



Update of NZTR Venue Plan - 2024

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Introduction

In December 2023, New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing (NZTR) advised that it was updating its current Venue Plan to take into account changes in the racing landscape since the release of the NZTR Directions Paper in October 2021.

NZTR's first step in the update process was to consult stakeholders on the current Venue Plan, taking into account the impact of recent key venue-related changes, such as the introduction of racing on the three synthetic tracks, Ellerslie's StrathAyr™ track and Te Aroha's newly reconstructed track. Stakeholders were invited to provide submissions on the current Venue Plan by Thursday 29 February 2024.

NZTR received 23 submissions, which were all carefully considered when updating the Venue Plan. Overall, those submissions were supportive of the current Venue Plan and the decisions that have been made by NZTR under it to date.

The updated Venue Plan, which confirms NZTR's network of venues through to end of the 2028/29 racing season, is set out below.

NZTR's objective, in updating its current Venue Plan, was to create a network of venues that caters to our current racing landscape and needs. As noted in the 2021 Directions Paper, we have also endeavoured to ensure that there are sufficient venues in each region to allow for major track renovations and reconstructions and to allow Clubs to have a suitable renovation period for their tracks each season to ensure (to the maximum extent possible) that our venues are providing safe and reliable surfaces for racing.

NZTR is of the view that the updated Venue Plan, which is fundamentally unchanged from the Venue Plan set out in the 2021 Directions Paper, remains appropriate and fit for purpose.

It is intended that the Venue Plan will be updated every five years, with the next review scheduled to take place in or around February 2029. It may, however, be necessary to review the status and role of individual venues prior to that update to reflect any changes in the racing landscape or in relation to a specific venue that impact on the Venue Plan.

Venue Plan to 31 July 2029

NZTR's decisions on the venues at which we will race until the end of the 2028/29 racing season are set out below, on a region-by-region basis. We have, where relevant, also included our current thinking on likely developments in the relevant region.

In summary, there are no changes to the venues at which we are racing under our current Venue Plan other than changes that were expressly identified in that Plan.

When our first Venue Plan was released for consultation in 2019, NZTR encouraged Clubs to develop solutions for racing and training in their respective regions. Since then, there has been significant progress with the Auckland, Counties, Waipa, Cambridge and Waikato Clubs leading the way through the creation, by merger, of Auckland Thoroughbred Racing and Waikato Thoroughbred Racing, respectively. NZTR continues to encourage Clubs to develop solutions for racing and training in their regions for the benefit of the industry as a whole.

Northland/Auckland Region

Racing in this region will be focused around Ellerslie Racecourse once the new StrathAyr track is in full operation and the current "teething" problems with the track surface have been resolved. Ruakaka Racecourse and Pukekohe Park will continue to play supporting roles, with Ruakaka playing an important role during the winter months when Ellerslie and Pukekohe will both have reduced racing programmes.

NZTR still expects that the Avondale Racecourse will no longer be required as a racing venue after the 2025/26 season. NZTR is currently in discussions with the Avondale Jockey Club regarding the future of its racecourse and will make further announcements in this regard, as and when appropriate.

Bay of Plenty

The future of the Tauranga Racecourse continues to remain uncertain with a decision around the potential use of the racecourse land for the construction of a hospital now unlikely to be made until 2025. Until there is certainty regarding the future of the Tauranga Racecourse, both it and Rotorua will continue to play an important role in the region.

Waikato

NZTR understands that Waikato Thoroughbred Racing is working on a “Master Facilities Plan” for the Te Rapa, Te Awamutu and Cambridge racecourses and training facilities.

Subject to the outcome of that process, the Matamata, Taupō, Cambridge Synthetic and Te Aroha racecourses will continue to play supporting roles for Te Rapa, as the major racing venue in the region.

Taranaki

The New Plymouth, Hawera and Waverley racecourses will all continue to play a role in the region, with Waverley regularly taking on additional meetings when issues arise with other venues in the Central Region. The proposed installation of irrigation at both Hawera and Waverley will improve their availability for racing throughout the entire racing season.

Hawke’s Bay

NZTR received a detailed submission from the Wairoa Racing Club, which was supported by some participants and other parties, to recommence racing at the Wairoa racecourse. After carefully considering the Club’s submission, NZTR remains of the view that we will not race at Wairoa. Importantly, the Club’s submission did not raise any matters that had not previously been considered in relation to the Wairoa Racecourse and its role in the industry when the decision was made to cease racing there.

NZTR acknowledges the geographical issues for the Club and local racing supporters of racing at Hastings but, after taking into account the cost to the industry, overall, of racing at Wairoa and the views of the wagering operator (which is required to issue betting licences for racemeetings), we remain of the view that the best outcome for the industry overall is for the Wairoa Racing Club to race at Hastings. NZTR also acknowledges, in this regard, that ensuring New Zealanders have access to racing was (and remains) one of its guiding principles for its Venue Plan. However, a balancing act is required when applying the guiding principles, with the result that this principle may be outweighed by other principles in relation to a particular venue. In particular, NZTR remains of the view we need to invest industry funds in improving the quality of our existing racing venues and developing a network of venues across the country that are fit for purpose, rather than returning to venues that we have previously decided do not form part of the industry’s future. We are also of the view that our current network of venues is appropriate for our current racing programme and, with continuing investment, for meeting potential future growth in that programme.

Discussions continue about the long-term venue for Hawke’s Bay RI. NZTR will make further announcements in this regard, as and when appropriate.

Manawatu/Horowhenua/Wellington

NZTR received a detailed submission from the Woodville-Pahiatua Racing Club in support of the Woodville racecourse being retained as a racing venue. We also received submissions from a number of participants who strongly supported the retention of the Woodville racecourse as a racing venue.

In view of potential track developments and reconstructions in the Central Districts over the next five years, NZTR has decided that we will continue to race at Woodville until the Venue Plan is next reviewed in 2029 unless the status and role of the Woodville Racecourse needs to be reviewed prior to then to reflect any changes in relation to it or the racing landscape more generally.

NZTR understands that the potential redevelopment of RACE Trentham, if it proceeds, is likely to commence after Wellington Cup week in January 2026. Assuming the redevelopment does commence then, RACE Trentham is unlikely to be available for racing again until January 2028 at the earliest. In addition, RACE Awapuni is unlikely to be available for racing again until early 2025 and the Hastings Racecourse could potentially also be unavailable for racing at some stage over the next five years depending on decisions made about its future. We do, therefore, need to ensure that we have enough racing venues available in the wider Central Region to accommodate the required number of meetings over the next five racing seasons

Accordingly, we will race at Awapuni, Wanganui, Otaki, Woodville, Trentham and Tauherenikau in this region until the end of the 2028/29 season.

Marlborough

We received a submission from the Marlborough Racing Club, which was supported by some participants, to recommence racing at the Waterlea Racecourse. After carefully considering the Club's submission, NZTR remains of the view that we will not recommence racing at Waterlea. Importantly, the Club's submission did not raise any matters that had not previously been considered in relation to the Waterlea Racecourse and its role in the industry when the decision was made to cease racing there.

We acknowledge the geographical issues for the Club and local racing supporters in racing at Riccarton Park but, after taking into account the cost to the industry, overall, of racing at Waterlea and the views of the wagering operator (which is required to issue betting licences for racemeetings), we remain of the view that the best outcome for the industry overall is that we do not race at Waterlea. The comments made above in relation to Wairoa regarding the access of New Zealanders to racing, the need to invest industry funds in our chosen racing venues and the appropriateness of our current network of venues for our racing programme, apply equally to Marlborough.

Canterbury

Subsequent to the release of the NZTR Directions Paper in 2021, NZTR decided that we would continue to race at Timaru (as well as at Oamaru in North Otago). As a result, we will race at Riccarton Park, Ashburton and Timaru in the Canterbury region.

West Coast

No changes are proposed to the venues for racing on the West Coast, being the Reefton, Omoto (Greymouth) and Kumara racecourses.

Otago/Southland

As noted above, subsequent to the release of the 2021 Directions Paper, NZTR decided that we would continue to race at Oamaru.

Accordingly, we will race at Wingatui, Cromwell, Oamaru, Kurow, Gore, Riverton and Invercargill in this region.

Updated Venue Plan

The map (right) shows NZTR's Venue Plan to the end of the 2028/29 racing season.



* Avondale Racecourse to be retained until the end of the 2025/26 season

Conclusion

As noted above, the Venue Plan set out in this document will be reviewed and updated by NZTR every five years, with the next review scheduled to be carried out in or around February 2029. It may, however, be necessary to review the status and role of individual venues prior to that update to reflect any changes in the racing landscape or in relation to a specific venue that impact on the Venue Plan.