



# PRESS RELEASE

## **New world class gondola for Mt Ruapehu secures Government backing**

*State of the art gondola to transform Mt Ruapehu visitor experience*

**MT RUAPEHU, 15 June 2018:** Mt Ruapehu's Whakapapa is set to be transformed with a new luxury gondola - one of only two of its design in the world – with the Government's Provincial Growth Fund assisting with financing of the project.

Fifty gondola cabins will feature floor to ceiling glass for breathtaking views, internal ski racks, wi-fi, 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.

Today the project became one step closer to realisation with Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones announcing that the Provincial Growth Fund will loan \$10 million for the project based on its tourism potential for the central North Island region.

Ruapehu Alpine Lifts (RAL), which operates the Mt Ruapehu ski fields, has welcomed the announcement saying the gondola will transform the mountain into a world-class visitor attraction for skiers as well as sightseers, and also boost the local economy.

RAL Chief Executive Ross Copland says, "This project will disrupt the traditional flow of visitors throughout the North Island creating a compelling reason to venture off the beaten track deep into the Ruapehu district to experience this world-class attraction and the vibrant communities nearby."

He says that 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 in the restaurants, maintenance, sales, retail and transport teams.

"This translates into more people booking accommodation, eating at local restaurants and experiencing local activities creating employment and lifting household incomes."

Ross adds that the gondola will also attract more high value international tourists and that the number of sightseers is expected to increase from 60,000 currently to 300,000 within a few years of opening.

"The mountain sits within a UNESCO Dual World Heritage Area and its outstanding natural beauty and cultural significance is there to be enjoyed by not only skiers and snowboarders, but also walkers and sightseers."

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. 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 past waterfalls and snow-laden peaks.

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.

"Our design process involved working closely with Ngati Tuwharetoa and DOC during which time we significantly reduced the number of structures on the mountain, the new installation having less than half of the structures it replaces. We are very pleased to take this opportunity to continue shrinking the presence of infrastructure on the maunga while still meeting the aspirations of visitors to the Tongariro National Park," Ross says.

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

**For more information contact:**

Michelle Caldwell  
GM – Sales & Marketing  
[mcaldwell@mtruapehu.com](mailto:mcaldwell@mtruapehu.com)  
021 796 552

Tracey Mehrtens  
Accento Communications  
021 430 606