chairman Ross McRobie said the trust would commit \$2m to the project.

A map showing the 500km continuous trail network, estimated to cost \$26.3 million. GRAPHIC SUPPLIED

