



PRESS RELEASE

New \$25m gondola for Mt Ruapehu in 2019

February 10, 2018: A new state of the art gondola is set to transform the Ruapehu visitor experience.

The \$25 million gondola will be the largest and most technically advanced in New Zealand travelling 1.8 km's through one of the North Island's most rugged and spectacular landscapes and is on target to open for the start of the 2019 ski season.

The economic indicators for the region are compelling with the new gondola expected to contribute \$50m per annum of additional visitor expenditure, and an additional 137 full-time jobs at Whakapapa in the restaurants, maintenance, sales, retail and transport teams.

Ruapehu Alpine Lifts (RAL) CEO Ross Copland says that the project is viewed by many as a much-needed catalyst for the economic development of the Ruapehu Region.

The 50-cabin gondola will start from Whakapapa's Base Area (1,630 metres) climbing to the Knoll Ridge Café (2,020 metres) with a trip taking just 5 minutes at full speed. It will become the main access lift to the Knoll Ridge Café, with the Waterfall Express chairlift scheduled to be removed signalling the end of an era for New Zealand's first high speed detachable chairlift.

The Rangatira Express chairlift, installed in 2016, will continue usual winter operations and the increased capacity from the base area will reduce congestion and provide a stunning level of service for skiers visiting the mountain.

"The gondola will be a revolution for skiers with fewer closed days, improved performance on windy days and a blistering fast trip travelling at 6 metres per second. In Europe ski resorts are reporting a shift in preference with skiers choosing the speed and comfort of modern Gondola lifts," Ross says.

The generous internal dimensions of the 10 passenger cabins allow even the tallest skiers to stand upright with over 2m of internal clearance. "Internal ski racks, leather seats and wi-fi onboard offer business-class luxury to passengers befitting of the UNESCO World Heritage status of Whakapapa Ski Area," he says.

RAL successfully secured a Tourism Growth Partnership grant in 2017 to complete a feasibility study and that work led onto an application being made for economic development funding support for the project in July 2017.

"The capital raising is progressing well and we are working hard to align financing, consents and design into the critical time window required to complete a project of this magnitude in time for the 2019 winter. Our lengthy design process has allowed us to hugely reduce the

number of structures on the mountain with the new installation having less than half of the structures it replaces reducing environmental and cultural impacts associated with having a ski area in the Tongariro National Park," Ross says.

He adds that the gondola will be a huge asset for all visitors to the mountain, not just skiers and snowboarders. "It will open the mountain up to those who, in winter, might just want to visit the Knoll Ridge Café, try sledding higher up the slopes – or just take the kids to build a snowman.

"One of our aims is to make Mt Ruapehu accessible for all and the gondola will attract more visitors to the region - some of whom don't ski, but want to see the views and experience of being on the highest mountain in the North Island. With wheel-chair accessibility into every cabin, it will open up the mountain to less physically able visitors to enjoy the mountain air and views all year round."

Ruapehu Alpine Lifts operates Whakapapa and Turoa ski fields on Mt Ruapehu. The company was incorporated in 1953 and is a public benefit entity with all proceeds reinvested in the ski areas.

2018 Season Passes are on sale now. Find out more at mtruapehu.com

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