

Overview of Wellington City

Infometrics' provisional estimate of GDP shows Wellington City's economy grew by 1.9% over the March 2016 year, following strong growth of 3.4% the previous year. Indicators related to the service sector are in particularly good shape, with construction activity also climbing.

Data from Marketview shows that retail spending on electronic cards in Wellington City increased by 3.4% over the March 2016 year, above the 2.8% rate of growth experienced nationally. Population growth and increasing activity in the tourism sector, as well as relatively buoyant consumer confidence are contributors to the lift in spending. According to a Westpac-McDermott Miller survey, a net 20% of respondents were optimistic about the outlook for the Wellington Region in the March quarter.

Increasing tourism sector activity is evident in the 5.2% lift in guest nights over the year to March 2016 and high levels of hotel occupancy. Domestic passenger numbers over the past year through Wellington Airport have risen 4.7%, while international passenger movements have climbed 16% over the same period.

The other major talking point in Wellington City since last quarter's report is a further acceleration to house prices, which in the quarter were up 11% from a year ago. One would expect this type of price increase to be rapidly pushing up homebuilding activity, but with supply constraints an issue at present demand pressure seems to be spreading into other parts of the Wellington Region. Nevertheless, Wellington City's construction sector will continue to be kept busy on commercial projects, with non-residential building consents having risen 40% over the past year.

We are not reading too much into the easing of traffic flows at present, as road works may be affecting flows past monitoring sites. Once Wellington's new smart motorway is opened and the additional northbound lane is operational, we would expect traffic flows to begin rising, particularly given ongoing growth in economic activity and population throughout the region.

Indicator	Wellington City	Wellington Region	New Zealand
<i>Annual average % change</i>			
Gross domestic product	↑ 1.9%	↑ 2.2%	↑ 2.3%
Traffic flow	↓ -1.4%	↑ 0.7%	↑ 4.2%
Residential consents	↑ 4.5%	↓ -0.7%	↑ 11%
Non-residential consents	↑ 40%	↑ 30%	↑ 10%
House prices*	↑ 11%	↑ 8.9%	↑ 9.7%
House sales	↑ 17%	↑ 20%	↑ 19%
Guest nights	↑ 5.2%	↑ 6.8%	↑ 5.8%
Retail trade	↑ 3.4%	↑ 2.5%	↑ 2.8%
Car registrations	↓ -0.2%	↑ 2.3%	↑ 4.9%
Commercial vehicle registrations	↓ -11%	↑ 0.6%	↑ 4.2%
Job Seekers	↑ 0.8%	↑ 0.5%	↓ -1.4%
<i>Level</i>			
Unemployment rate	5.4%	6.1%	5.7%
International net migration	2,239	2,773	67,619

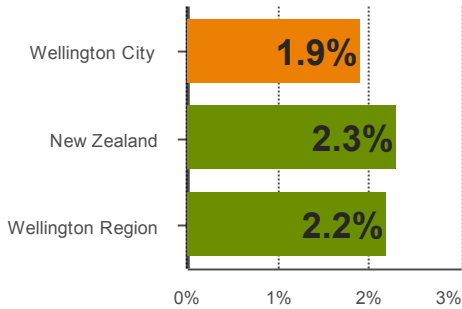
* Annual percentage change (latest quarter compared to a year earlier)

Overview of national economy

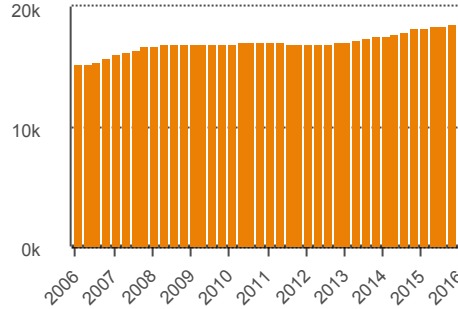
The sharp lift in employment in the March quarter highlighted that economic growth in the New Zealand economy continues to perform well. But at the same time, wage growth remains subdued, as a result of a significant lift in the size of the labour force (due to high net migration) and low inflation expectations. Taken on its own, stronger employment demand would ordinarily suggest that there is less need for the Reserve Bank to cut interest rates further. However, after balancing this consideration against the risk that inflation risks are still skewed to the downside, we see grounds for the Reserve Bank to still err on the side of caution and cut the OCR by 25 basis points in June. This move would help see interest rates on mortgages and business credit lines remain at a low level.

Gross domestic product

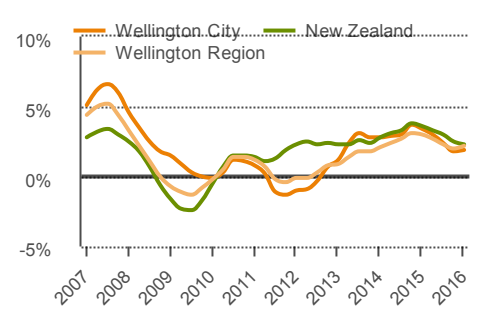
Gross domestic product growth
Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



Gross domestic product (\$m)
Annual level, Wellington City



Gross domestic product growth
Annual average % change



Highlights for Wellington City

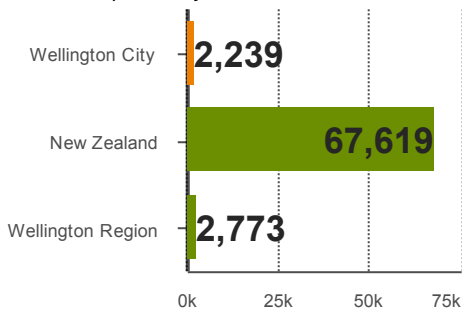
- GDP in Wellington City was up 1.9% for the year to March 2016 compared to a year earlier. Growth was lower than in New Zealand (2.3%) and lower than in Wellington Region (2.2%).
- GDP was \$18,680 million in Wellington City for the year to March 2016 (2010 prices).
- Annual GDP growth in Wellington City peaked at 6.6% in the year to September 2007.

National overview

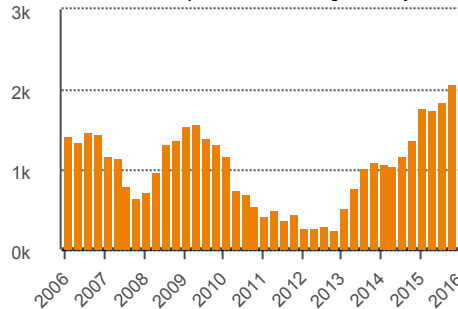
The New Zealand economy has performed surprisingly well over the early stages of 2016, despite downward drag from the dairy sector. A number of factors have helped prop up overall economic growth, including: a better performance from most other primary sector exporters and rising activity in the construction sector. There has also been strong growth in consumption demand, as a result of high net migration, record levels of international visitors to New Zealand, and increased employment demand. Higher consumer demand has added to an already buoyant service sector where firms are generally upbeat about their future and hiring intentions. We anticipate this dynamic will continue, which, when coupled with further lifts to construction activity, will continue underpinning GDP growth over the coming quarters.

International net migration

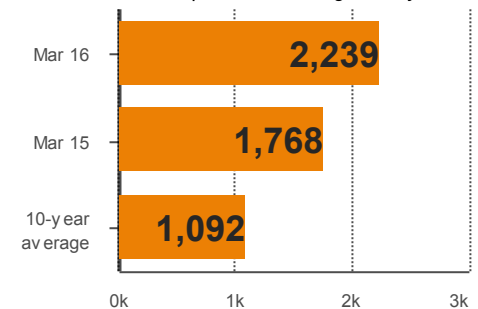
Net migration
Number of persons, year to March 2016



Net migration
Annual number of persons, Wellington City



Net migration
Annual number of persons, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- Wellington City experienced a permanent and long-term net migration gain of 2,239 persons in the year to March 2016. This compares with a gain of 1,768 a year ago, and a ten year average of 1,092 (gain).
- New Zealand's annual net migration increased to 67,619 from 56,272 a year ago.

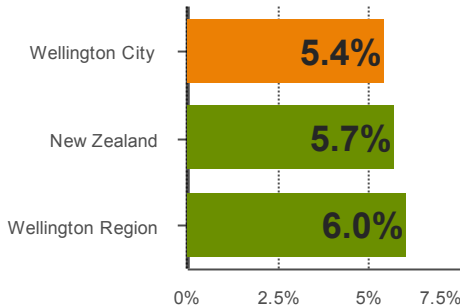
National overview

The seasonally adjusted net inflow of migrants in March was the smallest since June last year, driven down by a lower flow of student arrivals, particularly from India. Nevertheless, despite declines in student arrivals, favourable labour market conditions in New Zealand (relative to Australia) continue to draw people to our shores for work purposes and discourage New Zealand residents from leaving. The slide in departure numbers is broad-based across destination countries, with fewer people moving to parts of the Pacific (including Australia), Asia, and Europe. Against this backdrop, we anticipate that the net inflow of people to New Zealand is likely to remain at an elevated level for the time being, albeit slightly below its seasonally adjusted November peak.

Unemployment rate

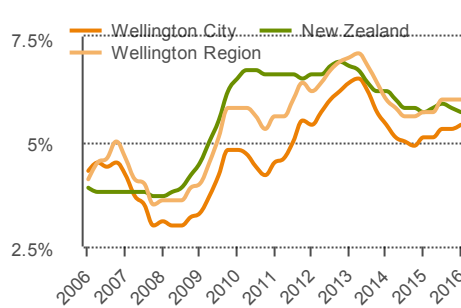
Unemployment rate

Average annual rate, year to March 2016



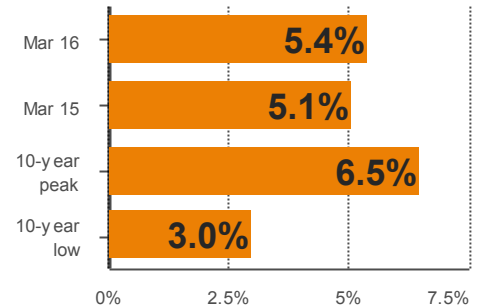
Unemployment rate

Average annual rate



Unemployment rate

Annual average, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- The annual average unemployment rate in Wellington City was 5.4% in March 2016, up from 5.1% a year earlier.
- The unemployment rate in Wellington City was lower than in New Zealand, where the unemployment rate averaged 5.7% over the year to March 2016.
- Over the last ten years the unemployment rate reached a peak of 6.5% in June 2013;

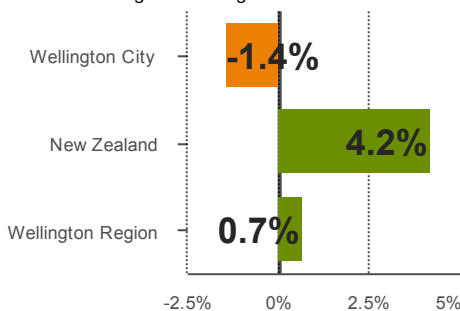
National overview

Although total employment in March recorded its strongest quarterly growth since 2013, employment growth over the past year has still lagged the increase in the working age population. A rebound in the participation rate from its surprisingly low December level meant that the unemployment rate lifted from 5.4% to 5.7% over the March quarter, a figure that we believe more accurately reflects the true state of the labour market than the high September or low December published unemployment rates. Construction is a hotspot with a 12% lift in hours worked over the last year, while a range of service sectors involved with tourism, real estate, education, and healthcare are all recording annual growth of between 4.0% and 7.0% in hours worked.

Traffic flow

Annual change in traffic flows

Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



Highlights for Wellington City

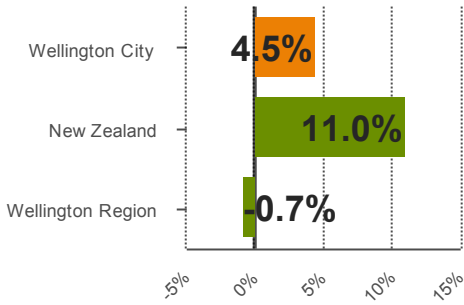
- Traffic flows in Wellington City decreased by -1.4% over the year to March 2016. This compares with an increase of 4.2% in New Zealand.

National overview

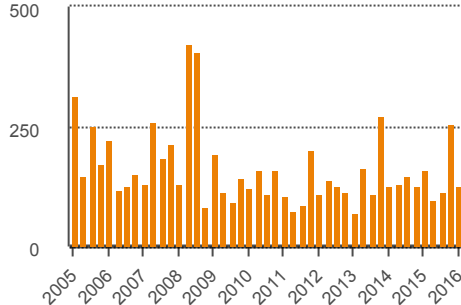
Growth in traffic flows has picked up over the early stages of 2016, with growth evident in most parts of New Zealand. Not only have relatively low petrol prices encouraged households to get out and explore, but this trend has also been supported by increasing employment levels. Another factor at play has been a significant increase to the size of the vehicle fleet, as car ownership rates have risen and migration has pushed up household formation. The surge in overseas visitor arrivals is also evident in the data, with areas that are tourism hotspots among those showing the highest growth in traffic flows.

Residential consents

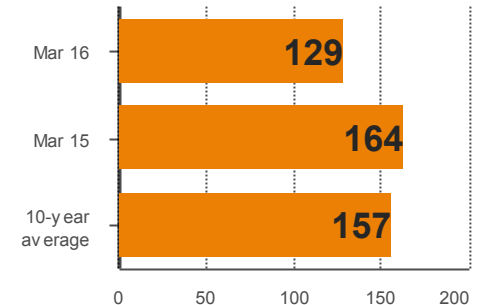
Growth in no. of new dwelling consents
Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



Residential consents
Quarterly number, Wellington City



Number of new dwelling consents
Quarterly number, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

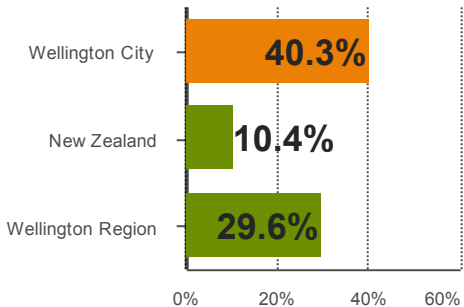
- A total of 129 new residential building consents were issued in Wellington City in the March 2016 quarter, compared with 164 in the same quarter last year.
- On an annual basis the number of consents in Wellington City increased by 4.5% compared with the same 12-month period a year ago. The number of consents in New Zealand increased by 11% over the same period.

National overview

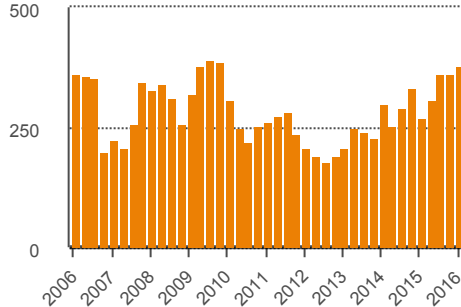
A relatively weak March for residential building consents rounded out a mixed quarter for the residential construction sector. Although a strong February month ensured total consent numbers in the March quarter were still up 11% from a year ago, this lift lagged our forecast of 18% growth. The key theme that has emerged over recent months is that homebuilding activity is strongest in places with elevated migration, while areas with struggling export sectors are experiencing more subdued numbers of residential building consents. Looking towards the future, our most recent building forecasts had pencilled in growth in consent numbers accelerating to 20%pa by the end of the year, but we see an increasing risk of growth continuing to lag this expectation.

Non-residential consents

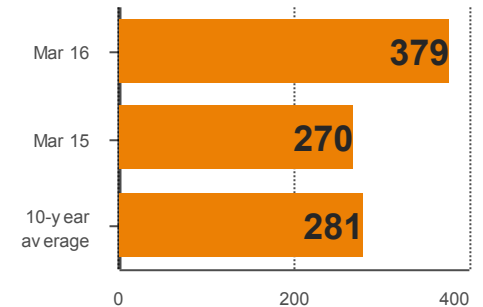
Growth in value of consents
Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



Non-residential consents, Wellington City
\$, annual running total, Wellington City



Value of non-residential consents
Annual value (\$m), Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- Non-residential building consents to the value of \$379 million were issued in Wellington City during the year to March 2016.
- The value of consents increased by 40% over the year to March 2016. By comparison the value of consents in New Zealand increased by 10% over the same period.
- Over the last 10 years, consents in Wellington City reached a peak of \$393 million in the year to September 2009.

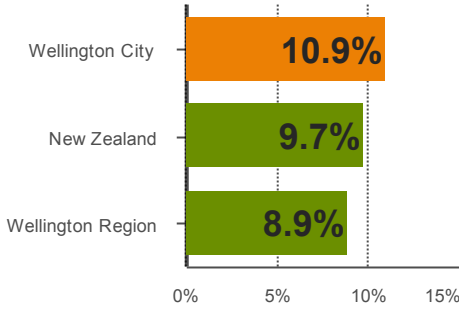
National overview

Having reached a 21-month low in February, it didn't take much for the seasonally adjusted value of consents to pick up in March. However, with the March number being the second weakest monthly result in almost a year, the value of non-residential building consents during the quarter were still below expectations across all non-residential building categories. We continue to anticipate that the value of non-residential building consents will drop-off during the middle of 2016, with the weakness in commercial building consents in Canterbury a key downside risk.

House prices

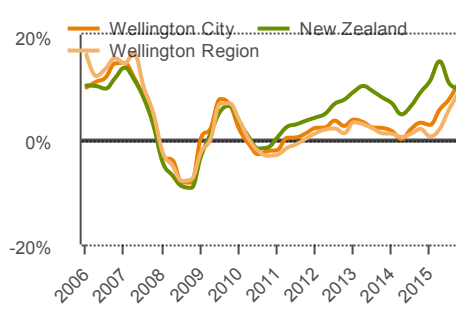
Annual change in house prices

Annual % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



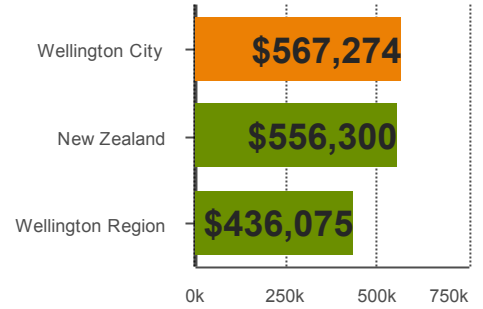
House price growth

Annual % change



Average current house value

Average for 12 months to Mar 2016



Highlights for Wellington City

- The average current house value in Wellington City was up 11% in March 2016 compared with a year earlier. Growth outperformed relative to New Zealand, where prices increased by 9.7%.
- The average current house value was \$567,274 in Wellington City over the March 2016 year. This compares with \$556,300 in New Zealand.

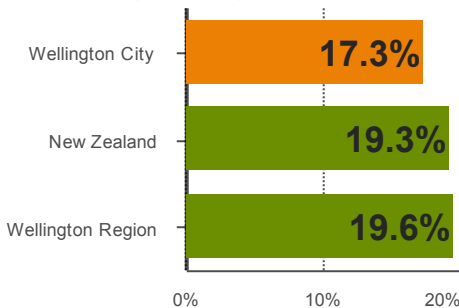
National overview

House price inflation was sitting at 9.7%pa in March. With house prices having accelerated on a monthly basis since January, there is mounting evidence to suggest that Auckland's house price inflation slowdown following a tightening of lending restrictions to investors will be short-lived. Nevertheless, the biggest movers in terms of house prices at present are other territorial authorities in the upper North Island. With their close proximity to Auckland, but being outside of the "Auckland investor zone", Waikato District, Hamilton City, Tauranga City, and Western Bay of Plenty District are experiencing strong house price inflation that is approaching the peak rates reached in Auckland last year! House price growth in is also racing ahead in other parts of the country, most notably Queenstown-Lakes, Wellington, Dunedin, and Nelson.

House sales

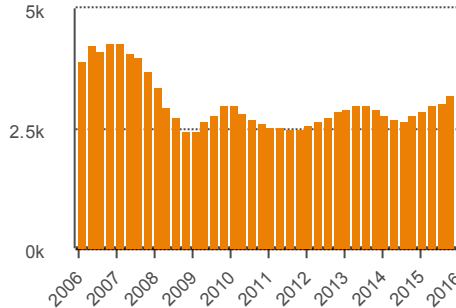
Annual change in house sales

Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



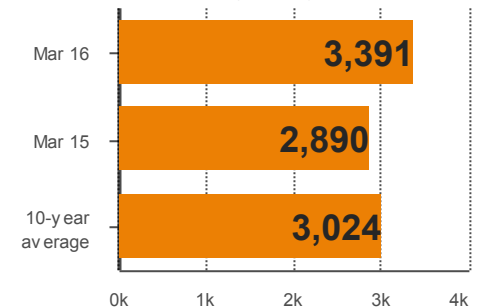
House sales

Annual number, Wellington City



House sales

Annual number, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- House sales in Wellington City in the year to March 2016 increased by 17% compared with the previous year. Growth underperformed relative to New Zealand, where sales increased by 19%.
- A total of 3,391 houses were sold in Wellington City in the 12 months ended March 2016. This compares with the ten year average of 3,024.

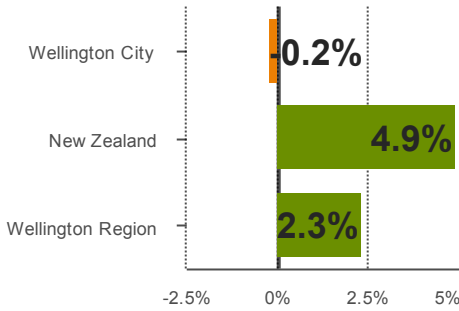
National overview

House sales over the year to March were up 19% from a year ago, with most places outside of Auckland experiencing a pick-up in real estate activity. Data from the Reserve Bank shows that high-LVR lending (ie to borrowers with a deposit of less than 20%) made up 8.5% of all new mortgage lending in February – its highest level in 16 months. The proportion of total new lending to investors also rebounded to a five-month high of 34%. Our interpretation of these numbers is that the easing in loan-to-value restrictions is boosting buyer demand for property outside Auckland. We expect further increases in house sales activity over coming months, especially given that net migration is still increasing and mortgage rates remain under downward pressure.

Car registrations

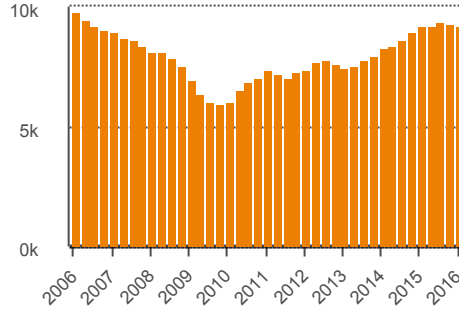
Car registrations

Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



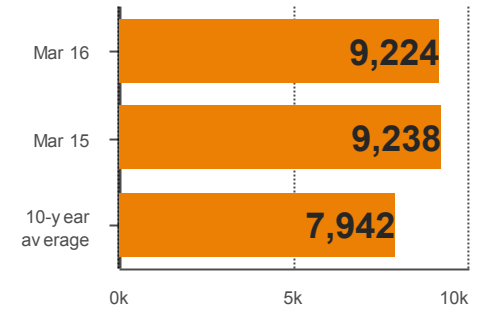
Car registrations

Annual number, Wellington City



Car registrations

Annual number, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- The number of cars registered in Wellington City decreased by -0.2% in the year to March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months. Growth was lower than in New Zealand, where car sales increased by 4.9%.
- A total of 9,224 cars were registered in Wellington City in the year to March 2016. This compares with the ten year average of 7,942.

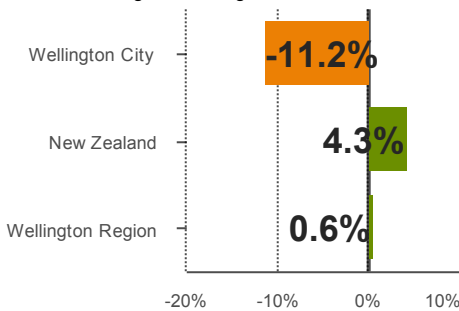
National overview

Approximately 240,000 cars entered the New Zealand car fleet over the 12 months to March. In a recent client article, we showed how fundamental demand factors will continue supporting total car registrations at these levels over the coming year. The key upshot of the article is that car buying is finding fundamental support from higher levels of household formation, as a result of elevated international net migration, as well as from an increase in scrapping of older cars. With migration showing no signs of waning yet, and a glut of older cars from the mid-1990s still in the fleet, we see support for car demand to remain at close to 240,000pa until the end of 2017.

Commercial vehicle registrations

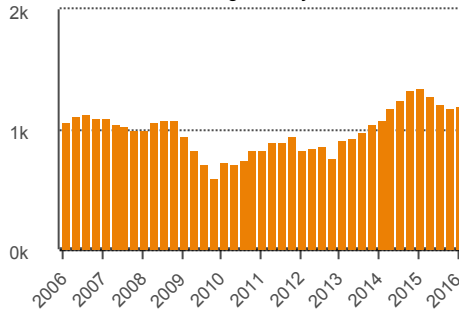
Commercial vehicle registrations

Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



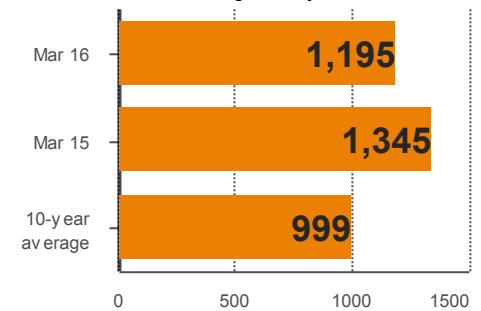
Commercial vehicle registrations

Annual number, Wellington City



Commercial vehicle registrations

Annual number, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- The number of commercial vehicles registered in Wellington City decreased by -11% in the year to March 2016 compared with the previous 12 months. Growth was lower than in New Zealand, where commercial vehicle sales increased by 4.2%.
- A total of 1,195 commercial vehicles were registered in Wellington City in the year to March 2016. This is higher than the ten year annual average of 999.

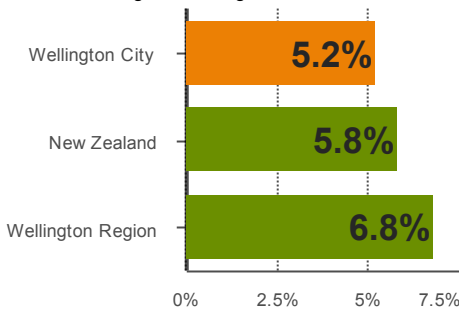
National overview

Another bumper month of sales rounded out a strong first quarter of 2016 for light commercial vehicle sales. Ongoing growth in building activity, as well as robust returns in most non-dairying parts of the primary sector, are continuing to support demand for utes. The fact that interest rates have pushed lower this year has also ensured that loan servicing costs remain affordable. But in contrast to light commercial vehicles, sales of very heavy trucks are easing. Transport operators and firms that run heavy trucks are showing a reluctance to continue their fleet upgrades at present. Reasons for this reluctance include lower levels of mining and forestry harvest activity, as well as expectations that low dairy prices have weakened the outlook for milk production in future seasons.

Guest nights

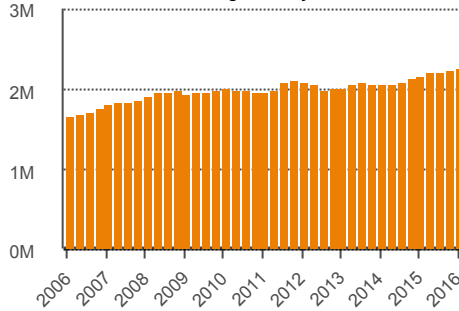
Guest nights

Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



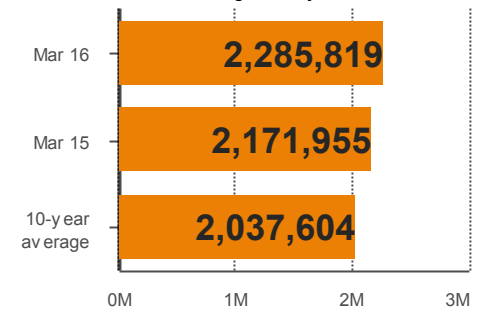
Guest nights

Annual number, Wellington City



Guest nights

Annual number, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- Total guest nights in Wellington City increased by 5.2% in the year to March 2016. This compares with an increase of 5.8% in New Zealand.
- Visitors stayed a total of 2,285,819 nights in Wellington City during the year to March 2016, which was up from 2,171,955 a year ago.

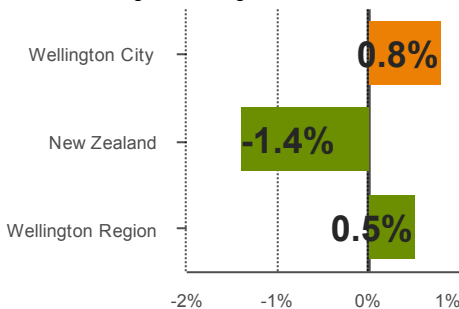
National overview

Guest nights over the year to March 2016 were up 5.7% from a year earlier, with guest nights by international visitors growing by 7.5%, while domestic guest nights rose 4.5%. Domestic guest nights are being pushed up by strong population growth and higher levels of employment, while sharp increases to international visitor numbers to New Zealand are propelling international guest nights to a higher level. Nevertheless, we are of the view that commercial accommodation data is currently not reflecting the true scale of the upturn in guest nights through New Zealand, with private accommodation through peer-to-peer providers growing at a more rapid rate. Recent Infometrics' analysis on the subject, showed guest nights through one provider, Airbnb, doubled over the past year.

Jobseekers

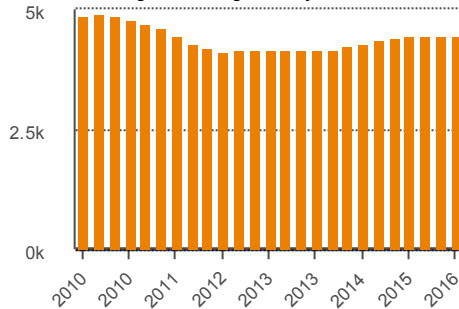
Annual change in Jobseekers

Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



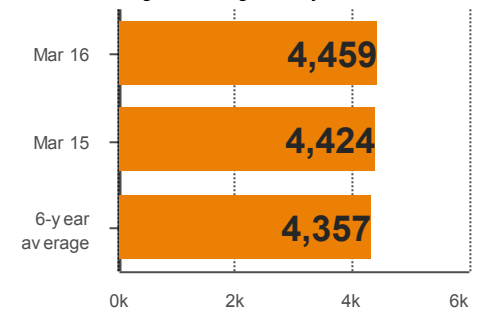
Jobseekers

Annual average, Wellington City



Jobseekers

Annual average, Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- Working age Jobseeker Support recipients in Wellington City in the year to March 2016 increased by 0.8% compared with the previous year. Growth was higher relative to New Zealand, where the number of Jobseeker Support recipients decreased by 1.4%.
- An average of 4,459 people were receiving a Jobseeker Support benefit in Wellington City in the 12 months ended March 2016. This compares with an average of 4,357 since the start of the series in 2010.

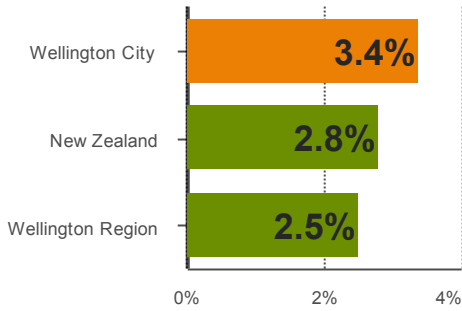
National overview

Over the year to March, the number of Jobseeker Support recipients nationwide fell by an average of 1.4%. Lower numbers of people receiving Jobseeker Support is consistent with robust growth in employment demand and hours worked in a range of industries, particularly in the construction and service sectors. With moderate growth in employment anticipated throughout 2016, there is likely to be further downward pressure to the number of people receiving Jobseeker Support over the coming quarters.

Retail trade

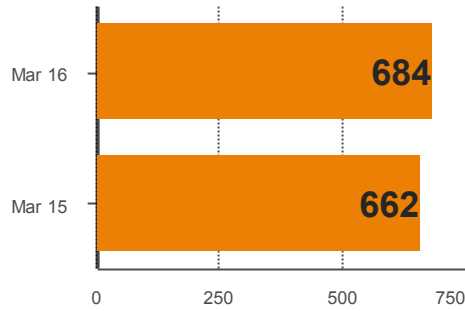
Growth in retail sales

Annual average % change Mar 15 - Mar 16



Retail sales

Quarterly value (\$m), Wellington City



Highlights for Wellington City

- Electronic card retail spending in Wellington City, as measured by Marketview, increased by 3.4% over the year to March 2016 compared to the previous year. This compares with an increase of 2.8% in New Zealand.

National overview

The total value of electronic card spending on retail purchases in the March 2016 quarter was up 3.6% from a year earlier, according to data from Marketview, taking growth over the past twelve months to 2.8%. Compared to March 2015, there were an extra 123,536 visitors in New Zealand during the March quarter, which added to the net population increase of 20,589 people through international migration over the quarter. This boost to the customer base has continued to drive up spending in many key retail categories. Statistics New Zealand's Retail Trade Survey shows that some of the biggest upward movers in the March quarter were spending on clothing and footwear, food and beverage services, accommodation, and electronic goods. Strong growth in internet retailing continues to push up non-store based retail sales.

Technical notes

Gross Domestic Product

Gross Domestic Product is estimated by Infometrics. A top down approach breaks national industrial production (sourced from production based GDP measures published by Statistics New Zealand) is broken down to TA level by applying TA shares to the national total. Each TA's share of industry output is based on earnings data from LEED. GDP growth in recent quarters is based on a model which uses the various partial economic indicators presented in this report as inputs.

Net migration

Net migration is the difference between the number of arrivals and departures of permanent and long-term migrants. Data is sourced from International Travel and Migration statistics from Statistics New Zealand.

Unemployment

Regional level unemployment rates are sourced from Statistics New Zealand's Household Labour Force Survey. Trends in the number of Jobseekers at TA level are used to break down regional unemployment rates to TA level. To reduce volatility the unemployment rate is presented as an average for the last four quarters.

Traffic flow

Traffic flow growth rates are calculated from the number of vehicles passing approximately 110 sites monitored by New Zealand Transport Agency. Each of the sites has been mapped to a territorial authority.

Retail Sales

The retail spending data is sourced from Marketview. It measures total electronic card spending using spending through the Paymark network and adding to it an estimate of non-Paymark network spending using the pattern of BNZ card holder spending at non-Paymark retailers. For further breakdown of the data by storetype and other variables contact Marketview.

Accommodation

The number of guest nights is sourced from Statistics New Zealand's Accommodation Survey. A guest night is equivalent to one guest spending one night at an establishment. For example, a motel with 15 guests spending two nights would report that they had provided 30 guest nights.

House sales

The number of house sales is sourced from REINZ. The indicator measures the number of house sales at the point when the sale becomes unconditional. The unconditional date is the date when all the terms of an agreement have been satisfied and the sale and purchase can proceed to settlement.

House prices

House price levels (dollar value) are sourced from QVNZ. We report on the average of the median sale prices for the past 12 months. The percentage growth in house prices is also sourced from Quotable Value. The indicator measures the change in the average prices of sales entered into QV's system in the three month period compared with the same period of the previous year.

Building consents

Building consents data are sourced from Statistics New Zealand. Non-residential consents include the value of both new buildings and alterations.

Vehicle sales

Car and commercial vehicle sales data are sourced from New Zealand Transport Authority. Sales are based on new registrations which include the first time registration of new vehicles and used vehicles imported from overseas.

Dairy

Dairy data has been sourced from the "New Zealand Dairy Statistics", a publication co-owned by DairyNZ and LIC, as well as calculations made by Infometrics. The data accords to dairy seasons, which run from June to May. Total dairy payouts in each territorial authority have been calculated by Infometrics by utilising milk solids production in conjunction with Fonterra's farmgate milk price (excluding dividends) from the dairy season in question. For the current season, Infometrics calculates a payout forecast using our own expectation of the farmgate milk price and the assumption that milk solids production continues running at the same level from the previous season.

Jobseekers Support

In July 2013 the New Zealand's welfare system changed to better recognise and support people's work potential. As part of this the Jobseekers Support benefit was introduced. This benefit is for people who can usually look or prepare for work but also includes people who can only work part-time or can't work at the moment, for example, because they have a health condition, injury or disability.

Data presented for the September 2013 quarter onwards is provided by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). Data prior to September 2013 are Infometrics estimates based on re-grouping pre-July 2013 benefit categories to be consistent with the post-July 2013 benefit categories. The pre-July 2013 benefit categories used to estimate the number of Jobseekers Support recipients are: Unemployment Benefit and Unemployment Benefit Hardship; Unemployment Benefit Training and Unemployment Benefit Hardship Training; Sickness Benefit and Sickness Benefit Hardship; Domestic Purposes Benefit - Sole Parent (if youngest child is 14 or over); Women Alone and Widow's Benefit (without children or with children 14 or over)