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Latest research: Hawke's Bay well connected for doing business

Research conducted with air travellers is showing that it is increasingly easier to do business from and with Hawke's Bay, and that with greater regularity and affordability of flights to Auckland, more business opportunities are being taken up.

Conducted by Business Hawke's Bay as part of a 12-month business connectivity project, the top-line results of the online survey are being shared with airlines, Hawke's Bay Airport, councils, and local tourism and business organisations.

"While there's been no huge surprises, there have been a few light bulb moments. Essentially, we've been able to confirm what has been anecdotal or already known but is now quantified," says Carolyn Neville, BHB's project manager.

"We've asked business travellers for their experiences and opinions and it's rewarding to see that they are being listened to," says Ms Neville. A case in point, having free WiFi available at the airport was a prominent suggestion, confirming for Hawke's Bay Airport that this was a more urgent priority, and encouraging action on this.

BHB enlisted the help of EIT in the survey process, working closely with its researcher, Dr Jonathan Sibley and an Industry Based Learning student, Sarah Witkowski to delve deeper into the observations of business travellers and those arranging travel.

Students in EIT's Tourism and Travel School have also assisted with distribution of the 'arrival and departure card' short survey forms to business travellers this past week. The distribution of these cards will be ongoing and travellers can pick one up one of the orange cards from around the airport as they're passing through.

Dr Sibley, who is EIT School of Business postgraduate research programme coordinator, says the project was a win:win for all involved. He said the project worked well across the various platforms and was statistically robust.

"It's important to EIT that our applied research at degree level is relevant, well structured, and contributes to the improvement of our community, in this instance improving the environment of business travellers," he says.

From BHB perspective, Ms Neville was extremely impressed at the interest and time taken by business travellers in sharing their thoughts and experiences.

"It's helping to build a very useful picture to enable our key partners to meet business traveller needs and enhance the travel experience. It shows that the Hawke's Bay business community is keen to see competitive air travel remain and, in fact, expand to other routes," she says.

“The comments have been perceptive and overall it confirms that Hawke’s Bay business is outward facing and engaged with marketplaces out of the region, with international travel high. The region is very mobile. Despite the internet opening up long distance relationships, businesses are making the effort for face to face engagements, and the ability to travel cost-effectively is helping that.”

Some of the research findings (based on the respective traveller’s experience in their past month):

- 62% of business travellers arranged their own travel; 31% was organised by a team member; 7% was through an agency
- 48% of respondents were from micro (up to two employees) and small businesses
- 74% of respondents were 41 to 65 years old, with an even gender split
- Over 50% of travel was for sales, business development and customer meetings; 12% was for contact with out of HB team members; 12% was for networking. Training was also a priority, and innovation and problem solving key in some roles. 1% was for those living in HB but working full time out of the region
- Over a one-month period there was an average of 2.5 trips per traveller
- **And in that one-month, just under one-third travelled to one destination; two thirds to two destinations; over one third to three or more different destinations (separate trips)**
- 28% trips to Auckland; 20% to Wellington; 33% to South Island destinations and 12% international with the balance made up of and other regional North Island centres
- 30% increase in those making more trips to Auckland this year; reasons being lower cost of fares, increased business and growth in Auckland markets, new business ventures.
- 63% very well satisfied with HB Airport services and facilities for business travel and very useful feedback on desired enhancements to the business travel experiences.
- 68% would fly to Wellington more for business if airfares were consistently lower
- Approximately 90,000 more travellers have used HB Airport since the arrival of Jetstar in December, increasing airport throughput ahead of airport company predictions

Hastings District Council Mayor Lawrence Yule believes the data from the survey proves what was long known.

“Hawke’s Bay is a great place to do business and people are increasingly taking up the opportunities our region provides.

“The increased air travel options that have come on stream have certainly helped and this survey throws up information that means our people will be able to put in even more initiatives that will make our region even more attractive.



“As a travelling business person myself, I understand the difference a variety of flight options and things like being able to access high-speed wifi at the airport make,” he says.

His Napier counterpart, Mayor Bill Dalton views the results so far as highly encouraging.

“This research completely backs up what we at Napier City Council are hearing about the high numbers of business people connecting with our region.

“We know that Hawke’s Bay is on the radar for business and it’s fantastic that it’s getting increasingly easier and more affordable to jump on a flight in or out of Napier.

“It stands to reason that the higher traffic has a positive flow-on effect in attracting new and existing businesses to make a permanent move to the Bay – and we certainly welcome that,” Mr Dalton says.

The Business Connectivity project is an initiative of Business Hawke’s Bay and is being jointly funded by Hastings District Council and Napier City Council for 12 months.

Everyone who completes any of the survey approaches can go into a draw for a night of luxury accommodation at The Dome in Napier, drawn on 14 February 2017.

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