Number of motor vehicles

This report presents an analysis of the growth of the motor vehicle fleet in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly regarding different fossil fuel types and electric vehicles. These data are sourced from the Ministry of Transport's Fleet Statistics.

Key facts

- In 2024, there were 4.7 million vehicles in New Zealand, up from 3.2 million in 2005.
- The number of light vehicles per capita remains high relative to other countries at 815 vehicles per 1,000 people in 2024.
- The end of the Clean Car Discount scheme was associated with a drop in the number of new Electric Vehicle (EV) registrations. There were 113,715 EVs in the vehicle fleet in 2024, up from 103,665 in 2023. This equates to 9.7% growth, compared with more than 50% growth in the EV fleet for each of the 3 years that the scheme was active.
- Light EV ownership per capita was highest in more urbanised regions.

Why is the number of motor vehicles important for environmental health?

The use of motor vehicles can impact human health through air pollution, crashes and accidents, noise, and by accelerating climate change. In particular, motor vehicle emissions from petrol and diesel combustion affect outdoor air quality and human health. It has been estimated that motor vehicle emissions caused 2,247 premature deaths in 2016 (Kuschel et al 2022) – compared to 327 deaths from road traffic accidents that year (Ministry of Transport 2023).

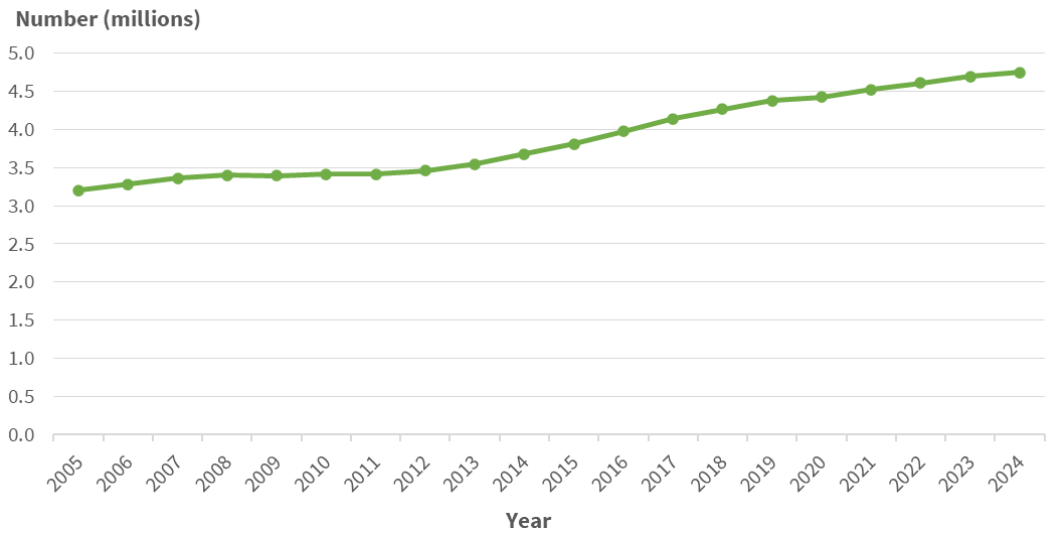
Evidence also shows that diesel engine fumes can cause lung cancer (IARC, 2023). Road traffic noise can also affect health, particularly through high blood pressure resulting from stress associated with road noise (van Kempen and Babisch 2012).

The size of the vehicle fleet continues to grow

Between 2005 and 2024, the number of motor vehicles in New Zealand increased by just over 48%, rising from 3.2 million to 4.7 million. This contrasts with a growth in population of 28% over the same 20-year period.

Annual growth in the vehicle fleet has varied over time in response to policy changes, financial conditions, and other significant events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. After slowing in the years following the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, the fleet experienced strong growth between 2013 and 2019. Growth slowed again during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but has increased steadily since (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of motor vehicles (all types), 2005–2024



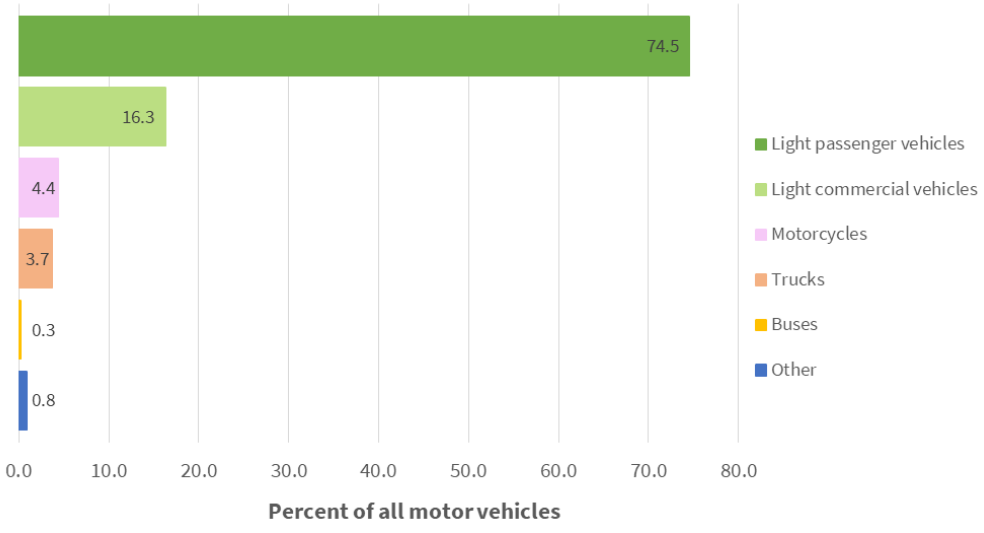
Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

The vehicle fleet is almost exclusively composed of light vehicles

In 2024, light vehicles made up 90.8% of the total vehicle fleet. Light passenger vehicles remained the most common type of vehicle, at 74.5% of the total fleet (3.5 million vehicles), down from 80.4% of the fleet in 2005. Light commercial vehicles accounted for a further 16.3% of the fleet (775,441 vehicles) in 2024 (Figure 2), up from 12.1% of the fleet in 2005.

The rest of the fleet consisted of 209,471 motorcycles (4.4% of the fleet), 174,787 trucks (3.7%), 12,057 buses (0.3%) and 39,005 vehicles of other types (0.8%). The proportions for these categories have remained relatively unchanged over the past 20 years.

Figure 2: Vehicle types as a proportion of the combined vehicle fleet, 2024

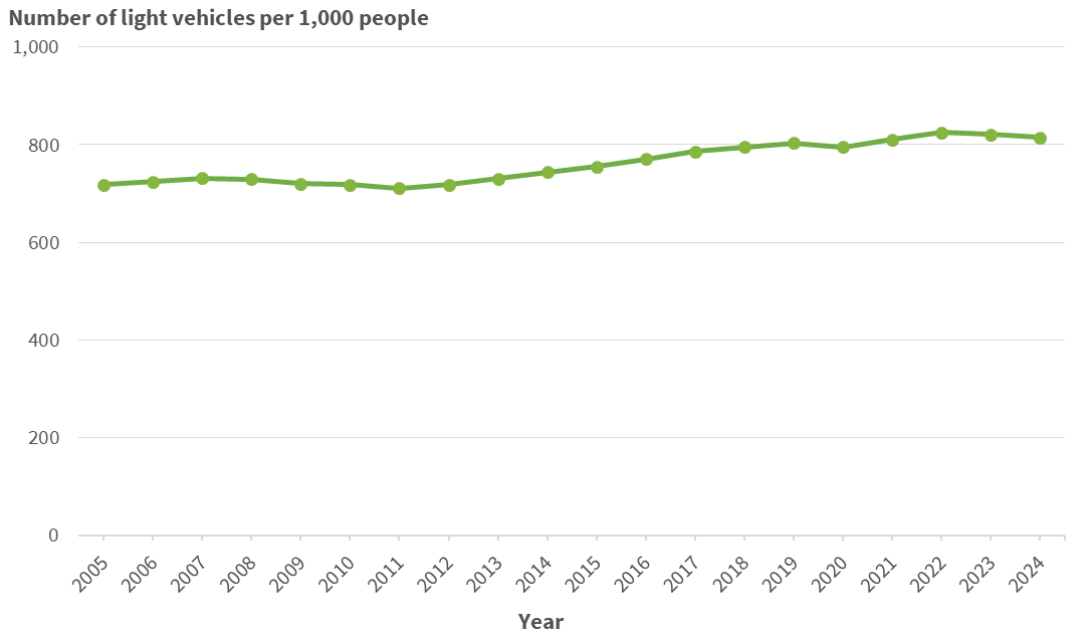


Notes: The total for all types does not add to 100% due to rounding. 'Other' vehicles include mobile machines, special-purpose vehicles, tractors and agricultural equipment.
Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

Vehicle ownership per capita is high relative to other countries

New Zealand has one of the world's highest rates of motor vehicle ownership (Ministry of Transport 2024). The number of light vehicles per capita was 815 per 1,000 people in 2024, compared to 718 per 1,000 people in 2005 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Light motor vehicle ownership per capita, 2005–2024

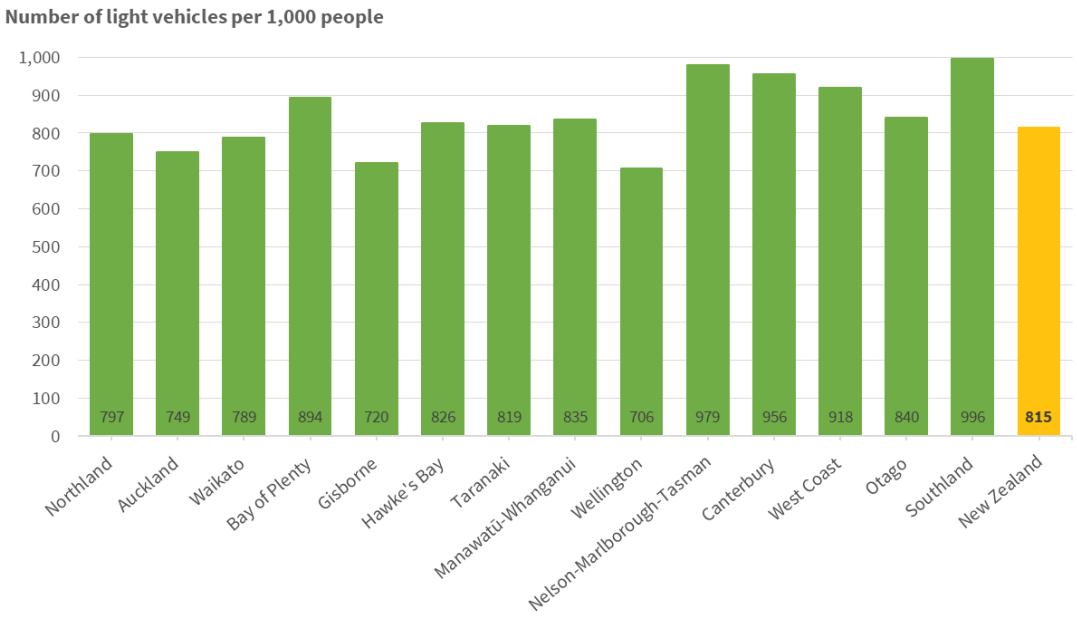


Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

Light vehicle ownership across New Zealand

Light vehicle ownership rates varied across the country in 2024 (Figure 4). The regions with the highest rates were Southland (996 vehicles per 1,000 people), Nelson-Marlborough-Tasman (979), Canterbury (956) and West Coast (918). The Wellington region had the lowest ownership rate in 2024 (706 vehicles per 1,000 people), followed by Gisborne (720).

Figure 4: Light motor vehicles per capita, by region, 2024

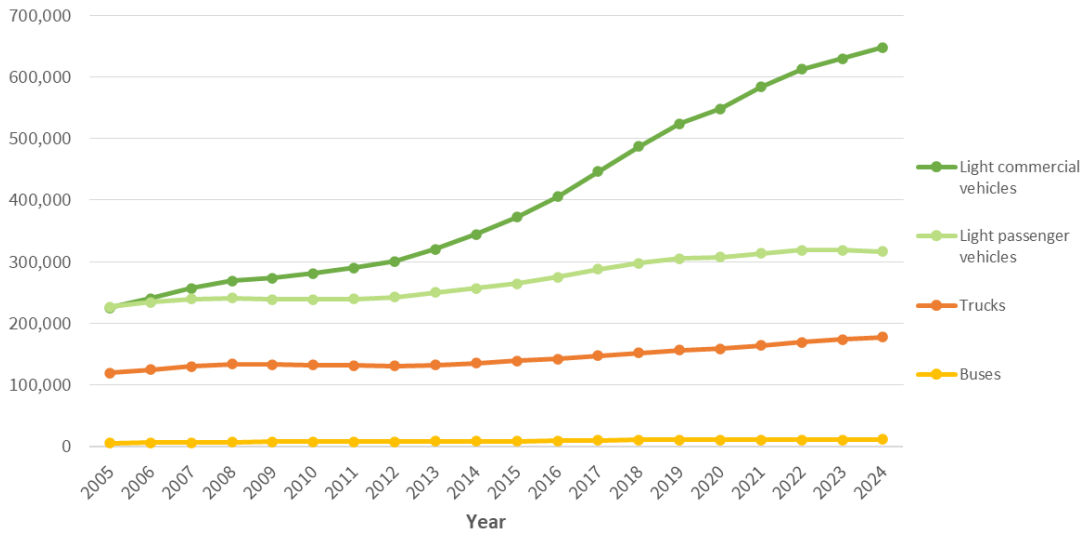


Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

Diesel vehicle numbers are still increasing

The number of diesel-powered vehicles has increased steadily, with consistent growth occurring in the light commercial fleet from 2012 onwards (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Number of diesel vehicles, by vehicle type, 2005–2024



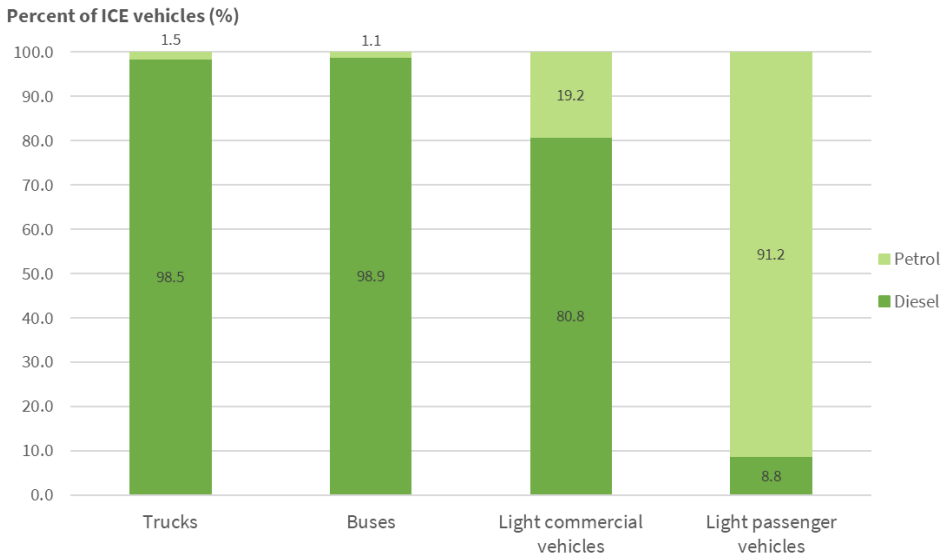
Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

Almost all trucks and buses are diesel-powered

In 2024, one quarter (25.1%) of all internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles were diesel-powered, though diesel fuels are limited primarily to heavy and commercial vehicles (Figure 6). Nearly all trucks and non-electric buses were diesel-powered (over 98% in both cases), as were 81.0% of light commercial vehicles. There were more than twice as many electric buses as petrol-powered ones, with 515 electric (equal to 4.3% of all buses) compared to 131 petrol-fuelled ones.

The proportion of diesel vehicles within the light commercial fleet has grown over the past 20 years – in 2005, only 55.6% of these were diesel-powered, compared with 80.8% in 2024.

Figure 6: Percentage of internal combustion engine vehicles, by fuel and type, 2024



Note: This graph only includes vehicles powered by internal combustion engines (ICE). This includes petrol hybrids, but not pure electric vehicles.
Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

Electric and petrol hybrid vehicles are a growing minority

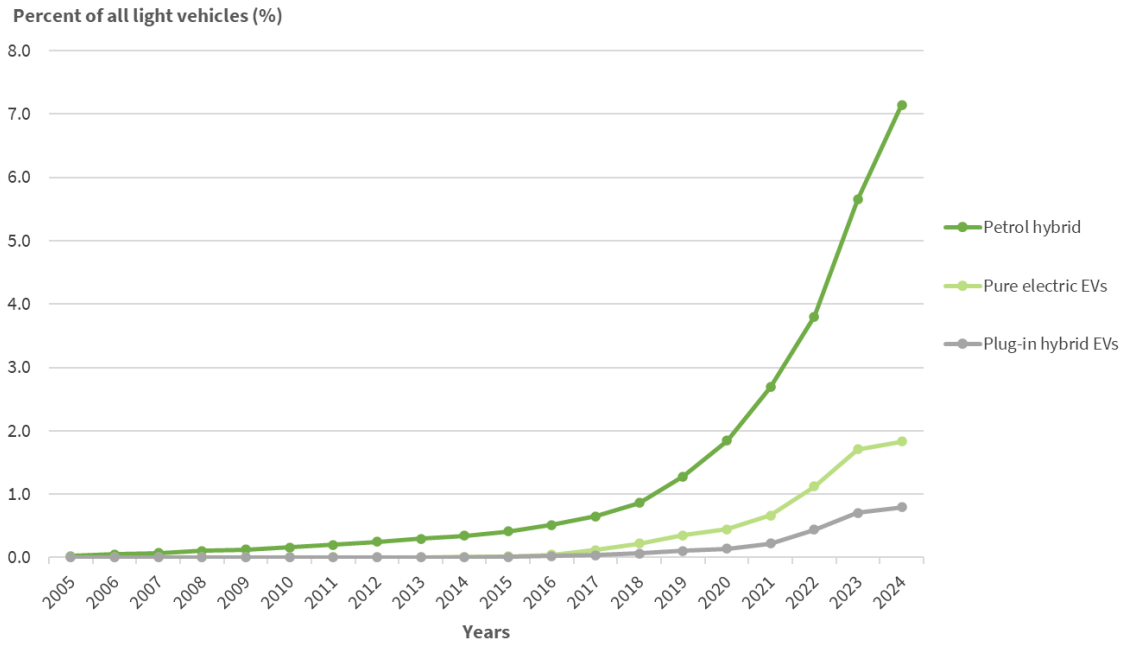
Electric vehicles (EVs) are charged externally from a power source. There are two types of electric vehicles in New Zealand:

- Pure electric vehicles are powered solely by batteries
- Plug-in hybrid electric vehicles use a combination of externally charged batteries and a conventional fuel-burning engine.

Petrol hybrid vehicles are not counted as 'electric vehicles' in this report, as they are not rechargeable from external electrical power sources. Instead, their batteries are charged from onboard sources - using electricity generated by their ICE engine and regenerative braking.

While the light vehicle fleet remains dominated by vehicles powered exclusively by fossil fuels, both EVs and petrol hybrids have grown as a proportion of the fleet, with growth accelerating between 2016 and 2023. Petrol hybrids made up 7.1% of the light fleet in 2024. Pure EVs and plug-in hybrid EVs combined made up 2.6% of the fleet (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Electric and petrol hybrid vehicles as a percentage of the light fleet, 2005–2024

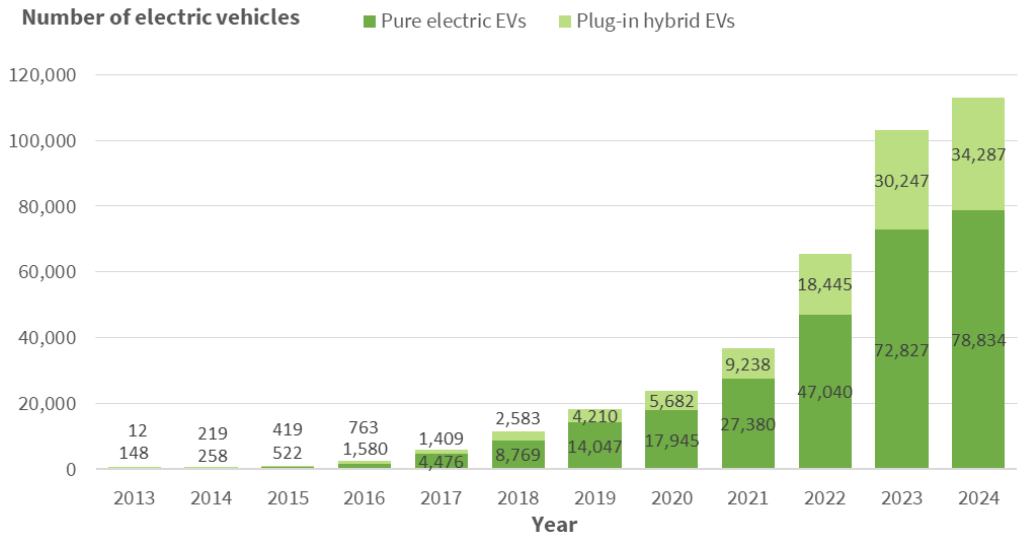


Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

EV fleet growth stalled in 2024

The electric vehicle fleet in New Zealand is almost exclusively composed of light passenger vehicles. After several years of growth, the uptake of the EV fleet stalled following the closure of the Clean Car Discount scheme in December 2023. In 2024, there were 113,715 electric vehicles, up from 103,665 in 2023 (Figure 8). Pure electric EVs comprised 70% of the light EV fleet, with the remainder consisting of plug-in hybrid vehicles.

Figure 8: Number of light electric vehicles, 2013–2024



Source: Ministry of Transport 2025a

The Clean Car Discount scheme ran from July 2021 to December 2023 and was associated with rapid growth in the share of quarterly registrations that were EVs. There was a spike in registrations at the end of the scheme, followed by a large drop in the March 2024 quarter. There has been some recovery since, with EV registrations accounting for 8.0% of new vehicle registrations in the June 2025 quarter; however, uptake remains lower than it would have been had the scheme continued (Figure 9).

Figure 9: EVs as a percentage of quarterly light vehicle registrations, June 2018–June 2025

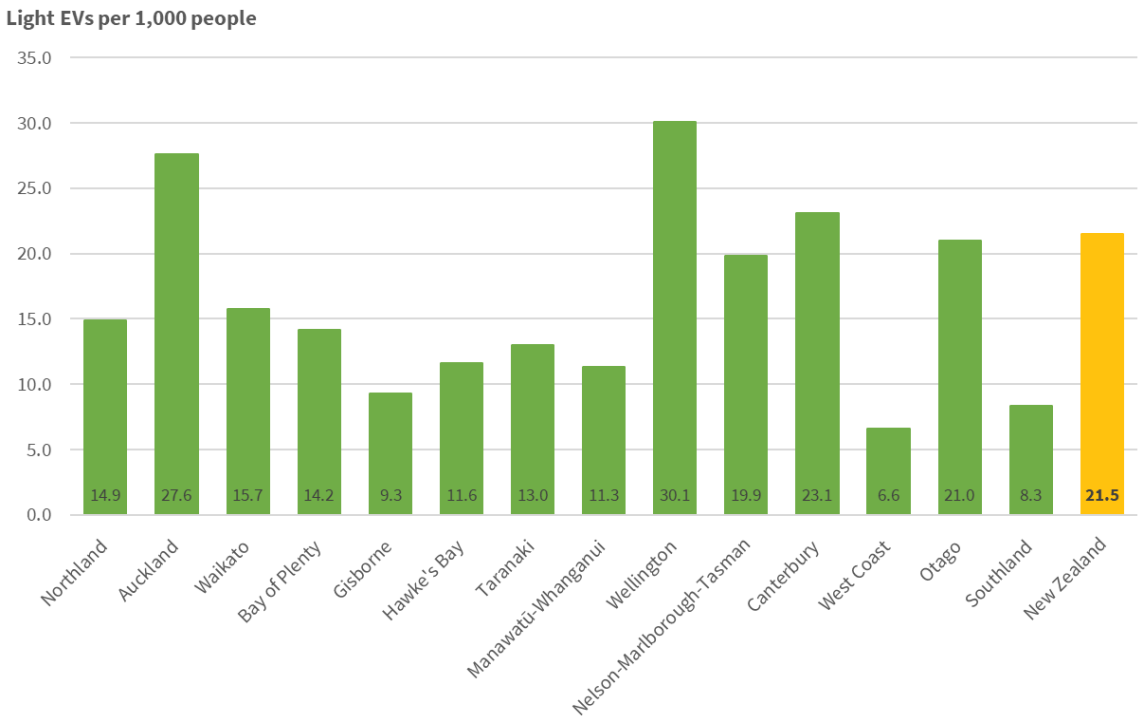
Source: Ministry of Transport 2025b

Light electric vehicles across New Zealand

In 2024, there were 21.5 light EVs per 1,000 people in New Zealand, down very slightly from 2023. This is the first time that ownership per capita has not increased. Ownership rates varied by region and were markedly higher in major urban centres (Figure 10).

The regions with the highest rates were Wellington (30.1 EVs per 1,000 people) and Auckland (27.6 EVs per 1,000 people). Regions with relatively low EV ownership rates included West Coast (6.6 EVs per 1,000 people), Southland (8.3) and Gisborne (9.3).

Figure 10: Light electric vehicles per capita, by region, 2024



Sources: Ministry of Transport 2025a (total NZ EVs), 2025c (numbers by region)

Data for this indicator

This factsheet is an analysis of the most recent data from the Ministry of Transport's annual vehicle fleet statistics, published in October 2025, together with quarterly and monthly data releases specifically for EV numbers.

The following categories of vehicles are used:

- Light vehicles, which includes:
  - Light passenger vehicles (passenger vehicles weighing up to 3,500 kg)
  - Light commercial vehicles (the following if under 3,500 kg: goods vans, trucks, utilities, buses, and motor caravans)
- Trucks (the following if over 3,500 kg: goods vans, trucks, utility vehicles, and motor caravans)
- Buses (those over 3,500 kg, including minibuses)
- Motorcycles (including mopeds and quadbikes/ATVs)

Data on electric vehicle numbers and registrations come from the Ministry of Transport's quarterly and monthly data releases, and cover two forms of light electric vehicles:

- Plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV), and
- Battery electric vehicles (BEV).

The data includes all vehicles on the Motor Vehicle Register, excluding those exempt from having a license (not used on roads) and those with an expired license (if the license has not been renewed within 6 months).

For additional information, see the Metadata sheet.

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