General Manager Communications & External Relations

Strategy, Risk & Corporate Affairs

Team:	Strategy, Risk & Corporate Affairs	**Location:**	Auckland (preferred) or Wellington
Reports to:	Chief Strategy, Risk & Corporate Affairs Officer		
Role Type:	Permanent		

About Us

KiwiRail's Role in Aotearoa, New Zealand

KiwiRail, a proud State-Owned Enterprise, delivers sustainable and inclusive growth for our customers, communities, and people.

For more than 150 years, rail in New Zealand has connected communities, delivered freight and passengers around the country, and showcased our spectacular scenery to the world. Our purpose—Hononga Whaikaha, Oranga mo Aotearoa (Stronger Connections, Better New Zealand)—speaks to connection with our customers and the future needs of their businesses, connection with the communities we serve and operate in, and connection with each other. KiwiRail is carrying this legacy into the future, delivering connected rail and shipping transport services that create economic, social, and environmental value for New Zealand and New Zealanders.

Our Workplace

At KiwiRail, our values define the behaviour we expect from everyone. We have a team of over 4500 people, and every connection we make with each other, our union partners, our customers and all our stakeholders must be of the highest standard.

Safety, health, and well-being are our number one priority, ensuring our people return home safe and healthy every day.

About the Role

Purpose of the role

KiwiRail is in a phase of a significant five-year plan to modernise and grow our rail and Interislander ferry services in Aotearoa.

This senior leadership role is responsible for developing and executing an integrated enterprise-wide strategic communications and stakeholder engagement strategic plan aligned to the purpose, mission, vision, ambition and strategic priorities.

Bringing together internal communications and external affairs talent including media, government relations, stakeholder and community relations, the role will ensure strong coordination and collaboration across the enterprise to ensure that KiwiRail maximises positive impact to support its strategy for growth, increasing trust and consistently managing reputation.

Key Accountabilities

Strategic Communications

- Lead the development and implement a comprehensive strategic communications framework strongly aligned to strategic priorities (lifting employee engagement, support improved safety and business performance, value for money, future growth and value to the shareholder).
- Craft and maintain clear, consistent, authentic key messaging across internal and external communication channels and appropriate tailoring based on insight of and for different audiences to achieve identified outcomes.
- Oversee and collaborate with marketing to achieve strategic and brand aligned enterprise-wide communication platforms internally and externally, including media relations, social media, digital platforms and crisis communications.
- Act as a key trusted advisor to Executive Leadership Team and the Board on communications, stakeholders, trust and reputational matters.
- Ensure that our people and union partners are engaged for insights and needs and as recipients of simple, complete and easy to receive relevant, timely and consistent communications.

External Relations

- Take a leadership role in building pride internally and enhancing reputation externally.
- Build trust, awareness and manage strong connections proactively with key media and key stakeholders.
- Design and lead a coherent and cohesive external stakeholder engagement strategic plan that builds trust through consistency, proactivity and responsiveness to stakeholder needs and which recognises the roles and responsibilities of being an SOE, such as complying with the Official Information Act and meeting expectations about openness.
- Identify, map and manage key external relationships that are built and maintained including media, poliiticans, government agencies, regulators, community leaders, industry groups.
- Design, coach and lead effective stakeholder engagement strategies that are authentic and consistent across Kiwirail.
- Lead centralised planning and execution of key stakeholder events, consultations and communications partnerships.
- Strong collaboration with marketing, brand, customer experience, transformation, business improvement and shareholder/investor relations.

Leadership and Management

- Build, lead, mentor, develop and grow a high performing future-focused communications & engagement team.
- Manage relevant budgets, resources and performance metrics.
- Actively contribute to the senior leader community, build strong cross-functional relationships across the organisation to align communications strategies and stakeholder initiatives.

- Strong focus on ensuring that leadership and communications are aligned to strategic and risk outcomes.

Issues and Crisis Management

- Anticipate and manage reputational risks through proactive issues monitoring and management.
- Develop and maintain crisis communications plans and response protocols.
- Ensure clear, coordinated points of contact for media and stakeholders during crises and critical events.

Key Relationships Here are the key relationships relevant to this role		Manage /Lead	Deliver to	Collaborate with	Advise or inform
Internal	Chief Strategy, Risk & Corporate Affairs Officer		✓	✓	✓
	Executive Leadership Team		✓	✓	✓
	Board of Directors		✓	✓	
	General Manager Marketing & Customer Experience			✓	
	External Relations & Internal Communications Teams	✓		✓	✓
	Finance, Senior Leadership Team & Enterprise Wide		✓	✓	✓
External	Politicians and Government Agencies		✓		✓
	Media Organisations			✓	✓
	Regulators (e.g., WorkSafe)				✓
	Service providers / Auckland Transport / CRL		✓	✓	✓
	Community Leaders and Industry Groups			✓	✓

What you will do to contribute

Health Safety and Wellbeing	• Implement safety procedures and ensure team compliance • Analyse workplace risks and develop mitigation strategies • Promote a culture of safety and wellbeing within your team • Respond effectively to safety incidents and near-misses • Support team members' physical and mental health
Customer Focus	• Provide a positive customer experience • Support a customer-focused culture at KiwiRail • Know our services well and explain them to customers • Respond quickly to customer needs • Develop solutions to meet customer requirements • Solve complex customer issues • Work with colleagues to improve customer outcomes
High Performing Teams Skills	• Set clear performance standards aligned with KiwiRail's goals • Build a supportive and cooperative team environment • Provide timely and constructive feedback • Actively seek diverse perspectives in problem-solving • Identify opportunities for coaching and mentoring
Commercial Acumen	• Plan and monitor resource allocation to achieve team objectives • Consider financial implications when making recommendations • Understand and comply with procurement guidelines • Work with suppliers to ensure quality outcomes • Recognise how financial decisions impact KiwiRail's overall position
Strategic Communications and Relationships	• Lead the development and execution of an enterprise-wide strategic communications and stakeholder engagement plan aligned to KiwiRail's purpose and strategic priorities. • Ensure consistent, authentic messaging across internal and external channels to build trust, support cultural change, and enhance reputation. • Act as a trusted advisor to the Executive Leadership Team and Board on communications, stakeholder engagement, and reputational matters. • Oversee crisis communication planning and response, ensuring clear protocols and coordination during critical events. • Drive continuous improvement in communication platforms, content, and delivery to lift employee engagement and external influence.
Enterprise Collaboration and Influence	• Build and lead a high-performing communications and engagement team with a strong future focus. • Foster cross-functional collaboration across business units to align messaging and stakeholder initiatives. • Partner with internal leaders and external partners to deliver integrated campaigns and events that support KiwiRail's transformation.

	• Represent KiwiRail in high-impact forums and engagements with government, media, and community stakeholders. • Champion a culture of transparency, inclusion, and proactive engagement across the organisation.

Decision Making

The position is accountable for decisions regarding all project operational objectives and for the provision of advice to project team members and relevant stakeholders on day-to-day operational decisions.

Key decision-making requirements of the position include:

- Project management and delivery decisions
- Risk management decisions
- Project resourcing, planning and scheduling decisions

Human Resources Delegations	Senior Leader
Direct reports	5 (total staff reporting, approx. 17)
Finance Delegations	Level 3: TBC Operating | Nil Capex
Budget (operating and capital)	As agreed
Travel Delegations	Yes approves national travel
Statutory powers	Nil

Physical demands and the nature of work

This role is office-based and requires:

- prolonged sitting and high computer usage
- limited walking, standing, twisting, bending (at the waist), crouching (bend knee)
- carrying of laptop and paperwork when alternating between home and office
- limited lifting of up to 7 kg archive boxes

Your role may include other tasks suited to your level, as your manager directs. This job description shows your current duties. We'll review and update it with you if your responsibilities change.

About you

Knowledge and experience

- You bring a minimum 15-20 years' experience in strategic communications, stakeholder engagement and relations, change communications, corporate affairs, external relations or public relations role(s).
- You are experienced influencing, collaborating, advising and coordinating with senior leaders, Executives and Boards.
- You can demonstrate success working inside an operationally led, large complex unionised organisation that is customer focused to ensure that authentic, easy to grasp communications in a changing environment support and engage people and union partners.
- You have proven experience managing large, complex stakeholder environments including political, regulatory and New Zealand community landscapes.
- You can demonstrate success in crisis communications and media management situations.
- You have strong experience leading, developing and growing high performing engaged teams.

Ways of working / Work-related qualities

- You are a system thinker and operate at as an enterprise leader
- You have an outside in view and can translate complexity to strong evidence based story telling
- You know how to build channels to support audiences receive the right information at the right time
- You can distil complexity and change to build relationships and understanding with multiple stakeholders
- You are structured while agile and flexible and practical
- You have strong judgment and confident in decision making
- You communicate in an impactful and strategic way, influencing at all levels
- You have high integrity, credibility and build trust and relationships
- You build growth in people and strong teams
- You embrace innovation and are comfortable leading through ambiguity
- You champion safety across the organisation and lead by example

Other Requirements

- You can travel nationally as required
- You can pass pre-employment checks, including drug and alcohol screening
- You have a valid New Zealand Driver's licence

Qualifications

You need either:

- A bachelor's degree in Communications, Public Relations, Journalism, Political Science or a related field.
- Or Postgraduate qualifications related to the above
- And relevant commercial experience in these areas

CREATING STRONGER CONNECTIONS