



## PRESS RELEASE

### Mt Ruapehu's state of the art gondola taking shape

**MT RUAPEHU, 4 MARCH 2019:** The challenges of working in an UNESCO World Heritage alpine environment high on a mountain are all being taken in the stride of the Leitner Ropeways team constructing the new Mt Ruapehu gondola.

Work is well underway on Sky Waka, the new high-speed gondola, with the team facing ever-changing logistical challenges with engineering specifications, getting materials on-site, and the physical construction process.



Whakapapa GM Jono Dean has acknowledged the Wellington-based design team who have been constantly revising the project's structural requirements. "Due to the unique geographical location of the site and the rock composition the construction design requirements are evolving daily as work progresses."

Lack of access over this unique volcanic terrain adds to the complexity of this project. Even transporting concrete from the truck to the construction site has required some out of the box thinking.

"Conventional concrete trucks drive part way up the mountain and are then replaced with a trailer concrete mixing bowl with a 3.5 cubic metre capacity. The concrete is then transferred onto a purpose built aerial material ropeway system that then transfers the loads to the locations required in the mid mountain. To date, 400 of the 1100 tonnes required for this project has been transported," Jono says.

The Swiss engineered ropeway can transport up to 5 tonnes of equipment and materials without relying on helicopter use, which can be restricted due to weather conditions. At over 1000m in length with towers up to 34m tall, it is the first of its kind in NZ to be constructed for the purpose of building a passenger ropeway on a ski field.

Jono says that while the project is on schedule to be completed in June the team is totally at the mercy of mother nature. "We've had amazing luck with weather this summer, which has got the project off to a great start but being up a mountain conditions could change rapidly and affect the project timeline."

The construction of the 14 tower foundations to support the new Sky Waka gondola line are nearly complete and work is underway on the terminal stations where people will get on and off the gondola.

Italian based company Leitner is supplying and installing the gondola, and General Manager David Ratcliffe says he's excited to be involved in New Zealand's largest gondola installation. "This project has presented unique challenges but work is progressing well and it's exciting to be a part of such an iconic project."

The fifty Sky Waka gondola cabins will feature floor to ceiling glass for breathtaking views, internal ski racks, audio and lighting and individual leather seats offering business-class luxury to passengers befitting of the UNESCO Dual World Heritage status of Whakapapa Ski Area. Each cabin accommodates 10 passengers and even the tallest skiers will be able to stand upright in the cabin with more than 2m of internal clearance.

The Sky Waka will run from the Top of the Bruce base area directly to the award-winning Knoll Ridge Café. It will transport 2,400 people per hour over the 1.8km in approximately 5 minutes.

Social and economic indicators for the gondola project are compelling, with a team of about 35 hands on people working on the project and another estimated 100 people contributing to the project behind the scenes, including a strong contingent of local employment from the area.

The gondola project has involved working closely with Ngati Tuwharetoa and DOC which has seen a significant reduction in the number of structures on the mountain, the new installation having less than half of the structures it replaces.

As a public benefit entity RAL invests its proceeds back into developing the mountain's facilities and the new gondola forms part of the \$100m reinvestment strategy announced by the RAL board in 2015.

[mtruapehu.com](http://mtruapehu.com)

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Caption: Work is underway on Mt Ruapehu's new \$25 million gondola, which will be the largest and most technically advanced in New Zealand. It will travel 1.8 km's through one of the North Island's most rugged and spectacular landscapes past waterfalls and snow-laden peaks.